Story-Making: A Narrative Pedagogy For Transformative Christian Faith

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STORY-MAKING: A NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHRISTIAN FAITH

a dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

STORY-MAKING: A NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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The mid-twentieth century upsurge in scholarship on the methodological and conceptual importance of narrative for theology - established in the work of H.R. Niebuhr, Hans Frei and Stephen Crites inter alia – was a watershed moment for narrative pedagogy in Christian religious education. By and large, narrative approaches have however tended to privilege one form of narrative embodiment - literary (or discursive narratives) - over action (or non-discursive narratives).

This dissertation points to the equivocal and pluriform nature of narrativity, and its codification in much more than oral and written textuality. I extend it to refer to a distinct competency for establishing a meaningful world (or ethos) to inhabit, which congeals in varied forms of human expression including our lived narratives. Narrative competency allows us to understand ourselves as persons and communities in (synchronic) relationship with the rest of creation, as well as in (diachronic) relation with persons and communities from the past and in the anticipated future.

I propose a narrative pedagogy for transformative faith based on the concept of story-making, which draws on this expanded understanding of narrativity. My story-making approach is grounded in Christian praxis that aims to establish the experiential matrix that, through the working of God’s grace, invites and aids the re-storying of the learner’s life. Story-making also has as its vision narrative historic praxis that incarnates
in social action the understanding that human subjectivity is lived in responsible agency in the present, retrieving the memory of suffering and possibility from the past, in the hope of a more just future.

This dissertation is inspired by the Caribbean heritage of survival and grace-filled possibility, but ultimately extrapolates for universal wisdom. It is sustained by a belief that Christian religious education is about forming disciples with agency for furthering the Great story of the reign of God in history and society. The creative, even poetic, enterprise of Caribbean existence is iconic of this existential challenge that remains ubiquitous for life in the modern globalized economy.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**REVISITING NARRATIVE IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES** .............................................................................................................. 1  
  - The Storyed World in Which We Live .................................................................................................................. 1  
  - Christian Religious Education for Agency and Responsibility in God’s Reign .................................................. 5  
  - Caribbean Inspirations: Narratives of Survival, Resistance and Possibility ...................................................... 12  
  - Contemporary Narrative Approaches to Religious Education ...................................................................... 20  
  - Core Themes of a Transformative Approach to Narrative Education ............................................................ 32

**THE TEXTURE OF NARRATIVITY** ....................................................................................................................... 36  
  - Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................... 36  
  - A Model of Narrative Ethos ................................................................................................................................. 40  
  - Judging the Efficacy of the Model of Narrative Ethos ..................................................................................... 48  
  - Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Narrativity ......................................................................................... 60  
  - Revisiting Ricoeur’s Framework from the Perspective of Curriculum Planning ........................................... 72  
  - Summary: Religious Education and the Texture of Narrativity .................................................................... 81

**ENCOUNTERING THE RISEN JESUS ON THE ROAD: A PEDAGOGICAL HERMENEUTIC AROUND NARRATIVITY** ............................................................................................................................... 86  
  - Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................... 86  
  - Some Comments about Jesus’ Narrative Pedagogy ......................................................................................... 91  
  - The Lukan Jesus as Empowering Story-Maker ................................................................................................. 97  
  - Pedagogy on the Road to Emmaus .................................................................................................................... 103  
  - Implications for Employing Narrativity within Religious Education Today ................................................. 114

**FOUNDATIONS OF A NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY IN A CARIBBEAN NARRATIVE-PRACTICAL THEOLOGY** ................................................................................................................................. 119  
  - Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................... 119  
  - A Narrative Theology of Being ............................................................................................................................ 124  
  - A Narrative Theology of Praxis ............................................................................................................................. 131  
  - The Texture of the Caribbean Yes: Theological Debates ............................................................................... 137  
  - The Yes of Faith as Shaped by a Narrative Historicism .................................................................................. 145  
  - Yes as the Recognition of Being through Narrative Hospitality .................................................................... 152  
  - Yes as a Celebration of Being through Festivity ............................................................................................ 164  
  - Conclusion: The Significance of Story-making ............................................................................................... 169

**STORY MAKING: TOWARDS A NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE FAITH** ......................................................................................................................................................... 171  
  - Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................... 171  
  - On the Perennial Need for Critically Reflecting on our Stories ..................................................................... 175  
  - Approaching Adult Faith Formation through Story-Making ........................................................................ 183  
  - The Movements of Story-Making ..................................................................................................................... 204  
  - Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................................... 229

**CONCLUSION: STORY-MAKING AND BECOMING HUMAN BEFORE GOD** ............................................................... 230
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation delineates a narrative pedagogy for religious education that is intent on transformative faith. A significant question for consideration is how does Christian religious education invite learners to a re-storying of their lives, by imagining and embracing life-giving and freeing narratives, while also abandoning destructive and oppressive ones? My focus here is on Christian religious education (or educating for Christian discipleship), delimiting this work within the universe of religious education models. It is hoped, however, that much written here on the role of narrativity in religious education may be of use in broader educative circles.

I contextualize my reflections by drawing on the Caribbean faith witness, in the belief that its unique particularity can ultimately provide lessons of universal import. The Caribbean has forged stories of resistance, survival and creativity amidst the immense challenges of a colonial past. Its people – my people – have been a primary inspiration for my scholarship – to them I offer the first fruits of thanksgiving.

Many others have provided accompaniment, prayer and mentorship in my academic journey. Regretfully, I can only mention a few here. I am deeply grateful to Profs. Tom Groome, M. Shawn Copeland and M. Brinton Lykes for their scholarly mentoring, but also for their invaluable life witness. To my colleagues in the doctoral program in the Department of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, and to the numerous faculty, staff and students throughout Boston College who nurtured, supported and challenged me over the last few years – my heartfelt thanks! And to my family, near and far, especially to Wendy and Zara: this work is dedicated to you.
CHAPTER 1

REVISITING NARRATIVE IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

The Storied World in Which We Live

How ought we to live? Robert Bellah and his colleagues preface their insightful critique of American democratic society with this perennial question.¹ They observe that the modern American psyche is pervaded by an anxious search for moral integrity amid a burgeoning culture of individualism that values independence, self-reliance and pure undetermined choice above all else.² These values have often proven to be morally unfulfilling, leading to a ‘win or lose,’ ‘sink or swim’ mentality that venerates strength and success while dismissing weakness and failure. The culture of individualism is revealing itself to be bankrupt at providing a vision of life that upholds personal freedom...


² I have witnessed this search in my religious education work with the undergraduate population at Boston College. Many students are restless for new and innovative experience, ritual practice, or prayer form to hang an integral spirituality. This search is often interpreted negatively – as a naive rejection of the metanarratives and traditional rituals of institutional religion, or positively – as the active search for a more authentic and sustaining spirituality. Both of these readings indeed illustrate specific instantiations of the postmodern condition. See Harold D. Horrell, "Cultural Postmodernity and Christian Faith Formation," in Horizons and Hopes: The Future of Religious Education, ed. Thomas H. Groome and Harold D. Horrell (New York: Paulist Press, 2003); Harold D. Horrell, "Fostering Hope: Christian Religious Education in a Postmodern Age," Religious Education 99, no. 1 (2004).
and agency, while at the same time safeguarding the intrinsic dignity of human beings and the indispensability of the common good.³

One way of interpreting this existential angst is as revelatory of a yearning for deeper connectedness – a desire to not only foster the bonds of community, but even more profundly, to be part of a transcending *story and vision*⁴ that gives meaning and direction to our limited existence.⁵ This role has traditionally been played by the foundational myths – both sacred and secular – of religion and civic society.⁶ However, unmoored from such narrative foundations in a secular age,⁷ modern democratic society has struggled to enunciate a common vision of the human good, and an alternative to the culture of radical self-reliance and individualism.

Bellah et al help us recognize how morality and identity are shaped by the narrative world in which we live. I consider the culture of individualism as constituting a

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³ Modern sociology has long rejected John Locke’s description of the human being as a rational, self-determinative monad that ontologically precedes society, in favor of Durkheim influenced theories on the social connectedness that constitutes human being. We are by nature relational beings, flourishing not as individuals but as persons in relationship with others. An unchecked ego-centered individualism is generally considered antithetical to forming healthy, life-giving relationships.

⁴ I believe Thomas H. Groome was the first to use these two terms – story and vision – as partners in his treatment of the Kingdom of God. See Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 193.


⁶ But as the late Joseph Campbell has insisted, the modern atrophy of such mythologies has left a moral void for discerning how we are connected, or for navigating the web of commitments that tie persons together into what Bellah et al called a social ecology. See Joseph Campbell and Bill D. Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

narrative world. It is more than a mindset or a set of practices; rather, it is better perceived as a confluence of practices, mindsets, symbols and mythic discourses. It references a storied world, wherein the story is one of the virtues of self-reliance and radical independence. This story has been transmitted through history by way of cultural myth, values and norms, and ultimately congeals in the practices, mindsets, and discourses of our time. It is within this storied context that the question “how ought we to live?” resonates.

Admittedly, I have expanded the idea of narrative beyond its traditional identification with literary genre. In a general sense, narratives establish meaning through connectivity. The archetypal form (literary narrative) links events, characters, actions and goals into meaningful plots. The unique artistry of historical and fictional writing is to establish for people meaningful connections among events, persons and places, which otherwise exist in simple temporal sequence (or, in the case of fiction, may not exist at all). Narrative connection transcends identification with a particular genre or cultural artifact. Indeed, some consider it as permeating human existence. Narrative psychologists tell us, for instance, that personal identity is derived from the sense of having an ongoing life story that links past experiences and future aspirations in meaningful ways. Similarly, we understand day-to-day events by seeking the stories

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8 I should make it clear that this reference to individualism is by no means an exhaustive characterization of American society. It serves rather to initiate this discussion on how narratives shape human meaning, identity and morality.

9 I use narrativity here to denote the ‘doing’ of narrative, or the work of connection that is achieved by narratives such as literary plot.

behind their occurrences – their causal connections with other events. Moreover, as I shall argue more fully in the next chapter, narrativity extends even to non-textual forms. We live our stories in our daily practices and actions (our lived narratives).

From these examples it is hopefully clear that narrativity is a pluriform and variegated phenomena that establishes meaning through connectivity. It not only establishes temporal connectivity but also spatial connectivity. This theme is often neglected in narrative literature. The idea of home, for instance, is that of a storied place - a physical space that memory invests with enough of what Bouma-Prediger and Walsh call “story-soaked meaning” to become a place of rest and identity. In this case, temporal connectivity (the meaningful linking of past events) and spatial connectivity


11 In a highly influential study in the field of interpersonal perception, Heider and Simmel offered evidence of this human tendency to interpret events through forming stories. Subjects were asked to interpret the events in a short film in which three geometric objects (a circle, a large triangle and a small triangle) were made to move at random speeds and directions, in and out of a large rectangle. Almost unanimously the film was interpreted as a story played out by animate objects - most commonly human beings caught up in a tragic love affair. See Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel, "An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior," The American Journal of Psychology 57, no. 2 (1944).

12 Recalling Robert Bellah’s study, one may indeed ask that if narratives are so ubiquitous and so important to meaning and connectivity, why then is individualism so rampant? My answer is that, at least in the context of the United States, the phenomenon of individualism is itself enabled by antecedent social narratives that valorize individual agency and achievement. Dan McAdams’ study of the ‘redemptive self’ is illustrative of this viewpoint. Backed by strong empirical evidence, McAdams argues that this redemptive self - the image of the hero who ultimately overcomes obstacle and travail to find fulfillment in life – is representative of the American self-image, and is embodied in foundational myths (such as the story of the first pilgrims to land in Massachusetts), literary classics, and cultural icons such as the cowboy and the ‘self-made man.’ Individualism and self-reliance are current manifestations of a traditional myth that has been constitutive of the American ethos. See Dan P. McAdams, The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

13 Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 45. Home can also be a place of painful memories and suffering, but that too emphasizes the relationship between narrative, memory and home.
(the association of such events with a physical place in a way that differentiates it with other spaces) converge to define the storied concept of home. Narrativity may congeal most evidently in textuality, but it also manifests itself in plural and ubiquitous forms of temporal and spatial connectivity.

It seems helpful then to think of narrativity broadly in terms of a space or *ethos* within which human meaning and identity can unfold. The concept of narrative ethos shall be elucidated in chapter two. At this moment it suffices to say that just as Calvin Schrag has persuasively shown that human communication is most adequately conceived within a *space of communicative praxis* consisting of the interplay of expressive thought, discourse and action, so too might narrativity be thought of as permeating an ethos in which thought, discourse, and action interplay to establish meaningful temporal and spatial connections within which human identity is implicated as a narrative identity.

**Christian Religious Education for Agency and Responsibility in God’s Reign**

The idea of a narrative ethos is significant for crafting an approach to Christian religious education. I propose that Christian discipleship takes place within the narrative ethos of the *reign of God in history and society*. From this perspective, Christian discipleship is a lived form of narrativity, through which the great Story of God’s

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15 The term ‘Christian’ distinguishes my concern for educating for discipleship in Jesus Christ from the universe of religious education models. Henceforth, I abbreviate with the less clumsy ‘religious education’ or ‘narrative religious education’ as appropriate.
unconditional love and action in history has unfolded or been stymied. The great Story of
the reign of God concerns how salvation has unfolded in history, and how the Holy Spirit
empowers and perpetuates the salvific mission of Jesus through our actions in the
world.\textsuperscript{16}

This dissertation proposes a narrative hermeneutic as fecund for the profound task
of educating for faith and Christian discipleship. It builds on a premise that Christian
religious education is a privileged context for helping learners grow in discipleship by
exploring fundamental and interrelated questions of identity and ethical agency in the
context of a life story of faith, and in the context of the overarching narrative of God’s reign. Narrative religious education invites learners to attend responsibly and with agency
to this spatio-temporal context of their discipleship.

A major outcome of a narrative approach to religious education therefore is
discerning how to further God’s reign with agency, authenticity and responsibility.
Narrative religious education should not only renew critical reflection on the story of
God’s saving action in history; it ought also to encourage responsibility in Christ’s
mission of realizing this saving work through the action of the Holy Spirit. It aims at
renewed commitment to the establishment of the reign of God on earth, but also aims at
working to remove the obstacles to the growth of that reign.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Salvation in history is a major theme of liberation theology, particularly as enunciated by
(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993). See also Nancy Pineda-Madrid’s practical theological treatment of
the possibility of salvation in the context of suffering: Nancy Pineda-Madrid, \textit{Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez}

\textsuperscript{17} Liberation and political theologies have long argued that primary in this list of obstacles are the
injustices associated with poverty, oppression and discrimination.
Moreover, a narrative hermeneutic in education attends seriously to the historical situatedness of the learning community. It asks: How does education foster critical awareness of the particular moment in time and place in history in which learning takes place? How do we live authentically as followers of Christ in our time and this place, in which we are all witnesses to the triumphs of the human spirit as well as the darkness of suffering, poverty, oppression and discrimination? How does religious education promote accountability and responsibility to the memory and lived experience of the poor and oppressed, in keeping with the gospel vision? How do we perpetuate the healing and ennobling stories of faith, while recognizing the many destructive stories? Shall we also remember the forgotten stories, the lost stories and the voices of those whose stories have been silenced? Such discernment of the spatio-temporal context of faith is critical for a discipleship that is relevant and responsive to the demands of this age.

_A Conative Vision for Religious Education_

This is no easy task of discernment; it needs to engage our intellect and our will in the learning process, with hopes of growing in wisdom through critical reflection and active faith commitments. Perhaps Thomas Groome best characterizes this pedagogical vision as _conative_ for Christian faith. It is about the ‘be-ing’ and becoming of faith. In many ways, narrative religious education is about _forming and transforming_ learners in their own storied identity as disciples of Jesus Christ. Along with Groome I argue that, to

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18 The concept of _conation_ is central to Thomas Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis approach to religious education. He describes it as the “fundamental eros that moves us to realize our own “being” in relationship with others and the world,” through the exercise of our cognitive, volitional and affective powers (mind, will and emotions). By accentuating being in terms of relationality, Groome distinguishes his definition from the originating work of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) who defined conation as an impulse towards self-preservation. Thomas H. Groome, _Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis_, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 11.
undertake this task, narrative religious education must employ our full faculties of knowing - including mental knowledge (from the application of memory, reason and imagination), but also somatic knowledge born of one’s lived-discipleship and of the convictions or felt-sense that may attend the experience of discipleship.

Specifically, this dissertation will argue that a narrative hermeneutic can mold a conative pedagogy that aims at forming and transforming faith in at least three ways. *First, it draws attention to the storied world in which human life and moral agency unfold.* We are often unawares of the ways in which we are socialized; one of the tasks of narrative education is to name our sociocultural reality so as to bring it into critical focus. It also draws attention to the religious myths and traditions that establish the visions and norms for discipleship. As indicated before, it also recognizes that all stories hold the potential for delusion; it attends therefore to the many destructive stories handed down by religious tradition, culture and society. Finally, it brings to light as far as possible the forgotten stories, the lost stories and the voices of those whose stories have been silenced.

*Second, a narrative approach is concerned with engaging learners with the ways in which religious understanding and formation is mediated.* It mines the potential of storied experiences, biographies, practices and rituals to bring one’s social context and personal story into clarity, to engage the imagination, and thus to beckon to an alternative (or more substantial) vision of that context and story. The power of narrative mediation in the transformation of human understanding is a major theme of Paul Ricoeur’s narrative hermeneutics, and will be explored further in chapter two.

*Third, a narrative approach charges learners with the responsibility for crafting their own narratives* – for writing their own faith autobiographies, as well as for
developing and taking part in their own life-giving spiritual practices. In a word, narrative education fosters *story making* – it fosters intentionality, creativity and responsibility in one’s discipleship so as to incarnate anew the gospel story and vision through one’s life.\(^\text{19}\)

*The Road Ahead*

My strategy in this dissertation for elucidating this vision of narrative education will follow three lines of argument. First, I introduce a more expansive notion of narrativity than is currently en vogue in scholarship that privilege literary forms (oral or written texts) in pedagogy. To be sure, there are many impressive and effective curricula models in the literature, a number of which will be surveyed later in the chapter. However, a more holistic approach to narrativity invites a consideration of the interplay of thought, discourse and expressive action. Rather than limiting narrative to literary forms therefore, I broaden the set to include *lived narratives* - the practices and rituals of everyday life that embody meanings from life stories.

Second, I investigate how narratives function as mediators of meaning and self-understanding in conversation with Paul Ricoeur, whose hermeneutics of narrative is widely regarded as unsurpassed in its analytical depth and interdisciplinary applicability. Ricoeur almost exclusively focuses on the mediation of what he defines as the archetypal narrative form - literary text. By engaging the power of the reader’s productive imagination to appropriate the world of the text, these artifacts make possible new life meanings and renewed understandings of self. However, I extend Ricoeur’s model of narrative mediation beyond literary text to include the way that significant events, rituals,

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\(^{19}\) *Story, as used here, refers more than simply literary artifact. Rather, it is a person’s unique configuration of discipleship – the constellation of beliefs and practices that constitute a person’s faith identity, and through which the gospel story is received and incarnated anew.*
and exemplar life stories also mediate meaning and understanding in life. These deserve consideration because they populate the narrative ethos within which human life unfolds. Moreover, as narratives engage human imagination and memory, they also must engage critical reasoning skills in order to resist any tendencies towards ideological distortion.

These themes are worked out and defended in the first two chapters of the dissertation. The third major task, undertaken in chapters three and onwards, is to explore how such an expanded notion of narrativity can potentially influence the way in which we do religious education. I examine (in chapter three) scriptural warrants from Jesus’ own pedagogy as detailed in the gospels, particularly in the resurrection narrative of Luke 24:13-35, popularly known as the Road to Emmaus. I then propose that narrative education at its best is a form of narrative-historic praxis that engages learners’ agency and responsibility in furthering the reign of God (chapter four). In the fifth chapter, I outline how a narrative pedagogy for adult education – based on the concept of story-making – may be considered as fecund for Christian formation and discipleship in our time.

My revisiting of the theme of narrative in religious education is inspired by my original Caribbean context. Caribbean society emerged as Europeans, Africans, Indians and Chinese were brought together (forcibly in the case of the enslaved African majority) to serve early plantation economies. Born of a culture of displacement, a perennial existential task was that of identity-constitution. An examination of this rich legacy is warranted not merely for intellectual accountability, but also for drawing some important lessons for a conative approach to religious education. It is a case study in the narrative
world (ethos) of Caribbean society, wherein the lived stories of Caribbean nationals emerged as compelling counter-narratives to the coloniality of being instituted by plantation culture. This chapter proceeds with an outline (albeit necessarily brief) of this narrative world.

Next, I survey the ways in which narrative has been featured in the literature on narrative religious education, enquiring into the implications for a conative approach. I critique the overall direction of narrative models of religious education that in my opinion, under the influence of literary theory and linguistic philosophy, have focused too exclusively on the pedagogical potential of oral and written narratives - such as autobiography and oral storytelling. I close the chapter with a synopsis of the main themes to be developed in the rest of the dissertation.
Caribbean Inspirations: Narratives of Survival, Resistance and Possibility

For we are once again considering the possibility of creation: creation of new social realities, new stories to tell, and new selves to tell about them. What does it mean for human beings to be able to create all these new things? It means that in addition to being subjects in the sense of being subjected-to the determinative power of culture, we are subjects who have the power – in principle, if not always in practice – to recreate both culture itself and our place within it.

~Mark Freeman

Above all, what is new and has never yet been can only be introduced in narrative.

~Johann Baptist Metz

In the village of Jacmel, St Lucia shrouded by the verdures of the Roseau valley, is a small, culturally significant church. Adorning the wall to the rear of a modest altar is an arresting mural of the Holy Family, adorned with shades of blue, brown and green.

Fig 1.1

borrowed from the surrounding valley - a portal to a vision too easily forgotten in the travail of daily life.

The mural is painter Dunstan St. Omer’s re-creation of island commonplaces. In the top right corner, a conch-shell blower heralds the return of the fishermen from the day’s labor, while in the top left the chantwèl – village songstress – inspires festivity with her creole call-and-response song called the belair. Together, the conch-shell blower and the chantwèl occupy the stead of the angels of traditional religious iconography – heralding the presence of the sacred. The mural also includes a banana farmer, local musicians playing the chac-chac and drum, a painter, and a couple dancing.

The Madonna and child Jesus (with Eucharist) occupy the focal point, from which radiates color, vibrancy and life. Indeed, this coalescing of the sacred and profane embodies a sacramental vision of Caribbean life. It is a contextual vision of salvation history and of God’s reign in Caribbean history and society, which holds in tension the contingency and travail that has all too often defined Caribbean existence, with the hope and faith in the fullness of life made possible by the abundance of God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

The mural is an indispensable vision of Caribbean life as a counter-narrative to the denigrating judgments of colonialism. In the nineteenth century, novelist and historian James Anthony Froude (1887) wrote in his *The English in the West Indies*:

There has been no saint in the West Indies since Las Casas, no hero unless philonegro enthusiasm can make one out of Toussaint. There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own.\(^{21}\)

\(^{21}\) James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies: Or, the Bow of Ulysses* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1900), 347.
The Caribbean native, displaced by slavery from ancestral culture and myth, was deemed a non-entity on the world stage – a deficient derivative of venerable mother cultures. The Jacmel mural voices our collective riposte that detractors like Froude are surely wrong!

The islands emerged in the post-Columbus era as societies of displaced persons of European, African, Chinese and Indian origin, an existence that St Lucian Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott has described as “fragments of epic memory.” For much of the subsequent history, the preeminent challenge of life was arguably to draw a sense of identity from this fragmentary existence – answering the existential questions “Who am I?” “Who are we as a people?” “How do we live in this new place?” It was a challenge of legitimacy, largely in opposition to the hegemonic truth claims of the dominant European planter class that sought to define the identity and social role of all others as inferior.

Caribbean subjectivity was born out of the need for de-legitimatizing that dominant narrative, whilst asserting the dignity of a way of life that only gradually took shape as a creole hybrid of ancient cultures. Survival and flourishing in this context has been (and

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24 The struggle for identity has been a central theme for Caribbean philosophy, epitomized in the work of Martiniquan-born theorist Franz Fanon who identified the paradoxes borne of living as a black person in a world defined by white consciousness. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

25 The clash of narratives has been a dominant theme in the philosophy of Sylvia Wynter. She has drawn attention to the epistemology of human being – the ways in which self-knowledge is constituted through the symbolic network into which we are all socialized. She argues that underlying any social order are hegemonic narratives of what it means to be human. The task facing humanity is to look to the lives of the oppressed to galvanize a counter-imaginary of the status quo. Wynter however cautioned that even the narratives of the oppressed can become oppressive if they ever rise to become a dominant narrative. Hence,
still is) a creative act of resistance, coupled with an envisioning and actualizing of possibility amidst tragedy.  

This narrative of survival, creativity and possibility is not primarily to be read in historical archive, nor even in the work of the regional poet or novelist – it is ‘read’ in the lives of the people. Walcott sees it in:

the hard mahogany of woodcutters: faces, resinous men, charcoal burners; in a man with a cutlass cradled across his forearm, who stands on the verge with the usual anonymous khaki dog; in the extra clothes he put on this morning, when it was cold when he rose in the thinning dark to go and make his garden in the heights - the heights, the garden, being miles away from his house, but that is where he has his land - not to mention the fishermen, the footmen on trucks, groaning up mornes, all fragments of Africa originally but shaped and hardened and rooted now in the island's life, illiterate in the way leaves are illiterate; they do not read, they are there to be read, and if they are properly read, they create their own literature.  

These are stories of survival, travail, hope, tragedy, beauty and the human agency to engage the challenges of history and cultivate new life and community along a trajectory of hope. They are epiphanies of the everyday, to quote philosopher Richard Kearney, that open the sources of Caribbean theology beyond oral and literary archives to a


How this existential task is to be attained has been a major source of dispute in Caribbean philosophy. For a treatment of the poeticist and historicist streams in Caribbean philosophy see Paget Henry, Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2000).  

Walcott.  

consideration of the sacramentality of lived historical experience, and to a valuing of possibility and creativity as foundational metaphors.29

Lessons from a Legacy of Resistance

As a native of the region and religious educator, I am intellectually and spirituality inspired by its testimony. I recognize how religious education has both helped and thwarted this being-becoming of the Caribbean people. Indeed, a number of important lessons emerge concerning the role of religious education in the formation and transformation of human being.

First, the history of religious education in early colonial society is a perennial reminder of what educator Margaret Ann Crain deems the remarkable power of narratives to both liberate and oppress.30 In Caribbean slave society, the biblical narrative was often interpreted so as to serve the interests of the ruling planter class, by way of justifying slavery and undergirding a spirituality of docility and sub-servitude.31 The colonial


31 Slave plantation owners had total control over religious instruction on their estates, and attitudes to education varied widely. For instance, some planters prohibited all preaching and teaching of the slaves in fear that empowerment would lead to revolt. The following objection to religious instruction from the Governor of Martinique to the French Government (dated 11 April 1764) is illustrative of this attitude: “...to me religious instruction is an obligation enjoined upon us by the principles of religion, yet the public weal and the strongest considerations of social order are opposed to it. Religious instruction could give the Negroes here new vistas of knowledge, a kind of reason. The safety of the Whites, fewer in number, surrounded by these people on their estates and at their mercy, demands that they be kept in the profoundest ignorance.” Cited in F. R. Augier and Shirley C. Gordon, Sources of West Indian History (London: Longmans, 1962), 145-146. In contrast, other planters tolerated preaching, deeming it harmless, or as
church was largely established and maintained by missionaries who, in general, perceived their Christian duty as converting the local population to Christ through baptism and basic religious instruction. On the promptings of the planters, many interpreted the Christian story to the slaves as a message of spiritual (rather than actual) freedom and eternal reward. Accordingly, the slave could legitimately serve a temporal master as part of God’s will; what the gospel demanded was ethical righteousness in order to guarantee one’s eternal reward.

At the same time, in the hands of many slaves, the scriptures could inspire zeal for freedom and a conviction that slavery was immoral and against the divine order. This hermeneutic was powerfully manifested in the Jamaican Baptist War of December 1831 where a slave uprising of unprecedented scale, led by Baptist lay preacher Sam Sharpe (1801-1832), catalyzed the demise of the slave institution on the island.

The contrasting ways in which the biblical narrative has been interpreted in Caribbean faith history is a reminder that narratives are never neutral but, in their very telling and performance, offer a vision of life with ethical consequences. They require some form of adjudication over the validity of their truth claims. The ethical impulse of

“nugatory as if a man were to sow a field with horse-hair and expect a crop of colts.” Excerpt from the journal of a West Indian proprietor (1816) as quoted in Augier and Gordon, ibid.

Protestant leader Count von Zinzendorf is reported to have told slaves in St Thomas in 1739 “God punished the first negroes by making them slaves, and your conversion will make you free, not from the control of your masters, but simply from your wicked habits and thoughts, and all that makes you dissatisfied with your lot.” Quoted in John Holder, “Is This the Word of the Lord?: In Search of Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics, the Eastern Caribbean,” in Religion, Culture, and Tradition in the Caribbean, ed. Hemchand Gossai and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 122.

Phillip Sherlock quotes Mary Reckford in describing the role of scripture in motivating Sam Sharpe: “Sharpe was literate, intelligent and ambitious, and, like many of his kind, he found an outlet and a stimulant for his ambition in a mission church...From his own reading of the Bible he became convinced that slaves were entitled to freedom.” Sir Philip Manderson Sherlock, Shout for Freedom: A Tribute to Sam Sharpe (London: Macmillan, 1976), vii. Emphasis added.
narrativity is also true for lived narratives or for actions that embody a life view in their very doing. The practice of slavery, for instance, embodied and communicated the narrative of superiority peddled by the ruling planter class, while the discourses and actions of slave resistance supplied the counter narrative.\textsuperscript{34}

The second lesson to emerge from Caribbean history is that it illustrates how identity may be reshaped or re-storied within a narrative ethos. The systematic displacement of the slaves from ancestral lands and cultural heritage was deliberate; the African was divorced from the semiotic system comprising native culture, community and ecology, which gave meaning to life and anchored self-identity. Stripped of name, relationships, and other identity signifiers, the life of the African native could be reshaped by the practices and ideological hegemony of slavery. He/she became ‘a black slave’ (reduced simply to identification by skin color),\textsuperscript{35} and a commodity to be bought and sold in the slave market.\textsuperscript{36} Moreover, desperate for humanizing narratives, the slaves could readily be converted to Christianity by European missionaries. Now, they were no longer

\textsuperscript{34} James Scott has done much to bring to light the many forms of resistance practices by the oppressed, including such everyday practices as foot-dragging, dissimulation, feigned compliance, and sabotage. See James C. Scott, \textit{Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). See also his work on the significance of public discourse and hidden transcripts in relations between the powerless and powerful: James C. Scott, \textit{Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

\textsuperscript{35} Willie James Jennings traces the impact on slave identity from being removed by one’s native land. He writes “The central effect of the loss of the earth as an identity signifier was that native identities, tribal, communal, familial, and spatial, \textit{were constricted to simply their bodies}, leaving behind the very ground that enables and facilitates the articulation of identity.” Willie James Jennings, \textit{The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 43.

\textsuperscript{36} The epitome of the dehumanizing effect of displacement was the slave market (a far contrast from the life-giving peasant markets that emerged in later Caribbean society). For an evocative critique of the slave market and the commodification of the human being, see Walter Johnson, \textit{Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).
simply black slaves; they were *black Christian slaves* with attendant ethical responsibilities that served to preserve the “master” culture.

In this emerging space, the newly formed Caribbean people were challenged to re-imagine and re-story a displaced identity. Toni Morrison provides a poignant metaphor for this recovery of identity in her image of ‘the Clearing,’ into which matriarch Baby Suggs, “holy,” leads her slave community. “In this here place,” says Baby Suggs, “we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in the grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh.”\(^37\) To ‘flesh’ is to regain one’s humanity as creative, embodied, cultural beings. It is what the fishermen, farmers, dancers and musicians are doing in St Omer’s mural. It is to re-imagine and recover a sense of being at home in one’s own skin, of belonging in a new land, of building new memories, and of possessing a new destiny through the daily practices of life.\(^38\)

There are clear narrative and conative resonances in this picture. The challenge of identity formation in Caribbean history has been one of establishing relations in space (building a new home, industry, life style) and time (creating memories and a new vision for life). Normative sources were recognized in biblical stories and in the traditions of the various cultures that comprised the pastiche of the West Indian cultural landscape. This


\(^38\) The validation of the witness of daily, lived narratives is a recurring theme in this dissertation, and is why Derek Walcott understands Caribbean lives as primordial text to be read and interpreted for the practical wisdom they embody. Long before the Caribbean story was captured by the pen, it was composed with blood, sweat and tears. There are interesting parallels to U.S. Hispanic theology here, which has repeatedly claimed the ordinary, everyday experience of Latino/a people (*lo cotidiano*) as a foundational source of theology. For further consideration of this theme, see Orlando O. Espin, "Grace and Humaness: A Hispanic Perspective," in *We Are a People!: Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology*, ed. Roberto S. Goizueta (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).
narrative ethos or space of the West Indies admittedly changed dramatically over colonial history, but arguably it was always constituted by the confluence of the following:

1. Narratives at the communal level (including religious and secular narratives), which socialized Caribbean residents to the ethical and social norms of colonial life
2. Personal life stories of tragedy and triumph, displacement and resettling, death and life, darkness and hope; stories of faith and cultural exemplars
3. The daily actions, practices and discourses that embodied the life stories of people (such as the opportunities to dance, sing, worship, cultivate the land)

These converge to co-constitute the narrative space in which everyday life evolved, and within which Caribbean identity – as a storied identity – emerged.  

The concept of narrative ethos and its proposed constituents will be further elaborated in the next chapter. However, the previous anecdotal treatment has hopefully indicated some parameters that a narrative religious education, which is conative of a life-giving faith, would have to take into consideration.

**Contemporary Narrative Approaches to Religious Education**

The use of story in religious education is as old as the biblical tradition itself. The Hebrew scriptures, for instance, are records of the events surrounding God’s fidelity in forming, saving and sustaining the people of Israel, and are used in handing down that

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39 A narrative ethos is complex and the constituents may or may not be mutually reinforcing. Certainly the practice of slavery reinforced life stories of subservience, and was legitimized by colonial racial ideology. However, the life witness of revolutionaries like Toussaint L’ouverture and Sam Sharpe, as well as their subversive actions and discourses, would have countered the dominant racial ideologies of the time. Both ideology and utopia – concepts that have been elucidated by Paul Ricoeur, and that will be considered in chapter two – are dynamics of a narrative ethos.
sacred legacy. The Torah itself, far from being a system of laws and codes, is also an overarching story of God’s salvific actions on behalf of God’s people, recounted in summary at each Passover meal.

Christian tradition tells us that Jesus taught using parables and stories, but also using what Joachim Jeremias refers to as *parabolic actions* – practices (such as table ministry and healing) that overturned the narrative world of the time. Later, the early church would have followed suit, communicating the gospel in storied word and deed. The church fathers and mothers would also have used stories in their teaching ministry, exemplified by St Augustine’s admonition in *De Catechizandis Rudibus* that those uninstructed in the faith be exposed to the “full narration” of the gospel, from the creation story to the present time of the church, in a way that inspired enthusiasm, intrigue and the desire to embrace the story in one’s life.\(^4^0\) The persistence of narrative pedagogies testifies, as educator Susan Shaw reminds, to the perennial power of stories to “touch, challenge, and change learners on affective and behavioral levels.”\(^4^1\)

Recent models of narrative education have recommitted to this strategic vision in the wake of the didactic catechism-based models of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The new interest in narrative mirrored an upsurge in scholarship on the methodological and conceptual importance of narrative for theology – established initially in the work of Hans Frei and H.R. Niebuhr.\(^4^2\) This literature review draws on the


\(^4^1\) Susan M. Shaw, *Storytelling in Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1999), x.

boon of scholarship that followed these pioneering efforts. It is by no means exhaustive of scholarship on narrative and curriculum design, but hopefully is indicative of the present state of the field.\textsuperscript{43}

Probably a worthy place to start is with Frank Rogers’ typology of narrative models, delineated in a recent book \textit{Finding God in the Graffiti: Empowering Teenagers through Stories}.\textsuperscript{44} Rogers describes six types of narrative pedagogy, differentiated by their fundamental goal or purpose. His classification is not meant to be precise, as is the case with most typologies. He admits that blending of the various types is inevitable and indeed recommended in any narrative curriculum.

Rogers first identifies pedagogies that teach for \textit{religious literacy} with regard to the stories that hold the truth claims of a given faith community. This also includes teaching so that the community can discern the ethical import of these stories, and internalize their meanings in personal action. Second, many narrative pedagogies educate for \textit{personal identity}, wherein “teens reimagine their personal life stories through the interpretive lenses of cultural or religious narratives that promise to be both meaningful


\textsuperscript{44} Frank Rogers, \textit{Finding God in the Graffiti: Empowering Teenagers through Stories}, Youth Ministry Alternatives (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2011).
and liberative.\footnote{Ibid., 18.} Third, are narrative pedagogies that aim at mediating the presence of God through a “profound indwelling of a story.”\footnote{Ibid.} These methodologies teach for contemplative encounter. Next, are pedagogies concerned with cultivating critical reflection skills, including the ability to discern destructive life narratives and their founding presuppositions. Fifth, many narrative pedagogies edify the human spirit by nurturing creative vitality. Finally, narrative pedagogies can use any and all of the above skills in teaching for social empowerment, or for the ability, responsibility and commitment to pursue social change.

All six of these goals are profoundly important for a conative curriculum. In fact, because narrative models are often structured on a hermeneutic that deems stories to be the primary vehicle for meaning and self-understanding, they tend towards educative goals like identity formation and transformation. As Susan Shaw reminds “stories invite learners into a realm of possibility in which they may learn new ways of being faithful people in the world.”\footnote{Shaw, xi.} The emphasis of much of the literature is on the formative power of narratives, whether regarding the power of stories to cultivate an appreciation for the mythical dimensions of life,\footnote{Theodore Brelsford, “A Mythical Realist Orientation for Religious Education: Theological and Pedagogical Implications of the Mythical Nature of Religious Story,” Religious Education 102, no. 3 (2007).} or about the power of stories to oppress and liberate,\footnote{Crain: 245.} or about the responsibility of the storyteller as the steward of a narrative heritage.\footnote{Terence Copley, “The Power of the Storyteller in Religious Education,” Religious Education 102, no. 3 (2007).}
It may therefore prove more helpful to distinguish according to the narrative forms that the literature proposes for consideration in curriculum. It is readily apparent that the vast majority of studies concentrate on literary narrative tools: autobiography, storytelling and written stories. There are indeed some fine examples of scholarship here, bearing much promise for practitioners on the ground. However, the considerable focus on literary genre begs the question as to whether narrative educators have mined fully the way narrative functions in life and faith. How would our approaches look differently if we considered narrative more as a meaning-making schema than as unique to a particular cultural artifact?

A noteworthy example of a holistic conceptualization of narrative is Thomas Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis Approach, which fosters critical awareness and dialogue between personal life story and vision with the Story and Vision of the Christian tradition, in the context of a faith community, so as to promote responsible agency and discipleship. This dialectic is neatly summed as a movement of bringing life to faith and faith to life. What is instructive for the argument being developed here is that Groome defines ‘Story’ to symbolize “the whole historical reality and spiritual wisdom of Christian revelation.” He unpacks this in his early work *Christian Religious Education* as follows:

By Christian Story I mean the whole faith tradition of our people however that is expressed or embodied. As our people have made their pilgrimage through history, God has been active in their lives (as God is active in the lives of all peoples). They, in turn, have attempted to respond to God’s

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51 Groome uses the capitalization to distinguish the overarching metanarrative of the Christian Story and Vision from its particular embodiments in personal story and vision.

actions and invitations. From this covenanted relationship there have emerged particular roles and expected life styles, written scriptures, interpretations, pious practices, sacraments, symbols, rituals, feast days, communal structures, artifacts, “holy” places, and so on. All of these embody, express, or re-create some part of the history of that covenant. The term *Story* is intended as a metaphor for all such expressions of our faith tradition as they are all part of our Christian Story.\(^{53}\)

Such a broad conception of story is atypical among current narrative approaches. Autobiographical approaches, for instance, may use various configurations in an effort to lead learners in critical reflection on their life stories in the light of scriptural narratives. These approaches may pursue any combination of Rogers’ six goals of narrative education. An influential and evocative example is Anne Streaty-Wimberly’s work in African-American religious education.\(^{54}\) Her book, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* seeks to help learners reflect critically on their life stories in the light of the Christian faith heritage. Streaty-Wimberly develops a model of *story-linking*, in which participants creatively and sequentially engage three primary sources:

1. The stories of their daily life.
2. The biblical story of creation and redemption

The insertion of the stories of faith exemplars is noteworthy as it signals a broad conceptualization of the narrative space in which African Americans live. The curricula objective is to form a practical wisdom that inspires action towards liberation.

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Other autobiographical approaches include Cindy Kissel-Ito’s application of curriculum theorist William Pinar’s model of *currere* (the infinitive form of curriculum), which emphasizes educating for critical reflection skills and transformation.\(^{55}\) *Currere* focuses on “the experiences of the teacher/learner and their reflection and articulation of these experiences.”\(^{56}\) Using data from autobiographical reflection on a learning experience, Kissel Ito itemizes four steps in the process:

1. A regressive step of honest remembering of what happened during an educational experience.

2. A progressive step of imagining possible futures by way of proposing core themes for discussion, or through “stylistic experimentation” in which participants step away from present to re-imagine possibilities for different learning outcomes.

3. An analytical step of critical self-examination of past and present praxis in light of the possible futures.

4. A synthetical step of recommitting to present praxis in light of this newly obtained knowledge.

The model of *currere* hopes to achieve transformed pedagogical practice by exploring connections between academic knowledge, personal faith experience and social and ecclesial context.

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\(^{56}\) Kissel-Ito: 340.
In an interesting study, Fernando Cascante-Gomez argues for the use of “countercultural autobiographies, particularly in educating for justice.” He contrasts his approach with three popular uses of autobiography (educational, existential and cultural) that focus primarily on forming self-knowledge, awareness, and identity. Lamenting the lack of approaches with explicit justice-related goals, he advocates using personal and communal biographies of marginalized groups to foster a critical awareness – or “praxical empathy” – of structural inequalities and of the need for structural change. However, his study seems limited in that it appears to target an audience for whom such biographies would be novel, without exploring how social justice education would look in marginalized communities themselves.

These studies highlight the significance of biographical narratives in forming disciples. The strength of the approach is that oral and written life stories can be imaginatively engaged by learners to draw out lessons for application to their own lives. However, missing from the discussion on the power of life story is any consideration of the potential of personal encounters and relationships particularly with faith exemplars. The growing popularity of immersion programs in school and church ministries signals recognition of the power of lived narratives for faith education.

**Using Storytelling in Religious Education**

Besides biographical approaches, the other important narrative tool used in religious education is the art of storytelling. These include oral storytelling and written

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narratives, but it also extends to the impact of non-traditional media such as blogging on personal storytelling.\(^5^9\) In a particularly thought-provoking study, Russell Dalton’s focuses on the deleterious rewriting of children’s bible stories in the United States over the course of the last century, to eliminate “their built-in gaps and ambiguities, their multivalent nature, and their examples of fallible people in the face of God’s grace,”\(^6^0\) all of which he deems essential resources for religious education.

In contrast to Dalton’s emphasis on sanitized biblical narrative, Hosffman Ospino engages in a hermeneutical analysis of popular religiosity narratives, such as the stories of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe.\(^6^1\) He points to the narratives of everyday life (lo cotidiano) as a foundational source for U.S. Latino/a theology. In this realm, popular religious narratives emerge significantly as interpretations of religious experience, articulations of personal meaning, and insights into the divine and human interplay in everyday life. Ospino reminds “it is with the instruments of the everyday” that religious experience is articulated, using such media as “popular imagery, words, expressions, metaphors, biases, ideas, social structures, limitations and convictions

\(^{59}\) Dean G. Blevins, "Story Telling or Storied Telling? Media’s Pedagogical Ability to Share Narrative in the Form of "Knowing"," Religious Education 102, no. 3 (2007).


normally born in everyday experience." He then offers pedagogical strategies for the use of popular narratives in religious education classrooms.

**Issues with Contemporary Approaches**

In a recent essay published in the Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology, R. Ruard Ganzevoort critiques narrative approaches as running “the risk of becoming too cerebral, verbal, and cognitive.” Instead he advocates for a broader understanding that includes “rituals, practices and physical and emotional movements.” Paralleling Ganzevoort’s critique, I contend there is more involved in narrative that may supplement our current corpus of approaches.

The bias of narrative approaches towards literary genres of narrativity is symptomatic of a much more broadly based partisanship. Religious education has been a late arrival to a boon in narrative research that has issued from the human sciences, most significantly from literary theory, but also from philosophy and psychology. Research on narrative has skewed to its archetypal form of literary (or discursive) narrative, largely under the influence of literary theory, even though disciplines such as psychology have long attested to other forms of (pre-linguistic) narrative embodiments such as life story. Compounding this situation has been the recent linguistic turn in philosophy (partly issuing from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure) whose bias has become so pervasive as

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62 Ibid., 331.


64 Ibid.
to be characterized by Calvin Schrag as a “linguistic-epistemological dogmatism,” and an “excessive and self-limiting preoccupation with discourse and discursive practices.”

However, in following the conceptual patterning of these other disciplines, narrative approaches to religious education have departed from their own ancient roots. For, before the gospel stories were crafted as text, there were originating events and actions from the life of Jesus and his disciples that embodied the story of salvation. Before the gospel story was written and told, it was lived! Moreover, the early church carried on the work of Jesus through its ministries of the word, sacrament and service. Religious understanding was made possible by participating in this inextricable nexus.

Two consequences of the bifurcation of narrative expression and the privileging of discursive (literary) over non-discursive (actions) forms are notable:

1. Such action limits the rich potential of narrative approaches to educating for conation in discipleship. In general, human beings acquire a sense of self and purpose not only through the mediation of text, but also by immersing in the action and ritual traditions – the lived, embodied narratives – of the communities to which they belong. As Groome points out, conation isn’t pursued simply by engaging the cognitive faculties – the affective and volitional faculties must also be employed. Educating for conation is a whole-body affair. Greater attention within the curriculum to the variegated texture of narrativity, especially its non-discursive modes – actions, practices, rituals

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66 For the ways in which Christian education communicates the gospel as story, see Donald E. Miller, *Story and Context: An Introduction to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987).

– is necessary for a holistic approach to forming persons in the practice of discipleship.  

2. Meaning and religious understanding may too easily be reduced to the province of mental cognition. Any meaning realized in the course of expressive action is then overlooked. As a consequence, action is often treated as a telos of reflection, rather than as a primary form of narrative expression and interpretation with its own unique claims to knowledge and meaning. Narrative curricula are consequently linked to cognition-based transformative learning approaches to adult education that unfold via a reflection-following-experience model or an action-following-reflection model.

Opening up narrative tools to include action and practices mines the benefits from a different philosophy of education based on learning-during-experience and warrants a consideration of felt meanings, and non-cognitive, somatic epistemologies. These issues will be further considered in chapter five.

As such, narrative approaches need reconstituting based on a more holistic conception of narrativity. As phenomena of human communication, they come to expression in discursive forms (speaking, writing, and language) and in non-discursive action, with no primacy given to either vehicle. Rather, drawing on Calvin Schrag, it may

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68 Maria Harris’ typology of curricula forms comprising koinonia (curriculum of community), leiturgia (curriculum of prayer), didache (curriculum of teaching), kerygma (curriculum of proclamation), diaconia (curriculum of service) is indicative of the multiplicity of strategies by which the church community educates for discipleship. Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).


be said that discursive and non-discursive forms interplay to populate or provide texture to the narrative ethos within which meaning and identity may unfold.

Chapter two will provide a more thorough examination of how this narrative ethos is textured by different codifications of discursive and non-discursive narratives. For now, an overview of the major themes to be developed from this point on may prove helpful.

**Core Themes of a Transformative Approach to Narrative Education**

The holistic approach to narrative religious education being proposed in this dissertation will henceforth be argued by way of the following major themes:

1. I first describe the narrative ethos (or space or world) within which identity and ethical agency unfolds. Communal tradition, life story and daily practices converge to establish this narrative world of meaning. As such, narrativity transcends literary artifact. Rather, it is textured by the interplay of thought, language (oral and written) and action that are the media in which communal story, life story, and lived narratives (action) are communicated.

2. Narrative curricula engage the learner as historically situated and determined by this narrative world. It explores not only the learner’s sense of identity as expressed in life story, but also encourages a critical dialogue with the narratives of faith, culture and tradition in which he/she is immersed. Moreover, narrative curricula afford the opportunity for participation in formative spiritual practices
(as lived narratives). Transformative learning develops through the interplay of such critical dialogue and practice.\textsuperscript{71}

3. Luke’s account of the journey to Emmaus serves as a pedagogical archetype for narrative education. At stake in the encounter on the road was the recognition of the risen Jesus. The two disciples were led to this fuller and richer understanding of the reign of God by the narrative encounters in word (the opening of the scriptures) and action (the breaking of the bread in hospitality).

4. Transformative learning is prompted by the narrative encounter, described in chapter five in terms of an interplay between two (or more) narrative fields of meaning - such as one’s life story (the world of the reader) and the biblical narrative (the world of the text).\textsuperscript{72}

5. New meaning and new possibilities emerge from the narrative encounter. Jesus’ use - for instance - of parables of the reign of God were meant to disrupt the established narrative ethos of his hearers, enabling the birth of radical new understandings and new ways of life. Such encounters make possible the eruption of new possibilities into the itinerary of life.

\textsuperscript{71} Admittedly, the role of prayer in forming disciples is missing in this model. As all models are inevitably abstractions of reality according to David Tracy, I hope the omission does not take away from the viability of the approach. It also signals areas for developing the argument in terms of the relationship narrative, education and prayer.

6. I develop an anthropological vision (chapter 4) that human beings are capable of imagining, intending and co-constituting a storied-sacred world that is life-giving for all. Also, human beings are capable of responding to God’s preeminent gift of self with a lived and storied “yes!” This storied yes to God is characterized by a narrative historicism, which engenders social praxis as poetic-historical action borne of an appreciation for our historical agency and for the connectedness of all humanity – past, present and future.

7. In the more holistic sense of narrativity being developed here, narrative religious education is about story-making, which invokes our narrative meaning-making competencies to imagine and constitute Christian praxis that is generative of responsibility and agency to further the great Story of the unfolding of God’s reign in history. Story-making is narrative historic praxis.

8. A story-making approach to religious education that is transformative for a lived faith inspires the narrative encounters that help learners further God’s reign in the here and now - plunging deeply and responsibly into the dailiness of life while confessing a transcending and hope-filled vision of redemption.

9. The Caribbean faith legacy concerns the event of a narrative historic agency in the face of tragedy and travail. The prosaic scenes of island life immortalized in the interpretative art of Dunstan St. Omer and the poetry of Derek Walcott are perennial and universal reminders of the workings of grace as human beings seek to foster more authentic relations across space and time. The same partnership
with grace is invited for transformative discipleship in postmodern cultures of individualism and displacement.
CHAPTER 2

THE TEXTURE OF NARRATIVITY

Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.

Alisdair MacIntyre

Introduction

What do we mean when we speak of narrative religious education? In the previous chapter, I pointed to the predominance of biographical and storytelling approaches in the literature. Narrative religious education seems to be distinguished by the narrative form of the pedagogical resources more than anything else. I offered that this use of narrative seems limited, given the ubiquitous and pluriform texture of the phenomena in everyday experience. Indeed, narrativity better references a distinct competency at forming meaningful connections among events, situations, causes, goals and other phenomena in life. This competency makes possible the composition of literary narratives, but it also underlies our ability to construct an identity based on a sense of life story. In addition, I posited the more holistic image of a narrative ethos – the storied world

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in which we live that provides an interpretive vision of life as a meaningful whole, a vision embodied in meaningful or expressive action.

In light of this more holistic understanding, narrative religious education is as much defined by the overall texture of the narrative context within which it is undertaken, as by the narrative resources at its disposable. It interprets the process of faith formation as a maturing of discipleship in the context of a narrative vision of life that spans both temporal and spatial horizons. I offered that the reign of God is an example of such a vision. Narrative religious education aims at responsibility and agency in furthering God’s reign in history and society.

This chapter advances the argument for a holistic narrative approach by way of the following: 1) it elaborates on the concept of narrative ethos with a proposal of its constitutive elements, and 2) it outlines the dynamics of interpretation by which the narrative ethos mediates meaning and self-understanding, and provides the contours for ethical action. This latter objective is pursued in critical conversation with Paul Ricoeur’s narrative hermeneutics, widely regarded as the most influential and well-developed philosophy of narrative in contemporary scholarship. The chapter closes with an initial discussion on the implications of this narrative interpretive framework for religious education curriculum design. I reserve the fuller discussion of such implications for the final chapter.
An Anecdote: The Life Witness of Carl Brashear

There is much to be learned from the life story of the late Carl Brashear. The U.S. Navy’s first black master deep-sea diver and first amputee diver, Brashear knew personally the dynamics of struggle and triumph. A sharecropper’s son, born in 1931 in Tonieville, Kentucky, he joined the Navy in 1948, applying six years later to the salvage diving school, with visions of rising to the heights of a diving career despite the tremendous racial prejudices of the era. The U.S. Navy diving program had never had a black diver in its then one hundred-year history. Tested by such a storied tradition, Brashear prevailed to earn the elusive qualification of master diver in 1970. All this he achieved despite having to re-qualify for active duty after losing his left leg in 1966 to a freak accident while on duty.

Carl Brashear’s provocative biography serves as a reminder that narrativity involves so much more than reading or telling formative stories. While it was not about religious education, this story illustrates the complexity of the narrative world of which learners are a part. To understand the scope of narratives in religious education simply as that of engaging the normative stories of faith, or of reflecting on autobiographies, or even of creative writing, is to truncate narrative’s fecundity, both in providing a philosophy of religious education and in tailoring a conative pedagogy. Brashear’s legacy illustrates that narrative encompasses so much more than literary or oral media. Before being immortalized in film, his life story was a lived story. It framed his practice of Navy diving with the meanings acquired from all the past experiences that connect in a personal life story. Moreover, the formative witness of his family to such virtues of

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2 This outline of Brashear’s Story is inspired by his biography on the website http://carlbrashear.org, the 2000 biographical film entitled Men of Honor, as well as data from the Naval Historical Center’s website: http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq105-1.htm.
determination, persistence and hard work – his family traditions – would have shaped his overall sense of character and the virtues he brought to the practice of diving. It would therefore have served in constituting the narrative context for his life.

On another level, Brashear’s biography also highlights how narratives can be thoroughly oppressive, and in need of rejection. His life and career countered the dominant narratives of the racialized ethos, including the actions and discourses that demarcated sociocultural privilege and roles based on the color of one’s skin. His story portrayed just how entrenched was racism and white privilege in his sociocultural world, as well the strength that it took to mount an effective counter-narrative to this culture, through his actions and, ultimately, through his life story. What we witness in Brashear’s story is an encounter between a life narrative and a dominant sociocultural narrative, wherein the former may be interpreted as a ‘living parable’ that invites a re-imagining and questioning of the prevailing social order.³

More will be written on the dynamics of a narrative encounter as chapter five explores the theoretical basis of a narrative approach to faith formation. Suffice it to say at this point that Brashear’s biography highlights how essential it is to encourage learners to reflect critically on the narrative ethos that surround them, and into which they are socialized. Otherwise, persons can easily (and even perpetually) find themselves bound by destructive narratives.

³ The same can be said of Jesus’ life and ministry as being polemic to the dominant religious narratives of his time. This theme shall be elaborated in chapter three.
A Model of Narrative Ethos

Brashear’s biography is illustrative of what I have been calling a narrative ethos, which references the communicative space within which the ethical life unfolds. It consists of the cultural heritage of stories, norms, beliefs, traditions, discourses and practices which constitute the symbolic world into which a person is socialized – regardless of whether they may or may not be aware of this influence – and which is shaped and perpetuated in personal action, discourse and, ultimately, in a person’s life story. A narrative ethos defines human being in its historical and spatial situatedness, pervades it with the sense of being part of a larger human and planetary story, and shapes the discernment of what such spatio-temporal relationships demand. In chapter one, I described the culture of individualism in the United States as a current example of a narrative ethos. Later, I shall offer that the reign of God be considered as a narrative ethos of paramount significance for discerning the shape of discipleship. Brashear’s story adds an important qualification: it illustrates that persons are not powerless against socializing influences, and have agency and responsibility to further, or to transform, or even to disrupt these metanarratives through their own life and practices.

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4 I borrow from Calvin Schrag’s thesis on the space of communicative praxis in my use of the term ethos. Schrag describes it as “an integument of attitudes, social practices, and cultural memories” within which moral deliberation and ethical judgment take place. See Calvin O. Schrag, Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 208. It is the virtual space constituted by the network of communal norms and traditions, personal and communal memories, visions, rituals, practices and experiences that constitutes the psychological arena for discerning between authentic and non-authentic, conventional and non-conventional, fitting and non-fitting social action. Schrag argues that ancient Greek ethics revolved around an understanding of ethos long before formal theories of ethics emerged in Western thought. For a succinct treatment, see Calvin O. Schrag, "Interpretation, Narrative, and Rationality," Research in Phenomenology 21, no. 1 (1991): 112.
I model narrative ethos, therefore, as an interaction of three dimensions of human existence: 1) cultural heritage; 2) life story; and 3) personal, expressive action and discourse.

*The First Dimension of a Narrative Ethos: Cultural Heritage*

Drawing on Clifford Geertz’s influential definition of culture, I define cultural heritage as *an “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols” which advances communal memory, wisdom and vision for life and the commonweal.* I tag the term ‘heritage’ to ‘culture’ not to reference a stock of knowledge or tradition that is passed down from generation to generation; rather, heritage emphasizes the historical or diachronic aspect of culture. As Geertz has shown, culture is the coalescing of meaning patterns in a community’s way of life – patterns that may evolve (or disintegrate) over time. The idea behind the term cultural heritage is to situate life along its proper temporal (and spatial) continuum. It also highlights the narrative quality of a person’s involvement in culture, and of being part of an ongoing and dynamic story of community that is embodied in symbol and tradition.

This dimension of narrative ethos extends to symbol systems of religious, familial, social and civic communities, as well as to the traditions they nurture. All of these are relevant for religious education since they interface to establish the sociocultural

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5 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89. Geertz’s full definition of culture bears mentioning. “It denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [human beings] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.”

6 Alasdair MacIntyre has reminded of the narrative shape of communal tradition. Living traditions, he claims, continue a ‘not-yet-completed narrative.’ See MacIntyre, 223.
world of the learner. Critical reflection on this world ought therefore to include the manner in which these different arenas cooperate (or clash) as persons discern their unique agency. It should also be recognized that some communities might emerge as more personally significant than others. For example, despite recent trends towards the increasing secularization of social life, religious communities and family are still generally considered as foundational and originative of the essential norms, values and worldviews necessary for the flourishing of any society. A narrative ethos accounts for such hierarchical interplay in personal meaning systems.

It is important to state that I recognize cultural heritage as only one element of the narrative ethos. It seems natural to identify it with the whole of the ethos, since culture is the symbolic universe into which one is socialized. But the storied world in which human beings live is much more integrated; it also involves a person’s life story and its interplay with cultural norms, which plays out in personal action, practices and discourses. Going back to the previous anecdote, Carl Brashear’s narrative world was the complex interplay between dominant sociocultural narratives and what he stood for in his own life – an interplay embodied in his life practice of diving.

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7 Of course, religious education by nature privileges the hermeneutic of faith cultures, but this privileging should always be open to the critique of the wisdom of the ‘secular’ cultural systems. For instance, the negative religious rhetoric of slave systems needed, among other things, the counter narratives of ennobling and vivifying slave social practices like dancing, singing, cultivating, and market trading.

8 This discussion reminds of Kathryn Tanner’s insightful critique of traditional notions of culture, in which she theorized about the complex and interwoven nature of human cultural systems. Culture, she claims, is seldom the universal, static, internally consistent entity commonly portrayed by popular discourse. A postmodern anthropological critique reveals that, in practice, cultures are more often than not historically dynamic, and occasioned by internal conflict. See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). Tanner’s work reaffirms the plurivocality of the narrative ethos and that, ultimately, adjudication between the validity claims of the various cultural narratives is essential in the discernment of responsible human agency in the context of the religious education.
The Second Dimension of a Narrative Ethos: Life Story

The second dimension of a narrative ethos, therefore, is that of life story, which connects the events and experience of life, ideally bestowing coherence and meaning to the past, while framing a vision for the future. As narrative theorist Donald Polkinghorne argues, life stories take shape thanks to a primal psychological impulse (or scheme) by which human beings render daily existence meaningful and livable. They do not need to be documented as official biography to be present and functioning. They may also work subconsciously; a person’s life story need not be ever in mind to be determinative of behavior.

This does not mean however that life stories can’t be revised or that they don’t warrant critical reflection. Because life stories are meaningful interpretations of past events and future aspirations, they are open to introspection and critical revision. This, indeed, is the domain of narrative therapy. As far as warranting critical reflection is concerned, life stories reflect the socializing influences of the cultural systems that were mentioned above. A person bears the imprint of family, religion, and civic society largely through participation in the traditions and symbols of these cultural systems. A

9 Numerous authors (across disciplines) have describe life story in terms of bridging the past and future, but I have been most influenced by the work of Stephen Crites, one of the early and most influential theorists of the narrative shape of experience. See Stephen Crites, "Storytime: Recollecting the Past and Projecting the Future," in Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct, ed. Theodore R. Sarbin (New York: Praeger, 1986).


12 It is important to note that life stories of heroes and exemplars may also help to give shape and establish the same cultural systems. Christian culture and tradition is a product of the life, death and resurrection of the historical Jesus, as well as of the numerous exemplars of faith in history.
person may live largely unawares of these influences, whereby critical reflection is needed to jolt awareness to alternative possibilities in life. Chapter three will describe how the practice of table fellowship in the ancient Mediterranean world established and solidified the culture of honor and shame and class hierarchy that determined the self-identity of inhabitants. Jesus’ critical reimagining of this practice was instrumental in his ministry of teaching about the reign of God, and of reforming the lives of his disciples.  

Again, one lesson for religious education is that it ought to help learners critically reflect on their lives using faculties of memory, reason and imagination, especially in light of the fact that life stories may indeed be very destructive, or perpetuate dehumanizing elements of cultural heritage.

*The Third Dimension of a Narrative Ethos: Expressive Action and Discourse*

The final pole of a narrative ethos identifies the *personally expressive actions and discourses* of daily life. However, for the sake of clarity, two essential points must be made. First, the term “action” encompasses human actions as traditionally conceived in terms of purposeful, bodily motility. Human discourse may also be considered as a form of action – or more accurately, as a *speech act* – highlighting the expressive quality of discourse. I treat the two – action and discourse – as separate so as to leave open the interplay between them in human communication. It leaves open for consideration the

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13 This example illustrates that critical reflection need not only involve the use of reason, but also extends to the imagination and memory as well. This theme will be returned to later in the chapter and also as I discuss the pedagogical implications of this description of narrative.

14 Following Calvin Schrag’s theory of communicative praxis, I focus on the *expressive* or *meaningful* dimensions of action and discourse so as to highlight their communicative dimensions, or their ability to express personal intention and meanings, or communal intentions and meanings (as in the case of ritual action and myth). It is this intentional dimension of action (or practice), which makes it a basic unit Alasdair MacIntyre’s narrative schema.
fact that a person’s actions may often be inconsistent (or express contradictory meanings) with their words. Second, personal involvement in action is being highlighted here, even if such action takes place in community (as in participation in communal ritual). The emphasis is on personal involvement and on the understood meanings behind their action and discourse. Third, the term ‘expressive action’ is also necessarily broad. These may be simple or complex (as in the complexity of a life practice). They may also be peripheral to the life of a community, or constitutive of what a society or community deems as necessary and normative.

As such, the third dimension of a narrative ethos deals with the set of actions and discourses by which a person expresses and constitutes personal intentions and meaning, or takes part in the enactment of communal intentions and meanings. These actions and discourses may reflect a person’s life story and/or the cultural heritage; but they may also be inconsistent with life story and polemic to cultural heritage. Emphasis is placed more on the interplay between the three dimensions of a narrative ethos, than on whether or not they synchronize. In fact, the recognition of inconsistency between cultural heritage, life story, personal action and personal discourse may provide the needed incentive for transformation in any of these realms.

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A Visual Representation of Narrative Ethos

These three dimensions of existence – cultural heritage, life story and realm of personally expressive action and discourse – coalesce to establish the ethos within which ethical life and decision-making unfold.\(^{16}\) A simple graphical illustration is as follows:

![Graphical Illustration](image)

Fig.2.1\(^{17}\)

To reiterate, this is also a narrative framework. A community’s story is lived through its cultural heritage, which maps the temporal development in the symbols, myths, wisdom, and practices that the community deems to be sacred, foundational or normative. Tradition, in itself, constitutes a type of temporal ethos whereby members of a community may situate themselves within the historical trajectory of a community’s self-understanding.\(^{18}\) Furthermore, personal life stories are interwoven with the story and

\(^{16}\) Readers may recognize in this tripartite model strong influences from Alasdair MacIntyre’s work in *After Virtue*. MacIntyre uses this framework to redefine the concept of virtue in terms of its constitutive role in tradition, life story, and practice.

\(^{17}\) Brad Kallenberg has used a similar model in his exposition of MacIntyrean ethics. His diagram illustrates the relationship between virtue, tradition, narrative and practices, which was a major thesis in MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*. See Brad J. Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*," in *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* ed. Nancy Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 29.

\(^{18}\) Terrence Tilley has done some significant work in reconstituting the religious understanding of tradition away from understanding it as a stock of doctrine and dogma, to the more dynamic understanding as an unfolding story manifested and critiqued by each successive generation. Traditions are invented and reinvented through time. See Terrence W. Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000). In similar vein, MacIntyre describes tradition as constituted by a community’s sustained argument. MacIntyre, 222. My understanding of tradition has been shaped by these scholarly exemplars.
history of communities. Culture provides the symbolic matrix that shapes the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior, and frames the self-understanding of members. Finally, actions and discourses can be expressive of a person’s or community’s story – they embody these stories. In so doing, they express and perpetuate the life of community. The interplay of these three dimensions – cultural heritage, life story and action/discourse – forms the storied world within which human life unfolds as meaningful.19

In chapter one, I briefly described how this narrative ethos contextualized the process of identity formation in Caribbean society, from the displacements of slavery to the establishment of a new hybrid culture memorialized in the murals of artist Dunstan St Omer. The practices of farming, fishing, music, and industry expressed in St Omer’s painting, are properly perceived in the context of human beings establishing a new way of life and new life stories, in opposition to the racialized narratives embodied in the practice of slavery and in the biblical interpretation of the planter class. The story of Carl Brashear also reflects the tensions within a narrative ethos, namely between his diving practice, life story and the prevailing naval (and societal) culture. His life story and diving practice pushed back against the destructive racist narrative of his era. The confluence of these opposing forces establishes the texture of the ethos of racial discrimination, tragedy, struggle and triumph that made his life into an evocative film.

19 Some of the most memorable literary plots demonstrate the profound interplay of these three dimensions. The character of Babette in Isak Dinesen’s Babette’s Feast, for instance, emerges through a unique constellation: Babette is a mysterious figure with a tragic life story who uses her exquisite culinary artistry to inject life and hope into the austere and puritanical social/religious culture of a small village community in Berlevaag, Norway. The confluence of the culture of austerity, life story and food established the narrative world of the plot. See Isak Dinesen, "Babette’s Feast," in Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).
Judging the Efficacy of the Model of Narrative Ethos

Models, by definition, simplify reality so as to allow for analytical reasoning. The model illustrated in Fig. 2.1 is no exception. Indeed, the real life complexity of each of its three poles is obvious upon reflection. For instance, persons are part of many cultures, some of which overlap and some of which are entirely separate. Some hold greater normative sway than others over the actions of their members, such as religious and family culture. Also, individual cultures are hardly ever homogenous; polyvocality and diversity are indeed common within a particular culture.20

Additionally, a person’s life story does not unfold in a vacuum - it is intertwined and co-determined by the stories of others, especially with close relations. Moreover, it is not clear whether persons have unique life stories, or senses of self. The self in the postmodern world is inundated by relationships, meanings and images from media and society; some theorists argue that it has become saturated, even diffused.21 Human beings are constantly negotiating the myriad of demands imposed by the institutions of family, friends, school, and work. As psychological theorists Holstein and Gubrium contend, it may indeed be more accurate to speak of a person’s postmodern selves rather than their postmodern self, with multiple versions emerging within the various institutional settings.

20 Kathryn Tanners argument in *Theories of Culture* (previously cited above in note 8) is again of relevance here. Cultures are hardly ever homogenous, and internal discord and non-standardization of behavior is part of the inevitable process of transformation. Christian culture, for instance, is fractured, as David Tracy has noted, among modernists, anti-modernist reactionaries (including fundamentalists and neoconservatives), and postmodernists. David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church*, Concilium Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 7-22. Fig 2.1, could not model such fractioning.

in which the subject is engaged.\textsuperscript{22} One of the central thrusts of postmodernism is that identities are constantly being negotiated.

Finally, the description of action and discourse glossed over the complexity and layers of these phenomena. Indeed, there is little standardization in theories of action or discourse in the literature because of this complexity. The distinctions between types of action (such as between basic and non-basic action),\textsuperscript{23} or between spontaneous and planned action was not accounted for in the model.

These arguments are legitimate; the narrative context within which ethico-social life unfolds is much more complicated in reality that the simple tri-polar model presented above. Narrative ethos may be more accurately represented by a complex web established by intricate connectivities among the multiple cultures, communities, institutions and traditions, as well as by the expressive actions and discourses shared by different persons, and by the numerous life stories that are intimately entwined and co-determined. This makes ethical deliberation and identity constitution much more intricate in practice, considering that each layer of complexity may offer different truth claims on social life.

Yet, these limitations by no means eliminate the efficacy of the model. They do not detract from the basic point that the nexus of cultural heritage, life story and personal action and discourse constitute a basic narrative framework that provides norms for ethical life. To be sure, I am not arguing that this is the only way of conceptualizing the relationship between narrative and ethics. The virtue and character ethics traditions are

\textsuperscript{22} James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, \textit{The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World} (Oxford University Press, 2000).

\textsuperscript{23} Arthur Danto, "Basic Actions," \textit{American Philosophical Quarterly} 2, no. 2 (1965).
replete with offerings on the shape of this relation. Rather, this exposition of a narrative ethos is one way of contextualizing the dynamics of ethical action and identity constitution. Heuristic support for this model has already been provided from the life of Carl Brashear and from the previous chapter’s description of Caribbean colonial society. There is also theoretical precedence to the model in Alisdair MacIntyre’s virtues ethics framework.

Indeed, there are several implications of the model that further commend it for use as a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between narrativity and life in general, and for constructing a narrative approach to faith formation in particular. I discuss four implications below:

1. **Narrative Ethos helps in the ‘Understanding’ of Religious Understanding**

The model of narrative ethos provides a way to think about what is entailed in religious understanding. So far, I have described a narrative ethos in quite general terms as an overarching context within which life is embedded. From a faith perspective, this ethos is significantly a religious ethos; it comprises the ethico-religious story through which life is interpreted as meaningful. This story is not limited to the foundational myths of religion (which in Fig 2:1 would occupy the ‘community’ pole of the model). Rather,

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extending the arguments above, the storied-world in which we live, move and have our being is a nexus of life story, myth and daily faith practice.

Paul Brockelman, in his book *The Inside Story*, challenges conceptions of religious understanding that relate to a rational assent to truth claims of dogma and doctrine. He argues that this ‘understanding’ of understanding is a fruit of modernity, which defined truth as needing to meet conditions of rationality, empirical verification and scientific objectivity. Brockelman argues that the modern approach has led inexorably to a dysfunctional notion of religious understanding and religious truth, as exemplified by the contemporaneity of a stubborn religious extremism and a type of debilitating postmodern skepticism to any religious claims. He constructs what he claims to be a more authentic notion of religious understanding and truth that mines the hermeneutic turn in contemporary epistemology, as well as recent developments in narrative theory. Religious understanding, he claims, is best conceptualized as a symbiosis of two moments of understanding: 1) the acquiring from religious myth of an overarching vision of life as a meaningful whole, and 2) the practical wisdom that proceeds from faith, where faith is defined as the active living out of the holistic vision supplied by myth. Faith gives life to myth, while myth lends the source of meaning for the life of faith. Together they constitute religious understanding.

I find Brockelman’s work particularly insightful, and indeed it influences my own thinking on how religious understanding develops within a narrative ethos. His idea of myth is part of my dimension of cultural heritage, which also includes ritual and other traditions that embody cultural wisdom. His idea of the life of faith parallels the generic

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actions and discourses of the third pole of Fig 2:1. Yet, my thinking departs from his framework in two significant ways: First, the holistic vision of life that Brockelman understands as supplied by myth, is also embodied, in my argument, by ritual and other traditions that embody a community’s wisdom. We do not participate in such practices as a faith-filled response to the vision communicated by myth, as Brockelman’s model seems to imply; they are also primary embodiments of that vision in their own right. If the Christian story and vision are part of a living tradition, then they are experienced in worship and ritual as a necessary complement to myth.

Second, my reference to life story is also significant. Religious understanding isn’t simply distilled from the interpretation of religious myth and its incarnation in a life of faith; it is also about how that mythological tradition has resonated with a life story on the whole. To illustrate: I understand the Christian truth about Jesus not only by engaging the gospel stories, but also by engaging the stories in light of my life story. The African American spiritual tradition is replete with metaphors that indicate such a blended understanding. As James Cone has argued, the Negro spirituals “are silent on abstract theological speculations about the person and work of Christ...He was perceived in the reality of the black experience.”26 Jesus simply isn’t the Jesus of the gospels; in the spirituals he is “my Jesus” and “my Lord.” Cone argues that black slaves saw themselves in the story of Jesus’ passion. They identified with his suffering and so imagine themselves by his side: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” As such, they were not alone in their suffering; Jesus – the victorious one – was with them. The story of Jesus and the life story of the slave were intricately intertwined.

2. **Narrativity is Far More than Literary Artifact**

Describing narrativity in terms of an ethos allows it to transcend popular identification with textual genre. Fig. 2.1 suggests that narratives suffuse various levels of human existence. Again, our life stories are embedded in the stories of family, community and culture and in the myths of religion that frame the normative boundaries of our social existence. As Paul Ricoeur would say, we are beings “entangled in stories.”

Even more profoundly, narrative psychologists remind that narrativity is intrinsic to the way in which human beings perceive meaning and identity. This is especially apparent in the process of making sense of the novel or strange experience, as needs happen in the aftermath of a traumatic event. Some theorists even contend that human experience itself is structured according to narratives - the way in which we think about and experience reality is shaped by story.

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29 The process of recovery entails the gradual re-storying of life, reconnecting its events and reshaping its vision in a way that incorporates the trauma. For a moving collection of reflections from trauma victims that illustrates such re-storying, see Howard Zehr, *Transcending: Reflections of Crime Victims: Portraits and Interviews* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2001). Also relevant to this discussion is Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

From a cross-disciplinary perspective therefore one may conclude that narrativity refers to much more than literary artifact. Indeed, there is a pluriformity and ubiquity to narrative, which is one reason that makes it so hard to define with precision. Most definitions from literary theory understandably identify it with fictional and historical literature, as well as with other non-literary forms of storytelling such as movies, television sitcoms, video documentaries, and oral expressions of storytelling. However, it is hopefully clear by now that the way in which narrative is understood for the purposes of this dissertation transcends the level of artifact.

In fact, rather than propose a definition of narrative, it may be more helpful to speak in terms of the *narrative competency* by which human beings form meaningful connections among events. Such competencies make the authoring of textual narratives possible in the first place, and also come into play in the act of reading. Furthermore, it

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32 For a critical look at a variety of definitions, see Marie Laure Ryan, "Toward a Definition of Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).


33 I am admittedly settling here for a description of narrative (what it ‘does’) rather than a concise definition. As discussed above, arriving at a concise description of narrative has so far escaped theorists. My focus on what narrative does is an attempt to locate common ground in conceptualizations of narrative, while serving to advance the discussion on the relation between narrative and life.

is also manifests in the composition and transformation of life story. In fact, the narrative ethos would be unrecognizable without such competency; human beings would be unable to understand life as unfolding within larger, multidimensional stories of family, community, world, and salvation-history. The link between our narrative competency and the narrative ethos is alluded to in such common expressions as “That person has no sense of history” or “We need to pause to take stock of this moment.” In short, narrative competency is necessary for self-understanding as historical beings.

3. The Spatial Connections of Narrativity

Not only does narrative ethos animate the historical consciousness, but it also pervades life with a sense of spatial connectivity and positioning. Understanding one’s life as part of a broader and more fundamental cultural heritage not only places one within the history of a particular community, but also makes conscious one’s geographical location vis-à-vis other locations. The example of the difference between home and house may serve to illustrate. Home is the place where a person shares intimate memories (good and bad), practices, and stories with others. It is storied-place, where memory establishes historical continuity, and distinguishes this place from other houses or abodes. Home is a symbol established by a narrative ethos.


The term hasn’t emerged as a major analytical category in the philosophy of narrative, but I agree with David Pellauer as to its promise in that area. See David Pellauer, "Limning the Liminal: Carr and Ricoeur on Time and Narrative," Philosophy Today 35, no. 1 (1991: Spring): 61. Paul Ricoeur mentions narrative competence a few times in his work on Time and Narrative, see particularly volume 1, pp. 54, 91, 93, 177. He does characterize human imagination as a type of competence or capacity that allows narratives to be engaged. See Paul Ricoeur, From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, 2, trans., Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 9. While, it otherwise isn’t a major analytical category in Ricoeur’s work, narrative competency is arguably intrinsic to the acts of narrative composition and reading that he holds as mediating the transformation of everyday action. See below for more on Ricoeur and narrative.
As was hopefully established in chapter one, and again in this brief treatment on the concept of home, the spatial connections enabled by narrativity are of special significance in the process of identity formation. It means that a person’s identity isn’t understood only in terms of being part of a tradition or heritage, but also as tied with distinct places that gain symbolic weight as a result. Thus, Caribbean identity is tied up with the geographic region, colloquially described as ‘home.’ The spatial configuration achieved by narrativity also gives insight into the challenge migrants face in resettling – a task that requires forming new stories so as to build a new identity in a new home.  

4. The Model of Narrative Ethos Elucidates the Dynamics of Change

The fourth benefit of this framework is that it sheds light on the dynamics of sociocultural transformation. Paul Ricoeur uses the categories of ideology and utopia to denote the dialectic development of social institutions. Ideology is the “tool of legitimation applied to given systems of authority.” Positively considered, it promotes the survival of institutions through reproduction, conservation and integration into the status quo. Its pathology is a myopic dogmatism that tends towards “distortion and dissimulation.” Examples already cited are the Christian discourse that legitimized the

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38 Ibid., 323.
slave institution, and racial discourses that define and conserve perennial structures of racial hierarchy and discrimination.\textsuperscript{39}

The utopic is necessary for countering the rise of such pathologies. It introduces novelty, innovation and change in a given social system. The utopic provides the perspective to see the possibilities beyond ideology, affording a critical distance from the status quo by bringing images of the new and innovative to the social imagination. It is the domain of the prophet and the revolutionary. The pathology of utopia is a tendency to perpetual fragmentation, or a schizophrenic avoidance of stability, which a healthy utopia always seeks to re-establish.\textsuperscript{40}

In terms of the previous discussion of narrative ethos, cultural ideologies depend on the complementarity with life story and action. Ideological discourse needs to be embodied in the actions and practices of a community and in the sense of identity of citizens to gain legitimacy. However, without the creative imagination holding utopic possibilities out to the social imagination, such discourses may become hegemonic. Again, discriminatory racial discourses of the colonialism thrived when served by


\textsuperscript{40} Both ideology and utopia, in their positive senses, are necessary for the development of any society or community. However, as Ricoeur points out, there exists a perpetual tension between them, reflecting the perennial tensions between forces of constancy and change, or between unity and conflict. Sylvia Wynter captures the paralyzing tension between the utopic and hegemonic ideology in expressing the guiding question for her postcolonial search for a new humanism: “How do you deal with the stereotyped view of yourself that you yourself have been socialized to accept?” See David Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," \textit{Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism}, no. 8 (2000): 131. In other words, how does the utopic emerge from the stranglehold of the ideological? She has further argued that, since utopias consist of “modes of being human,” they too have natural tendencies to calcify in time into ideologies. A critical standpoint towards our self-understanding is therefore always required. For a summary of Wynter’s thought see Paget Henry, \textit{Caliban’s Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy} (New York: Routledge, 2000).
practices of biblical interpretation, and with official sanctioning of the practice of slave holding.

In the same way, it is also possible to envision ways that utopia may emerge in terms of the three poles of narrative ethos. Indeed, it may be introduced from any one of the poles. Prophets challenge the status quo through the witness of their life story, as well as by the force of their words and practices. Heroes, saints and martyrs epitomize the power of a life story to reshape our moral imagination.41 Finally, cultural immersion experiences are contemporary practices that are becoming increasingly popular for their ability to inspire change. Prophets, heroes, saints, martyrs, immersion experiences all appeal to the moral imagination by configuring life in ways that are often polemic to the status quo. They introduce a new and compelling vision of life.

By way of describing narrativity, so far I’ve proposed as follows: I have offered a more holistic notion of narrativity that involves an appreciation of the overarching narrative interpretive framework, or narrative ethos, within which moral life unfolds.42 I depicted a tripartite texture to this ethos, consisting of cultural heritage, life story and expressive action/ discourse. These interface to not only provide a meaningful and integral vision for life, but more significantly, embodiments of what that vision looks like in practice. This framework was further commended for its utility in describing narrative

41 Metz has pointed out the easy tendency for religion to become ideological, and hence the utopic need for preserving in religious life the ‘dangerous memories’ of the history of human suffering. Metz’s placed the life stories of history’s poor at the center of his narrative theology. See Johannes Baptist Metz, Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology, trans., J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2007). See also his Metz, "A Short Apology of Narrative."

42 As Alasdair MacIntyre famously writes, “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?’” The stories that we are a part of constitute the narrative ethos. See MacIntyre, 216.
as more than just literary artifact, and also for providing a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of ideology and utopia. I further argued that Christian discipleship is given form and expression within a (narrative) religious ethos; religious understanding becomes therefore synonymous with a practical wisdom that emerges as the myths and traditions of a religious community are embodied in daily faith practices and, ultimately, life story.

The model portrayed in Fig 2.1, however, is simply meant to describe the narrative context of morality. It is a static model that says nothing about how narratives function in the transformation of human action and meaning. It seems intuitive that literary narratives, for instance, do influence meaning in life. The classics of literature (part of our cultural heritage) are such because of their enduring relevance to life. Yet, how narratives function in the restructuring of meaning is yet to be established. This will be important in applying the theoretical framework being laid out here to narrative curriculum development.

I turn at this point, therefore, to the narrative hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur for a theoretical framework on the dynamics of narrativity. One of his significant theses is that narratives mediate human meaning and identity by structuring the temporal flow of existence into livable stories. Reality is structured as a meaningful world through the mediation of language, symbol and narrative.

Ricoeur is also widely recognized as having produced the most comprehensive philosophy of narrative in contemporary scholarship. His flagship publications in the area are the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*[^43] in which he ruminates on the

interrelationship between narrativity (as historical and fictional text) and temporality. He followed this with *Oneself as Another* in which he continued his exploration of the concept of narrative identity, and advanced the ethical consequences of his thesis in what he describes as his ‘little ethics.’

Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Narrativity

Paul Ricoeur’s narrative hermeneutics concerns the functioning of narratives. He is in general agreement that personal meaning and identity are constituted in the interpretive context of a community, society and tradition. The problem is we are seldom conscious of the stories of which we are a part. To a great extent, we are unawares of the ethos into which we are socialized and which structures our daily ethical decisions. Ricoeur posits that human beings are in constant need of self-interpretation, wherein life can be viewed with an introspective lens afforded by critical distance. Literary text is Ricoeur’s privileged media that makes possible such distanciation from everyday reality, through its capacity to compose (or plot) a virtual world that can be imaginatively engaged by readers.

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I make more explicit this Ricoeurian dynamic of narrative mediation in what follows. I first contextualize his narrative work within some key events in his life story and career. This biographical information is necessarily brief, but hopefully serves to indicate Ricoeur’s personal investment in thinking through how narrative lends meaning and coherence to what he often called the aporia of human temporal existence. I then outline his thoughts on narrative mediation through the concept of *mimesis*. This occasions a critique of the Ricoeurian model wherein I argue that it needs expanding to include other forms of narrative mediation. I close the chapter by extrapolating what Ricoeur’s theory on narrative mediation means for narrative approaches to religious education.

*Paul Ricoeur’s Storied Life: The Vision of the ‘Capable’ Man*

Richard Kearney, ex-student of Paul Ricoeur and now Ricoeur-scholar, describes with fondness how his mentor would often direct the following question to his students: “Where do you come from?” In asking this, Ricoeur sought to establish in the minds of his students the significance of context, experience and story in determining their questions, opinions and interpretations of reality. In keeping with this vision, and at the obvious risk of doing an injustice to life’s inherent complexity, a synopsis of Ricoeur’s life context may help in foregrounding the sort of questions that guided his research into narrativity.

To be sure this is no easy task, as Ricoeur was notoriously reticent about speaking of his personal life and of its influences on his work. He left behind an intellectual biography in which he chronicled the development of his major ideas, which gave fruit to
over 30 major publications. The details on his personal life were left to biographers, who mainly sought to contextualize his entire body of work rather than his narrative research.

Perhaps one major theme that unifies Ricoeur’s personal life with his narrative work is his vision of the agency and creative possibilities of human existence on the one hand, and of its stark contingency and finitude on the other. This dual vision is summarized in his philosophical anthropology of the “capable man,” a constant theme that went back as far as his early work on freedom and human nature. For Ricoeur, human being is an endeavor in freedom, initiative, responsibility and self-actualization, even as life is open to contingency and the temporal flow of experience is interjected by unplanned and often tragic events. Later in his career, Ricoeur would seek to establish that a narrative identity reconciles this dual vision, by establishing a sense of coherence and unity to life within the context of life story.

Ricoeur would have understood this dialectic of possibility and contingency as constituting the rhythm of life in mid-twentieth century Europe. Born in Valence, France on February 23, 1913, Jean Paul Gustave Ricoeur lost his mother (Florence) at the age of seven months, and his father (Jules) shortly after while fighting in World War I. Raised by his paternal grandparents, these early years of tragedy and transition were made easier

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47 It is important to note that Ricoeur resists approaching the idea of being from the perspective of ontology. Rather, giving a nod to Baruch Spinoza’s concept of conation, he thinks of self-actualization more in terms of an act of perseverance in being, rather than as some form of ontological perfection. In this, Ricoeur’s work offers a polemic against what he sees as the ontology of the Descartian cogito, in which being is envisioned as a rational form of consciousness.

48 Much of this detail was taken from Charles Reagan’s important biographical essay on Ricoeur. See Charles E. Reagan, Paul Ricoeur: His Life and His Work (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4-51.
by a passion for books. In his intellectual biography, he describes his childhood self as a precocious reader, with a “curious and unsettled mind.”\footnote{Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 4.} This passion would serve him well in his later studies at the University of Rennes where he earned his teaching certificate in 1933, and later at the Sorbonne in Paris. He would go on hold professorships at the universities of Strasbourg, Paris and Louvain as well as multiple appointments in the United States and Canada over a 30-year period.\footnote{His scholarship could in general be characterized as a sustained inquiry into questions about understanding, language, and human agency. Early influences on his thought included Gabriel Marcel, Edmund Husserl and Karl Jaspers, however the depth and breadth of his scholarship would lead him to profound engagement with major scholars across disciplines, including Freud, Heidegger, Habermas, Greimas, Gadamer, Levinas, Derrida, Rawls, Saussure, Austen, and Levi-Strauss.}

He married a childhood friend, Simone, at a young age and together they had four children. The early tragedies of childhood would revisit when his youngest child committed suicide in 1986, an event that affected Ricoeur greatly. Mobilized for World War II by the French army in 1939, he was captured and spent nearly five years as a Nazi prisoner. Despite the obvious challenges of imprisonment, there were some unexpected benefits, notably his taking part in a community of scholars and fellow inmates. This time of confinement would ironically yield his first major publications upon release.\footnote{Ricoeur’s work on narrative undoubtedly marks an important stage in the evolution of a lifetime of thinking about the relationship between language, describing captivity as a time of “extraordinary human experiences,” that involved “daily life, shared interminably with thousands of others, the cultivation of friendships, the regular rhythm of improvised instruction, of uninterrupted stretches of reading those books available in camp.” Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 9. He would further describe this time as “extraordinarily fruitful from a human as well as from an intellectual standpoint.” Ibid., 10. The friendships that he made in captivity with French intellectuals like Mikel Dufrenne (1910-1995), and the philosophical reading that he was allowed, were formative of his early thought, leading to co-publication in 1947 (with Dufrenne) on the philosophy of Karl Jaspers.}

Ricoeur’s work on narrative undoubtedly marks an important stage in the evolution of a lifetime of thinking about the relationship between language,
understanding and human agency. I hope that these snippets of his personal life illustrate how his scholarship would have also issued from the ebb and flow of life in a time of tremendous turmoil. In his eulogy to Ricoeur upon the latter’s death in 2005, Richard Kearney references the legendary Owl of Minerva, which Hegel held as a symbolic of the fact that meaning and clarity are realized only with time and maturity. Perhaps at the end of Ricoeur’s life and career the synergies between his personal life and scholarship may indeed be appropriated more fully, as I have sought to do by way of this brief biographical sketch.

**Ricoeur and Narrative Functionality**

Ricoeur’s contribution to narrative theory can probably best be understood within the context of his hermeneutical philosophy, which advanced the inevitable mediating role that language played in human understanding in general, and self-understanding in particular. In direct opposition to the immediacy with which the Cartesian ego of modernity was theorized to know itself and the surrounding cosmos, the hermeneutical turn in philosophy posited that all understanding is mediated by a complex of signs, symbols and texts that comprise the semantics of language.

Ricoeur was thus led to thinking about narrative by way of its “remarkable features…as a distinct structure of language.” Narratives achieve a unique gestalt of meaning that makes them more than the simple summation of sentences – just as the

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poetic configuration of metaphor engenders it with meaning that transcends literal readings. Moreover, literary narratives are open to an infinite number of imaginative variations in plot and character, which provide alternative visions of life. In the act of reading, a person’s imagination and experience is engaged so that meaning may be recovered from the text that may in fact go beyond what the original author intended. Meaning, therefore, is a product of the dialectics of composition and reading; it is interpreted as the world of reader engages the world of text.

It is important to note that Ricoeur’s aim has never been to offer a comprehensive theory of narrative. Rather, as mentioned before, he sought to bring conceptual clarity and analytical precision to scholarship on how narrative function in the work of mediation, leaving the inquiry into narrative form or structure to literary theorists. Borrowing from Aristotle, he couches narrative mediation as working through a process of mimesis, or creative imitation. An author draws from the material of everyday experience to create a virtual world that, far from duplicating reality, is rather a creative imitation (mimeses) by which a new vision of reality is born.

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56 Ricoeur describes his work on narrative function as being dominated by three major preoccupations: 1) “preserving the fullness, the diversity, and the irreducibility of the various uses of language;” 2) “gathering together the diverse forms and modes of the game of storytelling,” namely “history and the related literary genres of biography and autobiography” and “fictional narratives such as epics, dramas, short stories, and novels, to say nothing of narrative modes that use a medium other than language: films, for example, and possibly painting and other plastic arts;” 3) the testing of the selective and organizational capacity of language itself when it is ordered into those units of discourse longer than the sentence which we can call texts.” Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 2, 1-3.

Ultimately, it may be because he concentrates on narrative function that he neglects to discuss the various narrative forms and how they relate to the mimetic process. This is one of the criticisms that shall be taken up in the next section.

Mimesis may be deconstructed into three moments – mimesis$_1$, mimesis$_2$ and mimesis$_3$, corresponding to the moments of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. These warrant a closer look in order to understand the intricacies of Ricoeur’s thought, and before any implications can be drawn for religious education.

Mimesis$_1$: The Preconditions for Narrative Composition and Reading. In mimesis$_1$ Ricoeur identifies the pre-conditions or pre-understandings that make narrative composition and reading possible.$^{58}$ For Ricoeur, the idea that narrative plots can be composed and then followed during the act of reading, references a three-fold human competency. First, human beings can distinguish between action and simple physical movement based on our “prior acquaintance with the order of action,”$^{59}$ or our facility with the conceptual network of action, that can distinguish:

- project and intention, motive and reason for action, circumstance, obstacle and occasion, agent and capacity to do something, interaction, adversary and helper, conflict and co-operation, amelioration and deterioration, success and failure, happiness and misfortune.$^{60}$

Second, narratives configure actions that are in reality caught up in symbolic conventions that bestow meaning. Ricoeur uses the example of raising one’s arm - a movement that may be variously interpreted as a way of saying hello, or hailing a taxi, or voting, depending on the social circumstance. The interpretation depends on the existence of a socially constituted network of signs, rules and norms that precedes and provides the

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$^{58}$ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Vol. 1*, 54.


$^{60}$ Ibid., 141.
semantic context to the basic movement of raising one’s arm. Our fluency in this network supplies a “readability to action” that renders it pliable to emplotment.61

The third enabler of narrative composition is that there already exists a pre-narrative quality of experience, which makes narratives recognizable and ‘followable’. Ricoeur argues that, in effect, the temporal flow of life is itself experienced as a nascent (or inchoate) story that calls for narration. This characterization of life as a story-not-yet-told is evidenced by the ubiquitous impulse to tell stories about events and situations, and to formulate self-understanding in terms of a life story.

Mimesis₂: The Configuration of Plot. Mimesis₁ prefigures the narrative configuration of mimesis₂. Ricoeur refers to the act of configuring a work in terms of the establishment and mediation of plot.62 Plot mediates in three ways, each of which achieving a synthesis of heterogeneous elements.63 First, it synthesizes multiple events into a unified and coherent story. Events cease to be mere occurrences, and are now rendered with new intelligibility within the gestalt of plot.64

Second, emplotment “brings together factors as heterogeneous as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results”65 to develop, not only a story that can be followed, but an ethical world that can be intelligently engaged and whose judgments may be compared with real life. Moreover, the story retains some measure of

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61 Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," 29.

62 Ricoeur’s notion of emplotment (or the creation of plot) parallels the Aristotelian concept of mythos, the creative ordering of the events into a story.

63 Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," 21.

64 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative: Vol. 1, 65.

65 Ibid.
the discordances inherent in the contingencies of circumstances, agents and results that supply its data, making it into a totality that is “at once concordant and discordant.”

Third, from a temporal point of view, emplotment transforms what may be otherwise characterized as a serial succession of the story’s incidents into a temporal whole characterized by a sense of “integration, culmination and closure.”

Narrative composition, for Ricoeur, effectively frees the text from the intended meanings of its author and from the world of its initial audience. Meaning becomes dependent on the interpretation of the reader who may imaginatively engage the world now created in front of the text, and is able to play out the meanings that derive from this world. Such is the novelty of emplotment.

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67 Ibid., 22.

68 Distanciation is a critical concept in Ricoeurian hermeneutics that is the “condition of understanding.” Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," 88. When discourse becomes fixed into text, the text becomes autonomous (or distant) from that originating discourse in three ways: 1) the situation common to the interlocutors of oral discourse (the ostensive reference) is lost once the discourse is fixed as text. There is no longer a common reality for the author and every reader of the text. This fact is heightened in case of fiction - the ostensive reference of oral discourse is abolished in the creative work of composition, so that a new world may be proposed by the text, in which the reader can inhabit and project one of his/her “ownmost possibilities.” Ibid., 86. This proposed world is the world of the text. 2) The text is detached from its author, in the sense that it escapes the author’s meanings and intentions. 3) The text escapes the limits of its initial audience to an audience comprised of anyone who can read. To these three dimensions of distanciation can be added the critical distance from reality enabled by the text, which allows the reader to live the story vicariously, and which gives genre like science fiction its distinct popularity.

69 Ricoeur’s definition of interpretation relates to explicating “the type of being-in-the-world unfolded in front of the text.” Ibid. Emphasis Ricoeur’s.

70 Besides the distanciation achieved by fixing discourse into text, various structural elements – such as built-in gaps within the emplotted story - also help in stimulating the imagination of the reader. For a discussion on how such gaps work in children’s stories used in religious education, see Russell W. Dalton, "Perfect Prophets, Helpful Hippos, and Happy Endings: Noah and Jonah in Children’s Bible Storybooks in the United States," Religious Education 102, no. 3 (2007).
Mimesis: The Refiguration of Life. Narrative completes its sequence in mimesis, the stage of refiguration, when reading enables new understandings to emerge and be appropriated from the text. As stated above, reading enables a temporary suspension of reality, whereby the reader is thus able to imaginatively enter the world of the text, and vicariously experience what it might be like to live in that world. Mimesis “marks the intersection of [this] world of the text and the world of the reader.” As a result of the employment of this productive imagination, the reader is able to see new possibilities for action. These may subsequently be rejected outright or accepted so as to transform daily life. But this decision in no way abstracts from the fecundity of the text in proposing a world to inhabit. Rather, it points to the limits of narrativity that are to be picked up by ethics. I will return to this point in the subsequent critique of Ricoeur’s model.

Another effect of reading is that daily experience is brought to new lucidity. Ricoeur acknowledges that a certain level of naiveté pervades everyday life, wherein human beings go about life largely unawares of the symbolic world in which we exist as sociocultural beings. Growth in personal agency needs us to bring a critical interpretive lens to our lives. Thus, narratives don’t only transform our vision of the world through engaging the productive imagination, they also uncover what Ricoeur describes as the

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71 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Vol. 1*, 71. Here, he draws heavily on Gadamer notion of fusion of horizons.

72 Ricoeur draws on Kant in describing the action of the productive imagination in “drawing together” the components of a plot in a holistic understanding. See *ibid.*, 66-68.

73 Ricoeur does not work through such ethical considerations until the last three chapters of *Oneself as Another*, which followed his three *Time and Narrative* volumes.
“opaque depths of living, acting and suffering”\textsuperscript{74} to provide greater intelligibility, intentionality and agency.\textsuperscript{75}

\textit{Narrative and Identity: Life as Ongoing Story}

The \textit{mimetic} arc does not only describe the transition to new meaning or new action; it is also central to the constitution of human identity. Again, for Ricoeur, identity (or selfhood) is realized not through the immediacy of introspection as in the Cartesian cogito, but is mediated by the complex of signs, symbols and texts – the narrativity – with which human beings are always engaged, and which shape our consciousness. Literary narrative is a privileged textual form, which affords the opportunity to engage a variety of plots and characters by which the self can be reflected upon and evaluated. The reader engages the proposed world as unfolded by the text, and receives from it “an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed.”\textsuperscript{76} Telling a story therefore constructs the identities of readers just as it constructs the identity of its main characters.

Narrative identity is therefore one way of conceiving human identity that promotes the vision of the self as dynamic, perpetually in-process, and in search of unity.

\textsuperscript{74}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative: Vol. 1}, 53.

\textsuperscript{75}Ricoeur argues that human beings ultimately need \textit{mimesis} to represent human reality in a way that reminds of its transcendental depths, and that can then inscribe action with such meaning. Human actions are imitated so as to make them “appear better, higher, more noble than they are in reality.” Paul Ricoeur, “Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics,” in \textit{Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation}, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 180.

\textsuperscript{76}Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," 88.
and coherence through a life story. In effect, self-identity is tantamount to a life story that establishes temporal concordance to the events and circumstances of life, even as unexpected events, unmet goals and unforeseen ends continue to interject a measure of discord in life’s course.

Moreover, narrative identity is subject to a dynamic of innovation and sedimentation that also characterizes literary composition. Selfhood lies along a temporal continuum consisting of the multitude of other ‘selves’ whose life stories are available for engagement. Narrative identity is a product of such social influences; it bears the imprint of other lives, instantiating influences from significant others and from exemplars of community and tradition. To be socialized into a community is to perpetuate the character traits of what the community deems to be a good citizen or member. Socialization entails a degree of character sedimentation and social control. Yet, narrative identity also recognizes an element of innovation in everyone’s life witness. We are not simply clones of society and community; rather we embody a creative spirit, cultivated from the specific events and experiences of each life, that makes each instantiation of human being unique. It is in the dynamic interplay of sedimentation and innovation (the received self and the constructed self) that narrative identity is constituted.

Ricoeur’s discussion of narrative identity and selfhood constitutes the raison d’être of his major work Oneself as Another.  

Ricoeur deepened his thought on the problem of identity in Oneself as Another. There, identity was recast as a search for coherence or permanence-in-time. The establishment of selfhood-identity entailed a dialectic of identity-as-selfhood (ipse) and identity-as-sameness (idem). Ibid., 140.
Revisiting Ricoeur’s Framework from the Perspective of Curriculum Planning

So far I have demonstrated that one of Paul Ricoeur’s seminal contributions to narrative theory is to conceptualize narrative hermeneutics as a triple mimetic process. According to Ricoeur, the mimetic evolution is made possible by the fact that narrative structures embodied in literary texts are already prefigured in the semantics of human action \((mimesis_1)\), albeit in a rudimentary, inchoate form. Literary narratives are crafted from this foundation to configure an imaginary world \((mimesis_2)\) that readers may live in vicariously, making possible – through an act of appropriation – a refiguration of life and everyday praxis \((mimesis_3)\). This mimetic process ultimately bestows narrative contours to human identity.

Ricoeur’s narrative philosophy bears much appeal for religious education. Narratives have been used in the mediation of learning for centuries. As was mentioned before, a good story is eminently persuasive – from the parables of Jesus, to Augustine’s use of salvation history as the bedrock of his popular catechesis. Ricoeur’s attempt at bringing analytical clarity and depth to the discussion on narrative function helps curriculum planners to go beyond an uncritical or superficial understanding of narrativity. Triple \(mimesis\) offers one way of conceptualizing how life may be transformed by the mediation of literary narrative.

Yet, there is much about Ricoeur’s framework that needs revisiting before one can declare its efficacy for narrative curriculum theorizing and design. In what follows, I take a critical look at his thought by way of the following questions:

1. What does Ricoeur mean by narrative’s capacity to bestow greater intelligibility to otherwise ‘mute’ existence? What does this mean for curriculum theorizing?
2. Are there other mediators of meaning besides literary text?

3. What are some limits to narrative mediation?

1. *The ‘Muteness’ of Existence and its Challenges to Curriculum Planning*

With his demarcation of *mimesis*, Ricoeur departs from approaches to narrativity that concentrate on the act of composition. Again, the first mimetic moment identifies the necessary preconditions for narrative composition. It proposes that literary narratives are ultimately foreshadowed in everyday life and experience, which manifest a certain nascent narrativity that makes composition possible. Literary narratives rely on familiarity with the constitutive elements of human action, such as goals, means, settings, success, as well as with the symbolic conventions that bestow meaning and ‘readability’ to basic actions like raising one’s arm to hail a taxi. By drawing attention to this moment Ricoeur expands our understanding of narrative function and also of just how pervasive is the phenomena.

However, Ricoeur’s description of the relationship between narrative and life may at times seem ambiguous. On the one hand, he speaks of the pre-narrative character of experience or the nascent narrativity of *mimesis*; on the other, he is also known for describing temporal experience as being “confused, unformed, and at the limit mute” and in need of narrative intelligibility. How can these two be reconciled, and what does it all mean for narrative curriculum planning?

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70 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Vol. 1*, xi.
Philosopher David Carr is one of the more prominent scholars to point out this ambiguity. \(^{80}\) Carr’s own position regarding the narrative quality of life is that “literary story-telling arises out of life;” \(^{81}\) literary narrative, he believes, draws its structure from life. \(^{82}\) However, Carr reads in Ricoeur’s reference to existence as being “confused, unformed, and at the limit mute,” an implicit characterization of temporal existence as being chaotic – a serial succession of ‘nows’ that lacks narrative coherence. This does not square with Ricoeur’s thesis on the pre-narrative character of \textit{mimesis}. Carr thus sees much ambiguity in Ricoeur’s thought. \(^{83}\)

Carr’s criticisms of Ricoeur are poignant. Most importantly, he points to Ricoeur’s limiting definition of narrative in terms of literary text. \(^{84}\) By identifying narrative almost uniquely as text, Ricoeur is ignoring the ongoing narratives of daily life, in which, human beings try to retrieve coherence and meaning from the day-to-day procession of experiences and events. However, Carr may be over-representing Ricoeur’s position on the narrativity of life. First of all, Ricoeur’s objective in \textit{Time and Narrative} (and in his other essays on narrative) is not so much to ruminate on the narrative structure of experience, as it is to theorize on how narratives \textit{function} in life. Ricoeur’s reference to a confused and mute existence is to how life would be \textit{apart from the three mimetic}


\(^{81}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{82}\) Carr counters what he calls the standard position – which he associates with narrative thinkers such as Frank Kermode, Seymour Chatman, Roland Barthes, Louis Mink and Hayden White – that claims that life is experienced as a discrete succession of events, and that any narrative configuration of these events must be artificially introduced.


\(^{84}\) Ibid., 171.
Indeed, this is a virtual and even illusory existence, envisioned as lived outside the everyday symbolic and semantic milieu (*mimesis*) that renders the actions and events of life readable. But this milieu is inescapable; we are all immersed in worlds of stories and symbols that shape our sociocultural lives.\(^8^5\) Ricoeur’s point is to demonstrate the pervasiveness of narrativity, and the intelligibility that it brings to life. For him, life without narratives is inconceivable, and even if it were conceivable, it would be unintelligible and mute.

I propose that Carr’s critique of Ricoeur can actually serve to illumine the latter’s basic point that we are beings “tangled up in stories.”\(^8^6\) As mentioned before, the problem is that we are seldom conscious of the stories (or the ethos) into which we are socialized. On an ordinary basis, we lack the necessary distance to critically examine the influences on our behavior. This is a challenge and opportunity for religious education, a point that I shall return to later in the chapter by way of a preliminary consideration of the role of the religious educator in helping learners come to such critical knowledge of their narratives. For now, it suffices to remember Ricoeur’s point that literary text makes possible the necessary distanciation from everyday reality by its capacity to compose (or plot) a virtual world that can be imaginatively engaged by readers. One’s everyday life can then be examined through the lens offered by the world of the text, enabling a creative re-thinking and re-constituting of the actions of daily life. In this way, narrative text

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\(^{8^5}\) Psychologists have long attested to the identity constituting dimension of stories. George Herbert Mead’s thesis on the socially-constituted self, laid the groundwork for perceiving the self as received from the images, norms, and models deemed normative by society. Of course, such social determination can go to the extreme. We may be too entangled in stories, if one takes heed of Kenneth Gergen’s characterization of the postmodern self as saturated by these very stories. But, the point can still be made that an existence independent of social context and its constitutive narratives is inconceivable today. We understand ourselves in context, and to do otherwise is impossible.

\(^{8^6}\) Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," 30.
mediates the ever necessary movement from “the opaque depths of living, acting and suffering”\(^{87}\) to the imaginative refiguring of an examined life.

However, two important questions arise: Is the mediation by written and oral text unique? What are the limits to narrativity as mediators of meaning and identity? These questions are engaged below, and again as implications for religious education.

2. *Mediation by More Than Literary Text*

Ricoeur relies heavily on literary narrative in his elucidation of narrative functionality. This is understandable since he considers written narratives (both fictional and historical) as the archetypal textual form. Yet, he does seem to leave room for considering how artifacts other than literature can mediate human meaning by admitting that literature is only one member of a universe of symbols that mediate meaning and identity. In relation to the development of self-knowledge he writes,

> The refiguration by narrative confirms this aspect of self-knowledge which goes far beyond the narrative domain, namely, that the self does know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of the cultural signs of all sorts which are articulated on the symbolic mediations which always already articulate action and, among them, the narratives of everyday life.\(^{88}\)

Perhaps his most evocative detour in this direction is his thesis on the textual qualities of human action. His highly influential essay *The Model of the Text* argued that the notion of text could be extended to the realm of meaningful action, partly because actions have the text-like quality of being remembered (and reinterpreted) long after they

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\(^{87}\) Ricoeur, "Mimesis and Representation," 139.

\(^{88}\) Ricoeur, *Narrative Identity*. 198. This statement acts as a bridge to his earlier work on interpretation, and on the function of other linguistic forms such as symbol and metaphor. In the preface to *Time and Narrative, vol 1* he briefly touches on the parallels between narrative and metaphor, in that both are forms of poetic composition that overflow with meaning. However, the link between narrative and symbol was left largely unexplored.
are performed.\textsuperscript{89} Memorable actions by definition leave a trace over the course of history and, as such, are subject to repeated interpretation in the same way as literary text.\textsuperscript{90} Taking this thesis as correct would mean that actions might serve as vehicles of meaning as do literary texts; they too may capture the imagination of observers, and influence the birth of new meaning and revised life praxis.\textsuperscript{91}

Consider for a moment how types of symbolic action serve in this way. Ritual action, for instance, is a ubiquitous cultural symbol and bearer of a communities’ self-understanding. As the late Catherine Bell often reminded, ritualization – the ‘doing’ of ritual – is a basic need of human existence, wherein we signify certain practices with meaning through strategic repetition.\textsuperscript{92} Engaging in social rituals promotes social integration by communicating the values, vision and norms that are understood as


\textsuperscript{90} Ricoeur provides further technical support for the action-as-text thesis by pointing to four characteristics of action that are innate to textuality: 1) Actions possess a fixity in the same way that speech is fixed in writing. 2) Action may achieve distance from their agent much in the same way that a written text may be detached from the intention of its author. 3) The meaning of an action may outlive or transcend the initial context that gave it birth, becoming relevant to a new situation or event. 4) The meaning of an action is not dependent on its initial audience, but open up to new audiences and interpretations. See Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," 530-545.

\textsuperscript{91} Actions that are experienced (what Ricoeur calls sufferings) must also be considered, as they can occasion new meaning for better or for worse - as attested to by trauma narratives.

intrinsic to that society, culture or community. Religious rituals, for instance, mediate and help instill the identity of religious communities.

An important connection could yet be explored between action and narrative functioning, exemplified in Alasdair MacIntyre’s oft quoted line “man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.” As I have been arguing, expressive actions are embodied stories; they enflesh our life stories and also those of the cultures and traditions into which we are socialized. Communication theorist Walter Fisher has offered further support for this narrative dimension of action by arguing that narrative is a paradigm or root metaphor of all forms of human communication. Discursive and non-discursive forms of expression, regardless of genre or type, he argues, always tell stories.

If actions tell stories and are understood as text then it seems plausible to include them in Ricoeur’s narrative framework. To illustrate, ritual action was already described as powerful mediators of personal and communal identity. Seen now in the light of

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94 Louis Marie Chauvet has a particularly rigorous treatment of the formative role of Roman Catholic sacramental ritual. See his Louis Marie Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995).

95 MacIntyre, 216. Several other scholars from philosophy, theology and communication theory have written on the connection between expressive action and narrative. Walter Fischer provides a list of such scholars while making the same point himself. See Walter R. Fisher, Human Communication as Narration (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 58-59.

96 Fisher’s work is important not only in advancing the storied-quality of human expression, but also for his proposal for a revised understanding of rationality and logic more in keeping with human existence understood as “homo narrans.” Fisher, xiii.

97 Calvin Schrag has argued persuasively that is the interplay of discursive (oral and written) and non-discursive (action) forms of expression that comprise the space of communicative praxis. His influential thesis served to bring attention to what he described as the epistemological privileging of literary discourse in the linguistic and communication theory as well as in philosophy.
narrative, the compositional aspect that is intrinsic to good rituality is highlighted. Moreover, as symbolic action, rituals open up a vision of life to its participants that parallels the way in which readers imaginatively enter the world of the text.\textsuperscript{98} Finally, rituals serve to reaffirm and renew meaning in life, just as Ricoeur envisioned of literary text. Clear resonances are thus found with all three mimetic moments.\textsuperscript{99}

My critique of Ricoeur serves therefore to expand his notion of narrative mediation to encompass non-discursive texts such as expressive actions. This is a move of some consequence for the practice of narrative education, as will be explored in the rest of the dissertation.

3. The Limits of Narrative Mediation: Ethics

Ricoeur’s thought also opens up several questions concerning the limits of narrative mediation. He admits that the narrative function can go so far and no more in determining how life is refigured by the world of text. The productive imagination can make this world come to be in the mind of the reader, and the narrative can even suggest different courses of action as well as the moral consequences associated with choice. But

\textsuperscript{98} This discussion suggests that Ricoeur’s narrative work can be furthered through an examination of the relationship between narrative and symbol. Much of Ricoeur’s early work had been on the relationship between symbol and metaphor, linguistic tools with great semantic utility deriving from the surplus of meaning that they generate. See for instance Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning. His later work on narrative delves into it as a more complicated figure of discourse. Yet, while he draws obvious parallels between metaphor and narrative, particularly in the introduction to Time and Narrative, Vol. 1, he does not engage in a discussion on the link between symbolism and narrativity. Such a step would have been an intriguing complement to his narrative theory, potentially opening up the mimetic continuum to a consideration of the mediation of symbols.

\textsuperscript{99} The question at hand of whether actions can populate of the mimetic framework, also has to do with a distinction that might be made between the expressive and interpretive aspects of narrative as a form of human communication. Every event of communication involves expression and requires interpretation, both of which involves the competency to link events in a coherent and meaningful way. Narrative expression congeals in easily discernible ways such in oral and literary texts. Narrative interpretation however remains at the level of a competency that may be applied to the process of understanding of phenomena.
narratives cannot *decide* for the reader which course of action to take. This becomes a question for ethics.\textsuperscript{100}

Narratives are never neutral. Womanist, feminist, black, liberation, and Caribbean theologies have long demonstrated that a critical hermeneutic of suspicion and/or retrieval is a necessary corrective influence against any tendencies for narrative towards ideological distortion.\textsuperscript{101} Johann Baptist Metz has further argued that the iconoclastic and dangerous memories (narratives) of the poor and dispossessed of history also serve as correctives to ideological hegemony – in Metz’s understanding against distortions to the Christian story.

Additionally, going back to the discussion on narrative ethos, it could be imagined how each person is part of increasingly wider cultural communities - family, village, city, state, country, and planet. Where does one draw the line in determining which level of community is significant for shaping daily action? How much should one consider, for instance, the past and future of the planet in the decisions of daily life? Should an immigrant community hold on to native traditions or should it embrace the customs of the host culture? Such questions suggest that narrative theory needs a supplementing ethical outlook for completion. This would include establishing some form of validity criteria for discerning between the truth claims of alternative narratives.

I leave further consideration of narrative ethics for a later chapter. However, it bears mentioning at this point that the narrative vision of the good life is contextualized

\textsuperscript{100} Ricoeur followed up his *Time and Narrative* trilogy with *Oneself as Another* in which he endeavors to address these limits of narrativity through an ethical framework. His “little ethics” is outlined in chapters 7-9 of Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another.*

\textsuperscript{101} The relevant literature in this area is voluminous. However, mention should be made of a set of essays, many of which brought critical reflection to Paul Ricoeur’s thoughts on narrative. The set includes a response by Ricoeur himself to the essayists. See Morny Joy, ed. *Paul Ricoeur and Narrative: Context and Contestation* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997).
within the narrative ethos developed earlier. This vision is determined by the stories, traditions and behavioral norms of the cultural communities within which people reside, by how they understand their personal life story and vision, and by the life witness of others. It also congeals in the actions and discourses of daily life, in the hopes of achieving some measure of integrity between such action/discourse and the cultural value system.

Ethical decision-making consists therefore of judging from this web of stories what is canonical and what is peripheral, and in determining how these stories will play out in daily life. Accounting for the ethics of narrativity is the necessary supplement to Ricoeur’s mimetic arc if the goal is to have a more complete statement of how narrative functions.¹⁰²

Summary: Religious Education and the Texture of Narrativity

I have attempted in this chapter to do two things. I first laid out a holistic conceptualization of the texture of narrativity in terms of a narrative ethos, which foregrounds everyday action and discourse within an interplay cultural heritage and personal story. We inhabit a storied world into which we are socialized. However, we are seldom conscious of this ethos; we ordinarily lack the distance necessary for critical self-awareness.

This brought up the second area for discussion, in which Paul Ricoeur’s contribution to narrative theory was engaged. Ricoeur argued that literary text makes possible a productive form of distanciation from everyday reality by its capacity to

¹⁰² Ricoeur does engage this question of ethics in the seventh, eighth and ninth studies of *Oneself as Another*. 
compose (or plot) a virtual world that can be imaginatively engaged by readers. In doing this, literature imitates the primordial or nascent narrativity of life while, at the same time, it fosters a distance from life by means of its capacity to create worlds. The meanings of the text can then be appropriated to renew everyday life. This movement from life to text and back to (renewed) life was explicated using Ricoeur’s concept of mimesis.

Having established this interpretive framework, I argued that Ricoeur’s privileging of literary narratives served the purpose of illustrating the workings of narrativity, and did not preclude consideration that other symbols and artifacts may act as mediators of meaning. In fact, including the influence of non-discursive forms of expression (such as action) in narrative functioning extends Ricoeur’s theory to make it more representative of how life evolves within a narrative ethos. I further argued that any theory of narrative functioning must account for issues of power and ideological hegemony, acknowledging that some narratives are destructive – many are utterly oppressive.

A number of preliminary conclusions can be drawn from this framework for the benefit of a narrative approach to education. These will be further investigated and substantiated in subsequent chapters but, for now, they can be outlined in summary of the chapter. First, as Stanley Hauerwas reminds, a major goal of religious education is to initiate “people into a story.”\textsuperscript{103} There are many names for this story: the gospel, the reign of God, salvation-history; but underlying them all is the mystery of God’s creative,

redemptive and sustaining love for creation. Narrative mediates the communication of this by capturing the imagination of learners.

Moreover, *education should encourage ownership and agency in this story*. This means that the gospel story isn’t only to be read; it must also be lived, with intentionality, agency and responsibility. Religious education must promote opportunities and strategies for engaging in the realization of the reign of God and in the work of salvation history. Discerning the truth of the gospel story means embodying its message in our life story and in our practices and discourses.104 Ownership and agency may also be facilitated from active participation in meaningful worship and other sacred ritual actions.105

Second, the exchange between Ricoeur and Carr described earlier draws one’s attention to the reality of the narratives that surrounds us, and in which we understand ourselves and make meaning. More often than not, we navigate this world oblivious of the ways in which we are formed and socialized by it, for better or for worse. Narrative education bears this in mind. It ought to *invite critical reflection on the ways in which learners have been socialized, and inspire creative response*. I shall return to the significance of critical reflection in chapter four.

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104 Ibid.

105 See for example Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989). This discussion also suggests that Ricoeur’s narrative work can be furthered through an examination of the relationship between narrative and symbol. Much of Ricoeur’s early work had been on the relationship between symbol and metaphor, linguistic tools with great semantic utility deriving from the surplus of meaning that they generate. See for instance his Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. His later work on narrative stands as a progression of this corpus into more complicated figures of discourse. Yet, while he draws obvious parallels between metaphor and narrative, particularly in the introduction to *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, he does not engage in a discussion on the link between symbolism and narrativity. Such a step would have been an intriguing complement to his narrative theory, potentially opening up the mimetic continuum to a consideration of the mediation of symbols.
Third, religious education must also be proactive in encouraging persons to recognize and push back against negative narratives that diminish them and their identity – such as narratives of racism, sexism, and classism. It is also essential that learners be assisted in adjudicating between the validity claims of the many narratives that surround.

Finally, Ricoeur’s model outlines the transition to a new understanding of everyday life and action through the mediation of narrative. It seems natural that narrative curriculum should include all three mimetic moments. However the transition into the practical realm of curriculum opens up some issues that Ricoeur’s theoretical framework would have to gloss over. For example, an educator, who is thinking through how to lead students from mimesis$_1$ to mimesis$_2$, would need to consider (among other things) what stories, ritual actions, or other media would serve best to encourage critical examination of the everyday world into which students are socialized. Similar questions would need to accompany the transition to mimesis$_3$, such as what pedagogical strategies will be used to encourage the appropriation called for under this mimetic moment. In short, the transition from the theoretical world of Ricoeurian hermeneutics into the world of curriculum planning opens up some practical issues concerning the movement between mimetic moments.

This chapter has sought to provide a philosophical grounding for a narrative approach to education in conversation with the narrative hermeneutic of Paul Ricoeur. Questions of how faith interfaces with this narrative framework have been deliberately ignored mainly in the interest of parsimony. It is time, however, for the question of faith to be explicitly taken up once more. I begin, in the next chapter with a consideration of
Jesus’ teaching ministry, interpreted with an eye for how he used narratives or narrativity. I illustrate his pedagogy mainly through a hermeneutical reading of Luke 24:13-35, the story of the encounter with the risen Jesus Christ on the road to Emmaus.
CHAPTER 3
ENCOUNTERING THE Risen JESUS ON THE ROAD: A PEDAGOGICAL HERMENEUTIC AROUND NARRATIVITY

Introduction

In the last chapter I argued for an understanding of narrative that is broader than its customary equation with literary genre. I proposed, as a working definition, that narrative relates to a distinct human competency for forming meaningful connections among events, situations, causes, goals and other phenomena in life, weaving all into a consistent sense of meaning across time. This competency may congeal in many forms, including myth, symbols, historical markers, events, anniversaries, oral stories, and literary text. But, more significantly for the purposes of this dissertation, narrativity also encompasses the actions and practices of daily life (the lived stories) that express, constitute and embody our sense of identity and life story – over time. The amalgam of such discursive and non-discursive forms of communication constitutes a storied world in which life unfolds as meaningful and livable. Narrative is a human competency to establish a storied and, hence, meaningful world.

Building on this broadened sense of narrativity, I turn more explicitly to the theological import of narrative competency with a question about the narrative mediation
of ultimate meaning or mystery. I ask: can narrativity unfold the ever-expanding depths of knowledge associated with ultimate mystery? To be more precise, can narrative forms (such as oral, written and lived stories) mediate a more profound and intimate knowledge of the mystery of God? Paul Ricoeur, ever the theological dabbler, believed that this is the case. He pointed to the ability of parables to refigure or transform our understanding of sacred mysteries.¹ They are structurally able to do this because the “extravagance of these short dramas”² discloses new possibilities for daily living – a ‘surplus of meaning’ – that powerfully engages the human imagination.³ Parables actively engage people’s own stories precisely by telling or embodying a story in which people can find echoes of their own. They are both offered and echoed stories.

Jesus was renowned for using parables to communicate the mysteries of the reign of God.⁴ He loved telling stories! But he also loved enacting parables in the course of his ministry. Jesus’ table fellowship and healing ministries, for example, were powerful symbols of his vision of the reign of God.⁵ More often than not, such enacted parables

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² Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables of Jesus," 245.


⁴ I use the term ‘reign of God’ to avoid gender biases associated with the patriarchal term ‘kingdom of God.’ Other popular synonyms include the political term ‘empire of God,’ as well as the more neutral ‘domain of God.’ By ‘reign of God’ I mean an envisioned sphere of human activity wherein God holds ultimate influence and authority.

portrayed an understanding of life that defied simple interpretation. His table fellowship in particular usurped the status quo of his time – it posed a counter story and a critique of the dominant story of excluding certain people from the table. To dine with Jesus in the company of sinners and outcasts was to be challenged to envision a world based on an egalitarianism that was polemic and alien to the stories of honor-shame in this society of antiquity. To dine with Jesus, as was the case in listening to his parables, was to be opened to the radical possibilities of God’s reign – a new and emerging story for all.

On the face of it, therefore, the answer to the question of whether stories can mediate ultimate meaning is yes. Such recognition is important because it provides a way of approaching some of the more profound challenges to Christian discipleship issued by the church. The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC), for example, defines the purpose of religious education as promoting “communion with Jesus Christ” or, more exactly, communion with the risen Jesus Christ, encountered in faith on the road of life. But, what does that mean, and how is it to come about? And, how are disciples to cultivate a more intimate knowledge of this Jesus? It is the contention of this chapter that, on the testimony of the synoptic gospels especially, greater intimacy with the risen Christ may be occasioned through narrative mediation or narrative encounters. However, here I will focus on an eminent instance that reflects and epitomizes Jesus’ narrative pedagogy throughout this teaching ministry.

are what Joachim Jeremias calls parabolic actions. See Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972). I will use the two terms interchangeably, along with the lived parables.

Luke’s account of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) provided for the first Christian communities, as well as for us, a paradigm for how the mystery of the risen Christ is received in faith in the unfolding story of daily life. The gospel writer’s unique prescription was that the risen Christ would be present in faith to the community who memorialized the story of Jesus through its sharing of the story of salvation history, and through sharing in the Eucharistic meal that embodied the vision of the reign of God. In other words, intimacy with Jesus is mediated by the encounter with the scriptural narrative and with the enacted narrative of the Eucharistic meal. Moreover, the Emmaus story would have also served to make plain to the Lukan community that its own story was implicated in this encounter; by hearing the story and sharing the meal, they were commissioned to be a community of hospitality and justice. For the writer of Luke, the risen Jesus Christ is only truly known within a community that perceived its own story as constituted in solidarity with the poor and oppressed of the world.

From a different perspective, Luke’s account is also about the power of stories in changing lives. Luke features the two disciples as harboring in their hearts and minds traumatic stories of a crucified teacher, friend and messiah. They were fleeing Jerusalem amidst the turmoil that followed his cruel execution, even though some of the women disciples had reported seeing a vision of angels proclaiming that their teacher had risen from the dead. The encounter with Jesus along the road occasions a re-storying of their lives from fear and bewilderment to the certainty of conviction.

Jesus first elicits from them their own stories, and then “pushes back” with the story of how his passion and death fit into the grander story of God’s loving relationship

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with the people of Israel. By asking them to recall their stories first, Jesus made it more possible for them to connect that story with the community’s story. Also, Jesus own story sharing was shaped by what he heard from the disciples, enabling him to effectively counter their expectations of a political messiah with the more fecund vision of a suffering-servant. In essence, Jesus set up a narrative encounter on the road to Emmaus between their story and the Jewish community’s story of faith.

This narrative encounter continued under the auspices of the sharing of a meal in Emmaus. Here, Jesus lived the story and vision of God’s reign in his table fellowship. Just as he had challenged the people’s worldview throughout his life with parables, his table fellowship at Emmaus was another of those parabolic actions that called persons to examine their own life practices and to re-story their lives in accordance with the vision of the reign of God made manifest around Jesus’ table.

In what follows, I expand on this encounter with storied word and deed in the gospel of Luke by first commenting on the innate narrativity of Jesus’ teaching style, and then attending more closely to the specific pedagogical profile developed in the gospel of Luke. I continue with a hermeneutic of the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35 as epitomizing Jesus’ pedagogy, so as to mine its unique prescriptions for a pedagogy of narrativity that cultivates discipleship as a communion with the risen Jesus Christ. I close

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9 The task of retrieving the pedagogy of Jesus from the gospel is complicated by difficulties in conclusively identifying the words and deeds of the historical Jesus from that introjected by the early Christian communities in their interpretation and teaching about the Christ of faith. There have been many learned attempts to do so, and I make no attempts to repeat or critique this body of scholarship. Doing so would entail a needless and protracted detour to my main arguments. All biographical accounts are interpretations. To rely on the Lukan portrayal of Jesus the teacher, as I have done, is to honor the testimony and interpretation of this early Christian community as to how the risen Christ was understood as present in their midst, and how he was believed to continually form them in faith.
by extrapolating a few significant implications for employing narrativity within contemporary Christian religious education.

**Some Comments about Jesus’ Narrative Pedagogy**

To single out a set of activities that might uniquely be characterized as Jesus’ teaching ministry is particularly challenging and could fail to do justice to the pedagogical orientation of Jesus’ entire life witness. Jesus embodied the teaching vocation; it was the most frequent designation of his public ministry. The entirety of his life, death and resurrection were indeed educative of God’s salvific and loving plan for all of creation.

*All of Jesus’ teaching was imbued with narrativity.* He constantly invited persons into the meta-narrative of the reign of God – to see for themselves the goodness, beauty and truth of God’s inbreaking love revealed in their own life story, and to participate in re-storying a world in which human activity could be more in tune with God’s will. In bringing such narrative pedagogy to the fore, I hope to highlight the ways in which Jesus taught for life-giving and transformative faith.

**The Context of Jesus’ Teaching Ministry**

Pheme Perkins has identified four general categories of recognized teachers in Jesus’ world:

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1. Philosophers, typified by Stoics and Cynics, and commonly associated with established schools of philosophy

2. Sages or teachers of wisdom

3. Teachers of the law, such as scribes, Pharisees and rabbis

4. Prophets and visionaries, who interpreted God’s will for the community

Jesus would have understood his own teaching as foregrounded by such storied traditions. While he may indeed have been loosely associated with such categories at various times – both in terms of furthering these traditions as well as in terms of challenging them to renewal – in the main, he did not neatly fit into any one of these categories alone. He did not establish a major philosophical school, nor was he known to have apprenticed with a renowned teacher. Indeed, he was an itinerant teacher, travelling the villages and cities of ancient Judea, inviting and commissioning persons to companionship and discipleship. His followers “learned by observing what he said and

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12 Compare this with Paul who describes himself as mentored by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

13 Vernon K. Robbins, in his study of the Jesus-the-teacher motif in Mark’s gospel, argues that this teacher/disciple pattern departs from Rabbinic and Greek tradition wherein the disciple was the one who sought out the teacher and requested consent for mentorship. Robbins identified three phases (or cycles) in the Markan Jesus’ distinct teacher/disciple relationship: 1) the initiation of discipleship, primarily through request and response/following; 2) a phase of teaching and learning in which Jesus’ identity, his core values, and systems of thought and action were passed on to his disciples; 3) a phase of bidding farewell followed by separation/death of the teacher. See Vernon K. Robbins, Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark, First paperback ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

While Mark’s gospel is unique in the extent to which its writer has emphasized Jesus in his role as teacher, Robbins’ pattern can usefully be migrated to frame Jesus’ teaching ministry in Luke’s gospel – albeit with adjustments for how each phase progresses. Eugene LaVerdiere has persuasively shown how the writer of Luke introjected a (Eucharistic) meal motif into Jesus’ ministry. The writer develops Jesus ministry through a series of ten meals with Jesus, beginning with the banquet at the home of Levi the tax collector (Luke 5:27-39). This meal could arguably be considered as a paradigm for the first phase of Jesus’ teaching ministry (the phase of initiation), with the Last Supper (Luke 27:7-38) embodying the third stage (the stage of farewell and departure), and all the meals in between constituting the second stage of teaching and learning. Moreover, I would suggest that the Lukan post resurrection appearances, revolving around the meal at Emmaus (24:13-35) and the meal in Jerusalem (24:36-49), entail a distinctively Lukan fourth phase of the teacher/disciple relationship – a phase which would continue in the life of first Christian communities and beyond. This phase comprises the re-commissioning and empowerment of the disciples by the risen Lord. The subsequent sections of this chapter will significantly elaborate on this theme.
did in different situations.”

To understand that Jesus was a part of the storied tradition of Jewish teaching was therefore to appreciate how his ministry advanced that narrative in unique and dramatic ways.

**Jesus’ Style of Teaching**

Jesus taught with a striking authority, which he claimed was bestowed by his Father in heaven. This made him often at odds with the prevailing wisdom of the scribes, Pharisees and lawmakers regarding the interpretation of the law and the moral code. With customary charisma, however, he persisted in calling persons to spiritual renewal and to a deep commitment to live for God’s reign in their lives; he challenged persons to respond with a whole-bodied assent (mind, heart and will). He insisted that God must be first in life, even before family, home and work, and that discipleship was costly (Matthew 8:18-22). With such a demanding message it is little wonder that many changed their minds about following him (John 6:66).

Further, Jesus was welcoming and open to all who would heed his message and who would believe in God’s power to renew humanity and create a world of inclusion, compassion and justice. He did not use technical theological terms, but rather spoke in ordinary language, using material from the everyday experiences of his listeners to enable them to see for themselves the wisdom and implications of his teachings.

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14 Perkins, 1.

15 His frequent quarrels with the Jewish elite should not however be taken as indicative of his complete rejection of the Jewish way of life. Jesus, as Amy-Jill Levine has reiterated, was a Jew through and through, following the dietary regulations and modes of dress, and faithful to the oral and written Torah given by God to Moses. His disagreements would not have constituted a polemic against Judaism, but rather against how the tradition was being interpreted. See Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).
Jesus’ Narrative Pedagogy

As stated previously, all of Jesus’ teaching was pervaded by narrativity. He loved to engage the crowds that gathered around him with stories. Most of these stories, especially in the Gospel of Luke, were about the reign of God – a narrative vision of fullness of life in which creation is in perfect harmony with God’s will. Stephen Crites’ distinction between sacred and mundane stories is helpful in gaining an appreciation of the relationship between the narrative vision of the reign of God and the everyday stories that Jesus employed.

Crites argues that there is a dimension of narrativity that cannot be fully embodied in literary text, oral stories or lived stories. There are stories that “cannot be fully and directly told, because they live, so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies” of human beings.\(^\text{16}\) Crites refers to these as sacred stories, not because they are necessarily tied to religious belief, but on account of the fact that they create our sense of self and our sense of world. Indeed, they are essentially unutterable in their pure form because they “lie too deep in the consciousness of a people to be directly told: they form consciousness rather than being among the objects of which it is directly aware.”\(^\text{17}\)

On the other hand, mundane stories are “the stories that are told, all stories directly seen or heard.”\(^\text{18}\) They are formed from the words, images, events, roles, and characters that are “plausible objects of consciousness” within an everyday (or fictitious)


\(^{17}\) Ibid. Emphasis added.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 70.
world. As such, all written, spoken and lived stories by which people articulate their felt meanings of the world are mundane stories. Crites sums up the difference between sacred and mundane stories as follows:

[People] awaken to a sacred story, and their most significant mundane stories are told in the effort, never fully successful, to articulate it. For the sacred story does not transpire within a conscious world. It forms the very consciousness that projects a total world horizon, and therefore informs the intentions by which actions are projected into that world. …

Between sacred and mundane stories there is distinction without separation. From the sublime to the ridiculous, all a people’s mundane stories are implicit in its sacred story, and every mundane story takes soundings in the sacred story. But some mundane stories sound out greater depths than others. Even the myths and epics, even the scriptures, are mundane stories. But in these, as well as in some works of literary art, and perhaps even in some merry little tales that seem quite content to play on the surface, the sacred stories resonate. People are able to feel this resonance, because the unutterable stories are those they know best of all.20

Using Crites’ schema, I understand the narrative vision of the reign of God as the primary sacred story that animated and informed Jesus’ entire life. Jesus knew it “in his bones and belly” so to speak. Moreover, to communicate this sacred story, Jesus’ life became a story. His unique artistry was in making stories – told and lived – that would embody, explain, or give witness to God’s inbreaking of love in human reality. He drew on the full arsenal of his narrative imagination, telling stories about the reign of God everywhere: in the synagogues (Luke 13:10), in the Temple (Luke 21:37), on a mountain (Matthew 5:1) and in a boat by a lakeshore (Mark 4:1). Through his stories, he constantly invited persons to turn to the everyday stories of their lives – the seasonal fruition of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-25), the daily challenge of catching fish for a living (Matthew 13:47-48), how yeast makes bread rise (Matthew 13:33), how God cares even for the...

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 71.
birds in the air (Matthew 6:26), the struggle to earn a living wage in labor markets (Matthew 20:1-16) – and, in so doing, he engaged their agency to understand anew the meaning of the reign of God.

His favorite pedagogical tool for achieving this was the parable. As mundane stories, parables were doubly symbolic; they symbolized both the unutterable vision of God’s reign and the life stories of the community. In a sense, they offered both a spotlight and mirror so that Jesus’ vision of God’s reign and the human story could be juxtaposed in a transformative dialectic.

In turning people to their own stories, he turned them to the story of the reign of God. In the parable of the prodigal father (Luke 15:11-32) they recognized their own familial relations; in stories likening the reign of God to a net full of fish (Matthew 13:47-48), or to a sower scattering seed (Matthew 13:24-30), or to woman hiding leaven in flour (Matthew 13:33), people were able to recognize their own daily practices and their own stories of survival. The story of the Good Samaritan would have resonated with their own narrativity as they daily witnessed the plight of the oppressed as well as the political tensions between the Jewish people and their Samaritan neighbors. Examples multiply of how Jesus occasioned a turning to one’s own life story. By challenging his listeners to examine their stories in the light of parables, Jesus invited them to re-storying their lives in resonance with the mystery of God’s reign hidden in the texture of the stories that he told.

Jesus also lived stories of the reign of God. He welcomed the outcasts and oppressed of society – women, children, sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, and lepers frequented his company and shared his meal table (Luke 19:5; Luke 15:1-2; Mark 2:14).
He healed the sick, expelled demons, and forgave sins, all of which engaged persons with a new narrative about the in-breaking of God’s reign. In doing this he challenged persons to re-story their own lives in accordance with this vision, by working for justice for the marginalized, the oppressed, and the least of society.

In short, Jesus loved telling and living stories of the reign of God! He certainly made use of other rhetorical devices – short prophetic and parabolic sayings, exhortations, and apothegms – but even those seem to be imbued by his narrative consciousness. Most of all, he seemed to love engaging his disciples and listeners with evocative parables that mirrored people’s own stories and lives, enabling their engagement and recognition of the significance of his teaching about God’s reign. He embodied narrativity in his actions – through his table fellowship and healing ministry he enacted parables that challenged his disciples’ imagination with a new vision of life – a new story by which to live their lives and make meaning out of them.

The Lukan Jesus as Empowering Story-Maker

Turning now to the gospel of Luke and, specifically, the Emmaus story may serve to bring out in much more detail the function of narrativity in Jesus’ teaching ministry. While Jesus use of parables and parabolic actions appear throughout the gospels, Luke narrative makes special reference to the practice of meal sharing and hospitality as ways in which the sacred story of the reign of God is to be lived by the Christian community.

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21 There is comparatively little scholarship on the identity and role of Jesus as teacher in Luke’s gospel. The theme seems to have been more central to the writers of gospels of Matthew and Mark. See for example Samuel Byrskog, Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994); Robbins.
Background to Luke’s Gospel

There is a distinct temporal overlay in the gospel of Luke, consisting of two components. The first concerns how the writer of the gospel situates the person of Jesus in relation to Israel’s history.22 A pervading theme in the gospel is the dawning of the reign of God in salvation history. Jesus is portrayed as the reign-preacher “par excellence,”23 as well as the one who issues it in, thereby fulfilling Isaiah’s words of good news to the poor, captives, blind and oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). As such, the gospel writer portrays Jesus’ world as pervaded by a powerful narrative ethos in which the care, compassion and inclusion of the most vulnerable of society was firmly established. This moral vision was part of Israel’s faith narrative, receiving meaning and urgency from the living memory (the great narrative) of God’s covenant with the people on Mount Sinai.24

As such, Jesus’ spoken and enacted parables pertaining to the reign of God served to reconnect and remind his hearers of the faith narrative that they had inherited. His table fellowship with sinners and tax collectors, while scandalous to the sensibilities of many of the religious authorities, served to jolt the religious imagination with the surprising yet authentic vision of what God’s covenant implied for human life, and to provide a foretaste of what God’s reign would look like in its eschatological fulfillment. Such

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22 While there is considerable debate on the identity of the writer of the Gospel of Luke, Fitzmyer holds him/her to be a Gentile Christian writing to a similarly composed community of believers. Fitzmyer adds that, while there is little concrete evidence to identify the gospel writer with Luke the physician of Colossians 4:14, or with the sometimes companion of Paul (Philemon 1:24 and Colossians 4:14), such adjudication makes “little difference to the interpretation of the Lucan Gospel.” Fitzmyer, 53.

23 Ibid., 154.

24 In chapter two, I described a narrative ethos as consisting of the cultural heritage of stories, norms, beliefs, traditions, discourses and practices which constitute the symbolic world into which a person is socialized, and which is perpetuated in personal action, discourse and, ultimately, in a person’s life story. I emphasized that it defines human being in its historical and spatial situatedness, pervades it with the sense of being part of a larger human story, and ultimately shapes the discernment of what such spatio-temporal relationships demand.
actions challenged the destructive and discriminatory narratives that had diminished and demeaned so many. Jesus was steeped in the narrative ethos cultivated by Jewish faith, and was well aware of its radical import for life practice. He knew well, too, how negative narratives must be challenged and changed in order to bring all toward “fullness of life” (John 10:10).

The second temporal overlay introduced by Luke defines the narrative as a product of the first century Christian community from which (and to which) he/she was writing. Scholars generally believe that the Gospel of Luke reflects the wisdom from liturgical celebration and communal life of the Lukan community, written circa 85 A.D., after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. More particularly, the Lukan narrative is indelibly shaped by this community’s belief that the risen Jesus Christ was encountered in and through its Eucharistic practices and its daily moral life. As such, it is generally contended that the gospel writer introjected the rationale and the dynamics of such practices into the Jesus story, for its use as a catechetical model. The gospel would serve as the community’s inherited wisdom of how its faith life was to be sustained through encounter and communion with the risen Christ in worship and in daily moral practice. In a sense, their ongoing narrative of Christian faith was to be a lived story of discipleship in Jesus that was sustained by the Eucharist.

Jesus’ Use of Parables in the Gospel of Luke

This point on the catechetical overlay in the gospel of Luke will be further illustrated in the upcoming hermeneutic of the Emmaus story. For now it suffices to state

that two Lukan narrative devices – the situating of Jesus in relation to Israel’s history and the catechetical narrative for people’s faith – decidedly shaped the portrayal of the style and vision of Jesus teaching ministry.

A case in point is the Lukan presentation of Jesus’ spoken and enacted parables within the overall story of dawning of God’s reign. C. H. Dodd has casted the parables as “perhaps the most characteristic element in the teaching of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels.”26 They warrant attention if one is to understand Jesus’ teaching ministry.27 Luke’s gospel has the most parables out of the synoptic gospels,28 and they generally cover themes that relate to the demands of the reign of God, such as: repentance, the overturning of the world’s values, God’s compassion for the poor, outcast and oppressed, as well as the importance of prayer, joy and praise.29

As mentioned previously, the parables are to be understood in terms of the overall narrative of the in-breaking of God’s reign. They were, in effect, mini-narratives within that one great narrative, inviting people to turn to their own lived story, and to recast it in embracing the new narrative of God’s reign. Luke exemplifies this story-within-Story pedagogical strategy by situating a significant number of parables within meal settings

26 C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, Revised ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 1. Dodd’s study is dated, but remains a landmark treatment of the kingdom motif in the parables. He defines a parable as “a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.” (p.5)

27 Jesus followed in the line of prophets from the Hebrew Scriptures who used parables in their ministry. A popular example is given in the account of the prophet Nathan who convicts King David of his sin with a parable about the fate of a poor man’s ewe lamb (2 Sam 12:1-4). Other Hebrew Scripture parables include Judges 9:7-15, Isa 5:1-6, Ezek. 24:3-5, Ezek. 17:3-10.


29 Ibid., 114.
(symbols of the eschatological banquet). These meals in turn are narrated in the context of Jesus’ journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, again richly symbolic of the unfolding story of God’s salvific plan. Luke’s narrative is dominated by this story-journey motif (Luke 9:51-19:38) and each meal episode serves as a pause along the way that recalls the greater narrative of God’s salvific plan, renews the agency of Jesus’ disciples in this narrative, and bestows meaning and purpose to Jesus journey and his disciples’ journey as well.

The use of meals is also significant in the context of the liturgical practice of the Lukan community, who had grown to understand the presence of the risen Lord in its celebration of the Eucharist. A community meal is a form of narrative – it gathers together different persons with diverse stories, hopes and struggles into the coherent whole of a shared table. Additionally, Eucharist was to be reenacted by retelling the story of how, on the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, then offered the cup as well (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). It is within this narrative of community that the risen Lord was beheld in faith in their midst.

Significant for Luke, therefore, is that Jesus taught within the narrativity of meals. Also significant is that many of the parable-meal conjunctions served to specifically educate about the importance of practicing hospitality toward all, as opposed to the

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30 Ibid., 143.
31 Indeed, “Luke depicts Jesus’ whole salvific mission as a course or a way.” Fitzmyer, 169.
33 Arthur A. Just makes the point that Jesus’ meal at Emmaus “is the transitional meal between the historical meals, including the Last Supper, where he physically and visible ate with the disciples, and the multiple, endless Eucharistic meals where he is present but not seen.” Arthur A. Just, The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993).
exclusion of many – a new narrative towards God’s reign. Luke’s journey narrative begins with Jesus sending out seventy-two of his disciples to preach and heal, commending them to the hospitality of those whom they would meet (10:4-8). Later, Jesus himself receives hospitality in the home of Martha and Mary (10:38-42), and this episode is shortly followed by a parable about someone begging for food in the night to have something with which to extend hospitality to a guest (11:5-8). Later again, in the context of a Sabbath meal in the home of a leading Pharisee, Jesus relates the parable of the great banquet (14:15-24) in which he portrayed the reign of God as open to the poor, crippled, blind and the lame (14:21). These are all narratives of hospitality in which persons may recognize their own stories and practices and be challenged by the gratuity of the reign of God.

The gospel writer’s message in this meal-parable sub-plot within the journey narrative is clear: the Eucharistic community is one which lives a story of hospitality to all, especially the outcasts and marginalized or society. Jesus’ teaching emphasized the necessity of compassion, openness and service – practices constitutive of the Jewish narrative ethos. The enacted parable of his meal fellowship was a foretaste of its eschatological denouement in God’s reign.

This consideration of the Lukan Jesus’ narrative sensitivities sets up the context within which the Emmaus story can be mined for its particular pedagogical import. The Emmaus story represents a critical advancement in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. There, it is the risen Jesus who reclines at table, who accompanies the disciples along the way, who elicits their traumatic stories, who breaks open the communal faith
story, who shares hospitality, and who ultimately invites them into fuller appreciation of
the story of salvation. Jesus needed to re-story their narratives of fear and bewilderment
into stories of hope and renewed agency in working for the reign of God. Luke’s Emmaus
account, therefore, serves as a pedagogical model for the kind of narrative encounters
that, with the help of grace, may re-story a person’s life of faith in accordance with the
unfolding drama of God’s salvific plan in history. The story also serves as a teaching tool
for the kind of community that the gospel writer aimed to perpetuate: the community
formed and nourished by the bond of shared narrativity – in its sharing of the Word, in its
Eucharistic worship and in its practice of radical hospitality.

**Pedagogy on the Road to Emmaus**

The narrative of the encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus,
establishes the previously mentioned characteristics of Jesus’ pedagogy as normative for
the early Christian community. Before getting to the passage, however, it is first
necessary to provide some context to the story.

*Background to Luke 24:13-35*

I have indicated that a pervading theme in the gospel in the dawning of the reign
of God, with Jesus as its premier herald. Also of significance for an interpretation of the
Emmaus story is Luke’s geographical perspective, which is shaped by an overriding
theological concern for portraying the ‘Christ event’ as the focal point of salvation
history. Jerusalem is not only the place where salvation has been accomplished, but the
kerygma – the good news of God’s salvation in Jesus – also proceeds from there to the
rest of the world (Luke 24:47). The gospel begins and issues from Jerusalem. The
narrative of the encounter with Jesus on the return journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus is contextualized by this significant Lukan theological theme.

The Emmaus story is immediately preceded by Luke’s account of the empty tomb (Luke 24:1-12). On the first day of the week, some of Jesus’ faithful disciples – the women who had come with him from Galilee to Jerusalem – went to his tomb to anoint his body with prepared spices and ointment. They found that the sealing stone was rolled away, and “did not find the body” (Luke 24:3). Suddenly, two men in dazzling clothes (angels) appeared, asking, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5). They announced that Jesus had risen, fulfilling what Jesus has said to them earlier in Galilee concerning his passion, death and resurrection. The women seemed to have believed the proclamation, but, to the other apostles, the women’s report merely “seemed to them an idle tale.” (Luke 24:11)\(^{34}\)

Luke’s ultimate focus in the narrative is the resurrection. However, the portrayal of the events at the tomb arguably serves more as a prologue to the Emmaus encounter (and the rest of the Lukan resurrection narrative) than as an epilogue to Jesus’ passion (as is likely the case in the parallel Markan source texts.)\(^{35}\) In effect, Luke’s message to his readers is that the proof of the resurrection was not to be found in the empty tomb!\(^{36}\) Neither, for that matter, was it located in verbal testimony, since the other disciples

\(^{34}\) The bias displayed against the stories of the women is symptomatic of the kind of discriminatory narrative that is in need of recasting by the encounter with the risen Christ. Reinstating the humanity of those with oppressed and silent narratives must be at the forefront of any narrative pedagogy that aims at leading persons into the fullness of justice in the reign of God.

\(^{35}\) LaVerdiere, 155. The sense of this is heightened by Luke’s portrayal of the Emmaus event as taking place “on that same day” (Luke 24:13) as the proclamation at the tomb.

explicitly rejected the women’s account. Rather, the proof of the resurrection rested in the encounter with the risen Jesus through the narrative of the road of life. The symbol of the resurrection was Jesus’ body, raised and glorified, and ultimately encountered in faith in the liturgical and moral life of the believing community, and in the narrative that sustains such discipleship.

Also worth mentioning is the initial narrative portrayal of the disciples as fearful, hiding away from the authorities, as well as incredulous over the news of Jesus’ resurrection. This description would set up the eventual transition from fear and incredulity to conviction, and from spiritual blindness to clarity of sight along the road to Emmaus.

The Encounter on the Way

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 14 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 15 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 16 And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us.

37 Sawicki, Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices, 84. Sawicki describes the church as “the community of competence to recognize Jesus as Risen Lord (p.1). Luke’s overriding concern was to sharpen this competence by delineating for those who educate in faith the essential ecclesial practices through which the Risen Lord was encountered, as well as the practices and symbols (like the verbal testimony about the empty tomb) that was insufficient to this task. Resurrection faith is therefore not primarily achieved with the mind, but rather with “hands and feet, blood and bones.” (p.3) It is cultivated in and through the practice of discipleship. Luke would outline the specific strategies or practices that occasion the recognition of the Risen Lord in the account of the events along the road to Emmaus.
They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find the body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the woman had said; but they did not see him. Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish are you, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

By all accounts the two disciples (only one of whom is explicitly named – Cleopas) were fleeing Jerusalem, after their hopes had been shattered with Jesus’ death. As they hurried along, the Lord “came near and went with them” (v. 15) but they did not recognize him. Jesus makes himself present to the disciples, and the particular mode of that presence serves as the first pedagogical point of the episode. He invites them to share their narrative understanding of the events on Jerusalem – even when he knew the timeline and significance of what happened far better than they did.

The observation that their “eyes were kept from recognizing him” (v. 16) is key in the Lukan narrative, and is juxtaposed with the eventual recognition of Jesus that takes place over a meal (v. 31). The events in between, therefore, receive their meaning from these verses. We will never know for sure the reason Jesus was not recognized, but

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38 There is little scholarly consensus on the identity of the two disciples, besides of course that one was Cleopas. According to LaVerdiere, Luke portrays them as leading members of Jesus’ followers in Emmaus, possibly two presbyters or prophetic teachers, to heighten the gravity of their abandonment of the way. See LaVerdiere, 157. Also, the location of Emmaus is uncertain. Fitzmyer proposes that Luke’s mention of it is to situate the event “within the vicinity of Jerusalem,” once more suggestive of its connection with the salvific events identified with the Temple city. Fitzmyer, 1562.

39 Jesus appears as a “sojourner visiting Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover.” LaVerdiere, 171.

interpreting it as a Lukan theological theme, it is suggestive of spiritual blindness in need of the “gift of new eyes, to recognize the risen Lord.”

Here, the Greek verb *epiginosko* translated as “to recognize” is the same used to express Luke’s purpose for writing the gospel as an “orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us” (Luke 1:4). It connotes acquiring a profound or intimate knowledge of Jesus. Luke use of the verb therefore renders the Emmaus passage as a narrative of coming to a profoundly richer and more intimate knowledge of Jesus, and precisely through the encounter and integration of narratives – personal and communal. Upon personal encounter with Jesus, the disciples’ story changes from Jesus as a “prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (v.19) to Jesus the risen Lord (v.34).

The disciples obviously felt that Jesus’ death had dismantled the vision of the world nurtured by his life and ministry. Jesus has an empathetic presence to their despair, gently and respectfully inviting the disciples to share their story. “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” (v. 17) “What things?” (v. 19) The two share of the tragedy of Jesus of Nazareth, and of his unjust execution. They probably spoke of losing hope that Jesus was the long-awaited redeemer of Israel, and of their astonishment at the message delivered by the women. Jesus gives time and space to name their present reality. He drew out their own story and shattered vision as if he knew that this would be necessary in order for them to “come to see for themselves” and to truly recognize him. He reminded them of their narrative heritage, “beginning with Moses and

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42 Fitzmyer, 300; LaVerdiere, 158.
all the prophets,” authoritatively interpreting to them how the things about himself in all the scriptures” (v. 27). Quite possibly, he brought to memory the exemplars of faith, and narratives of how God had saved God’s people time and time again in the scriptures. Quite possibly he set up a dialectic with their image of the messiah – from a political figure to a suffering servant; a more promising story.

Thomas Groome describes Jesus’ pedagogical strategy here as inviting the disciples to bring their life to Faith to life. Jesus’ first calls forth their experience of life by pointed questioning, which “build pathos and anticipation towards the point where he himself, the questioner, will become the teacher” of the disciples. He then presents the scriptural witness in a way that invited conclusion as to its relevance for their life story, urging them to recognize the truth of the gospel for themselves. Interestingly, Luke describes recognition as not ultimately taking place at this point, but over the sharing of a meal.

Sharing a Meal

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he

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43 Fitzmyer contends that the theme of Jesus’ fulfillment of the scriptural testimony is important for Luke because of the author’s overriding portrayal of the Christ event as the entrance of salvation into history. Fitzmyer, 179-181.

44 The practice of faith in Israel is only properly understood within the narrative history of the people. The laws, rituals, statutes, discourses and practices associated with Torah were legitimizied by the living memory of God’s saving action on behalf of the people. Jesus would have understood all of this. Presumably it is why one of the first things that he did for the disciples on the road to Emmaus was to contextualize the events of his passion, death and resurrection within the history of the people of Israel. History received new salvific import with the advent of Jesus’ life passion, death and resurrection. By situating these events in the light of Israel’s faith heritage, he refigured what was originally understood as a dreadful tragedy into the wellspring of hope and redemption.

45 Groome.

46 Dillon, 111.
went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

The passage situates the moment of recognition of the risen Lord in a narrative framed by an ordinary household meal. Meal fellowships were an integral part of ancient Mediterranean society. They were special, storied ways of being together. Narratives of honor-shame were frequently played out in meal fellowships. Indeed, the gospel writer’s choice of the household meal for the epiphany of the risen Lord may indeed be a continuation of the theme that the Lord is experienced within the daily lived-stories of communal and liturgical life.

The meal is offered in hospitality to a fellow wayfarer, who must obviously have been hungry at the end of a long day’s journey. The pattern of such hospitality meals

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47 John H. Elliott has made the point that “the household serves as the most apposite sphere and symbol of social life for illustrating features of life under the reign of God.” John H. Elliott, "Temple Versus Household in Luke-Acts: A Contrast in Social Institutions," in The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 227. I wouldn’t go as far as stating this in my attempt to explain the gospel writer’s situating of the epiphany of the Lord in the Emmaus household. A critical interpretation of household dynamics in ancient Mediterranean society would arguably reveal that the home was a major symbol of gender discrimination. The household was generally considered as the privileged domain for women’s competencies and roles, as opposed to the public sphere that was considered as better suited to men. While women were not totally excluded from public and political life, Stegemann and Stegemann describe that, in general:

The differentiation of the competencies and roles of women and men at home and in public was in principle oriented and organized in terms of gender. That is, independent of their social status, women had, in comparison to men, a clearly restricted access to the various political, economic and social resources of public life. Here the asymmetry of the sexes and the dominance of men are the most obvious.

Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century, trans., O. C. Dean, Jr., First English-language ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999). “In principle,” the authors state, “the home [was] the woman’s place to stay.” (p. 372) Such gender-based discriminatory practices would detract from the degree to which the ancient Mediterranean household may be considered as an appropriate symbol of the life under the reign of God.

48 Oakman (1991) describes peasant villagers of the time as generally “suspicious and mistrustful of strangers,” leading one to think that the stranger on the road really must have had a powerful impact on
has been termed generalized reciprocity meaning that no return obligation is imposed on the recipient.\textsuperscript{49} It is a humble act of service in recognition of a fellow human need.

Yet, Jesus reverses the roles; he plays the part of host at the table, and becomes the one who serves them. Whether it was this gesture on the part of Jesus that made the disciples recognize him is uncertain. The fact is, they fully knew Jesus at the moment when he changed the ordinary plot line of table fellowship; his parabolic act offered a counter imaginary that opened their life narrative to the wider narrative of Christ as the now risen suffering-servant. The moment of recognition was accompanied by the powerful visceral sensation ("\textit{Were not our hearts burning within us}") that is often congruent with the perception of narrative truth.\textsuperscript{50} It isn’t a stretch to think that the disciples hearts burned as the traumatic events of Jesus passion and death were recognized with new and exciting coherence within the great story of salvation.

The new sight obtained in verse 31 can thus be juxtaposed with their spiritual blindness of verse 16, to reveal a Lukan pattern of coming to knowledge of Jesus. As the writer has developed the story, it is in the mutuality between the breaking open of the scriptural narrative in the context of the life stories of the disciples, \textit{as well as} in the storied fellowship of a meal, that the risen Jesus was recognized.\textsuperscript{51} The church has

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\textsuperscript{50} James Smith calls this kind of kinesthetic conviction (when meaning is received through the coherence of story) \textit{erotic comprehension}. See James K. A. Smith, \textit{Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works}, Volume 2 of Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Baker Academic, 2013), 31.

\textsuperscript{51} Richard Dillon argues that, for Luke, the breaking of the bread is symbolic that a Master is sharing his mission and destiny with his disciples. From this perspective, the sharing of word/sharing of bread pattern embodies a Lukan Christological paradigm that combines knowledge of messianic destiny.
traditionally recognized in this pattern the liturgical movements of Word and Eucharist. The formula evoked in the Emmaus story – took, blessed, broke, gave – is the same as instituted in the Last Supper suggesting that the latter had by now become a powerfully symbolic narrative for the early Christians. Jesus was revealed in the re-enacted story of the Last Supper.

Again, recognition for Luke connotes more than simple coming to awareness or cognition; the disciples enjoyed a profound understanding and inner conviction. The disciples’ recognition was, in fact, a deep bonding with Jesus.

Return to Jerusalem

33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Groome suggests that what took place over the meal was that the disciples came to fully see for themselves that the stranger on the road was Jesus who had indeed risen. They were brought to inner conviction of the unfathomable wisdom of God’s salvific plan for Israel in Jesus. This would constitute their own joyful proclamation, they own rendering of the Kerygma – their own retelling of the Story.

The disciples return to Jerusalem is portrayed as spontaneous and enthusiastic – no doubt to share with the others the events that had transpired on the road. They meet the community already forming and celebrating its own resurrection narratives. While showing respect for this testimony, they did not allow it to quell their newly found and Master-disciple solidarity. Dillon, 107. Luke’s teaching here is clear: to grow in intimate knowledge of Jesus, is to share in his mission and destiny.

52 Groome, 43.
meanings; they too recount the story of the what happened on the road to Emmaus and how they had recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Re-storying Through the Practice of Hospitality

One further point: the Emmaus story also reveals an inherent narrative creativity in the practice of hospitality. The practice of hospitality embodies a narrative hermeneutic that interprets human relationship where none may be readily apparent. Hospitality is first and foremost a work of the narrative imagination.53

To illustrate this narrative hermeneutic of hospitality, consider the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In the parable, Jesus is faced with the question of “Who is my neighbor?” He responds with the story of the Jewish traveller who, after being beaten by robbers and bypassed by a priest and a Levite, was eventually cared for by the most the unlikely of neighbors – a Samaritan. The lesson behind the parable is neatly summed up in Jesus’ return question: “Which of these three [the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan] do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” Jesus invited his hearers to understand that to be a neighbor is an act of decision; a hermeneutic of neighbor establishes a certain intimacy of relationship where none existed previously, or even where enmity existed.

53 I understand hospitality in terms of a dynamic of gift and receipt – receiving the gift of self of another, while extending our own self-gift. To offer hospitality is not just to act as host to a guest. Every gift presupposes the possibility that the gift will be received. Thus hospitality also entails being a gracious guest by way of receiving the offer extended by a host. In short, hospitality is a two-way street; it is always constituted in mutuality. To only give oneself is insufficient; one must also learn how to receive the gift of the other. For a treatment of the theme of hospitality see Letty M. Russell, Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference, ed. J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

Moreover, one may extend the idea of hospitality to the exchange of stories, that is, to narrative hospitality. In that case the hospitality was practiced in the initial stages of the encounter with Jesus along the road. The two disciples welcomed the presence of the unknown traveller, offering their own sense of the powerful events that had transpired in Jerusalem. In turn, the stranger took their stories to heart, and then broke open the scriptural metanarratives, which placed the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection in the context of a salvific history.
To engage in hospitality is therefore to engage in the re-storying of life. New relationality is crafted as a result of employing a narrative hermeneutic that renders hospitality into a profoundly creative act of narrativity, whereby the unknown other is seen as a kindred spirit deserving of one’s care and compassion. For the two followers of Jesus, this new story would have been motivated by the narrative ethos cultivated by their teacher about the virtues of feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, and shelter to the stranger. The hermeneutic of hospitality is part of the narrative ethos within which the disciples understood their mission.

I argued in the beginning of this chapter that, whilst the ultimate Mystery of God cannot be exhaustively known, we can tell and live stories that mediate and invite greater intimacy with God. Now, along the road to Emmaus, the writer of Luke’s gospel establishes a privileged pattern: the mystery of the risen Jesus would be made present when his story was recalled in the sharing of word, in the breaking of bread, and in whenever the narrative imagination reached out to care for the oppressed, marginalized and those living in poverty. Marianne Sawicki reinforces this last point in her work on recognizing the risen Jesus. She claims that in the Lukan narrative what makes it “possible to grasp resurrection is a community whose members can be hungry, recognize hungry persons, and fill their needs.” In effect, the Christian community would only come to more authentic and intimate knowledge of the risen Christ as it re-storied its life to include welcoming strangers and giving shelter and food to the weary. In this way the

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55 Sawicki, "Recognizing the Risen Lord," 442. For that reason, it is significant that the empty tomb is not the symbol of the resurrection for Luke; rather, it is the encounter with the risen Jesus as discerned in a life of hospitality, kindness and justice.
Christian community would not only be advancing the great Story of the in-breaking of God’s love into human existence, but would also have a foretaste of that Story’s denouement in the eschatological banquet wherein all are welcomed.

**Implications for Employing Narrativity within Religious Education Today**

At this inaugural scene of the first Christian community, amidst the brokenness and chaos of a shattered dreams and the missing body of a murdered teacher, our Lord appeared to his disciples on the road, re-situating them in the story and vision of the reign of God, re-storying their lives through word and deed. A new thing was being done in their lives, a new story was being written, in the obscurity of a country road, and its progenitor was the risen Lord. That story would be renewed each time the community of disciples gathered again in its liturgy to retell the story of God’s saving action in history and to break bread together, paralleling the hospitality to the hungry, the poor, and the needy that they were to practice in their daily lives. The community would itself comprise the lived story of God’s salvific plan and of the presence of the risen Lord in the world.

Indeed, the pattern for the way in which the risen Lord empowered the disciples to leave fear behind and embrace the new Easter life may be summarized by the terms: re-membering, re-visioning and re-commitment – all of which point to re-storying. Jesus helped them re-member the story of God’s saving action in Israel’s history, in light of which his death would be understood. Life revealed its irrepressible horizons when confined to death on a cross – a supreme paradox. Jesus also afforded a re-visioning of the disciples’ lives, helping them see anew the story/vision of the reign of God prefigured in the hospitality meal with the stranger. Finally, the encounter with the risen Lord
inspired *re-commitment* to apprenticeship in the work of establishing a more just and loving world in tune with that vision.

It seems to me that some crucial questions that face this generation of faith today are as follows: how do we educate for a more authentic, lived faith in the risen Christ today? How do we enable the re-storying of our lives towards greater truth, authenticity and wholeness, in keeping with our vision of resurrected life? How do we, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, move from our bastions of fear to new agency and conviction in the possibility of the reign of God? How do we help learners recognize the storied world, the narrative ethos in which we are all implicated, and to take up more redeeming and ennobling narratives when necessary? How do we leave behind stories that hinder or stifle life and human dignity, and take up more *truthful and edifying stories of life*?

We have, in biblical memory, the testimony of the Lukan community concerning how it lived its answer to these perennial questions through its worship and ethical practices. The memory of the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus now burdens us today with its possibilities. We too confess the presence of the risen Lord in our world today, and thus are entrusted with the vocation of the church in history to make manifest that presence, to be nourished and sustained by him, and to reshape the narrative of the world in tune with the will of God.

In answering these questions, we need to take into consideration the unique complexities of our age. This, in many ways, is a particularly challenging time for faith. The postmodern self is regarded as increasingly diffused, fractured and saturated by the
demands of family, friends, school, work, T.V. and social media. Compounding this is a distrust of institutional religion and the traditional metanarratives that assisted in providing stability to a person’s sense of self. On a more global scale, the unabated rise in global poverty and hunger continues to be a scandal in a world where the majority of inhabitants claim religious belief systems that abhor the suffering of the poor and vulnerable.

The wisdom of the Lukan community can be called upon. Honoring its pedagogical model of Jesus, our Christian communities today can also be a welcoming presence of all persons, proclaiming the great Story of the good news of the reign of God, and establishing our life witness as enacted parables of God’s grace. We too can apprentice with Jesus in service and solidarity with the marginalized of society. However, in the face of unprecedented global suffering, the horizons of our hospitality must extend beyond limits of parish, community, and country. Indeed we must gain a new appreciation for how the stories that we live impact on the lives and stories of others across the globe. Our spatial limits on hospitality must be reassessed.

Furthermore, we also can witness to the truth that whenever we meet to break open the word and break bread together, the risen Lord is in our midst as we tell and live the story like he commanded. But, this also burdens contemporary faith communities with the responsibility for forming and reforming our liturgies more in keeping with the vision of egalitarianism, inclusion and Eucharistic justice contained in the scriptural

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56 With the increasing popularity of the virtual communicative space of social media, many persons now juggle (often conflicting) virtual and ‘real’ identities. This “cacophony of selves in cyberspace,” says Tom Beaudoin, generates the sort of ambiguous sense of identity and selfhood characteristic of the so-called Generation X. Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 135.
accounts. How can we memorialize Jesus’ table fellowship when we exclude women, for instance, from full participation in the church’s ministries? We desperately need to continually renew our story of discipleship in fidelity to that which Jesus invited us all to live.

Regardless of the approach taken in meeting the task of bringing persons into more edifying and truthful life stories and practices, it is clear that the resurrection must be taught as a present reality into which, as a community, we grow in knowledge and communion. I fear that too often it is understood simply as an ancient event. Like the Lukan community, we too must occasion experiences of profound intimacy within community (whether in worship or through our practice of solidarity) that gives a felt sense of the presence of Lord.\footnote{Marianne Sawicki has argued this persuasively. She writes: “In what then does the competence to see Jesus as Lord consist? … Seeing the Lord is an event of recognition that has two fundamental preconditions: … There must be ways to reproduce real time engagement with some intense and intimate experience of empowerment in the midst of community, and there must also be ways of preserving information about who Jesus was.” Sawicki, \textit{Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices}, 6.}

The questions regarding how to help learners recognize the storied world in which they are implicated and assume more redeeming and ennobling narratives, will be taken up again in the chapter five from the standpoint of education theory. However, one closing thought: Luke’s journey motif has interesting parallels with the etymology of the word curriculum. From the Latin \textit{currere}, the word implies movement, running or a flowing current. Religious education curriculum may thus be regarded as a movement, or better, a journey into ever-greater intimacy and communion with Jesus. Indeed, it entails more than instruction for understanding dogmas, doctrines and general church teachings.
Rather, it is conative,\textsuperscript{58} aimed at leading learners to broaden their worldviews and embody Jesus’ vision, convictions, passions and commitments. It is a lifelong journey of encounter, transformation and communion with the risen Lord that engages the whole learner – head, heart and hand – to hopefully set our hearts on fire for recreating the world. A sobering thought if ever there was!

CHAPTER 4

FOUNDATIONS OF A NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY IN A CARIBBEAN NARRATIVE-PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Introduction

For we are once again considering the possibility of creation: creation of new social realities, new stories to tell, and new selves to tell about them. What does it mean for human beings to be able to create all these new things? It means that in addition to being subjects in the sense of being subjected-to the determinative power of culture, we are subjects who have the power — in principle, if not always in practice — to recreate both culture itself and our place within it.

~Mark Freeman

God made human beings because God loves stories

~ Elie Wiesel

If, as Elie Wiesel has claimed, God made human beings because God love stories, then it must also be said that human beings create stories because we love God! The Caribbean legacy has been about the making of stories — lived, “world-constituting” stories, by which we have resisted dehumanizing and tyrannical colonial narratives to

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embody a creative vision of human subjectivity on the world stage. Our story was forged in labor under the Caribbean sun because of our love and faith in God, and because we have refused to yield the sacredness of human being to the subversive powers of displacement, enslavement, poverty, or political, economic and cultural marginalization.

While the previous chapter dealt with the biblical foundations of a narrative pedagogy, this chapter takes up the challenge of establishing the theological foundations. I contextualize my reflections by drawing on the Caribbean faith witness, in the belief that its unique particularity can ultimately provide lessons of universal import. In many ways, religious education is about enabling learners to create their own lived and life-giving stories in faith, in ways that manifest the presence of God for a needy world.

Christian moral theology pursues the reciprocal concerns of who one ought to be and how one ought to act as believers in Jesus Christ and as apprentices in his mission of establishing the justice and compassion of God on earth. These concerns serve to delineate the main arguments of this chapter into what may roughly be considered a narrative theology of being on the one hand, and a narrative theology of praxis on the other.

I have previously undergirded my proposal for a narrative pedagogy with a particular understanding of the human being as possessing a narrative competency for establishing a meaningful world (or ethos) to inhabit. This narrative competency interprets being as constituted along temporal and spatial horizons. That is, it allows us to understand ourselves as persons and communities in (synchronic) relationship with the rest of creation, as well as in (diachronic) relation with persons and communities from the

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past and in the anticipated future. An unstated logic was that this narrative competency was a gift of God, which enables us to be and to act in ways that manifest God’s presence in history. This chapter now makes explicit consideration of these connections in the form of a narrative-practical theology.  

In terms of a narrative theology of being, I ask: what does our narrative competency imply for our being-in-relationship with God and others – and as disciples of Jesus Christ? I offer two suggestions for a theological anthropology that takes seriously our narrative competency:

1) Human beings are capable of imagining, intending and co-constituting a storied-sacred world that is life-giving for all.

2) Human beings are capable of responding to God’s preeminent gift of self with a lived and storied “yes!”

I utilize Karl Rahner’s notion of the fundamental option to conceptualize the human yes to God’s self gift. This ‘yes’ is not simply notional assent. Rather, it is lived and storied, unfolding through life’s ebbs and flows – times of fidelity and infidelity, times of ardor as well as times of indifference – while consolidating and imbuing such inconstancy with hope.

With regards to a narrative theology of praxis, I ask: what forms of moral agency are implied by this yes of faith? With the help of Johann Baptist Metz, I argue that the human ‘yes’ in Rahner’s transcendental theology is in need of contextualizing (or historicizing), without which, the existential challenges that shape the texture of this

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5 The chapter does not permit the systematic development of a theological ethic. Rather, what is presented here is better regarded as ‘markings’ of such an ethic, gleaned from sustained reflection and praxis in Caribbean faith and spirituality. I borrow the term “narrative-practical” from Johannes Baptist Metz.
assent to God would be lost. Metz’s categories of memory, narrative and solidarity serve to contextualize Rahner, but I show how they fall short of representing the nuances of Caribbean life and history. Metz, however, offers as a useful bridge for a distinctively Caribbean theology of yes, through his category of narrative.

The central proposition of the chapter is that the human yes to God, from a Caribbean perspective, is characterized by a narrative historicism, which engenders social praxis with an urgency and creativity borne of an appreciation for our historical agency and for the connectedness of all humanity – past, present and future. A narrative historicism subverts the dehumanization that is borne of displacing human beings from traditions and community, such as was practiced in the Caribbean slave trade. Forcefully separated from family, tribal community and native ecology, African slaves were divorced from the semiotic systems (culture, community and ecology) that gave meaning to life and anchored self-identity. Stripped of name, relationships, and other identity signifiers, one became ‘a black slave,’ reduced simply to identification by skin color. Denuded of human subjectivity, the slave could be commodified and sold as property, completing the reconfiguration of the displaced slave body. Narrative historicism encompasses practices that have reasserted human subjectivity through responsible historical agency, and that have (re)placed persons and communities within the bonds of community.

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6 Willie James Jennings, The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). Jennings traces the impact on slave identity from being removed from one’s native land. He writes “the central effect of the loss of the earth as an identity signifier was that native identities, tribal, communal, familial, and spatial, were constricted to simply their bodies, leaving behind the very ground that enables and facilitates the articulation of identity.” (p.43)

7 The epitome of the dehumanizing effect of displacement was the slave market. For an evocative critique of the slave market system and the commodification of the human being, see Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).
I will focus on two social practices that are ubiquitous to the Caribbean region and fundamental to an ethic of action based on a narrative historicism: *hospitality* and *festivity*. The former concerns *the recognition of being* through the exchange of narratives. It is narrative hospitality; it attends, with a critical mind and with responsibility, to how others are implicated and affected by the narratives that we live, and to how we are implicated in others’ stories by choice or by chance. On the other hand, to practice festivity is to *celebrate being*; it is to withdraw from the humdrum of daily living to re-member and re-story oneself into a primordial vision of authentic being.

Together, narrative hospitality and festivity comprise ways in which the Caribbean has lived a story of yes to God. These are by no means exhaustive of social praxis that exemplifies narrative historicism; but they are indeed significant in their capacity to reshape the Caribbean native as a subject with historical agency. As epiphanies of faith within the vicissitudes of Caribbean life and history, they open the sources of Caribbean theology beyond oral and literary archives to a consideration of the sacramentality of the lived historical experience.

Caribbean sensibilities about the humanizing power of narrative historic social praxis offer much wisdom for religious education pedagogy that aims at conation in faith. Caribbean people have flourished despite tremendous suffering in history – from our colonial past to the present scourge of the commodification of being in the wake of rampant market liberalism. The dehumanizing narratives of colonialism reappear in the form of a pervasive labeling of human beings as ‘capital’ for a globalizing world-economy. In light of these ubiquitous challenges to human dignity, Christian religious

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education must respond by leading learners to reimagine and recreate new stories that might embody God’s vision of justice and care. The Caribbean lived witness to narrative historic praxis may provide a worthy resource for other contexts in this regard.

**A Narrative Theology of Being**

1. **Human Beings as Capable of Imagining, Intending and Co-constituting a Storied-Sacred World**

   A call to Christian discipleship concerns the question, “who ought one to be as a believer in Jesus Christ?” My first proposal in this regard, which accounts for our narrative competency, is that *a human being is one who is capable of imagining, intending, and acting to constitute a storied-sacred world that is life-giving for all.*

   The concept storied-sacred is to be distinguished from ‘sacred story,’ although they are both expressions of our narrative competency. In ordinary usage, sacred story, of which the Bible is the privileged repository for Christianity and Judaism, refers to the oral and written codification of a community’s wisdom of faith. Christian sacred story concerns God’s love for creation, revealed in Jesus Christ, and embodied afresh through the power of the Holy Spirit in all creatures who cooperate with God in establishing a more just, compassionate world. Indeed, sacred story is as much an ecological story (hence, of course, a human story) as it is God’s story.9

My emphasis, however, is on our competency to constitute a *storied-sacred* world. My adjectival use of ‘story’ represents an appeal that *we interpret human existence as both storied and sacred*. Human history enshrains a drama of love in which God gives God’s self to all creation and solicits a human response. This drama plays out within the contingencies and vicissitudes of each person’s (and community’s) life.

To say that a human being is someone who is capable of imagining, intending, and acting to constitute a storied-sacred world points to our competency to develop a particular worldview (or narrative ethos) that bestows meaning to human action as caught up in a divine-human love affair. Human beings are able to imagine history as the drama between God’s perpetual self-offer and both the vision and myopia of our response. This worldview encompasses and reconciles (in the narrative sense, meaning story continues through his resurrected life in human history. At the heart of the phrase God’s story is therefore the mystery of the incarnation.

10 The language of sacred existence does not refer to metaphysical existence; rather, I mean God’s presence as revealed and interpreted within human experience. Our biblical heritage is replete with references to how God’s presence bestows sacredness onto life, even if many passages seem ambiguous about this dignity (such as those that fail to denounce the evil of slavery or tribal genocide, or that ignore the oppression of minorities.) For a recent survey of the biblical testimony to the sacredness of human life see David P. Gushee, *The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Vision Is Key to the World's Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013).

11 Hence the reason that personal attestation to the presence of God is more often than not in the form of a story or personal testimony.

12 One of Mircea Eliade’s significant contributions was to describe sacred existence as a distinctive worldview of societies throughout history that establishes a transcendent horizon for human existence. Eliade distinguishes the sacred from the profane not primarily by any claims to truth, but by the fact that the former characterizes a worldview in which “all nature is capable of revealing itself in cosmic sacrality.” Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans., Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), 12. In contrast, a profane worldview understands reality as homogeneously mundane, and does not claim the same experience of hierophany as would those with a sacral worldview. Eliade used the term hierophany to denote the occasion when “something sacred shows itself to us.” Ibid., 11.

13 My understanding of imagination here is not as a faculty for producing fanciful or illusionary representations of reality, but rather as the intrinsic human power to understand by producing mental
it holds heterogeneous conditions together in a life story) those occasions when God’s saving presence is plainly evident in human action, with occasions when it is hidden in personal and social suffering, as well as with times when it is hindered and stifled by personal and social sin.

In this way the sacrality of the world may be imaged as a living, unfinished story whose denouement in the reign of God has yet to be realized; it is continually mired in sinful institutions, practices and persons as well as in hopeful resistance and faithfulness. A storied-sacred worldview keeps the vision of God’s ultimate reign ever before us, and elicits our responsibility in playing our role – by God’s grace – in its unfolding.

Recognition of the storied-sacred nature of the world ought, therefore, to elicit not only reverence and esteem for all of creation, but also intention and action – once more, by God’s grace – for securing this vision through our efforts for liberation, justice and solidarity. We must remain attentive and committed to issues of human dignity, especially when humanity is daily trampled by poverty, injustice and oppression. The

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15 There is a strong aesthetic sense in possessing a storied-sacred worldview – something that may be akin to possessing a romantic view of the spiritual life as an unfolding love affair. This is plainly evident in the writings of the mystics like John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich. However, it is equally possible to view sacred life under the genre of tragedy – wherein life is a wrestling with instability, ambiguity and contingency – as is again visible in the writings of John of the Cross. See for example, Iain Matthew, The Impact of God: Soundings from St John of the Cross (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995).

16 Extreme poverty and wealth inequity continue to haunt humanity as a failure of its history. At its Millennium Summit in the year 2000, the member states of the United Nations committed to global partnership in 8 measurable, developmental goals for addressing extreme poverty by the year 2105. The first of these Millennium Development Goals was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. The
poor of this world are too easily marginalized (and dehumanized) as their stories get swept aside by the march of economic progress. To interpret such persistent and widespread denigration of human worth within the God/human story infuses our agency with the hope that human beings and human community are always in the process of becoming, with the potential of being more than what they are at any moment. With God’s grace our actions for justice and solidarity may indeed contribute to securing a more humanizing world.

2. **Human Beings as Capable of Responding to God’s Self-Gift with a Lived and Storied ‘Yes’**

The God-human relationship is commonly perceived through an offer-response dynamic, with God’s offer of God’s self anteceding and empowering human agency for gift return. Ideally, our response constitutes an existential ‘yes!’ to God. Far from simple notional assent, this yes is embodied in the actions, thoughts and discourses of our lives. With the help of God’s grace, it can become a lived yes!18

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17 There is also a strong aesthetic sensibility in knowing that human experience is caught up in God’s story, which adds an element of persuasion to ethical action. This point cannot be developed here, but it points to the crucial relationship between a narrative aesthetics and an ethics of action.

18 Arguably, the offer-response formula can also reflect the self-offer of humans to God (enabled of course by grace), and God’s response of Yes. From a Christological perspective, both human-offer and divine-response are actualized ‘in-Christ’ since it is in the person of Jesus Christ that the humanity finds its fullest expression of life as gift and, in turn, God speaks the definitive ‘Yes’ to human history.

Moreover, it is also a *storied yes* that traverses the mosaic of life. Our lived-through assent to God’s self-gift is never complete, and hardly ever consistent; rather, it is a ‘steady drift upwards’ in the sinusoidal ebb and flow of our faith lives – in our occasions of turning away from God, in our times of indifference, and in such times when we cooperate with grace enough to render our whole heart, mind, soul and bodies to God’s will. This steady drift is only revealed in hindsight as we form our faith autobiography. Conversion stories are points of inflection in the trajectory of our yeses to God who walks in the garden of our lives calling us ever into deeper, right and loving relationship with self, others and God.

To be capable of living this storied yes refers to our being fundamentally graced to live such an assent to God. Catholic theology speaks of this *fundamental option* as the overall tenor of a person’s commitment in faith, which is expressed, occluded or denied in our daily thoughts, words and actions. Human beings are essentially graced to make the fundamental option of a yes to God. Karl Rahner made frequent use of this concept. He insisted that a person’s life should be “a single acceptance of that which he [*sic*]

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19 This idea that faith does not develop in linear progression and that the yes of faith is discernable in retrospect through our powers to story our lives, echoes Mark Freeman’s critique of stage-based theories of faith development. Freeman’s evocative thesis is that faith development (or the maturation in our yes to God) is discerned only in retrospect – from the standpoint of present, looking back at one’s life to ascertain how far one has travelled on one’s journey with God. See Mark Freeman, “History, Narrative, and Life Span Developmental Knowledge,” *Human Development* 27, (1984). See also his *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative*.

20 According to The New Catholic Encyclopedia, the fundamental option denotes, an attempt to describe the basic orientation of one’s moral life as a continuous process with a definite moral direction rather than as a sequence of discrete, unconnected actions. Particular acts are seen as expressing and modifying the fundamental option, confirming and developing it or diminishing and ultimately reversing it. "Fundamental Option," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition* (Detroit: Gale, 2003).
inescapably is, an answer to an almighty call.”21 In other words, our life ought to be spent as an overall style of yeses to the self-offer of God.22 That is what we were created for – to live out a “sacramental existential,”23 wherein we abandon self into the Holy Mystery of God. Moreover, for Rahner, this communion with Holy Mystery is potentially mediated by our encounter with the other. We live our yes to God through love of neighbor.24

Yet, to simply state as a universal truth that we were created for saying yes to God’s self-gift, without then examining the ways in which both the reception of that gift and our response are conditioned by our historical existence, is to leave this truth at the unduly abstract and ultimately impractical level of a concept. Even admitting that our yeses are storied still leaves open the question of what kind of human agency is being implied here and for what context. The danger with conceptual universality as Ignacio Ellacuría reminds, is that it tends to conceal the problems and issues that are only disclosed in real historical praxis. What we need is a “historical, or historicized,

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22 Shannon Craigo-Snell has demonstrated three main forms of this lived yes in Rahner’s theology: the yes of silent contemplation of God, the yes of love, and the yes of the final gift of self in death. See Shannon Craigo-Snell, Silence, Love, and Death: Saying “Yes” to God in the Theology of Karl Rahner (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008).


conceptual universality” that grounds the universal in the particularity of context and, thus renders it practical, understandable and fecund for the challenges of discipleship.\(^{25}\)

In other words, one may ask: what does the assertion that human beings are created for living a storied yes to God imply for the way in which we (ought to) live in our specific sociohistorical context? This question becomes critical for the religious educator apprenticed to nurture greater authenticity, commitment and profundity in the yes of the learner’s life, as a disciple of Jesus, and as lived within their particular social and cultural context.\(^{26}\) In short, the question of moral agency, which comes to the fore particularly in an educative context, imposes on theology the task of historicizing the metaphysical category of ‘yes.’

To some extent this was Johann Baptist Metz’s critique of the transcendental methodology championed by Rahner. Metz’s categories of memory, narrative and solidarity focused his attempt to contextualize the theological insight into God’s self-gift and the human response within the history of humanity, which significantly for Metz was a history of suffering. Metz’s argument serves as a useful bridge between the universal

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\(^{25}\) Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation," in Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 1993), 253. His point is important enough to bear quoting in its entirety:

There is an ahistorical conceptual universality and there is an historical, or historicized, conceptual universality. The former may seem more theoretical and more universal; that is not so much because it conceals a historicity that by its concealment operates perversely, as because it ignores the universal dimension of historical reality. If theology does not reflect critically on what specific historical praxis the conceptualizations come from and what praxis they lead to, it places itself at the service of a history that the concept may be trying to negate. (p. 253)

notion of the fundamental option and the necessary contextualization offered by a Caribbean narrative ethic of Yes.

**A Narrative Theology of Praxis**

What form of human agency is implied by the ‘Yes’ of Faith? Metz’s contention with Rahner’s theological anthropology regarded the ahistorical nature of its human subject. Metz correctly saw that defining the identity of the transcendental subject in its historical context was essential to guard against a theology that was, at best, irrelevant to the needs of the very subjects to which it spoke. At its worst, such ahistorical theologies could perpetuate the suffering and marginalization of the same people by ignoring their lived testimony.

To circumvent the problems that attend to a “subjectless” theology, Metz defines the human being as a *subject of history and society* who also is, because of human injustice, a subject who suffers.\(^{27}\) History is, for Metz, a scandalous history of suffering in which the poor bear the double indignity of material deprivation and of having their identities and subjectivity denied in the forgetfulness of memory.\(^{28}\) Theology must then necessarily be practical and political: concerned with social praxis that re-establishes the subjectivity of all persons. It is the narrated memory of the poor that ultimately preserves

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\(^{28}\) Ibid., 118. If theology takes seriously this suffering subject in history then the character of a purely transcendental faith becomes something of a scandal. How can we as human beings legitimately claim that we are embraced by God while, at the same time, not reducing or ignoring the suffering poor of history, whose voice and identity have been denied? This question was for Metz a primary challenge to theological thinking that attends seriously to the meaning of salvation in history. Metz rendered it not as a question of theodicy, but as a question for theological methodology. Theology needed to be *practical*, situating itself among the social praxes by which human beings reclaimed their subjectivity in God’s presence through solidarity with the poor of history.
their identity as subjects and, in turn, constitutes the subjectivity of those who do the remembering. Identity, for Metz, “always begins with the awakening of memory.”\(^{29}\) It is only in solidarity with the poor, marginalized and oppressed of history, activated by memory, that humanity fulfills its communal vocation of becoming “subjects in God’s presence.”\(^{30}\)

For Metz, therefore, the moral agency implied by the yes of faith engages memory and narrative in building solidarity with the poor of history and society. These provide the norms for human subjectivity deemed missing from Rahner’s transcendental approach. To be human, for Metz, is to have a story that is recalled, known and appreciated; to be human is also to know, recall and appreciate the story of others, especially of the poor.

These categories of memory, narrative and solidarity are of immediate relevance for a local Caribbean theology. We can definitely appreciate Metz’s defining of the

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 75.

\(^{30}\) Ibid. For Metz, to evoke the name God is to evoke the political. The source and telos of freedom is thus not an ephemeral vision of the utopic but the practical vision of divine love, revealed in the scriptures as constituted by justice and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Metz’s theological hermeneutic is a major point of departure from his philosophical roots in Marxian thought and in the counter-Enlightenment critique of the post-World War II Frankfurt school. In reaction to what he understood of these traditions, Metz argued that an alternative vision of society couldn’t legitimately be secured through the ideality of utopia. It was also not to be found in the Enlightenment’s vision of society that is structured on an instrumental reasoning that objectivizes and dominates creation. Rather, the criteria for legitimizing an alternative vision of society must reside in religion, and in faith in God who transcends human existence.

For Metz, it is only the “religiously formed subject” – as one whose subjectivity is implicated in the subjectivity of others, especially the forgotten of history – that can serve as the objective basis for an alternative society marked by justice and human flourishing. Metz’s thesis on the centrality of the religiously formed subject in history is particularly relevant for conversations with secular Caribbean thinkers like Franz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter, both of who echo Marxist philosophy’s call for the “new human being,” albeit from different perspectives. A Metz-inspired question for such thinkers would be, “From whence comes the power and legitimacy for this new vision of humanity if not from religion?” See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. (New York: Grove Press, 1967). A useful introduction to Sylvia Wynter’s work is David Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism*, no. 8 (2000).
subject of transcendental theology as a being in society and history; we share his concern for contextualizing the type of incarnational theology developed by Rahner, and his insistence that theology is inherently political. We also have a rich history of theological reflection on what God’s gift of self implies for human historical agency in the context of societies emerging from the darkness of a colonial past. Metz’s categories of memory, narrative and solidarity echo in this indigenous legacy.

However, the uniqueness of Caribbean existence creates some significant points of departure from Metz’s theology that needs further attention. In constructing a Caribbean practical theology of yes that may inform religious education pedagogy, I depart from Metz in two main areas: 1) in his defining of history as the history of suffering and, 2) in his description of narrative as primarily an organizing principle of memory. Engaging Metz through these categories serves as a bridge to a more substantial discussion on the theological importance of narrativity in a Caribbean ethic of yes.

1. History as the history of suffering, survival, possibility, and creative agency

In contrast to Metz’s focus on the suffering of history, I highlight that, from a Caribbean perspective, history is also about survival, possibility, and creative agency! In other words, besides memory, a liberating practical theology also employs imagination in retrieving the creative potential of life. While I do appreciate that Metz applied his hermeneutical lens of suffering as a necessary corrective for an ahistorical, subjectless and, consequently, irresponsible theology, I offer that our theology must also be cautious in limiting subjectivity to the experience of pain and non-identity.

The Caribbean legacy of slavery and colonial oppression is intrinsic to who we are as a people; yet it does not entirely define us. To limit the memory of history’s
subjects to that of suffering risks losing focus of their subjectivity in their practices of resistance and survival. Indeed, theology (and humanity in general) needs to employ both hermeneutical lenses to its interpretation of history and society. We need the memory of suffering to preserve our consciousness from undue triumphalism, but we equally need the testimony of survival and possibility to stimulate imagination and preserve our theologizing from instrumentalizing suffering for our own purposes.

The issue here concerns the identification of being – particularly Caribbean being as a product of society and history. Caribbean selfhood emerged within tragic circumstances as being in suffering but also as being capable of survival and agency in constituting culture and a new world. It is only by preserving the totality of this witness of triumph amidst travail, possibility amidst oppression, hope amidst despair that we honor the dignity of the Caribbean being, from either being reduced to what is done to them (what they suffer), or to what they have accomplished.

The late Caribbean theologian Romney Moseley has argued this point consistently. I will discuss Moseley’s contribution to a Caribbean theology later in the chapter.

This is where critical contextual theologies suffer from a double consciousness that resonates with W. E. B Du Bois’ recognition of the binary existence of black folk and Franz Fanon’s similar observation of the “existential deviation” that confronts the Caribbean Negro. The double consciousness of contextual theology emerges from its need to counter the narratives of traditional Eurocentric theologies by emphasizing the suffering of humanity on the one hand, and its equal need to promote a vision that life is more than suffering.

I readily admit that focusing on suffering humanity is often of practical necessity in subverting hegemonic, bourgeois, patriarchal, racist and other oppressive theologies. Black, Latino, womanist, and queer theologies are based on a hermeneutics of suffering in order to reclaim the theological weight of the testimony of the victims of history. These subversive voices are essential and undeniably poignant. My emphasis on a hermeneutics of possibility, resilience and survival is to retrieve into focus a point that all critical theologies ultimately make – if only as a sub-text to their main assertions – that human dignity cannot ultimately be defined by suffering. May the day hasten when there would be no need to highlight the suffering of people everywhere, but instead we may focus our energies on what truly matters – the unique mystery of each and every human being.
2. *Narrative as a category of praxis and of memory*

My second point on the moral agency inscribed by the yes of faith concerns Metz’s twinning of narrative with memory. Once again my departure from Metz begins from a position of agreement. Metz correctly identified the significance of the story genre for the Christian kerygma in its persuasive capacity. Other Christian narrative theorists like Stanley Hauerwas and H. Richard Niebuhr are in agreement on this point. The narrative memory of those who have suffered is far more persuasive than, say, a purely statistical accounting of poverty.

However, Metz does not go *far enough* in his description of the significance of narrative for theology! Narrative is not simply a category of memory. As I have been arguing in this dissertation, it equally applies to human *praxis*. It is the *narratives that are lived by the Caribbean people* that I am proposing for primary theological consideration.

Without our narrative competency for holding the vicissitudes of life in the meaningfulness of life story, the yes of faith cannot be gainfully apprehended. Narrative is a fundamental category for theology not only because it represents the primary literary

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35 There are occasions when Metz seems to be reaching towards describing the life of discipleship as itself a form of narration. In *Faith in History and Society* he describes the praxis of discipleship as the central means by which the Christian message of salvation becomes intelligible (cf. John 13:34-35 in which Jesus states that his disciples will be known by the love that they practice). Metz then adds, “this intelligibility of Christianity cannot be conveyed in a purely speculative way, but narratively.” Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, 154. Emphasis added. But his significant focus is on narrative as storytelling, which he deems to be the primordial means for expressing the foundational truths of faith.
means of communicating the gospel with persuasion, but also because our lived discipleship is often even more persuasive, and also because our narrative consciousness enables us to have hope in our fundamental option of yes for God throughout the ebbs and flow of our faith commitment. We can live through life’s vicissitudes in the knowledge that God’s forgiveness is irrevocably emplotted in the human story in the person of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, I propose that it is not so much the narrated memory of the poor that is of particular theological import from a Caribbean perspective, as it is *the memory of the lived narratives of the poor*. The distinction is subtle but critical: the first rendition focuses on the story of certain lives in history; the second, on the *storied quality* of those lives. To speak of the memory of the lived narratives of the poor, once again, guards against the possible reduction of those lives to that of ‘poor people’ and, instead, asserts the narrative complexity of their lives. It portrays their lives as a narrative that crafts a meaningful existence out of the vicissitudes and paradoxes of history.

The task that faces Caribbean theology, now as always, is to define the indigenous categories that would constitute a Caribbean narrative-practical theology, which speaks to and out of the totality of Caribbean experience. In other words, the task is to discern with social and historical sensitivity the character of the Caribbean yes of faith. The detour through Metz’s political theology emphasized that a primary category of Caribbean theology has to do with the lived narratives of the people. It is the texture and complexity of our lived narratives that ultimately exemplify the uniqueness of our yes of faith in the face of dehumanizing narratives.
In the next section, I describe the texture of that lived Caribbean yes as a *narrative historicism*. I follow this by providing two ways in which a narrative historicism is engaged in Caribbean life and society: through the practice of hospitality, and through the practice of festivity. The narrative historicism embodied in these practices will hopefully provide much wisdom for crafting a narrative pedagogy for a faith that is historically responsible and conative for discipleship.

**The Texture of the Caribbean Yes: Theological Debates**

What is the texture of the Caribbean yes of faith? This question, in one form or another, has been of primary concern for Caribbean theology. In what may be described as the heyday for the discipline – coinciding with the general intellectual fervor that accompanied the independence movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s – scholars, clergy and lay leaders across the Caribbean reflected on the meaning of the incarnation within the unique sociohistorical context of the region, as well as on the kind of moral and social praxis invited by this situated faith.\(^{36}\)

Idris Hamid, in an address commemorating the inauguration of the Caribbean Conference of Churches, articulated a vision for a new Caribbean theology that recovered the truth of God presence amidst the Caribbean people.\(^{37}\) This truth had been occluded by a colonial brand of Christianity that proved, in many ways, to be irrelevant to the

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everydayness of island life. In the meantime, Hamid argued, “God had to do a lot of God’s work underground.”

Where then did God work if God’s work within the main-line churches was thwarted? God worked in and through the cultural fragments that were there among the oppressed…. God was present more in the canefields than in the cathedrals, more in the baracoons than in the basilicas, more in the ‘protest’ than in the ‘obedience,’ more in [the sorrows of the oppressed and downtrodden] than in the sacraments of the Church.

These incendiaryst words were poignant for the time, and very necessary for occasioning a seismic shift in theological thought away from colonial categories and interpretations. Hamid’s address also served to characterize the shape of moral agency within the ordinary existence of the Caribbean people. “The task of theology,” Hamid adds, “would be to point out ways in which [Caribbean] creativity and cultural heritage could become a vehicle to receive and express faith. For this is where man really is and God meets him.” The primary onus on a Caribbean practical theology was therefore to “explore the fullness of human possibilities as [children] of God” particularly as manifested in the people’s popular cultural practices.

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38 Ibid., 123. Hamid’s language has been changed slightly for the purposes of gender inclusiveness. I will continue doing this in subsequent quotes.

39 Ibid., 125.

40 Ibid. It is important to realize that Hamid draws no distinction between religious and secular culture in this statement. Because religious ritual had been colonized by a Eurocentric Christianity, the faith expressions of the people migrated into what they considered was truly expressive of their deepest, most authentic being—popular culture. In many ways this legacy distinguishes the Caribbean religious landscape from that considered by Latino/a theology, where popular religion is a primary form of faith expression. Of course H. Richard Niebuhr offered the seminal treatment of the relationship between faith and culture. H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1951). See also Orlando O. Espin, "Grace and Humaness: A Hispanic Perspective," in We Are a People!: Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology, ed. Roberto S. Goizueta (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

It will relentlessly search the various ideologies, and systems under which we work and live, as well as the revolutionary proposals that work for change to divest them of their inhuman demonic character, and promote greater human possibilities where these are present. It will help fashion the new Caribbean [human], one who will be led to [their] rightful status as co-creator with God to transform these Caribbean societies into just and humane ones.42

Besides advocating for exploring the fullness of human possibility, what is interesting in this statement is that Caribbean faith agency is described as an act of co-creation of being – world and ego constituting activity.

Hamid’s work in characterizing the Caribbean yes to God’s self-gift using concepts of possibility, creation and transformation was continued by Kortright Davis.43 His most recent book captures these concerns using the metaphor of *emancipation*, which he understood to be “the major thrust of Caribbean existence.”44 A theology of emancipation (as distinct from a theology of liberation) explicitly connects the Caribbean with the memory of the struggle of slave ancestors, while serving as the “strongest warning” possible about all forms of bondage and servitude in life.45 To be emancipated was therefore a highly creative act of subverting and transforming all that limits human freedom. Despite the tremendous paradoxes of Caribbean existence, an emancipated

42 Ibid., 128.

43 Davis is a Howard University-based theologian who was instrumental in the development of the Caribbean Conference of Churches in the mid to late twentieth century as a vehicle for Christian social praxis.


45 Ibid., 103.
people find ways to thrive; they cultivate a spirit of celebration, resilience, survival and praise.46

The late Romney Moseley offers an alternative perspective on Caribbean moral agency. In many ways, Moseley echoes a Metzian approach by focusing on the contingency, brokenness and suffering of Caribbean existence.47 He was weary of theologies that co-opted popular paradigms like ‘development’ to conceptualize Caribbean faith, since such terms were easily tinged in triumphalism, and glossed over the stark reality in which faith was shaped.48 The unique agency and power of Caribbean faith was to be judged not through achievement categories like ‘economic development’ or ‘faith development’ or ‘spiritual progress,’ but rather in its capacity for promoting self-emptying love.

For Moseley, Christian discipleship called primarily for inner transformation of being before any social or structural transformation could be discussed. Disciples of Jesus Christ needed to be continuously refreshed in the truth that true power and agency resided in a selfless love that seeks solidarity with the poor. Such love called for what Moseley

46 Ibid., 49. In an earlier work, he further defined Caribbean existence as constituted by practices of creativity, continuity of belief in a covenanting God, and community. See Kortright Davis, Mission for Caribbean Change: Caribbean Development as Theological Enterprise (Frankfurt am Main; Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1982).

47 This may be because like Metz, Moseley’s theology was in a large part a reaction to the imposition of continental theologies and U.S. theories of developmental psychology (particularly Fowler’s stage theories) on Caribbean existence.

48 Moseley critiques traditional stage-theories of faith development (such as James Fowler’s stage of faith) as inappropriate in contexts where survival was the first order of the day. In such contexts, faith does not linearly progress through stages but matures as one finds more authentic ways to be obedient and to surrender to the will of God, as demanded by the particular situation. Romney M. Moseley, Becoming a Self before God: Critical Transformations (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 40-41.
described as the *repetition* or imitation of the *kenosis* of Christ in the modern-day context.\(^{49}\)

Moseley’s theology responded to the plight of the Caribbean people in history, but also was undoubtedly influenced by his personal experience of suffering.\(^{50}\) A legitimate question may be raised as to whether his theological ethic implies a resignation in the face of suffering. But this is hardly the case. Moseley’s kenotic spirituality calls for an “emancipatory praxis” of obedience and surrender to the movements of God’s Spirit.\(^{51}\) The “hard paradoxes” of Caribbean faith are therefore inescapable: burdened by powerlessness, the poor are empowered through solidarity and compassion; meaning in life is only affirmed “in the face of meaninglessness, doubt, suffering and despair.”\(^{52}\) To accept this paradoxical vision is to live in the truth of the incarnation.

The Moseley and Davis positions constitute a debate about the kind of moral agency that is required to meet the challenges of Caribbean existence. While the two are united in their teleological vision of Caribbean freedom, they are primarily divided on the kind of transformation deemed necessary for this freedom. Davis emphasizes *social transformation* that draws on human creativity to dismantle oppressive structures and establish humanizing communities. Moseley stresses *transformation of consciousness* through re-membering the self-emptying love of God, so as to live in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

\(^{49}\) Moseley would have obtained this concept of repetition from his reading of Kierkegaard.


\(^{51}\) Moseley, 129-31.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 13.
This debate hints at an underlying and unresolved schizophrenia in Caribbean theologies of freedom and, even more broadly, in the region’s intellectual discourse on the dynamics of Caribbean transformation. Our intellectual tradition is split along Enlightenment-inherited binaries of materialism vs. consciousness, inner self vs. outer self, mind vs. body. Does structure determine consciousness, or vice versa? Is the ego constituted by society, or does it constitute itself and society? Is freedom won by changing the social structures external to the human being, or by transforming inner human consciousness? Such questions have generated divided allegiances in Caribbean thought.

We can trace this divide to similar tensions running through Caribbean philosophy. Contemporary Afro-Caribbean philosophy is fractured into two schools – historicism and poeticism – described by Paget Henry.

[The historicist tradition] has emphasized popular and state-led transformations of colonial/plantation institutions with a view toward creating national and egalitarian communities and corresponding changes in consciousness. In the poeticist tradition, the emphasis has been on the aesthetic reworking of the elements of broken traditions, with a vision toward transforming the consciousness and identity of Caribbean people, whose changed behavior would in turn change their societies.\(^{53}\)

The historicist tradition emphasizes the primacy of activism and the sociohistorical determination of the human ego. Human consciousness is only changed as the structures that inhibit the free exercise of our imagination and selfhood are dismantled. The human being is thus a historical agent with the power to (re)create the world.

In contrast, poeticists insist that human being is defined by possessing a consciousness that reaches for transcendence. Changing consciousness is therefore

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\(^{53}\) Henry, *Caliban’s Reason*, 16.
primary in changing historical agency. It is the human imagination – inspired by the
deeper vision of life offered by symbols, images, and text – that generates the necessary
impulse and convictions for ideological, behavioral and structural change.\textsuperscript{54}

The Moseley and Davis debate inherits this philosophical divide. There are
definite poetic strains to Moseley’s theology, particularly in his emphasis on inner
transformation. Christ’s kenotic self-emptying is the archetypal image for Moseley that
serves to shape the faith consciousness of the disciple and motivate moral agency. This is
a poeticism in theological guise. Davis, by contrast, seems to have a more overt
historicist bias, revealed in his admission that in the Caribbean “theology follows
praxis.”\textsuperscript{55}

Caribbean people are caught up with the daily urgency of confronting
endemic problems, making decisions on the spot, and trusting that such
decisions will move them from poverty to less poverty, from dependence
to more self-reliance, from alienation to affirmation. Theology follows as
a critical reflection on the immediate story in the light of faith in God, and
in the hope that new ways of thinking can reinforce what are already new
ways of acting…. For in the heat of the Caribbean sun, the force of the
narrative and the dynamics of persistent change never allow for theology
to keep pace with praxis, let alone to function as its matrix.\textsuperscript{56}

The schism in the Caribbean intellectual tradition is lamentable – a consequence
of abandoning the integrative, totalizing religious philosophies of our African ancestral

\textsuperscript{54} These distinctions do not do justice to the variation and complexity that exists within each
school of thought. Henry gives a far more critical discussion and exposition of each tradition than is
possible here.

\textsuperscript{55} Davis, “Two Caribbean Theologies of Freedom: The Romney Moseley-Kortright Davis
Debate,” 46.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 246.
heritage. Apart from each other, neither the poeticists nor historiologists possess the conceptual resources for the task of representing Caribbean reality. There is, fortunately, much scope for a more dialogical position. Historiologists can learn from poeticists—historical agency must be open to the (ego) constituting and renewing power of poetry, and to the possibility that something new can emerge in history through the power of language. Conversely, the poet ought to learn from historiologists that (transformative) praxis itself can be a poetic endeavor.

Any consideration, therefore, of the texture of the Caribbean yes of faith must be guided by a philosophy of action that understands historical praxis for its inherent transformative creativity. The Caribbean legacy of resistance and survival demand such recognition. It is because Caribbean existence is so often tragic and contingent that creative and transformative action is necessary. Examples multiply: to survive, to be

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57 Henry calls this a “discursive deviation” (paralleling Franz Fanon’s existential deviation) whereby Afro-Caribbean philosophy’s project of legitimizing Caribbean existence foregrounded questions of social praxis and backgrounded classical issues such the nature of the self. Binaries such as colonizer/colonized, colony/nation, or black/white quickly eclipsed those of being/nonbeing, spirit/matter, good/evil and so forth. In the process, traditional African religious philosophies that had provided comprehensive mythic accounts of being were discarded, leaving an analytical vacuum for establishing an integrative vision of life. See Henry, 3-4.


59 I hearken back to David Scott’s insightful reading of C. L. James’ autobiography of Haitian Revolutionary Toussaint L’ouverture, which serves as a window for examining what it is to be a Caribbean human being. Scott argues that the rightful genre for characterizing Toussaint’s life is not romance, with its penchant for redemptive endings, but rather tragedy, in which the protagonist Toussaint is faced with choices, each of which would lead to suffering and loss. For Toussaint, the tragic choice entailed choosing between allegiance to the intellectual and moral culture of imperial France and loosing solidarity with the revolutionary impulse of the Haitian people or, on the other hand, choosing to side with the Haitian people and thereby rejecting the ideological foundation that he dreamed of for a new Haitian society. See David
resilient and to flourish amidst the daily travails of life, the slave population mastered the self-empowering arts of deception, equivocation, and mimicry.  

Even the preponderance of dialects in the region is testimony to a creative process whereby new linguistic forms were forged as hybrids of colonial languages. Moreover, migrant communities across the Caribbean diaspora have had to recreate and reinterpret Caribbean cultural forms within their host communities.  

To ignore the historical agency and creativity of these witnesses would be to belittle them and to ultimately rob them of their unique expression of subjectivity.

**The Yes of Faith as Shaped by a Narrative Historicism**

I propose the language of *narrative historicism* to denote the quality of Christian praxis that the yes of faith demands in the context of the Caribbean.  

Narrative historicism describes the texture of our yes. It means that the type of praxis that constitutes this yes possesses both historical agency and narrative meaning. It is important to examine each of these components in turn, beginning with historical agency.

**A Human Subject with Historical Agency**

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61 Examples worthy of mention are the different events of carnival that exist in Caribbean cultural hubs such as Brooklyn, N.Y., Toronto, Canada, and London, U.K.

62 This concept draws from the two streams of Caribbean philosophy, with narrativity being a form of poeticism. It twins narrative with praxis (narrative-praxis), so that praxis is understood for its narrative, creative import, while narrative is appreciated for its lived, transformative significance.
Narrative historicism invites a vision that human praxis ought to have intentional and chosen historical agency. As I have stated before, the achievements of the Caribbean nations has been a riposte against dehumanizing narratives, previously under colonialism and now in reemerging in neocolonial, market liberalism. Against the narratives of James Anthony Froude that denied that we are people, with culture and ambition, we have established nations. And against the discourse of economic liberalism that defines us as insignificant, we run, sing and write our way into recognition with Usain Bolt, Bob Marley and Derek Walcott.

The Caribbean’s understanding of subjectivity is therefore caught up in world-constituting and self-constituting historical agency. To be a human being capable of living a storied yes to God is to be a creative, cultural being. Conversely, to be a cultural being is to live a Yes to the God who is present within, and yet above, all culture. The yes of faith is a yes to being fully, creatively human!

Moreover, to be a human being who imagines, intends and co-constitutes with God a storied-sacred world is to be a person who strives to redeem human culture in resonance with the vision of the reign of God. It is to realize and be animated in the belief that our cultural creativity has a telos – just and humanizing community.

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63 James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies: Or, the Bow of Ulysses* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1900).

Meaning Through Narrative Connectivity

Narrative historicism also implies that the meaning of our praxis is recognized (and expressed) in narrative connectivity. Perhaps an illustration from a popular Caribbean poem will suffice to explicate this point:

Tourist, white man, wiping his face,
Met me in Golden Grove market place.
He looked at my old clothes brown with stain
And soaked right through the Portland rain.
He cast his eye, turned up his nose,
He says, “You’re a beggar man I suppose,”
He says, “Boy, get some occupation,
Be of some value to your nation.”

I said, “By God and this big right hand
You must recognise [sic] a banana man.”

Excerpt from Song of the Banana Man, by Evan Jones

This poem is a banana farmer’s retort to the disparaging comment of a vacationer who beheld his raddled appearance in the public market. More importantly, it is the farmer’s lament over not being recognized, both for who he was and for the work that he embodied. Banana farming is deeply symbolic in Caribbean culture, not merely as a means of subsistence, but also as identity constituting.

The farmer was denied his dignity because the vacationer did not understand the stories that converge in the practice of farming, such as: the struggle to provide for one’s family; the legacy of banana farming in one’s ancestral heritage; the memory of forced labor and the dignity of working for oneself; the social narratives that understand the economic importance of the industry; the drama that plays out in world trade, which

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marginalize and disadvantage the small farmer. All these stories converge to shape the practice and identity of the banana farmer.

To recognize the meaning and significance of praxis is to appreciate the narratives in which it is embedded. The failure to recognize being consists in blindness to narrative. When Metz states that we don’t recognize the poor of history, it is because we don’t recognize their lived narratives. Conversely, the absence of narrative is a denial of recognition. Once one can see the various influences on a person’s life or praxis, one cannot help but form and tell the story! Narrative historicism implies that the meaning of our praxis is recognized (and expressed) in its narrative connectivity.

Trade liberalism and its touchstone – free trade – has been extremely detrimental to the economic livelihoods of the people of the Caribbean. Karla Slocum delineates the drama of the World Trade Organization ruling against the banana farmers of the Caribbean region as a case study in the impact of liberalism. The ruling was prompted by the filing of a complaint with the WTO Latin American multinational growers as to the lack of fairness behind trade arrangements that gave the bananas from (previously colonized) African and Caribbean states preferential access to European markets. The WTO sided with the U.S. government-backed multinationals and pressured the European Union into dismantling the trade preferences. See Karla Slocum, Free Trade & Freedom: Neoliberalism, Place, and Nation in the Caribbean (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

What was made evident by this application of neoliberalism was a blatant disregard for the livelihoods, narratives and cultures of the communities affected. The fact that the European preferential agreement under the Lomé convention of 1975 was an attempt at compensating the Caribbean banana nations for their colonial past was completely disregarded. The “level playing field” touted by advocates of free trade is a pure illusion. When human beings are reduced simply to the status of an economic agent, then those with money hold the power! The dollar becomes the principal signifier of identity within the non-space of markets.

We may also approach the narrative element of praxis through a theory of practice. An action may reveal our narrative competency when it is implicated in a tradition that provides normative standards of performance. This draws on Alasdair MacIntyre’s understanding of practice as socially cooperative activity in which certain goods are realized and traditional standards of excellence are furthered. Alasdair C. Maclntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187. An example of this type of tradition-based narrative praxis is the banana farmer who earns her living in the knowledge that her mother and grandfather did the same thing. Her sense of connectedness with the practices of her forbearers betrays the narrative element in her own practice. The narrativity of praxis is evident in statements such as: “My mother and my grandfather worked on this land, as do I!” or the ubiquitous defensive statement, “We have always done it this way!” In such cases, human subjectivity is derived from social, cultural or familial relationships.

Actions may also reveal our narrative competency when they are recognized as meaningful innovations to established structures and relationships. Here, our narrative competency provides meaning to action and events in their negative relationship to the status quo. When we tag an action or event with the appellation ‘counter-narrative,’ we reveal such competency. For instance, through our narrative competency we can describe our purchase of fair trade products at a supermarket as countering the
The Mutuality of Action and Being in Theological Praxis

With the concept of narrative historicism, the narrative theological praxis developed in this chapter comes full circle. Human competency to live the yes of faith in a storied-sacred world supports a narrative historic praxis, as well as is embodied by it.

It is through a narrative historicism that we may live our yes to God. This has been my contention all along and there is little need to rehash the arguments. Suffice it to say that a narrative historicism introduces an explicit notion of temporality and spatiality into our relationship with God. Our concern for the temporal and spatial connectedness of being becomes a spiritual concern. We bring not only our immediate concerns to God but also our responsibility to those who have gone before us, especially the poor and marginalized, as well as our responsibility to the present and for the future of our community and humanity in general. A narrative historic consciousness helps us recognize our connectedness with the many structures and institutions that perpetuate injustice; it helps us be sensitive to the many narratives that we are a part of, how they shape other lives, and also how the narratives that others live shape our lives. In short, dominant narrative that markets should be as efficient and low cost as possible regardless of how this impacts the lives of farm workers.

This idea draws on Michel de Certeau’s theory of practice, which emphasizes forms of practice, or tactics, which subvert dominant social narratives and customs. Tactics creatively co-opt the use of the resources of society and culture for its own end. Certeau states that tactics are ubiquitous in daily life; they are used to create opportunities through the manipulation of events. They are especially used as weapons of the weak to and get ahead in life, including “clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, “hunter’s cunning,” maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike.” Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, trans., Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

In practice, our daily lives are pitched somewhere between the poles of continuity and innovation. This makes life into an art comparable to narrative composition whereby we draw from tradition what is ennobling and supportive of life, in the process of bringing something new to being through innovation. This dialectic of continuity and innovation bestows a sense of creativity to human action, whereby every action carries the personal signature of its author that consists of how he/she has chosen between continuity and innovation. Indeed, we are constituted as a historical subject, by that choice.
narrative historicism helps us approach God not as individual subjects but as persons whose subjectivity is intimately tied up with the rest of creation across time and space.

Conversely, the more a narrative historic consciousness pervades our praxis and our prayer life, the more we are established in the character of human beings who live a yes to God in a storied-sacred world. We recognize our own finitude, brokenness and sinfulness, as well as our giftedness and grace as we take on this more relational understanding of human being. We also may recognize that:

1. *The yes of faith is not always emphatic;* we are always in need of the grace of God to aid our historical agency in promoting a more just world.

2. *The yes of faith is hardly ever unencumbered;* it is implicated in the wider narratives that we live. Our self-gift may be stymied in sinfulness and oppressive structures (disease, unemployment, poverty, and discrimination of all kinds) that turn the human psyche in on itself instead being free to exert its full creative agency in community.

3. *The yes of faith is always in process* as long as the human story goes on; there is always need for conversation and deepening our commitment to transforming culture in accordance with the reign of God.

4. We hopefully become persons sensitive to the social dimensions of human suffering, as well as reflective on our own culpability and agency in such situations. We hopefully grow as people of faith, hope, love, patience, humility, compassion, gratitude, freedom and resilience as we carry in our hearts and our minds the beauty and brokenness of our world to God.
As our narrative historic consciousness deepens we hopefully grow more trusting in God’s presence in history, even if that presence is often hidden, denied, neglected, denigrated, and crucified in the injustices of humanity. The Sacred shares our story! Hopefully, an appreciation of this suffuses our praxis with hope and responsibility. We recognize our agency in co-constituting (with God) this sacred drama in history and, consequently, our responsibility to continuing the story by making God more present, not less, in our world. The poetics of narrative connectivity, implied in our consciousness of a storied sacred world, converges on an ethics of responsibility within the Christian moral imagination.68

The Caribbean legacy has been about the making of stories – lived, world-constituting stories of resistance and creativity. These stories have constituted a unique subjectivity in history, embodied in legendary figures – such as the revolutionary Toussaint L’ouverture, the activist Marcus Garvey and the singer-prophet Bob Marley – but equally in the millions of ordinary folk caught in the daily struggle for survival. They are the unheralded artists of Caribbean existence. Together, we all share in a vocation of becoming human before God.

I now propose two forms of humanizing praxis that are recommended by a Caribbean historicism. There are, indeed, many more – we have planted, reaped, built, formed markets, formed societies and governments, danced, sang – all constituting a complex and storied Caribbean expression of humanity. However, two ubiquitous practices, each with a distinct Caribbean realization, are worth mentioning. The first is

hospitality (or more specifically, narrative hospitality), which I understand in terms of a mutual recognition of human being. The second form of praxis that constitutes a narrative historicism is festivity, which pertains to forms of celebration that return us to a primordial and life-giving vision of human being. These two – hospitality and festivity – are preeminent for a Caribbean poetics and historical commitment of everyday life.69

Yes as the Recognition of Being through Narrative Hospitality

The first form of a Caribbean narrative historicism I emphasize is the practice of hospitality, described by Thomas Ogletree as an “over-arching metaphor” of the moral life.70 Indeed, hospitality to the stranger, widow and orphan is fundamental to biblical faith and Christian spirituality.71 To say yes to God through the practice of hospitality is to cultivate a radical openness and welcoming to God’s creation, especially to the most marginalized among us.

The colloquial understanding of hospitality pertains to a unidirectional act of charity – the provision of a resource (food, clothing or a listening ear) that others lack and seek. I wish however to base this discussion on a richer, more dialectic understanding of


the practice of hospitality that is also truer to Christian tradition. It concerns hospitality as a form of mutual recognition.\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{What is hospitality?}

To practice hospitality is to share stories – told and lived. Indeed, \textit{narrative hospitality is the practice of receiving and sharing stories in recognition of our human dignity, so as to promote greater freedom and justice through the bonds of community.}

To share one’s story with another is to communicate in an encoded way one’s deepest sense of self. At the same time, to be open to the story of another is to risk welcoming “something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our life-world.”\textsuperscript{73}

Narrative hospitality is thus lived in the to-and-fro of mutual recognition of human being, in which power and vulnerability oscillate between persons. As stories are shared and received, traditional roles of host and guest are blurred. Power is shared to the extent that each person becomes host of the other’s story. Only in this way can the significance of the other’s story for one’s life be recognized.

Hospitality to the stranger points toward an ongoing dialectic of host and stranger. It expresses a fundamental recognition of the world’s plurality. The point is not that I may have no world of my own, nor that my world is unworthy of vigorous defense and advocacy. It is that I can have my world in a moral way \textit{only as I learn to relate it positively to the contrasting worlds of others.}\textsuperscript{74}

To practice hospitality necessarily implies \textit{moral responsibility} and agency to defend, uphold, and promote human dignity. Hospitality must be, according to the late

\textsuperscript{72} Pohl, 61. My understanding of recognition also draws on Paul Ricoeur, who sees mutuality as the zenith in the work of recognition. See Paul Ricoeur, \textit{The Course of Recognition} (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005).

\textsuperscript{73} Ogletree, 2.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 4.
Letty Russell, “*just hospitality*” in keeping with the Christian vision that each person is made in the image of God.\(^75\) We ought to attend to how our lived stories impact others for good or for ill, and to how the stories that our neighbors live impose upon us. This means celebrating the achievement of life-giving community, whilst also rejecting the injurious narratives that we inherit through the discourse and actions of community, institutions and nation. Hospitality is a partnership of mutually empowered persons working with God to embody greater justice in the world.\(^76\)

Hence, a further characteristic of hospitality is that *it is inherently creative*; in essence, it is an effort of the productive imagination. A relationship is created where one may not have existed previously. To accomplish this, one needs to provide an answer to the question: “Who am I neighbor to?” As such, hospitality problematizes the limits of community beyond traditional and narrow boundaries of family, village and local church. To practice hospitality is to be open to creating just communities that extend to all of humanity and creation.

*The Challenges of Hospitality in a Postcolonial Caribbean Context*

The above portrait of hospitality is an ideal that is never guaranteed in practice. Real life introduces complexity into our relationships that qualify our attempts at hospitality in significant ways.

As a case in point, consider the Caribbean legacy of hospitality. The region is known for its welcoming-people. The font of such virtue is undoubtedly everyday faith

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\(^{76}\) Authentic hospitality also entails that we challenge other people’s stories, especially if these are destructive to themselves and others. We ought to encourage others to re-storaying of their lives as Jesus constantly did in his use of parables.
but, arguably, it is also the hospitality of the Caribbean land itself, which has provided food, shelter and home for an embattled people.\textsuperscript{77} To craft a sustainable way of life the people had, in turn, to care for the land, and to rely on God and each other. Hospitality issues from a deep sense of gratitude felt by Caribbean people.

However, new and significant challenges from a rapidly globalizing world threaten to reshape this storied legacy. The dark side of globalization is that institutions and corporations are effectively replacing people as primary agents of an increasingly market-driven, economic existence. As the Caribbean nations advance steadily into this era of global competition and trade, the issue of institutional hospitality rises more and more to ascendency. Hospitality has been co-opted and commercialized, especially by the region’s tourism/hospitality industry.

The typical Caribbean tourism brochure promises an escape from the stresses of ‘real’ life into a paradisiacal, idealized existence, where life is a perpetual party hosted by colorful islanders to the rhythm of steel drums, all coalescing under the blue, forgetful Caribbean sky. To say the least, this parodic interpretation of island life glosses over the storied richness of local life, ultimately for instrumental gain.\textsuperscript{78} But it also signifies the perversion of power and relationality consequent to a postcolonial existence.

For, whilst the Caribbean islanders serve as hosts to these international visitors, the effective power in the relationship \textit{lies with the guest or visitor}. In traditional relationships of hospitality, as mentioned above, power resides with the host, who is free

\textsuperscript{77} My thanks are extended to Joanne Regan for drawing this to my attention. On the theological significance of land, see Walter Brueggemann, \textit{The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith} (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

\textsuperscript{78} For an examination of the social costs of tourism on a Caribbean island, see Frank Taylor, \textit{To Hell with Paradise: A History of the Jamaican Tourist Industry} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993).
to offer hospitality (or not) in whatever way he/she chooses. However, rendered to a state of perpetual dependence by the colonial project, the Caribbean nations face a debilitating inversion of power in their hospitality to the world. We market ourselves to attract the typical fun-seeking visitor from northern metropolises.

The fetishization and commercialization of hospitality in the Caribbean has meant that the stories of its people are ignored or deemed irrelevant to the demands of providing an efficient product. Whilst lying on a powdery beach sipping a rum and coke, the last thing the average tourist wants to learn about is the saga of Caribbean locals being increasingly denied access to the same beaches by foreign-owned hotels. Few take time or effort to venture beyond the confines of their all-inclusive resorts, or to even get to really know the very person who serves the rum and coke. Stories and identities evaporate under the Caribbean sun as we sell ourselves to the highest bidder on the world market. The opposite of hospitality is not enmity or selfishness; rather, it is *instrumentalism* – the self-serving denial and objectifying of human being!

This colonization of being is the psychic and social scar on human consciousness from a history of oppression and colonial dependence. In light of this, Caribbean faith cannot be a merely private affair. The God of hospitality invites our yes particularly at the troublesome margins where the Caribbean interfaces with the world. Here, Caribbean migrants in the diaspora also struggle anew to forge a humanizing existence, bringing the wisdom of their postcolonial sensibilities to bear on interpersonal relationships that are complexified with issues of identity, racial discrimination, classism and lack of social opportunity. The clash of civilizations marks out a new frontier for Christian discernment!
A question of supreme importance for Caribbean faith is therefore, how do postcolonial Caribbean subjects continue to say yes to God in hospitality, given the legacy of oppression that has indelibly shaped Caribbean existence? Alternatively stated, how can we bring postmodern sensibilities to bear on modern institutional relationships, in an effort to build the partnerships necessary for realizing a just world? Hospitality to “tourists” and visitors is part of the Caribbean’s foreseeable future; how we re-craft the industry for greater mutuality and a “just” hospitality will be a critical challenge.

These questions cannot be solved here. However, further consideration of this issue is necessary in keeping with the chapter’s vision of developing a practical theological foundation for religious pedagogy. If moral praxis is narrative historicism, then the Caribbean practice of hospitality may provide a useful conversation point for the kind of life praxis that religious education pursues. As such, I offer some guidelines for the practice of hospitality from a Caribbean postmodern sensibility.

Guidelines for Hospitality from a Caribbean Postmodern Sensibility

At the onset of this chapter I stated that its central goal was to frame the practical theological foundations of a narrative pedagogy. Drawing on a Caribbean context, I have considered Christian praxis in terms of narrative historicism, exemplified in the practice of hospitality. Letty Russell offers a useful framework for understanding the demands of a postmodern approach to the issue of hospitality. Indeed, much of her life’s work was spent grappling with this issue. I list below some of her main insights that I find significant for Caribbean consideration.

1. She describes hospitality as “the practice of God’s welcome, embodied in our actions as we reach across difference to participate with God in bringing justice
and healing to our world in crisis.” Key in this description is that hospitality is a partnership with God and with each other in the work of justice.

2. All practices of hospitality need to attend seriously to the “power quotient” implicit in every host-guest relationship.  

3. These power dynamics bear the imprint and often perpetuate colonial oppression.

4. A critical retrieval and debunking is required of the codified forms of knowledge that support the oppression of people and conscript the identity of the oppressed.

5. No person can exclusively be identified as oppressor or oppressed; we are all living a hybrid existence in this respect.

What do these guidelines mean for a Caribbean practice of hospitality? Besides the previously stated point that true hospitality is narrative hospitality, which invites moral responsibility and creative agency, I also add the following:

• Hospitality requires attending to issues of power

• Hospitality needs an appreciation for complexity and hybridity

• Hospitality has important temporal dimensions

• Hospitality has important spatial dimensions

*Hospitality requires attending to issues of power.* The practice of hospitality must be cognizant of what Leela Gandhi describes as “the compelling seductions of colonial

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79 Russell, 2. Emphasis added.

80 Ibid., 44.

81 Ibid., 32.
Power is ubiquitous to human relationality; it is embodied in our discourses, thoughts and actions. The ideal of shared power in hospitality is however hardly ever achieved, and once seduced it is hard to relinquish power. Caribbean history remains a poignant witness to the corruption of power, and also to how human beings may be oblivious or callously indifferent to the power that they embody at any moment. The abuse of power for personal or institutional gain is one root of personal and social sin. It is contrary to the *kenosis* that Romney Moseley held as a primary way of imitating Christ.

Yet, power is hardly ever unilateral; the weak possess the ‘weapons’ to resist, even through subterfuge. I do not agree with Ogletree who writes, “for the oppressed, the moral imperative is not to display hospitality to strangers.” This position is far too absolute in my opinion. As I shall argue next, the lines between oppressors and oppressed are often blurred; we all live hybrid existences in this respect. Also, such an extreme position ends up robbing the oppressed of their agency to determine which aspects of their story they wish to share with the other or the stranger. Without some measure of hospitality the Caribbean would in effect be cutting itself off from world society and economy. A Caribbean tourism industry can welcome visitors, but must increasingly be empowered to do so on the basis of a just and narrative hospitality.

The practice of hospitality therefore means being sensitive to how power is used and shared by all parties, in keeping with a humanizing vision for relationality. We must be gentle as lambs in following and trusting that God is present in the murkiness of

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84 Ogletree, 5.
globalized relationality; but we must also be wise as serpents in rejecting all that
dehumanizes within these relationships. This means also being critical attentive to the
ways that we ourselves act in perpetuating oppression.

*Hospitality demands an appreciation for complexity and hybridity.* How we say yes to
God in hospitality is oftentimes complicated by the social, economic and cultural
situation in which one is embedded. Praxis is hardly ever unencumbered; it is always
somehow implicated in social structures and injustices. The severely impoverished, for
example, can hardly be held to the same standards of ecological hospitality as the
wealthy. Poverty is particularly destructive on the environment because the people who
live in poverty often need to rely on nature for their resource needs. They have little
freedom in this area. Postcolonial sensibilities remind of the complexity that underlies
moral agency.

A postcolonial sensibility also reminds that, despite our best efforts, our practice
of hospitality is never ideal; it is always prone to duplicity and domination and is always
in need of critical attention. The Caribbean has been slow to come to terms with the way
we have oppressed each other. Patriarchy, homophobia, racism, sexism, classism are just
as present in the region as elsewhere. Recognizing our hybridity in this respect,

challenges us to listen with new ears to the cries of pain and hope that are
offered by our brothers and sisters, and to join them in imagining a
different way of relationship that points to God’s intention to mend the
whole of creation, beginning with ourselves.\(^{85}\)

*Practicing temporal hospitality.* Another critical dimension of hospitality highlighted by
a postmodern sensibility is temporal hospitality. This demands that, as persons and as a

\(^{85}\) Russell, 49-50.
nation, we recognize our place in the broader historical community. We ordinarily do this through our establishment of museums, libraries and through our erection of monuments. But temporal hospitality is wider and broader. It means recognizing the burden of the past, meaning that the possibilities of life that we enjoy today rest on the legacy of the silent majority who came before us. Temporal hospitality means keeping the storied memory of the poor and oppressed of history alive, as a barometer for our own moral decision-making. It means living the gospel story in the present with agency and fidelity and, as such, rendering our own stories as compelling witnesses to the truth of God’s love and forgiveness.

Moreover, temporal hospitality demands responsible agency to the future. Writing in the 1980’s, Kortright Davis said that Caribbean natives are more “ancestors of the future generations than they are the descendants of a line of ancestry.”86 He stated this in deference to the fact that, as a collection of nations, the region is very new on the world stage, and that it was established on cultural fragmentation and human displacement. With the bulk of history probably lying ahead of us at this moment, our present agency must bear the burden of deciding what legacy we will leave for our children and for their progeny.

Practicing spatial hospitality. We also need to create what Letty Russell called safe spaces where hospitality can be practiced. What do I mean by that? It means that we need spaces where we can encounter the stories of others, in all their richness, complexities, tragedies and victories and, in turn, have our stories recognized. Ideally our church communities are safe spaces for everyone. In practice we too often fall short of that bar,

86 Davis, Mission for Caribbean Change: Caribbean Development as Theological Enterprise, 113.
but at least we have a model for repetition in Jesus’ own ministry of hospitality. To practice spatial hospitality is to create spaces where we can be mutually recognized as subjects before God.

Yet, postmodern society is undergoing a crisis of place. The postmodern world is becoming increasingly populated by what anthropologist Marc Augé calls ‘non-places’ – the airport terminal, the highway, the shopping mall, the internet – in which the richness and diversity of human being is lost, and identities are reduced to utilitarian categories of ‘travelers’, ‘consumers,’ ‘website hits’ and ‘social media profiles.’ Indeed, entire countries can be essentially treated as non-spaces by the global market and by the practice of free trade, wherein human communities are reduced to “economic agents” with no identity or history, defined simply by their ability to produce and consume. The Caribbean’s struggle against trade liberalism is a case in point.

To practice spatial hospitality is to humanize. It is to reimagine common spaces where we can meet in “narrative empathy” – telling and living our stories, and listening and welcoming the storied lives of others. From the standpoint of the wealthy countries

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87 Philip Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). I agree with Sheldrake that place is a shaper of identity. He argues that a fundamental aspect of human existence is that we are placed – we are “always somewhere.” And we understand that somewhere (with its persons, objects and events) as being meaningful, and not as empty neutral space. We exist in storied places and live “placed histories” (cf. Brueggemann, 198, 201.) in which we accumulate memories, narratives and make meaning. The examples of such places propound: home, village, culture, and landscape; they all shape who we understand ourselves to be as human beings, either positively or negatively. The modern-day crisis of place described here is thus also a crisis of identity.

88 Marc Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity (London: Verso, 1995). The preponderance of such non-places is to be expected in a market-driven society that is founded on being able to quantify and objectivize the persons and products that enter and are trading on the market. This is the critique of the Enlightenment brand of modernity posed with such poignancy by the Frankfurt School in the mid twentieth century. See for example Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). On the tragedy of the postmodern loss of humanizing places, see also William Leach, Country of Exiles: The Destruction of Place in American Life (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999).

of the world, a non-traditional setting for the practice of such hospitality is our supermarkets. We are, more often than not, unaware of the source of our food, and of the stories of the agricultural workers who wrestle with multinational corporations for a living wage. To practice spatial hospitality is to get to know the transcontinental stories behind the products that we consume, and to promote global justice through practices like fair trade.

From the standpoint of the oppressed of history however, the practice of spatial hospitality is not as clear. A critical, guarded openness to the other is understandable. How can we be open to the lived story of an-other who has figured us as culturally, socially and racially primitive and inferior, or who has historically oppressed, killed, enslaved and robbed? How can we be open when, as Richard Kearney remarks, the other can prove to be monstrous?

There are again no easy answers. Narrative hospitality must be a critical hospitality on guard for the narrative that destroys, corrupts and belittles. The slave ancestors provided the legacy of such a hermeneutic of suspicion and rejection. They survived domination to claim as their own the hybrid, creole cultures and languages of today, forged over centuries as the Caribbean human kept fragments of colonial cultures that were ennobling of human life, and discarded that which was oppressive. For, the modern Caribbean citizen, caught in the throes of U.S. cultural hegemony, the challenge is to remember and reconstitute this legacy. The Caribbean native in the diaspora – the migrant who often lives in-between narratives from native culture and from host culture,

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with little sense of being rooted in either – would do well in forging cultural forms that honor their dignity in host societies replete with non-places.

Saying yes to God in the context of our age means greater openness and hospitality to the other, as well as greater risk and uncertainty. We are called to leave the certainties of our own finite existence and risk that the presence of the other may occasion a transformative encounter with grace. But this openness must entail a critical eye for narratives that destroy. In an increasingly plural and mobile world, such a critical narrative hospitality seems hardly optional.

Yes as a Celebration of Being through Festivity

As each society evolves it must find ways of remembering and recommitting to its foundational ethos, purpose and spirit. The Caribbean nations are no exception. For that reason, the yes of faith in the context of Caribbean society has and should continue to involve the reclaiming of a vision of authentic human being through the power of festivity. To unpack this assertion about Caribbean festivity, I first need to define the term festivity and then take a closer look at an example of such practice in the region – the celebration of carnival.

Festivity signifies occasions of withdrawing from the dailiness of life to celebrate and reconnect with life’s deepest meanings. It exists in opposition to utilitarian work or to forms of labor that serve a purely productive purpose. In contrast to such, the value of the

festival is intrinsic to its performance; it possesses meaning *in itself* – meanings communicated and experienced within its embodiment.\(^9\)

Given the Caribbean tragic past it is understandable why we have such a penchant for celebration and festivity.\(^9\) What better way to rescue the human spirit from a Kierkegaardian form of despair – in which persons lack the will to exist – than through the power of celebration.\(^9\) The deep existential sadness that accompanies the experience of meaningless suffering, exploitation and oppression is fertile ground for activity that celebrates human embodiment and values self-expression.

The significance of Caribbean festivity is truly profound. It is a source of national memory and a harbinger of the region’s vision on what life is truly about.\(^9\) Moreover, it is a universal form of expression that suffuses both sacred ritual (the Caribbean liturgy is distinguished by its celebratory spirit) and the more overtly secular forms of culture (such

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\(^9\) Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965). The value of festivity is evident in the Jewish celebration of Sabbath, and in the belief that it is God who demanded that we take a festive day out of seven for rest and worship.

\(^9\) Again, David Scott’s definition of tragedy sets a useful context for understanding the importance of festivity. A tragic situation:

…sets before us the image of a man or woman obliged to act in a world in which values are unstable and ambiguous. And consequently, for tragedy the relation between past, present, and future is never a Romantic one in which history rides a triumphant and seamlessly progressive rhythm, but a series of paradoxes and reversals in which human action is ever open to unaccountable contingencies – and luck.


\(^9\) The Caribbean is known for its festivity, particularly in relation to its various carnival celebrations, but also indirectly through the popular appeal of reggae, calypso music and dance. Unfortunately, the true significance and genesis of this sphere of Caribbean life is often lost in the commercialization of the region on the world market, wherein the region and its peoples are often reduced as emissaries of fun, frolic and a happy-go-lucky lifestyle.
as carnival). Such ubiquity is evidence that celebration is constitutive of our self-understanding and self-expression. Caribbean festivity is a gift of grace that resists simple demarcation into sacred and secular categories.

In describing carnival celebrations\(^{96}\) on the island of Trinidad, Suzanne Beddoe notes that it commemorates the passage out of colonial enslavement into freedom – the exodus that retains a telling and contemporary poignancy for all situations which limit the free expression of Caribbean being.\(^{97}\) She observes that, “despite our collective and personal tragedies (both historical and contemporary), Carnival provides the arena in which we move with grace against all odds.”\(^{98}\)

To “move with grace against all odds” is an eloquent reference to the creative praxis of the people to return to a vision of nobility and dignity through ritual festivity. Beddoe offers an evocative summary of what carnival is about – identity formation and restoration through the power of celebrating one’s embodiment. Consider her documented words of legendary costume designer and bandleader Peter Minshall, expressed on one occasion to the each masquerader in his band *Tantana* (which portrayed island diversity in squares of cloth):

Tantana is a celebration. It is a celebration of yourselves. It is not a fantasy – it is you, the real you, yourself at your very best, singing, dancing into the future, raising your spirit in joy, silencing the negative with an

\(^{96}\) Carnival is the name for the festivities that traditionally mark the transition into the Christian Lenten season for countries in the Caribbean with a strong Roman Catholic legacy. The core of the celebrations may last anywhere from two days to a week, with the highlight being a parade of costumed ‘bands’ (large groups of masqueraders) through the city streets, dancing to the rhythm of calypso and soca music.

\(^{97}\) Suzanne Beddoe, “De Mas' in We: Ritual and Symbol in Trinidadian Carnival” (Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, Yale University, 1990). In many ways, Caribbean life is a continued reenactment of the struggle for liberation from oppression, poverty, cultural imperialism, and political marginalization.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., ii.
immense chorus of the positive … Let your spirits soar. Let your square of cloth take flight as the tangible expression of your spirit. The square of cloth is there in your hands. Let your spirit flow into it. Spread joy with it. There is so much that can be done individually. And so much more collectively. You can make walls and ceilings and rivers of cloth … Friends, play Tantana to the heavens. Let the gods delight in your joy. Tantana is a celebration of life. The celebration of yourselves.\textsuperscript{99}

In essence, carnival is about reclaiming and reconstituting a transcending vision of human dignity and life’s “existential richness.”\textsuperscript{100} Such festivals advocate that true wealth lies not in riches or other material possessions but in having life and health, in being able to be creative, and to express one’s deepest sense of identity through bodily movement.\textsuperscript{101} By taking time off from the dailiness of work and by taking over the streets of the city, carnival revelers create an “alternative temporal and cultural order,”\textsuperscript{102} a ‘safe space,’ or what Michel de Certeau calls “utopian space”\textsuperscript{103} for reclaiming or re-storying identity.

The human body takes central place in this drama of being. The Caribbean body harbors the memory of centuries of oppression and survival. Not only the personal body but the social Caribbean body as well. The release of festival is primarily the personal

\textsuperscript{99} As quoted by Suzanne Beddoe, ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{100} Pieper, \textit{In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity}, 15.

\textsuperscript{101} Festivals achieve this through a sacrifice of time – giving up whatever work one would have been doing and placing one’s time at the service of making festivity. Josef Pieper claims that this achieves a relaxing of the strenuous fixation of the eye on the given frame of reference, without which no utilitarian act is accomplished. Instead, the field of vision widens, concern for success or failure of an act falls away, and the soul turns to its infinite object; it becomes aware of the illimitable horizon of reality as a whole. Ibid., 13.


\textsuperscript{103} Certeau, 16.
and social body’s release from the ideological and institutional fetters that have constrained it to a role of subservience and inferiority.\textsuperscript{104}

To be sure, a postcolonial sensibility applies equally to the celebration of festivity. The power of festivity is not always in the hands of the oppressed. Power is a complex and fluid dynamic. Festivals that are based on mimicry, for instance, are based on a jostling, dissimulation and masking of power.\textsuperscript{105} The celebration of carnival is in itself hardly free of power abuse and corruption. Issues of classism and racism, as well as of the commercialization of the female body are far from uncommon. We are wise to be attentive to such issues in our practice of festivity.

However, in the main, the celebration of festivity keeps the hope and energies of the Caribbean people alive to continue to resist and survive the contingencies and vicissitudes of life. Caribbean festivity is not an opiate that numbs us to the injustices of life; rather it is the respite that places the needed salve on our wounds so that we may continue the struggle. It is the utopian space that provides the necessary return to a vision of a free humanity. The aesthetic of festivity is thus “encountered and lived out within ethical-political action, as the deepest meaning and significance of the ethical-political.”\textsuperscript{106}

Saying yes to God in our age thus calls for the setting aside time and space for the practice of festivity. Safe spaces of hospitality are conducive to festivity, since they both

\textsuperscript{104} Copeland.

\textsuperscript{105} Examples of such festivals in the Caribbean are the La Rose and La Marguerite flower festivals. See Patrick A. B. Anthony, \textit{The Flower Festivals of St Lucia.}, Culture and Society Series; No. 1 (St Lucia: Folk Research Center, 1985); Daniel J. Crowley, "La Rose and La Marguerite Societies in St. Lucia," \textit{The Journal of American Folklore} 71, no. 282 (1958).

share a concern for recognizing human dignity. As narrative historic praxis, festivity is meaningful in its continuation of the story of God’s reign on earth. Through festivity, human beings return to an empowering vision that resists the non-places and dehumanizing narratives of this postmodern age.

**Conclusion: The Significance of Story-making**

Caribbean story-making goes on. Forged in the cauldron of colonialism, our people have crafted unique ways of embodying the saving presence of God. The strength, resilience and creativity demonstrated along the way are being called upon once again as we join the march of a postmodern, liberalized world.

I have argued that this witness, including its postmodern sensibilities, is fecund for contextualizing a theological praxis on which a narrative pedagogy may be based. The plot of Caribbean story follows the logic of a narrative historicism in which our people have expressed their subjectivity in historical agency that promotes justice and human flourishing. Narrative historicism incarnates in social praxis the understanding that human subjectivity is lived in responsible agency in the present, retrieving the memory of suffering and possibility from the past, in the hope of a more just future. Whether embodied in the historic deeds of the great charismatic exemplars of Caribbean history, or in the daily resistance and struggle of the masses, the Caribbean lived-faith witness is imminently meaningful within the narrative of a history of oppression and marginalization.

This chapter also offered an interpretation of the lived Caribbean experience as a primary source for Caribbean practical theology. This lived witness reminds that we are
all on a journey of becoming a people before God, bearers of God’s sacred presence but ever in need of redemption. We write our story from the pastiche of life’s suffering, travail, joy, and triumphs as a storied yes to God, whose grace alone can redeem our inconstancy, and sustain our best efforts for justice and liberation.

The next chapter turns explicitly to proposing an approach to religious education based on a narrative pedagogy. It draws on this lived Caribbean witness in formulating religious education as a humanizing, conative endeavor, that attends to the learner’s historical and spatial situatedness, in order to live with responsibility and agency for building a more just world.
CHAPTER 5

STORY MAKING: TOWARDS A NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE FAITH

Introduction

In the last chapter I established some practical theological foundations of a narrative pedagogy. Drawing on Caribbean postcolonial sensibilities, I argued that moral praxis is narrative historic praxis, and offered hospitality and festivity as examples that inform religious education curricula.

In this chapter, I delineate a narrative pedagogy for religious education that is intent on transformative faith. The significant question for consideration is as follows: how do we as religious or theological educators invite learners, with conviction and persuasion, to imagine and embrace life-giving, freeing and ennobling narratives while also occasioning the recognition and (when necessary) abandonment of destructive and oppressive narratives? In other words, how does Christian religious education lead learners in the re-storying of their lives?

Re-storying is an act of adult transformation. The agency to critically examine one’s life story and grow into more humanizing narratives which resonate with the great
Story of the reign of God is a competency of more mature stages of development. This does not mean that re-storying is easy. In fact, it is just the opposite. Re-storying can be difficult. Narratives both reveal and conceal, and the social narratives that shape our lives and consciousness – what Stephen Crites (chapter 3) calls sacred stories – may be so deeply engrained in our psyche that we may lack the autonomy needed for self-questioning. To recognize and own the oppressive narratives we live may be formidable. Johnathan Jansen contextualizes this point with reference to how many white South Africans live much of their lives without realizing the evil of racism.¹

Changing our narratives involves more than simply changing people’s minds; it also requires conversion of heart and life practice. I have argued that Jesus’ whole life and ministry could be interpreted as inviting persons to this holistic conversion – calling them to repent of limiting narrative worldviews and give flesh to the narrative of the reign of God, already breaking in their midst (Mark 1:15). Our narrative worldview is constitutive of our most intimate sense of self and personal identity. As such, to invite persons to change these life stories, no matter how persuasive the invitation, is really to invite persons to lose some of their “old” selves – a daunting enterprise on any day!

Yet, one cannot say it is never done. Oftentimes persons are forced by traumatic or landmark events to change their stories. The birth of a child, the death of a loved one, migration, natural disaster, major illness, being the victim of a crime – all of these are major episodes, which we are hardy ever fully prepared for, and which may serve as cognitive shocks to one’s worldview and life narrative.

Adult religious education, however, must consider situations when persons do have a choice. How do religious educators invite people, with persuasion and conviction, to see for themselves and, when necessary, freely take up alternative narratives from what they may be living at any moment? Furthermore, how do we help learners develop the competency for what is essentially a process of life-long conversion, as an ongoing dimension of lived discipleship?

My plan for engaging such questions follows this outline: I first examine more closely the perennial need for re-storying. I contextualize the issue within current media discussions on the issue of race that have revolved around the recently concluded trial of a white adult male arraigned for the fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager on February 26th 2012 in Sanford, Florida. Following this, I draw some implications on why it is so hard to change the narratives that we live by, as a prelude to the practical suggestions for doing so, which are offered by way of a narrative pedagogy.

The task of re-storying calls for a particular kind of learned agency that, in the context of adult religious education, I call story-making. **Story-making pedagogy invokes our narrative meaning-making competencies to imagine and constitute Christian praxis that is credible for our circumstances in life, that brings a sense of coherence to our personal story of faith, and that is generative in connecting us with responsibility and agency to other people and to the rest of creation, across time and space, so as to further the great Story of the unfolding of God’s reign in history.** Re-stated using themes from chapter four, story-making is a particular form of narrative historicism that understands human beings as graced with the agency for imagining, intending, an co-constituting a
storied-sacred world, so as to fulfill the human vocation of living an existential yes to God’s primary offer of self with unconditional love.

I unpack the journey of story-making pedagogy in terms of adult Christian religious education. I delineate key attributes of this pedagogy by drawing on theories of life-span development and adult transformative learning.

I follow this by engaging the question of how story-making may practically unfold in actual Christian education curriculum. *I frame story-making pedagogy as a significant extension of Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis Approach to Christian religious education that foregrounds our narrative competency and the role of the narrative imagination in the journey of forming Christian praxis.* My story-making approach is grounded in Christian praxis that aims to establish the experiential matrix that, through the working of God’s grace, invites and aids the re-storying of the learner’s life.

I identify and describe the movements of story-making in adult education that, again with God’s ever-present help, may draw the learning community ever nearer to the fullness of life embodied in the storied vision of the reign of God. Recalling the Caribbean spiritual practices of hospitality and celebration (chapter four), I show how these narrative performances may suffuse the curriculum with a narrative historicism that forms and empowers the learning community to establish a responsible way of being in history and society.
On the Perennial Need for Critically Reflecting on our Stories

As I write this chapter, the trial of George Zimmerman in the tragic shooting of Trayvon Martin, a black teenage boy walking home from a trip to the corner store, has just been concluded. Zimmerman’s controversial acquittal from all charges has sparked debates across the United States that pivot on the issue of race and justice in America. Did the accused racially profile Trayvon? Was the case symbolic of how young black males across America are perceived by the racial majority? Was the prosecution’s case disadvantaged from the start by jury selection? More to the point, could an all-white female jury have possibly empathized sufficiently with the narrative world of the young Trayvon in order to return a ‘fair’ verdict? These questions inundate the news media, unfortunately signaling the deep divide, distrust and moral blindness that continue to converge around the issue of race in America.

The trial has brought to consciousness the fact that racism is based on a failure to truly recognize the ‘other’ narrative. Claims that racism did not play a part in this trial, and that justice in this case was “racially-neutral” are delusional. Such claims fail to recognize the ways in which the narrative worlds of the protagonists in the trial intersect – regrettably too often with tragic effect. To deny the impact of race is to deny the storied experience of discrimination and oppression voiced by a substantial part of U.S. society. It is to deny the many ways that their lived narratives are dominated and determined by sinful social structures and stereotypes. Race-neutrality is a cop-out for the kind of narrative hospitality that would allow oppressed human beings to voice their story and, in so doing preserve their human agency, subjectivity and dignity.²

² If Trayvon Martin was a victim of a narrative that stereotyped him as a hoodlum, then Rachel Jeantel, the young black teenager who was a key witness for the state, was also a victim of narrative
The frustration with the discursive world of this case, particularly within the African American community, is understandable and also poignant for the road that lies ahead. People are tired of living the same old story! “When Lord will racial stereotyping and discrimination end?” When will humanity find the insight and courage to imagine and make the new story, in which all can be free and equal? When will Martin Luther King’s dream be finally realized? The road ahead is uncertain and complex. But it is “only made by walking” as, within the micro-contexts of learning communities (in family, school, workplace, and church), we attend with clarity and courage to the ways in which our unquestioned, hegemonic social narratives impinge on the lives of the subaltern in contemporary society, and we create new, humanizing lived narratives.

To change our stories, or re-story our lives, we need to name the social narratives that conscript our being. Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter has done much to bring to our attention the pervasive image of what Western society privileges as its model citizen and human being. This conception of human being functions largely at the level of the unconscious, yet it is sustained and reproduced, Wynter argues, by our social, political and economic order. To be recognized as a functional human being one must be independent, fluent, intelligent, well-dressed, well-mannered, cultured. It also helps to be


male, Caucasian, thin, heterosexual and without any obvious physical and mental disabilities. This image is innate to the narrative ethos that unconsciously constitutes modern life. Deviants from this narrative of ‘normalcy’ are seen with distrust and pity, suspicion and exclusion, or are dismissed as social pariahs. Visually-impaired by our own narrative world, we remain ignorant and indifferent to the humanity of those who do not fit the idealized social imago.

As long as such images remain unnamed and unquestioned by critical reflection, human beings can hardly be truly free. The way to proceed with the essentially humanizing task of imagining and living a counter-narrative is hidden from view.

Why is Changing Our Stories so Difficult?

The Trayvon Martin case reminds us all just how intractable our narrative world can be. We are all embedded in social narratives that shape our consciousness for better or for worse. As Stephen Crites reminds, we are born into a storied world – or better, a “story-shaped world;” our consciousness awakens to find a world already mapped out by what Crites calls ‘sacred’ story. This makes our childhood years critical for learning how to subsist and flourish within this narrative ethos. The teenage and early adolescent years

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5 Her technical term for the present genre of human being at the core of modern liberal, globalized society is *bioeconomic Man* – a progeny of Enlightenment humanism that emphasizes certain biological markers as “good” (being Caucasian, male, able-bodied), as well as certain economic markers (employed, consumeristic, intelligent, at least middle-class). Everything else is denigrated; they embody what is effectively considered as social evil. See also David Scott, “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism*, no. 8 (2000); Wynter.

6 cf. the case of Rachel Jeantel in note 2 above.

are then spent in an Eriksonian search for a coherent identity and a way of living in one’s narrative world. The first reason that social narratives grow intractable in a person’s life span, therefore, is because they are so integral to our sense of self and to our sense of being part of a meaningful, livable world; they prescribe ethical agency by demarcating the social roles and behavior that are considered normal and acceptable.

Another reason that narrative re-storying is so difficult is that we are largely unconscious to the stories in which we are implicated, even though they may be so destructive. We are also often tragically insensitive to stories that others live. As Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Donskis have recently argued, we are all prone to “moral blindness” and a lack of sensitivity in our everyday relations. In such a closed-minded state, evil often “lurks in what we tend to take as normality and even as the triviality and banality of mundane life, rather than in abnormal cases, pathologies, aberrations and the like.”

A third reason is that, as human beings, we value constancy more than change, security more than vulnerability. The gospel adage that those who want to find themselves must lose themselves in discipleship remains exceptionally poignant for a society that values individualism and competition. As long as the human ego is locked into its own narrow interests, change will always be feared and difficult.

Changing the stories that form our consciousness from birth – Crites’ ‘sacred’ stories – is difficult, but hardly impossible. We must learn to be increasingly free from

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10 Ibid., 37.
inherited narrative ideologies that conscript being as consumerist, market-oriented and efficient. Recognizing these as *socially inscribed narratives* is essential to the belief that we can be freed from their influence. They can be changed! We can re-imagine the narratives that we live by, and strive to live new, more humanizing narratives. With the help of God’s grace, we can live to a different rhythm.

*The Road Ahead: Making the New Story*

Echoing Sylvia Wynter I ask, “how can we shake ourselves free of destructive social narratives that seem to be intrinsic to our own conception of human being?” Alternatively stated in Wynter’s words, “how do you deal with the stereotyped view of yourself that you yourself have been socialized to accept.”11 This is a thorny problem, akin to asking how to saw off the tree branch on which one is sitting, or to experiencing an earthquake that shakes the very ground on which one stands. It concerns changing human consciousness by challenging the very narratives that give shape, if not determine, consciousness in the first place.12 Wynter’s evocative question will anchor the discussion of the present chapter.

I suggest that the social narratives that are often insidious to authentic humanity need the counter of a new imaginary that captivates and shapes human consciousness. Critical reflection on social existence is needed to name the socio-cultural sources of

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11 Scott: 131.

12 This was the existential burden that faced the Caribbean nations emerging from the shadow of colonial domination. To be a native of many of the English-speaking Caribbean islands was then understood as being a British subject. This was the normative vision of human being that shaped not only Caribbean self-consciousness, but also the values and aspirations of our educational and religious institutions. The resurgence in Caribbean art, dance, drama and other forms of native cultural expression, as well as the establishment of an indigenous political economy, provided the necessary counter-imaginary to this hegemonic Anglocentric vision of human being.
one’s narrative. But the ultimate trajectory is really narrative-world re-constitution. To change narratives that we ourselves have been socialized into, we need to awaken to and be powerfully persuaded to incarnate a new consciousness-raising story.

A conversion of social revolution that actually transforms consciousness requires a traumatic change in a man’s [sic] story. The stories within which he has awakened to consciousness must be undermined, and in the identification of his personal story through a new story both the drama of his experience and his style of action must be reoriented. Conversion is reawakening, a second awakening of consciousness. His style must change steps, he must dance to a new rhythm. Not only his past and future, but the very cosmos in which he lives is strung in a new way. 13

Framing the conversation more explicitly in the conceptual realm of religious education, what I am referring to here is the need for conversion, which I interpret as a constant re-storying of our lives in faith towards a more authentic ‘yes’ to God and to God’s unconditional love. Conversion is a holistic process that can’t be actualized only by critical reflection on the world in which we live.

More significantly, we need persuasive narrative encounters with oral, written and lived narratives of God’s reign, which move us to critically examine our own life stories in their transformative vision. As the two disciples fleeing Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus encountered Jesus in storied word and deed, so too must religious education aspire to cultivate a space and kairotic moment in which the counter-imaginary of God’s reign can be encountered anew, with fecundity and conviction.

To change the narratives that we ourselves have been socialized to accept, disciples of Jesus need to be re-evangelized by fresh encounters with the gospel narrative and, particularly, with the narrative vision of God’s reign as central to the life and mission of Jesus. The particular appeal of this narrative encounter is not so much in the

13 Crites, 83.
answers that the gospel may provide for human life, as in its capacity for questioning. One of Paulo Freire’s great insights was that learning is not so much about supplying answers to students, but rather posing questions that would engage their interests, and activate their curiosity and native creativity.\textsuperscript{14} Problem-posing pedagogy in the hands of a capable educator can better garner the critical insight and conviction necessary to change our stories than a banking model of education.

The gospel story questions disciples of Jesus through the ages. “How are you living into the fullness of the reign of God and in recognition of God’s unconditional love that holds and sustains all in being?” It issues an enduring invitation to conversion into more authentic discipleship and apprenticeship with Jesus Christ. This gospel-as-questioning or gospel-as-invitation theme is well-reflected in Jesus’ life and ministry. His life praxis entailed a perpetual questioning of his world. His parables and parabolic actions were provocative \textit{metaphors} of the inexhaustible mystery of the reign of God, which could only be expressed by way of metaphor.\textsuperscript{15} Drawn from everyday life, they had the power to engage people’s interests and invite them to reflect – often critically – on their lives in the world. The reign is God is not a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31), nor is it a net overflowing with fish (Matthew 13:47). Yet, it is the cognitive dissonance occasioned by the forced equivalence of these concepts, and significantly experienced as a question into the parable’s meaning, which provoked Jesus’ listeners to inquiry.\textsuperscript{16} The


\textsuperscript{16} C. H. Dodd describes a parable in terms of its metaphoric attributes in his classic study: “At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it
parables invite insight into the inexhaustible truth of the reign of God, and about the responsibilities it places on human relationality. But this truth is only discovered as the question it poses is engaged in light of one’s own life experience. This was the power of Jesus’ pedagogical praxis, especially in the parables; he engaged people with their lives in the world in order to “teach with authority” the Gospel of God’s reign, ever inviting them to embrace its emerging Vision as well as its Story.

The questioning made manifest in Jesus and codified for perpetuity in the gospel narratives must resound anew for this generation. As the disciples on the road to Emmaus encountered Jesus, so too may we be graced with such narrative encounters that prompt our conversion by inquiring of us, “What is taking place in your life at the moment?” “How do you understand and live into God’s abiding love in creation?” “What part of the human story do you wish your life to play?” Narrative religious education carves out time and space where learners may encounter fresh and evocative metaphors (narratives) of the reign of God that capture the imagination and motivate new insight.

The hope of a narrative pedagogy of story-making is that in encountering such evocative narratives, and in critical questioning of our own lived narrativity, we may find new wisdom, images and conviction for changing our narratives. Story-making is about imagining and living the new, redemptive story. It is, in a sense, about ourselves becoming metaphors of the reign of God as we incarnate more and more the insights from reflection upon our lives in the world and its integrating with the great Story of Christian into active thought.” C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, Revised ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 5. A metaphor, one would recall, demands the recognition of similarity between dissimilar entities. Its literal meaning must be denied before its metaphorical truth can be evinced.

17 The same kind of questioning is visible in Jesus’ table fellowship, healing ministry, exorcisms and friendship with the outcasts of society.
faith. Story-making cultivates the lived faith that is not only transformative for our own consciousness and life story, but can also be a beacon for a world that desperately needs living narrative symbols that life is more than the dailiness of consumerism, competition, individualism and efficiency. In making new stories, we exercise our humble but significant agency in remaking this world ever anew, whereby all persons may flourish as human beings.

I further develop the workings of story-making pedagogy in what follows. While story-making may foreseeably be developed for all ages, I confine my remarks to its contribution as an approach to young adult and adult Christian education. After brief anecdotes from my experience leading adult learners in a variety of contexts, I draw insight from three sources in attempting to better characterize the story-making journey. As an approach to adult faith formation I describe story-making as an endeavor of the religious imagination. I then draw from faith development and life-span development theories in inquiring into the kind of narrative competencies that can be expected from adults. Also, since I am targeting adults in their capacity as learners, I also lean on the literature on adult experiential learning (particularly transformative learning) in garnering wisdom for structuring the story-making pedagogy.

**Approaching Adult Faith Formation through Story-Making**

Consider the following stories, the first of which is from my experience as a religious educator with a non-profit organization based in Kingston Jamaica that provides homes and cares for persons who were abandoned by family and who live with severe

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18 In Maria Harris’ words, we are to become “metaphor incarnate” that may serve as a beacon and mirror for this world. Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 20.
physical and mental disabilities. My responsibilities as an educator was to design formal, small-community faith-sharing programs, as well as the much less structured, but equally important, cultivation of personal relationships that could be mutually empowering and educative. Debbie’s story emerges from the latter form of relationship.  

The second story, which offers interesting contrasts with the first, comes from my experience leading undergraduate seniors at Boston College, Massachusetts in theological reflection as they prepare for and then process week-long foreign immersion experiences in Latin America. These immersion experiences are remarkably formative for many students. The experiences raise questions about the changes in their life narratives that are necessary in light of the encounter with others from entirely different worlds.

*Debbie’s story*

I knew Debbie as a young, intelligent and highly competent member of staff at one of the homes in Jamaica. We would both take part in faith formation programs organized for the staff of the community, but I also knew her through frequent conversations about life, family and work. Our informal encounters reminded me that we never cease being educators and that in such relationships the lines between ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’ vanish (for which Paulo Freire always advocated).

Regrettably, despite her proficiency at her job and her receiving a steady income, Debbie didn’t make enough to care for her growing family. With no other supplemental income at home, Debbie was often at the point of desperation. Despite the help from friends, she had on occasion turned to prostitution to make ends meet. She hid this secret

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19 I use pseudonyms for the main characters to preserve anonymity.
from everyone at work. She carried herself with remarkable poise despite her tragic struggles and devoting herself to the well-being of family and community.

**Grace’s story**

Grace is in many respects a normal Boston College senior. I have known her to be an intelligent, driven and passionate young woman with a commitment to issues of social justice. Grace belonged to one of the groups that I co-led in theological reflection over the course of three years. Each member was in turn a leader of a small community of 12-15 persons who travelled on an international immersion trip to Latin America or the Caribbean.

The curriculum was structured to last the better part of an academic year. The fall semester was structured around Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis Approach. We reflected on various themes from participants’ own life experiences (such as human dignity and solidarity) in conversation with resources from Roman Catholic social teaching, bringing the group to new wisdom for transformative life praxis. The immersion trip always took place in the early spring semester. Upon their return, each small community was challenged to implement a solidarity project on campus, and I continued working with the group of leaders in reflecting on the immersion experience, particularly revisiting the discussions of the fall semester.

In my conversations with Grace inside and outside the formal faith sharing framework, I was always struck by how deeply moved she was from the encounter with the lives of those she befriended overseas. She returned from her immersion trip desiring to transform her life in keeping with the power of the experience. Like many students, she enjoyed the campus social life but felt she needed to engage in more meaningful
practices that could help solidify and deepen her newfound wisdom. She approached graduation with some trepidation over how to do this beyond the structures of college, but excited for future opportunities to make a difference in the world in such broad issues like poverty, justice and discrimination.

These are two different stories about contrasting contexts of religious education. I chose them because each in its own way illustrates how, as educators, we ought to always bring a critical sensitivity and openness to listening to the narratives that we and our students live, to the potential for living new narratives, and to the power issues that saturate and often stymie attempts to live a different story.

Both persons are products of their narrative world. Stories of personal and social suffering determine Debbie’s life. She is trapped within a matrix of poverty, family commitment, sexual exploitation, and the narratives of shame that such perpetuate. Her Christian faith is her primary source of hope and strength to resist such destructive narratives. But her everyday struggle reveals the intransigency of personal narratives – not by desire, but by social constraint.

From an entirely different context, Grace’s narrative is far more optimistic. She senses her personal agency is being able to do something meaningful in her life. She is able to have the opportunity to go on an immersion trip and experience life from a radically different perspective. She has access to the resources that allow for critical reflection on the ways in which life in the United States has global implications. She acknowledges having the freedom to imagine a possible career or vocational choice that re-stories her life in keeping with her international encounters.
Story-making Pedagogy Described

As mentioned previously, story-making pedagogy invokes our narrative meaning-making competencies to imagine and constitute Christian praxis that is credible for our lives, which brings a sense of coherence to our personal faith story, and that is generative in connecting us with responsibility and agency to other people and to the rest of creation, across time and space, in furthering the great Story of God’s reign in history. Ideally story-making is an intentional act. It is about empowering persons for agency and responsibility in their own narratives. The question is not whether as human beings we make stories, but rather what stories we make. To this end, story-making endeavors to primarily engage the narrative imagination and narrative historic agency to live a new story.

However, story-making also recognizes the power issues involved in changing stories like that of Debbie. Changing stories often needs the advocacy of others to promote liberation from sinful social structures and from social suffering. Far from an overly optimistic understanding of our re-storying potential, or an overly pessimistic one that lacks the hope necessary for activating our agency, story-making attempts to forge a hopeful story that is credible for our circumstances and expressive of our capacity to make all things new by God’s grace sustaining and working through our own best efforts.

Story-making encourages the learning community to critical recognition of its own lived story, in the hopes of re-storying this reality in fidelity to the vision and responsibilities of God’s reign. To do this, it operates on the idea that personal critical reflection needs the mediation of other narrative fields of meaning through which a person’s own story may be understood dialectically. Encountering other stories (lived,
oral and textual) enables the necessary distance for critical examination of one’s life. The aim of this encounter is to capture the imagination of learners to hope and to act towards the establishment of God’s reign in history, beginning with their own socio-cultural context in their own time and place.

**Story-making is Christian Praxis.** As an approach to religious education, story-making aims at forming learners in deeper and more engaged discipleship in Jesus Christ, whom we proclaim as the Word of God made incarnate in history. In terms of the theological anthropology outlined in chapter four, story-making invites learners to a more faith-filled vision of human being as capable of imagining, intending and co-constituting a sacred world and a storied yes to God. This is a necessary counter-narrative to destructive ego-centric social narratives because it advances a vision of the sacredness of all creatures of God. Moreover, since all persons live stories that at times promote and at other times hinder God’s inbreaking love in history, story-making attends seriously to personal and communal responsibility and agency in this historical drama of love. It promotes praxis that will advance God’s reign in history. At its best story-making is narrative historic praxis that prompts and shapes historical engagement.

**Story-making is an endeavor of the religious imagination.** Maria Harris’ work is instructive in this regard. She identifies four forms of the religious imagination: contemplative, ascetic, creative, and sacramental. A story-making pedagogy invokes the **contemplative imagination** by regarding each and every life as a unique story; it brings

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the level of attentiveness necessary for finding the wisdom that this life holds. The contemplative imagination is balanced by the ascetic imagination that preserves the ‘otherness’ of the narratives – demanding that they be treated with respect and care at all times. Story-making as an activity of the creative imagination sees the possibilities for new meanings held in the encounter with a new narrative. Finally, the sacramental imagination understands the narrative encounter and teaching itself as “a sacrament, a symbolic, ritual form through which the holy is mediated.”

21 The sacramental imagination in conjunction with the other forms of religious imagination establishes story-making as a creative, imaginative contribution to the unfolding story of God’s reign in history.

What are the Narrative Competencies that Attend to an Adult Stage of Development?

Story-making is about creating the stories by which we live meaningfully and responsibly. It is a competency that develops throughout our life span, but emerges in maturity during adulthood. As presently developed, story-making is an approach suited for adult education that can certainly begin with young adults (e.g. college age). The agency and responsibility for historical being that it cultivates in the learner are distinct features of the maturity and complexity of adult faith.

James Fowler has enumerated six stages of faith development from early childhood to adulthood, with stages four to six corresponding to adult development.22


22 For the sake of completion, the first three stages are Intuitive-Projective Faith (characteristic of early childhood and beyond), Mythic-Literal Faith (childhood and beyond) and Synthetic-Conventional Faith (from early adolescence). See James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 332. The
Stage four – *Individuating-Reflective Faith* – occurs when persons, in response to their life experiences, begin to “objectify, examine, and make critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and faith.”

One begins to own one’s identity through critical reflection on values, beliefs, norms, behavioral patterns and life style. At this stage “critically self aware commitments in relationship and vocation” are possible and the individual begins to freely associate with groups according to ideological beliefs.

During stage five – *Conjunctive Faith* – characteristic of early mid-life and beyond, one discovers the “need to face and hold together several unmistakable polar tensions in one’s life.” Truth is acknowledged as multidimensional. One is open to the “truths of traditions and communities other than one’s own,” even as one is committed to one’s tradition. The ability to embrace paradox in the midst of a chosen identity in faith becomes key.

The person at Fowler’s stage six *Universalizing Faith* grows to full inclusivity of the human community. Thomas Groome aptly expresses the idiosyncrasies of this stage as follows:

> Here the self ceases to be the centering reference point, and the ultimate is put there instead. The person has an ongoing experience of immediate participation in the ultimate and makes encounter with the ultimate

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26 Ibid.
available to others. The stage six person dwells in the world as a transforming presence.  

Stage six is characterized by a radical commitment to justice, and is often suggested as being exemplified in such lives as Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the older Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, among others.

It would be wrong to speak of story-making competency as constitutive of any one of Fowler’s adult stages of faith. An overly rigid regard for hierarchical stages would also introduce into religious education an element of having to discern what ‘stage’ learners are ‘at’ their faith journey before they can participate in the learning community. Rather, Fowler’s theory may be best regarded as suggestive of the kind of competencies that emerge in adulthood that would be important for story-making to intend. Such competencies include:

1. The ability to develop a coherent sense of personal identity and ownership of one’s values and beliefs (stage 4 faith)
2. The ability to hold in tension truths discovered from a narrative encounter that may be contrary to one’s own truth (stage 5)
3. The ability to understand one’s place in the universal community of humanity and all creation (stage six faith)

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28 Jane Regan cautions that “Fowler’s stage theory not be used as a means of labeling others.” She argues that “basically it is almost impossible to discern the dominant operative stage of another person; outward expression is not helpful in explicating another person’s faith stage.” See Jane E. Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago: LoyolaPress, 2002), 59.
Stage theories like Fowler’s are often criticized for their future-oriented understanding of human development. Narrative theorist Mark Freeman, for instance, argues that development is better perceived from a vantage point that looks back at one’s life in order to judge how much one has grown. There are strong resonances here with Erik Erikson’s understanding of identity as the developing capacity to reconstruct the past in light of the perceived present and the anticipated future. Rather than a forward-looking progression through stages, human development is claimed as better conceived in the burgeoning capacity to bind the past, present and future in a coherent sense of self.

Narrative psychology theorist Dan McAdams outlines six developmental trends in what he calls personal mythmaking – the formation of self-identity through the creation of a meaningful life story. As persons develop as adults, “personal myths should ideally develop in the direction of increasing (1) coherence, (2) openness, (3) credibility, (4) differentiation, (5) reconciliation, and (6) generative integration.”

Coherence means that the events of our life story ‘hang together’ in a meaningful whole. It also means that our character and value system are, by and large, evident in our everyday actions, bestowing on our life story the same kind of ‘followability’ constitutive of good literary plot. At the same time, some measure of ambiguity is consistent with every life story. “Our stories need to be flexible and resilient. They need to be able to

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30 Erikson.


change, grow and develop as we ourselves change.”\(^{33}\) Adult life stories are also consistent with a degree of openness to being storied anew. Openness and coherence exist in dialectic tension in every personal myth. If it is “too coherent, then it lacks openness. If it is too open, it will be incoherent.”\(^{34}\) The aim is to establish an Aristotelian-type mean of the two.

*Credibility* means that our life story is not based on distorted facts, but bears witness to who we really are in our daily existence. Credibility is closely linked to authenticity in this regard; it ensures that our personal myth squares off with the facts of our life and our world. The increasing *differentiation* of the adult life story refers to the complexity and variety of roles that adults take on in life. Our relationships multiply in adulthood, as we take on new roles as fathers, mothers, grandparents, colleagues, workers and employers. So, too, ought our stories to deepen to accommodate the complexities, conflicts and contradictions that naturally accompany such relationship portfolios. Adulthood is therefore also a time for the challenging task of *reconciling* these conflicting roles into a life that is meaningful, coherent and balanced. The requisite virtue for finding this equilibrium is prudence and practical wisdom in our relationships.

The sixth normative expectation of adulthood that McAdams identifies is *generative integration*, wherein adults are able to understand themselves as part of a wider social and cultural story.

In mature identity, the adult is able to function as a productive and contributing member of society. He or she is able to take on adult roles in the sphere of work and family. He or she is able and willing to promote, nurture, and guide the next generation, to contribute in some small or large way to the survival, enhancement, or progressive development of the

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 111.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 271.
human enterprise. The good myth integrates the mythmaker into society in a generative way.\textsuperscript{35}

Generative integration casts a wider net of care and concern. This element of adult development leads to greater concern for one’s immediate family, but it also means a person’s responsibilities are able to expand beyond the boundaries of family, parish and local community.

McAdams provides six narrative competencies that are innate to the adult stage of human development. They have immediate implications for the expectations that can be held by a pedagogy of story-making. As Debbie’s story reflected, personal narratives must be coherent and credible to the circumstances and the resources that the person has access to in life. Failure to do this leads to the kind of prejudices mentioned earlier to be discerned in the Trayvon Martin trial. At the same time, learners ought to be encouraged to have a healthy openness to narratives that are different from their own reality, and to imagine generative connections that take them outside their normal circle of relations. Again, this is exactly what foreign-based immersion experiences attempt to do. It is the novelty of these narrative encounters – which have taken learners far outside the comforts of their own narrative world – that often proves to plant the seeds for personal transformation.

\textit{Story-making and the Adult Learner}

Experiential forms of learning have becoming dominant in recent approaches to adult education.\textsuperscript{36} This has in part reflected the popularity of models of transformative learning, such as that proposed by Jack Mezirow.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 112-3.
Mezirow describes transformative learning as a specifically adult approach to learning that emphasizes critical reflection on life experience, rational discourse to test the reasonableness of our reflections, and decision-making based on the resulting insights. It encourages adult learners to become critically aware of the assumptions and expectations that undergird their beliefs, thoughts and actions. In doing this, we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action.

Learning becomes a process of “perspective transformation” that starts with recognizing problematic interpretations of experience, and works out new ones through critical introspection and reflective dialogue.

Mezirow reminds, as did Fowler, that critical reasoning is essential to adults in their roles as socially responsible decision makers. His understanding of transformative learning is, however, as an achievement of cognitive reasoning. Critics have asked for “more clarification and emphasis on the role played by emotions, intuition and

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37 Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000); Jack Mezirow, "An Overview of Transformative Learning," in *Lifelong Learning Concepts and Contexts*, ed. Peter Sutherland and Jim Crowther (London: Routledge, 2006). I selected these two essays from the substantial corpus of Jack Mezirow’s work as mature expressions of a theory first introduced to the field of adult education in 1978. The more dated essay summarized the learnings of the previous two decades, and focused on describing the core concepts of the theory. The later essay, far more reflective in tone, added a review of the major criticisms of transformative learning, and attempted a rebuttal.

38 Jack Mezirow and Associates, 7-8.
imagination in the process of transformation.”39 This critique isn’t new. Eugene Gendlin has consistently emphasized – and wisely so – the profoundly somatic basis of all experiential learning.40

Other scholars have departed from Mezirow to give more explicit attention to the role that narrativity plays in personal transformation, in many ways echoing Jerome Bruner’s thesis that there are two modes of thought – the logical/scientific (“a well formed argument”) and the narrative mode (“a good story”).41 In effect, while the vision of transformative learning has considerable importance for understanding adult education, a more holistic approach that incorporates somatic, spiritual and narrative channels of knowing and meaning-making is required.

Story-making pedagogy, as an approach to transformative learning, shares in the belief that learning is holistic. It isn’t simply an exercise of critical reasoning, though this is certainly included; coming to know one’s story and then to challenge its destructive aspects is an exercise of deep reasoning and cognition. Yet, there are also explicitly


intuitive, emotional and even spiritual dimensions to narrative knowing as well. As John Dirks writes, the traditional cognitive-based approach to transformative learning Represents the way of logos, the realm of objectivity and logic, the triumph of reason over instinct, ignorance, and irrationality. Transformative learning also involves very personal and imaginative ways of knowing, grounded in a more intuitive and emotional sense of our experiences. This aspect of transformation, the way of mythos, reflects a dimension of knowing that is manifest in the symbolic, narrative, and mythological…. It is a view of learning through soul, an idea centuries old reemerging in this age of information, giving voice in a deep and powerful way to imaginative and poetic expressions of self and the world.

There is a sense in which stories that are credible, coherent, and generative are not so much ‘understood’ as they are ‘appreciated;’ the meaning evoked by good stories is embodied through visceral feelings and emotions as well as through mental cognition. Paulo Freire’s transformative pedagogy, while not explicitly narrative, was based on having persons tell and reflect on their stories, with critical rationality yes, but also with attentiveness to the learner’s emotional involvement with their socio-cultural site.

Story-making also shares with Freire a belief that transformation cannot simply be personal; it must also have communal, social and structural dimensions. There are necessary and unbreakable connections here that must be fostered within transformative curriculum. All of the movements of story-making pursue the goal of personal transformation with the understanding that social transformation of unjust structures and institutions is also demanded by the vision of God’s reign.

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The story-making dimensions of a Freirein transformative pedagogy are recognizable in Brinton Lykes’ experience with a PhotoVoice project implemented with community members in Chajul, Guatemala.\(^{44}\) Within a historical context of Guatemala’s 36-year war, including widespread and consistent violations of human rights, the women of Chajul decided that they wanted to use photography to develop a public record of their lives, to ‘tell the story of the violence’ and also their story as women responding to war and its effects. They hoped to prevent future violence by speaking out, and, through storytelling, to build connections with other women in Guatemala and beyond who are engaged in similar processes.\(^{45}\)

The women took pictures of their daily realities around jointly-chosen themes. Each photographer was then given the opportunity to tell the story codified within a few of the pictures that they had taken. Many rounds of small and large group analysis of the photos and stories then ensued, with participants also exploring “possible solutions to the problems identified at the individual and collective level, thereby also developing a shared vision for change.”\(^{46}\)

By sharing their stories, the women gave voice to previously unspeakable experiences. By forming a learning community of liberation they journeyed into effecting what Lykes describes as “a tentative rethreading of community among a religiously, linguistically, politically and generationally diverse group of women.”\(^ {47}\) Far from Mezirow’s perspective transformation, Lykes’ Freirein-based conceptualization of


\(^{45}\) Ibid., 365.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 367.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 365.
transformation has more explicitly structural and social dimensions. It is action-oriented. It is about forming a healing community in a journey of debunking narratives of male domination and oppression, and claiming more empowering narratives of themselves.

Moreover, Lykes’ approach demonstrates more explicit attention to transformative learning as a holistic process that integrates mind and body as a unified source of knowledge. The project could not neglect the history of oppression marked on the bodies of the women, and expressed in anger, fear and regret, but also in determination and a ‘will-to-live’ that has obvious spiritual overtones. It is noteworthy that learning in the PhotoVoice project seems to develop through stages, including an initial cathartic response to the images taken and discussed. Clearly the photonarrative methodology highlights important moments in the learning process that are not as explicit under Mezirow’s scheme.

Story-making draws much wisdom from these sources of adult transformative education. It shares Mezirow’s advocacy for a critical recognition of the ways in which our thoughts and actions are socialized. It goes beyond to Freire-based approaches that insist that transformation is not only perspectival but also social and structural. To this conversation, story-making adds that transformation may develop through narrative channels and the somatic, intuitive and imaginative ways of knowing congruent with encountering narratives that are credible, coherent and generative.

Indeed, my necessarily brief foray into theories of adult education and life-span development may be captured in the following attributes of a story-making pedagogy:

1. *Story-making is life-giving, consciousness-raising, consciousness-forming praxis.*

   It is purposeful, reflective practice that aims to form learners not only through
pedagogical content but also through process. It recognizes and empowers learners as “agent-subjects-in-relationship,” 48 with the ability and shared-responsibility for their own learning, towards living more authentic ‘yeses’ to God’s self gift of unconditional love within history and society.

2. **Story-making appreciates the holistic nature of transformative learning.** It insists that critical reasoning is needed to name our own narrative ethos. Yet, it also holds that learning takes place through the strong emotional and imaginative connections that are invoked through narrativity.

3. **Story-making engages a community of learners in constituting a storied-sacred world.** It sets itself the vision of the reign of God and works to incarnate that vision in everyday life. The horizon in view here is none other than the fulfillment of one’s baptismal promises of discipleship to Jesus. In general, this is the aim of adult education and catechesis. “At its most integral,” Jane Regan writes, “adult catechesis provides participants with the means and perspectives that allow them to give expression to their baptism through engagement with the mission of evangelization.” 49

4. **Story-making aims at a healthy balance between openness and coherence, differentiation and reconciliation.** It fosters judgment and prudence in a person’s openness to different narratives, in the understanding that not all narratives

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49 Regan, 159.
encountered are ennobling of the human condition; in fact, and true for all people, many are destructive.

5. Story-making holds learners accountable to standards of credibility and generative integration. It acknowledges that there are personal limits as to how many and to what stories one may devote full energies, given one’s vocational, familial and occupational circumstances. It recognizes that we often lack the power to change our stories, and so are in need of supporting and liberating relationships. It invites generative action that meets Michael Himes’ three key questions for vocational discernment. That is, it invites action that 1) brings a sense of profound joy or that is accompanied by a sense of ‘rightness’, 2) meets a deep need in the world, and 3) is congruent with a person’s resources, talents and commitments in life.\(^{50}\)

6. Story-making attends to both personal and communal transformation. It is an intimately personal affair in that it is about conversion in one’s own life story; but it also seeks transformation in the social structures and institutions that limit human flourishing. These tasks are best undertaken with the support of community. A good supporting community can not only provide a shared vision and a holding space where persons can grow in recognition and expression of their life stories, it can also be a voice which aids in bringing critical awareness to aspects of those story to which we may be blind or neglectful. It also recognizes

that the boundaries of community ultimately extend beyond parish or community lines. It holds the learning community accountable to the fact that we all are one in the family of humanity and share in the ecological system of this planet. Story-making imagines what it means to share in the unfolding of the global story of creation.

7. *Story-making engages a community of learners in conversation.* Teachers and students share equally in its mission without possessing identical roles. Ideally teachers bring expertise, experience and practical wisdom in the topics of conversation, as well as leadership and classroom management skills that maximize learning potential. Story-making insists that students, too, bring a wealth of personal experience and wisdom that ought to be respected and taken as integral to the curriculum. They should be encouraged through the diverse means at the disposal of the teacher, to bring such experience into group conversation. Adult learners must also be held accountable to the learning community, not only in terms of active and respectful listening, but also for their own creative and committed contribution.

8. *Story-making forms a community of learners in narrative hospitality and festivity.* Recalling the discussion in chapter four, narrative hospitality and festivity are community building practices that restore participants in the vision that the human being has dignity as a creative, responsible subject made in the *imago Dei*. They do not necessarily constitute unique moments in the story-making pedagogy. Rather, they may be thought of as suffusing the entire pedagogical movement.

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51 Regan, 131.
Narrative hospitality forms a community of care - it encourages the empathy that forms community and makes transformative learning possible. Festivity forms a community of thanksgiving, reminding persons of what it truly means to be human, and subverting contemporary market-driven versions of human being that almost exclusively emphasize productivity, consumerism and efficiency.

Story-making is the humanizing praxis of a community that lives a transformative faith. The next section turns more explicitly to delineating its pedagogical movements, as grounded in Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis Approach. Five movements are identified:

1. A Generative Narrative Encounter (from which generative themes are extracted)
2. Critical Consideration of Personal Narrative in Light of Themes
3. Narrative Encounter with Stories of Faith
4. Appropriating Wisdom from the Narrative Encounter
5. Invitation to Imagine and Live a New Story toward Personal and Social Transformation.

These movements are animated by practices of narrative hospitality and celebration that may be thought of as shaping the overall tenor of the community of learning.

In what follows, I unpack this description in much more detail. I contextualize story-making as an offspring of Thomas Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis Approach to religious education and pastoral ministry, briefly summarizing the movements of this approach and situating story-making within its contours. I also suggest ways in which story-making represents an important development and explication of Groome’s comprehensive approach that foregrounds our narrative competency and the role of the narrative imagination in the journey of forming Christian praxis.
Following this, I consider in more detail each of the five movements of story-making, as well as the two community-building practices – narrative hospitality and festivity – that I suggest should pervade all the movements. My elucidation of the workings of the story-making journey is also buttressed by the work of Dan McAdams who has proposed some evocative psychological/epistemological channels through which narrative encounters and re-storying may be enabled to proceed.

**The Movements of Story-Making**

The overall trajectory of the story-making journey may be thought of as a spiral that deepens one’s lived commitment (or ‘Yes’) to the Great Story of the reign of God, particularly through solidarity with the poor and oppressed of history. The trajectory brings generative narrative encounters with an ‘other’ into dialectic relationship with the learner’s lived narrative experience. The encounter provides the perspectival distance needed for critical examination of lived experience. The wisdom from this dialectical process is then hopefully embodied in new lived stories that are, by God’s grace, more resonant with the vision of the reign of God.

It is important to make clear that the encounter with the narrative ‘other’ as described here *includes the encounter with the foundational narratives of the Christian faith*, present to us in diverse genre such as the scriptural stories, art, saintly biographies, music, and so on. In effect, the dialectic modeled here is between one’s lived narratives and narratives that codify wisdom for reflection, and whose alterity affords the critical distance necessary for seeing one’s own lived narrativity with new possibilities. *Christian narratives of faith occupy a privileged and normative position in this set,*
encompassing the collective sacred wisdom of the church throughout its history, across time and place. Jesus’ parables, as revelatory of God’s reign, provide such encounters. At least in theory, this set includes all narratives that, by God’s grace, engage our parabolic or sacramental imagination.

The trajectory of story-making may thus be graphically illustrated as follows:

![Diagram of story-making trajectory]

Note that Fig 5.1 models the trajectory of story-making, rather than the progression between its movements. There are dynamics between the movements that are not portrayed here. For instance, the story-making journey may start with a generative experience like an immersion experience, whose themes would later be brought into critical conversation with the Christian Story. Moreover, the learning community, under the leadership of the teacher, may choose to revisit any of the movements as necessary. The idea behind Fig 5.1 is to illustrate that it is the hermeneutical dialectic between self and other, story and Story which moves the overall trajectory of story-making towards a fuller incarnation of the Story and Vision of the reign of God.
Dialoging with Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis Approach

Story-making is modeled after Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis Approach. A necessarily brief description is in order. Groome’s approach begins with a focusing act around a life or life-in-faith generative theme that establishes the curriculum and turns learners to their own ‘being’ and praxis in place and time.\(^\text{52}\) The approach then spans a series of five movements: Movement 1 invites participants to express how they see the relevant theme as operational in their own praxis and/or in society. Movement 2 requires participants to “reflect critically together on the [generative] theme in their lives, on their own expressions about it, and to share this in conversation.”\(^\text{53}\) Learners draw on their full faculties of reasoning, memory, and imagination for this.\(^\text{54}\) Note, too, that such ‘critical reflection’ is both personal and social; for the latter, it is perfectly appropriate to turn to the insights of the social sciences, themselves critically appropriated into the unfolding conversation/narrative.

The Christian Story and Vision is made newly present in Movement 3 as relevant to the generative theme, to the stories of participants, and with “meaning and persuasion.”\(^\text{55}\) Groome recommends that the sources of Christian Story and Vision not be limited to the sacred scriptures or even to literary stories from tradition, but is mediated in many forms including traditions, creeds, myths, ritual, spiritualities, laws, song, dance,

\(^{52}\) Groome, *Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, 304.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 313.


art, architecture, and so on.\textsuperscript{56} The aim of Movement 4, then, is for learners to “come to see for themselves what the teaching and wisdom of Christian faith might mean for their everyday lives.”\textsuperscript{57} This is marked by a dialectical hermeneutic between the participants’ stories and the Christian Story, between their visions and the Vision of God’s reign. Finally, Movement 5 invites participants to decision or response for a lived Christian faith, or at least to ‘learn from’ the spiritual wisdom of the Christian Story and Vision.

While the movements are numbered sequentially, Groome recommends flexibility in the sequence in responding to the needs and inspiration of the learning community. However, the overall dialectic is one of life to Faith to (new) life (in faith).

Perhaps a table will help to illustrate how my proposed approach lines up with Shared Christian Praxis.

\textsuperscript{56} Groome, \textit{Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis}, 216. The full list is illuminating of the comprehensiveness of Groome’s vision, and well worth the read.

\textsuperscript{57} Groome, \textit{Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples}, 324-5.
I springboard from Groome’s foundational approach in three main ways, all of which foreground our narrative competency and the role of the narrative imagination in the journey of forming Christian praxis:

*First*, I draw out from Groome’s pluriformity of generative themes the idea of the generative narrative encounter. In this way, *I explicitly highlight the persuasive and engaging quality of lived narratives as essential in the journey of re-storying our lives. My experience in faith formation has taught me that it is often such powerful life experiences, prayerfully lived and critically reflected upon, that are most fecund for faith exploration and transformation. Experiences like an immersion trip are often powerfully
persuasive for changing one’s life story. To highlight the significance of this movement, I name it Movement 1 of story-making.

From the generative narrative encounter, certain events, imagoes, ideas, and themes may then be extracted for furthering the story-making journey. These categories serve to link the conversation back to the originating experience and as a conversational focal point for the story-making journey. They may be returned to at any point as the conversation/narratives unfold.

Indeed, whilst the generative narrative encounter is naturally presented as starting the story-making journey, it need not rigidly occupy this position. For instance, in my small reflection communities at Boston College, the immersion trips take place in early spring. The fall semester’s reflections focus around generative themes that the community decides are appropriate, based on their own experiences/praxis with issues of social justice and foreign immersion. The immersion trips then serve to re-initiate conversation around new or revised themes.

Second, Groome’s approach calls for decision-making for our lives in faith in its final movement, without limiting what such decisions may be, beyond that they must further the reign of God, constitute a “lived Christian faith” and fulfill human beings as “agent-subjects in relationship.” The final movement in story-making (my movement 5) explicitly invites learners to consider any decision made at this stage in terms of its intrinsic narrativity. It asks that learner’s consider how that praxis, as a lived-story, further the human story and the gospel story. It actively encourages the narrative imagination to continue to ‘write’ a more authentic lived story. There is, as such, a deep

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aesthetic sense to my movement 5 that may be occluded in the general descriptions of movement 5 of Shared Christian praxis.

Third, I introduce an emphasis on narrative conviction into the life-Faith-life movement, and provide some guidelines for accessing what I tentatively describe as the ‘moral veracity’ of such convictions. I have found it necessary to do this as I reflected on the convictions that are needed to change one’s life narrative. Narrative conviction in itself is a moral neutral category. Many great deeds as well as many evil deeds have been perpetrated in history on the basis of a narrative conviction. Slave-masters in Caribbean history justified their practices with the Christian narrative! I felt the need therefore to provide guidelines for establishing a narrative that would be congruent with the theological and anthropological vision of story-making as maturing in our lived ‘Yes’ to the invitation of God’s self gift. My guidelines appear just before the moment of decision or re-storying (written as part of my movement 4).

Before I examine each movement of story-making in more detail, it is first necessary to establish the conditions that enable story-making to take place. What are the psychological channels that serve to connect our narrative world with that of the other? How do we get a sense of understanding and gain wisdom from the plot of another’s narrative? In other words, how do the themes from the encountered generative narrative emerge in the first place? I now turn to these questions.
My Proposal for Story-making

One of McAdams’ distinctive contributions to narrative scholarship pertains to his theory on the components of life stories. In his book *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story*, he proposes that life stories are typically constructed around four main components:59

1. *Nuclear episodes*, or the landmark events in life. These are the “high points, low points, and turning points in life stories.”60

2. *Imagoes*, or “personified and idealized images of self” that function as ‘characters’ in our autobiographical narratives, and embody our aspirations to power and intimacy. Examples include images of oneself as a hero or victim, as a friend, as an adventurer, as a helper, or as a good citizen.

3. *Ideological setting* is the “backdrop of personal beliefs and values which provides a context for … action.”61 It is what we hold as true, good and beautiful in life.

4. A *generativity script*, defined as “a future plan or outline concerning what one hopes to put into life and what one hopes to get out of it to fulfill the developmental mandate of generating a legacy.”62 It is the component of our life story that orients us to the future and, hence, brings meaning and agency to our present.63

59 McAdams also argues that life stories are animated by a perennial tension between the need for power, autonomy and personal agency on one hand, and for intimacy, community, and relationship on the other.


61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 McAdams further developed this thesis in *The Stories We Live By*, in which he maps the various components of identity to the stages of human development. Motivational themes of power and intimacy “may be traced back to the elementary-school years; the ideological setting is laid down in adolescence;
How do these components of life story relate to the movements of story-making? I suggest that *narrative encounters are able to reconstitute human meaning and identity by engaging the human imagination with meaningful events, powerful and persuasive characters (imagoes), compelling ideologies, and fruitful and identifiable generativity scripts*. It is through these channels that we gain an appreciation for the narrative encounter, and that we find meanings that beckon us to go beyond our established certainties. These may hopefully be channels where grace may flow to inspire transformation. From a pedagogical perspective, they also provide the ‘conversation starters’ through which the generative themes that anchor the story-making journey may emerge.

An example may help to clarify the significance of these narrative components. It is from my experience in faith-based immersion preparation at Boston College – a program of which Grace (introduced above) was a participant. These trips do not always spur a re-visioning of life. But, when they are effective, they establish a new and fecund nuclear episode in students like Grace’s life – a major point of transition and high point of their college experience. Moreover, these trips also occasion a rethinking of life values, coalescing around such virtues as simplicity, charity, justice and gratitude. These newly found ideals are codified in images (imagoes) of self such as of ‘being a new person,’ and ‘being blessed in life compared with so many.’ There may be a new sense of awareness of personal culpability in perpetuating sinful structures; all of which may give

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imagoes begin to form in early adulthood; the generativity script becomes more salient as we move into mid-life.” See McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, 271.

His later work *The Redemptive Self* marks a shift away the conceptualization of story as relating uniquely to personal identity, to a consideration of national narratives and how they inform or constitute a nation’s sense of common identity. See Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
birth to an active discernment and adoption of a new generativity script – new ways of living more justly and responsibly in the world. All these ways were hopefully moments of grace for the students, helping them live more faithful and hopeful ‘yeses’ to God.

Movement 1: Generative Narrative Encounters. The initiating movement of a story-making pedagogy is the narrative encounter. This may often be planned by educators, drawing on their wisdom, skill and sensitivity to the work of the Spirit of God in the world and in participants’ lives, and in the hope of occasioning an encounter with God’s grace at work therein. However, narrative encounters may be ‘unplanned’ – moments of grace when we are unexpectedly moved to new insight through a chance encounter. These too can be powerfully educative and may be harnessed within curricula as needs be and as possible.

Narrative encounters should be thought of also as occasions for achieving the distance from our own narrative ethos that allows critical introspection and insight to take place. As a work of the religious imagination, students should approach the encounter in a contemplative, ascetic, creative and sacramental spirit. This is particularly the case when the encounter is with the life-narrative of another human being or community, such as occasioned by an immersion trip.

Narratives may be encountered in a variety of forms – oral, written or lived – in fact, through any mode of human expression. However, the lived variety is especially powerful whenever the educator can encourage it. It is not by accident that many of the racial conversion narratives to emerge from white Southern writers in the early twentieth century.

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64 This does not mean that educators can ‘plan’ an occasion of grace – “the Spirit blows where it chooses” (John 3:8). But we can at least prepare with diligence, skill and rigor spaces and occasions to open students to the gratuity of such moments of grace.
century testify that one of the primary factors to make conversion possible was the experience of egalitarianism outside of the racist South.\textsuperscript{65} It is also the reason that immersion experiences are often so deeply formative of faith. We often need such powerful cathartic experience to help us recognize the ways in which we are socialized into our storied-symbolic cultural landscape, and to inspire us to reconfigure our agency in that world.

Technically \textit{a narrative encounter occurs when one narrative field of meaning is placed in conversation with another narrative field of meaning, with the possibility of new or transformed meanings emerging from the dialectical interaction.} Examples of such encounters are commonplace. Visitors to a foreign country encounter a whole narrative ethos of customs and culture that may be quite different from their native experience. Traumatic events are cognitive and somatic shocks to our ongoing sense of narrative identity. Healing takes place as the event is incorporated into new or revised life narratives that perceive the event in a meaningful way.\textsuperscript{66} The so-called ‘clash of civilizations’ may be interpreted as a dialectic of narratives.\textsuperscript{67}

Recent advances in cognitive science shed light on how knowledge emerges from such encounters. Research suggests that new meaning comes about through a kind of metaphoric logic. For instance, Gerhart and Russell suggest that human beings think via

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interrelated networks of concepts and relations that form fields of meaning, and that new knowledge and meaning emerge as established fields of meaning are juxtaposed.\textsuperscript{68} I propose that narrative meaning may emerge in a similar way as narrative fields of meaning are placed in conversation and forced into equivalence.\textsuperscript{69} The parables, as argued earlier, are parabolic metaphors of the reign of God, which facilitate the birth of new insight as they are brought in dialectic relation with a person’s life narrative.

\textit{Narrative encounters engage the human imagination with meaningful events, powerful and persuasive characters (imagoes), compelling ideologies, and fruitful and identifiable generativity scripts.} These categories provide possible generative themes that may frame the discussion in the other movements. As such, an important strategy for reflecting on narrative encounters is to \textit{decode} the narrative experience in terms of these categories.

Another of Paulo Freire’s significant insights is that real life situations may be regarded as codified systems that need ‘decoding’ through critical reasoning and conversation. The situations and narratives in which we are all embedded are more often

\textsuperscript{68} Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell, \textit{New Maps for Old: Explorations in Science and Religion} (New York: Continuum, 2001). An example of their metaphoric process may be as follows: the concept of ‘world’ necessarily brings to mind related concepts such as life, earth and vast to name a few. The authors then propose that new understandings and meanings emerge when our established fields of meaning are forced into equivalence with other fields of meaning.\textsuperscript{68} Thus when NY Times journalist Thomas Friedman famously wrote that “The World is Flat” he was drawing an analogy between the field of meaning associated with ‘world’ with the very different one associated with the word ‘flat.’ In this case the fields interact as metaphors; new meaning is only discerned as the two fields of meaning get distorted to accommodate each other. The world is understood as flat to the extent that one loses the literal meaning of ‘flat’ as associates it with ease of communication and travel. The flat world speaks to the effect that the spread of communication technology and the ease of international resource flows is having in ‘leveling’ access to the global community. Thomas L. Friedman, \textit{The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century} (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

\textsuperscript{69} Even more recent support for the emergence of new meanings through juxtaposed conceptual fields is provided by Fauconnier and Turner’s thesis that cognition emerges through a process of \textit{conceptual blending}. See Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, \textit{The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities} (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
than not obscured from our immediate consciousness. Caught up in the daily movements of life, we are largely unawares of the degree to which we are socialized for better or for worse. For Freire, this narrative ethos remains coded, inchoate and hidden unless they are made the focus of critical reflection and raised consciousness that is disposed to take action toward new life and greater freedom.

It may be recalled that, for Freire, the “central problem”\(^{70}\) for human beings throughout history has been that of securing our “central vocation”\(^{71}\) as free and responsible cultural subjects, to become the re-creators of our culture rather than simply its products. To fulfill this vocation means addressing oppressive situations (or what Freire calls, limit situations) where human freedom is perennially denied. To be truly free of hegemonic and oppressive social narratives, oppressed persons must take the first step of naming and expelling the socialized image of the oppressor from their consciousness.\(^{72}\)

The process of decoding reality for Freire was thus a primary act of liberation. Education, as a praxis of liberation, needs to be “problem-posing,”\(^{73}\) \textit{wherein reality is framed as a question} that fosters a deepening of consciousness about one’s situation, encourages critical dialogue in order to “name” the generative themes, and imagines and commits to concrete action to change that reality.\(^{74}\)

\(^{70}\) Freire, 43.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 66.

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 46. The oppressed internalize the image of the oppressor as the normative standard of human being.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 79.

\(^{74}\) Freire writes, that people, as beings “in a situation,” find themselves rooted in temporal and spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own “situationality” to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human
For Freire, decoding means having learners reflect on their situation through the mediation of codified representations of such situations.75 Through critical conversation, learners name their own realidad by telling the story behind its portrayed relationships; they isolate the generative themes, the social, political and economic contradictions that persist in such situations, as well as the human aspirations and potentialities that are captured in the image or experience. Through such critical thinking, human beings are able to name the world that is obscured from consciousness, and to see the possibilities for existing beyond the boundaries imposed as limit situations.

McAdams’ narrative categories offer a useful strategy for the practice of a Freirein-type decoding in the encounter with narratives. The categories of nuclear episodes, imagoes, ideologies and generative scripts represent themes that generate the conversation of the learning community. Again, this is a critical conversation; identification of the nuclear episodes, imagoes, ideologies and generative scripts must lead to inquiry into their meanings, causes, and impacts on human relationship and society. The role of the educator is to return the learning community to the question or problem or metaphor that is asked by the narrative world that they encounter. Narrative encounters must be seen as problem-posing before any new wisdom can be drawn for the re-storying of life.

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75 These codified images represent “situations familiar to the individuals.” Ibid., 114. Yet, they should not be too obvious or straightforward as to close off further interpretation (there must be a measure of innovation or complexity to the themes). On the other hand, neither should the themes be too complex or abstract that their meanings are lost to learners. At best, codified images should be accessible, yet complex enough to allow multiple themes and interpretations to emerge; themes that may subsequently be turned into questions or problems for further investigation.
Movement 2: Turning to Our Own Narrative Ethos. In this movement learners are encouraged to bring a critical eye to their own lived narrativity. The events, imagoes, ideologies and generativity scripts discerned in the encountered narratives can now be used to galvanize critical reflection (especially awareness of socio-cultural influences) and discussion on personal narratives. As in the initial narrative encounter, this process resonates with a Freirein type process of decodification or Groome’s notion of critical reflection upon a generative theme of present praxis. One’s own narrative can be decoded into the above categories (events, imagoes, ideologies and generativity scripts) in dialogue and dialectic with the generative experience.

Groome has persistently stressed the necessity of turning to one’s experience and narrative in the journey of learning. He suggests that there are good pedagogical and theological reasons for doing so. Pedagogically, “all knowledge arises originally from human experience and experimentation.” Mining personal experience for one’s native wisdom is far more effective than the traditional “banking” models of education. Turning intentionally to the experience of learners – their praxis in the world – is also more likely to motivate the kind of interest and desire to know that is so critical for the success of narrative pedagogy.

Turning to our own life narratives is also necessary because, as argued earlier, we are often unawares of the extent to which our moral behavior is socialized by public narratives. As Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell remind,

76 Groome, Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples, 282.
77 Ibid., 283.
78 Freire, 71-86.
most of the convictions that charge us morally are like the air we breathe – we never notice them. We never notice them precisely because they form us not to describe the world in certain ways and not to make certain matters subject to decision.79

Bringing to light the narrative ethos that establishes the field of our moral behavior is a necessary precondition for learning that hopes to be formative and transformative for Christian faith.

The theological rationale cited by Groome is that human experience is a primary source of revelation for encountering God’s self gift. Roman Catholic tradition holds firm to the inherent sacramentality of life, and to what Karl Rahner called the sacramental existential whereby human beings are primarily graced to receive the self-gift of God and to return the loving gift of self. Everyday life is the scene for this drama of love, and so the experience/praxis of that reality is a privileged source of wisdom in faith.

Yet, as John Dewey has argued it is not experience in itself that is educative.80 Rather, as Groome has also stated, the raw material of experience/praxis must be critically reflected upon, drawing on the faculties of in-depth memory, critical reason and creative imagination.81 Critical examination of life praxis is needed to overcome the natural blind spots and biases that exist in our personal narratives. This is also where the community is so important, because it is often in the open conversation within the teaching/learning community that such myopia becomes evident. Both sharing our stories


and listening to the stories of others in true narrative hospitality is more likely to become effective in this regard.

The aim of this second movement of story-making is therefore for learners, with the support of a community of faith, to come to an appreciation of the movements of the Holy Spirit within their own lived narratives. This means recognizing and celebrating the life narratives in the group, and that may have been encountered in the previous movement. It also means discerning where new, life-giving narratives are necessary. The task is to critically reflect on one’s own narrative with the aid of the imagoes, ideologies, events and generative themes that were identified in the previous movement. The hope is to grow in clarity and honesty about our lived narratives, to become more sensitive and thankful for the relationships that we are a part of, and to grow in conviction where there is need for transformation or change in life behavior.

Movement 3: Narrative Encounter with Stories of Faith. In this movement the wisdom of the Christian faith tradition is brought to bear on the learnings from the previous stages. As Groome suggests, the faith Story is not only mediated by scripture, doctrine or dogma, but also by the variety of symbols that constitute the church as a community of disciples (traditions, creeds, myths, rituals, song, dance and so on).

More important to story-making is the emphasis on Christian wisdom as Story. It by now should hopefully be clear that what I mean by this is that the gospel events do not stand by themselves to be remembered only in the literary text; rather, they are part of an ongoing story of God’s unfolding reign in history and society. Indeed, we believe that they are privileged as well as profoundly pivotal and momentous for human history; but
they are nonetheless part of the human story that goes on at this moment, and whose
denouement in God is a cherished promise of faith.

Recognizing this story or narrative dimension of the tradition suggests that we too
 can play a part in its ‘writing’. Our actions are important in perpetuating the gospel of
love and forgiveness. We have powerful agency for promoting or hindering the unfolding
story of God’s reign. This is the burden of movement 3 that needs to resound throughout
the entire story-making journey.

This means that the Christian Story must be presented with meaning and
persuasion, as well as with imagination that inspires learners to perceive the creative
movements of the Spirit of God in our midst. The Christian Story must not only be
presented with imaginative choices of the type of media mentioned above, but maybe
more importantly, whatever media is chosen must engage the imagination of the learner,
as it engages their powers of in-depth memory and critical reason. 82

Once again the categories of events, imagoes, ideologies/ideas and generative
scripts can be used to decode the faith symbols so as to make them accessible for critical
conversation and appropriation. In this way, the wisdom of the faith may be brought to
bear on what has served as generative for discussion, whilst the wisdom of life hopefully
secured thus far in the story-making journey may be made accessible for facilitating a
critical engagement of how the faith Story has unfolded (and should continue to unfold)
in history.

Movement 4: Appropriating Wisdom from Narrative Encounters. Movement 4
synthesizes the wisdom of the previous stages. It brings the dialectic between our own

82 Ibid., 89.
life narratives, the narratives of scripture and the narratives initially encountered as generative, into hopeful fruition.

Importantly, this movement in the story-making journey is linked to the next because it calls for the discernment of some sort of validity criteria for adjudicating between stories. We need some way of deciding for ourselves the “truthfulness” of narratives for our own lives, especially since the next stage invites learners to re-story their lives. In this matter, the scriptural narratives are normative for Christian revelation, but their historically received versions are not beyond reproach. There is always a surplus of meaning and oftentimes forgotten “dangerous memories” in Christian Story. They too need careful and thoughtful consideration, applying a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval when necessary. The story that we ultimately adopt must resonate with what we understand to be true, guided by the best wisdom that the church in history and its contemporary scholarship has to offer. As Parker Palmer reminds, truth emerges in the midst of open and honest conversation between human and textual sources of wisdom.83

What I mean here may perhaps best be characterized as “narrative conviction” rather than ‘truth,’ since the latter is such a complex and elusive question. It is the quality of the ‘Yes!’ to God that I have been arguing is the texture of our story-making historical praxis. And like our ‘Yes’ of faith, conviction may wax and wane in life; but the hope is that, with the help of grace, even the dark nights of our faith may eventually yield spiritual wisdom and deeper conviction of the reality of God’s abiding in history.

I propose certain principles or guidelines for understanding narrative conviction, developed from the concepts of coherence, openness, credibility, differentiation,

reconciliation, and generative integration discussed earlier. These guidelines are meant to be mutually reinforcing and supporting. In this way they can serve as a litmus test for convictions that are antithetical to the Story. Some of the most evil acts of history (such as slaveholding) have been justified on the conviction of false interpretations of Christian faith.

The guidelines for narrative conviction are as follows:

1. *Narrative conviction should be grounded in narratives that are credible for the vocational status, resources and relational commitments of the learner.* This does not obviate praxis that constitutes a radical change in the direction of one’s life; it simply means that praxis must be grounded in a sense of God’s call, within the prudential limits imposed by our resources and relational obligations. Credibility is a question of vocational discernment in its broadest sense.

2. *Conviction should be grounded in a sense that our lived story is generative of more just relationships in time and space, especially with the poor of history and society.* We must be cognizant of power relations in all our actions and decisions. Not only must we seek to avoid harm to others, but also we must explore

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84 This proposal does not claim to be exhaustive of the question of narrative truth. It is merely suggestive. Quite competent scholars have addressed the question, and I highly recommend the reader to such sources. However, I find little in the literature to contradict the notion of narrative truth that I am advancing here. Hauerwas and Burrell suggest that the story that we ultimately adopt will need to display:

1. The power to release us from destructive alternatives
2. Ways of seeing through current distortions
3. Room to keep us from having to resort to violence
4. A sense for the tragic: how meaning transcends power
creatively ways of actively doing and promoting the common good of all – not just of the self.

3. *Narrative conviction ought to involve a belief that our narratives are open to change and challenge from new narratives that reveal our moral blindness.* Narrative conviction does not mean narrative intransigency. It is entirely congruent with having an attitude of openness, particularly when the more redeeming narrative comes along. In this way, conviction relies more on our openness to the movements of the Spirit of God than on the virtue of the narrative that we are living at any moment.

4. *Conviction ought to include a sense that our lived narrative is coherent with our understanding of life.* This means having a sense that our present praxis can be made meaningful in light of our past and of our anticipated future. Conviction also accompanies a sense of coherence between our lives and the narrative ethos in which we live, even if this means that our lives serve as parables, contradictions or counter-narratives to that ethos.

5. *Conviction ought to accompany a sense that our lived narratives can be reconciled with the best wisdom of the Christian tradition.* This includes the witness of what is usually meant by scripture and tradition, but also the witness, for example, of the saints throughout the ages. Conviction ought also to imply knowing that our life praxis is based on an interpretation of this witness that is tried and tested, that is shared by others in the church, that leads to human fulfillment and flourishing, and that stands the test of time. We must be weary of
convictions based on ‘private’ untested or self-serving interpretations of Christianity.

6. Narrative conviction ought to relish the diversity of Christian praxes in the life of the church. From the mythic acts of the greatest saints, to the life of the ordinary person hidden in the dailiness of survival, all our actions and discourses, done in faith as a ‘Yes’ to God’s self-gift of love, are of immense value in God’s sight.

Movement 5: Re-storying our lives in faith. Narrative conviction empowers our agency within the complex moral landscape of today. We are all immersed in a network of narratives – many of which are competing – that shape our character for better or for worse. The fifth movement of story-making seeks to embody life changing and world transforming praxis within this narrative milieu. This is a lifelong endeavor; it cannot be achieved with one sitting of a religious education program.

Story-making is a lifelong art, and its fifth movement perhaps is its most creative and artistic. It calls for reimagining one’s identity and the relationships through which this identity is lived. It means reimagining community to include the poor and marginalized that may live beyond one’s circle of family, friends and acquaintances. It may also mean deciding to care for the next generation by taking responsibility for present action; or perhaps honoring the struggles, achievements and faith praxis of those who have gone before us in history with our present praxis. Re-storying is the site for an imaginative narrative historic praxis.

As such, I offer few suggestions for this stage. The guidelines for narrative conviction obviously serve to qualify any decision made here. Beyond this, the fifth
movement is one of prayerful reliance on the Spirit for inspiration, most immediately available through the conversation of the teaching/learning event. The convictions entertained in this stage may depend on how fruitful were the previous stages – how deeply the learning community was able to enter into the constellation of events, imagoes, ideologies, and generativity scripts that emerged in the previous movements, and the critical perspective that was brought to bear in these conversations. Ultimately, however this stage draws on creative inspiration for it to have any traction.

One bit of practical wisdom: It may be wise to start with simple decisions when this movement is first engaged. Changing our life story is difficult. The advice that I give persons returning from immersion trips (and who are often on fire to change the world) is, “Start small. Find something that is eminently doable such as changing your consumption habits to include more fair trade products. Then, gradually be proactive in narrative hospitality. Find out the narratives of those who work to get your food to the supermarket. Before you know it, these initial acts may mushroom into a life commitment.”

Story-making is not a one-time commitment of faith formation. It is rather life-changing praxis that lasts a lifetime. It is within this temporal context that the decisions of movement five must be considered and encouraged.

Building Communities of Hospitality

The practice of narrative hospitality is to suffuse the entire movement of story-making. As discussed in chapter four, hospitality is a reciprocal welcoming and gifting of lived narratives that restores and promotes human dignity.
I choose not to describe this as a separate movement in story-making so that it may be regarded as the ethos that ought to permeate the entire curriculum. The dialectic between the narratives of faith (the narrative encounter) and the learner’s own lived story is one of narrative hospitality. So, too, the relationships between members of the learning community must be guided by mutual respect and agency. Learners and the leading-learners should cultivate from the start the narrative hospitality that enables the gift of self and the reception of that gift. This means sharing one’s personal story and actively caring for the storied reality of other learners. Moreover, the community should agree on practical and effective ways of holding itself accountable to this vision.

Narrative hospitality is also to transcend the physical limits of the classroom. It bears on the location of the learning community in time and space. Through narrative hospitality the community is challenged to grow in awareness and agency of its responsibility in the unfolding of the human story. It inspires awareness of what Harvard political theorist Marshall Ganz calls the story of ‘we’ and the story of now.85

Broadly understood, narrative hospitality garners learner’s interest in such pressing questions as: How are person’s lives affected by poverty? What are the structural and institutional causes of poverty or marginalization? What, if anything, has been effective in reversing such situations? What is my responsibility to the future generation? How do I learn from the struggles and achievements of those who have gone before me in time?

The focus in narrative hospitality, therefore, is in building a community of hospitality that is open to the movements of the Spirit of God within the storied existence

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of this world, and that takes seriously and prayerfully its responsibilities in co-
constituting the great Story of the reign of God in history.

Building Communities of Thanksgiving

Festive celebration is “at the heart of community.” It reminds us of our intrinsic
dignity as human beings, and so provides a source of nourishment that renews our
engagement of everyday life. This vision of celebration is not to be confused with
commemoration; it is not reduced simply to partying or merriment. Rather, when a
community celebrates, it carves out space and time for recognizing not only the
giftedness and uniqueness of each person, but also the connectedness and unity that is the
vision of authentic human community. As such, the community usurps the ethos of
individualism that Robert Bellah et al saw as constituting modern Western society, with a
spirit of togetherness and thanksgiving, as well as with a renewed vision of true human
worth and being. As Jean Vanier writes, “celebration is a song of thanksgiving.”

There is no unique way of celebrating; we may do so in many forms. I described
in chapter 4 the unique festival celebrations of carnival in Caribbean society. Church
communities celebrate through worship; families celebrate one another through birthdays
and anniversaries, and over the dinner table; school communities do the same whenever,
for instance, they intentionally engage a national holiday. But all celebrations ought to
aim at the authenticity, depth and richness that form those who celebrate into better

87 Robert N. Bellah and others, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American
88 Vanier, 13.
persons. Good celebrations take time, planning and effort to ensure that such objectives and vision are realized.

Within the framework of religious education curricula, the practice of celebrating introduces an aesthetic element to learning. It speaks to what John Dirkx describes as “learning through soul,”\(^{89}\) whereby the emotions that surround the experience of celebrating are regarded as “modes of learning in their own right.”\(^{90}\) ‘Positive’ emotions like joy (as well as ‘negative’ emotions like anxiety) that may accompany celebration, are full of meaning, as they speak to unconscious desires at the core of our human experience, such as the need (or fear) of community. Such knowledge is essential within the context of religious education, whose goals are more related to discipleship, self-knowledge, and personal formation and transformation than mere learning of content.

**Conclusion**

To change our story we must bring critical attention to the stories into which we are socialized. This is difficult, but it is possible. Through small, courageous, humble steps, learning communities may, with God’s grace, grow in self-knowledge and repentance, and in our ability to hear and live, ever more fully, the story of the good news. This is the vision that has been pursued in this chapter and dissertation. It is the vision demanded of all persons of faith today. Surely worth our best efforts!

\(^{89}\) Dirkx, "Nurturing Soul in Adult Learning," 83.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: STORY-MAKING AND BECOMING HUMAN BEFORE GOD

Four years ago, I was walking down a street in Bridgetown, the capital city of the Caribbean island of Barbados, on a busy weekday afternoon. Broad Street, the commercial center of the city is, on any given weekday, a mélange of Caribbean culture and society. Lined with department stores, malls, banks and restaurants, the narrow street teems with shoppers, office workers, entrepreneurs, visitors, schoolboys and girls, and street vendors peddling assorted wares. It is the kind of place that was (and still is) a great spot for meeting friends and for the avid ‘people watcher.’ On this tableau of Caribbean life, the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, seamlessly coalesce into the dynamic and evolving mélange that is the contemporary story of Caribbean society.

The memory of my walk down Broad Street does not culminate, however, on such a panoramic scale, but on the mundane figure of an old woman standing on a street corner selling four peeled oranges from a small clear plastic bag. She lacked the normal accoutrements of a street vendor – the cart or tray, the large umbrella, the busyness in serving the gathering of patrons. Instead, she stood in silence, careful not to obstruct the

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flow of customers who entered and exited the bank beneath which she stood, while holding out her meager offering of fruit in the hope that someone would stop and partake.

I will never know the old woman’s name or the story behind why she stood selling four oranges on a hot afternoon in Bridgetown. I may speculate a story that she was simply earning a living, or that she was trying to make some money for a special need – maybe a grandchild in her care needed school money. Who knows! Indeed, such speculation is an unwarranted imposition of my own narratives on her reality. What I do know is that she hearkens to the countless numbers of persons who daily struggle against poverty, and whose stories remain unheard and underappreciated amidst the din of progress. The old woman symbolizes the easily overlooked and forgotten ‘other’ within the hustle and bustle of modern Caribbean commercial society, who witness to the kind of stubborn creativity and will-to-live that has characterized Caribbean human being throughout its storied past.

*The Importance of Remembering the Storied Lives of the Poor*

I am convinced that remembering stories of suffering, survival and faith are vitally important for educating in Christian discipleship. As Johann Baptist Metz reminded, it is the memory of history’s poor that keeps our discipleship honest, relevant and grounded in our particular contexts. Moreover, I add that it is the memory of their creative resistance and survival that keeps us buoyant in life-giving hope. My memory of the old woman is a poignant reminder that, as an educator, I am graced with the opportunity to assist persons in forming their lives in apprenticeship with Jesus Christ towards the reign of God in history and society. I also recognize my personal agency in
helping persons grow in critical knowledge of their own stories, and of the way in which our broader narrative ethos shapes our lives in ennobling as well as destructive ways. Even more, I am also graced with the opportunity to aid in transforming lives to greater care, solidarity and responsibility towards the least among us. These are weighty vocational responsibilities made evident only by attending to the story that make together in community with those who struggle under oppression. With God’s ever-abundant assistance they are realizable and, indeed, may become wellsprings of profound joy and fulfillment.

*Narrative and Human Dignity*

I have argued in this dissertation that narrative is a fecund theological and pedagogical category for conceptualizing an approach to educating for transformative faith, that is sensitive to our connectivity with all human beings and with the rest of creation in time and space. Through the lens of narrativity, religious educators may find categories for understanding and expressing how our lives interface with culture, society and religious tradition, and how our lives play out in layers of storied relationships. In addition, through narrativity, we appreciate the intrinsic dignity of each person as a maker and possessor of unique stories, and as embodying the great Story of salvation that unfolds in history and society.

This vision of the dignity of all human beings is so easily occluded today that the need for narrative Christian pedagogy becomes vital. Modern Western market-oriented society is far too proficient at forgetting the storied-lives of its little ones – the poor, the old, those in prison, the physically and mentally ill, and the many others on the margins of society caught in interlocking narratives of injustice. The default human story
functioning in our societies is the person who is able-bodied, mentally competent, productive, educated, self-sustaining and professional, and in whose shadow all other embodiments of human being are devalued.\(^2\) Caught in the pursuit of this ‘ideal’ story, we have far too few resources left over for promoting wellbeing and justice for those who have been relegated – through fate or by human agency – to the underside of society.

Our resistance to change and to ending poverty speaks to the power of our narrative convictions. The ‘idyllic’ story of human being is one that seduces the best of us, and which resists a more humanizing and inclusive vision. We live such stories everyday in the spaces and institutions that structure life as we know it. Our markets, malls, highways and airports – the “non-places” of society\(^3\) – perpetuate a “forgetfulness-of-being.”\(^4\) In economic markets we are simply consumers, or producers, or traders and so on, differentiated more by our ability to pay and to produce than by any other personal markers. The lived-story of the poor is continually devalued by such standards based on economic power.

Egalitarianism and mutual responsibility is also constantly undermined by an ethos of individualism and unrestrained consumerism. In the pursuit of personal and

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national power, the major industrialized nations of the West consume far more than our fair share of the earth’s resources. Shorn from inter-generational and geographic ties and responsibilities our moral story and vision contracts in an inert egocentrism that counters the gospel vision that life is nurtured only by giving it away, freely and with responsibility, especially to the least around us.

The failure to recognize the dignity and humanity of the poor consists, in part, in our blindness to narrativity. We have little regard for the marginalized masses because we have little regard for their stories that depart from the standard, idealized script of modern human being. To fail to see – to really see – the story of another is to deny that person their human dignity. Narrative religious pedagogy, therefore, aims to reaffirm the dignity of those whose story is undervalued by empowering persons, with the help of God’s grace, to tell their stories, to live ever new and authentic stories, and to recognize our joint participation and embodiment of the unfolding story of the reign of God.

*Living our Stories with Responsibility and Agency*

Despite the many challenges that confront us all, we possess agency and responsibility for the kind of story that we live. We can choose to further or to resist the unfolding of the gospel story. With God’s grace and with the help of community we can live stories that are credible for our life circumstances – stories that are open to transformation and growth, and which bring a sense of coherence to our personal faith story. We can, in solidarity and assistance from others and through God’s grace, begin

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5 As previous chapters have described, Caribbean human beings could only be treated as slaves by forcefully displacing them from the narrative ethos established of native land, culture and traditions. Once they had been robbed of such storied identifiers, only then could they be treated as sub-humans, and ‘capital,’ fit only for servitude in the economic production. The challenge of Caribbean nationhood has been a challenge of re-forging humanizing stories from this colonial past, and of having our lived-narratives recognized as dignified on the world stage. Arguably, it is the same challenge that confronts the oppressed of modern Western society as well.
the uphill climb of recognizing and resisting the unjust stories that too often order our lives in destructive ways. We can live stories that are generative in connecting us with responsibility and agency to other people and to the rest of creation, across time and space, in furthering the great Story of God’s reign in history.

Author and Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison, tells the following story in her Nobel lecture of December 7, 1993.

Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind. Wise.

In the version I know the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town. Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without question. Among her people she is both the law and its transgression. The honor she is paid and the awe in which she is held reach beyond her neighborhood to places far away; to the city where the intelligence of rural prophets is the source of much amusement.

One day the woman is visited by some young people who seem to be bent on disproving her clairvoyance and showing her up for the fraud they believe she is. Their plan is simple: they enter her house and ask the one question the answer to which rides solely on her difference from them, a difference they regard as a profound disability: her blindness. They stand before her, and one of them says, "Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead."

She does not answer, and the question is repeated. "Is the bird I am holding living or dead?"

Still she doesn't answer. She is blind and cannot see her visitors, let alone what is in their hands. She does not know their color, gender or homeland. She only knows their motive.

The old woman's silence is so long, the young people have trouble holding their laughter.

Finally she speaks and her voice is soft but stern. "I don't know", she says. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands."6

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Morrison chooses to interpret the ‘bird’ in this story as language and the old woman as a practiced writer. The young people represent all of us, the moral of the story being that we all bear responsibility – as caretakers of the transformative power of human language – for our stories of this world, for our relationships and for the future of life.

I choose to interpret the ‘bird’ not as oral or written language, but as our lived stories. Whether our life witness is as evocative and powerful as the heroes and great saints of history, or whether it is hidden in banality along with the countless ‘ordinary’ lives who may never make the pages of history, we are all precious in God’s sight, possessing a God-given creativity for incarnating, in uniquely personal ways, the life of grace. We are not mimetic mirrors of the world. We each have personal agency and responsibility in ‘making’ the world more in tune with the story and vision of the reign of God. In our hands lie not only our own lives but also the wellbeing of those who will come after us, as well as the legacy of those who have preceded us. Morrison’s old woman (just as the old woman of my memory) beckons that we be cognizant and responsible for the agency that we have in making life or destroying it, in making healing and creative stories or stories that dehumanize.

*Story-making as Humanizing Praxis*

Living with authenticity and agency as children of God today demands that we reconsider and enflesh anew what it means to be a human being in time and place. To be human is to have a story and to possess the competency for re-imagining and re-living our story with God’s grace and in community with others. In a rapidly ‘shrinking’ world, our story must now, more than ever, reflect right-relationship with our neighbors, both human and non-human, both near and beyond traditional boundaries of parish and
country. We deepen our human existence – we become (more fully) human before God – the more we live stories that are in tune with the great Story of God’s reign, and the more our stories reflect responsible connectedness with the past and the future in our present actions.

Story-making is the pedagogical practice of such historical agency. It is narrative historic praxis that deepens one’s lived commitment (or one’s ‘Yes’ of faith) to the Great Story of the reign of God. It promotes historical agency, enlivened by a sense of personal connectivity in the ongoing human story and in the great Story of God’s reign. Story-making insists that a concern for the narrativity of life is central to religious education pedagogy that aims at formation and transformation in faith. Through our narrative competency, we may imagine and embody how our particular lived story, in our particular context, may further the ongoing Story of God’s unconditional love in the midst of history and society. Through our narrative competency we become, with God’s grace, more fully a relational human being.

Story-making beckons to the narrative quality of this vision of the reign of God. It is ongoing; it develops in every age as it inspires disciples to take part in creating a more just world where God’s indwelling and unconditional love may be evident. With the help of God’s grace, we can re-story our world through community and through the prophetic witness of our lives. We can, and must, also work to secure a more just world where all may live more authentic and humanizing stories. We need to build communities of hospitality, care and festivity that include but inevitably extend beyond traditional boundaries of home, parish, and local community. We need to live in solidarity with those who have little power to write (or rewrite) the story of their lives because that script
is dominated by social suffering and injustice. In this way, the unfolding drama of the reign of God in history may be furthered, and hope in Jesus’ vision of egalitarianism and unity may indeed be rewarded.

Story-making is a personal journey of faith formation and transformation that is best pursued in community. Ultimately, we write together a common human story. We all have personal stories to imagine and live, but these stories are never independent of others. Whether I choose to admit it or not, the story that I create is shaped by those who preceded me, who made it possible to live the way that I do and to enjoy the freedoms that I enjoy. My story bears their successes as well as their pain and suffering. Yet still, my story bears the responsibility for those who would come after me, for my progeny who will inherit the world that we leave behind. There truly is a vision to every story – especially one of responsibility. I may not be able to single-handedly change the world, but I may take responsibility for whatever agency I am graced with by God for doing so. Together we can cultivate stories that encourage communities of healing, solidarity, hospitality and thanksgiving that leave a better world for the inheritance of our descendants.

For, if life is understood as lived-narrative, then it is also understood as changeable, if not by our own agency, then in life-giving, just communities. We can change our stories, rewrite them, and live them anew if we have sufficient imagination, communal support, courage, hope and agency. This is not to ignore those who struggle in futility within cycles of poverty and oppression. Rather, it is to assert a hopeful vision that, working together in communities of hospitality, care and justice, we can at least begin to re-imagine and re-structure our world anew. The human will-to-live is itself a
demonstration of a hope-filled agency to resist all that seeks to rob us of our human dignity. It is also to say that many stories that are more amenable for change than others. We all have agency, for instance, to reject racist and sexist narratives, even if we lack agency to change our economic well-being. We are not robots of our social order, but can be creators and re-creators of it, in diverse ways, and through our life-giving stories. By God’s grace and in solidarity with others, we can, as Paulo Freire reminded, be creators of culture as well as creatures of culture.

A Narrative-Poetic Vision for Religious Education

It is the vocation and privilege of religious educators to initiate and nurture learners into the story of the reign of God, and to invite responsibility and agency for furthering that story. We do this, not only through our exhortations, but also through the witness of our own lives in solidarity with the least among us.

In one form or another we are all religious educators, commissioned by our baptism to bring the good news of God’s unconditional love and grace to our family, work, church, and every other community in which we are embedded. We all have agency in this regard even though we do not carry the professional responsibilities of catechist or religious educator. Thus, while this dissertation offered an approach that would be of immediate interest to those who understand religious education as a primary vocation, it hopefully will plant ‘seeds’ that may bear fruit in all persons who seek to take seriously our common baptismal vocation to evangelization.

First, we all must grow in sensitivity and proficiency in listening to other person’s stories. This means developing our capacity for narrative empathy. We may never be able to fully appreciate the other’s story but we can, through reason, imagination and memory
seek new wisdom and holistic insight. Not only, therefore, are we to encourage story-sharing by way of autobiographical reflection, but also, as far as possible, we must pursue ways of sharing lived-stories with our learning communities. One of the practices that I have personally found effective in this regard is joint participation and reflection on immersion experiences. This practice is extends the idea of community beyond our comfortable boundaries of parish and country. Many now find that living stories in solidarity with persons whom we choose to call neighbor, provides a fresh source for spiritual growth and renewal.

Second, we also need to foster learning communities that practice narrative hospitality across time. Countering the individualizing trajectory of our postmodern ethos means not only building communion across geographical divides, but also being responsible to those who have shaped who we are today. This may mean pushing back or utterly rejecting inherited narratives that degrade human existence, such as racist, sexist, classist narratives. Many of these are so ingrained in our psyche that they go unquestioned and unacknowledged. Learning communities must be sensitive to name and denounce such inherited narrative, as well as reinforce the best stories and visions of human being. In this way, we also hold ourselves accountable to the future. The narratives that we perpetuate through our present praxis will indelibly shape the world that we leave behind for our progeny.

Third, we must grow in conviction about our own lived-story of faith so that we may better educate with authority. Our personal conviction is contagious. A sense of living a true, beautiful and noble story can infuse our pedagogy with an energy and rhythm that indeed may become infectious. We remember the great teachers in our lives
because they exuded joy, passion (as well as skill) for what they were teaching. It animated their lives and infused their consciousness; their joy overflowed and we were all the better for it. So too, may we as Christian educators fall ever more deeply in love with Jesus and with his gospel of justice and unconditional love, so that our teaching may be suffused with his spirit.

Nurturing conviction in our students also has some very practical dimensions. The stories that we invite students to live must be *generative* of responsibility in building the reign of God. Yet, they must also be *credible* for our circumstances and context in that they ought to be discerned with prudence and in light of the particular obligations and situations of our lives. Moreover, we must also invite stories that are *open* to change and to new narrative encounters. All too often the Christian message is taught as an elitist supremacist gospel that denies the validity of any other claims to religious truth. The narrative encounter with the ‘other’ is necessary for pushing the horizon of our worldview to the story and vision of God’s love that is always more than we can imagine.

Finally, the vision of religious education perpetuated by the story-making approach is of a particular poetics of life. It is a poetics that is based on an exercise of our narrative competency in the domain of lived action and, as such, it is also historic action. Story-making is, therefore, *narrative-poetic praxis* – the creative embodiment of our yes of faith in life-giving social praxis. It is a consciousness-forming, world-transforming agency that imagines and pursues life according to the gospel story and vision, and that relies always on the grace of God.

The Caribbean witness has been my abiding motivation in this approach. I have argued in this dissertation that, in many ways, the Caribbean testimony of faith has been
our artistry in imagining, constituting and re-storying life from the shards of a colonial past towards a vision of God-given freedom. Caribbean story is punctuated by exemplars such as Toussaint L’ouverture, Fidel Castro, and Maurice Bishop, great visionaries like Marcus Garvey, Alexander Bustamante, Eric Williams, innovative artists like Bob Marley, Mighty Sparrow, David Rudder, Derek Walcott, and profound intellectuals like Franz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Arthur Lewis, and C.L.R James. Alongside these beacons of history, rise the numberless, nameless mass (represented by the old woman of my memory) who have labored unheralded amidst the din of history to resist all that dehumanizes and to craft an existence that is more than survival, and that aspires to human flourishing. They too share in the narrative-historic poetics of being.

The religious education vision of story-making is that all persons may mature in prophetic and creative witness of God’s reign and of God’s unconditional love for all of creation. As parables and living metaphors of that love, we may, with the help of God’s grace, draw others to this animating vision. My remembered encounter with the old woman on the streets of Bridgetown Barbados was evocative for me in this sense. Her lived story reminded not only of the contingency of the human story, but also of the dignity and creative agency entailed in resisting economic limit situations, and of the responsibilities entailed by the interconnections of our lives. Her story, hidden in humble action on a Caribbean city street, has reshaped my own story in profound ways, and I am all the better for it.
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