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The Role of Story in Pastoral Theology:
a theological examination and critique

Thesis submitted by John Pritchard, St. John's College, Durham
for the degree of Master of Letters
July 1992

ABSTRACT

Goals

The thesis sets out to examine the value of the category of story in pastoral theology, and to argue for its enhanced value as one of the resources available to practical theology and thereby to the wider family of theological disciplines.

In particular it seeks:

1. To establish an approach to pastoral theology which focuses on narrative, not to the exclusion or detriment of other approaches but as a complement to them. By using story in this way the thesis attempts to achieve for pastoral theology what narrative categories have done for other theological disciplines.

2. To offer a comprehensive categorisation of the use of story in the activity and theological reflection of the Church. The rationale for this categorisation is based on the various uses of language. The thesis attempts to examine the theological adequacy of such activity and reflection.

3. To explore the importance and significance of the particular and contingent in the theology of the Church, not to conflict with, but to counter-balance, theologies which emphasise system and structure. Thus to claim a more central place for practical theology among the theological disciplines.

Method

The method of the thesis is to pursue a cycle of five phases of enquiry in a model of pastoral theology which focuses on narrative. Three sources of information are placed in a critical conversation with each other; these are, narrative in models of pastoral theology, narrative in two related disciplines, and narrative theology itself. This critical conversation leads to provisional conclusions on the value of a model of pastoral theology which focuses on story, and frames these conclusions in the form of active responses in the practice of the Church.

The Role of Story in Pastoral Theology: a theological examination and critique

John Lawrence Pritchard

Thesis submitted for the Degree of M.Litt.

University of Durham

Department of Theology

1992

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Contents

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Introduction:
The Work of Pastoral Theology

1.The problem which pastoral theology addresses.

The complaint is made in many different ways. A parishioner argues that what happens in church on Sundays bears no relationship to what happens to him at work on Mondays. An ordinand objects that all the theology he undertakes at College seems irrelevant to the practice of ministry for which he came to train. A resolution in a deanery synod deplores the absence of clear statements from church leaders concerning the moral malaise of contemporary society. An editorial in a national newspaper takes the church to task for writing about the needs of the inner city without a sufficient understanding of the workings of post-industrial society. A man in a pub rails at the unfortunate lady from the Salvation Army that Christians are all hypocrites.

The problem is one of making connections. There is a perceived dichotomy between theological theory and practice, and in consequence, between faith and action. The relation between theology as an academic discipline and faithful Christian living in and beyond communities of faith, is a problematic one, both for the academic and the practitioner. In the words of Lewis Mudge and James Poling:

> On the one hand, the academic theological world seems preoccupied with its own problems of methodological coherence and reality reference. On the other, faith communities function with scant attention to theology of the scholarly, critical kind. (1)

This dichotomy is itself part of a larger problem facing theology today, that of holding together a perception of reality as unitary. Pannenberg points to the crisis of scriptural authority as arising in part from historical criticism and in part from the hermeneutical problem.

The result of this analysis is that theology cannot continue as a special science

> of divine revelation. Theology can understand the meaning of the (biblical) events as deeds of God only in relation to universal history, because statements about the origin of all events can be defended only with a view to the totality of all events. (2)

Reality is one; so too is theology.

In his major work Theology and the Philosophy of Science (3), Pannenberg argues powerfully that as a science of God, theology derives its unity from its object, and not from its methods or its connection with practical activity. Theology is therefore 'concerned with the divine as all-determining reality' (4), and the divine is indirectly co-given in all objects of experience. Theology provides a comprehensive view of reality, and history is the most adequate horizon for it.

Given this background, anything which creates divisions in the theological enterprise is likely to carry within it the seeds of destruction of the enterprise itself. Hence the division of theological thinking into theory and practice, academic and practical, is likely to run into the sands on the one hand of intellectual incoherence or on the other of pastoral irrelevance.

The danger in this theory/practice dichotomy for communities of faith is in part that they may lose their intellectual undergirding. Just as pressing is their need of adequate resources for the task of bearing witness to the integrity of faith and faith-statements in a culture sceptical of religious truth claims. More serious still for their internal integrity is the danger of a collapse into personal religious experience as the basis of ecclesial authority, and individualism as the basis of ecclesial action.

On the other hand, the danger in this dichotomy between theology and lived faith for theology faculties and theological colleges, is that they become objects of suspicion to religious believers who regard academic theologians as functioning largely to cast doubts on cherished beliefs. A more serious concern in the long term is the marginalisation of theology, which is seen by secular-minded institutions as having lost its point of reference

in reality or at the very least as performing a purely psycho-social or pragmatic function. In a cultural and political climate which looks at academic work in terms of its practical value, theology appears neither pure enough for the academic colleague, nor practical enough for the market place.

One traditional manner of bridging the gap between theory and practice, has been the method of applied theology, what Edward Farley calls a 'source-to-application' process (5). Theology learned in one academic context can thereafter be applied to any other context of ministerial or intellectual activity.

The inadequacies of this model of doing theology are various. In the first place, the theory-to-practice paradigm assumes that abstract knowledge, or knowledge acquired apart from its social or ecclesial context, is the primary focus of theology. 'Quite obviously the best focus for such a scholarly enterprise is academia and not the context of a Christian faith community in the world' (6). The crucial question which such a presumption poses is to do with the location of what may be perceived as God's activity in the world. Is he to be met more in the library and the lecture room than the workplace and the living room? Is not God's activity rather experienced in the historical particulars of action and place? The lecture room is but one very small part of God's stage.

A second problem with this theory-to-practice model is that theology emerges as being done either for the people or to the people, but rarely by the people. Theology may be relevant to the people of God, but they gain access to it as it trickles down through their appointed teachers and preachers, the perennial problem of clericalisation. Theology is then in danger of being practical only by accident, and believers are not subjects of their own faith but objects of the reflection of others.

Let us examine a third problem by means of a concrete example. A mission is to be planned at St. James' Church and the new curate is put in charge. He calls a meeting of key lay people with varying hopes and fears about the mission. He has three years of learning behind him on the nature of the church and the theory of mission. Instead of

inviting the group to explore their understanding of mission, using his knowledge as a theological resource, he presents a mish-mash of anecdote, exhortation and church growth theory. Instead of inviting the group to let their vision of mission interact with the different visions of mission in the documents of the New Testament church, he asks them to think "what might work around here". So little has his theological education empowered him to do his theology in the social and ecclesial context of his parish that he fears to use his theology at all. Herein lies the third main problem of a theory-to-practice model of theology. It simply fails to equip people for practical ministry.

An alternative model for doing theology moves in the opposite direction. Faced with the inadequacy of giving primacy to theory, this model gives primacy to action, and all but negates the theoretical formulations of the Christian tradition. David Tracy describes it thus: 'Concrete actions and commitments to a particular cause supply all the criteria necessary for truth in theology' (7). Theory is therefore at best secondary, a more or less extrinsic reflection on the primary action of the church. In a more sophisticated form contemporary praxis-orientated expressions of liberation and feminist theologies operate with this primary focus on action. For much of Western history praxis was contrasted with theoria and poiesis, but the more modern usage of the word goes back to Hegel and Marx, for whom praxis is the network of social relationships which both include and determine the structures of social consciousness. Praxis includes both a reflective and a practical moment, and the process is self-perpetuating as reflection upon action leads to yet further action.

In its cruder form, however, this model presupposes that the considered reflection of the believing community through history is of limited value, for the contingencies and demands of the present moment are determinative of the task of theology. The corollary would seem to be that God could not disclose himself to his people over time in such a way that they can make intelligible statements about him. This would make credal statements and discursive theological thinking all but valueless.

Two forms of this model may be discerned in popular Christian thinking. The first is that

which gives undue weight to the social sciences and the functionalist approaches which they often use. Quasi-scientific models in the social sciences may place undue reliance on statistics and generalised theory in sociology, psychology and educational theory. These are not the basis for a coherent theological vision. The other form of the model which gives primacy to practical action is that which starts from the believer's experience of God in the present moment. Such a 'charismatic' approach to theological thinking may be based on a pre-critical handling of the Bible and an unfounded trust in the significance of subjectivity.

We are apparently faced with an impasse. There exists a disturbing gap between theology and life, and consequently between faith and action. Evidence mounts that the church loses ground very quickly when this gap strains the credibility of its worship, preaching and inner life too far. People cease to believe in it. They take their pursuit of meaning elsewhere. Neither giving primacy to theory or primacy to practical action is an adequate response. Both have been tried and found wanting.

This is the problem which pastoral theology addresses.

2.The problems which pastoral theology evokes

The placing of theory and practice together in an instructive form of theological interaction, is the task of pastoral theology. Paul Ballard defines it thus: 'If it is accepted that theology is reflection on Christian experience informed by and explorative of the tradition, then pastoral theology is reflection on the pastoral situation' (8). Or James Whyte: 'The systematic theologian asks critical questions about the way faith expresses itself in language; the practical theologian asks critical questions about the way faith expresses itself in practice, and about the relation between the practice and the language' (9).

a. Very quickly, however, we encounter the first major problem which pastoral theology evokes, that of definition. Already we can see how Whyte prefers to use the phrase 'practical theology' rather than 'pastoral theology', reflecting the preference of theology

faculties in North America and Scotland. Other theologians would argue that all theology is inherently practical, and that 'pastoral theology' is the more appropriate term, focussing attention only on the limited task of being a theology of care.

At first glance the position of pastoral or practical theology seems clear: it marks the linkage of scholarly theory and ecclesiastical practice; study and vocation. However, this relationship can be evaluated very differently. Ebeling puts it succinctly: 'In one evaluation, it (practical theology) appears as a descent from the heights of scholarship into the lowlands of a trade. In the other, it appears to be the goal of the theological ascent of the mountain' (10).

If we trace the history of practical theology we can see how it has moved through three major stages of development. For many centuries, though most clearly in Schleiermacher, theology had been pursued through the disciplines of scripture, dogmatics, church history and practical theology. Schleiermacher in his ' Brief outline of Theological Study ' of 1811 (11), saw the roots of the theological tree in scripture, the trunk of the tree in dogmatics, and the branch and flower (the 'crown') of the tree in practical action, chiefly by the clergy. Practical theology was therefore chiefly concerned with ministerial function, and was divided into homiletics, liturgics, catechetics and poimenics.

This clerical paradigm finds few friends amongst practical theologians today. It undervalues the critical reflective function of practical theology and reduces the discipline to the imparting of skills and methods. Paradoxically this result runs counter to Schleiermacher's own central concern in his theory of understanding, namely to hold together the qualities of critical reflection and action-related practical understanding. Nevertheless, this reductionist approach to pastoral theology remains a danger, and some pastoral theologians have been so concerned to value the particular and contingent that they have lost their critical rigour and the sense that their concerns belong to a broader stream of ongoing corporate tradition and story. Not that a practical outcome in self-conscious action in church and society is not important. Indeed it is vital; but the action flows from critical reflection, not from a ministry slavishly bound to the

particularities of the present moment. Whitehead's definition ensures the outcome is not lost: 'Practical theology is that process by which Christians reflect on some significant question of life, and through clarification and purification, move toward some graceful action' (12).

Let us return, however, to the second main phase in the development of practical theology. This emerged in the United States with a theological focus on the theory and practice of pastoral care and counselling. One particular form of this became dominant from the 1930s as clinical pastoral theology, in which the central concern was to relate the emerging field of psychotherapy to the pastoral care of the Church. In Britain, this is the context in which the pioneering work of Frank Lake is most appropriately placed (13).

It was soon seen, however, that in spite of the obvious value this approach had for the ministry and existentialist theology of the Church, this move in pastoral theology was a wrong turn. Although it drew on mainstream theologians such as Paul Tillich, it had narrowed the concerns of pastoral theology to a dialogue between theology and psychology, and had seduced an important theological enterprise into a therapeutic, especially psychotherapeutic, self-understanding.

The third phase in pastoral theology began therefore when Seward Hiltner in 1958 proposed that pastoral theology finds its identity in being 'operation-centred', in contrast to classical or 'logic-centred'. Pastoral theology is:

> that branch of theological knowledge that brings the shepherding perspective to bear upon all the operations and functions of the church and the minister, and then draws conclusions of a theological order from reflection on these observations. (14)

This 'shepherding perspective' on theology was perceived to entail three aspects: healing, sustaining and guiding, but the most important development in this approach was that pastoral theology was being seen primarily as a theological enterprise rather than a therapeutic one. In this form, pastoral theology is a mode of theological reflection:

> 'in which pastoral experience serves as a context for the critical development

> of basic theological understanding...Here pastoral theology is not a theology of or about pastoral care but a type of contextual theology, a way of doing theology pastorally'. (15)

This approach was soon followed and sharpened in a neo-orthodox direction by Thomas Oden (16), but has broadly held the field ever since. It values the particularity of the present situation and the data of the minister's experience and it makes the claim that theology is validly done from this point of primary activity, in conversation with other theological disciplines.

The definition to which this essay will be working, therefore, sees pastoral theology as that part of the theological enterprise which offers critical theological reflection on the action of the Church within its own life and within the life of society.

This approach places pastoral theology in a wider frame than the practical training of the clergy, or the socio-theological analysis which leads to principles facilitating the Church's distinctive task. It also guards pastoral theology from the reductionist tendencies of psychotherapeutic and sociological theory and practice which have influenced some recent expressions of pastoral theology. Pannenberg notes that just as practical theology has for long struggled with its dependence on another discipline - dogmatics - so now it must struggle to maintain its independence of the social sciences. It must depend only on 'a science of the life-world of Christianity' (17).

In our definition, pastoral theology is essentially a theological enterprise, conducted with critical rigour: it is informed by and takes seriously the life of society and the human sciences which describe it, but it is not seduced by those new disciplines : and it focuses on the practical action of the Church, leading to a renewal of faith-full living.

b. Underlying the issue of definition is a further problem which pastoral theology evokes, that of its theological identity. Ebeling contends that the fate of practical or pastoral theology is a touchstone for the fate of all theology, a 'critical symptom of the understanding of theology' (18). Moreover, other theological disciplines are often

suspicious of pastoral theology as a phantom enterprise, an upstart in the theological family, without pedigree or credibility. What is at issue here is the theological identity of pastoral theology.

It is helpful to draw a distinction at this point between a theological discipline and a theological activity. A discipline contains the data and methods which have accrued to it over time and through experience. An activity in this context is a movement of reflection using theological disciplines as part of the method. It can thus be argued that pastoral theology is not a primary theological discipline, but is nevertheless a primary theological activity, a way of doing theology using both theological and other disciplines to illuminate discussion and promote practical action.

Ballard makes the distinction clear:

> 'It is the theological activity appropriate to and demanded by the gospel affirmation that the present, the particular and the concrete is God-given, the place where God is met and we can live by obedience. But it is important to be clear that we are not talking about a subject in a curriculum, though there are relevant courses of study, but a mode of doing theology which is appropriate at every level, from the immediate and the ad hoc, to the highly sophisticated and carefully structured'. (19)

Ebeling identifies the nature of practical theology as being orientated to the present time and experience of the church. Indeed all theological disciplines have this dimension, but 'the relationship to the present emerges with particular penetration in practical theology' (20). He maintains that there is a tendency in theology to blur what is distinctively Christian and asserts that practical theology is unable to succumb to that temptation, because it brings into single focus the concrete reality of life and the fundamental event in the Church's existence, the event of Christ.

Pastoral theology, of all theological activities, is most especially the property of the people of God since it is their own lived experience of faith upon which they reflect. The manager

struggling to bring into a single focus his responsibility to effect redundancies in his firm, and his understanding of Jesus' proclamation of good news for the poor, is involved in the enterprise of pastoral theology. The PCC trying to integrate its understanding of worship with its understanding of communication theory, in order to make changes in its conduct of worship, is involved in the interactive process of pastoral theology. A Synod Committee working at a report on the ethics of disinvestment in a South American dictatorship, is correlating theological and socio-political factors in the exercise of pastoral theology. Even the child trying to decide if she can pray for her cat not to die, is engaging in an embryonic form of pastoral theology.

This theological activity may therefore be personal, interpersonal, or structural in focus. It may involve individual, group or political process. But essentially it will take seriously the concrete and particular, the given situation, with all the possibilities of corruption and redemption which may be present (21). It honours the particularity of each event-in-time, as God has honoured historical particularity in the incarnation. There is a 'hermeneutic of the situation', as there is a hermeneutic of the text.

c. There is however, a third problem which pastoral theology evokes, and that lies in the emphasis in pastoral theology on the significance of the concrete and particular. The problem is highlighted by Anthony Thiselton:

> If hermeneutical theorists rightly attack those biblical scholars who adhere to a seemingly innocent descriptivism should not the same challenge be addressed to those pastoral theologians who begin with bare "description" of the present situation in abstraction from its past and future context of theological founding and theological promise? (22)

It is important therefore that pastoral theology understands the present situation within a larger frame which transcends mere particularity. The historical depth and theological future of that situation are essential dimensions of it. Pannenberg's insight is important here, that history provides the necessary horizon for all branches of theology, including practical theology; so too is Moltmann's insight that the future promise of God may transform the meaning of the present.

This is not to uproot the 'present situation' from its significant place in pastoral theology; but merely to make sure that the richness of the concept is fully recognised. Pastoral theology makes no imperialist claim for the present situation. In no sense would it seek to displace central Christian truths and metaphors, such as the cross. As Anthony Thiselton points out: 'The cross transforms present criteria of relevance: present criteria of relevance do not transform the cross.' (23) Rather pastoral theology works in a different way, putting the present situation in all its richness and density into a critical conversation with normative Christian thinking and with other relevant disciplines from our culture. Wolfhart Pannenberg affirms the significance of the action of the Church in the present moment while ensuring that such action is seen within the broadest historical frame:

> Practical theology will analyse the present practice of the churches in relation to the whole of the history of Christian reconciliation, and offer critical interpretations of it in an attempt to produce models of present day church practice. (24)

We have examined, therefore, how pastoral theology addresses the problem of giving theory and practice a theological framework, having observed the failure of the 'primacy of theory' and the 'primacy of action' approaches. We then encountered the problems of definition in pastoral theology and suspicion of its theological identity, and finally we discussed the place in pastoral theology of the 'present situation'. We now have to explore and evaluate the various models of pastoral theology which contemporary theology presents. From there, we can examine how far 'story' represents a hopeful category in pastoral theology, offering a common frame of reference as well as a methodological resource, to pastoral theologians, both professional and lay.

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PHASE ONE

NAMING THE ACTION UNDER REVIEW -

PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Contemporary Models of Pastoral Theology

In order to examine the role of story in pastoral theology it is necessary first to undertake a survey of the contemporary scene in pastoral or practical theology. Five main approaches have been chosen, to indicate the dimensions of the central field of play.

1. Interpreting Situations : Edward Farley

Farley puts forward a powerful analysis of the theological enterprise in his book Theologia (1). His thesis is that what is needed is a recovery of the original form of theology as theologia, which encompasses both theology as wisdom (habitus) and theology as discipline. Habitus he identifies as a habit of the human soul, the individual's cognition of God, which was in the early Christian centuries the assumed purpose of Christian thinking, and came about by the transformation of the person as he or she engaged in disciplined meditation on and study of the sacred texts, and human life. Farley traces the history of the concept of theologia, distinguishing it from the concept of theology as a disciplined scholarly enterprise of understanding. He sees this latter approach to theology developing with the Thomists, although they still saw the disciplines as being for the purpose of habitus; only now habitus could be deepened and worked at with the new tools of scholastic study. (2)

With the Enlightenment, however, theology as discipline assumed complete ascendency. Theology was an increasingly technical and specialist study, and the four fold categorisation of theological disciplines, (scripture, dogmatics, church history and practical theology), came to be expressed in the encyclopaedia model of theological literature.

When, later on, the encyclopaedia-approach to theology began to wither, however, the

method of doing theology in discrete disciplines remained, and practical theology became even more the realm of professional practices and techniques, particularly with the development of theological colleges for ministerial preparation. By this time, the concept of theologia had all but disappeared. The specialist now prevails, both in university and in parish. Theology as habitus is more an accident, or the enthusiasm of a rogue cleric, whose book becomes for a while a minor cult, striking a deep chord as some half-glimpsed truth, but eventually submerged by the onward rush of ecclesial or academic activity.

All this is the background to Farley's account of a model of pastoral theology which is designed to overcome the fragmentation of the theological task. He presents a five-stage approach to the interpretation of situations by which faith, through disciplined theological reflection, may come to understanding. This hermeneutic will function first to discern the distinctive contents of the situation.

> 'Whatever is to be said about the independence and primacy of revelation in the order of knowledge and salvation, theological understanding is inevitably the understanding of an individual existing in an already disposed biographical, social and historical situation ... There is no other matrix of theological understanding than this concrete situation'. (3)

This first movement (attention to the situation) is succeeded by a second one, attention to the tradition. The tradition, by a hermeneutic of suspicion (i.e. a process of critical doubt and evaluation), probes the repressed past and the true nature of the situation. 'It repudiates the situation's claim to absoluteness as it discerns its corruption and its relativity' (4). Faith, therefore, intervenes to ask the questions which a transcendent viewpoint makes necessary.

Faith, however, would not be true to its critical stance in pursuit of truth, if it failed to question its own temptation to hubris. The hermeneutics of suspicion must therefore, as a third stage, be applied to the tradition itself, for that tradition is itself in part a human construct, devised and modified in imagery, symbols, beliefs and stories, in a concrete historical situation. 'Only then are the elements in the tradition which serve oppression, ideology and the legitimization of privilege, unmasked'. (5)

The tradition is now expressing its value both as normative (stage 2) and relative (stage 3). To overcome that impasse the fourth stage of the process of reflection is the determination of the normativeness of the tradition, particularly by the engagement of fundamental theology as the enterprise which explores the way in which the theological map reflects the nature of truth and reality. Thus reflection is rooted in a broader theological framework.

This leaves the last step in the reflective process as that of going beyond the de-absolutised tradition to discern the possibilities of redemption (and corruption) present in the situation, in order to plot a course into the values of the kingdom and the vision of the King. The concrete demands of the situation are therefore the touchstone of an adequate hermeneutic of the situation. For the pastoral theologian, faith includes understanding, which itself includes action.

Let us consider Farley's approach in practice. A minister is called to hospital where a young mother has just died; the husband is there: not so the children who are still at school. The minister has first to discern the particular contours of this tragic situation; his own knowledge of the family, the events of the last few hours, the reactions of the husband, the whereabouts of the children, the proximity of supportive friends and family and much more (stage 1). The minister is also aware of the tradition which he represents and expresses by his presence. He is aware that many others have died this day in this hospital, and what the tradition says to one it says to all. He carries a message of a God who in Christ suffered, died and was raised to life, a message of darkness and light, corruption and new creation. He is also thinking of the wider context in which this mother died, a hospital short of resources, staff under pressure, conflicting health care and financial priorities, a political and social grid of issues. This family is but the centre of a web of human and social dilemmas which are the arena of God's activity and concern (stage 2).

Nevertheless, the Christian tradition is not immune from criticism in this situation. Has the family's involvement in the Christian community prepared them in any way with resources to begin to cope with this crisis? Did the imagery of Christian faith, the beliefs and stories of the church constantly rehearsed and retold, provide any framework of meaning or hope,

or any access to truth? Have hospital and church become so separate in their self (and mutual) understandings, that the minister is hampered from working effectively and in a trusted manner in this situation? The minister is at least subconsciously aware of a number of disturbing questions which cannot be answered immediately (stage 3).

The minister now has to move towards determining which elements of the tradition are appropriate to this situation. As in each stage, he is aware of the expertise of other human sciences against which to check the normativeness of the Christian tradition. He is aware of areas of common perception, the 'holy ground' of silence and listening, the cross as a living symbol of suffering and injustice, the reassurance of touch and the cathartic value of tears, all understood by a God who has become incarnate in Jesus and experienced the pain and consolation of human relationships. He will know that resurrection is not a category for today's conversations with the husband, but will be crucial at some point in his pastoral care (stage 4).

The minister has now to discern his mode of action with husband, children, hospital staff, church, friends and family. He sees many possibilities of 'corruption' in the situation, despair and bitterness in the husband, vulnerability and emotional chaos for the children, unspoken pain in the staff, blame of the institution - the hospital - which was unable to offer the care its staff would like. But he determines to move gently towards the possibilities of redemption by caring after the manner of Christ, with few words but rather with the reassurance of his presence and the ministry of his silent prayers. He arranges for the children to come and for him to talk with them. He makes time for the staff to talk too. He meets unspoken needs for the sensitive handling of this point of transition, and the need for appropriate ritual, with prayer, touch and tears at the bed side. He makes a mental note to discuss resourcing problems with the Hospital Management, having experienced again the personal sharpness of these constraints (stage 5).

There is nothing remarkable about such pastoral activity, but the practice of ministers, lay and ordained, is diminished if it lacks reflection and refinement. The actual practice may be no different in many cases from instinctive pastoral care, but the potential for creative

response to situations of personal, group or structural crises, is greatly enhanced by some such process of critical engagement and reflection.

The problems left by Farley's hermeneutics of the situation are to do with assumptions in the methodology. In rightly starting with the concrete and particular, pastoral theologians may be tempted to move too quickly to religious categories of meaning and purpose. This may have the effect of constricting the value of the experience within the limitations of the particular religious frame of the theologian or minister. The situation may have to be left alone to speak in its human categories of loss and pain. 'The task of seeing God through mud', says David Cockerell in Beginning Where We Are, 'is essentially a spiritual and a practical one: a response of love rather than of intellectual enquiry'. (6)

A more serious methodological problem in Farley's approach is that it appears to make each phase of the model self-contained. This is to impose unjustified restrictions on the way progress in theological understanding is made. For example, we do not come into any 'situation' without a prior theological framework which itself determines what things will count as significant for us in that situation. There can be no pure objectivist description of what that 'situation' is. Theological presuppositions are inevitable. It may well be that our understanding of the tradition is only operating unconsciously as we approach a fresh situation, but it is nonetheless real, and determinative of what we perceive.

The reality of Farley's 'hermeneutic of situations' is surely that no sharp boundaries can be drawn around the phases of his model; they run into each other, and indeed the whole process is one without a beginning free of theological presupposition, and without an end free of further theological implications. Farley's model is helpful if it is not taken too rigidly but seen as a two-dimensional snapshot of a continuing process and a complex interaction.

2. Critical Correlation : David Tracy

David Tracy goes further than Farley in seeking to establish the place of practical theology in the public arena. For him it must be a philosophical discipline concerned with public

ethics:

> My aim is to suggest one basic heuristic scheme for practical theology as public theology. My claim is that practical theology attains its public character by articulating praxis criteria of human transformation as well as an explicitly theological ethic' (7).

Tracy starts by defining theology as the discipline that articulates mutually critical correlations between the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the Christian fact, and the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the contemporary situation (8). This theological method of critical correlation applies to all three sub-disciplines of theology: fundamental, systematic and practical, a position for which he argues in Blessed Rage for Order (9), and The Analogical Imagination (10).

It follows therefore that for Tracy, practical theology is the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian fact, and the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation (11). It is of the essence of the critical correlational approach to practical theology that neither the tradition nor the culture are dominant, but that each is allowed to offer a critique of the other. As Don Browning puts it, those who advocate this approach want:

> the practical theologian to enter an open and honest conversation with the secular educator, the secular mental health worker, the Marxist revolutionary, the local Jewish mayor; the feminist member of the municipal council, and the fundamentalist senator with his huge popular following' (12).

Tracy advocates a four-fold action in practical theology. First, the interpreter comes, in the company of others, with various models of human transformation, offered by psychology, the social sciences, historical studies, cultural anthropology, philosophy, theology and other disciplines. The method of mutually critical correlation is applied to these models, owning the possibility of a full range of correlational options, ranging from the identity of one model with another, through similarity, to analogy, and finally to complete non-identity

or confrontation. The dice are not fixed.

The second action is the analysis by the interpreter, again collaboratively, of the public claims to human transformation which are provided by different concrete ideals for the future, among them those of the secular humanist, the utopian (Mannheim), the retrospective utopian (Mircea Eliade), Christian eschatology and others.

The third step applies critical theories or hermeneutics of suspicion appropriate to the various models and ideals of human transformation. Thus, some might use psychoanalysis to unmask systematic distortions in models of transformation at the individual level; some might draw on the critique of ideology to do the same at the social and historical level; others might utilise aspects of the prophetic and mystical tradition to do the same at the religious level.

This groundwork allows the fourth action of practical theology to take place in explicit ethical reflection on moral praxis. Again this keeps practical theology in the public domain, and involves the application of ethical principles, rules and norms in the fully public realm of arguments about relative adequacy. Without the fourth step, practical theology could still be left with a purely individualistic, dispositional ethic.

The method of mutually critical correlation has much to commend it. It takes seriously both the cultural information and the social context of practical theology. It keeps the theological debate open to the pursuit of meaning and truth in dialogue with other disciplines. It refuses to allow either the tradition or the culture to dictate the terms of the debate.

The central question to be put to Tracy's approach, however, is about the validity of the correlational method. He is developing the work of Paul Tillich whose main concern was to hold together the Christian message and the cultural context in which it is proclaimed, by a correlational method which impugned the integrity of neither. The problem is that the content of the Christian tradition in this approach may find itself matching the existential

concerns of the age in a way that must generate suspicion. That the questions of the particular age must call forth particular elements of the tradition, is undoubtedly right; that those elements are all that the tradition contains, must surely be incorrect.

In an interesting discussion in The Modern Theologians vol 2 (13), it is suggested that Tracy steers an unstable middle course between revelation and human imagination, and it is not surprising, therefore, that Farley criticises him for failing to take Christian particularity seriously enough, while others (Kaufman) object that he leaves such particularity substantially unquestioned. The correlational method runs the risk of being insufficiently anchored and of allowing too wide a range of outcomes in its search for truth.

3. The Imaginative Interplay of Authorities : James and Evelyn Whitehead

In Method in Ministry (14) the Whiteheads propose both an alternative model and an alternative method for practical theology. They regard the bi-polar model of Tracy (following Tillich, Ogden and others) as too dense for common use, but more seriously, as ignoring a vital third source of significant information. While Tracy's critical correlation involves the interaction of tradition and cultural information, the Whiteheads propose a tripolar model which includes in the correlational activity the additional 'pole' of common human experience.

The first pole, the Christian tradition, includes 'insights, images and convictions given to us from Scripture and from the two millenia of pastoral practice' (15). The tradition is therefore intractibly pluriform, but it is also often threatening to ministers, who are inclined to lay aside the knowledge they acquired at theological college because of its complexity. The urgent need is for ministers as well as lay churchpeople to gain an intimacy with Scripture which is more than an intellectual grasp. Such 'befriending' of the tradition 'moves between a participation in faith in the biblical writings and an informal critical understanding of them' (16).

The second pole of significant information is that which comes from personal experience, what the individual and the community bring to the reflection. This information too is pluriform and ambiguous, since we carry with us the deposits of much bias, misapprehension and prejudice, as well as more neutral and positive memories. The later correlational activity needs to work with these deposits, to clarify them and reveal their tendency to corruption and distortion.

Similarly, cultural information may also be confusing. The Whiteheads describe it as 'that information - confirming, ambiguous and demonic - which arises from the culture' (17). It may, depending on the central concern, be the philosophy of Heidegger, the political analysis of Marx, the comparative interpretations of reality in other religious traditions, the human insights of the social sciences. It can well be seen that the latter approaches of the social sciences are particularly valuable in theological reflection for they are the intellectual perspectives of our age, and offer both tools for self assessment by the church, and also resources for ministry in counselling, group work, church management, the engagement of the church with complex ethical issues and other forms of ministry.

Given this tri-polar model, the dynamic which moves the model forward is to be found in the method by which this information is applied to the task of influencing pastoral action. The goal of practical theology is always, for the Whiteheads, given shape by the desire 'to promote both competence and confidence in the exercise of Christian ministry' (18). Their method therefore, is one of listening, assertation and decision. In the listening stage, the interpreter attends closely to the information from the three authorities, suspending judgement and remaining open to the hidden complexities of the experience, the culture and the tradition. To cut short this stage of accurate attention runs the risk of precipitate interpretation and action, all too common in church life, whether in a first interview with an engaged couple or in a church leader's condemnation of society's latest moral crisis.

The listening phase gives way to that of assertion, which is the correlational activity of this method, engaging the three sources of information in a process of mutual clarification and challenge. In his later writing James Whitehead neglects the phrase 'critical correlation' in

favour of 'imaginative interplay' as the most helpful description of this phase of reflection in practical theology (19). He sees the paradigm of 'play' gaining increasing attention in philosophy, psychology and theology, and quotes theologian John Dominic Crossan as suggesting that play is more than a metaphor, but in fact a metaphor of metaphors, a comprehensive image of human living (20).

This assertation phase, the imaginative interplay of authorities, is succeeded by the third phase of decision. The Whiteheads are writing of a model and method in practical ministry, and conclude that a 'ministerial' decision has to be one to act in a particular fashion. A 'theological' decision, by contrast, can decide not to decide, but to reflect again, to return to the phases of attending and assertion.

The merit of this model and method of imaginative interplay (correlation) is its simplicity of outline but receptivity to complex, ambiguous information. One mark of good pastoral theology should be its accessibility both to the lay Christian, struggling to make sense of the ambiguities of her daily existence, and the academic theologian seeking a model of sufficient subtlety and richness for his comprehensive range of information. Moreover, it is able to affirm the presence of God in the tradition, in the personal experience of the interpreter, and in the developing perceptions of reality offered by other 'secular' disciplines. It takes seriously therefore both the comprehensiveness and elusiveness of God, 'whose circumference is everywhere, and whose centre is nowhere' (Augustine). God is central to the pursuit of truth wherever such pursuit takes place, though religious information so gained will always be partial and distorted.

The drawback of the model lies in two areas: problems of terminology and a failure to take sufficiently seriously the given reality of the ministerial concern. The terms 'personal experience' and 'cultural information' may not be sufficiently sharply delineated. They are reasonable as far as they go but what 'experience' and 'cultural information' consist in needs to be unpacked further. Secondly, by taking the three poles of significant information as tradition, experience and culture, the concrete particularity of the event, situation, person, group etc. which is the object of attention, is in danger of failing to come into focus. The

value of Farley's hermeneutic of the situation was its sharp focus on the distinctive content of the action or situation involved (even if such an event needs to be seen in the context of broader streams of ongoing corporate traditions and systems which give present empirical phenomena their identity). In the present model the unique quality of the situation may be cast adrift between the three poles of supposedly significant information, each one failing to make critical contact with the central concern itself.

4. Shared Christian Praxis : Thomas Groome

Thomas Groome proposes a model of pastoral theology in education which he argues has the merit of being capable of handling complex empirical and theological data as well as being appropriate to much simpler ministerial practice. For example:

The session was part of a 'Christian Foundations' course and a dozen adults were there to review their basic understanding of faith and their commitment to it. The subject this week was prayer. The course members were first asked to fill in a questionnaire on their current practice of prayer, not necessarily for them to share with others, but in order that they could engage with their present experience. They were then invited to offer their reactions to the questions on the sheet, in effect questioning their own practice and understanding of prayer by discussion and comparison with the thinking of others. They were then offered specific Christian teaching on prayer, drawing on scriptural injunctions and the practice of the church, by audio visual presentation and a direct talk. The participants were then invited to discuss the meaning of the Christian teaching for their own understanding and practice of prayer, and to let their questions and doubts challenge the normativeness of the teaching. The group examined a series of statements about prayer to clarify their own response to this new interaction of tradition and experience. Lastly, the group members were asked to experiment with a form of prayer in the coming weeks to see whether their own practice of prayer effectively substantiated the claim of the tradition that prayer is transformative in its power.

Without realising it, the group leader had been employing the educational method which

Thomas Groome calls 'shared Christian praxis'. In his influential book Christian Religious Education (21), Groome affirms the necessity of theory and praxis existing in a correlational relationship, not only in our theological thinking but also in our educational methods. Otherwise, the gains made in recent years in the acceptance of theological paradigms which overcome the dangers inherent in the theory-to-practice model of theological activity, will be lost in the perpetuation of inappropriate models of theological education.

Groome is not simply proposing a practitioner's model of educational design. The major part of his book provides a firm framework in theological method, and reveals his debt to liberation writings and to the conscientisation approaches of Paulo Freire. (We will return to a discussion of praxis in pastoral theology in chapters 9 and 10). Only then does he propose a method in education which is consistent with such a theological framework.

However, Groome is also concerned that theology should be understood as an activity done by all Christians, with God's activity having a primary locus in human history, and the consequent theology being done with the intention of facilitating lived faith. Christian religious education by shared praxis is therefore defined as:

> A group of Christians sharing in dialogue their critical reflection on present action, in the light of the Christian Story and its Vision, toward the end of lived Christian faith' (22).

The first phase of such an approach is the naming of the present action in response to the particular focus. In our example, by using a questionnaire on prayer, the participants were being invited to express their reactions, feelings and understandings of prayer. They were making a personal statement.

Phase two concerns the participant's stories and visions. They look below the surface of their present action in relation to the subject and ask why they do what they do and what their hopes are in doing so. Again in our example, discussion on the prayer questionnaire allowed a mutual checking and questionning of personal responses, thereby starting the

process of reflection, breaking open the surface of unexamined practice.

Phase three focuses on the Christian community story and vision, giving an opportunity for the participants to encounter the Christian tradition both in its primary story and in the responses the story has evoked. The audio visual presentation and the direct talk on prayer gave the opportunity for this engagement to take place, with the tradition expressed as an open story, not a closed system.

The fourth movement of shared praxis is the correlational one wherein there is a dialectical hermeneutic between the participant's stories and the Christian story. The nature of the engagement should be one of mutual critique. In what ways does the Christian teaching on prayer resonate with, affirm, call into question or invite further, the stories of prayer brought by the members of the Christian Foundations course? Moreover, in what ways does the praxis of the participants affirm, recognise the limits of, or push beyond, the Christian story of prayer?

This correlation leads to a fifth movement: a dialectical hermeneutic between the Christian vision and the participant's visions. In other words, the question to be addressed is how far the participant's present practice substantiates the claims of the tradition in terms of purpose and hope. This teleological perspective invites a faith response: how will we act in the future? In the case of our group on prayer, the challenge was given of assessing the adequacy of their practice of prayer, judged by the transformative purposes of prayer in the Christian story. They were also invited to make a practical response, to work out a new form of prayer for use in the coming weeks.

Groome's shared Christian praxis represents an advance on other models of critical correlation. He uses the best of Farley's hermeneutic of situations but takes it further in making a praxis methodology available to theological education. The accessability and proven value of this approach are significant strengths. Nevertheless, there are drawbacks. The normativeness of the tradition as story and vision is raised as a question that is never adequately answered. The re-telling of the story in different times and places may hold

open the possibilities of exploration and reinterpretation, but the nature of the authority carried by the tradition has to be assumed rather than examined. A second hesitation about shared praxis is that its very strength, its emphasis on practical theology as an ordered and accessible procedure, needs balancing with an equal strength in Farley's emphasis on theology as habitus, a habit of the mind and heart. The one may appear unduly rationalist; the other unduly intuitive.

5. Practical Moral Reasoning: Don Browning

Don Browning offers one of the most satisfying models of practical theology. The merit of his approach is that he builds on the basic correlational principle of other models but he succeeds in integrating practical theology with a framework of theological ethics.

In his Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care (23), Browning identifies four steps of practical theological thinking:

1. experiencing and defining the problem
2. deeper attention, listening and understanding
3. critical analysis and comparison of the relevant options, including one's Christian commitments
4. decision and strategy

These steps correspond to similar patterns in Whitehead, Groome and others.

Where he goes further, however, is in placing this revised correlational method in the context of theological ethics, thereby restoring an often neglected connection and affirming that practical theology should be open to critical, public scrutiny. Practical action by the Church, '..must be defended before the entire community in a public way with reasons that, although grounded in faith, can at the same time be made understandable..'(24).

Browning therefore delineates five levels of practical moral reasoning which apply to each of the four steps above, though particularly to steps three and four:

a. The metaphorical level: what basic metaphors and stories are being used to represent the ultimate context of our experience?

b. The obligational level: what comprehensive principles of obligation tell us what we are morally justified in doing?

c. The tendency/need level: what human needs are requiring to be met in this situation?

d. The contextual level: what is the present cultural, sociological or ecological context, and what constraints does it place on our actions?

e. The rule/role level: what should be the concrete rules and roles that we should follow in this particular situation?

Browning goes on:

> "In suggesting that these five questions are always in some way present in all instances of free and autonomous moral thinking, I do not mean that they are consciously so, nor do I mean that we always start with the higher or more basic questions and systematically go down from there. In fact we probably generally back into the higher questions as we gradually move from the problem we are confronting to a more theoretical analysis."(25)

This analysis, therefore, will be most appropriate at the correlational stage of the process of theological reflection, and will involve insights from not only theological disciplines but also from philosophy and the human sciences.

There is a further value in Browning's approach, in that each of the five levels of practical moral reasoning has a counterpart in the more 'aretaic', character-forming dimension of human experience. The aretaic counterpart of the metaphorical level of moral thinking is therefore to be found in the development of faith: of the obligational level, in moral development: of the tendency/need level, in emotional development: of the contextual level, in perceptual development; and of the rule/role level, in concrete rule/role awareness. It is the task of Christian education to form people who have the kind of character, motivation and knowledge necessary to approach the process of practical moral thinking from a Christian perspective. Browning's analysis provides a satisfying balance between

the objective task of theological ethics in practical theology and the subjective task of character formation.

One particular problem with Browning's approach lies in its over-identification of practical theology with theological ethics. While it is helpful to have a closer connection between the two drawn out, it is perhaps expecting too much of the identification to bear all the weight of practical theology. It is not always the case, for example, that pastoral counselling, Christian education or prophetic social action are best seen as ethical activities, although each might have an ethical dimension.

Nevertheless, Browning has done practical theology a considerable service both in finding an appropriate location within the theological frame, and also in asserting that this theological activity must be open to critical public scrutiny.

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Convergence in Pastoral Theology through the Category 'Story'

1. Convergence in Pastoral Theology through Story

While none of the foregoing models of pastoral theology uses story as its main frame of reference, nevertheless story is a key component of many of the models, and it will be argued here that the framework of narrative offers a helpful way forward in pastoral theology, and ties this field of theology into a major theme of the contemporary theological scene. We begin by looking again at the pastoral theologians mentioned in the last chapter to examine their use of the category of story.

When Thomas Groome identifies the process of pastoral theology as a dialectical hermeneutic between our story and vision and the story and vision of the Christian tradition, he is clearly giving a central role to the concept of story. In the educational process he values both the stories with which students approach their particular focus of learning, and also those parts of the christian story which relate to that focus. It is the mutual interaction of these stories, from which choice of future action or vision emerges, which makes the education effective. Personal and communal stories are the crucial ingredients of this educational process.

For James Whitehead the correlational activity of pastoral theology 'tests the leeway' between, on the one hand, our experience and the story within which it is embedded, and on the other hand, the experience and convictions of the Christian tradition, again often expressed in narrative form. Indeed in his imaginative interplay of three sources of information - personal experience, the tradition, and the culture - each of the sources may well be described as having a narrative quality, since the cultural information relevant to most pastoral situations will often be in story form, the empirical work and case studies of the human sciences being much in evidence.

Edward Farley makes his case for a 'hermeneutic of situations' which requires 'reading' in a disciplined, self-critical manner. When pastoral situations come under scrutiny, they are usually presented in narrative form, whether a young mother is talking about her post-natal despair, or a clergy team is discussing the progress of a tenants' association. Those involved in the reflective process of learning from experience often find narrative the most helpful vehicle to use. It is not suprising therefore that narrative is a primary category for pastoral theology.

In their Epilogue to Formation and Reflection (1) editors L. Mudge and J. Poling write of the final phase of practical theology as that of reconstituting the faith community. They maintain that the thinking which accompanies this activity is typically not that of the academic setting, and not essentially reflective. It is nonetheless seminal material. They describe it as anecdotal, deliberative, and characterised by story-telling. The concern of such Christians is to live faithfully, and 'the thinking required to form and maintain such communities in faithful being would be their working, eminently practical, theology.'(2)

Other theologians active in the field of pastoral theology make similar excursions in the area of story. David Deeks identifies words, deeds and feelings as three of the basic resources of pastoral theology. He draws particular attention to the place of story-telling and conversation in contributing to the common quest for meaning. Stories are told about our culture, history and significant influences, the things we feel deeply about, the puzzling, rich experiences of life. From bases of this kind, pastoral theology seeks to find meaning in life as a whole and to establish a conversation between those struggling towards meaning, and the Christian tradition (3).

Charles Winquist sees the task of practical theology as 're-visioning ministry' and suggests three movements in practical hermeneutics. First, ministry has to accept experience as it is given, uncensored and uncompromised. Secondly, the surface of the experience has to be penetrated to expose a more satisfying vision of what is really going on there. Then thirdly, the experience is reconstructed using the history, symbols and ideas of the tradition to make meaning. In this way, says Winquist, 'our individual stories are implicated in the

stories of God.' (4).

The category of story is therefore being offered by a number of theologians as a helpful component of a model of pastoral theology. It will be argued here that story is not only a helpful component but a major frame of reference, that there is a structural logic within the concrete and particular realities to which pastoral theology attends, which intrinsically demands narrative. It will be argued that narrative offers a fuller way of ordering our experience, and that the creative conversations which can take place between stories coming from the particular situation, the tradition and the culture, are at the heart of the enterprise we call pastoral theology.

2. The Model of Critical Conversation

It would be generally agreed within pastoral theology that any viable model of pastoral theology has to meet a number of criteria:-

a. It must take sufficiently seriously the concrete event or experience, scripture and tradition, and the contemporary culture in which the event or experience takes place.

b. It should incorporate a central phase of critical correlation, allowing for a fair juxtaposition of information, and the possible operation of a hermeneutic of suspicion.

c. It should be sufficiently elegant and purposeful that it can be used by sophisticated cognoscenti of the field of pastoral theology and yet not be inaccessible to the hard-pressed clergyman and the faithful layperson.

d. It should be capable of prolonged reflection but be intended to issue in faithful action in the world.

e. It should be sufficiently open-ended and porous both to manage awkward material and to let through material which confuses the central concern of the reflective process.

The model which is proposed in this thesis is one of critical conversation between stories,

and it seeks to meet the above criteria. It operates in five interdependent phases:-

ONE: Naming the situation or action under review

The first necessary step is to identify as clearly as possible the particular unique features of the situation and to analyse the relationship the participant has with it. This involves asking rigorous questions of the situation or event until it has yielded its specific contours in their full historical contingency and particularity. It involves penetrating the surface of the event and trying to read the sub-text of it. It includes challenging the normal way of describing or evaluating the situation, and exploring the many dimensions of it, and the multitude of perceptions which will be owned by the various participants in the action. Much of this material will have the character of story, since it will centre on an experience, incident, crisis, or development within the story of an individual, group or institution. 'There is something intrinsic in experience which demands narrative'(5).

A word of caution needs to be registered, however, lest it be thought that an objective, value-free description of events is possible. Agents involved in this process of 'naming the situation' inevitably carry with them their own subjectivity. Nevertheless, a crucial element of this phase is the task of becoming as clear as possible about the way the observer involved in the reflection relates to the situation; how, for example, the observer thinks or feels about, reacts to, understands, evaluates or otherwise participates in the action. There can be no clear distinction between the situation and the observer since the situation cannot be understood except as it is shaped in the perception of the observer.

If, for example, a pastor is faced with a suicidal young woman, he will need to consider the history and background of this crisis, previous care and family support, the signals of distress and immediate practical needs, the perceptions of those closest to the situation, the woman's relationship to the medical services and her own prior record of receptivity to help. He will also need to be aware of his own relationship to the woman, and his own bias in working with the depressed, his knowledge and his prejudices. By asking these and many other questions of the situation and of himself, he will try to construct as full a

picture as possible of the experience in order that he may minimise the dangers of fantasy, imprecision and ignorance. Only on this basis can the rest of the reflective process operate securely.

TWO. Inform the situation or action from the relevant cultural information/human sciences

The second element of the model of critical conversation is the investigation of the cultural setting of the situation, drawing on appropriate secular knowledge and insights. We come here to the fundamental theological conviction of pastoral theology that God's action and disclosure of himself is to be encountered in the woof and warp of creation, and that we find reflections of his truth in the self-critical secular disciplines as well as in the theology of the Church. It is therefore not only possible but essential that due attention is paid to the findings of the human sciences in pastoral situations, of anthropology and sociology in mission, of literary and artistic disciplines in liturgy, and more.

There is clear precedent for a dialogue of theology with other disciplines. The most familiar one is that between theology and philosophy, which has been to their mutual benefit. There are, nevertheless, a number of obvious dangers. One is that the human sciences may be inclined to try and treat all religious language as primary discourse for which it is the task of the human science to give some explanation. Certainly it is true that first-order religious language and concepts may be used by people in ways which disguise realistic and truthful perceptions of what is really going on in a given situation. However, that is only to say that any vocabulary may be employed in the aid of sickness rather than health. What matters is that both theology and the human sciences accept the validity of the other discipline as not only first-order language but also second-order, theoretical and reflective discourse, through which the two disciplines may engage.

Another danger in the debate of theology with a human science is the reduction of vocabularies and concepts to a table of equivalents, e.g. neurosis = sin, acceptance = justification. This move to the lowest common denominator does not enrich either

discipline or offer any real challenge to adapt concepts or language. Only the risk of true change makes the conversation worth-while.

The greatest and continuing danger in pastoral theology, however, is that engagement with the sources of information that emanate from the culture, the human sciences, is treated too superficially. Stephen Pattison is a severe critic of this weakness:

> 'A further criticism concerns the depth of the critical conversation....Deepening conversation might demand extensive research of a fairly academic kind into the social sciences.' What is needed is that 'those who practice theological reflection will get drawn into the complexities of analysis using the tools and insights of secular and theological disciplines in order to construct a more nuanced critique and world view.'(6)

If a church is undertaking a mission audit it will need to draw on the disciplines and practices of sociology in order to understand the context of its mission. If a family is struggling with a teenage son, any pastoral intervention would have to be equipped with some of the sociological and psychological factors behind deviant behaviour, and some of the insights of family therapy. A church which takes seriously its mission to a multi-racial parish, will have to engage with sociological and religious factors concerning the belief and behaviour of ethnic groups, and the literature on racism. In pastoral theology there are no short cuts through the wealth of information offered by the human sciences. Good pastoral practice depends on it.

What then is the justification for calling this information 'story'? It will not be contended that story is the best or only category to cover the broad range of information available to pastoral theology. Nevertheless, if, as will be argued in chapter four, human experience has a narrative structure, and the information which pastoral theology requires from the human sciences is essentially related to human experience, then it follows that narrative or story will be a natural category to use in trying to put a grid of interpretation over the information from those sciences. Pastoral reflection is concerned with the human dimension of those sciences and the structural logic of such discourse will therefore be

narrative.

THREE. Inform the situation or action from the Christian tradition

The next dimension of the model is the activity of drawing deeply on the resources of the tradition to illuminate the distinctive features of the action under review. It is generally agreed that those resources are in scripture, the doctrines and disciplines of the Church, spirituality and liturgy, and the accumulated experience of faithful Christian lives. The task of working at scripture critically and with discernment to establish the proper 'conversation partners' for the particular situation, is not lightly accomplished. Unsophisticated quarrying of biblical themes and texts is no substitute for rigorous study. The tradition provides a context of interpretation and understanding for the working of any model of pastoral theology. It will in fact be the 'pre-understanding' which determines what counts as significant information in the first phase of the model.

It has often been argued in recent years (for example, by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England in their report Believing in the Church (7)) that the activity which gives the Church its identity and renews its life, is attending to the Christian story. Worship, evangelism, daily Christian living and most other distinctive Christian activities depend centrally on telling that story, sharing that story or imitating that story.

> It would be arguable that the common activity which the Church (of England) ordains most clearly and in the largest measure for its people is not praise or fellowship or even prayer: it is "attention to the story". (8)

In this thesis it will be argued that the task of pastoral theology, therefore, is to identify in the Christian story the most appropriate material for the critical conversation which follows. A church may be asked by a gay group if it can use its meeting facilities; the church will have to examine the elements of the Christian tradition which relate to sexuality and the outcast, to creation and compassion, to community and hospitality. The exercise could seem like pulling a never-ending thread out of a piece of knitting; it needs rather to be seen as the selective and controlled study of a number of different threads in

a rich and colourful cloth.

FOUR. Critical conversation between the stories

The correlational phase of the model is central to the enterprise of pastoral theology. Having attended acutely to the three informational phases in order to set up the raw material for theological reflection, the conversation between them now has to be facilitated and encouraged with critical rigour. As the pastoral situation, the Christian tradition and the relevant cultural information are now in place, the dynamic of the model is in what is being called 'conversation', allowing for Tracy's full range of correlational possibilities, from identity, through similarity and analogy, to non-identity or confrontation.(9)

The image of the conversation is helpful here. In the first place it is a concept with which we are all familiar. Moreover conversation affects both or all parties to it, leaving no party in the same state of understanding as before. Conversation is a living experience and implies an openness to change or at least, to participation. Conversation may also be difficult and involve effort, or it may lead to silence and disagreement. These points are developed by Stephen Pattison, who concludes:

> 'Conversations can be conducted at many different levels, from that of preliminary acquaintance to that of long term dialogue. As participants get to know each other, their views of each other and of relevant factors in relation to each other will change and evolve to become more complex and sophisticated. This does not however, devalue the perceptions and insights gained on the first and perhaps naive preliminary encounter, though later these may be radically modified and relativised' (10)

Conversation therefore makes the concept of theological reflection accessible both to the professional theologian and to the layperson.

Crucial to the art of conversation is the activity of question and answer. This dialectic is essential to the discovery of meaning and is well brought out by Hans-Georg Gadamer in

his Truth and Method. He argues that things arise in conversation and questioning which no single person sees by individual reflection alone.

> Precisely this is what characterises a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of the statement that demands to be set down in writing: that here language, in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point, performs that communication of meaning which, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. (11)

And it is the questioning process itself which establishes the meaning:

> A person who seeks to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question... The meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply. (12)

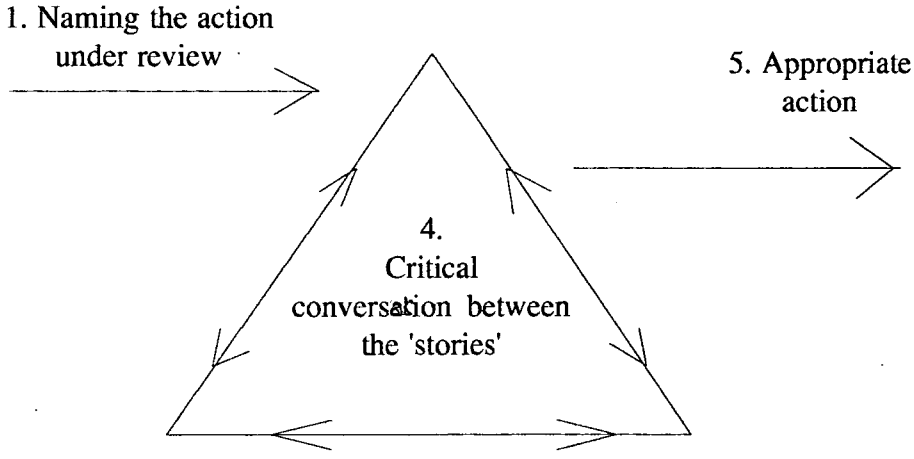
The question, therefore, takes the mind beyond its accustomed location in order to allow some critical distance from its own tradition and culture. This makes conversation exciting and unpredictable, and just such an uncertainty exists in the proposed model of doing pastoral theology. When tradition and culture interact new possibilities immediately open up in this 'hermeneutic of the situation'. The Christian will hold the tradition to be normative but not unchallengeable. He will be prepared to change the shape of his understanding of the tradition in the light of the conversation, but he will also be prepared to challenge the secular information with the insights of theology. The sharp edges of the situation or action under review will also both affect and be affected by, the other partners in the conversation. The interaction may be brief and decisive or prolonged and necessitate further research, but it should not be hurried, or if pastoral crisis demands an immediate response, it should not be omitted later, in order to check the accuracy of the action and to learn from the experience.

FIVE. Appropriate Action

The reflective stage of action-reflection learning has the purpose of stimulating new

action. Pastoral theology as a process of theological reflection on the concrete and particular, has a purposeful quality which earths it in the reality from which it came. It is meant to contribute to the redemptive purposes of God in the specific opportunity laid before it. The appropriate action may be not to take concrete action yet, but to reflect further with more information; nevertheless, the end of pastoral theology is always pastoral action. The suicidal young woman should receive appropriate help; the gay group wanting to use church premises should receive their decision.

The five phases of the critical conversation model of Pastoral Theology may be represented thus:-



3. Pastoral Theology within the wider development of Narrative Theology

The role of story in pastoral theology needs to be seen against the background of wider trends in the theological enterprise. Over the last fifty years various theological trends have emerged and burned brightly, though some have since lost their early brilliance. It is relatively easy to name historical theology, biblical theology, process theology, contextual theology, liberation, black and feminist theologies, and now one more recently encountered in various forms, narrative theology.

George Stroup has attempted to chart the progress of this approach in The Promise of Narrative Theology (13). We will examine his thesis in greater detail in chapter 6 but his main argument is that Christian identity is formed, and revelation takes place, when an individual's personal narrative 'collides' with the narrative of the Christian community. Personal identity, he maintains, has a narrative form, being the interpretation of personal history by memory. Similarly community identity has a narrative form from scripture and from the history of the interpretation of scripture. As the two narratives 'collide', or 'fuse' (Gadamer), so personal identity is reconstructed in Christian faith.

> Christian narrative emerges from the collision between an individual's identity narrative and the narratives of the Christian community. The metaphor of "collision" is appropriate for describing this encounter because in many instances if a person's identity is illumined and transformed by Christian faith, if revelation takes place, significant disorientation and reinterpretation take place. (14)

There are echoes here of Paul Ricoeur who writes that in narrative 'the hearer...becomes who he is' (15). Moreover, David Tracy in The Analogical Imagination reaches a similar conclusion to Stroup on the importance of narrative in defining our identity and giving shape to our experience. He writes:

> 'In part, I suspect, narrative alone provides us with some fuller way to order and unify our actual lived experience, with its tensions and surprises, its

reversals and triumphs, its experience through memory of a past and, through anticipation and hope, of a future.' (16)

He also makes the link with biblical narrative by observing that, 'the gospels share the prejudice of life for narrative as a key to lived experience. They share the assumption common to humankind that life itself has the character of a story' (17).

If this is so, it would be strange indeed if pastoral theology, that part of the the theological enterprise which takes as its focus the action of the church with people and society, did not have at its heart the category of narrative. If telling a story is a universal way of structuring human experience, we would expect it to give shape also to that theology of human experience which is called pastoral theology.

4. Early Warnings - the limitations of story in theology

What this thesis has been seeking to establish so far is a potential space for narrative within a proposed model of pastoral theology. We have not yet examined any of the technical definitions of story in terms of sequence, narrative time, plot, or any of the literary conventions of story. This will come later in the chapters on literary criticism and on narrative theology. All that is being claimed at this point is that narrative categories offer a fruitful framework for pastoral theology, a claim which it is the task of the thesis to substantiate. Sufficient is already being claimed, however, for it to be necessary to put down a number of disclaimers, lest the charge of theological imperialism be brought too soon.

Theology as story, or as a critical conversation between stories, must not seek to carry more of the theological task than it can bear. When David Cockerell waxes enthusiastic about story and claims that, 'Theology-as-story is the re-location of theology itself,'(18) he overstates his case. Yet he is right to identify the raw material of this theology as the hopes, fears, pains and pleasures of everyday life, rather than a metaphysical or doctrinal system. Such raw material is within the grasp of every Christian. The Church has to tell

its story so that others can set their own stories, their own raw material, alongside that community story, and be changed.

The claims of narrative theology raise other questions also, and pastoral theology needs to be aware of these unresolved issues before building too much on the foundations of story. F.W. Dillistone raises a crucial question.

> 'What makes a narrative theologically significant? A narrative may be aesthetically, morally, historically significant. But theologically significant? Does it depend on the teller of the story? Or on the relation between teller and reader? Or on the form of the story? That seems to me the most important question that can be raised in any discussions of narrative theology.'(19)

It may depend largely on the content of the story itself; not that the story has to be overtly Christian to be theologically significant but it should have a performative effect rather than simply an informative one (in a sense of the term to be discussed later) and the performance should resonate with the Christian story. In other words, if a story in human experience of failure and forgiveness echoes those parts of the Christian story where the hearer may be changed by exposure to the story of God's reconciliation of the world through Christ, then that story has a theological significance. Nevertheless, the issue of what gives a story such significance is not settled.

A further question concerns the interpretation of stories. How far does a narrative call for a further interpretation, or does it, like a parable, make its own impact? Does a story convey its own meaning, so that further work diminishes it, or is it merely a bridge to real understanding, a glorified illustration? Suppose one were to watch a factory worker using his leisure time sitting in the early morning by the river bank, concentrating utterly on the business of fishing. The observer would see a man absorbed and attentive, methodical and patient, watching for the small signal of life at the end of the line, waiting for a tumultuous moment of activity, vigour and pursuit. Does such a scene need explaining, or could one simply say: 'The Kingdom of God is like a man who went fishing...'?

The discovery of story as a major, liberating theological category must not lead the discoverer to a naive anti-intellectualism. Faith needs a language, and story represents a valuable form of such language, but the dimensions of the language must be rich and broad enough to bear the weight of faith experience. Hence the value of poetry and chronicle, law and prophecy, music and art, ritual and movement, as well as that of story. Says David Cockerell:

> 'It is simply prejudice to elevate one kind of formulation to the status of paradigm, and the Christianity which cannot nourish its faith through attention to these arts is going to be left sadly limited in its experiential range.'(20)

We might also note at this point the associated dangers of story-telling becoming either exclusive or individualistic. When one person's stories prevents them hearing and giving value to those of another, then the story has started to become a system, to be defended or enforced rather than shared and enjoyed. The believer may still regard his story as normative because of its performative character, but triumphalism has no place in either the content or the style of Christian believing.

Finally we may notice the danger of our interest in story becoming a subtle form of nostalgia or conservatism. Telling stories may keep us bound to the past with its impossibly golden ages and its unmmatchable heroes. To guard against this it is important to view the past rightly, as that by which we discover who we are in the present and who we might become. Stories about the past place us in a culture which helps to define us, and give us a framework to work out our possibilities. Telling stories helps us create and recreate our social identity, reminding us that our identity is firstly social before it is individual. Simone Weil went so far as to write: 'Of all the soul's needs, none is more vital than this one of the past.' (21) To live in a society which neglects the past is to be made into an absolute beginner in our formulation of meanings, values and purpose. Properly understood, therefore, story, far from imprisoning us in our past, provides us with roots and identity. Nevertheless, we must still register the danger of sentimentality.

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PHASE 2

INFORMING THE ACTION UNDER REVIEW FROM RELEVANT CULTURAL INFORMATION

The Role of Story in Literary Criticism

So far we have been examining contemporary models of pastoral theology and seeking to discern the extent to which the category of story is being helpfully employed. We have also been considering the model of critical conversation as a five phase approach to the task of pastoral theology.

The study thus far represents in itself the first phase of this model of critical conversation, in that it has attempted to name the situation under review, identifying as clearly as possible the current contours and features of a narrative approach to pastoral theology. The contention of this essay is that this narrative approach may have still more value than has thus far been apparent.

It is necessary therefore to engage the second phase of the critical conversation model, i.e. to inform the situation under review, (the role of story in pastoral theology) from other relevant disciplines. The two disciplines to be offered here are those of literary criticism and ethnography, in both of which narrative is brought into focus.

Phase three of the approach employed in this essay will seek to inform the role of story in pastoral theology from the Christian tradition by examining the nature and place of narrative theology in the ongoing theological task. With these three sources of information in place, (story in pastoral theology, the human sciences, and the Christian tradition), we will be in a position to start the conversation and to see how far the category of story helps to clarify both the method and content of pastoral theology.

The fifth and final phase of the model is that which identifies appropriate action resulting from the crucial correlational stage. It will be argued that narrative has a valuable role in the praxis and pastoral theology of the Church and of theological education.

We turn, then, to the role of story in literary criticism.

1. Classic lines of approach in Literary Criticism

Giles B. Gunn, in the introduction to Literature and Religion (1) suggests that there are four basic elements in any work of art - the artist, the work, the world which the work of art creates or reveals, and the audience with which the work interacts. It may be seen further, that the four classic approaches to the study of literature have emphasised in turn these basic elements.

The oldest theory of criticism was based on mimesis, imitation. The tradition is to be found from Plato and Aristotle through to Dr. Johnson and the diarists: the principal concern was with the world revealed by the work, the world of human affairs and emotions, of the polis and culture. Such an approach was, however, superseded by the educative theory which emphasised instruction rather than imitation. Through medieval and Puritan literature came the underlying motif of literature as a means to an end, that of the spiritual and moral enrichment and improvement of the audience.

The late eighteenth century saw the emergence of romantic theory in literary criticism, whereby the expression of the writer him or herself became the prime focus of attention. The life and passions, the tragedy and possibly the death of the writer, became the absorbing interests of the critic, who examined the writing for its power to express the experience of the life behind it.

The next phase of literary theory concentrated on the fourth element of the work of art, the work itself. This was the achievement of the literary theorists of the 1930s through to the 1950s, and went under the designation: 'the New Criticism'. The result was a semantic or linguistic approach seeking to understand how the writer uses words, idioms and images to disclose particular kinds of meanings. One form of this approach achieved a particular focus in connection with a specific philosophical world-view which came to be known as structuralism. This began in French intellectual circles as a reaction against the subjectivity

of existentialism and in its attempt to exclude the role of the human subject took the rigorous position of positively excluding the intention of the author or any interest in history. Structuralism, therefore, works from within the 'sealed and sovereign context' (Jasper) of the work itself. The literary form employed by the writer is seen as inseparable from the content of the work, so that it is the structures and literary devices which create the meaning.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure stands at the source of this important stream of western literary theory in the twentieth century. At the heart of his thought is the concept of the sign, comprising a signifier (the spoken word), and the signified (the mental concept). Literary theory is not, according to the new criticism, concerned with referents beyond the work itself. Language and literature are enclosed systems concerned with internal rules rather than with meaning in relation to an outside reality.

Such an approach to literature, though useful, would not be acceptable to most theologians in its pure form. By abandoning a concern for any existing reality which corresponds to the structures of language, structuralism hardly leaves room to address the central concern of theology, the understanding of the nature, purpose and action of God. The hermeneutical task of retrieval in this situation, spearheaded by Ricoeur, Gadamer and others, must await later discussion. Our concern at the moment is to describe the background to contemporary literary criticism, identifying the main lines of approach.

Since the 1960s a newer approach to literary theory has emerged which makes the reader the focus of attention, rather than the deep structures of the text. Initial movements in this direction can be seen in Gerard Genette's important work Narrative Discourse (2) which is both a culmination of structuralist work on narrative, providing a systematic narrative theory, and also a study of the way narrative structures work in persuading the reader to a certain understanding of events. Genette studies the possible relationships between the time of the story (the events themselves) and the time of the narrative (the discourse which presents those events). These relationships he classifies in terms of order, duration and frequency. Under 'order', he studies the way events occur in one order and may be narrated

in another: so-called anachronies, which themselves divide into flashbacks (analepses) and flashforwards (prolepses) (3). Under 'duration', he considers how, for example, a narrative may give detailed attention to one event and then pass over several years in a few sentences. Under 'frequency', he investigates how some events which happened once may be narrated several times, and how an often repeated event may only receive one mention in the narrative - what he calls the iterative use of narrative (4).

We see in Genette's work, therefore, a movement towards a concern with the way the reader is likely to be influenced by the text, and this represents an overlap of interest with rhetorical criticism, as found for example in Wayne Booth's The Rhetoric of Fiction (5). This interest in rhetoric in turn led to a greater concern with the reading skills required by particular texts, and thence to the reader implied by those texts. By this stage this approach to literary theory had become known as Reader-Response criticism, in which a central contention is that the meaning of a literary work is created by the reader's construal of the text. The central focus of this approach is the range of semiotic codes employed by the reader rather than the writer. In the biblical field, examples of literary critics working in part with the tools of reader-response analysis can be found in the two books of Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative and The Art of Biblical Poetry (6) and Meir Sternberg's The Poetics of Biblical Narrative (7), to which we return in chapter six. These writers show how the reader may make sense of the text by actively engaging with the use of words, phrases, sentences, repetitions, conventions, reticence, montage etc. Not all readers will construe a text in the same way, of course; nor will all readers be equally competent at handling the text. Wolfgang Iser, therefore, is one who attempts to teach the new skills required by the different conventions of narratives. (8)

Another major concern of contemporary literary theory arising from the concern with the act of reading, has been the relationship of time and narrative. We have seen that Genette made that relationship a central focus of Narrative Discourse. We can now trace the development of this interest through the writing of Seymour Chatman and other literary theorists. Chatman starts from the structuralist position that 'every narrative is a structure with a content plane (called "story") and an expression plane (called "discourse").' (9) The

events in a story are turned into a plot by the mode of presentation, which is termed discourse. Story is made up of events as they occur, and existents as they are given. In turn, events are made up of 'actions', in which a particular character is the subject of the narrative events, and 'happenings', in which the character is the object of the narrative events. All this takes place in 'story time'.

In 'discourse time' a further interaction is taking place. Whatever narrator and narratee there may be in the text, beyond them Chatman finds a real and implied author, and a real and implied reader. Within the narrative text there is in operation an 'implied author', a principle that 'invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images.' (10) There is also both an implied reader and a real one. The implied reader of Paradise Lost is a Christian; the real reader may not be one.

The relationship of time and narrative in Chatman's work is therefore elucidated in terms of story time and discourse time, both of which have a complex inner structure. A different way in to the problem is employed by Paul Ricoeur in vol 1. of Time and Narrative. (11) His thesis is based on the complementarity of time and narrative, and is expressed by him thus:

> The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a narrative world...Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience. (12)

Ricoeur goes on to argue that this circle of narrativity and temporality is not a vicious circle but a healthy one. He fuses together Augustine's discussion of time in the Confessions with Aristotle's disussion of narrative plot in the Poetics. Augustine faces the dilemma: how can time exist if the past is no longer, if the future is not yet, and if the present is not always? His solution of the three-fold present, whereby past and future exist in memory and anticipation as modalities of the present, is described by Ricoeur as 'elegant - but how laborious, how costly, and how fragile!' (13) It is only by binding Aristotle's

approach to narrative plot to Augustine's 'fragile' approach to time that a strong solution is found. Ricoeur's theory is that narrative-plot or 'telling' is the dimension of human time in which human possibilities can be understood in temporal sequence. Narrative-plot creates a coherent and intelligible narrative world.

The history of literary theory has therefore travelled far from its early emphasis on the world revealed by the text. It focussed in turn on the work's educative impact on the audience, on its concern with the writer, his nature and history, and on the structure of the text itself; and it has found its most recent challenge in the reader's own response to the narrative conventions he or she faces. In chapter six we will examine how these contemporary tools of analysis are applied to biblical narrative.

2. Metaphor and the Roots of Language

At this point a brief consideration of the nature and role of metaphor is appropriate, for two reasons: firstly because of its place in current discussions in literary theory, and secondly because of the extensive use made of metaphor by religious language.

Aristotle commended metaphor thus:

> The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars. (14)

Paul Ricoeur wrote Time and Narrative as a parallel work to his Rule of Metaphor. In his earlier work he had described metaphor as a semantic innovation which is the product of an imagination which assimilates terms that at first seem distant and then close. (15) Similarly in his vol 1of Time and Narrative he describes narrative as a semantic innovation which grasps together and integrates into one whole, what are otherwise multiple and scattered events. He discerns a parallel process in narrative and metaphor, and together they play a major part in language.

Some writers have made extravagant claims for metaphor.

> All language is ultimately traceable to metaphor - it is the foundation of language and thus of thought. (16)

> If narrative is the way we construct our sense of identity, metaphor is how we think, especially in areas in which we need to build our knowledge of the unknown by comparison with the known. (17)

These are unnecessarily large claims. Nevertheless they point to the crucial role of metaphor in the emergence and continuity of language. It is unclear when or how man first let an image, a sound, a word, and later a written symbol, stand as surrogate for something else, and thereby become a linguistic animal. Nevertheless it is this analogical imagination which uses metaphor as one of the basic means of making something understood.

Although metaphor may not stand alone at the mysterious roots of language, at least it may claim more than an honourable mention. Much of what we know prior to the use of a metaphor may be inchoate and confused. The use of the metaphor enables us to see the principal subject through the screen of the metaphorical expression and thus to gain an understanding of the place and meaning of the subject. As such, this act of 'naming' a subject is a more fundamental form of language than discursive reason. Discursive or systematic thinking is a necessary development from the first-order language of metaphor, but it is not a higher form. Conceptual language gives order and shape to poetry, myth, parable and story; it clarifies meaning and enables new linkages to be made; it checks and verifies the claims of metaphor; but it does not take precedence. It rests on primary metaphorical forms. 'Meaning is not there to be read off conceptually; we only get at the meaning through the metaphor,'(18)

The central problem of language is that of being adequate for the richness of the way things are in their contingent reality. There are other ways, apart from metaphor, of describing that richness. Aphorisms play a part; as do prayers, hymns and psalms; legal language, scientific, economic and other descriptive languages have a place. Nevertheless, various metaphorical forms of language constitute an important core of the linguistic

armoury. One of the prime forms is poetry, which functions as discrete metaphor, having all the precision of language associated with systematic or scientific descriptions, but being of a quite different order - that of rigorous metaphor.

Paul Ricoeur gives a more discrete role to metaphor. Rather than locate it at the root of all language he understands it as 'the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality.' (19) He is also concerned to safeguard the claim that metaphor has a truth-telling function; it is not to be regarded as unreliable because it seems not to have the precision of second-order systematic language. Thus he is able to state:

> From this conjunction of fiction and redescription I conclude that the 'place' of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb to be. The metaphorical 'is' at once signifies both 'is not' and 'is like'. If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally 'tensive' sense of the word 'truth'. (20)

Ricoeur therefore affirms the creative value of metaphor at the same time as maintaining its truth-telling capacity. It is here however that some doubt begins to creep in. Kevin J. Vanhoozer in his book Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (21) observes a lack of adequate criteria in Ricoeur to distinguish between fictional and non-fictional discourse. He asserts: 'Lacking in Ricoeur's otherwise brilliant philosophical rehabilitation of metaphor is any indication of how one may fudge the difference between good and bad metaphor.' (22) The result is that Ricoeur does not ultimately allow for non-fictional reference to God or to the world. He writes of narrative being metaphoric discourse, but if the distinction between fictional and non-fictional narrative discourse is blurred he may soon appear to be denying extra-linguistic reality to God. His claim that one may speak of 'metaphorical truth' is therefore decidedly limited by his definition of metaphor, at least in narrative.

The whole contemporary discussion of metaphor is complex. Apart from contributions

from Genette, TeSelle and Ricoeur, there has been helpful material from Janet Soskice with her distinction between illustrative metaphors which can be substituted for other modes of expression, and 'models' which cannot be so substituted because they are used creatively to express conceptual truth. (23) The debate on metaphor is lively. It is not the purpose of this chapter, however, to do more than allude to its centrality in the discussions on the origins of language and the nature of narrative discourse.

3. The Nature and Primary Elements of Narrative

It has been claimed that just as poetry functions as discrete metaphor, so narrative functions as extended metaphor. We have already noted that Ricoeur understands narrative to function primarily as metaphoric discourse. Sallie TeSelle is especially concerned to maintain this position in regard to parables. She admits to this not being the majority view in theological tradition. Parables have more often been seen as 'one-point stories', or as having a particular meaning in a historical context. Nevertheless, she maintains: 'The emphasis on strangeness, doubt, and teasing into active thought, preclude the reduction of the parabolic form to one point or to a purely historical interpretation'(24).

Instead TeSelle quotes with approval Amos Wilder who conceives of the parable as a metaphor in which 'we have an image with a certain shock to the imagination which directly conveys vision of what is signified.'(25) In the telling of a parable, whatever other purpose it may have, a crack appears in the surface of reality and a new order is glimpsed, a new logic of grace. This is what gives the parable its particular metaphorical quality: by offering a screen through which to look, new possibilities are seen in the subject beyond, a subject which invariably involves the hearer's participation in the new and present Kingdom of God.

Whether or not we regard narrative as extended metaphor, it seems reasonable to credit narrative with an essentially metaphorical character. Narrative presents itself in every culture as a primary form of discourse in myths, legends, songs and poems. It does not purport to give a systematic account of the way things really are, but to offer glimpses and

insights onto the richness of reality through the window of human experience. That human experience, often expressed in narrative form, is the metaphorical screen laid over reality.

The narrative form, therefore, is not derivative; it cannot be broken down into non-narrative components. If it is a primary form of language it is also necessary and not optional. The contemporary view that narrative is for ancient people in myths, and for children in fairy stories, quite fails to see the sublety and necessity of story. Wesley Kort, in an article in the Journal of Literature and Theology, later published as a chapter in Story, Text and Scripture (26), argues that narrative has an indispensable function in human life and society, because the elements of narrative establish an ordered human world. A common narrative in a family or community or society, establishes the possibilities or conditions of life, the moral and spiritual constitution of the group, the processes in which individuals and groups are involved and by which they interact, and the relationships and values by which people live and die.(27)

What, then, are the essential elements of story which have this considerable potential? Gabriel Fackre defines narrative as: 'an account of events and participants moving over time and space, a recital with beginning and ending patterned by the narrator's principle of selection'(28). The basic elements of narrative would seem to be five:

1. Setting or atmosphere. The story takes place in a certain context, both physical and mental. The boundaries which enclose the narrative's world are crucial, whether they be those of the Garden in Genesis, or the island in Lord of the Flies, or the medieval world view in The Name of the Rose.

2. Theme or characterisation. Within the setting of the story a number of characters exist and interact. Their personalities, values and attitudes will largely determine the theme of the story, and indeed it is on the rich mystery and vagaries of human personality that novelists of the contemporary era dwell, such is our preoccupation with personal existence.

3. Plot. The storyline or plot gives narrative its temporal process, which may be both

episodic and configurational (29). Thus the plot may proceed according to its sequential nature, but also according to the patterns of relationship between the characters - rhythmic and repeated, progressively interactive, or simply mythic and archetypal.

4. Resolution. Stories characteristically come to a point of resolution in which mysteries are solved, dilemmas are untangled, relationships are healed, or, in more modern literature, problems are recognised, passion is spent, nemesis experienced. In mythic literature this resolution would often have an eschatological dimension. The expression of resolution in the story justifies the narrative and enables the hearer to internalise the story or otherwise handle it appropriately for his or her own life.

These four elements are the basic 'story grammar' of narrative. Stephen Sykes quotes research in experimental psychology which suggests that the presence of these four constituent factors provides the most effective method of making sure stories can be recalled (30). It is a relatively straight-forward enterprise to study any major work of literature through the western tradition and to discern the presence of these elements. It is also relatively easy to see how they operate at the simply profound level of children's stories, fairy tales, legends and family stories.

There is, however, a fifth element in narrative which completes the picture:

5. Storyteller. The one who transmits the story has a crucial role. He or she not only selects the material and edits it, but also displays an attitude towards the narrative by tone of voice, body language and choice of context, which is of decisive importance in the de-coding and reception of the narrative. The storyteller has a critical hermeneutical role which is ignored at their peril by teachers and parents, by the media and the guardians of a community's life. There is no such thing as value-free transmission of narrative; it is important, therefore, for those who tell a culture's stories, whether they be those of the micro-culture of a family or the macro-culture of a society's beliefs, that they be as aware as possible of their criteria for selecting material and transmitting it in particular ways.

Given these five basic elements of story, it is readily apparent that the complexity of story

lies not only in those elements but also in the relative weighting given to them in a particular narrative. The emphasis is likely to distort the narrative towards that element. Wesley Kort illustrates this phenomenon from the rich vein of biblical narrative.(31) The book of Exodus is clearly dominated by plot. The book of Judges, by contrast, emphasises character; the office of judge is never delineated, whereas the individual characteristics of the judges themselves are clearly drawn. The book of Jonah is concerned largely with 'setting' as the prophet finds himself in a number of uncongenial places, learning that God in fact imposes no boundaries on his salvation. The gospel of Mark, on the other hand, is more influenced by the storyteller, as the writer works from his distinct theological position.

If these are the five essential ingredients of story, we are now in a position to move on to consider stories in themselves, and to see whether there is a helpful method of mapping or categorising the vast field of narrative literature. To that question we now turn.

4. Principal Types of Narrative.

Literary critic Northrop Frye has laid out a helpful analytical map for western literature (32). He posited a great imaginary circle, the four cardinal points of which act rather like the principal points on a compass. Within that circle he would place any narrative work, if not necessarily at any particular single point of the compass, at least somewhere between those principal points. He presents, therefore, four narrative genres within which to locate specific works of literature.

a. Comic Narrative. These stories are characterised not so much by humour as by a satisfactory ending. Here the element of resolution comes to the fore. Comic tales move from problem to solution; they move from confusion towards integration. The classic comedies of Shakespeare reveal this type in a pure form as entanglements and misunderstandings in, for example, A Midsummer Night's Dream are finally dissolved. The same process is to be seen nightly on our television screens in soap operas and situation comedies.

The direction of the comic narrative is precisely opposite to that of tragedy. It depicts misunderstanding and confusion deepening until a particular knowledge or disclosure takes place, and harmony becomes possible. It is an essentially optimistic genre and therefore popular, and retold in a thousand stories every day. We tell it in children's stories; we tell it in popular fiction; we tell it to our sick, encouraging them to look for good outcomes.

b. Romantic Narrative. These stories also contain happy endings, but the journey to them is the journey of adventure, courage, danger and excitement. Such stories are also enormously popular on television, in science fiction, westerns and historical romantic novels. The essence of the romantic genre is that good and evil are sharply delineated, and the outcome, though delayed, is never seriously in doubt. Heroes and heroines abound and invite our self-identification. As Frye writes,'The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance unnatural to us are natural to him'(33). Indiana Jones is only the latest in a long line!

We tell such stories not only for escapist enjoyment. We also use them in times of trial, to encourage resolve in war, courage in tragedy, determination in personal adversity. We bolster our children with tales of sporting heroes. We rehearse the triumphs of our national past. In the process we either encourage the hearer greatly, or depress him inordinately.

c. Tragic Narrative. Tragedy presents the experience of resolution but it is a resolution through necessary loss. The tragic hero has to submit to a harshly authentic world, and not expect an external miracle as in romantic narrative or an inner disclosure of vital knowledge as in comic narrative. The world has to be faced, with all its intractability, and the otherness of life will stand over the tragic hero, refining him, but not yielding to his desperation.

The tragic hero is saved rather than cured. His honesty and courage is shown in his bending his will to the given pattern of life, even if that means to the acceptance of death. Christ accepts the cross as a tragic hero. According to our belief, we face the laws of God, the hand of Fate, or the nature of the universe, and as we adapt, so we discover a tragic

salvation. Such tales are easier to read than to tell to those facing tragedy themselves, but counselling rooms are full of such stories, and the world's store of myths would be much depleted without them.

d. Ironic Narrative. In ironic tales there is little room for heroes or happy endings. Life is seen as disenchanted and without design. There are no purposes to find, no miracles to experience, no ultimate justice or salvation to experience. Such stories will emphasise the sober assessment of empirical data, and will not expect to find rationality within an overarching purpose, but rather to see absurdity in many fearful forms. The only form of freedom is that which comes from accepting the givenness of the world as it is, and reaching out in fellow feeling to others in the same plight of helplessness. The only form of celebration allowed is that of our common humanity. Camus, Sartre and Becket are obvious exponents of the ironic narrative but their counterparts exist and tell their stories at every level in a universe of orphans.

Frye's literary circle gives a helpful backdrop to the study of narrative, whether in literature itself or in theology. It is worth noting that most stories in Frye's circle are actually identified by double terms, such as comic ironies, tragic romances or romantic tragedies. This is because the richness of human experience, as depicted in narrative, demands a greater subtlety of definition than a single connotation 'tragic' or 'romantic'. Only the combinations of cardinal opposites - comedy and tragedy, romance and irony - are structurally impossible, because their worlds are contradictory: comedy moves from problem to solution while tragedy moves in precisely the opposite direction.

This brief survey of the basic elements of story and the principal types of narrative may be sufficient to reveal the theological possibilities of narrative. Story has a character which is especially conducive to theological discourse, and ultimately we will hope to show its accessibility to pastoral theology in particular.

5. The Theological Potential of Narrative.

Narrative is clearly of cardinal significance in literary theory. It also offers a valuable tool to theologians, and an important resource for the practice of the Church. We can now examine some of the reasons for this theological potential.

A. Narrative is significantly indirect

Narrative does not attempt to overlay reality with a relationship of direct correspondence. It presumes rather to offer a story, the episodes and configurations of which will give insight and understanding about some part of the way things are in the world and in human affairs. Narrative therefore can grant a special openness to transcendent realities or the dimension of grace. Michael Polanyi claims that in narrative our focal awareness is on the story, but our subsidiary awareness is on the transcendent dimension.(34) Philip Wheelwright prefers to speak of seeing with a 'soft focus' or of writing with 'assertorial lightness'(35). The meaning is the same: narrative enables us to avoid the heavy footedness of conceptual statements but rather to employ the significant and disclosive indirection of metaphor, parable and story.

Theology too values the indirection of language about God. This is not at all the same thing as vagueness and laziness. Poetic and narrative form may be as precise as any propositional statement about God, but it has the added value of allowing connections to be made, insights to be glimpsed, and the very stuff of this world's life to speak of the divine reality. Sallie TeSelle, for example, writes that 'the parables keep "in solution" the language, belief and life we are called to, and hence they address people totally' (36). To separate out the words we use to confess faith, the process of coming to faith, and the life lived out of that faith, would be seriously to limit the communicative power of the gospel. By keeping them "in solution", the parable speaks at many levels. John Tinsley too in an article in Theology (37), writes of the importance in theology and Christian communication of 'telling it slant', for thus we are in accord with primary language about God.

B. Narrative is related to open-endedness and belief.

The leaning of narrative towards the language of theology can be seen even more clearly when we concentrate on the five basic elements of narrative. Each is concerned with uncertainties of one kind or another, and the answers which those uncertainties receive in particular narratives are beliefs.

For example, 'setting' raises questions about boundaries - what is possible here? Narrative answers to such questions reveal what beliefs people have about such boundaries. 'Character' raises questions about what human nature is like, and narrative gives some pictures of what people believe about men and women and their complexity. 'Plot' raises questions about processes in time, and their reliability. Narrative shows whether time is to be trusted or not.

In other words, the questions inherent in the elements of narrative have answers in the specific stories which are told, and these emerge in the form of beliefs. Kort maintains that 'the indispensable function of narrative is to express or address the belief structure of an individual or a community's life. Conversely, the implicit structure of coherence which undergirds human life has a potential narrative form.'(38)

There is therefore a clear link between narrative and the theological task. If narratives are the bearers of our culture's beliefs, then theology is going to be fundamentally concerned with the nature and content of such stories

C. Narrative is related to the routinisation of ritual.

A further theological relationship with narrative is seen in the nature of ritual. Stephen Sykes argues that ritual in Christian practice is a form of what Weber calls 'routinisation' (39). Rituals are formed around abbreviated narratives, as in baptism and the eucharist. The credal statements at the centre of baptism are a summary of the Christian story in a form which can be memorised and recalled. That the narrative form is still there can be seen by attention to the basic elements of story. The setting of the creed is creation; the theme is

of fall and redemption; the plot is in the deeds of Christ; the resolution is in the eschatological clauses; the storyteller is the believer. Thus the basic story grammar is in place in the routinisation of the Christian story in the creed. In the eucharist too, the story of creation, fall, redemption and consumation is present in routinised form in the eucharistic prayer at the heart of the ritual.

By the recitation of the creed and participation in the ritual, people internalise the story and are formed in their Christian identity. Narrative emerges again therefore in this routinised form, as a basic theological concern. Understood in this way, narrative takes us right to the heart of liturgy and what it is to be a Christian.

D. Specific typologies of narrative and of religious discourse may be closely related.

James Hopewell has shown how Northrop Frye's typology of narrative genres may be helpfully transferred with modification, to the setting of religious belief and how it is expressed. This link between literature and religious language will be more fully examined in the next chapter in the context of the ethnographic study of particular religious communities. Nevertheless it is well to note now that Frye's interpretative circle can bring literary criticism and religious language into close conversation.

The purpose of these four examples of the theological potential of narrative has simply been to suggest that the insights of literary criticism can greatly benefit the study of theology. In phase four of the argument we will endeavour to show how these insights may particularly illuminate the task of pastoral theology. In the meantime, the words of T.R.Wright are an apt summary:

> Because no language is completely transparent upon reality, providing unambiguous 'names' for clear cut 'things', the indirect mode of reference employed in literature constitutes some of the most effective theology. (40)

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The Role of Story in Ethnography

In the last chapter an attempt was made to describe the role of story in a discipline other than theology, i.e. literary criticism. The intention now is to demonstrate how story functions in a further field of enquiry, ethnography, in order to broaden the scope of the material we will later have available for a critical conversation with the role of story in pastoral theology.

Ethnography has been chosen because of an emerging subset in anthropology which focuses on symbolic or narrative studies. The designation 'ethnography' is one more widely used in the United States than in Britain, where the nearest equivalent might be 'structural anthropology'. We will therefore examine the nature of such ethnographic enquiry within the wider field of the study of culture. We will then explore an underlying issue concerning the narrative quality of experience, before turning to a particular example of the use of narrative in research into communities, that of the study of congregations. We will then critically examine this approach in order to evaluate its usefulness in a potential conversation with pastoral theology.

1. Approaches to the Study of Culture

Any contemporary study of culture requires that we first examine the broader quest for a critical social theory which will do justice to social and cultural modernity. This task has been most rigorously addressed in recent years by Jürgen Habermas, most notably in his Theory of Communicative Action (1). Habermas approaches the reconstruction of social theory through philosophy and sociology, in dialogue with Wittgenstein, Marx, Weber and Talcott Parsons. His project is to find a rational justification for universal normative standards, a trans-contextual way of knowing what is valid.

After an earlier foray in which human interests guided the enquiry, Habermas in his later

work has used the philosophy of language as his point of entry. Indeed he argues for a 'paradigm shift' which locates 'the foundations of social science in the theory of communication.' (2) Habermas' major contribution is to propose a way of holding together two approaches to social theory which had been seen as widely separate. Views derived from the later Wittgenstein and from J.L. Austin emphasised the variability and particularity of human actions by agents sharing a common life-world. On the other hand, developing Weber's functional approach to the analysis of society, Talcott Parsons offered a concept of society as a system which transcends the subjectivity of persons. In the one case, Habermas writes:

> society is conceived from the perspective of acting subjects as the life-world of a social group. In contrast, from the observer's perspective of someone not involved, society can be conceived only as a system of actions such that each action has a functional significance according to its contribution to the maintenance of the system. (3)

As Anthony Thiselton points out:

> These two aspects reflect a great methodological divide not only in linguistic theory (speech-acts and hermeneutics vs structure and semiotic theory) but also different traditions in modern sociology (hermeneutical value-oriented approaches vs structural-functional quasi-objectivist approaches). (4)

What Habermas proposes is that we conceive of societies simultaneously as systems and lifeworlds. This is made possible by using a model of linguistic and behavioural interaction which demonstrates the interdependence of human actions and transcendent systems. Anthony Thiselton again:

> This 'linguistic turn' to Habermas' critical theory exposes and makes transparent two complementary points. On the one hand, language is a matter of action by social agents; hence the approach which sees everything in terms of system is one-sided and incomplete...On the other hand, we cannot fully understand or critically evaluate the inter-personal language game as life-world without reference to the system which transcends it. Each pole or axis

represents a different dimension of human rationality. (5)

Habermas identifies a progressive uncoupling of life-world and system as societies emerge from tribalism to nationhood. Laws, sub-systems and state mechanisms increasingly protect the interests of sub-groups at the expense of social integration. He therefore offers a social diagnosis of the alienations and struggles of cultures and communities which is coherent with Marxism but far from identical with it.

It is against this background that we can now examine some of the approaches to the study of culture presently employed by social scientists. They will demonstrate favoured emphases in terms of the life-world and systemic aspects of social theory, but we are now enabled to see these differences as creative overlaps rather than exclusive methodologies.

Robert J. Schreiter in Constructing Local Theologies (6), a work often referred to in pastoral theology, offers a helpful breakdown of contemporary approaches to cultural analysis, and we follow his terminology below. An adequate methodology ought to be holistic and able to address the issue of social change as well as stable situations: the following approaches meet with varying degrees of success.

a. Functionalist approaches reflect the pragmatic ethos of the Anglo-Saxon world where they are most commonly found. Rooted in British anthropology and the sociology of Durkheim and Weber, functionalist approaches are concerned to examine the constituent parts of a society and their inter-relationships. Talcott Parsons' approach transcends functionalism, although in the view of some of his critics he was seen as reductionist. He developed his methodology into a general theory of systems as we saw above. This approach studies the impact of new data on a society and how it copes with such change and resolves conflict. Such a common-sense stance has an obvious attraction through its attention to discrete facts, but it has limitations in the area of symbolic material and behaviour.

b. Ecological approaches take seriously the physical environment as formative of culture, emphasising in particular the way in which societies endeavour through ritual to keep in

harmony with nature. Materialist methods share this concern with physical setting, preferring however to study the realities of climate, nutrition and production (in overlap with Marxist thinking). Both these ways into the study of culture have particular value in dealing with major and sudden shifts within a culture. Their limitation however, is found in their tendency to reductionism and determinism. They are best employed therefore as just one part of the ethnographer's resources.

c. Structuralist approaches are most closely identified with Claude Lévi-Strauss. This method of study is concerned to uncover the unconscious structures operating within a culture which control its continuing existence and its transformation. Structuralists commonly see the deepest patterns in terms of binary opposites which establish rules according to which society is organised. Such opposites may be found for example in the binaries male and female, nature and culture, parent and child, mortality and immortality. The advantage of this approach is its helpful analysis of systems of classification, structures of identity and cohesiveness, and forces of change operating in society. The weakness is in the apparent arbitrariness of the method. The axiomatic status of binary opposites is assumed, and the methods used in the field can seem more intuitive than empirically defensible.

High structuralism was relativised by Roland Barthes who envisaged the possibility of a semiotic system working within a system which in turn operated within another system. So for example, a love story might take place within an advert which in turn was 'embedded' within a particular culture. Such a regress of systems might take the structuralist analysis almost to the point of breakdown, where the concept of life-world would re-assert itself, and social theory would collapse into sociology. It is this problem, amongst others, which has led to the emergence of a more fluid approach to systems, which goes under the umbrella term 'semiotics'.

d. Semiotic approaches to the study of culture are the newest in the field, but they are offering fertile ground for ethnographic enquiry. Semiotics understands culture as a vast network of signs, whereby messages are carried along complex pathways by particular

signs or symbols, according to particular codes or rules. Sharing a set of rules ensures that a sign is accorded its rightful meaning in a given culture, as distinct from what it would mean in another culture. For example, various finger signs have radically different meanings in different cultures, as travellers have found to their cost!

The codes or rules discerned by semiotics in a particular culture are akin to that culture's grammar (syntactics), its language content (semantics), and its methods of communication (pragmatics). Schreiter writes:-

> The interaction of signs, groups of signs that mutually define each other, and these three kinds of rules,are a creative collaboration that produces a culture. They span more than the verbal dimensions of culture and more even than the visible dimensions of culture. The task of semiotics is to describe and explain the signs, their interaction, the rules that govern them, and the complex that we call culture which emerges from all of this.(7)

In its emphasis on the deeper structures of signs, semiotics is drawing on insights from structuralism and the work of Lévi-Strauss, but it is breaking out of the prison of structuralist reductionism, and allowing for the fluidity of systems and structures. It is also a markedly inter-disciplinary approach drawing on genetics, psychoanalysis, cybernetics, linguistics, sociology and much more.

Moreover, for the purposes of this particular investigation it is important to note the affinity of this type of cultural analysis with literary criticism. When semiotic ethnographers discover symbolic themes and motifs, they often choose to describe those themes in literary terms. Indeed Clifford Geertz likens the work of an ethnographer to that of a literary critic. He or she 'traces the curve of social discourse' and 'fixes it in an inspectable form'(8)

It is worth while pausing over the methodology of Geertz since he is a leading exponent of semiotic studies in ethnography, though he canot be narrowly defined, and in his attention to detail he shares much with the functionalists. His chief concern however is to

expose the underlying structures of meaning in a culture's sign system. The important thing about an observed set of actions or responses is not their ontological status, but their meaning.

> The concept of culture I espouse...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he him-self has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.(9)

Ethnography is therefore an elaborate exercise in what Gilbert Ryle calls 'thick description'. A culture is made up of an interworked system of behaviour, social events, institutions and processes which can be described in their complexity (thickness) by ethnography. The goal of this cultural study is meaning, but meaning can only be stored in symbols, and sacred symbols in particular relate the way things are in fact and at depth, to the world of aesthetics, values and morality.

In his book The Interpretation of Cultures, Geertz develops this semiotic approach to ethnography in detail, and often by means of specific cases. For example, in the realm of sacred symbols he quotes initiation rites among aborigines, complex philosophical tales amongst the Maori, dramatic exhibitionism in the Eskimo, human sacrifice by the Aztecs, communal feasts among the Indonesians etc.The important point for our argument however is that when it comes to describing the nature and place of these rituals in the semiotic system, the appropriate means of expression seems to be narrative.

Geertz goes on to describe the narrative form in terms of world view and ethos, a distinction to which we will need to return. Suffice it at present that the semiotic study of cultures is now emerging as a major methodological approach in social anthropology and the most satisfying means of describing it is in literary, or specifically narrative, terms.

2. The Narrative Quality of Experience

A narrative form of expression for the semiotic study of culture is both possible and appropriate since experience itself seems to have the quality of narrative.

Such a position, however, cannot be regarded as self-evidently tenable; it must be justified. There are other views on the formal quality of experience, and its relationship with narrative. One major alternative is to see narrative as specific to a particular context, as for example the narratives of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are formative of the identity of Christianity. These stories are not, on this view, instances of a more general narrative quality to human experience, but the specific characteristics of an historical religion.

Let us examine, however, the other thesis, that there is in experience itself a temporal quality of narrative. If this is so, it follows more easily that the ethnographic study of culture which focuses on signs and symbols, expressed in narrative form, has a sound foundation. This in turn will make such study more amenable to a conversation with an approach to pastoral theology which highlights the place of story.

One main champion of the narrative quality of experience has been Stephen Crites in an article in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion.(10) He distinguishes between sacred stories and mundane stories as formative and expressive of a culture. Sacred stories are those which lie deep within the soul of a people and are so buried in the consciousness that they are incapable of being directly told. Rather they are themselves the stories within which the people live. Their actions and beliefs are themselves the lived expression of the sacred story, which is the 'story within the story'. Yet even though these stories may not be directly told, their form still seems to be most naturally narrative; they are moving stories with the quality both of music and narrative, being nearer to poetry and myth than anything else, but not even being that, for the culture seems itself to be the telling of the stories rather than the teller of them.

Mundane stories on the other hand are the actual stories a culture tells. By these means,

whether in narrative, art, ritual or other form, people articulate and clarify their understanding of their world, in conformity with their sacred stories. Whereas people may never sit down consciously to think up a sacred story, the attempt is continually made to create mundane stories, the more accurately to express the inner motivations and values of a culture.

Crucially, Crites posits a mediating form between sacred and mundane stories: the form of the experiencing consciousness itself, and this he declares to be narrative in shape. This consciousness is moulded by the sacred stories and expressed in the mundane ones, and thus mediates between the two; but this is only possible because its structural logic is narrative.

Our experiencing consciousness has a bedrock chronicle of memory which is where the stream of images from our past lies, not in haphazard, chaotic form but in a rude chronicle characterised by successiveness. This is very different from the recollected form of the past which emerges in story. In this case the image stream lodged in the chronicle of events is drawn upon by the selection of significant emphases in order to tell the appropriate story. The selection of material by comparison with events and understanding gained over a long period, will be a much more sophisticated undertaking.

So far we have only been looking at the past experience of a person's consciousness. The decisive distinction between past, present and future is what gives experience its particularly rich narrative form. Augustine long ago pointed out that logically only the present can exist, but that it exists in three modalities.

> It might properly be said: there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things future.....For these are in the mind as a certain triadic form, and elsewhere I do not see them: the present of things past is memory, the present of things present is direct attention, the present of things future is anticipation. (11)

Experience is made up of the tension of these three in the present, and narrative seems to be the appropriate form by which to describe such experience. Memory we have seen to have an essentially successive and narrative form in the unsophisticated chronicle of events. But anticipation too has a narrative shape in that we frame stories about how things will turn out, and although such stories may be thin and vague compared with the detail of the chronicle of memory, they nevertheless have a narrative form.

Both memory and anticipation however are only tensed modalities of the present, and it is here that the narrative takes its critical shape. Stephen Crites writes:

> The conscious present is that of a body impacted in a world and moving, in process, in that world. In this present, action and experience meet. Memory is its depth, the depth of its experience in particular; anticipation is its trajectory, the trajectory of its action in particular. The praesens de praesentibus is its full bodily reality. (12)

In the present, past and future not only meet but are formed, as action and experience take the story onwards in the dramatic movements of present decisions.

The argument here, therefore, is that there are three dimensions to the narrative quality of experience. The sacred story underlies and pre-exists the mundane stories, and the form of experience itself is also story-shaped. When these three tracks cross each other there exists the potential for powerful symbols, which are the domain of the ethnographer. The semiotic study of culture will therefore encounter a multitude of symbols where behaviour demonstrates a mundane story which is rooted in an untold sacred story about the way things truly are in that culture. The narrative form of such behaviour in ritual, myth, poetry, legend and epic indicates that narrative is perhaps the form of expression most able both to be in touch with the deep structures of human experience, and also rich enough to contain the tensions, surprises, reversals and achievements of actual temporal experience.

Narrative is therefore one of the best resources available to ethnography. It remains to test that statement in one particular ethnographic enquiry. One example will not prove its

worth, but it will indicate its methods and potential. The study chosen is that of congregational life in communities of faith.

3. The Ethnographic Study of Congregational Life

One of the most helpful typologies for the study of congregational culture is drawn from Stephen C. Pepper's World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence (13). He proposes four 'relatively adequate' hypotheses for the use of evidence, and the young discipline of congregational studies has found them a useful starting point. While Pepper's categories are not to be taken as more than a useful background, they do nonetheless underline distinctions between different tools and procedures. They also make clear the point that different approaches can be complementary - in this case, in the study of congregational life.

Contextualism employs the root metaphor of the historic event in the particular environment. In the study of congregations, therefore, interest will centre on the way the church relates to the immediate community, how it manages change, to what extent it defines its task by the needs of the social environment, and similar issues. When the Church was concerned to 'let the world set the agenda' in the 1960s it was working within a contextualist framework.

Mechanism uses the obvious root metaphor of the machine, insisting on the primacy of particular facts, methods, statistics and techniques. Students of congregational culture will therefore be interested in the origin, numbers involved and success rate of the programmes offered by the local church; they will monitor finance, study leadership and management functions and examine patterns of statistical growth and decline. A prime example of mechanistic thinking is to be found in the Church Growth Movement where the rhetorical emphasis on power and success indicates a preoccupation with outward signs of spiritual vigour.(14) It may also indicate a flawed missiology and a distorted vision of God. Mechanism as an approach to understanding congregational life, however, is a neutral tool stemming from a valid method of handling evidence.

Organicism works primarily with the systemic nature of structures and events, and has the root metaphor of an organism, with an inner cohesion and relatedness. A congregation will therefore be studied in the complexity of its life and membership, its broken relationships and struggles, its kaleidoscope of gifts, aims and processes. Church leaders who use a systemic approach will seek to understand the church's culture, its sub-systems and heterogeneous characteristics, in order to work towards a more integrated, holistic vision of church life.

It will help here to draw out some connections between these distinctive approaches to the use of evidence and the previous discussion on the sociology of knowledge. Contextualism relates most closely to Habermas' use of the concept of 'life-world', while mechanism relates to Talcott Parsons' idea of 'system'. On this analogy the term 'organicism' might suggest kinship with the interaction between life-world and system which is the main thrust of Habermas' argument. However it is the fourth of Pepper's categories which might be seen to make the further link with semiotics.

The fourth of Pepper's world hypotheses is Formism, whose root metaphor is 'similarity'. In congregational studies this is represented by Symbolic Studies, an approach which emphasises church life as a discourse, an exchange of symbols which express the values, beliefs and intentions of the people. Here we are on similar ground to the semiotic approach we considered in ethnography as a wider discipline. Identity in a congregation can be sought in the underlying 'personality' which holds it in being through change and chance and the vagaries of new leadership. This analysis of church culture will involve finding significant motifs and themes, expressing the world view and ethos of the church. It will involve using a linguistic model for what Geertz calls the 'construable signs' in congregational life, and most significantly of all, it will require literary and narrative forms for its desciption.

There are as yet relatively few students of congregational culture who are using symbolic studies and narrative categories as their major investigative tools. Nevertheless, some may be mentioned. Samuel Heilman's study of an orthodox synagogue was written up in

Synagogue Life, and Melvin Williams' study of a Pentecostal church in Community in a Black Pentecostal Church. (15) Urban T.Holmes analysed congregational culture in a number of writings, but most notably in Priest in Community: Exploring the Roots of Ministry (16) More recently, James Hopewell in Congregation: Stories and Structures (17) has used his previous experience in anthropology to draw together ethnographic and theological insight in congregational analysis.

We now turn to examine the processes of this approach in more detail. We start with the distinction drawn by Geertz (18) and others between the world view of a community and its ethos. World view represents what a community believes is in fact going on in life. It is the way people picture reality, both cognitively and existentially. Ethos, on the other hand, is made up of the particular choices and valuations which a community makes within that world view. It is about the tone, character or quality of a local culture.

Already the links may be seen between this approach to ethnography and a narrative approach to literary criticism. We examined earlier how the basic elements of any narrative are fivefold: setting, characterisation, plot, resolution, and the storyteller. 'Setting' therefore has its counterpart in 'world view', both of them providing the underlying atmosphere for the action; and 'characterisation' has its counterpart in 'ethos', both of them delineating the themes, values and attitudes which will move and take effect in the story.

The student of congregational culture, if he is choosing the symbolic or narrative approach to the task, will consequently need to attend first of all to its world view.

1. World View

In the last chapter there was a discussion of Northrop Frye's great circle of western literature, in which he invited critics to place works of literary significance in the setting of comic, romantic, tragic and ironic genres. Hopewell develops this circle in the field of congregational study so that the points of the interpretative compass read: gnostic (for comic), charismatic (for romantic), canonic (for tragic), and empiric (for ironic). He found

that no simpler bipolar scale would do justice to the complex responses of a church. A scale of conservative to liberal was not sufficiently subtle or flexible.(19) It needs to be borne in mind that Hopewell's use of these terms is not meant to be strictly technical but rather, illustrative. The technical meaning of gnosticism is not at stake in Hopewell's use of the term, for example. He uses it merely as an indicator of the territory someone with such a world view might inhabit.

The various world views of members of a church community could be plotted on the circular field he thus devised by asking questions about significant change or crisis, and what they thought was really going on behind or underneath that event. An individual respondent would not emerge with a world view representing only one point on the compass. He or she would be placed at a position negotiated between two or more major directions. For they could be no more than directions; the temporality of human experience necessitates the image of a journey rather than a fixed residence.

The gnostic category (20) for Hopewell indicates answers which see life as a process moving from dissipation towards harmony. The religious struggle is one towards understanding and an awareness of the basic unity of things. Charismatic answers, on the other hand, look to an intervening supernatural presence which will put wrongs right. Hope is to be found not in an evolving cosmos, as for the gnostic, but in the constancy of a transcendent God. Life is an exciting, romantic adventure in which one can expect the work of the Spirit to be decisively encountered. Canonic interpretations of experience rely upon the authoritative word of God's revealed will, whether through scripture or Church. What is required of the believer is obedience and acceptance, even through hardship and loss. Finally the empiric category involves answers based on the objective data received from the five senses. The right religious response is to be realistic within the intractable givenness of the world, rather than to seek any other-worldly intervention.

By plotting the answers and basic world views of a large proportion of the congregation it was possible for Hopewell and his researchers to identify the disposition of a church. Understood in this way, it becomes easier to see why some congregations resist particular

changes or resent particular styles of leadership; there is a conflict with the self-understanding of the community and the church 'personality' is aggrieved; people are dissatisfied without quite knowing why. Wise leadership in all communities of faith will listen well to the implicit world view of the church, as well as the more explicit story.

2. Ethos

The ethos or characterisation of a congregation is made up of the particular choices being made in the field of values, ideals and motivations. Here we get closer to the true personality of a community. The character emerges distinctly from the background of world view, and from this gestalt we can begin to understand the themes that will be prominent in parish story.

In A Community of Character (21) Stanley Hauerwas develops the idea that churches are story-formed communities, whose primary task is to be themselves, living 'out of control' of history, transforming fate into destiny, so that the unexpected can be accepted and welcomed as gift. He uses the story of the rabbits in Watership Down as a parable of a community being shaped by its story, (the origin story of El-ahrairah), and then living up to it, in its encounters with other contrasting communities. Thus he shows that Christian churches, which are similarly communities shaped by story, have also to live by their story, to be true to their own identity.

Hauerwas uses this important thesis as the basis for a comprehensive account of social ethics, but its wider significance is obvious. Referring to the story of Jesus Christ, he concludes: 'We must challenge ourselves to be the kind of community where such a story can be told and manifested by a people formed in accordance with it'(22).

The Christian community is therefore formed by its paradigmatic story, but it is also given particular shape by lesser stories, to which, moreover, it seeks to conform itself by its decisions and choices. Hopewell's option for these other stories is to look to the world of non-christian myths, and there to find characters whose qualities epitomise those of a congregation. Such mythic figures, he maintains, allow communities to understand

themselves and therefore to explore their own identities. For example, to know itself as Daedalus church helped a particular community to understand its maze-like quality to the outsider, its concern for the arts and creative invention, its crisis with young people, its favoured preaching style which gave people wings for a brief time, and so on.(23)

The argument for this option of mythic figures as adequate characterisation of a congregation, however, needs examination. There is a clear difficulty in making a double step, not only into narrative depiction but into mythic narrative. If the myth is supposed to bring interpretative power to the pattern of the community's life, the category of characters should be accessible and congruent. Characters from the biblical story would be more easily identifiable and would enable congregations to find their place within the overall story of biblical salvation. Hopewell's answer to this is that the biblical narrative has a different function within the Christian community, to stand over it rather than be a representation of it. While taking the force of this argument, it seems possible to distinguish between the authority of the story and the fallible quality of individual characters within it, whose relationship to the divine presence may give a community a deeper understanding of their own struggles with the divine and with each other.

3. Plot

With both setting and characters in place, the ethnographer of church community will now become aware of the story line or plot which the characters play out. He or she will already have heard many stories of how the community responded to crisis and change, but usually on the individual and personal level. The opportunity now is to learn how parish story plays itself out, in the past and in the continuing present. The narrative which is distinct to the particular congregation is its uniqueness in the study, giving it the microscopic particularity of its life. As Geertz puts it, to declare that 'Jonesville is the U.S.A.' will not do. It is only Jonesville, a small town in the U.S.A. What an anthropologist does is not to study Jonesville, but to study in Jonesville.(24) The congregation is unique, most especially in its plot.

The actions of the plot may be various. For one thing, a plot links actors and events, and makes sense out of a thousand details. Plot also unfolds, giving reasons for the way things are and what may happen next. Plot may also thicken, gaining depth and complexity from the addition of action parallel to and deeper than, the main stream of the story-line. Plot may also twist, adding surprise and indeterminacy to the process. The faithful recording of parish plot is a crucial stage in the ethnographic study of congregations, and a wise strategy for an incoming leader.

4. Resolution

What Hopewell fails to mention in his description of a symbolic or narrative account of a congregation, are the fourth and fifth elements of narrative which we noted in chapter three i.e. resolution and the role of the storyteller.

The question of resolution is an area of subtle differentiation in narrative theory. Some types of 'closure' or resolution signal an ending, while others simply operate to give a sense of completeness without actually terminating the story. One need only think of the difference between Matthew's didactic closure of his gospel and the 'open closure' of Mark. Certainly there can be no final resolution in a congregational story, short of the closing down of the church. Even here however, its people carry the story on, and the building continues to carry symbolic power. Nevertheless, within parish story resolution occurs as dilemmas are untangled, relationships are healed, and tasks are completed, so that the sub-stories are subject to a degree of resolution. Viewed sociologically a congregation has a finite story, no matter how long that may be. Viewed eschatologically, the resolution of the Christian story, as represented by any part of the Church, is in the hands of God.

5. The Storyteller

The role of the ethnographer in telling the parish story cannot be ignored in this field of enquiry any more than in any other study of narrative form. It will be significant to examine how the student of the congregation selects and edits the material, how he or she

obtains it in face to face interview, participant observation or questionnaire. It will be no less important to observe when and how the student tells the story to others, for there is no such thing as value-free transmission of narrative. There is a critical hermeneutical role exercised by the storyteller, and an awareness of the issue is vital for the ethnographic study to have value.

4. The Limits of Story in Ethnography

This chapter has outlined a variety of approaches to the study of culture, and has examined in particular that which concentrates on the symbolic elements within a culture, which are often expressed in narrative form. We then explored the basis for such an approach in the narrative quality of experience, which together with the significance of sacred and mundane stories, made a narrative approach to culture valid. We then tested this method in the field of congregational study, drawing on a framework from literary criticism. It remains for us to examine the limits of such an approach in social anthropology, especially in the context of a conversation with pastoral theology.

a. Failure to address issues of change.

Semiotic ethnography is naturally concerned with adequate analysis of the present situation. In seeking to delineate sign systems operating pervasively through a culture, the student may fail to do justice to the radically new factors which bring about change. Ecological and materialist approaches to the task are more adept at handling such material. This may not be a major problem if a variety of approaches are employed together, but it becomes a potential inhibition to dialogue with pastoral theology, which is by nature an agent of change. Pastoral theology is committed to new, appropriate action out of the creative interplay of situation, text and culture. Semiotic or narrative ethnography may not be sufficiently committed to criticism of the story, or indeed to self criticism of its own cultural story as a method. It may also rest too much in the hands of expert researchers, rather than with the very people who are telling the story, and perhaps looking for change through it. It may, in other words, be too committed to a life-world approach rather than to a systems approach.

b. Failure to take history seriously

More specifically, the problem is to do with the process of recording history. The temptation in a narrative and symbolic approach to ethnography may be to understand the writing of history too simply. There may be more emphasis on the content of a culture's history and less on how the history came to be written in that way. A culture's account of itself may therefore be accepted at face value without discerning the complex motivations which caused it to be written.

John Van Seters in his book In Search of History (25) takes issue with the view of history that it developed with the rise of a historical consciousness about the process of things in time (as in Butterfield: The Origins of History). Rather he quotes the Dutch historian J. Huizinga: 'History is the intellectual form in which a civilisation gives account to itself of its past'. Not all literary forms about the past, therefore, are history. As an example of how history emerged he gives credit to the genius of the Deuteronomist who integrated a basic chronicle with lists of kings, genealogies, annals and royal inscriptions, to produce a genuine history with a unity and a distinct rationale. We are reminded here of the complex debate about the distinction between history and 'history-like' material which followed the work of Hans Frei (see chapter 5). The debate has continued recently in the critique by Kevin J. Vanhoozer of Paul Ricoeur that the latter lacks adequate criteria to distinguish between fictional and non-fictional discourse. (26)

It is not sufficient therefore to accept any or all historical narrative as accurately depicting a community's sense of identity. The ethnographer needs to exercise critical discernment over his or her use of historical narrative material; and without its history, a community's story cannot truly be told.

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PHASE THREE

INFORMING THE ACTION UNDER REVIEW FROM THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Narrative Theology: an Introduction

We have now attempted to put into place two of the three poles, or 'conversation partners', of a proposed model of pastoral theology. We have considered the role of story in contemporary approaches to pastoral theology, and the place of narrative in two disciplines from the human sciences: literary criticism and ethnography. We need next to examine to what extent the category of narrative may be of value in current theology. On this basis we shall then be in a position to place the three poles together, and to assess the potential of story in pastoral theology in particular. We turn, therefore, to explore narrative theology.

1. The Attractions of Narrative

In Fackre's words, 'Narrative theology is discourse about God in the setting of story'(1). There are many reasons for the attractiveness of narrative to theology. At the most obvious level narrative is one of the primary genres of the Bible, and the common inheritance of all Christians. Biblical stories stand near the centre of Christian experience from the earliest age, and constitute a source of continual inspiration, guidance and discussion. Immediately theology engages with one of the most common and fruitful modes of the Church's self-expression.

It can also be seen that narrative allows real and original experiences of faith to be a part of the theological agenda. As J.B. Metz points out in an important early foray into narrative theology, 'Theology is above all concerned with direct experiences expressed in narrative language.'(2) If we silence the first order language of religious experience (of which narrative is one important form) we have already lost contact with one of the primary and most foundational modes of language.

Moreover, narrative provides the underlying structure both for creeds and for the rituals of baptism and eucharist. Stephen Sykes points out how the ritual delivery of the story to

the baptismal candidate, for example, gives him or her entry into an interlocking series of dramas of individual, familial, national and universal significance.(3) The story, abbreviated in ritual form, provides the key. Metz observes that by recognising the sacramental quality of narrative in baptism and eucharist, the relationship between word and sacrament may now be more fully elaborated theologically.(4)

Narrative also serves the needs of Christian theology because of its focus on the concrete and particular, rather than the more abstract (but equally important) formulations of other branches of the theological enterprise. It appears to affirm the distinctive value not only of the story of the biblical text but also of the story of the individual believer, and to demonstrate that the two stories are crucially related. It deals in the interaction of specific people in particular events, conflicts and processes, and thereby it enhances confidence in a God who is actively engaged with his creation in history.

It can also be claimed for narrative that it offers a way into doctrinal and ethical issues which is both imaginative and inclusive. In other words, the telling of one story does not invalidate the telling of others to add depth, contrast and subtlety to the stance being taken. In ethical decisions it may be that we gain more guidance from stories which help us to recognise appropriate action, than from principles which lay down more abstract criteria.(5)

One particular value of narrative theologically is that it opens up new possibilities of speaking about the relationship of historical fact to Christian truth. These new ways are not without their own problems, as we shall see, but they do at least rephrase the questions by introducing literary approaches to break up ground which has become hardened by constant treading. Such literary resources, far from negating the value of historical-critical methods, complement them by acting in what Meir Sternberg calls 'community' or 'overlap' with them.(6) The different frameworks make the work of reading the text both more complex and more productive.

Narrative offers a further attraction in that not only does it facilitate encounter between different theological approaches, it also engages in discussion with other disciplines outside

the field of theology. As well as literary studies themselves there can be fruitful conversations with psychology, linguistics, anthropology, history, communications theory and other disciplines. This is not to deny the danger that categories may be transferred all too easily and uncritically from one field to another, but the inter-disciplinary possibilities of narrative in theology remain all the same one of its chief virtues.

Not least among the positive features of narrative are its pastoral and social or corporate potential. When a Church is seen as a story-telling community, it is clear that story can function pastorally, evangelistically, educationally and indeed prophetically (since many narratives are dangerous and promote freedom and justice rather than a privatised, comforting faith). The nature of the church as a story-telling community is strongly emphasised by various authors in the Doctrine Commission's Believing in the Church (7). The corporate activity of the Church is seen to be 'attention to the story', and the characteristic work of re-telling that story has a performative rather than simply an informative effect. Vanstone argues therefore that the performative effect of a story can be achieved only by a specific narrative which entails the conditions for that effect. In the context of his argument, specific attention to the story of Jesus Christ is irreplaceably the distinctive task of the Church.

The information content of the Christian story could in theory be available from other sources apart from the biblical material, but on the basis of this argument the performative effect is uniquely tied to the distinctive features which make this precise story operative. The practical task of the Church becomes clearer when seen through this window of narrative; rather than being primarily a steward of information, the Church is to be an agent of performance, and such performance can continue to be appropriated only through report of the story and attention to it. How the story is actually told is the multi-dimensional task of the Church.

The important influence that narrative can have in the development of local theologies has come to light as part of an enterprise much engaging the Church. On the one side we may see this in the models of South American liberation theology, but it also appears in the

more modest attempts in Britain to encourage an appropriate theology for the inner city.(8) In his book, Constructing Local Theologies, Robert Schreiter writes,

> In cultures that still have a strong oral focus, commentaries, narratives and anthologies may be the most likely forms of theology... The natural forms of handing on the central messages of the culture - proverbs,old stories and the like - are legitimate vehicles for the development of local theologies. (9)

When it comes to developing a theology for the city, Andrew Kirk suggests that four major assumptions made by liberation theology should be adopted by local theologians. Writing in Theology in the City, he highlights four elements in local theologies:

1. theology acts as critical reflection on the life and practice of the Church;
2. the starting point for mission is the particular historical situation in which the Church finds itself;
3. theology needs to use the social sciences in order to make its reflection concrete;
4. theology has to reckon with the fact that it cannot be divorced from ideology and that social conflict may be part and parcel of a particular economic and political situation.(10)

One of the chief ways in which these criteria may be met in the city has been found to be careful attention to the experiences and stories of local people, and a weaving of this together with biblical narratives. The interaction of these narratives will disclose genuine local theology. Although it may seem slender to traditional theology, and may never even be written down, nevertheless it may be owned and lived by the community in a way which may never occur with other forms of theology.(11)

For all of these reasons narrative has appeared an attractive resource for theology in recent years; but how has narrative theology come into being? What are its roots, and how has it developed? To these questions we now turn.

2. The Origin and Development of Narrative Theology

The roots of much narrative theology are to be found in the so-called 'Yale school' and with what may be termed a "pre-history" in the work of the Yale theologian H. Richard Niebuhr. His book, The Meaning of Revelation, introduced the phrase 'the story of our life'.

> The Church's compulsion arises out of its need - since it is a living church - to say truly what it stands for, and out of its inability to do so otherwise than by telling the story of its life. (12)

He drew the distinction between external and internal history, history as observed and history as lived, and maintained that revelation in the Christian church is our own history as lived and apprehended from within. The New Testament writers wrote this internal history, so that it was always concerned with 'our Father', and 'our Lord'. To understand the history and vision of these writers it is necessary to look not so much at them but with them, and so to participate in their history.

Niebuhr therefore distinguished revelation from history in the merely outward sense. In the first place, history cannot be experienced in universals; it is known in particulars, finitude and accident. In the second place, if revelation simply meant history, faith would equate with belief in certain historical events and this would be a denial of the living God. Nevertheless the external history of events is intimately related in tension with the internal history of revelation. One cannot live in two worlds. This tension is not one to be resolved; rather it is to be lived in. For example, the church's history of itself is an attempt to see itself with the eyes of God and so to integrate external history with its already known internal history. Faith and history therefore are allies, but revelation itself is found in the story of our life, the living memory of the community.

Here was a direct antecedent of narrative theology. The Yale school went on to explore sociological and anthropological approaches to the New Testament and canonical ones to the Old. Postliberal theologians influenced by Yale take the biblical narratives as narratives

rather than as historical sources or existential symbols.

There are, however, other strands to be noticed in the earlier development of narrative theology. In Europe, theologians such as Gerhard Von Rad and Cullmann were writing of Heilsgeschichte in an attempt to place the life of Israel and of Jesus within a total salvation history. Tillich's symbol theory in Systematic Theology, Vol.1,(13) though decidedly not narrative itself, offered a context for narrative; and Johann Baptist Metz in Munich began to put the whole theological endeavour under a narrative umbrella. We may also observe, though it was not explicitly done so at the time, that Barth handled narrative in a particularly significant way. David Ford considers that the unity of Barth's theological method is his interpretation of biblical narratives. In a careful examination of Barth's use of narrative, Ford writes:

> Barth is claiming that God chooses to bring people to faith through certain stories; that this does not depend on us being able to verify the stories historically or affirm them as inerrant; but that it does depend on us following the stories carefully, and trusting that their subject, who is still alive to confirm them, is rendered adequately for God's purpose. (14)

In addition to these developments, literary criticism was having increasing influence in post-war biblical scholarship. There were, however, other more pervasive cultural factors which may have been subtly influential. In an environment increasingly dominated by television, people became hungry for the telling of stories, a phenomenon considered by Harvey Cox in his Seduction of the Spirit.(15) Moreover there was in the 1960s and 1970s a widespread cultural reclamation of the imagination, sometimes excessively and sometimes productively, experienced in spheres as far apart as art, politics, literature and ethics. The first-order language of experience and the creative potential of the right hand side of the brain, became prominent.

The 1970s therefore, became the period when narrative theology emerged into self-conscious existence. However, before we trace the contours of this approach, it is important to examine the deeper roots of narrative in our theological culture, because the

way in which narrative has been handled in the Christian history of recent centuries will be a central element of our understanding of current issues in narrative theology, especially the relationship between history, truth and meaning.

Our chief guide in this historical excursus is the Yale theologian Hans Frei, whose Eclipse of Biblical Narrative (16) has become the statement with which others since have had to deal. His basic thesis is that before the rise of historical criticism in the eighteenth century, Western reading of the Bible was strongly realistic, so that the literal sense of the text was inseparable from the historical events. Most people read the Bible as a grand comprehensive story which made sense of their own lives as they fitted into that story. With the rise of critical methods, however, this correspondence between the text and the 'real world' of the reader broke down.

> It is no exaggeration to say that all across the theological spectrum the great reversal had taken place; interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story. (17)

The primary world became that of the reader, and the theological task became that of making sense of the biblical world within that framework. This, however, was to misunderstand the intention of the biblical writers, and to distort the nature of their narratives. A further problem arose in that with the rise of scientific paradigms of knowledge, meaning began to be perceived as resting on ostensive reference. This reflected a narrower dependence on reference than that presupposed in the pre-modern world. Erich Auerbach, by contrasting biblical and Homeric narrative, shows how the Bible is committed not just to realism but to truth. Homer's style is uniform, with all events in the foreground, while the Bible is purposive, suggestive, highlighted only in parts, so that:

> The Bible's claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer's, it is tyrannical - it excludes all other claims... The stories are not, like Homer's, simply narrated reality. Doctrine and promise are incarnate in them and inseparable from them. (18)

Pre-critical reading of the Bible, therefore, saw the text as describing actual historical events, being one whole cumulative story woven together by figures and types, and embracing the experience of the present age and reader.(19) Such an approach was given fresh impetus by the Reformation, when with relief the Reformers rescued the text from a complex development of literal, allegorical and anagogical understandings, and declared, with Luther, that Scripture:

> is through itself most certain, most easily accessible, comprehensible, interpreting itself, proving, judging all the words of all men. (20)

The literal sense was therefore the true meaning, and figural or typological interpretations related different texts to each other under a unified view of scripture as witnessing to Christ.

An interesting consequence of this confident Protestant approach to scripture is found in the prodigious outpouring of English religious poetry in the seventeenth century. Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Trahearne and others shared a 'Protestant poetics' which was rooted in the Bible as God's Word encapsulated in human words. In Barbara Lewalski's words: 'The Bible became normative for poetic art as well as for spiritual truth.'(21) This poetic theory involved lyric genres, figurative language, symbolism, modes of meditation, and distinctive ways of perceiving the spiritual life; and it was thoroughly Protestant. As Lewalski writes:

> The Bible afforded the poets a literary model which they could imitate in such literary matters as genre, language and symbolism, confident that in this model at least, the difficult problems of art and truth are perfectly resolved. Far from eschewing aesthetics for a rhetoric of silence, these poets committed themselves to forging and employing a Protestant poetics, grounded upon scripture, for the making of Protestant devotional lyrics. (22)

The first breaches in this unitary view of Scripture came about with Pietism, which affirmed the grammatical meaning of the text but also allowed transcendent and veiled meanings only open to the devout. Spinoza also declared the intention of scripture to be the inculcation of piety and obedience to God. 'Scripture does not explain things by their secondary causes, but only narrates them in the order and the style which has most power

to move men to devotion.'(23) Gradually there was emerging the fatal split between the literal sense of the text and its historical reference; moreover, the religious meaning of the text was logically distinct from both these two, but in no way in opposition to either.

The historical-critical approach of the eighteenth century got under way first in England and then in Germany.(24) In England the discussion centred on revelation: how to understand it philosophically and historically. The focus was therefore on the issue of external evidence. In Germany, by contrast, the focus was internal, on the literary-historical questions. How, and with the aid of what authority, does one settle the principles of biblical interpretation? In either case, there was no more room for different levels of meaning; the plain meaning was all there was, and the realism of the present age had taken over from the realism of the biblical world. As Hans Frei said:

> By the end of the century, belief in layers of meaning in a single text - literal, typological, and spiritual or mystical - had virtually disappeared as a major force... From now on, the harmony of historical fact, literal sense and religious truth will at best have to be demonstrated; at worst some explanation of the religious truth of the fact-like description will have to be given in the face of a negative verdict on its factual accuracy. (25)

Now that the split has occurred between meaning and history it has proved hard to recover an integrated approach to the text. At its best, narrative theology tries to work in that gap. It seeks to overcome the distinction between literal and historical meanings, not by pretending there are no historical critical questions, nor by subsuming the historical into the literary form of the text, but by working 'in community' (Sternberg) with the historical critics, to find meaning on both sides of the text, the point of integration being the text itself.

From the 1970s therefore, there has been an increasing interest in narrative approaches to theology. Few would want to categorise themselves as 'narrative theologians' but the insights of this area of study have affected the agenda and methods of many. The field is complex, but in the following chapter we will attempt to delineate three of the major

thrusts of contemporary narrative theology.

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Three Major Directions in Narrative Theology

A number of different shapes could be given to the overall field of narrative theology. An approach could be made through key themes, for example through literature, human experience, history and fiction; or an approach which posits an overarching category, such as biblical narrative or revelation. The classification chosen here seeks to combine comprehensiveness in examining the field with precision in identifying particular contributions to the debate. The three areas are deliberately called 'directions' inasmuch as they are in no sense points of arrival or exclusive of other directions. They overlap and mutually enrich each other; they check each others indiscretions; and they admit their limitations. They are:

1. The Bible and literary criticism
2. Narrative in Christian doctrine
3. Narrative in theological ethics

1. The Bible and literary criticism

The Bible has a broad and profound variety of concerns, but whichever those are, they are expressed in a collection of literature. It follows therefore, that it is entirely fitting that some interpreters of the Bible should study it as literature and use the technical resources which literary critics employ in other fields. As early as 1895 R. G. Moulton wrote his Literary Study of the Bible which was a comparative study of literary forms including epic, lyric, rhetoric, prophecy, wisdom and drama, although his emphasis was on complete poems rather than on particular components of them. Of the works which began to appear later, The Bible as History by T. R. Henn, published in 1970, paid greater attention to biblical imagery and its effect on English literature.

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From the 1970s, however, the growth in work in the field necessitates a further sub-division of focus. Again, to limit the interaction between different foci would be arbitrary and naive. There is some value, nevertheless, in identifying some particular critical methods within the field of literary studies, on which scholars concentrate:-

(i) genre criticism

(ii) structural analysis

(iii) narrative criticism

They offer emphases, not exclusivity.

(i) Genre criticism

In literary criticism in general, and biblical literary criticism in particular, there has been a shift in the last twenty years away from prime concern with the author and his intention, to the reader and his or her act of reading. It is possible to distinguish between (a) author-orientated interpretations, (b) processes of reading which lay emphasis on the role of the reader and (c) interpretation which confines its focus to the text itself as an autonomous system which generates forces of meaning. The first, (a), represents the classical humanist paradigm; (b) takes account of the conventions of the cultural context of the reader and fits well the reader-related concerns of pastoral theology; (c) is reflected in literary formalism and in structuralism. Meaning could therefore be found in the book itself, in its particular literary form, as well as in the mind of the author or redactor. Furthermore, the expectations of a community of readers may also be reflected in the literary conventions which give the text meaning.

The particularity of the literary form is known as genre. As defined by Jonathan Culler a genre is:

> a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text... The function of genre conventions is essentially to establish a contract between writer and reader so as to make certain relevant expectations operative, and thus to permit both compliance with and deviation from

accepted modes of intelligibility. (1)

The vital skill in understanding the meaning of the text, in this discipline, is an appreciation of the literary form rather than just the linguistic form of that text. Borrowing a phrase from the structuralists, what is required is a 'literary competence' which recognises the genre and the consequent conventions for its use, so that, for example, we realise that if we are reading apocalyptic literature, we are not to expect its references to mysterious animals to function as zoological descriptions. Linguistic analysis of the words of the text will not help us to understand its meaning if we have not made the fundamental moves to determine the genre of the material.

Thus John Barton writes that the relevant skill in literary competence is the ability to recognise genre.

> By 'genre' is meant any recognisable and distinguishable type of writing or speech which operates within certain conventions that are in principle (not necessarily in practice) stateable... We cannot say, First you must establish the 'meaning' of the passage, and then you can ask about the genre to which it belongs; for the meaning depends on the genre. Yet, on the other hand, there is no way of establishing the genre to which the text belongs except by reading it, and that must involve decisions about meaning. (2)

The question of genre is, therefore, by no means straightforward, but it is nonetheless vital. Genre and exegesis offer a mutual critique in the pursuit of understanding a text, and modern scholarly competence in the recognition of genre in biblical material is a well established development. There may indeed still be scholarly debate over the nature of particular texts but the importance of whether the material is myth, legend, history, epic, biography, prophecy, apocalyptic, proverb, hymn or parable, is beyond doubt.

There is room for further debate over the place of narrative in biblical literary genres. Some would see narrative as the primary biblical literary form where others would be more pluralist in their approach. Within narrative itself there are different claims about

primary genres. Auerbach, as we have noted above, puts forward 'realistic narrative' as the normative form of narrative in the Bible. He regards the three high points in the development of the realist narrative tradition as being the Bible, the works of Dante, and the nineteenth century novel, and claims that the full significance of the Bible has been too often overlooked. (3) Another literary critic, Robert Alter, sees the central feature of biblical narrative as 'historicised prose fiction'. (4) Sallie TeSelle (McFague) makes the same claim for metaphor. (5) There are a number of possibilities and consequently, a lively debate.

Genre criticism, therefore, focuses attention on the crucial issue of the nature of the material being studied. It is essential to know whether the text is poetry, parable, myth or allegory. It is then necessary to know how that literary form functions and what are its key characteristics. In this way genre criticism contributes to the holistic understanding of the text.

(ii) Structuralist Analysis

Whereas the historical dimension of a text remains a necessary and constructive partner in a genre-critical approach, structuralism remains in general unconcerned about the objective historical context of a biblical narrative. Structuralism assumes the autonomy and, in this sense, supreme sovereignty of the text. (6) This approach has therefore been a controversial resource in narrative theology. It reached a hey-day in the "high structuralism" of the early 1970s but suffered collapse with the realisation of the socially relative nature of texts. Nevertheless it has been sufficiently influential to demand some consideration here. A critical appropriation of some of the tools of structuralism has proved helpful; wholesale advocacy no longer retains credibility with the emergence of post-structuralist perspectives.

Following Saussure's attempt to discover and describe the deep, permanent structures of language (see chapter 3, above), Vladimir Propp was the first to apply this broad approach to narratives. He claimed to have discerned the underlying structure of fairy tales in the

limited number of 'functions' which characters in a tale could perform.(7) This approach, which A.J. Greimas developed into a more concise and powerful model, was first applied by Roland Barthes to biblical narrative in his essay, 'The Struggle with the Angel', (1971). He applied the idea of a narrative grammar which all stories had to obey, to the story of Jacob at Jabbok, giving an account of the central paradox in the unexpected twist of the opponent turning out to be God himself.

The other mainstream account of structuralism comes from Claude Levi-Strauss whose theory of binary opposition became highly influential. He moved behind the surface structure of stories to explore the deep underlying structure of language itself as expressed in mythic themes. These themes will be sets of contrasts and parallels which the myth will seek to mediate or overcome. In Saussure's terms, the deep binary structure is the 'langue', or underlying system, of which a particular story will be the 'parole', which becomes actualised in an event of communication. One of the first to apply Levi-Strauss' theory to biblical texts was Edmund Leach in Genesis as Myth(1969). He claimed that Genesis was constantly setting up opposites, heaven/earth, light/darkness, tree of life/tree of death, thereby revealing the hidden binary structure of all such myths. Such general systems then generated meaning in particular acts of communication.

A number of literary and biblical scholars have pursued these structuralist methods since these early forays. Northrop Frye, from the literary critic's standpoint , saw the Bible as a huge self-enclosed system, which The Great Code (8) set out to decode. Historical reference is unimportant at the level of the system; meaning arises from the present text alone. The general form of biblical narrative can assume a systematic pattern, namely a series of falls and restorations whereby disasters and mistakes are overcome in new covenants and visions. From a different direction, John Dominic Crossan argues for a world which he claims is created by the story (of the Bible) rather than described by it.(9) Story functions in several ways for Crossan, but in particular it establishes 'world' in myth, and subverts 'world' in parable. The structuralist basis for this, however, is that 'reality is language, and we live in language like fish in the sea.'

There are clear gains in a structuralist perspective on biblical texts. We are able to understand the way some texts work with unexpected power, such as that of Jacob's struggle with the angel. We are able to find fresh insight on familiar texts by appreciating the way the mind may work in binary opposites. Nevertheless, there are considerable problems with an over-zealous use of these tools of analysis. The major one is the structuralist disregard for the historical dimension of a text at the level of parole. The emphasis on the final version of a text as a timeless system may have blinded some critics to the paradox of applying a method which arose out of the study of myths and fairy tales to the study of historical material which depends on temporal processes, such as the gospels. Again, what works passably well in some contexts may not work in others. Some writers may have been guilty of an over-enthusiasm and arbitrariness about the discovery of binary opposites because this seemed to provide a more "scientific" or "objective" approach to meaning; but the relativity, particularity, and complexity of some narratives simply makes them inappropriate subjects for structuralist analysis of this kind. For example, it has proved impossible to fit the whole of the Passion narrative in Mark 14-16 on to one semiotic square, and the subsequent compromise proves to be practically indecipherable.(10)

Terry Eagleton has pointed out a further problem with structural analysis of biblical texts.(11) As structuralism reduces narrative to underlying patterns, it is likely to eliminate the particularity of plot and character. As long as the structure of relationship between the units of the narrative is preserved, the actual characters could be anyone, and the actual storyline quite different from the original. Finally in criticising this approach to biblical narrative, it becomes evident that structuralism signals the eclipse of the author as a significant agent in the narrative's meaning, a position well summed up in the title of a 1968 article by Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'. Such a conclusion is so far removed from the central insight of redaction criticism (the author's theological motivation is unavoidably significant), that it inevitably undermines the structuralist argument.

Having made these points, however, structuralist insights can be valued for what they rightly contribute. It is surely possible, as Anthony Thiselton says, 'to use structural

methods, without necessarily subscribing fully to structuralism as an ideology.'(12) It cannot but be helpful to understand more about the system of rules and norms which governs the composition of a narrative, even if we rightly refuse to let such understanding dictate the narrative's whole meaning.

(iii) Narrative Criticism

The term narrative criticism is here taken to mean forms of literary analysis which include compositional techniques and reader-response theory. The focus on authorial intent is not that of the redaction critic's concern for his theological point of view, but the literary critic's interest in his skilled use of literary devices such as gaps, repetition, dialogue, reticence and particular words. The obverse of this, however, is that there is an 'implied reader' who should be able to create meaning for him or herself in the text by making sense of the constituent parts. This is the other field of reader-response criticism.

Narrative criticism on this view, therefore, is a two-edged weapon. It looks to literary form and the artistry of the writers, and also to the power of the text to evoke a particular response in the reader. The link is found in the fact that the form of the text itself creates an ideal reader; there is a form of response which is encoded in the way the author has created the text. (13) The term 'narrative criticism' is chosen here to indicate that both dimensions of this approach are important, and to avoid the potential richness of this thinking from being undermined by too narrow a version of reader-response theory.

One of the most attractive introductions to narrative criticism of this nature is Robert Alter's The Art of Biblical Narrative. He objects to reading 'the Bible as literature' as if one would read 'Dante as literature'. Instead he appeals for a complete fusion of literary art with theological discipline. This does not mean ignoring historical methods but valuing the literary artist. Nevertheless he is critical of:

> the tendency of scholars to ask questions of the biblical view of man, the biblical notion of the soul, the biblical vision of eschatology, while for the most part neglecting phenomena like character, motive and narrative design as

> unbefitting for the study of an essentially religious document. (14)

For Alter the Bible is primarily historicised prose fiction or fictionalised history. Only Israel chose to cast its sacred national tradition in prose, and fiction was the main means available to the authors to make their history real.

> Under scrutiny, biblical narrative generally proves to be either fiction laying claim to a place in the chain of causation and the realm of moral consequentiality that belongs to history, as in the primeval history, the tales of the Patriarchs and much of the Exodus story, or history given the imaginative definition of fiction, as in most of the narratives from the period of the Judges onwards. (15)

The Bible presents as history a wide range of material, from factual and legendary history to aetiological tales, from archetypal fiction and folk tales to fictionalised versions of known historical figures. In declaring that prose fiction is the normative biblical genre, Alter has not put himself beyond dispute. The relation between narrative worlds and realities beyond the text is probably more complex than Alter allows for. Meir Sternberg, for example, has been critical of him for not recognising the subtlety of fiction and mistakenly identifying history with the 'real facts'.

Nevertheless Alter's working definition provides a helpful base or key for biblical interpretation. When applying the key to the historical narratives of David, for example, he shows how the writer brilliantly grasps David's inner mind in much the same way as Shakespeare does with the characters of his historical plays. When applying the key to the Patriarchal narratives he shows they are ' historicised' in that they claim to be related to known historical circumstances, and are 'fiction' in that national archetypes claim to be actual individual human lives.

Alter goes on to examine with affection and enthusiasm a number of literary devices which reveal the narrative art of the biblical writers. Biblical type-scenes such as betrothals, initiatory trials, annunciations and epiphanies in the fields, allow the audience to take

pleasure in the familiarity of the conventions. Dialogue in the form of direct speech, gets to the heart of human and divine encounter, 'obtruding the substratum' of biblical belief about God. Repetition and parallelism through the use of Leitworter, repeated motifs, themes and sequences, has the intention and effect of intensifying or complementing the action, emphasising the inescapable tension of human freedom and divine plan. Reticence is a practiced art which has the effect of giving biblical characters a certain opacity and ambiguity, allowing the unpredictability and depth of human personality to emerge. A further device is the artistry of superimposing narratives, which appears confusing but is in fact purposeful, indicating that God knows what he is doing in the complexity of human affairs.

Altogether Alter reveals the biblical writers to be people of high theological purpose who also delighted in their narrative art. Their work was an experiment in the possibilities of knowledge: the limited knowledge of humankind and the omniscient knowledge of the narrator, usually only glimpsed in indirect modes of expression. They had at their disposal a wide variety of literary techniques which they used with imagination and pleasure. And yet it was decidedly purposeful.

> Attention to such features leads not to a more 'imaginative' reading of biblical narrative, but to a more precise one; and since all these features are linked to discernible details in the Hebrew text, the literary approach is a good deal less conjectural than the historical scholarship that asks of a verse whether it contains possible Akkadian loanwords... or whether it may have been corrupted by scribal error.(16)

Alter does not always find it possible to resist a side-swipe at biblical scholars! Nor would other biblical scholars necessarily be averse to retaliation. The main ground of complaint would be that Alter makes claims for his insights which are too imperialistic. Sophisticated literary techniques may illuminate many biblical narratives, but not necessarily all. Moreover, as John Rogerson writes:

> It is one thing to accept that in presenting historical material some biblical writers may have used literary devices in order to express their belief in the

> 'meaning' of the events; it is another matter to invent the all-embracing category of fictionalised history. This generalisation may arise from the assertion that it was the biblical writers who invented narrative prose in the ancient world. Such a claim needs careful scrutiny... (17)

Although he takes issue with Alter on his central designation of biblical narrative as prose fiction, Meir Sternberg in his book The Poetics of Biblical Narrative essentially argues for the same literary understanding of the Old Testament material. It is not simply a matter of applying a 'literary approach' to the Bible, (as if there were any such unitary approach in any case.) Rather the Bible has to be seen as a literary work in itself.

> To offer a poetics of biblical narrative is to claim that biblical narrative is a work of literature. Not just an artful work; not a work marked by some aesthetic property; not a work resorting to literary devices; not a work that the interpreter may choose (or refuse) to consider from a literary viewpoint or, in that unlovely piece of jargon, as literature; but a literary work. The difference is radical.(18)

Sternberg distinguishes between source and discourse orientations on the text, and upholds the need for both. A source orientation will explore the historical setting, the language system, tradition, the original documentary material, the passage from oral to written mode, the identity of writers and schools and the influence of editorial work. In contrast, the discourse approach will tackle the text as a pattern of meaning and effect, will look at the rules being followed, the image of the world being expressed, the way the plot unfolds and the impact of the implied author's view point. There has been much good work in this second 'discourse' field recently and the most productive concepts so far have been gaps, ambiguity, redundancy, exposition, temporal ordering, omniscient viewpoint, reading process, patterns of analogy, alternative forms of reference, indirect characterisation and rhetoric. In spite of this division between orientations on a text, however, Sternberg is at pains to emphasise that there is no absolute distinction between history and fiction; the Bible 'obliterates the line dividing fact from fancy'.

One of Sternberg's main arguments is that biblical narrative is governed by three

principles: ideological, historiographic, and aesthetic. This gives the narratives their distinctive 'thickness', to use Gilbert Ryle's phrase. The ideological principle establishes a world-view which is then organised into doctrine, as themes like promise and fulfilment, sin and retribution, weave through the text. The historiographic principle is seen quintessentially in the chronicle but is very often present, for example, in concerns about dating, the origin of place names, and the emphasis on handing on a remembered past. The aesthetic principle is seen through all the endeavours of the literary critic to uncover the inventiveness of the writers as they tried to enhance the reality behind the narratives. The three principles interpenetrate at all points, so that, for example, it is not simply the fact of an aesthetic principle which is significant, but the pervasiveness of it.

The tension between the principles, however, is the very strain which forces the reader to draw out the implications and thereby become involved in the drama. In order that the narrative should not simply be subject to individual response but be available and formative of the whole community, the text is presented in a form which can be over-read and under-read but cannot be counter-read. In other words, the community cannot collectively misrepresent the text because the story line, word order and value system reflect a measure of stable consistency, and are in turn guaranteed by the so-called 'omniscient narrator'. We will need to return to Sternberg's handling of the relationship of history and fiction, but it is clear that both he and Alter are making a major play for the literary character of biblical narrative.

Without the same depth of analysis of specific texts and devices, a number of other works have emerged applying these insights to particular books of the Bible. In Mark as Story (19), David Rhoades and Donald Michie do not attempt to address the issue of the relationship of the gospel to historical events. Instead they examine the story world in which Mark exists, and argue for the inseparability of story and rhetoric, what the story is about and how it is told. In that story world there is a unity - the plot is coherent, anticipated events happen, conflicts are resolved, predictions are fulfilled, characters are consistent, and literary techniques give unity.

The work of Rhoades and Michie is narrative criticism in a pure but reductionist form. They work entirely within the confines of the text and investigate it from the position of the implied reader, seeking to uncover what ideal responses would be made to a text constructed as it is. The strengths of such an approach are clear; it is single minded and helpfully discloses much about the writers intent. The drawback is its monophonic attention to the text as an intra-linguistic system, ignoring the profound insights of historical criticism, and leading to the suspicion of a kind of 'literary imperialism'.

Another example of a literary study of a particular book is Alan Culpepper's Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel (20). He sets out to examine the gospel not as a window, through which we can look at the Johannine community and understand the meaning of the text, but as a mirror, so that by looking at the text we can understand more of our own world in the light of the greater reality of the narrative story. Culpepper uses a model derived from Seymour Chatman in Story and Discourse (21) to explicate the relationships of real and implied author and reader, implicit and explicit commentary, narrator and 'narratee'. He also adopts G. Genette's approach to time (22) to explore how narrative gives structure to time through the order, duration and frequency of the way events are depicted. He works his way through the plot of John, the characters ('an odd collection'), and into the implicit commentary; he examines the silent communication of the gospel, which gives it its power and mystery through the overtones of language; and discusses the irony of conversations and events, and the symbolism of places and things.

A further development in narrative criticism takes the thematic approach of Alter and Sternberg, together with the study of a particular book from Rhoades, Michie and Culpepper, and from this base moves into full literary commentaries. Examples of this recent development are Jack Dean Kingsbury's Matthew as Story and Robert Tannehill's Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts.(23) The story of literary narrative criticism continues to unfold.

We have now examined three critical methods within the field of literary study of biblical narrative. We found genre criticism to be well established, structural analysis to be useful

but contentious, and narrative criticism to be burgeoning but inclined to over-reach itself. Nevertheless, as critical study concentrates increasingly on the nature of the text and the response it calls forth from the reader, the insights of literary approaches to narrative are now well-proven.

2. Narrative in Christian Doctrine

The second major direction in narrative theology is systematic. It is concerned with the ordering of Christian doctrine such that new light can be thrown on the traditional problems of what particular doctrines mean and how they relate to each other. The contribution of narrative to this vast and complex field may be best explored by looking through two windows, those of Christian identity and Christian revelation.

This is not to undervalue other related areas of narrative concern such as social critique, redemptive eschatology or even theodicy. Johann Baptist Metz, for example, considers salvation to be a critical theme, well addressed by narrative.

> Can the theology of salvation and of man's redemption and reconciliation through Jesus Christ really hold its own against the history of suffering and the non-identity of history? That is the central problem facing systematic theology. (24)

He considers that neither an existential approach to suffering nor an eschatalogical one, nor even taking suffering into the heart of a crucified God, can adequately fend off the problem; but narrative approaches allied to argumentative ones might enable the story of salvation in history to be told within the history of suffering itself, thus recounting God's salvation without diminishing the historical reality of suffering.

Nevertheless, Metz's proposal was an early and provocative suggestion and more work has since been undertaken which might helpfully be examined under the two headings below: identity and revelation.

(i) Christian Identity

The question of Christian identity revolves around the twin issues of what one understands by Jesus as the Christ, and what it means to confess him as Lord. If one is seeking the distinctive contours of Christian believing then one has to attend to the central figure of the given data, and the response which Christians make to him. This exercise has regularly run into crisis. George Stroup, in The Promise of Narrative Theology, describes several features of the contemporary problem. (25) He notes the all-too-frequent silence of scripture in the life of the church as ministers are unsure how to use it and lay people are uncertain how to apply it. The tradition of theology has also been lost, as people want to leap from first century practice to contemporary application. Moreover, the discipline of theology is rarely appealed to, as the church turns forever to pragmatic concerns and easy handbooks. Finally, individual Christians are unclear how to make sense of their own identity by means of Christian faith - they let other communities and narratives form their lives.

George Lindbeck sees the problem in a rather different way. He is concerned with the identity of Christian doctrine, and the inadequate paradigms theology works with. He simplifies two of these approaches in these ways:

> The propositionalist approach: emphasises the cognitive aspects of religion and stresses the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.
>
> The experiential-expressivist approach: interprets doctrines as non-informative and non-discursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes or existential orientations. (26)

The problem with the former way of thinking about Christian identity is shown particularly in ecumenical dialogue. How can ecumenical reports maintain that different denominations now agree on a doctrine when the doctrines themselves have not changed for either church? On the propositionalist approach such statements must either be self-contradictory (because the previous doctrine is still in place) or self-deceived (because

no attempt has been made to repudiate earlier formulations of belief). The alternative approach, the experiential-expressivist, which Lindbeck traces through Schleiermacher and Otto to Mircea Eliade, is ultimately unsatisfactory because it works on the basis of some pre-linguistic religious experience common to humanity, and Lindbeck denies the possibility of such experience independent of the language in which it is expressed.

Lindbeck's preferred method of identifying the nature of doctrine is what he calls the cultural-linguistic approach, in which doctrines function as authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action within a community. Doctrine, therefore, is the grammar of a religion, and being an adherent of a religion is analogous to learning and speaking a language. It is therefore not possible to have an experience without the means to express it. 'One simply could not have an "experience" of being "saved by faith in Christ" without a language that included ideas like "salvation", "faith" and "Christ".'(27)

It follows from this approach that it is unhelpful to make judgements of truth and falsity about doctrines. Like languages, some doctrines are richer than others and enable men and women to lead fuller Christian lives because the grammar and vocabulary are broader and deeper; but direct judgements of accuracy or inaccuracy are inappropriate. The ecumenical report can conclude that the grammar of doctrine has changed, and therefore there need be no inconsistency, for example, in churches disagreeing in the Reformation period and finding agreement today.

Lindbeck maintains that the vocabulary of doctrine is essentially narrative in form, corresponding to the linguistic nature of doctrine itself. Thus 'to become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one's world in its terms.' (28) A religion expresses itself in stories, myths and doctrines, both directly through teaching and indirectly through the rites, customs and attitudes of the believing community. Again we can see the power of liturgy to communicate truth through creeds and the abbreviated narratives contained in the sacraments.(29)

Stroup's answer to the crisis in Christian identity is also to appeal to narrative as a way through the stalemate of doubt and lack of confidence. His central conviction is that such identity is formed by the 'collision' of the narrative of the Christian community and the individual's personal narrative. Personal identity is initially formed in narrative shape because it is the result of interpretation of one's personal chronicle by memory, and the original chronicle is intrinsically historical. The Christian community also gathers round a particular collection of narratives. Its identity comes from its interpretation of historical experiences, for which narrative is again necessary. In the Old Testament identity was found in the community narrative of exodus, promise and covenant; in the New Testament, identity is found in the individual narrative of Jesus. It is when these two identity narratives collide that conversion takes place.

> At that point where a person encounters the Christian community with its narratives, common life and faith-claims about reality, there is the possibility that the individual will begin the lengthy, difficult process of reinterpreting his or her personal history in the light of the narratives and symbols that give the Christian community its identity. (30)

The individual's decision to see and live by means of the Christian narrative is what is meant by faith.

Narrative theology therefore introduces into Christian doctrine an openness and flexibility which removes it from the twin dangers of existentialism and fundamentalism, or the relativism and scepticism of secular attack. By valuing community and personal narratives, and the grammar and vocabulary by which they are expressed, narrative theology enables the Christian to live and act positively in church and society, with confidence that he or she is held by a consistent narrative web. Narrative theology offers no cure-all, but contributes valuable insights to the complex debate on Christian identity.

(ii) Revelation

As we have already seen (ch. 5), David Ford claims that narrative is a key category for no less a scholar than Karl Barth. He came increasingly to reject natural theology and to find

that revelation is the door to theological understanding. Through narrative Barth proposed a third way into the problem of revelation, which contrasted with Harnack's historical reconstruction of the simple gospel of Jesus, and the subjectivism of Bultmann. Instead,'when the Bible speaks of revelation it does so in the form of narrating a story or a series of stories'.(31) This form of revelation is inseparable from its content and the life-death-resurrection of Jesus is inescapably normative. David Ford comments:

> The years A.D.1-30 constitute Barth's overarching narrative world, and there is a great emphasis on the resurrection as its culmination. The Virgin Birth does for the beginning what the resurrection does for the end, by defining the stretch of time which is 'eternalised' and so embraces all history. (32)

For Barth therefore, dogmatics is 'much less a system than the narrative of an event' (33), an event which effects a fundamental alteration in the way things are in the world, ontologically as well as historically. In effect therefore, the Bible takes over our world of meaning. Revelation is entirely centred in biblical narrative. Barth is careful, of course, to locate revelation in the incarnate Christ and not in the Bible's witness. The Word of God may come through the Word proclaimed or the Word written, but Christian faith is in the redemptive grace of God enacted in Christ, not in any spoken or written word.

All is not well, however, with the doctrine of revelation. Stroup enumerates a number of attacks on it from different directions. (34) Firstly there are those who see the doctrine of revelation as drawing a sharp and untenable distinction between the natural order and the supernatural sphere. The protest of Bonhoeffer and Ebeling is essentially that God is thereby reduced to occasional forays from the supernatural. The adequacy of Barth's understanding of revelation in or through the Word of God is also attacked by theologians such as Wolfhart Pannenberg who question his claim that God's revelation in his Word represents his full self disclosure. Rather God's revelation is indirect and produced by the acts of God in history - all of history and not just a special series of events. The significance of this revelation-in-history can only be grasped from the end of history, or in the anticipation of history's end in Jesus Christ. Popularly Pannenbergs's 'theology of history' is often set in contrast to Barth's and Bultmann's 'theology of the Word'.

A further undermining of revelation as traditionally portrayed has been attempted by James Barr who challenges the common assumption that revelation properly and entirely comes through history. As an Old Testament scholar he points out that much of the biblical material of undisputed value is non-historical. More specifically, he exposes as an over-generalisation the too-easy contrast between a 'Hebrew' emphasis on history and a 'Greek' emphasis on nature, even if he acknowledges that the contrast is quite often operative.

In the face of these challenges (and some are even more fundamental (35)), our question is whether narrative theology has anything to contribute to the re-instatement of revelation. For, as Ronald Thiemann writes: 'Contemporary theologians have been much too sanguine in assuming that belief in God's prevenience can survive the demise of a doctrine of revelation' (36) And without prevenience, theology, and indeed Christian living, collapses as a valid and worthwhile exercise. One interesting, though not entirely satisfactory, attempt to rescue revelation using narrative categories is that of Thiemann himself. His starting point is this:

> The fatal flaw which haunts the modern doctrine of revelation is the epistemological foundationalism which theologians employ in order to provide the theoretical justification for Christian belief in God's prevenience. This foundationalism relies on an incoherent notion of non-inferential intuition as the means of asserting the priority of God's gracious reality.(37)

Thiemann proposes instead a theology without a foundational theory but rather one which is descriptive in character, and seeks to show not the truth of belief but the intelligibility, aptness and assertability of it. He wants to show how much of Christian life and liturgy would have to be abandoned without this 'holist justification', and therefore how the web of beliefs and practices can only be maintained in mutual support. Instead of foundationalism Thiemann proposes an understanding of revelation as 'narrated promise'. Scripture discloses an identity in God as one who promises, and whose promises are given response by men and women in acts of obedience and folly. Always, however, it is the promise of God which is prevenient. 'God is the God of promise whose promises receive

narrative enactment and fulfilment in the history of Israel and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus' (38)

Thiemann thus refuses to look behind the story of God's narrated promise to a foundation in intuition or an independent doctrine of revelation. He looks simply at biblical narratives of promise, declining to persuade others of their truth but content to offer them as a basis for intelligible Christian living and believing.

The problem with such a descriptive approach is that it side-steps the critical issue of truth. To describe Christian activity in belief and practice as intelligible, apt and warranted is to have left a vacuum underneath, at the very point where credibility is crucial. Is Christian faith based on truth claims which can be investigated by reference to history? It may be granted that proof will never be forthcoming in ultimately objective terms, but the pursuit of legitimacy for Christian faith is not finally served by ignoring the truth claims of the narratives or other biblical formulations of faith. Truth cannot be collapsed into meaning in a faith where truth has been historically enacted.

Another attempt to use narrative categories to explicate a Christian doctrine of revelation is made by George Stroup in The Promise of Narrative Theology. He employs Barth's division of faith into the object of faith and the act of faith, which then further divides into acknowledgement, recognition and confession. That confession involves the reconstruction of the personality around Jesus Christ, starting with baptism. Stroup emphasises the significance of confession as the culmination of the process of revelation, when the individual's narrative identity collides with the narrative identity of the Christian community. Thus when Augustine wrote his Confessions it was the act of writing rather than the experiences which he there describes, which constitutes the true experience of revelation and conversion. It is as the personal narrative is reconstructed in the light of the larger community narrative (for which truth-claims are made) that revelation is truly effected in confession.

> Confession takes place and revelation becomes a present reality only when those narratives which are the basis for the community's Credo are used to

reconstruct and reinterpret an individual's personal history.(39)

The value of this approach to revelation is that it takes seriously both the history of the community and the individual, and is in line with mainstream hermeneutical principles. To see this sympathy of approach most clearly we can look briefly at Gadamer's view of the process that leads to understanding.(40) According to Gadamer, there is more to language than social function. Words and symbols have histories and are therefore more than mere 'tools'. Understanding, therefore, is not just a product of using language, but is a learned capacity that takes place in the encounter of interpreter and text. Tradition is the 'horizon of the past' and in every act of understanding, what happens is that the moving horizon of the past fuses with the horizon of the interpreter.

It is easy to see that what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons is closely related to what Stroup refers to as the collision of narratives. In this case the collision is between the faith narratives of the Christian community (with all their history), and the identity narratives of the individual (the memory's interpretation of past events). Stroup prefers the idea of collision to that of fusion because he sees it reinforcing the radical nature of the reorientation which may be necessary, but the basic concept is the same. The product of this encounter is the revelation which takes place in confession, the final stage of the act of faith. Stroup's approach to the doctrine of revelation thus does justice at the same time to the historicity of community and individual existence, to the dual nature of revelation as content and action, and to the hermeneutics of Christian narrative.

One further attempt to engage narrative with the doctrine of revelation is worth brief inspection. Gabriel Fackre in The Christian Story (41) uses a particular translation 'key' or perspective to apply to the Christian story, in order to unlock its revelatory potential. Although revelation is a gift, by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the act of translation, understanding may occur by use of the appropriate perspective. The specific perspective Fackre commends as appropriate to our day is the combined image of 'vision' and 'reality', the one keeping the other in check. This perspective should be applied to the Christian story to translate it for our culture. The translation will only be authoritative if this

perspective is loyal to the gospel (the story) expressed through the faith of the writers (the storyline), ordered in the Bible as the source and norm of faith (the storybook), told by the Church (the storyteller) and related intelligibly to the world's cultural patterns (the storyland).

> When the beliefs are coherent with and intellibible to the world, in continuity with the Church and its tradition, and derived from the Scriptures, then the beliefs can be revelatory of the Truth, and insight is possible. Possible - but only God makes it happen, as revelation is a gift of grace. (42)

Fackre's schema, while rather contrived, does at least identify the key areas of engagement for a doctrine of revelation. What he fails to do as satisfactorily, however, is to take seriously the contentious issue of historical reference and the criticisms made of traditional formulations of the doctrine, as outlined earlier. Moreover, his choice of the particular translation key of vision and reality cannot but seem arbitrary. The result is a systematic approach which appears to be a thorough re-working of individual doctrines, but without any obvious rationale for the choice of his theological 'key', nor with any attempt to integrate this approach with classic systematic theologies.

What we have seen, therefore, is a variety of forms of the use of narrative in the field of Christian doctrine, especially in the issues of Christian identity and revelation. Some of this work claims the description 'narrative theology'; some simply uses narrative as a major methodological approach. The possibilities of narrative are becoming clearer; the limitations are also emerging. We will attempt an evaluation of the debate later, but it is sufficient now to note the increasingly significant contribution which can be made by the basic theological category of narrative.

3. Narrative in Theological Ethics

The ethical dimension of narrative theology will receive further treatment in the correlational phase of this essay, but it is important now to draw attention to it as the third main direction in which narrative is moving in contemporary theology.

The chief proponent of story in ethics is Stanley Hauerwas, but others have shown an interest too. Metz argues that most stories have a practical purpose in making a moral point, giving practical instruction or suggesting rules for living.(43) Indeed Martin Buber argued that stories are performative as well as informative. This point has been taken up by W.H. Vanstone in his contribution to the Church of England Doctrine Commission report of 1981, Believing in the Church.(44) Buber himself wrote:

> The story is itself an event and has the quality of a sacred action....It is more than a reflection - the sacred essence to which it bears witness continues to live in it. The wonder that is narrated becomes powerful once more(45)

Out of the telling, re-telling and transmission of stories through the generations, communities are formed, and the notion of the 'story-formed community' is central to Stanley Hauerwas's argument about the nature of ethics. In the first place, he takes issue with what he sees as the commonest assumption of ethical decision-making, that there is a universal, rational moral principle which can be applied to dilemmas, in isolation from their context historically or societally. In the second place he contests the view that communities, whether nations, schools or families, can free themselves of the stories that have shaped them in order to find a common standard of moral behaviour.

In A Community of Character (46) Hauerwas argues that the alternative to this rational ethic based on common human experience is to attend to the stories that have shaped communities where Christian virtues are possible. In facing dilemmas he maintains that we obtain guidance much more from stories than from principles, because stories help us define the sort of person we want to be, and also because they are concerned with virtue and character which are formed in whole lives, not in an isolated moral decision. We hear these stories in particular communities; it is therefore the task of the Christian community to attend to and re-tell those stories which shape it, so that Christians can respond to problems with integrity and robust character.

At the beginning of A Community of Character Hauerwas offers ten theses towards the reform of social ethics. He argues that every social ethic involves a narrative, and that the

truthfulness of these ethics depends on the truthfulness of our existence. The primary social task of the Church, therefore, is to be itself - a community formed by a story. For the Church to be, (not to have), a social ethic means we must recapture the social significance of common behaviour, such as kindness, friendship and family life. All of this challenges the belief readily accepted by many in western democracies that liberalism is the appropriate social and political response to the Christian story. Liberalism, in fact, is based on an implicit assumption that society can be organised without any commonly accepted narrative. The Church does not provide an ethos for democracy or any other political theory, but is rather a political alternative witnessing to the kind of social life possible for those who have been formed by the story of Jesus Christ. 'We must challenge ourselves to be the kind of community where such a story can be told and manifested by a people formed in accordance with it'.(47)

There are echoes here of Lindbeck's use of language and narrative as that which creates a cultural and linguistic framework within which a believer lives and acts. He maintains that 'religions are comprehensive interpretative schemes, usually embodied in myths and narratives and heavily ritualised, which structure human experience and understanding of self and world'.(48) This means that decisions are taken from within a community formed by those narratives, and the task of the Church is to sustain those narratives and their life-shaping power. Lindbeck even puts his theology to the judgement of its practical usefulness to the community it serves:

> If a post-liberal approach in its actual employment proves to be conceptually powerful and practically useful to the relevant communities, it will in time become standard. It was thus that the theological outlooks of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Schleiermacher established themselves. There is no way of testing the merits and demerits of a theological method apart from performance.(49)

The implication and possible flaw in this community-based approach to ethics, is that it becomes sectarian. Hauerwas acknowledges his debt to the admittedly sectarian standpoint of John Howard Yoder, and Lindbeck writes of developing the kind of 'close-knit groups...

needed to sustain an alien faith'(50). Clearly there has been considerable influence on social ethics in the past from particular religious groups, and there may again be the need for distinctive disciplined living by Christian communities in protest against social mismanagement. Nevertheless it would be well to view cautiously an approach which too easily restricted virtue to the Christian Church. Of obvious lasting value, however, is the insight that it is narratives which form communities and the character out of which they make ethical decisions. It is all the more important that the Christian community gives keen attention to its formative story of the acts of God in Jesus Christ.

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Areas of Debate in Narrative Theology

As we have examined the origins of narrative theology and its major directions in biblical criticism, doctrine and ethics, we have encountered a number of recurrent problems. It may be helpful to explicate them further at this point in order to focus some of the debates which are currently under way in the field of narrative. The three which will be identified are:-

1. Terminology and terms of reference
2. The narrative quality of experience
3. History, fiction and truth

1. Terminology and Terms of Reference

The discussion of genre is an immediate issue for the literary student of the Bible. From early debate on whether the first chapters of Genesis were history or myth, to later discussion on whether the Song of Songs is an allegory or pure love poetry, the decision as to what type of material we are dealing with has been seen to be crucial for its role and interpretative function in the reading community. Once the student has broken into the genre, the detailed work of Alter and Sternberg, amongst others, proves to be extremely valuable in gaining an understanding about the devices which arguably are being employed for particular effects. Decisions about genre are crucial.

The question also arises of the relationship of different genres to each other. Many narrative theologians would understandably give primacy to narrative in the biblical material, while others would see narrative as no more than one among other models or genres. Within narrative itself there are different evaluations of the primary normative form, from Auerbach's nomination of 'realistic narrative' to Alter's 'prose fiction'. Sallie McFague puts forward metaphor and its extended form of parable, while the status and

role of myth occupies a central place in Bultmann's approach, and is developed further by Gogarten and others in the Bultmann school.

Many now accept the kind of position adopted by Hans Frei that biblical worlds do not reflect a sharp distinction between history and history-like narratives, although recently Vanhoozer and others have begun to question some of the assumptions behind this. Hans Frei describes the biblical context as: 'a world with its own linguistic integrity, much as a literary art work is a consistent world in its own right,' although it must be added that 'unlike any other depicted world it is the one common world in which we all live and move and have our being.'(1)

A further complication for the category of biblical narrative is the question raised about its unitary nature. It has been popular to refer to the biblical narrative as if there were an overarching story which encompassed God's purposes from creation to the parousia. Northrop Frye's latest work in this area, The Great Code, offers a major example. However, there is a plethora of different readings of the Bible - amongst them feminist, liberation, black - which undermine such confidence. It might also be pointed out that since James Joyce there has been a tradition of writing in the modern novel which has rejected the idea that there is any such thing as a coherent narrative: life is too chaotic to allow such a simplification. William Placher concludes: 'A theology that appeals confidently to the biblical narrative (in the singular) has some explaining to do.'(2)

Discussion also surrounds the question of the relation of narrative theology to other theological disciplines, particularly Systematic Theology. The issue is clearly put by Stephen Sykes: 'Story is not itself theology, which is a conceptual discipline issuing in regulative propositions, but is the raw material for theology.' (3) According to Sykes, the term 'narrative theology' therefore risks confusing two types of activity. The distinction is to be seen in the fact that it is theology which tells the student how to address questions to the story, not narrative itself.

There is clearly a valid distinction between primary narrative and derivative second-order

reflection. However, the distinction between primary narrative and critical second-order reflection is one which must be questioned. It is the contention of this thesis that narrative theology also has a critical function. The methods of narrative theology enable critical judgements to be made in biblical study, doctrine and ethics. To say other than this, that narrative theology is a misuse of the words, is to accept criteria of meaning and truth which it is the very claim of narrative theology politely to challenge and then to complement. David Ford writes:

> Thus narrative theology, even though it is itself not usually narration but discursive argument, sees itself liberating other genres from oppression by conceptual and theoretical types of theology... The latter must be reminded of its dependence on narratives, and the traditional doctrines, from creation to eschatology, can be seen as corresponding to key events and aspects of the overarching Christian story. (4)

In this way it can be seen that narrative may be both a first and a second order language, and a proper place reserved for the reflective process of 'narrative theology'.

2. The Narrative Quality of Experience

A further area of debate which has several times been encountered concerns the validity or otherwise of ascribing to experience itself the quality of narrative. On the one hand it is argued that the temporal, historical shape of our existence makes narrative the basic form of human expression. Thus scholars like Stephen Crites and George Stroup maintain that narrative has a fundamental place in human consciousness without which it would not be possible to recount human experience at all. Religion in general and Christianity in particular, are bound to reflect this priority in the expression of their beliefs in story-form.

Crites argues that 'the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative'.(5) He goes on:

> I want to suggest that the inner form of any possible experience is determined by the union of these three distinct modalities (past, present and future) in every moment of experience. I want further to suggest that the tensed unity of

> these modalities requires narrative forms both for its expression (mundane stories) and for its own sense of the meaning of its internal coherence (sacred stories). For this tensed unity has already an incipient narrative form.(6)

Against this argument are those who regard narrative not as a universal form of consciousness, but simply as the particular way Christianity explains itself. The specific narratives about Jesus Christ are normative for Christian identity, not an instance of the deep structure of human experience. Skills of narrative interpretation are then the appropriate form of theology, focusing on the biblical text. Thiemann sees this as the proper theological task, 'the critical redescription of the Christian faith in categories consistent with the Church's first order language'. (7) Not for him the Kantian 'turn to the subject' which reduces theology to a branch of philosophical anthropology. His primary interest in biblical narrative is in establishing God's identity as the one whose promise has been narrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The idea of the narrative quality of experience itself is but an example of the theological foundationalism which he rejects.

Admittedly it is not necessary to hold one of these views entirely at the expense of the other. It is possible to maintain that there is a basic temporal form to experience which requires narrative, as well as that a major task of narrative theology is the literary examination of the biblical texts and the ordering of theology around them. However, it is difficult to maintain both views with equal emphasis, since the practical outworkings of the two positions force a choice. For example, in examining the role of narrative when engaged in dialogue with other cultures and religions, one view 'assumes a common basis in human consciousness; the second questions that, and stresses specificity and differences'.(8) The debate is not over, but the attraction of universals in theology is waning, in preference to the particularities of text and contingency.

3. History, Fiction and Truth

Perhaps the most crucial area of debate for narrative theology is that of the relationship of

a literary approach to the Bible, to the historical interests of theology. If literary studies often give privilege to models borrowed from fictional narrative and Christian theology is rooted in history, how do the two interact in narrative theology? What can be said about the historical status of the Bible? And how do history and fiction, however fused, relate to questions of truth?

In The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, Hans Frei shows how a fundamental shift in the way the Bible was read came about with the rise of historical criticism. Prior to the rise of a cultural tradition based in science, there was no questioning of the correspondence of the biblical world to the 'real' world of everyday experience since the narrated world seemed to be in fact the real world into which we fitted our lives. But by the eighteenth century, 'interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story, rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story.'(9) Theology then seemed almost to be forced into the options of trying either to make historical claims about biblical narratives, or to claiming that the narratives bore witness to some eternal truth or moral which they symbolised. Theology was in this sense at the mercy of either the historian or the philosopher.

Earlier than Frei, Auerbach had argued that biblical narrative was sui generis, a literary genre concerned passionately with truth, contained within its own complete biblical world, and standing confidently as realistic narrative demanding a response. That realism is not the simple two-dimensional realism of Homer's Odyssey, but the far more radical realism of truth-telling. 'The stories are not, like Homer's, simply narrated 'reality'. Doctrine and promise are incarnate in them and inseparable from them.'(10) It was this compelling vision of biblical reality which was lost in the Enlightenment victory of historical criticism.

Frei's argument therefore, following Auerbach, is that the biblical narratives need to be read as they are, meaning what they say, in the way that realistic novels do. This obviously runs the risk of historians discounting them on the grounds that they do do not correspond with actuality, or some philosophers discounting them on the grounds that they do not fit in with an existential agenda. The gain, however, is that in Frei's approach the narratives

have their own integrity in a consistent world existing in its own right. Frei's position is illustrated by his treatment of the stories about Jesus in his The Identity of Jesus Christ.(11) Concern about how Jesus can be present to us, is to let our experience set the agenda again, so that in the case of the resurrection we are left with the need either to establish historically that Jesus was raised from the dead or with having to find Jesus eternally present in our ultimate concerns.

Both approaches, however, are arguably unfaithful to the gospel narratives, which, while they do not claim to be in all respects accurate history, are not myths either. Instead Frei argues that the story is to be trusted, given always that there must be some disengagement of story from the task of sheer historical reconstruction. Jesus' identity is most clearly demonstrated in his resurrection, and that identity implies that he is present with us. The narrative, accepted for what it is as a truth-telling story, has its own disclosive power.

There are some affinities between Frei's work and the approach found in Culpepper's writing. Though rather more influenced by structuralism, he is able to sum up his approach like this:

> When the gospel is viewed as a mirror, its meaning can be found on this side of it, that is, between text and reader in the experience of reading the text; and belief in the gospel can mean openness to the ways it calls readers to interact with it, with life, and with its own world. It can mean believing that the narrator is not only reliable but right and that Jesus' life and our response mean for us what the story has led us to believe they mean. When art and history, fiction and truth are again reconciled we will again be able to read the gospel as the author's original audience read it. (12)

The approach represented by Frei and Culpepper to the relationship of historical-critical and literary methods represents a kind of middle ground, although they let the theological priority go to the literary disciplines rather than go behind the text to look for the historical Jesus. Others would not go so far, and like Edward Schillebeeckx would want to combine the two approaches.(12) Others, however, would go further and would enclose the

meaning of the text entirely within the linguistic framework, needing no outside reference at all. The structuralist and post-structuralist work of John Dominic Crossan is an example. In The Dark Interval he restricts reality to language, so that the function of story is not to tell us about a world existing objectively but rather to create that world.

> Reality is neither in here in the mind, nor out there in the world; it is the interplay of both mind and world in language. Reality is relational and relationship. Even more simply, reality is language. (13)

This intra-linguistic structuralist position draws in principle on Saussure and, less directly, on I.A. Richards and the whole tradition of literary formalism and the new criticism. Literary criticism of this nature does not deal with anything outside the text for there is no outside referent, only the consciousness engendered by language itself. Such an approach poses very real problems for theology where an outside referent has always been central.

Structuralism began in France as a reaction against the undue subjectivity of existentialism. The alternative approach was provided by Bultmann who advocated an existentialist interpretation of the text. Starting with the observed fact that the text is historically and culturally very alien, he attempted to strip away the covering of mythological language to reveal the true personal possibilities of the gospel for the reader.

Another main alternative to the excessive parochialism of the text in structuralism began in the mid 1960s with a theory which grounded interpretation in ontology rather than in existential consciousness, but also avoided dependence on the autonomy of the text alone. The key theorist here is Gadamer. Paul Ricoeur stressed the autonomy of the text to a greater extent, but even so he increasingly stressed the need to supplement structuralist starting points with a hermeneutic rooted in public human life. This brings us back to issues of reference. Something is learnt in the reading process apart from a knowledge of how to read. For Ricoeur, 'to understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference, from what it says to what it talks about'(14). In Truth and Method (15) Gadamer proposes that hermeneutics is a dialogue between text and reader, a 'merging of horizons' which involves the reader being changed or 'interpreted' by the text, thereby learning to see

things in a different way. Biblical interpretation, therefore, has to try to relate critically to what the texts speak about, and help may be received in this from historical and literary-critical sources.

A third line of response to the closed system of structuralism is to be found in the 'literature as action' model of Thiselton, Lundin and Walhout in The Responsibility of Hermeneutics (16). Instead of the literature-as-language approach, literature-as-action focuses equally on the function of the text and on the consciousness of the reader in the act of reading. There is concern both for what the text says and what the reader brings. The texts are therefore brought back into contact with history and culture. They are also the place where existential and historical interests meet. Although the reader may bring many conflicting and even chaotic interests to the text, the limits to responsible interpretation are provided by the directedness of the text, often descibed as the intention of the author, together with issues about genre and the nature of the subject, for example, the person and ministry of Jesus.

Modern hermeneutical method is therefore enabling the literary study of the Bible to break out of a structuralist prison. We are able to get back in touch with the issues of history and extra-linguistic states of affairs in the pursuit of truth. Perhaps too, we can venture further than the middle ground between historical and literary approaches attributed earlier to Frei and Culpepper.

At this point we may pick up the criticism that Meir Sternberg makes of Alter's essentially centrist position in the debate between historical and literary studies. Alter maintains that 'prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative'.(17) Sternberg, however, argues that to ascribe fictionality to the Bible is false, for the narrative is reliable and tells the truth.(18) What matters is that the source and discourse oriented methods of treating the text are seen to overlap and work 'in community' on the same ground, history and literary studies existing in a creative tension. Simply because some events in the biblical narrative may have been proved to be highly unlikely does not mean that it does not deserve to be designated 'history'. History writing is not a record of fact but a discourse

that claims to be a record of fact; just as fiction is not a tissue of free invention but a discourse that claims free invention. In other words, what matters is not our subsequent judgements but the rules of the game, the contract that exists between writer and implied reader. What did the writer intend, and what does the reader rightly assume?

Sternberg therefore asserts that the biblical narrative is historiographic, not merely 'prose fiction'. It is written by and for a people who were defined in terms of their past and thus who anchored their narratives in the surviving record of the past. God inhabits history and has dealt with his people in a thoroughly temporal manner. Biblical narrative emerges as a complex genre governed by the three principles of ideology, historiography and aesthetics. In a telling conclusion Sternberg has a timely warning for literary approaches to the texts, proposing that this method should spend less time on denigrating other traditional forms of biblical scholarship and more on examining its own aims and equipment.

This evaluation of the relationship of historical and literary disciplines is measured and sustainable. While not denying the value of structuralist insights, there is no need to accept the view of the text which sees it as a closed system without any referent. Nor is it possible to renounce the ways of literary criticism and to pursue a historical approach innocent of the wealth of literary insight now available. The position that the characteristic form of biblical literature is realistic narrative or prose fiction, valuing story as story, is a helpful advance and encourages a more confident handling of the text with all its richness and creative intent. Nevertheless it still tends to give the theological priority to literary approaches, and a more tenable position may be to see the two methods as occupying the same ground and enriching each other, the historical-critical approach working on content, the literary-critical approach examining form and style.

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PHASE FOUR

CRITICAL CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE THREE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Religious Significance of Story

Elie Wiesel tells the following story:

> When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple the celebrated Magid of Mezrich had occasion for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer," and again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient.
>
> God made man because he loves stories. (1)

We have now put into place the third aspect, or source of information, in our proposed model of pastoral theology. In examining the role of story in pastoral theology we needed first to attain some clarity on the current configurations of the discipline, investigating its history, its contemporary expressions and the place which narrative already holds. The second consideration was the role of story in other related fields, namely literary criticism and ethnography, in order to explore what light could be shed from a comparative study.

Thirdly the resources of the Christian tradition were unearthed by an examination of narrative theology in the three fields of biblical studies, doctrine and ethics.

The dynamic of the model comes from the three sources of information being put into a critical conversation with each other. The results of such a conversation cannot be predicted and should not be contrived. Its value lies in its potential for new insight, mutual enrichment and the humility of change. Moreover, rather than proceed in a uni-directional hermeneutical circle, the proposal allows for a free-flowing interaction of views so that in the surprises of dialogue, truth may be glimpsed and followed wherever it leads.

However, before we set this critical conversation in motion, it may be helpful to probe the religious significance of story for humankind and for the Church. A background survey will help to place our subsequent theological reflection on the life and action of the Church.

1. The Human Significance of Story

"God made man because he loves stories." While it would be hard to justify such a poetic claim, Elie Wiesel is right in pointing to the enormous importance of story in the lives of men and women. Pre-literate people lived within stories, shared stories, explained their experiences in stories. Sam Keen maintains:

> Wealth and status were often measured in archaic societies more by the stories a man knew, the rituals he was authorised to conduct, and the dances he could perform, than by the cattle and possessions he had accumulated. (2)

Telling stories played a crucial role in establishing the identity and culture of tribes and families, as has been noted in previous chapters. The Greek cycle of life and nature and the Jewish drama of history have been just two of countless narrative interpretations of life's mysterious contingencies. Through our stories we have clarified our place in life, our values and our relationships. In a fluent passage Harvey Cox writes:

> Without our stories we would be bereft of memory or anticipation. We know

> that we are something more than mere hairless bipeds because of our parables, jokes, sagas, fairy tales, myths, fables, epics and yarns. Not only have we created innumerable stories, we have also found endless ways to recount them. We dance them, draw them, mime them with masks and carve them on rocks. We sing them around tables stacked with the cold remains of a dinner. We whisper them in the ears of sleepy children in darkened bedrooms. We stammer them out to confessors and therapists. We inscribe them in letters and diaries. We act them out in the clothes we wear, the places we go, the friends we cherish. As soon as our young can comprehend our words we begin to tell them stories, and the hope we harbour for our elders is that we will be able to hear their full story before they go. (3)

Since the Enlightenment, however, the telling of stories has been less valued by western culture. The atomisation of human life and thought has broken up the coherence bestowed by centuries of story-telling. One main cause has been that the scientific method has become the privileged paradigm and hence effective arbiter of truth; analysis has become the favoured approach to reality. This in turn has involved a spurious confidence in universal systems whereby elements of a whole are abstracted from it and articulated as a generality.

One severe critic of the imperialism of the scientific method is Hans-Georg Gadamer who rejects the idea that understanding is the activity of a subject confronting an independent object. In Truth and Method (4) he draws a helpful distinction between Descartes' paradigm of understanding, which is mathematics, and the paradigm of his near contemporary J.B. Vico, which is history. Descartes 'method' merely captures the abstract and general and fails to do justice to the contingencies of history, tradition and narrative world. Gadamer believes that once we have discovered how truth operates in art and history we can begin to see how understanding in general - including scientific understanding - works, which is in historically situated events having their interpretative horizons enlarged and eventually 'fused' with others drawn from the past.

A further cause of the decline of 'story' in the Enlightenment was the rationalist distrust of narrative as trying to short-circuit the necessity of critical distance. The fight back from this position was launched by Schleiermacher who attempted to re-instate intuition and creative immediacy as essential correlates of critical distance. Nevertheless it has taken until the 1960s and 1970s for Gadamer's work in philosophy and Ricoeur's in hermeneutics to begin the revaluation of narrative.

A third problem for story was the new emphasis on atemporal ideas in contrast to historical events within temporal horizons. Again it was the work of Heidegger, which initiated an approach later into literary theory by Ricoeur, which has sought to redress the balance. Lastly, we have already referred to the work of Hans Frei in exposing the changes brought first by the empiricism of Locke and then encouraged by the Enlightenment, in the way biblical narrative was perceived. Biblical material ceased to live in the validity of its own self-authenticating world but came to be seen as dependent on other outside referents. (5)

The result of all these changes flowing from the Enlightenment was that people had become distrustful of the contingent and the historical event; relativism and pluralism had become liberal axioms; myths and stories had become an embarrassment. This process has been well documented and has received some vigorous responses, in large part led by writers such as Gadamer and Ricoeur as cited above.

Another important philosophical response to the post-Enlightenment forgetfulness of story has come from Alasdair MacIntyre in his influential After Virtue. MacIntyre maintains that narrative history is the basic and essential genre for characterising human actions. (6) He presents 'conversation in particular and human actions in general as enacted narratives.'(7) Narrative is not a disguise for something else, nor is it mere decoration; it is the central way in which human activity is perceived. This is in high contrast to the existentialist notion that individual actions are simply random moments of inchoate activity. Sartre for example, in Nausea (8), depicts the downfall of his hero Antoine Roquentin, as being the direct result of his hopeless search to find meaning in his life as a framework of beginning

and ending and a story in between. Rather he discovers there are only days, "tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable, monotonous addition." (9)

MacIntyre has quite a different view:

> The notion of "an" action, while of the highest practical importance, is always a potentially misleading abstraction. An action is a moment in a possible or actual history or in a number of such histories. (10)

Actions are therefore far from being disjointed, meaningless events. They are the raw material of a story which exists and is always in the making. Stephen Crites would call this raw material the 'chronicle of memory', in which lies the image stream of events, not in chaotic form but in the unsophisticated shape of simple succession. (11) Crites makes a similar point to MacIntyre when he identifies as a contemporary heresy the fashion of dividing narrative experience into fragmented episodes.(12) He calls this 'the strategy of contraction', whereby we have:

> the constriction of attention to dissociated immediacies: to the particular image isolated from the image-stream, to isolated feeling, sensation, the flash of the over-powering moment in which the temporal context of that moment is eclipsed, and past and future are deliberately blocked out of consciousness. (13)

This fragmented moment is, on the contrary, a contraction of the narrative movement, which is the really concrete quality in experience. Consequently the attempt to escape from the narrative by indulging in the immediate experiences of the senses and abandoning the search for any given meaning in my own story or that of my culture, is to court disillusion, and perhaps to dissolve oneself in the warm stream of immediacy. The value of narrative, however, is that as long as it retains its primary hold on the imagination, the pull of immediacy is balanced by the counter-attraction of abstraction, and in the tension between the two lies the normative strength of the story itself. (14)

Harvey Cox describes the threat of modernity in another way, but equally appeals to story

and symbol as the necessary corrective to the threat. In The Seduction of the Spirit he is concerned that in western society stories are being swamped by what he calls 'signals'.(15) These he defines as the elements of religion that become coded, systematised, controlled and distributed by specialists. He does not reject the value of signals, and sees societies and religions needing both stories and signals. His complaint is that the story elements are being lost. Where stories blend emotion, value and history into a cohesive fabric, signals make possible large scale associations and connections. Where stories amplify, signals specify. Where stories are opaque, signals must be clear.

Cox sees a general reaction against the domination of signals in society. He presents many of the new 'religious' practices, such as astrology, Zen, Transcendental Meditation, and New Age phenomena, as examples of 'a rebellion by story and symbol against a culture which has gone much too far in the direction of cues and signals'.(16) Hence he calls for a return to two basic forms of religion: testimony, and the popular religion of the people. Testimony will involve the telling of my story in such a way that I break out of the strict interiority of my world and embrace and am embraced by, the stories of our shared world. (17) Popular religion will involve learning from how people actually live their religion , by participant observation and experimenting with liturgy. (18) In these ways we will be re-introducing the story and symbol elements to the religious life of western culture. Whatever the extremes of Cox's vision (and his description of an experimental Easter liturgy in Boston is nothing if it is not startling! (19)), his call to re-engage the right hand side of the brain, is one which the Church is rightly trying to hear.

The importance of story and signal complementing each other is emphasised in a different vocabulary by J ü rgen Habermas. We have already discussed how he seeks to hold together the notions of 'life-world' and 'system' in his reconstruction of social theory. (20) This emerges in his Theory of Communicative Action: a Critique of Functionalist Reason, vol. 2 (21) where he demonstrates how intuitive, narrative-like understanding appropriate to descriptions of life-world must be complemented by the methods of critical distance employed in the analysis of systems. Richard Bernstein in Habermas and Modernity puts it well:

> We cannot understand the character of the life-world unless we understand the social systems that shape it, and we cannot understand social systems unless we see how they arise out of the activities of social agents. (22)

The threat which Habermas sees, and which is parallel to Cox's perceived threat of signal to story, is that of rationalistic systems invading the integrity of life-world. It is crucial for the defence of modernity against post-modernism that communicative action includes both immediacy and criticism, both the creative role of social actors and a systemic understanding of interacting structures.

What we are now able to see, therefore, is the steady re-habilitation of story in the last few decades as the dominance of rationalism and analytical systems is being resisted and a healthier correlational relationship is being established between narrative, history and contingency on the one hand and science-led systems and methods on the other. The significance of story is thus being grasped afresh, the implications of which are not being lost on the Church.

2. The Place of Story in the Life of the Church

If it is true, as MacIntyre and Crites believe, that narrative is an essential category for understanding human experience, and that a description of that experience based on fragmented action is inadequate and misleading, then the churches ought to have a considerable opportunity in the intelligent use of their stories. David Cockerell writes:

> Christian faith can help to keep alive possibilities of self-understanding without which we all become absolute beginners, finding our meaning and purpose in life opportunistically, as and where we can. (23)

Many people are dissatisfied with this 'opportunistic' living, starting from scratch all the time, seeking pleasure in spite of lack of meaning. The overarching Christian story and its multitude of component stories can provide a framework within which to live and grow.

At the same time, the Church has been rediscovering its confidence in its own story. The

Church of England Doctrine Commission made 'attending to the story' the crucial activity of the Church. (24) We may recognise from experience that people do not express their basic beliefs in terms of credal statements. We may also recognise that statements of doctrine lead unavoidably to pluralistic interpretations, as we ask not, 'is it true?' but, 'what does it mean?'. Doctrinal statements, therefore, can no longer be relied on to have the same meaning to the majority of believers. (25) The essential task of the Church could instead be seen as being faithful to Scripture by constant wrestling with the story. Individually, too:

> ...in so far as I am a member of the Church, I associate myself with a 'corporate believing' which consists in a recognition of, and a constantly changing response to, 'the authority of Scripture'. (26)

The Church uses the Bible as story in three ways: 1. as it is recontextualised in the lives of individual readers; 2. as it is recontextualised corporately in the lives of Christian communities, and 3. as the subject of an evolving interpretation and understanding in tradition and history through the years. This latter story is that of the presuppositions or historical pre-judgements on the basis of which we make conscious judgments of interpretation. The key theoretical expression of this is Gadamer's distinctive category of Wirkungsgeschichte, 'effective history'.

How the story is told in practice will be the subject of much of the remainder of this essay. However there is an obvious early problem in how the Church moderates and controls its story so that it is accurately re-told. If it purports to tell the truth in story form, it needs to be aware of the perpetual danger of both deliberate and innocent distortion. Anthony Thiselton, in the same Doctrine Commission report, answers the problem in this way:

> Creeds, liturgy, pastoral oversight and perhaps most notably, the use of the Bible and of the sacraments... effectively anchor the community's present both in the founding events of its past and within the overall frame-work of its ongoing life in a way which transcends individual experience and provides a control against undue novelty or individual innovation. (27)

Nevertheless the problem of interpreting the biblical story with integrity and without distortion will continually press the Church. Frances Young suggests an approach through the analogy of performing a musical score, an example used by Anthony Thiselton in The Two Horizons (28) and by Nicholas Lash in Theology on the Way to Emmaus. (29) Young extends the analogy of performing 'the classic repertoire', but still concludes:

> There will never be a definitive performance if the scriptures present us with a Christ who is both the fulfilment of all the complexities of our existence and a critical challenge to it. Nor will there ever be a single adequate 'doctrine' of biblical authority or a single adequate 'theology' of biblical inspiration... Only as the struggle to 'perform' Christological and sacramental theology adequately bears upon the struggle to 'perform' Holy Scripture will we begin to appreciate the range of dynamics we need to exploit. (30)

Within the context of the biblical story and sub-stories, the Church uses narrative in many different ways. Primary attention has to be given to the scriptural narratives, but if the insights of our previous authorities in narrative theology, literary criticism and ethnography are to be believed, the opportunities for using story in the Church are endless, because narrative is a central genre for describing human actions and experience. How, then, can we characterise the Church's use of story? What grid can we put over this elusive material? One attempt has been made by Gabriel Fackre in his book The Christian Story: a Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine. (31) Fackre identifies three kinds of story in the life and practice of the Church: canonical, life and community. In each case he observes what tools of analysis are used, what is the essential data, what is the intended public for such stories, and what form of theology is related to them.

(i) Canonical stories use the tools of literary analysis, as we saw in chapter 6. The essential data are the biblical stories which have been uncovered for the Church in new ways by Auerbach, Frye, Hans Frei, Alter, Sternberg and others. As the Church tells such stories it is not simply informing the public of the past; it is exercising a performative function whereby, in the words of David Tracey: 'the disclosive and transformative power and meaning of the story are grasped only in and through the narrative itself.' (32) When

identifying the intended public of canonical stories, Fackre unduly limits it to the academic world. Clearly the retelling of the canonical story is heard by people in books, sermons, schools and families, and indeed wherever the 'old, old story' is given life or dressed in new clothes.

In Fackre's typology Canonical stories are related theologically to fundamental theology. It is not the doctrinal concept of liberation that is important, but the journey out of Egyptian bondage; it is not the penal substitutionary theory that matters, but 'the blood of Jesus on Calvary' (33) The central theological enterprise becomes the study of the history of God's dealings with his people, and the history-like accounts of biblical narrative.

(ii) Life Stories, by contrast, use the resources of the social sciences. Their raw material is not Scripture but the contingencies of human experience. The appropriate public for them is society at large, without restraint, for they form part of the vast exchange of stories which construct culture. And the appropriate theology is praxis orientated, working not from fundamentals of given material in scripture or systematics, but from the action-reflection model of contemporary praxis approaches.(34) There is, however, an older pedigree for this mode of theological thinking. It lies in the genre of autobiography or confession which has fed the Church's theology for centuries. The genealogy goes back to Augustine's Confessions, travels through Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua and Kirkegaard's Journals and emerges in the more recent past in Hammersjold's Markings.

Nonetheless it is true that there is a new impetus in the pastoral theology of the Church from the social sciences. The praxis orientation of liberation, black, feminist, and local theologians, has learnt much from these related disciplines. In this context, life stories are there to be told and examined; the stories of others are to be heard; the demands of social justice may be enlivened through stories of oppression; Christian faith may be commended through story in preaching or the use of the media. Life stories carry all the richness, complexity and potential of human experience, and in the fusion of such stories, lives and communities change.

(iii) Community Stories are composed of communal lore and sediments of tradition which make up the very fabric of a community's culture. Such narratives have different names in varying descriptive schemes. For Frye they would be the 'over-arching tale'; for Crites the 'sacred story'; for Wilder the 'world-plot'; but in each case these are the stories which define a community, so that the narrator of the story is the community itself. Within such a story, canonical stories are crucial sub-plots, according to Fackre, and life stories are its episodes. (35)

The data for community stories is in tradition, rather than in scripture or human experience. The intended public is ecclesial, inasmuch as the sacred story is retold to affirm the identity of the church community. Again, however, this may be an unnecessary limitation on the range of community stories, in that many western cultures are underwritten by the story of the Church, and it is to the whole of society that the stories therefore speak. Finally, the appropriate theology for such narratives is systematic, since the stories are essentially raising issues of meaning, identity and cohesion.

Fackre's typology of story in the life of the Church has the virtue of clarity and coherence. As long as its classification of relevant theologies and publics is not pressed too far, it serves to offer some order to a rich and diffuse field. Our proposal in the next chapter is to enter the arena through a rather different typology, which starts with the concerns of pastoral theology, that is, disciplined reflection on the practice of the Church in its own life and in society. Much the same ground may be covered, but the particular perspective will be more sharply defined as the role of story in the explicitly pastoral theology of the Church.

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The Role of Story in the Praxis of the Church

The definition of pastoral theology to which this essay has been working is that it is that part of the theological enterprise which offers critical theological reflection on the action of the Church within its own life and within the life of society. (1) In particular, this study is concerned with reflection on the use of story in the action of the Church. We shall want to examine what use the Church makes of story, the theological adequacy and appropriateness of such use, and the consequences of a more thoughtful and precise use of story in pastoral practice. (It will be well to remember that the word 'pastoral' in this context refers to dealings with structures and communities as well as with individuals, since it is impossible to understand the nature of human need apart from its social context.(2))

In order to undertake this reflection, three conditions must be met. First, we need to justify the use of the word 'praxis' in this context; second, we need a working classification of the Church's use of story; and third, we need to refine and then activate the approach to pastoral theology which this essay has been building up.

1. The use of 'praxis' in this essay must be recognised clearly to involve both theory and practice in a mutually dependent relationship. Paul Avis in the Scottish Journal of Theology (3) argues that whereas philosophers have been careful about their use of the term, theologians have often weakened it to mean almost 'practice'. Rather we need to understand that praxis is a highly theory-laden concept. For Marx it represented the culmination of the process of 'relentless criticism' of the structures of society, ending in the need for 'revolutionary practice'. Hegel had taken the philosophical task as far as it would go; it remained to actualise the critique, but not to abandon it. Marx therefore saw the need in praxis of a correct theoretical analysis, an analysis which would grip people's conscious

decision making and not just their speculative interests, so that finally praxis would involve a transcending of philosophy, actualising it in revolutionary practice. Theory and practice are therefore the indispensible poles of true praxis. Richard Bernstein writes:

> What might at first seem to be a chaotic array of meanings - praxis as human activity, production, labour, alienation, relentless criticism and revolutionary practice - are aspects of a single, comprehensive and coherent theory of man and his world. (4)

Praxis is here used, therefore, as a concept holding theory and practice together. Its antipathy is to ideas, not to theory. Correct theory as rigorous analysis of the social and historical forces which mould life, must be an essential part of the praxis of the Church.

2. The classification of story chosen here is as follows:-

(i) Stories used for Description

These stories are used in the Church to describe the particular features of a situation of pastoral significance. The aim is understanding.

(ii) Stories used for Definition

These stories are used in the Church to define the Christian identity of the corporate body and the individual believer. The aim is identification.

(iii) Stories used for Transforming Dialogue

These stories are used in the Church to encourage change through personal encounter. The aim is transformation.

(iv) Stories used for Decision-making

These stories are used in the Church to help clarify the issues involved in making ethical decisions in personal and societal dilemmas. The aim is clarification, leading to decision and action.

(v) Stories used for Development

These stories are used in the Church to enable individuals, groups

and communities to develop greater perception and skill in living out their Christian discipleship. The aim is growth.

The rationale for this classification lies in the various dimensions of language. Clearly this basis gives a vast range of possibilities, as an inspection of Wittgenstein's list of the functions of language in section 23 of the Philosophical Investigations indicates. (5) Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some of the key categories of language and to construct a 'topography' of story in the Church along the lines proposed. 'Description' corresponds to the cognitive dimension of language, namely intellectual information; 'definition' corresponds to the semantic dimension, identifying meanings and relationships; 'transforming dialogue' matches the emotional content of language; 'decision-making' represents the volitional aspect, and 'development' the capacity of language to grow and change. There is, therefore, in this classification a comprehensive range of possibilities for the event-ful use of story.

3. The Critical Conversation model of pastoral theology was outlined in chapter 2. It comprises five phases, the first three of which have already been set in place in the current study, and the fourth of which is the subject of this chapter and the next.

1. Naming the situation or action under review.

   In this case, the role of story in the praxis of the Church.

2. Informing the situation or action from the relevant cultural information (human sciences)

   In this case, literary criticism and ethnography.

3. Informing the situation or action from the Christian tradition.

   Narrative theology in biblical studies, doctrine and ethics.

4. Critical conversation between the three sources of information.

   Activating a conversation between the use of story in each of the partners.

5. Appropriate action, stemming from the conversation.

At this point we need to consider essential refinements to the model. We have so far left it in its original basic form in the interests of clarity while its essential contours were being revealed. Now, however, we need to make it more responsive to some of the complicating factors we have uncovered.

The first refinement affects the first 'moment', that of naming the situation or action under review. In the light of the previous discussion on the meaning of praxis we see the need to broaden the category of 'situation or action' to include more of the 'life-worlds' in which the Church is involved. 'Situation or action' must also involve the broader framework of experience, which includes emotion, memory, intuition, immediacy, hope, faith etc. These are the legitimate concerns of the pastoral theology of the Church, and may not be recognised adequately under the simple heading 'situation or action'.

Furthermore, and crucially, this naming of experience, situation or action cannot be a straight-forward first phase of the model, untrammelled by a subsequent reflective or critical process. The model cannot proceed in a vacuum or in a pure logical progression of action first and reflection second. Rather the process is more of a spiral, where the insights of previous critical and reflective processes are always fed into the initial perception of what counts as the experience or action under review. There can be no value-free or theory-free objectivist examination of the experience or action; it will always be filtered through the social and theological pre-suppositions engendered by previous reflection. Thus it can be seen, for example, that what use the Church makes of story will be in part determined by what counts as story in the Church's perception and interpretation of it. Equally it may now be seen that the final phase of the model of critical conversation, 'appropriate action', will in fact be another part of the spiral leading into and determining what counts as experience or action in the further praxis of the Church.

Another refinement of the model is required in what we have previously identified as phase 4, 'critical conversation between the three sources of information.' This is the essential correlational moment in the model, but it would be easy to limit the process by identifying it with a narrowly rationalist and cognitive process of reflection. The time has

come to notice that the meaning of 'critical conversation' may include a range of interpretative moves such as those provided by narrative, art, drama, poetry and music, as well as those of discussion, analysis, report and academic inquiry. In particular the interpretative move of 'story' may shift the axis of reflection in a much more radical way than cognitive methods alone. A range of new responses may emerge as an experience or action is understood in ways which story reveals as more forceful, mysterious, disturbing or pregnant.

We are now in the position, therefore, of having a more refined version of the model of critical conversation. More subtlety is revealed in a closer attention to what constitutes both the situation or action and what constitutes conversation or reflection. Moreover it now emerges more clearly that the progression of the model is in spiral form, revealing how previous critical processes feed into the determining of what counts as experience and action. On this basis we now turn to apply this model to the various categories of story outlined above.

(i) Stories used for Description

> The leader of the parish mission was meeting members of the church to prepare some of the ground. He put up a long piece of wide paper on the wall and marked it off with every decade since the war. He asked the group to remember any year on which a special event took place in the life of the nation or the world. As they spoke up, he wrote them on the chart: 1963, assassination of President Kennedy; 1979, Mrs. Thatcher becomes Prime Minister; 1956, Suez crisis; 1969, first men on the moon. The chart soon filled up. Some people were amazed at how inaccurate their memory was; others were surprised at precisely what they did remember. After a while, the leader asked the group to do something different. In pairs, would they try to remember what had happened in the life of their parish in that same period? Who had done what, when? What problems and crises had they faced? What major changes in parish policy had there been, new buildings, change of

services, stewardship campaigns? After a sluggish start, the room was soon alive with memories and laughter. The leader started to mark the wall chart again, parallel to the national events. People were bright with delighted memories, challenging each other, and laughing at shared escapades. The exercise could have gone on for hours, but the leader stopped the flow. "That," he said, "is part of your parish story. It's the story of your mission through the years. All I can do is come and help you take your story on, one step further."

Church Analysis

As one example of the descriptive potential of story in the life and action of the Church we will examine the way that narrative may be used in church analysis. We have already observed, through the work of James Hopewell (6) that story is an instructive means of elucidating the culture of a congregation. Approaches to church analysis have tended to emphasise the context of mission, (as in the secular theology of the sixties), the mechanisms of the church, (as in the Church Growth Movement), or the organic structure of the church, (as in methods influenced by theories of group process). A neglected approach is that of exploring the narrative composition of the church. By carefully constructed interviews and questionnaires, focusing particularly on the way that change, crisis and faith are handled, a profile may be built up which indicates the predominant world view of the church. (7) Hopewell uses categories which differ from their more regular use, and which some may regard as too generalised; but in his terminology, the negotiation of this world view will be between categories which are gnostic, (moving from dissipation towards harmony), charismatic, (looking towards supernatural intervention), canonic, (relying on an authoritative Bible or Church), and empiric, (trusting observable realities). (8)

Hopewell also proposes that narrative categories are helpful in adducing the particular character of a church within its world view. While accepting the allusive value of his proposed mythological figures, it was suggested in chapter four that biblical characters might serve the purpose with greater precision and relevance for congregations. Finally

Hopewell examines the way in which the plot of a parish story may link and unfold, and twist and thicken. (9)

If congregations have cultures, the internal logic of which is narrative, then it is not surprising that it is often found best to describe a church's life for the benefit of an outsider by means of story. This may be well seen in Nicholas Bradbury's book, City of God?, (10) where rather than give a more detailed analytical description of models of church life in the inner city, he constructs four sketches of churches responding to the gospel and their context in contrasting ways. (11) Moreover, when he wants to describe the ways in which the church may meet the needs of different parishioners, rather than elaborate psychological types of behaviour, Bradbury offers pen pictures of typical characters in an inner city congregation. It would be futile to criticise this approach for lack of analytical rigour; the method of description by telling a story is a complementary approach which satisfies the learner by its inherent capacity to encourage recognition and identification.

The main conversationalists with story-as-description in our approach to pastoral theology, are clearly sociology and ethnography. It is plain to see the conversation taking place in both the work of Hopewell and Bradbury. It is clear also in the work of Robin Gill who brings a sociologist's discipline to the study of church decline and regeneration. In his Competing Convictions (12), he embarks on a long discussion of cognitive dissonance in church life by telling the story contained in the book When Prophecy Fails. (13) Without this detailed and vivid introduction, the subsequent discussion would have lacked an anchor and it would not have been as easy for Gill to proceed with his own alternative theory on dissonance and the positive value of competing beliefs. (14)

While Gill proceeds from story to more codified and statistical methods later in his book, some of the most widely respected sociology provides a closer synthesis. Peter Townsend's classic study, The Family Life of Old People (15) combines a novelist's eye for detail with a concern for tabulated analysis. Crucial to the work are the interviews with two hundred old people in Bethnal Green, and it is their stories which provide the touchstone for the work. Increasingly sociological study is discovering and employing the rich

methodological style of story. (16)

The strength of narrative approaches to the analysis of church life is their ability to offer a fuller and more satisfying picture of what is truly going on. Listening to stories is a crucial part of most mission audits (17), the point being that a church will gain a more adequate perception of itself by listening to what the men in the pub and the mothers at the school gates say about it, than by mere records of finance, membership and internal programmes. When church life is seen as a drama, with a specific setting, peopled with a rich cast of characters who are constantly writing a complex plot, with numerous sub-plots, mysteries and comic tales, then that church life assumes a much more interesting and accessible texture. It may also be much more accurate in its representation of the 'density' of the church's experience.

The weakness of this narrative approach is its inherent temptation to slip into anecdote, and therefore to lose its claim to accuracy. It lacks the capacity to be checked and assessed by public criteria. The attraction of story is seductive. The vividness of a particular narrative may distract the researcher from the valid claims on his attention of other narratives. The range of interviews may be too narrow or unrepresentative to be the base of any valuable conclusions. Moreover there is the problem of the distortion endemic to such interviews, where the interviewee is aware of religious overtones which draw from him the answers he believes are expected. The best approach is that of 'participant observation' (18), but the danger remains that the level of congregational observation will be at what Hopewell calls the 'travelogue stage'. (19) An anthropologist would not make large claims to accuracy without a substantial exposure to and involvment in a group or tribe, possibly over a period of years. (20)

Theologically, therefore, the weakness of descriptive narrative is that it may fail to meet the criteria for truthful statements found in either correspondence or coherence. The story description may neither correspond to the subtle realities of the situation, nor may it sufficiently cohere with other known facts of the church's life drawn from other analytical methods. Two stories of the church's failure with the young may not tally with the facts

of a growing, thriving youth group, the missing factor being the two teenagers' antipathy for the youth leader. Story in the description of church life, therefore, must have the maximum rigour possible and commensurate with the task, and be held in check by the claims of other methods of congregational analysis.

We have briefly examined the role of story in the praxis of the Church as it is used descriptively. We chose only to look at one area in which story is thus used - church analysis. Other areas would demonstrate this process in at least part of their praxis, for example, pastoral counselling, theological education, reports from Boards of Social Responsibility. Examples could be multiplied, but the above may serve as a basis for the claim that story functions descriptively with relative adequacy in the practice of the Church, although the temptation is ever-present to be insufficiently rigorous in the use of other tools of social analysis to complement the descriptive insights of narrative.

(ii) Stories used for Definition

> A group of rabbis were meeting together in a concentration camp in the last war. In the midst of so much daily horror they decided they must put God on trial, charged with being unjust and unfaithful to his chosen people. Speeches were made, arguments put forward; the debate was heated and lasted many hours. Finally they put God's justice to the vote, and the verdict was...'guilty', of crimes against humanity.
>
> There was a long silence, and then the oldest rabbi stood up.
>
> "Nevertheless," said the old man, "it is time for our evening prayers."
>
> And all the rabbis got up and followed him to pray.
>
> A community is formed by its stories and beliefs. (21)

Stories are used in the Church to define the Christian identity of both the corporate

body and the individual believer. We will examine some aspects of this process in the areas of worship, preaching and evangelism.

a. Worship

> Just as for a family, the 'family story' is told and reinforced when the family meets together, so in the Church the liturgy, the coming together of Christians to worship God, provides the natural context for the Christian story to be told. (22)

We have already observed how crucial the liturgical setting is as the place where the Christian story is told in the abbreviated narrative forms of creed and ritual. (23) Sykes points out how creeds function as brief sequential narratives with creation being the setting, redemption the theme, the deeds of Christ the plot, and the eschatological hope the resolution, of the story. (24) The performative function of telling the story in liturgy marks it out from the informative function of simply letting people know, for example, the story of the Good Samaritan. Constant exposure to the story helps to fuse that powerful message with the life of the believer, so that he or she is formed and shaped by it in attitude and behaviour. The central story of the death and resurrection of Jesus is restated in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, so that it is here that the greatest transformative power of the gospel will be experienced. These are points developed further by Frances Young in The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture. (25)

The important process to observe here, therefore, is how story in the liturgy defines the Christian community and the individual believer in their religious identity. As we examine this process, the conversational partner in pastoral theology will be biblical narrative theology, for it is the use liturgy makes of this narrative which is disclosive of Christian identity. A simple reading of an act of worship in which the ministry of the Word predominates, or of the ministry of the Word in a eucharistic service, might suppose that the primary activity is didactic. The people are being taught the ways and demands of God through the psalms, readings, hymns and sermon. A deeper examination will reveal that

at least two other processes are taking place. Firstly, the Church is in the act of proclaiming its faith and so defining its identity. This is the story which establishes the unique contours of that enormous religious group, the Church. Repetition of the story, far from being an encouragement to boredom, confirms and deepens the community within its narrative context. Secondly, as Barton and Halliburton observe in Believing in the Church, the very act of declaring the story in the presence of God is an act of worship towards him.

> For the Jew, the public reading of Scripture, especially the Pentateuch, is a kind of prayer, an exposition in God's presence of an ordered account of his deeds, demands and promises which become a vehicle through which he is worshipped. (26)

As for the Jew, so for the Christian. He or she too comes to membership through the corporate knowledge which is shared in worship, and which then regulates the Christian life. In this way the Word becomes almost sacramental. Alexander Schmemann points out that in the Orthodox tradition 'the Word is as sacramental as the sacrament is evangelical' (27) because the proclamation of the Word is a transforming act, changing both human words into the divine Word and human lives into temples of the Spirit. The Orthodox tradition does indeed place much emphasis on the performative character of the liturgy. (28)

It is worth noticing how the Christian narratives also have a defining character within popular religion. Those who would not otherwise claim a strong Christian allegiance attend in large numbers the popular re-presentations of the Christian story at festivals. The Service of Nine Lessons and Carols, the rediscovered Moravian custom enshrined in the Christingle service, the Nativity play and the Passion play - all these, as well as the ever-popular 'christening', enable people to 'stand inside' the Christian story at key moments, and so to identify themselves with the larger story of the culture, or even the sacred story, in which they sense subconsciously that they live. Baptism especially has a deep resonance with people's needs and their dissatisfaction with the vicarious and the ephemeral, with what Hoggart describes as 'the pallid half light of the emotions where

nothing shocks or startles or sets on edge, and nothing challenges or gives joy or evokes sorrow; neither splendour, nor misery.' (29) In that arena, the Christian narratives reassure people that they belong somewhere in a realm of greater significance.

It is because of the importance of the defining art of telling the story in worship, and the deep feelings attached to it, that changing liturgical practice is so often opposed. This point is well brought out by Robin Green in his book Only Connect, (30) in which he attempts to explore the dimension of pastoral care implicit in worship. This is a neglected area in British liturgical writing, which is the more surprising when so many churches are aware of the catastrophic pastoral implications of changes in worship. If we are in liturgy remembering and standing inside what Jesus did, and at the same time discovering and defining our own existence in the Church, then the texts, rituals and style of worship will be deeply significant to us, and change will be fraught with painful possibilities. It is a point noted also by Moltmann in his The Open Church:

> An effective church reform begins first of all by changing the rituals. Thus there have been more splits in the church on account of rituals than on account of substantive questions or interpretations. (31)

By putting together the use of story in worship, therefore, with the place of narrative in biblical studies, we can see how story acts to define the nature of the Christian community and the individual within it. We have discussed in chapter seven how the normative genre of biblical material has been described as 'realistic narrative' (Auerbach) or 'prose fiction' (Alter) or a variety of similar depictions. Whichever one we favour, the significant point is that these narratives were used both by Jews and Christians to define their identity as the people of God. Nowhere has this been clearer than in the Jewish use of narrative in the synagogue, the Passover seder, or the Barmitzvah. Christian worship too has faithfully retold the story in word and sacrament, and in its attention to the story, safeguarded its life. In the interplay of the community story and the individual's story, lives have been shaped after the image of Christ. The practical questions for the church are whether the story is adequately being told for this time and place; and whether our worship gives sufficient space for our personal stories to be valued, and the interaction with the community story

to take place honestly and with transformative effect.

b. Preaching

Preaching is essentially putting the Christian story in scripture and tradition alongside the human story as experienced and narrated, and thereby facilitating transformation. By so doing it helps the listener to define her own Christian identity, to understand the implications of the story of the Church for her own life, to experience the challenge and comfort of the gospel. This is not the place to extend the theological literature on homiletics, but rather to explore in conversation with the insights of narrative theology (from the tradition), and communications theory (from cultural information), the role of story in preaching.

Marshall MacLuhan, in his superceded but still seminal work on communication theory, proposes a development in the passing on of knowledge from an original auditory culture, through the phonetic alphabet, to the 'Gutenberg galaxy' and now on further to the electronic age in which the 'medium is the message'. (32) Humankind's early experience of communication was predominantly through the ear, an all-embracing world of sound where the spoken word had awesome power. Any reading of the Old Testament will support that last proposition, for the word of blessing or of curse was unavoidably performative. The advent of the Greek phonetic alphabet separated people's hearing from their sight; written letters need no sound, they say what they are seen to be. The foundation was therefore laid for the great Gutenberg revolution when the advent of the printed word shifted human perception to the eye, making learning visual, linear and logical. Light is now thrown onto the text rather than through it; dictionaries and formal grammar come into existence, and the individual learns on his own.

The consequences of this for preaching are drawn out by Richard Jensen in Telling the Story.(33) The inevitable form of preaching in a visual, linear culture is didactic. Preaching is to teach lessons from the text; preaching is 'about' Christian subjects, and so we have the bizarre possibility of it becoming like two lovers reading each other books about love

instead of experiencing its delights. (34) The aim of such preaching is to show, to teach or to convince; it aims at the hearer's mind. There is another form of preaching which moves on somewhat from the didactic approach. Jensen calls this proclamatory preaching (35), and distinguishes it as preaching-as-event. The reality and effect of preaching are what matters. Preaching is a present summons to the hearer to believe. Thus Bultmann can say: 'In the word of preaching and there alone, we meet the risen Lord'. (36) The goal of such preaching is that the Good News should happen in the hearer, that she should be a lover sharing the love of her beloved rather than reading about it.

Jensen proposes, however, that a third form of preaching is more appropriate in many ways to the needs of a post-Gutenberg generation, brought up on the electronic media. That form of preaching is story. He maintains that people have tired of the immediacy of direct communication and the technological wizardry which always imparts information with precision and without remainder. What people hunger for is an indirect form of encounter with information: instead of reading about slavery in the southern states of North America, they enjoy watching the television programme 'Roots'. In preaching in this mode, the text is seen as a configuration of literary form and content, inextricably mixed. 'Why should we de-story these stories in our sermons or simply pass on the point of the story to our listeners?' (37) Essentially the story is the preaching itself, and the aim is the participation of the listener in the gospel story allusively but comprehensively.

A number of supporters may be called to witness for this form of preaching. Henry Mitchell, in The Recovery of Preaching (38), argues that there is much to be learned from black preaching born out of an oral culture, and less inhibited by the written word.

> The oral processes, long lost in most western societies because of the advent of the printing press, have survived amazingly well in such places as West Africa. And the Black Church in America has been built not on the literacy denied to slaves and their descendants, but on the African cultural bias for massive memory, lively renditions and supportive situational sharing, whether in ceremony or simple conversation. The early biblical method of verbally passing on the history/gospel is alive and well today. (39)

John Dominic Crossan in his work In Parables (40) argues that the parables were metaphors of participation rather than metaphors of illustration. The latter are dispensable, but the former are not. The parables are themselves the preaching, inviting the listener to become involved by active response in attitude and behaviour. Story-preaching would have that same kind of character, where form and content are inseparable, and the crisis of response would be present in the hearing of the story.

The story itself in preaching is most effective if it is indirect in its communication. As Emily Dickinson wrote: 'Tell the truth, but tell it slant..'. The classic expression of this approach is in Nathan's story to David in 2 Samuel 12. It is the indirectness, or allusiveness which commends both the parable and the story sermon. It has the quality of a fairy-tale. In his essay, "On Fairy Stories," J.R.R.Tolkien compares the allegories of C.S. Lewis with the parables which he wrote in The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings. In his parables he aimed to compose a complete story world, so that by participation in the story the reader would experience the 'good turn' (good news) which is the experience of the gospel. This participation in the story to the point of transformation, he called 'eucatastrophe'. The Gospels, he says, contain the fairy story which embraces the essence of all fairy stories.

> The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. The story begins and ends in joy. (41)

The transformative potential of story in rhetoric is helpfully explored by Richard Leith and George Myerson in The Power of Address: Explorations in Rhetoric (42) in which they argue that stories carry the reader along by their temporal logic to potentially life-changing consequences, and that they are, indeed, a necessary antidote to the post-Enlightenment emphasis on reason and science. The rhetorical power of the story lies in the fact that in it the actions 'have been selected and sequenced so as to give a heightened sense of causality, giving us the impression that certain actions have consequences not only fitting but inevitable.' (43) Moreover, stories use the non-confrontational approach of 'attacking from behind' in the manner of Kierkegaard and of Wisdom literature. The persuasive

power of story in preaching, therefore, lies in these elements and devices of rhetoric, redressing an imbalance in modernism, and giving a new rationale for oratory performance and popular storytelling.

'Attacking from behind' is another way of describing the potential of story in preaching to have a subverting effect on the listener. The parables of Jesus had this quality. The style may have seemed disarming and the narrative intriguing, but the message was invariably uncomfortable and challenging, overturning conventional wisdom about religious belief and behaviour. J.D. Crossan offers five modes of story, whereby life-worlds are established in myth, defended in apologue, described and investigated in action, attacked in satire and subverted in parable. (44) Story or parable in preaching is particularly adept at this last subversive role and in setting forth Jesus as the parable of God. Crossan follows Kermode in holding that whereas myths are the agents of stability, parables are the agents of change (45), and it is this challenging nature of story which makes it so effective in preaching.

It has to be admitted, of course, that preaching as story offers a number of hurdles to both preacher and listener. Apart from the years of conditioning to didactic and proclamatory sermons, there is the danger of misunderstanding or incomprehension. Story preaching in its pure parabolic form, participative rather than illustrative, is necessarily open-ended. Nevertheless, such story-telling has biblical precedent, and the open-endedness is to the interpreting Spirit of God. Moreover, it is probable that even the best of more orthodox sermons are regularly misunderstood by large numbers in the congregation!

It can also be argued in support of preaching as story that people are well used to the story form by being inexorably exposed to narrative through television. It is not only the case that soap operas consistently achieve the highest viewer ratings, but more that narrative is the dominant form of television production, where everything from comedy and adverts to news programmes and documentaries, uses a contracted or extended narrative format. Colin Morris, from a position deep within television production, boldly asserts:

> Television is narrative and there is always a story-teller, even when no presenter or reporter is visible and in spite of the fact that there may not be

> any commentary whatever. Someone is telling the story, has visualised the action, rendered it into shape and reflected on its out-come - if not a producer then a film editor or a cameraman but there is always some controlling intelligence. (46)

Television is well suited to telling stories which fulfil the function of the parables of Jesus. They address people wholly, and with a total claim. Television can achieve what Sallie TeSelle in Speaking in Parables (47) calls a 'keeping in solution' of the primary elements of faith: the language, the belief and the life of the Kingdom. Religious television does this primarily through testimony, documentary and worship, with occasional forays into the much more expensive genre of drama. Morris calls in support of his claims for television as religious narrative, F.W. Dillistone, who writes that human beings yearn to hear stories or to relate to symbols which point to the realisation of certain profound personal needs and goals, and that the symbol which gathers up all these concerns is that of the living Christ, who may be made visible on television through stories about his followers caring, venturing, suffering and witnessing. (48)

A more profound philosophical reflection on symbols occurs, however, in the more substantial works of Tillich, Jaspers and Ricoeur. Tillich writes of the integrating and stabalising power of symbols as against the disintegrating power of other forces, arguing that symbols function from 'beyond' the split between essence and existence. (49) Ricoeur and Jaspers insist on the psychological necessity of symbols, citing psycho-therapeutic considerations as well as philosophical and theological ones. (50) Jung, Jaspers and Tillich especially stress the necessity of interplay between conscious and pre-conscious states of mind for the wholeness and health of the human person as well as for self-knowledge. The point for us to keep in mind here is that these symbols are often caught up and expressed in narrative form.

Story is therefore well used in communicating the Christian faith, both in preaching and the gentler persuasion of television. It is able to take the timeless narratives of the Christian story and to place the human story alongside them, so that God through his Spirit may

pass between the two and illuminate both. In this way people are able the more clearly to define their own place in the life of faith and to identify their relationship with the Church. The value of story in this process is that it is both ancient and modern, able to use its timeless quality to let 'deep speak to deep'. Nevertheless, it would be a weakness of preaching if it attempted to remain in the first order religious language of narrative too long. It may be that narrative can achieve an element of second order reflection in the way that it achieves a particular density at certain points, just as the gospel narratives achieve an extraordinary density when they relate the story of the Passion. However, an experience of preaching which rested too much in narrative without developing into a systematic way of reflecting on Christian faith and life, would both be untrue to the Christian tradition, and also prove unsatisfactory to the human need for a reasonable framework of ordered thought.

In our 'critical conversation' it is also necessary to let Christian theology reflect on the practice of the media in the light of the communication theory to which we have refered. Television tends to reduce the viewer to an object and a consumer, to which the theological protest is a vigorous affirmation of the value the Incarnation has placed on persons in community. Moreover, television and the techniques of Christian communication imported from the media, encourage a concern with the ephemeral and the visual image, while theology points to the extended life-narrative of Jesus whose deep engagement with life, evil and death was essential to the needs of the human condition. The trivialisation of profound human issues by their juxtaposition with light entertainment, is a distortion which the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament would often have seen as sinful. (51)

c. Evangelism

> Max Warren, the former General Secretary of the C.M.S., was invited back to an African village to celebrate the anniversary of the local church. The building was packed: 600 bodies sang and swayed; they danced and praised; faith and joy were evident everywhere. After the service Max Warren asked

> his host how the church had started. "Well," he was told, "it all began when two women came from a neighbouring village, and while they did their washing in the market place, they just gossiped about Christ."

The proposal here is not to embark on an extended discussion on narrative in the wider mission of the Church, but to confine consideration to the way in which story helps to define Christian identity in the practice of evangelism. Admittedly, in principle evangelism cannot adequately be considered theologically apart from the missiology surrounding it, but such an enterprise would carry us well beyond the scope and confines of this essay.

Scholarly work on evangelism which incorporates rigorous research and argument is, in general, remarkable by its absence. Since the influential report Towards the Conversion of England (52), published in 1948, most of the material has been secondary, and practical in intent. (53) Such works as Michael Green's Evangelism in the Early Church and David Watson's I Believe in Evangelism are written more especially to generate evangelistic practices on a biblical basis in the present life of the Church, than to undertake a systematic examination of the theology which undergirds the practice and processes of evangelism as an activity. One exception to this paucity of theological material is the body of reports issuing from the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the evangelical world's Lausanne Reports. (54) A recent attempt to engage theologically with the issue is William Abraham's The Logic of Evangelism. (55) Abrahams states:

> Evangelism has failed to fire the imaginations of the leaders of the central ecclesiastical institutions; most of these have been committed primarily to the maintenance of the institutions... In such an atmosphere it is not likely that evangelism will receive much critical attention. There simply is not in place the kind of intellectual and moral support to sustain those willing to risk their reputation or their vocation in such a spiritual and unacademic wasteland. (56)

Given this lack of serious theological evaluation, there is little precedent for considering the place of narrative in evangelism. At the popular level, there has never been such an outpouringof books of testimony, usually of a dramatic nature. This is not simply the result

of the enormous publishing opportunities stemming from technological advance. It also bears witness to the innate power of personal narrative. Nothing communicates so vividly as our own story. Conversion occurs when, to use the image of George Stroup in The Promise of Narrative Theology (57), our own identity narrative collides with the identity narrative of the Church. This collision has a transformative effect, necessitating the reconstruction of our own identity, our ways of thinking and acting. The final stage of this conversion occurs in the act of confession by public testimony; it is therefore Augustine's writing of his Confessions which constitutes the completion of the process of conversion, rather than the famous experience in the garden itself.

Abrahams in fact argues for a wider definition of evangelism which would not end with the process in confession. He prefers to talk of being initiated into the rule of God, and from within that horizon, what it means to be initiated into the community of the Kingdom, the Church.

> Logically speaking, this takes the primary focus away from external admittance into a particular organisation and relocates it in the sweep of God's action in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Our eyes are not then initially on ourselves, on the ecclesiastical community to which we belong, or on whatever we have to do to become part of the appropriate body. (58)

The process should rather be a protracted and thorough grounding in Christian realities, an initiation into the Kingdom. Although he does not make as much use of the category of story as Stroup, Abrahams nevertheless writes of the 'grammar' of Christian initiation (59), and his whole approach lends itself to the conviction that he envisages a 'narrative of conversion', rather than an event of conversion.

Thiemann's concept of the gospel as narrated promise provides valuable material for a theology of evangelism. (60) He argues that the biblical narratives describe God as the One who promises, and the gospel is an account of that narrated promise. The biblical narratives do not compel acceptance of their claims, but the reader has acted intelligibly if she accepts the promise in the text as promise for herself. (61) Thiemann argues for a

descriptive rather than a foundational theology, one in which normative proposals are made which can be rendered reasonable and apt, without appeal to an underlying explanatory theory. At the heart of such a descriptive theology lies an account of God as prevenient in his gracious activity, a God whose promises are narrated in the Bible, having been enacted definitively in Jesus Christ.

It would seem to follow from this, that evangelism consists in offering again that narrated promise, and allowing the hearer to make a free response to that story, by which the narrative identity of the hearer would be changed. Evangelism is thereby more satisfactorily anchored as part of the doctrine of God, just as Thiemann asserts that revelation should be part of the doctrine of God rather than a discrete doctrine in itself. (62) The theological root of evangelism is then in the offering of God's narrated promise and humankind's response to it, making that narrative their own.

We may therefore conceive of the value of story in evangelism as being to help the recipient to define their life and action in relation to the Christian narrative and the personal narratives of others. At the popular level we observe the impact of the story in the way people give their testimony to their encounter with God in Christ, but there is a deeper sense in which it is the fusion of stories which transforms peoples lives, because their own essentially narrative identity is matched and overcome by a narrative identity more compelling than their own.

(iii) Stories used in Transforming Dialogue

> When the bishop's ship stopped at a remote island for a day, he strolled along the sea shore and came across three fishermen mending their nets. In pidgin English they explained to him that centuries before, they had been Christianised by missionaries. "We Christians!" they said proudly pointing to one another.
>
> The bishop was impressed. Did they know the Lord's Prayer? They had never heard of it. The Bishop was shocked. What did they say when they prayed?

"We lift eyes to heaven," they said, "and we pray, 'We are three, you are three, have mercy on us.'" The bishop was appalled at this heretical praying, so he spent the whole day teaching them the Lord's Prayer. The fishermen were poor learners but they tried hard and before he sailed away the bishop had heard them go through the whole prayer without a mistake.

Months later the bishop's ship happened to pass the island again, and he was pleased to think that thanks to his efforts, those three men were now able to pray. Then he noticed a spot of light in the east; it kept approaching the ship and, as the bishop gazed in wonder, he saw three figures walking on the water. When they were within speaking distance, the bishop recognised his three friends, the fishermen.

"Bishop!" they exclaimed. "We hear your boat go past island and we come hurry hurry meet you. We so, so sorry. We forget lovely prayer. We say 'Our Father in heaven, holy be your name, you kingdom come...' then we forget. Please tell us prayer again."

The bishop felt humbled. "Go back to your home, my friends," he said, "and each time you pray, say, 'We are three, you are three, have mercy on us!'"

Listening to stories can have the power to change and transform our perceptions and our behaviour. Belief in the efficacy of transforming dialogue lies at the heart of much professional social discourse, not least in the orbit of the Church.

Stories used descriptively by the Church appeal to the cognitive faculty of the mind; stories used for definition are based on the semantic faculty of clarification, especially of identity and character; stories used in transforming dialogue, however, are based on the emotional power of language to unlock human change.

There are many areas of religious activity which illustrate this potential. The field of inter-faith dialogue is an obvious example of the value of re-telling the foundational stories

of faith-communities in order to expose and to be exposed to the living tissue of the religions involved. This is closely linked with the importance of story in establishing the personhood of the deity in any religion. William Hordern in his book Speaking of God: The Nature and Purpose of Language (63) argues that it is in telling stories about the nature of God and his actions in particular situations that we build up a true hermeneutical understanding of the personhood of God. Whereas the explanation of observed phenomena may come about through the scientific method, understanding of personhood comes through the giving and receiving of stories.

Another particularly interesting example of the use of story in transforming dialogue is to be found in the action of the Church in its pastoral care and counselling, and it is in this field that our investigation will proceed.

Pastoral Care and Counselling

The main conversation partner in a pastoral theology of story in pastoral care is psychology, and the growing literature on story in counselling. The Journal of Pastoral Care provides a forum in which this interest is increasingly found. (64) The purpose of listening well to a person's story is to help him or her to come to terms with the past, or to resolve a problem in the present, or to see the connection between the two. Michael Jacobs, in an article in the journal Contact (65), writes of stories:

> Like dreams and day-dreams, they are attempts to order feeling and experience, and to set the past at rest, to create a sense of belonging, to provide a set of meanings or to view the present in new and affirming ways.

This may be achieved by attentive, active listening, which allows the story-teller to work through conflicts or despair or guilt. Particularly this may be so of an elderly person who is seeking peace and acceptance. Robert Randall, writing of reminiscence among the elderly, also points to the value of such story-telling in holding together the fragmented self, in a stage of alarming bodily and emotional change. (66) Self-esteem is severely

threatened at this time and the act of telling normative stories may help a person retain a sense of self. A similar problem may present itself in the case of an attempted suicide. Alasdair MacIntyre in After Virtue suggests that a loss of narrative may be the cause. An attempted suicide who claims that his life is meaningless is 'characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or telos' (67)

There may be more to be done than mere active listening. It may also be necessary to listen to the whole story and then to reflect back the main story-line to help the person to re-view it and change the interpretation he usually puts on it. Further,it may be necessary, in the words of Randall (68), to enhance the story, or to give it a different twist of meaning as it strikes the listener. This new metaphor or interpretation may enable the teller of the story to make fresh discoveries out of the old material.

Whether the counsellor's method is active listening, reflecting back the story-line or offering a new twist, the crucial task is to help the 'client' use their story to deal with their need. There is no such thing as a 'wrong' story; the question will always be, 'why did the person choose to tell that particular story out of all the hundreds that could have been told?' (69) And if the story a person chooses to tell is one from a film or television programme or book, why was that story significant for her? We become entwined in the stories we watch or read, so those we retain and retell may offer some clues to our own dilemma.

These points are given theological support by Alastair Campbell in his Rediscovering Pastoral Care. (70) In seeking a theological foundation for pastoral care he offers images with a narrative quality, as important resources. The three he develops are the courageous shepherd, the wounded healer and the wise clown, and he draws from these rich images the complex characteristics and methods of those who might offer pastoral care. Each of these images is grounded in narrative, whether the messianic shepherd of the Bible, the vulnerable surgeon of T.S. Eliot, or the perceptive fools of Shakespeare and Godspell. In terms of the previous discussion of story in counselling, it may be that there is a narrative

quality in the listener as she cares, as well as in the 'client' as he speaks.

Moreover, the listener may be aware of some of the benefits of a literary critical understanding of story such as we discussed in chapter three. In other words, he or she may be aware of the story grammar provided by setting, theme or characterisation, plot and resolution. He or she will certainly be aware of the fifth element in this grammar, the role of the story-teller. The listener may therefore discern the particular atmosphere of fear or guilt giving a context to the story. The counsellor will listen to the way key characters are depicted, what judgements about them are implicit in the story, who exercises undue influence, who causes a tightening in the body-language. He or she will listen to the main plot but also to the sub plots, looking for clues, noting how the plot unfolds and when it becomes particularly dense with meaning. The element of resolution in the story may be the very heart of the problem being addressed. Such resolution may be absent or inadequate and frustrated; the material may never have been in the open before, and had no chance to be placed properly in the larger story of this person's life. Some form of resolution is, therefore, the task of the counselling encounter, the transformative goal.

Michael Jacobs makes the point that our stories often have a credal quality to them. They act as belief systems which are recited when the opportunity is given. (71) It is important that the listener does not question the credal stories as such, but only the interpretations made of them. The story itself is part of the supportive fabric of a person's life; it is not to be denied or contradicted simply because it is hard to establish fact from fiction. What is available for question, however, is the interpretation given to the story; it is in the changes that may take place here that personal growth occurs. The story of my schooldays is my own property; my understanding of their value may develop as I absorb more of life's experiences.

It is clear, therefore, that there are a number of conversation partners in the practical play of pastoral theology in this field of counselling. Psychology has insights to offer, focusing particularly on the theory and practice of counselling and psychotherapy. However, the literary critics are again in evidence offering their insights on the nature of story. For the

conversation to be genuine it has to work in both directions, however. Theology has to have a chance to speak of its own concerns and accumulated wisdom. It is open to theologians to question whether the use of story in counselling takes sufficient account both of the story of the community immediate to the person in need, or of the larger story of the culture. Christian theology can never view an individual apart from what Stephen Crites calls the 'mundane' stories of a community, or the 'sacred' stories which are the unspoken context of all speech and action. (72) The social dimension of human existence is often overlooked in the contemporary cult of the individual and his therapeutic needs.

Moreover, the counselling situation is never simple. Edward Farley, in discussing his model of interpreting situations, asserts that the interpreter must be aware of the pluriformity of the situation, in which there will be present the individual herself, her world view, the groups to which she belongs, the pressure of her past and the possibilities of her future, various strata of language she uses, her social setting, her story itself, and much more. (73) It is a pre-requisite of good pastoral theology and practice that the situation be 'read' in all its complexity and density, and counselling theory may not always take full account of such factors.

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The Role of Story in the Praxis of the Church (continued)

Having considered the use of story in (i) description, (ii) definition and (iii) transforming dialogue, we now move on to explore two further uses of story in the life and action of the Church:- stories used in decision-making and stories used in development.

(iv) Stories used in Decision-Making

Charles Elliott recounts the following story in his typically punchy style:

> The church was successful. Indeed that was exactly its problem. It was a show-place - membership high and rising; giving going up; activities galore. When a new minister was appointed he was told he was taking over one of the best churches on the eastern seaboard of the USA. There was, however, one fly in the ointment. Right across the river from the church there was a shipyard where nuclear submarines were built. Indeed, many of the congregation were employed in the yard. Hitherto that had been a taboo subject. The new minister found a few people in the church who were not too comfortable at this stand-off; who thought that maybe Christian discipleship did in fact involve finding the right connection between the two. So a study group was set up to look at a responsible Christian attitude to the armaments industry. Some people were hurt, others outraged when the study group reported to the church meeting that it was incompatible with Christian obedience to be involved in any way with the production of nuclear weapons.
>
> Amidst uproar, the church divided. Many people left. A few, however, got a whiff of something that was new and exciting. This small minority were put under enormous pressure by those who wanted to preserve the status quo, who

wanted a successful church. Despite such pressure, they began to see the scale of the new obedience into which they were being led. They resigned from the shipyard and the navy. They began to share their savings and their homes, initially with each other and then with the under-privileged and deprived in the neighbourhood. And that contact with the "fourth world" on their doorstep led them to begin to ask questions about their nation's role in the Third World. There were more conflicts, more resignations, departures, attempts to starve the church into submission. The minister was invited to move. He refused. Looking from the outside, you would say that that church was dying. Numbers were less than a quarter of their level two years earlier. Funds were so low that the minister's salary went unpaid. Most of the normal church activities had stopped. Death, in a word, was imminent.

But that is the oddity. As that little group really began to live out the new quality of life it had discovered, it began slowly to attract others to it, even a few of those who had gone off in disgust. A church that two years ago had been little more than a corporate chaplain to the arms industry had become, through risking its own institutional and physical life, a seed for peace. The calumny, the subtle persecution, the institutional marginalisation continues. But oddly, membership is now at an all-time high, and income is more than triple the level it reached in the most "successful" days of the church. (1)

Just as that church had to examine its own life in the light of parts of the story of Jesus, so in turn its story may sharpen the way other churches face their own issues and decide their own strategies.

The use of story in decision-making could take the discussion into a vast field involving personal and social ethics, political action, liberation theology, and what the World Council of Churches designates as 'justice, peace, and the integrity of creation'. For clarity, and to limit the territory, we will approach the relevant material through the three windows of personal and social ethics, and liberation and local theologies, and church management.

a. Decision-making in Personal and Social Ethics

We have already noted, particularly through the thinking of Alasdair MacIntyre, that narrative is the most appropriate genre for characterising human actions. (2) MacIntyre argues that individual actions are only abstractions from a basic human narrative which is constantly being enacted. It would follow, therefore, that our ethical decision-making shares this narrative foundation.

> I can only answer the question "what am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question, "of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and youngest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its original dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things. (3)

The actions we decide to take in life depend in part on our understanding of our narratives. If this is followed through, it becomes clear that the influence of ethical rules and principles on the one hand, and person-orientated situation ethics on the other, are of rather less importance in the formulation of moral activity than some ethicists, or indeed the general public, may imagine. Of more importance may be the narrative context within which we have come to locate our lives, the stories which Stephen Crites calls both sacred and mundane. (4) These stories have formed first our culture, and then our community and then our own perceptions of the world and of ourselves.

A narrative base for ethical response avoids the polarisation which occurs between

principles and situation ethics; it allows a coherent logic of narrative plot which admits patterns and open systems of behaviour, but at the same time it takes seriously the particularity of each situation. In the case of the 'successful' church quoted above, general principles about war and peace would have seemed too abstract for ethical decision-making by the church, and yet the close personal and economic involvement of church members in the prosperity of the plant would have made self-sacrifice hard to countenance. A narrative way through the dilemma, by which they looked at their own identity as formed by the story of Jesus Christ, holding together both the general and the particular, helped them to make brave decisions.

It is this central conviction about the narrative identity of communities which is explored consistently in the writings of Stanley Hauerwas. It is a theme expressed vividly in his use of the narrative of Watership Down in A Community of Character (5), but which is most clearly presented in The Peaceable Kingdom. (6) He sees a need to return to the Aristotelian ideal of the virtues as a framework for moral living, and defends the use of the qualifying word "Christian" as applied to ethics because of the distinctive nature of the peace which Christians embody and offer, based on the kingdom which has become present in Jesus of Nazareth.

When the primary focus is on what sort of people we ought to be rather than on what sort of things we ought to do, the ethical debate opens up into new, refreshing pastures. We cease to search for the behavioural implications of our beliefs, because, 'our moral life is not comprised of beliefs plus decisions; our moral life is the process in which our convictions form our character to be truthful.' (7) It also ceases to be possible for ethics to be manipulated into being the handmaid of political ideology, supplying imagined 'absolutes' to shore up the crumbling wall of particular values which are sought by the ideology for different reasons, as when the Church is asked to promote the values of the Victorian family. On the other hand, it becomes possible for the Church to concentrate on its central task of forming a genuine Christian identity for the people of God. Christian character, shaped by the life of Jesus Christ, becomes determinative of personal existence and action, and the ethical enterprise is rooted firmly in theology. In essence, the Church's

tradition is unfolded through the medium of narrative and the way it commemorates the central events which define its structure.

If we are tempted to argue that Christian ethics has its source in the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, further reflection demonstrates that they are unintelligible when treated as sets of rules justifiable in themselves. Their significance is theological in that their existence is bound up with the covenant of God with his people. That covenant is part of the narrative of God's dealings with humankind, so it is again the story which creates the context for moral living; and that context is a community.

> The nature of Christian ethics is determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better, a set of stories that constitute a tradition, which in turn creates and forms a community. Christian ethics does not begin by emphasising rules or principles, but by calling our attention to a narrative that tells of God's dealing with creation. (8)

It follows that our sin consists in attempting to be the authors of our own stories, and our redemption lies in learning to place ourselves in God's story. Again we see the significance of the fusing of our story with the Christian story, of being taken into the narrative character of God. Our new character as Christians, moreover, does not depend on our having some spurious, transcendental freedom which is able to make moral choices from a free-floating objective standpoint; it depends on us recognising the narrative nature of our existence, formed by a community which is itself created by the story of the life and teaching, the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. (9) This would account for the strange experience which we often encounter of 'discovering' what our ethical position on a particular matter is, rather than working it out when the situation is presented. Our freedom lies precisely in our not having to make a decision because 'this is the way things are', but being able to see things in a new light which enables us to act consistently with our true character. To act inconsistently is not a real possibility because it would change our lives, which is another way of saying that we would have to change the way we tell our story.

H.H. Price (10) argues that to say someone 'believes' is in fact to make a dispositional statement about him, equivalent to saying what he would be likely to say or do or feel in particular circumstances. Although it is possible for someone to 'half-believe' by acting inconsistently with his beliefs, it would be a betrayal of the integrity of his beliefs, which involve a logical necessity of appropriate conduct. In the terms of this thesis, the narrative of faith has an internal consistency which entails acting in certain ways.

The theme of dispositional ethics, founded in a community of particular character, is explored by many writers, not least some of those committed to the practical theological enterprise of Christian education. The distinction we have been drawing is one between ethics as what Don Browning (see below) calls a 'deontic' or an 'aretaic' discipline, one based on rules or on character. John Westerhoff sees theological ethics as fundamentally an aretaic discipline, which it is the task of Christian education to serve by helping people to internalize, within the context of a Christian community, the full significance of the Christian story. (11) James Fowler too, in an essay entitled "Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives", embraces the aretaic position. He defines the task of a practical theology of Christian education as critical reflection on the Church's task in the formation and transformation of personal character. (12)

Nevertheless, others concerned with a practical theology of Christian ethics are more critical of a one-sided emphasis on Christian character. Don Browning argues for an approach which combines both deontic and aretaic methods, based on his five levels of practical moral thinking, five levels of questions we ask ourselves when we are faced with a fresh moral demand. His basic metaphorical level asks what kind of world we live in, and answers the question with symbols and narratives which represent the ultimate context of our experience. His obligational level asks what we should do, and answers the question with general principles such as the Golden Rule. The tendency-need level asks what are the basic instinctual needs of humankind. The contextual questions are about the cultural, sociological or ecological context of moral reasoning; and the rule-role level of questions are the obvious, pragmatic ones. (13) This is the more objective, 'deontic' presentation of principles and levels of moral reasoning.

Browning agrees with Hauerwas, Westerhoff and Fowler, however, in affirming the aretaic dimension of these questions, in addition to the deontic. Just as there are precise questions and principles to invoke, so there are also perspectives of character to mould and encourage. The five aretaic perspectives are in the development of faith, morality, emotions, perceptual skill and rule-role understanding. The developmental line integral to each of these perspectives is already well attested. What Fowler has demonstrated in faith development (14), Kohlberg has done in moral reasoning (15), Erikson in emotional development (16) and others in their own perspectives on personality development.

For our purposes, it may be seen that narrative has a part to play in ethical thinking based both on character and on principles. Narrative is particularly important at the metaphorical level of Browning's approach, but at other levels principles are often adduced from the narratives of case history, just as legal principle is often adduced from the narratives of case law.

Nevertheless, the primary role of story in theological ethics will be found in the work of the story-formed community acting as the context for the formation of Christian character. The contemporary witness of MacIntyre and Hauerwas reaches back to an ancient source in Aristotle and Aquinas and finds there ample support for an ethics of character, in which principles and rules are distinctly secondary, and moreover, decisions have a strange propensity for making themselves. It is narrative which opens the door to character.

b. Decision-making in Local and Liberation Theologies

The narrative category of story, anthology and drama is a fundamental resource in local and liberation theology. Both forms of theology arise out of a protest (perhaps only fair in some cases) against what is seen as traditional 'abstract' theology. Liberation theologians make stringent criticism of the western theological tradition as culturally limited, imperialistic, and dominated by post-Enlightenment analytical thinking. Rebecca Chopp, for example, criticises the whole liberal enterprise of theology, and its modern counterpart in liberal-revisionist theology which uses the critical correlational method. She claims that,

'Liberation theologians ask different questions, consider different human experiences and existences and, most of all, experience Christianity in a very different way than (sic) liberal theologians are able to conceive of or reflect upon.' (17)

Gustavo Gutierrez is careful not to condemn the theological past in too cavalier a fashion. He pays tribute to the tradition of theology as wisdom in the early centuries and to the necessity of theology as rational knowledge.

> These are permanent and indispensable functions of all theological thinking. However, both functions must be salvaged, at least partially, from the division and deformations they have suffered throughout history. A reflective outlook and style must be retained, rather than one or another specific achievement gained in a historical context different from ours. (18)

Gutierrez proposes that the function of theology is most appropriately critical reflection on praxis, an approach encouraged by a number of new factors in the contemporary setting of theology, including a greater awareness of anthropological aspects of revelation, the eschatological dimension of theology, the influence of Marxist thought, and the growing understanding that the Church is the true place where theology is to be undertaken. (19) Thus, 'the pastoral activity of the Church does not flow as a conclusion from theological premises. Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it.' (20)

It has to be recognised first of all that liberation theologians are working from a particular socio-political tradition. This means that they are comfortable with a notion of praxis as it has evolved in a social tradition stemming from Marx and the Frankfurt School. Hegel and Marx made the 'historical turn' which rooted meaning in specific social contexts; they were therefore critical of what they saw in the western intellectual tradition as the 'abstractions' of value-neutral knowledge, which they saw as ideologies.

Secondly, it is important to note the major shift which has taken place in liberation theology since 1967, away from a concern with the larger structural questions of the region of South America and towards the local theology flowing from the so-called 'base

communities'. This movement is well charted by Juan Luis Segundo (21), and the work of the base communities is well described by Carlos Mesters (22). Mesters formulates a central model for hearing the word of God whereby the Bible text, the community con-text and the social reality pre-text must interact. He also identifies the key characteristics of biblical interpretation in the small study group as these:- the gospel message is broader than the text; an emphasis on the unity of creation and salvation; the reappropriation of the Bible as the people's book; the Bible as a mirror of contemporary life.

Nevertheless the considerations which Chopp and Gutierrez and many other liberation theologians have highlighted have led those concerned with local theologies in this country, and those involved in forms of industrial mission, to take up a critical stance on the way theology is approached in Britain. Margaret Kane makes the point strongly in her writings, and suggests an approach more rooted in narrative categories.

> Theology is currently practised at a highly abstract level and all of us who have undergone formal theological training have been infected with this approach. Yet pictures, stories, concrete realities and practical responses are much closer to the biblical mode of expression. There is no lack of capacity for theological thought among 'working class' people. It is our way of doing theology that is wrong. (23)

Such protest is overstated. Theology is a multi-faceted exercise and a plurality of approaches is in order. Anthony Harvey defends this plurality in the introduction to Theology in the City (24) He quotes the proposal of George Lindbeck that theology is concerned with a grammar of religious discourse rather than a foundational content. (25) This would indicate that more than one theological language could be used to describe God, each with its own distinctive grammar. Moreover, paradigm shifts in thinking in the physical sciences have led to complementary models of phenomena (such as light), and a corresponding development should not be discounted in theology. The Orthodox tradition has long offered an approach to theology based much more on the mystical way and on what God is not. Such a theology is not incompatible with orthodox western methods, but rather, a contrast. (26)

We may be inclined to say, therefore, that liberation theology and local theologies act to complement, but also confront, the classic western approaches. Nevertheless, the challenge of such alternatives, together with kindred theologies of feminism and black consciousness, is one which traditional theology must address urgently. The protest may not be deflected simply by appealing to a principle of complementarity, since it is often the claim of other theologies not just to be alternatives, but to be outright attacks on fundamental flaws in western theological methods. As British theology addresses the issue, the most commonly agreed modus vivendi would seem to be that expressed by Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner:

> Neither of us would want to jettison the historical-critical method which is an important resource for questionning readings which may tend to be self-indulgent and careless of the form and content of the text. What is necessary is a renewed quest for guidelines in our biblical reading, assuming that a fixed Archimedean point is no longer possible. (27)

Nevertheless, Rowland and Corner would not want British theologians to sleep comfortably:

> If many who write in the West prefer not to attempt any systematic analysis of their own Sitz im Leben, that may in part be because they are on the whole the beneficiaries of that system. They reject language which describes the present order as demonic because its demonic aspect never touches them. (28)

Let us turn, then, to examine the use made of narrative in one of these newer 'grass root' theologies in this country. In seeking to develop a theology for his local parish, Laurie Green made parable a key methodological category. (29) The group which sought to create a local theology was clear that action and reflection belonged together in a unity, and that there should be both a dialogue style - after Freire (30) - and a critical method. Realising that no history is objective, they decided to see their history in terms of story, 'for story is the dynamic interplay of the object and subject, of happening and interpretation' (31) In practice, when their work had led the church into setting up a Community Advice Centre, they found their reflection centring on the issues of waiting and powerlessness. Their

theology at this point came out of their experience of people waiting on the margins and feeling impotent to change their lives at significant points. From reflecting on powerlessness they were led deeply into the form of powerlessness expressed by the Cross. They examined power in its physical, political, economic, cultural and spiritual forms and saw how they were focused on the Cross of Jesus Christ.

> On the Cross Jesus placed himself before all the powers of evil and refused to acknowledge their authority. For him, only God had the final and absolute authority. He got in amongst evil in all its horror and power, experienced its fullness, placarded it and advertised it, held it up for public display and confronted the authorities with their own evil and shame. The Cross demonstrates firstly, his total solidarity with those who are oppressed by evil; secondly, it placards and displays evil's ugliness back to the world. Thirdly, through the Cross Jesus makes God's ultimate protest against evil; and finally and profoundly, it brings the key to unlock history. (32)

Green maintains that through the project he learnt that theology is done by working with the raw material and the situations which present themselves. If their problems as a parish had been different, their starting point for theology would have been different. 'If we had got ourselves stuck during the project then we would have had to work on a theology of 'stuckness'. (33)

The consequence is a theology rooted in the local culture but referring constantly to the stories and symbols of the Christian tradition. The resources a community needs to do its own theological work lie not so much in teachers as consultants; those who will help local people to discover the meaning of Christian beliefs in their lives, histories and immediate circumstances. This consultancy model is the specific proposal made by David Lockhead in his chapter in The Bible and Liberation (34); the 'expert' inevitably has his prejudices, and so does the ordinary reader; the expert can help with the original context of the text but the meaning of it for the present reader is her own responsibility.

Wesley Carr in The Priestlike Task (35) comes to the same consultancy model by a different route, and this approach is to be found in other British writers including Margaret

Kane. (36) It depends on acute listening to the tentative theological material presented by people unaccustomed to their language of faith being treated with theological seriousness, and on careful correlation with traditional theological resources. The building blocks of such a local theology are likely to be those of story, anthology, drama, liturgy and conversation. (37) The content is likely to start with incidents and memories of conflict, tragedy, powerlessness and celebration; but the critical conversation between these situations and the resources of cultural information and Christian tradition can yield a vital, working theology, based on praxis. Hence we arrive at a truly practical theology, reflecting on the action of the church in its own life and the life of society, and the action of God in the world.

It must not be thought, however, that such a theological method has any innate primacy over other approaches. We have already noted the appropriateness of a plurality of methods in theology (38), and the sharp analysis of a systematic approach may be more beneficial than a narrative or situational theology. For example, stories in Northern Ireland may be so full of distortions and overladen with prejudice as to be entirely deceptive if used as the basis of a practical theology. (39) Nevertheless, if our proposed model of pastoral theology is worked effectively, it should allow for an adequate hermeneutic of suspicion in the critical conversation of the three sources of information. The point is rather that theology is as validly done from the concrete and particular contours of a situation, as from the familiar starting points in biblical and systematic thinking. The methods may be different but the approaches both need and enrich each other.

c. Decision-making in Church Management

Closely related to church analysis is the field of church management. It will receive only brief mention here, for it is not a major user of narrative. Nevertheless it is a young activity in the life of the Church and shows the potential for both profitable and distorting use of narrative categories.

The main expression of story form is to be found in the case study. Early attempts to

correlate church order and management studies were made by the Urban Ministry Project in the late 1960s, but the form was largely sociological in character. (40) Since then, a number of more substantial works have appeared, notably Rudge's Ministry and Management (41) which contributes a valuable analysis of styles of leadership. Many more popular works show the influence of management theory, usually with a simple exegesis of biblical material construed as relevant.(42) Very few Church of England dioceses fail to offer courses on aspects of management in their provision of continuing ministerial education. Courses on the management of change, handling conflict, working in teams, and time and stress management, are common programmes. Sometimes the level of training is high, and employs the services of management consultants. (43) Organisations such as Marc Europe specialise in courses on the management of the local church, and have produced a stream of detailed books applying the theories of secular management skills. (44) It is interesting to note that in the work of one of the most respected management theorists, case studies and stories are an integral tool. In his book Effective Leadership (45) John Adair uses narrative material from commercial, military and historical sources as a central teaching resource.

One of the most comprehensive attempts to employ the theory and practice of management studies in the service of the Church, however, has been the Church Growth Movement. With its origin in the work of Donald McGavran, who founded the Institute for Church Growth in Eugene, Oregon in the early 1970s, the Movement has attracted legions of disciples worldwide through its seminars and books. (46) The emphasis is on discerning the reasons why growth is blocked in the local church and applying so-called biblical principles which will lead inevitably to growth. The supportive literature is vast; theologically critical literature is much more rare. A recent, as yet unpublished, critique of the Church Growth Movement argues that its exponents offer a theologically flawed form of realism, which is emphasised by rhetorical means. (47) This rhetoric is dominated by a concern with power and mechanism, and in Hopewell's terms, it gravitates towards canonic and charismatic discourses.

> The seductiveness of this approach is that it is partly correct. The flaw lies in the fact that it ties God into an axiomatic relationship with the world in which

> his communication and being centre on personal or corporate problem-solving activity, and fails to acknowledge his freedom inside and outside creation, inside and outside the Church, as well as inside and outside invented or perceived axioms. In short it fails to acknowledge his total abundance and dynamism. (48)

The role of (success) story in the life of the Church Growth movement is therefore seen to be part of a rhetoric belonging to a flawed missiology and a defective theology, and it is categories arising from narrative which most helpfully expose these errors.

(v) Stories used in Development

> The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath..."What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"
>
> "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."
>
> "Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.
>
> "Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."
>
> "Does it happen all at once, like being wound up?" he asked, "or bit by bit?"
>
> "It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time...Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very

> shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand." (49)

The fourth function of story in the praxis of the Church is in development, in growth in understanding of what is 'real' in knowledge and experience. Narratives can effectively help individuals, groups and communities to develop greater perception and skill in living out their discipleship, and also to continue and consolidate their identity in the action which they take. The two examples which we will consider here are Christian education and spiritual guidance.

a. Development through Christian Education

In the General Synod Board of Education report, Children in the Way (50), a distinction is drawn between different models of the Church's work with children. The 'School' and 'Family' models are less favoured by the report than that of the 'Pilgrim Church'.

> Traditionally a pilgrimage is a group of people of all kinds and ages united in reaching a common goal. They stop at significant places on the way. They exchange their own stories, and share past experiences and memories of those who have gone before them. They look forward to the rest of the journey and to reaching their ultimate destination. (51)

The telling of stories is an essential part of pilgrimage. The Church is formed by its stories, lives by them, and passes them on. The development of the Church and its continuance in faithful action therefore depend in large measure on the adequacy of its story-telling. As Hans-Ruedi Weber put it:

> The most common way of remembering, teaching and proclaiming God's great acts is story-telling. This is true both for the Old and the New Testament. It remains true still today, especially in predominantly oral cultures. If we want to be messengers of the biblical message we must learn the art of story-telling. (52)

In writing about story-telling in Christian education, therefore, we are not referring to inspirational anecdotes but to the formative and transformative stories of tradition and

current experience which are performing a crucial role in enabling the Church to continue and to grow in its very being.

As we have often seen in this essay, it is not simply the stories of the tradition which are vital, but the interaction of those stories with the stories which people bring of their own identity. In that interaction lies the transformation of a person or a group, or the reconstruction of a new Christian identity. Stroup calls this the 'collision' of narratives (53) because he wants to emphasise the radical nature of the reconstruction. However, an alternative description is that of the gentle moulding of a life around the narratives of faith, within the nurturing environment of a church.

One who makes much of this interaction of stories is Thomas Groome, who chooses to describe the activity as a 'dialectical hermeneutic' between the Christian Story and the stories of participants in an educational event. We have already examined his five-step 'shared praxis' approach to Christian education (strongly influenced by Paulo Freire), in chapter 1. (54) After naming the present action in response to a particular focus of study, the stories and visions of the participants are explored in terms of why such action is taken and with what purpose. The third movement involves encountering the Story and Vision of the Christian community, after which the dialectical hermeneutic between the Story and the stories can take place. In that mutual critique the Christian Story may affirm, call into question, or invite further, our own stories; but our stories may also affirm, recognise the limits of, or push beyond, the Christian Story. The fifth movement is a dialectical hermeneutic not between the stories but between the visions of the community and the participants, giving the opportunity for a response to the learning process in action.

It should be noted that Groome has a special meaning for the word 'story'. By Christian Story he means 'the whole faith tradition of our people, however that is expressed or embodied.' (55) It therefore includes sacraments, rituals and structures as well as narratives and their interpretation. Similarly, by 'Vision' he means the lived response which the Christian Story invites, as well as God's promise of the Kingdom in that Story. Nevertheless we have in this practical theology of Christian education a methodology

which places story in its widest and richest form at the centre of the approach. In the interaction of stories and visions there is scope for personal learning and transformation in a way which engages the total personality, in belief, affective response and action. (56)

Although stories have power for any age and stage of life, a closer examination of the way people develop and change in their faith reveals that story may be more important at particular times. This is a legitimate conclusion from the work of James Fowler, expressed most comprehensively in his influential book Stages of Faith. (57) The details of these stages are not necessary here, but we should note the broad outline of his developmental scheme. The initial total dependence and trust on parents in primal faith is succeeded by Intuitive-Projective faith as stories, symbols and rituals provide shape, guidance and reassurance to the child's life. The second stage of Mythic-Literal faith relies strongly on stories, rules and the implicit values of the family's faith. (Faith is defined broadly by Fowler as 'a person's way of seeing him or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose'. (58))

In stage three Synthetic-Conventional faith the person moves on to look for 'a story of my stories' which makes sense of life generally, but in a fairly conformist and non-reflective way. Stage four faith, characterised as Individuative-Reflective, is more personally chosen and explicit, where questions are asked but too much de-mythologising is rejected as threatening. At stage five, Conjunctive faith relishes paradox and diversity, looking for relatedness between traditions and being unimpressed by simple, rational solutions to complex mysteries. Stage six is connoted Universalising faith and is the preserve of the saint!(59)

From this brief review it may be seen that certain stages of a developing faith are more receptive to story than others. Stage one is the time when younger children 'depend upon rich stories to provide images, symbols and examples for the vague but powerful impulses, feelings and aspirations forming within them.' (60) Stage two, which commonly occurs between 7 and 12 years of age, is also a prime period for story to extend the child's experience and understanding, but with a limitation on reflection.

> If we picture the flow of our lives as being like a river, stage 2 tells stories that describe the flow from the midst of the stream. The stage 2 person does not yet step out on the bank beside the river and reflect on the stories of the flow and their composite meanings. (61)

Fowler is clear that people may pass into and through these stages at any age, and will normally come to a halt at any stage after three. Moreover we do not rid ourselves of the insights of previous stages; we take them with us and rework them. Stories therefore continue to fascinate, but they come into their own again at the higher levels of five and six, Conjunctive and Universalising faith. As someone moves out of stage four, stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes will insist on breaking in on the neatness of previous faith, and they will be appreciated in stage five because the person has been grasped by the reality to which they refer. (62) Thus the familiar narratives of the Bible may come alive again in new ways because they are redolent of meaning at a number of different levels.

The value of story at stage six is less that such people use stories, as that their stories are used by others! These are the figures of the stature of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Theresa, and Bonhoeffer, about whom stories are told to encourage and inspire the faith response of others. 'They are contagious in the sense that they create zones of liberation from the social, political, economic and ideological shackles' in which the rest of us live. (63) Life is loved but held loosely and sometimes such people suffer martyrdom, but their stories still inspire others precisely because we all recognise the persistent, muted call to integrity and holiness.

Fowler presents us with just one of a number of theories of human development, all of which remind us of the narrative character of human experience. Wherever a person stands in her faith story, she is able to understand herself rightly only if she can see her present as existing in a tensed modality with past and future, memory and anticipation. Her narrative may have a number of different frames of reference into which it may fit. Freud and Jung offer a psychological frame, with Freud proposing stages of human development described as oral, anal, genital, latency, and adolescence; whereas Jung emphasises the

second half of life as having the major task of individuation, following the first half of life where the major task is that of establishing the personality. Erik Erikson offers another frame for human development in which eight key stages are identified with special developmental tasks which will be resolved with relative adequacy. For example, the first task is seen as 'trust versus mistrust' in the first year of life, with the latency age 5 to 12 presenting the dilemma of 'industry versus inferiority'. Young adulthood (16-22) is understood as a time of 'intimacy versus isolation', and late adulthood as offering 'integrity or despair'. (64)

A further framework is presented in educational psychology by Piaget, whose well known contribution delineates such stages as intuitive, concrete and abstract thinking. We are now in the area of cognitive rather than personality development, but the model of a sequential process again brings to the fore the story-like character of human experience. The same is true of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. He proposes three levels of judgement, each divided into two, resulting in six stages of moral development. The three bases of moral judgement are 'pre-conventional', 'conventional' and 'self-accepted' moral principles, and within them the six motives for moral action are described in pairs as 'fear and self interest', 'conformity and social order', 'the rights of others and universal principles'. (65)

A complex synthesis of these and other models of human development has been attempted by Michael Jacobs in Towards the Fullness of Christ. (66) The result is too tidy to be thoroughly convincing, but it performs a useful task in demonstrating the relatedness of different models and frames of reference to each other. What also becomes clear is the essentially narrative character of human life and experience. In each model there is an underlying sequence, and a particular theme - personality, cognitive thought, faith, morality - which we have previously referred to as 'characterisation' when we have been studying the elements of narrative. In any individual life the other elements of narrative are present also. The 'setting' or world view is unique to the individual, inscribed by genetic make-up, culture and choice. The 'plot' of the story is present in the way the person develops within the characterisation frame of each model. The 'resolution' of the narrative is evident in the particular journey's end which the person achieves within the frame. The 'teller of the story'

is in this case the designer of the model - Freud, Jung, Erikson, Piaget, Fowler, Kohlberg. What emerges, therefore, is the thoroughly narrative character of human experience, however it is described developmentally. All the elements of narrative are present as any human life is seen through the window of any one of the developmental theories.

In conclusion, we can evaluate the role of story in the educational practice of the Church. In the first place, story probably has a greater effectiveness in communicating with children and adults, particularly at certain stages of development, than do more conceptual methods. In part this is because of the narrative character of human experience which is instinctively recognised by the hearer. It is also because of the sheer weight of narrative material which is presented to people through newspapers, television, T.V. adverts, films, drama and books.

It is particularly the case with Christian education that the utmost care must be put into employing appropriate learning methods. John Hull has demonstrated with commendable but depressing rigour that Christian adults have a considerable resistance to learning. (67) He identifies four substantial causes : Christians' responses to modernity, the need to be right, the pain of learning, and the problems associated with moving through difficult transitions in the evolution of faith - drawing here on Fowler's stages. The intelligent and imaginative use of narrative can overcome some of these resistances by employing a genre well known to Christian learners both from their secular and ecclesial cultures.

Secondly, story has value in Christian education because it is in step with one of the central strands of the Christian tradition - the narratives of the Bible. Care has to be taken, however, that nothing has to be un-learnt as a child grows up. Narratives must therefore be given their 'history-like' character, rather than an insistence made on their literal meaning. It is easier to move from 'history-like' to 'history' than in the opposite direction, when at a later stage critical faculties are brought to bear on the biblical material. By using story, however, Christian educationalists are taking the incarnational principle seriously, that God has entered the human story and so may be revealed at any point within the fabric of creation or the countless narratives of history.

Nevertheless we have to note the limitations of story, primarily in its inability to be self-reflective. Fowler's fourth stage of faith development (individuative-reflective) affirms the need of maturing Christians to step outside the narratives of faith, whether their own or other people's, in order to structure their perceptions of faith and of the world. Only so will they be able to carry their understandings into novel situations. Jesus well demonstrated the power of parable without explanations, but the secondary work of theologians from Paul onwards has vastly enriched the life of the Church and the individual believer.

b. Development through Spiritual Guidance

Story has had an honourable role in guiding Christians further on their journey in the life of the Spirit. The testimony of others has long encouraged believers who take their pilgrimage seriously, from the classic text of Augustine's Confessions to the masterly allegory of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress or the agonised Markings of Dag Hammersjold. Those who have progressed near to Fowler's stage six in their spiritual journey have often left behind a trail for others to read with a mixture of awe and hope. More specifically, there are a number of ways in which story has been fruitfully used to help Christians travel on in prayer and faithful living, as we can now see:

1. Biblical stories

The study of biblical narratives has been a bedrock of devotion and inspiration for most Christians. As Hans-Ruedi Weber writes:

> If a story has been imprinted on our memories, it becomes part of our own life-story. It begins to function as a small or large sector in the frame of reference in which we see and by which we measure everything that happens in our own lives. In Bible study we attempt to see our life's story in the light of the biblical story and vice-versa. In this way the two types of stories can illumine one another, and the biblical story gets a chance to have an impact on our lives. (68)

Weber's work on participatory Bible study through the World Council of Churches has been a particularly valuable contribution to the Church's living tradition of bringing the texts alive for each generation. The foundational Benedictine method of Lectio Divina has been adapted in many ways for renewal in prayer based on the Bible. Ignatian prayer is a form of use of the Bible based on the imaginative participation of the believer in the narrative event, and has had a considerable resurgence in recent years. The method is commended in particular in two influential books published recently, Charles Elliott's Praying the Kingdom (69) and Gerard Hughes' God of Surprises, (70) while Kathy Galloway in Imagining the Gospels (71) takes the approach a stage further by retelling biblical narratives in a contemporary setting, as a vehicle for meditation. There are, however, countless ways, ancient and modern, of re-telling and re-reading the biblical stories in such a way that they inspire believers afresh with their power and insight. The process can be seen as a 'fusion' of the two horizons of time, either by simple conjunction or by a deliberate slowing of narrative time to facilitate affective engagement with the biblical horizon.

The work of biblical scholars is here of great significance. For the Church, the function of scholarship is to illuminate the text so that a truer obedience may result in prayer and action. Theology and the life of prayer are bound together. Karl Barth affirmed:

> The first and basic act of theological work is prayer. Theological work does not merely begin with prayer and is not merely accompanied by it; in its totality it is peculiar and characteristic of theology that it can be performed only in the act of prayer. (72)

With such unity of purpose it is clear that the work of biblical scholars is a major resource for the spiritual journey, and in the concerns of this essay, the insights of biblical literary critics such as Alter and Sternberg can immeasurably enrich the Christian's understanding of his basic texts. Moreover, the imaginative but scholarly-based book by Gerd Theissen, The Shadow of the Galilean, (73) shows how refreshing a narrative approach to biblical studies can be.

2. Journey Stories

A second form of story in the life of prayer and obedience is the journey or pilgrimage. The basis for such devotional narratives is the central biblical motif of journeying, seen most clearly in the story of the Exodus and then echoed frequently, culminating in the journey of Jesus to the Cross and Resurrection. This is bound together with great artistry by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews as he depicts the Christian life as travelling towards a city that has true foundations and entering a 'rest' to which only Jesus can bring us. Ernst Kä semann makes profound use of the theme of journeying in his commentary on Hebrews, The Wandering People of God (74), and in the introduction relates the theme of desert wandering to his own imprisonment by the Nazis in Germany.

Pilgrim's Progress will forever be the classic expression of journeying in post-biblical Christian literature, but the path is well charted by many writers. In its contemporary form the use of the journey metaphor can be seen in Gerard Hughes' In Search of a Way (75) or Henri Nouwen's The Road to Daybreak. (76) The theme is well explored in English literature from the Canterbury Tales to Tolkein's Lord of the Rings. Tolkein was expressly intending to create a complete story world in this book where the Hobbits' journey would be seen not merely allegorically but as an all-absorbing parable of redemption. (77) Watership Down by Richard Adams is another such journey which we have already observed being used for its theological significance by Stanley Hauerwas. (78) These echoes of the paradigmatic journey of Israel are sufficient to encourage the believer to root his own journey in the story of the great trek of the People of God, and to find in that fusion much stimulus to prayer and action.

3. Life Stories

The stories of the saints or those approaching Fowler's stage six, have been a major resource for spiritual guidance and growth. Of biographies and autobiographies there is no end, and the popular sector of the market in particular has been flooded in recent years with stories of an ephemeral nature. Nevertheless the major stories of the saints have been of lasting significance to the Church. In recent years the life stories of Thomas Merton,

Carlo Caretto, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Theresa, Oscar Romero and others have given Christians models of discipleship against which to review their own. Although the stories do not have the normative character of the biblical narratives, they nevertheless contain some of the qualities which David Tracy would call 'classics' (79), and the force of the collision of these narratives with the life stories of ordinary believers should not be underestimated.

4. Incident Stories

Although some features of Crossan's arguments may be open to question, one of his methodological distinctions throws helpful light on stories which narrate incidents. (80) Such stories tend to be metaphors of illustration rather than of participation. They are dispensable, unlike the parables which are themselves the message and invite a participative response. Nevertheless, incident stories may carry a considerable potential to transform the hearer by challenging him to make a particular new response. The art of illustration is one worked at with energy by most preachers, and the right story or image is regularly sought by those charged with the spiritual direction of others. One who has perceived the power of story for spiritual growth is Anthony de Mello, a Jesuit priest whose fascination with story and eastern spiritual traditions is demonstrated in The Song of the Bird. (81) He encourages the reader not only to listen to the stories but to taste and feel them to the point where they transform her. Such reading is neither entertainment nor theology but the gateway to mysticism. (82)

The value of stories of any of the above types, is that they can open up new spiritual space for the listener. The obverse of this is the danger that story may prove an intractable medium, that it may ensnare the listener in the confined space delineated by the form and content of the story. Undoubtedly there is truth in this challenge. The responsibility is all the greater on the story-teller, therefore, both to choose carefully the content of the story and to adopt a style of story-telling which seeks not to domimate but to invite and to encourage. The aim of using story in spiritual guidance is to offer living metaphors in which the listener can locate himself and discover new ways of being with God in the

world. Such stories therefore need to have a certain opacity and obliqueness so that there is room for manoeuvre. There must be an openness of texture so that a variety of responses is possible and paradox is not excluded. People need space to experiment with different strategies, and the right story will open up new, promising territories of the Spirit.

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PHASE FIVE

APPROPRIATE ACTION

Story in the Experience and Action of the Church

In order to complete the model of pastoral theology being offered in this thesis it is necessary to 'move toward some graceful action'.(1) In other words, an essential mark of pastoral theology is that it has an outcome in practice. The outcome is most usually that of practice-in-action though it may be that the practical outcome is temporarily suspended pending a further turn of the reflective spiral.

In this thesis we will consider three arenas for appropriate action: theological process, Christian ministry, and theological education for ordination. In each case, the fourth phase of critical conversation between the three sources of information relevant to a consideration of story in pastoral theology, leads into particular identifiable tasks. It is to these tasks that we now turn.

1. Tasks for Theology

(i) A hermeneutic of situations

The first task for theology is to give more attention to the need not only for a hermeneutic of texts but also what Edward Farley calls 'a hermeneutic of situations'.(2) This must involve theological methods which can prise open the density of a pastoral situation and enable it to be adequately 'read' and understood so that a faithful and appropriate response can be made. Inasmuch as every approach in pastoral theology is a hermeneutic of situations, this is a call for more refined and adequate models of pastoral theology, particularly on this side of the Atlantic. The methods of North American practical theology and South American liberation theology do not translate into the British context without difficulty. In particular there is need for more work on the resources of narrative in pastoral

theology, since it is in narrative form that many pastoral situations are presented, and because the structural logic of human experiencing is also narrative in shape.(3)

The use of the word 'hermeneutics' here follows the sense explicated by the two pioneers of modern hermeneutical theory, Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Schleiermacher saw hermeneutics as the broad exercise of inter-personal understanding; Dilthey saw it as grounded in evaluating the competing claims of the two axes of the general and the particular. It is to this latter approach that we now look in the second task of contemporary theology.

(ii) The value of the particular and contingent

As he surveys common threads in contemporary theology David Ford writes of: 'the emphasis on particularity: theology is free to engage deeply with the specificity of Christianity in its narratives, social forms, behaviour, and affirmations of faith.'(4) Following especially the pioneering work of Habermas in establishing a dialectic or dialogue between system and life-world in a sociology of knowledge it is now no longer just possible but necessary to engage with the particularity of events in order fully to understand their meaning.

One of the crucial starting points for theological method is the 'common practice' of the people of God.(5) For many years the favoured approach to the study of this common practice has been system-based. Generalisations about the nature of this practice have been felt to be more neutral or value-free than the examination of specific examples of the practice. Large scale systems of realist or idealist philosophy have therefore often been the trusted route. There has, however, been much dissatisfaction with generality in philosophy, the classic expression being from Wittgenstein who writes of:

> our craving for generality as another main source-preoccupation with method in science...Instead of "craving for generality" I could also have said, "the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case." (6)

The problems of this approach have been acutely felt not only by philosophers but also by those who have participated in the actual practice of the Church and who have often been unable to recognise the systemic descriptions of that practice as adequate. They have seemed too abstract and indeed generalised.

This approach creates a deeper problem also. Generalised inquiries into practice tend to remove the function of critical judgement. 'What is the case' too easily becomes 'what should be the case', without being judged by reference to the truth. On the other hand, writes Dan Hardy:

> According to the English vision of theology, from common practice, and employing methods of historical and rational judgement, it was thought to be the task of human beings to judge the quality of common practice, the common practice of the nation, in order to correct it by reference to its own truth. (7)

The critical function is best exercised when the practice concerned is specific and can be tested and tried. Hardy again:

> The task of theology is to begin from common practice and to examine its quality in open trial by the use of natural reason in order to discover the truth of this practice, by a truth-directed reason; and the fulfilment of this purpose requires reference to the author of practice and practical reason. (8)

It is important, however, not to over-emphasise the value of particularity in the exercise of critical judgement. Just as generality alone is an unreliable framework, so too is particularity, for it allows no broader principle in terms of which the particularity can be assessed. The truth is rather that critical judgement depends on a dialectic between the two principles, whereby the one informs and questions the other. To elevate the contingent to a position of supremacy would be to run the risk of a post-modernist abandonment of the tension, and to re-conceptualise reality as a series of anarchic particularities.

It remains the case, nevertheless, that the critical testing of practice needs to be activated in the contingencies of 'life-world' as well as in the more usual context of the abstractions

of 'system'. And amongst the resources and tools of life-world, narrative stands out as a prime category. Story, in its various forms, offers a way of handling specificity because it is the form chosen to describe so much human interaction. Reflection on (common) practice will often be reflection on conversation, reported action, parable, anecdote, and testimony. These narratives are some of the primary language forms through which common practice is monitored and understood.

Don Cupitt's argument in What is a Story? is that this attention to narrative forms would be a return to an older cultural tradition.

> The philosophers rebelled against the old oral narrative culture. By giving precedence to the contemplation of truth fixed in writing, they turned the old temporal order into a simultaneous spatial one. Practice was replaced by theory, and actforms by timeless concepts. Stories about the gods were replaced by speculation about the nature of things. The old narrative-emotional engagement with the living of life was set aside in favour of a new ascetical ideal of disinterested and visionary knowledge, absolute knowledge, oddly disjoined from the imagination, the emotions and action. (9)

Nevertheless it is important not to embrace a new sentimentality about older narrative cultures. The emphasis on the specific may be an important focus for theology today but it must not discount the achievements of philosophy and system-based theologies. The study of the system and the study of the contingent are complementary. It is the relative weighting which may usefully be changing.

(iii) Closer engagement with local, cultural and political theologies

It was claimed in the last chapter that attention to local culture and particular events was an important starting point for theologies which are genuinely to be possessed by the people of God. Alternative theological methods are now commonplace as liberation, black, feminist, Asian and other theologies emerge, making an explicit challenge to western theological traditions. The claim was made, following Harvey (10), that such theologies

could live in paradoxical tension with each other, on the basis of their addressing a variety of agendas and performing different functions. In this context thinkers have cited the analogy of different theories of the electron in quantum physics, in which whether the electron was viewed as a wave or a particle depended on which questions the formula was designed to address. It was also noted, however, that this accommodation might be based on a misunderstanding of the radical nature of the challenge of other theological methods to the western traditions.

Nevertheless, the task for theology is to listen to emerging local theologies, and to accept the culture-dependency of all theological enterprises, without descending to the lost-world of total relativism. One encouraging feature of the concern with political theologies is that it forces into Christian consciousness the implications of maintaining that God is involved in historical contingencies. The trauma of the Jewish Holocaust and the dropping of nuclear bombs to end the war in the Pacific, are events which theology has been asked to address with acute seriousness. The social existence of the poor in South America gave birth to a relevant theology, and the relative poverty of a British underclass in the inner cities is calling for a similarly appropriate theological response.(11)

In this search to give local, cultural and political theological expression to a community's belief and practice, there is a prime role for story-based discourse, provided that the paradigmatic narratives which are selected are not drawn from too narrow a base. It has been a consistent theme in this thesis that a community gains meaning for itself, and understanding by others, from its stock of stories. Whether in the field of personal and social ethics, or the analysis of congregational life, or the ordering of worship, it is the stories a community tells which give it cohesion and identity. From these narratives, and other primary language of experience, comes a theology which is tested and tried by other traditions, and it is in the debate which ensues that theological truth is discerned. Cupitt puts it more boldly: 'Reality is a battlefield, an endless struggle between many rival stories about what's going on.'(12) The particularities of stories keep theology in touch with its constituencies, whether they be the Church, the wider public or the academy. They are rooted in common practice, but are nevertheless open to mutual checking and critique.

They occupy the border country between practice and theory.

2. Tasks for Christian Ministry

(i) Attending to the Story

The distinctive task of the Church is to attend to the story of Jesus Christ.(13) Much else is important; little else is as necessary. The tasks of worship and Christian education, therefore, have this in common: that they have a primary responsibility to set forth the master-story of God's salvation of human-kind, as clearly, imaginatively and truthfully as possible. We must, of couse, employ caution in using concepts such as 'master-story'. In the light of previous discussion in this chapter and others, it will be remembered that such an idea can only stand as one 'pole' of generality in dialectical relation with another pole of particularity. Analogously the 'master-code' of Marxist thought has come under the severe criticism of post-modernist thinking. We would rather more constructively favour a dialogue model between the generality of master-story and the particularity of contemporary situations.

Nevertheless, expressing well the Christian story in its many forms in worship, is a clear task for the Church. The touchstone for good worship is not innovation or conservatism, but whether the Christian story is well expressed in a particular aspect, dimension or slice of time, so that it may be formative of true Christian community. This approach circumvents many of the arguments about contemporary worship and its adaptation to the spirit of the age. Rather it affirms the crucial role worship has in setting forth the mighty acts of God in such a way that the people of God are being created and moulded in accordance with his nature and purposes.

Similarly the task of Christian education is to present the different aspects, levels, and particularities of the Christian story in such a way that the 'community of character' to which Hauerwas refers (14) may be formed so that, in turn, faithful people may respond to the issues of living from within a framework of lived stories. The task of this education, therefore, moves far beyond the mere imparting of cognitive information. It involves

cognitive, affective, behavioural, and inter-personal learning. It involves the philosophy incorporated in Children in the Way (15) and developed in the work currently being undertaken on the Catechumenate (16), that Christian education is a process of education for a life of faithful Christian living and therefore involves a staged, appropriately marked journey into deeper believing and belonging in the community of faith, and that community is formed and sustained by its Story and its stories. Again, the mark of good practice should neither be novelty nor loyalty to golden memories, but making the Story accessible to people in ways which transform their living.

(ii) Recognising the centrality of Christian confession

Confession plays a key role in helping Christians define their faith, their place in the Church and their aptitude for mission. The act of confession occupies a large tract of theological ground. It is more than a Christian being able to tell the story of his conversion to faith, although it includes that. It is more than an extravert (in Jungian terms) maintaining that he 'cannot know what he believes unless he hears himself speak'. It is rather the speech-act that allows a person to start to reconstruct her own identity around the life of Jesus Christ, and this activity starts for an adult with the baptismal catechumenate and continues throughout life. This reconstruction of belief involves not only a cognitive but also a performative element. Belief and conduct are logically and inextricably linked in the dispositional view of belief, as we saw in the discussion of H.H. Price in chapter 10.

The insights of George Stroup, drawing on Barth and Gadamer, are useful here, and were discussed in chapter six. The 'collision of narratives' brings together the narrative identities of the individual and the community, and out of this radical encounter comes the new Christian identity.(17) The importance of this for Christian ministry, however, is that the use of personal story by the Church in mission, education and spiritual guidance is not a mere sentimental and subjective indulgence, nor is 'telling the old, old story' in preaching, evangelism and worship simply an unsophisticated, vain repetition. Rather it is a specific act of formative and transformative power, the culmination of Barth's 'act of faith' with its elements of acknowledgement, recognition and confession. As such, an important task of

Christian ministry is to facilitate the imaginative, truthful and confident telling of the Christian story, its component stories and the personal stories of Christians moulded by their encounter with the tradition.

(iii) Affirming the narrative character of human experience

An important approach in ministry in helping others towards self-understanding is that of offering a narrative interpretation of experience. Western culture has long lived in the restricted Enlightenment world of rational discourse and bounded concepts. This has led many to seek self-understanding through theoretical constructs which are often inimical to their own experience of themselves. Recovering the older cultural method of narrative may be a way through this impasse. Stephen Crites' work, discussed in chapter four, offers support to the notion that our experiencing consciousness is narrative in shape, and that out of the basic chronicle of memory, we construct meaning for our lives by selecting material to create narratives. (18)

Generally the parts of the chronicle which seem to us to carry most significance are those of transition. These are the places where most energy is generated and expended, just as an easy-going river expends most energy when it passes over rapids. This, therefore, is where most counselling and spiritual direction is focussed, as well as much pastoral care in the preparation of people for the occasional offices of baptism, marriage and funeral rites. The value of using the interpretative tool of narrative in these encounters is that it enables people to set these life-crises within the longer narrative perspective of their whole lives, rather than as totally discrete events for which there is no preparation or (as may be feared) recovery. It behoves Christian ministers, therefore, to learn the skills which other caring and management professions are also learning, of enabling people to tell their stories with care and understanding. Guiding people in discerning the significance of themes and incidents in their stories is a skill requiring much time, study and practice.(19)

(iv) Letting the biblical narrative speak with its own transforming power

One central task for Christian ministry is to put the power of biblical narrative back into the minds and imaginations of the people of God. This involves a recovery of confidence in the authority and transformative power of scripture. Recent work by Frances Young (to which we have already referred) builds on earlier work of David Kelsey (20) in emphasising that what makes a biblical text 'scripture' is that 'it functions to shape a person's identity so decisively as to transform them'. (21) Hans Frei charted the decline of the biblical world-view in The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative (22) and although it is neither desirable nor possible to return to an uncritical literalism, the power of biblical narrative to define and form faithful living in Church and society, is one long neglected. Frei succeeded in showing that the analytical approach of Enlightenment thought risked damaging the temporal flow of narrative by setting up a series of analytical and atomistic questions. He also demonstrated that narrative is a fundamental biblical category and that questions of ostensive reference signal a return to a more integrated and temporal view of the function of biblical narratives.

One of the tasks of the Reformation had been to re-discover the creative power of scripture not to abolish tradition but to re-shape tradition and personal identity. This remains a contemporary theological task, one to which Werner Jeanrond turns in the final chapter of his recent Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance:

> Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas and others have convincingly emphasised the significance of hermeneutical reflection for the development of the individual human being as well as for the emancipatory discourse of society as a whole. However, the significance of hermeneutical thinking for the self-understanding of the Christian movement, i.e. the Church, may need further clarification. (23)

Thus, hermeneutical issues are central to the task of transforming churches as well as individuals.

Nevertheless, in rediscovering the power of the biblical narratives, it is the individual in the Church who is also confronted with the magisterial text. Many new resources are now

available to teachers and interpreters. For example, the work of Alter, Kermode and others in opening up the literary character of the Bible, has done nothing but good.(24) It has enabled biblical studies to move away from an over-emphasis on historical and critical issues and to engage the imagination with literary devices and qualities. The task of ministry is to bring the refreshing findings of this approach into Bible study, preaching, and public reading of the scriptures.

(v) Recognising the communicative power of narrative

In chapter eight on the religious significance of story we observed how writers as diverse as Cox, MacIntyre, Gadamer and Ricoeur have argued for the centrality of narrative in human communication. At the popular level too we may observe the anecdotal character of much conversation, the story-like quality of most television programmes, the narrative basis of much journalism, even of the serious variety. Christian ministry would therefore be exploiting a seam of proven value if it were to put more effort into the precise and powerful use of story. When education authorities have started employing 'story-tellers', social workers are receiving training in the use of narrative, and television 'soap operas' are consistently at the top of viewer ratings, it is clear that narrative is proving its use in the art of effective communication.

For the Church to recover the communicative power of story would only be for it to return to its roots. It has always possessed a master narrative and constituent narratives of enormous power, and has used them in preaching, drama, liturgy, and visual presentations of the biblical stories in frescoes and stained glass. Today the art of story-telling will require the mastery of other media, including television, video, and local radio, but many of the old skills remain essential: the art of telling a story to children with verve and variety, making biblical stories live in fresh colours from the pulpit, writing articles involving personal experience without being self-indulgent. The skilled use of narrative requires just as much time in preparation as more conceptual approaches.(25)

This work on communication through story will also involve a search for vigorous

parables. The Judaeo-Christian tradition has given the world some of its most compelling parables and images, but human history continues to provide stories which echo, ask questions of, or conflict with biblical stories. Such narratives are to be found in the local community, in the news, in novels, films and theatre, and are all available to be used to evoke and subvert, in the tradition of the parables.

(vi) Concentrating on becoming communities of specific character

If Christian ministry is to be effective one of its prime tasks will be to enable the Church, in its many diverse forms, to be a community with a sufficiently distinctive character that people are attracted to its life and beliefs. Stanley Hauerwas, as we saw in chapter six, makes this task the crucial determinant of ethical action, for it is as the Christian community is formed around the life and narratives of Jesus Christ that it acts instinctively in obedience to him, rather than through the conceptual routes of middle axioms or natural law. In terms of the elements of story delineated in chapters three and four, the world view of such a community is given by the life of Jesus, the character of the community is formed by its attention to that story, and the plot is written by being lived out in the daily actions and responses of the community.

A prime task of Christian ministry, therefore, is to form the character of the community by exposure to the master-narrative of Christian faith, the constituent narratives of the Bible and the lived narratives of other Christian lives, thus setting up the dialectic between universality and particularity to which we have already referred. There is a vital task of identifying, protecting and proclaiming the essential elements of these narratives, for the tendency to deviate and manipulate the narrative texts is always present. It is then necessary, however, to trust the implicit power of the narratives to do their own work and to mould the community as they will. It is not the task of leadership ministry to define the final shape of the community, since it is the divine interaction between the Christian story and the local story that will decide the outcome, which is the provisional character of that community. Rather, the task of Christian ministry in leadership is to take great care about what narratives are being told to the church and what narratives it is telling to the wider

community. Hopewell's analysis of local congregational life (26) provides one model through which the character and narratives of a church may be discerned.

(vii) Respecting alternative narratives

If there is in Christian ministry a genuine attempt to use narrative categories, then there is a fundamental need for an attitude of respect towards the narrated experiences of others. Some of the stories we hear from others will have a sacred quality for the story-teller and therefore may not be dismissed as error. There will still, however, be a critical judgement which we bring to bear on the interpretation of those experiences. The crucial interpretative task of ministry, therefore, is that of detecting the narrative of God's action, often in unexpected places.

That narrative is more easily discerned within the immediate orbit of the faith-community. Detecting God's activity elsewhere is more difficult, but essential, since decisions about the wisdom of working with people of other faiths or none is constantly being tested in local ministry. Discernment is needed in recognising the narrative of God's action in society and its organisations, in the lives of non-believers, in folk or implicit religion (27), and in movements for peace and justice and the integrity of creation. Provided it is recognised that God's activity is far broader than the activity of the Church, these decisions should not cause too much difficulty. Much sharper questions are raised, however, by the possibility of inter-faith worship; in the terms of this thesis the question here is whether two quite distinct narratives are compatible and capable of living together in tension or mutual questioning, or whether on the other hand they are so contradictory as to compromise anyone seeking communality of intent through them. More simply, are these alternative narratives part of God's story with his diverse people or are they not? If they are, how incomplete are they? Further, how does a Christian offer his or her story as the most normative and productive of authentic faith on the basis of a claim to a grounding in scripture? All of this points to the need for a respectful but rigorous approach to alternative narratives of God's action.(28)

3. Tasks for Theological Education

(i) Equipping students with a model of Pastoral Theology

The crucial task for theological education is to provide a methodology for thinking and acting theologically in the practice of ministry. The need in the Church is for pastoral theologians or theological pastors, people who are able to hold together the exigencies of the pastoral situation with the resources of the Christian tradition. In order to do this, theological education needs to provide not just opportunities for reflection on practice but an approach to thoughtful practice which will sustain them, and the communities they will serve, for a lifetime.

Church reports have consistently pointed to this primary task. The ACCM report Education for the Church's Ministry (29) stated: 'Theological education is to form the ordinand in a wisdom and habit of life by which to know, respond to and participate in the activity of God.' It went on to delineate three parameters within which this objective must operate.

1. It must provide a deep and intelligent inquiry into the Christian Scripture and tradition.
2. It must include a deep inquiry into the conditions of the Church's life as called by Jesus Christ.
3. It must enable the ordinand to identify the situations in which the Church is formed and to which it must address itself. (30)

The way these needs are held together is in the 'wisdom and habit of life' of the minister, a way of being and acting in ministry which integrates theology, spirituality and practice.

The various models of pastoral theology which we examined in chapter one are all attempting to offer such an approach to thoughtful practice. They offer what Michael Taylor in Learning To Care describes as: 'a consistent or settled approach' to pastoral action,'to what it is about and how it is exercised, which has developed over a period of time through the interplay of growing experience and deep convictions, committed practice and careful reflection.' (31) There is no greater task in theological education than providing a working, sustainable model of pastoral theology if we are to avoid the great

divorce between theological theory learned at college and unreflected pastoral practice exercised by the hard-pressed minister.

It may be that story-based models of pastoral theology provide an approach which is both discrete enough to attend to the contingencies of human experience and also comprehensive enough to embrace the systematic needs of a coherent theology. We have noted in chapter two how many approaches to pastoral theology lean towards narrative categories. In part this is because, as David Deeks maintains, 'in story-telling we are open to our culture, and the network of groups and institutions whose values shape our lives.' (32) Not only cultural information but also the theological resources of the tradition often come to us in narrative form, whether the material is biblical, doctrinal or ethical (see chapter six). Since most pastoral situations are also encountered in ways that give themselves to narrative interpretation, it may be seen again that the main sources of information for a model of pastoral theology are often presented in story form.

If, then, ordinands preparing for pastoral ministry are to be equipped with an approach to their work which has integrity both in theology and in the context of ministry, story-based methods have much to commend them. Not least they may have life and influence both on the pastor and the lay person because they appeal not only to the intellect but to the imagination. A good interpretative story may also provide a framework or vehicle for an entire area of Christian thought. As the evangelists' theology was contained and expressed by the ways they told the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, so also our theologies may be set within the interpretative map of our sacred and mundane stories.

(ii) Explicating the narrative form of many biblical writings

The recovery of the literary quality of the Bible has been one of the major advances in the study of the Bible in the last 25 years. The domination of the historical-critical approach had been such that the face of the text itself was being lost in the search for the elusive background texts and events to which there now seemed no direct access. Literary approaches, however, have given a timely balance to such studies. Alter and Kermode

describe the process thus:

> What has happened now is that the interpretation of the texts as they actually exist has been revalidated. This development has not been simple or single, and it has not been merely a reaction against the modern tradition of professional biblical scholarship. It comes of a need, felt by clerical and secular students alike, to achieve a new accommodation with the Bible as it is, which is to say as literature of high importance and power. (33)

Part of this new exploration of the 'importance and power' of the Bible has been a renewed emphasis on the narrative forms of the literature. That the Bible contained much narrative material has never been in doubt; the fresh appreciation has been of the devices and conventions which have made the narratives so effective. It is, of course, important not to make imperialist claims for narrative in the complex field of biblical genre. Nevertheless, literary approaches to the Bible enable us to be both nearer-sighted and farther-sighted than before, and we are able to discern the overall narrative context within which the biblical material operates, and also the small-scale narrative devices 'undertaken by writers with the most brilliant gifts for intimating character, defining scenes, fashioning dialogue, elaborating motifs, and balancing near and distant episodes.' (34)

The need in theological education is to make these discoveries widely available to ordinands so that they in turn may make them available to the Church in such a way that many may rediscover the power of Scripture for themselves. It will mean more thematic teaching so that the Bible speaks its message in its grand design as well as its detail. It will also mean more inter-disciplinary teaching so that other narratives are able to interact with biblical ones. For example, stories and themes in Reformation church history or the spirituality of the desert fathers, the theological system of Barth or the pregnant fragments of Bonhoeffer, the ethical dilemmas posed by homosexuality or the pastoral demands of bereavement, may all be well tackled in conversation with biblical narrative and other material. When the sophistication of biblical narrative is allowed to interact with the complexity of other narrative accounts of theology and of current experience, then new and exciting links will emerge, as liberation theologians have been maintaining for some

considerable time.

(iii) Narrative models of teaching

There is a widely acknowledged need for more attention to be paid to methods of teaching in theological education. In the preface to the ACCM occasional paper 29 Theology in Practice Rowan Williams writes:

> A good deal of our theological training has in the past been fragmented - the acquiring of a lot of rather disconnected bits of conceptual equipment, linguistic skills, historical information, pastoral techniques - in a way which creates obvious and serious problems for the person trying to relate what he or she has assimilated to the practical conditions of ministry. The constructive response is to look to a method of theological formation that allows some productive 'conversation' between different frames of reference and accounts of experience, traditional and contemporary, 'interior' and practical, so as to help nurture an integral personal vision, a discipline of informed reflection - 'wisdom' rather than skill alone. (35)

The method advocated by the report as one which can contribute to more integrated training is that based on urban studies centres and attachments.

In the terms employed by this thesis the 'conversation' between different frames of reference is often well achieved by the use of narrative methods of teaching and learning. The case study or role play, the judicious use of novels and plays, carefully selected video material - all of these can open new doors of perception and make connections which might otherwise be lost or never made. The compelling need is for theology to inform practice and not be left behind as a theoretical deposit too complex to use actively in ministry. Narrative may provide a bridge between theory and practice in such a way that students can see the on-going possibility of 'doing theology' in the crucible of ministry itself.

Theological education needs to operate at four interlocking levels: the cognitive, affective,

interpersonal, and behavioural. There must be the acquisition of basic knowledge and comprehension of subject disciplines. Experiential, emotional and artistic responses to God and his world must also be energised. Interpersonal skills appropriate to pastoral care and team work are necessary, as are some of the fundamental skills of ministerial practice - the 'behaviour' of the minister.

Gerald Collier in A New Teaching, A New Learning (36) identifies eight generally agreed objectives in higher education, but argues that the traditional shortfall is in all those after the first two cognitive objectives. Moreover, he specifies three further objectives. In the first place, since research has shown that much knowledge which people acquire is tacit and unverbalised, and that academic knowledge rarely gets applied to practical situations in any of the disciplines, it is therefore an essential task of learning to acquire an existential understanding of academic subject matter and to develop a practical judgement of people and situations. In the second place Collier identifies collaborative work as an essential skill in all professional fields today; and in the third place, he maintains that skill in reading cultural assumptions is a necessary educational objective.

Collier's conclusion is that learning will not be internalised unless serious thinking is undertaken on how to make teaching and learning more interactive and participative, and he suggests from an educationalist's perspective that this will best be done by using problem-solving and experiential methods. Narrative methods such as role play, drama and case study enable texts to be transformative in a way which didactic lectures will rarely be unless the lecturer is supremely gifted. The issue remains, however, of how to ensure that texts are treated with sufficient rigour and intellectual depth while they are being made memorable and life-changing for the student. One practical difficulty with more interactive methods also concerns the length of training in British colleges, since narrative methods and case studies inevitably take longer to unpack than more abstract presentations.

Some of the suggested methods will seem foreign to the traditions of British theological education. The verbatim is an importation from Clinical Pastoral Education in the United States. Case study method is more often associated with training in the social services and

other 'caring professions'. However, this latter case study method has a proven record in other parts of the world as a structured critical approach to integrating theology and practice around a particular significant incident. Michael Northcott, writing in the journal Contact (37) argues that the method functions at a number of different levels:

1. It presents to students their own presuppositions concerning methods and styles of ministry.
2. It helps the student to integrate the different disciplines and perspectives of the theological curriculum in analysing and evaluating ministerial practice.
3. It helps the student identify and develop her own operative theology.
4. It has proven value in enabling students to reflect on practice in a disciplined way after they have left the seminary.

Case study is just one approach based on narrative which can enrich theological method in preparing students for ministry. The use of narrative methods in theological education is therefore a valuable seam to explore. Not only does it begin to meet the crucial test of theological training that it bridges the gulf between theory and practice, but it also contributes to the formation and refining of a working theology of ministry in a particular context. As Northcott writes:

> The formation of local theologies at its core involves the relating of individual and group stories and biographies to the paradigmatic biography of Jesus Christ and the corporate biography of God's people in the world and the church. It is in the relating of our individual biographies with the biographies of Christ and his people that contextual theology is created. (38)

(iv) Teaching the potential of narrative in ministry

Narrative approaches to teaching in theological education are additionally appropriate because they are also well suited to the practice of ministry itself. The logical structure of human experiencing, we have argued, is narrative, and therefore the story form will commend itself in both college and parish alike.

We have already explored five major categories of narrative-use in the action and

experience of the Church: stories used for description, as in church analysis; for definition, as in worship, preaching and evangelism; for transforming dialogue, as in inter-faith encounter and pastoral counselling; for decision-making, as in ethics and constructing local theologies; and for development, as in Christian education and spiritual guidance.

One task of theological education is to draw out more self-consciously the narrative thread in this diverse activity, thereby equipping students with a category of broad ministerial relevance. Without needing to make any imperialist claims for story it can be seen that an awareness of the power of narrative opens up channels of communication in ministry which might be clogged at the minister's end with a deposit of unusable theology and at the layperson's end with a morass of misunderstanding and incredulity.

Perhaps the chief contribution of story to Christian ministry is that it enables our own life stories to be given new meaning when they are taken into the grand narrative of God-with-us in such a way as to transform or to affirm our individual or corporate identity. The overarching story of God's presence gives our stories a context, a beginning and end, through which they take on meaning. It is the task of the minister to help people locate their life-story in the story of God-with-us, in which the universal dimension entailed in 'God' interacts with the contingent particularity of 'us' through our concrete story. It is the task of the preacher in particular to focus this fusion of stories in such a way that although our past may include or even constitute a story of tragedy or damage, our future may be both open and yet ultimately secure. Christian eschatology may be transposed from the abstract to the temporal, in the temporal and transforming logic of narrative. As Buttrick observes:

> Christian preaching sketches an ending, or better The Ending, for it tells the denouement of God's story with us. Christian faith is incurably teleological. So in visioning conclusion, preaching transforms the human story and all our stories as well... For if God's story with us will end in a world reconciled - with new humanity engaged in glad, grave courtesies of love; with "the song of them that triumph and the shout of them that feast"; with the City and the Lamb and the wiped-away tears - then all our stories must be revised. (39)

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