

Lecture Ohio School of Ministry
Thomas Boomershine
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The primary source of life and creativity for the people of God in every age has been the Word of God. We in the United Methodist Church are a church in decline at this point in our history. We in 1981 now have fewer members than the former Methodist Church prior to the merger with the former EUB Church in 1969. We need, therefore, as a community to re-examine and research for our sources of power and life in the Word of God. My thesis in this lecture will be that because the dominant medium of mass communication in our culture has changed, we need to relearn and reappropriate the forms and styles of oral culture, the most important of which is storytelling.

We are now in the midst of a media revolution. In the 20th century, electronic media - telephone, radio, film, and especially television - have become the dominant media of mass communication. This is a major media shift for us as Christians because most of our history has been in the media worlds of writing: manuscript, print, and silent print. You can't graduate from seminary without writing papers. But, for the most part, we have responded to the new media of our age with hostility and indifference. The church has invested far less thought, money, and energy into electronic media than any other major segment of our society: business, education, government, or military. This is in contrast to earlier media changes. The early Christians embraced mass distribution of the Scriptures in writing; Protestants printed the Scriptures and made them widely available. To be sure, there were violent reactions against new media in earlier periods by segments of the Christian community. Thus, parts of the Roman Catholic Church bitterly opposed the printing of the Scriptures and their being read by the people. But the future has always been explored by those who use the media of the new age as a means for the distribution and interpretation of the Word of God. Unfortunately, in this age, it is the orthodox church that has reacted with hostility. And power is shifting to individual entrepreneurs whose churches are growing as the orthodox denominations decline. The question is then what is the shape of the future? How do we think about the future as Christians charged to communicate the Word of God?

Many media analysts including Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong have suggested that the increasing dominance of electronic media as the primary medium of mass communication will result in a reemergence of the basic forms and styles of oral culture. Electronic media, particularly television, create experiential dynamics which are similar to communication events in tribal villages. It is now possible for persons to gather around the electronic campfire as a global village. And it is happening: look at rock and roll bands, royal weddings, and world catastrophes. Much of the world can be joined together instantly in a common experience of a news story event such as the attempted assassination of the Pope. Assuming that McLuhan and Ong are right, the basic models for the effective communication of the Word of God in electronic media will

emerge from the forms of the Word of God in oral culture. By far the most extensive and authoritative material that we have from a period of oral culture in the history of our religion is Biblical narrative. I would propose, therefore, a program of action that has two basic components. The first is that we as a people rediscover and reappropriate oral Biblical storytelling as the original media source of our faith. The second is that we move aggressively into presenting and interpreting Biblical narratives in electronic media.

First, then, we need to rediscover Biblical storytelling. The original oral medium of the Word of God is our source, the spring at which we need once more to drink. We can reexamine and learn from the basic source of our religion in the oral culture of the Biblical world, before the development of writing. And the most important form of the Word of God in oral culture was storytelling. Therefore, Biblical storytelling is the most important form and style for us to learn. It is the basic tradition of our religion.

In the first part of this lecture I want to outline the history of Biblical storytelling as a way of clarifying our present situation. I'm going to refer to the chart on the front of your packet. And I should start with a story. It is a story that captures the spirit of Biblical storytelling.

When God was looking for a people to call his own, he went to all the peoples of the world and asked them what they would do for him if he became their God. He went to the Greeks and said to them, "If I become your God and you become my people, what will you do for me?" And the Greeks said, "Master of the universe, if you become our God and we become your people, we will create for you the most beautiful works of art the world has ever seen. We will develop the most profound systems of philosophy the world has ever known. And all people will come and bow before you because of your beauty and your wisdom." And God said, "Thank you."

He went to the Romans and said to them, "If I become your God and you become my people, what will you do for me?" And the Romans said, "Lord of the universe, if you become our God we will set your standard at the head of the world's mightiest commercial empire and we will carry your flag before the world's most powerful armies and fleets. All people will come and bow before you because of your power and your might." And God said, "Thank you."

God went to all the peoples of the world and finally came to a scrawny bunch of nomads in the Sinai desert called Hebrews. Now these Hebrews were very shrewd traders. And God said to them, "If I become your God and you become my people, what will you do for me?" And they said, "Lord God of heaven and earth, we cannot offer you great works of art or philosophy; we are neither artistic nor philosophical. We obviously cannot offer you great wealth and power; you can see our tents and our flocks. But if you become our God and we become your people, we will tell the stories of your deeds

to our children and they to their children and they to their children to all generations."
And God said, "It's a deal."

God, too, was a very shrewd trader. And if you examine our history as the people of God, the wisdom of the story is clear and describes what we have experienced as a people. Biblical storytelling is at the heart of our religion. Story has been the most powerful, popular, and pervasive language in our tradition. I want to trace the history of Biblical storytelling in relation to the history of media. The most advanced mass medium of each age shapes the forms and values of the culture and thereby determines the distinctive forms of Biblical storytelling and interpretation in each age. Also it is critical to recognize that media ages are not exclusive alternatives. As Walter Ong has shown in his book, The Presence of the Word, the development of new media of the word simply creates an ever-more complex media mix. New media do not cancel out old ones; they are simply added on and a new mix is developed.

And now the history - Biblical storytelling has its sources in oral culture. The human voice is in oral culture the only means for the presentation and interpretation of the stories. The occasions for storytelling were determined by the medium. As many people can hear the story as can hear one person's voice. Thus, the tribes would sit around the fire and tell the stories. Samuel Terrien, my professor of the Old Testament at Union in New York, used to tell about his month with a Bedouin tribe in the Arabian Desert. Every night the men would gather around the campfire after supper. Instruments would appear out of those magnificent robes and while everyone played along, one of the men would begin to tell the tribe's stories. He would begin with the creation and perhaps Abraham, then stories of Israel and Jesus, then stories of Mohammed and Islam, then the Turks and their conquest of the region; there was a story about Lawrence of Arabia and of recent events. Finally, about two or three o'clock, everyone would be silent and he would start on a new story. This happened virtually every night. That is the primary occasion of storytelling out of which the narrative traditions of Israel were formed. Of course, there were also the gatherings in the marketplace or at the gate, and later the major national holidays. All of these were storytelling occasions. Thus, when Joshua gathered the tribes together to form the nation as recorded in Joshua 25 he recited the story and so did David and Solomon. Indeed, every Israelite was required to recite the story as he brought the first fruits of the harvest (Duet. 26:5), "And you shall make response before the Lord your God:" "A wandering Aramean was my father and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number" and so on. In oral culture, everyone learns to tell at least some of the stories. To this day, a young Jew is required to recite the Torah at his bar mitzvah; you become an adult member of the congregation by proving that you can recite the stories of Israel. Thus, storytelling is not something to be done only by professionals or ordained clergy; it is a language of the people that everyone learns and does. This network of memory and knowledge is at the heart of the power of Biblical storytelling in Israel.

Early Christianity developed in the 1st century as an extension and fulfillment of the religion of Israel. Storytelling was equally central. The Gospels were composed in and for storytelling events. The stories were told in the synagogues, the marketplaces, and in homes. The longest of the Gospels, Luke, takes about 4 to 4^{1/2} hours to tell; Mark only 2^{1/2} to 3. In oral cultures, good, solid evenings of storytelling; anything shorter wouldn't really be a story. Thus, the gospel form was shaped by the basic parameters of oral culture. And you can observe the power of storytelling in early Christianity. The early Christians were a very small, relatively powerless group against enormous odds: the power of Rome and the opposition of much of Judaism. But they told the stories of Jesus not only within their own groups but also to those who were not members of the community. Thus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were evangelists who drew together the stories that had been preached and that they in turn preached. Thus, Eusebius records in his Ecclesiastical History, referring to Clement and Papias, "They say that this Mark was the first to be sent to preach in Egypt the Gospel which he also put into writing and was the first to establish churches in Alexandria itself." Thus, what was early Christian evangelism: storytelling. The evangelists were storytellers. And so was the early Christian community. The Gospel tradition was pervasive throughout the various regions and groups of the early church. Everyone told the stories to some degree. Thus, the power of early Christianity is inextricably related to the power of the Word of God in story.

Let me briefly discuss a particular Biblical story. In the ending of Mark, we can see him struggling with the problem of getting people to tell the stories. As you may recall, Mark's gospel ends with this enigmatic report: having heard the incredible news of Jesus' resurrection and having been commissioned by the angel to tell the disciples and Peter, the women went out and fled from the tomb. For fear and trembling had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid. Why would Mark end in this way? My conclusion is that Mark was dealing with the problem that people were saying nothing to anyone, were not telling the stories, because they were afraid. They had good reason to be afraid. His purpose in ending the Gospel was to shock them into reflection about the scandal of this response. They had the best news in the world to tell would fear prevent them? Also Mark knew that the failure to tell the story was the greatest single threat to his church in the midst of resistance and persecution. Thus, Mark was fighting for the power of the Word of God through the storytelling ministry of the church. And, as the phenomenal growth of the early Christian church demonstrates, Mark and his fellows fought successfully.

Memory was the mode of transmission and preservation of the stories in oral culture. Only the stories that were remembered were passed on. The memorization was not word for word. Oral tradition research in recent years has revealed that oral tradition memorization is formulaic. Long stories are memorized by learning basic story structures and formulas. At each story occasion, the story is retold anew. It is very much like jazz. The story is repeated but there is also spontaneous improvisation. It is like a good teller of jokes now.

In an oral culture, storytelling is passionate, full of emotion, highly expressive and spontaneous. All forms of gesture are used so that the hands are constantly in motion.

The patterns of community organization are determined by who can get together to hear the stories: in Israel, the tribes and later the nation at the great festivals, in early Christianity, the house groups that were the earliest form of the church.

Retelling the stories for each new situation was the dominant mode of interpretation. The story was interpreted for new situations by being retold in a new form. That is, the storytellers were the thinkers. In Israel, the Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly writer, Deuteronomist and in early Christianity; Matthew, Mark, Luke, John - they were the formative thinkers of the community. It is true that Paul and the prophets were in distinctive and critical ways equally formative thinkers. But the storytellers' way of thinking was the most highly valued. I emphasize this because we tend to think of the theologian as a thinker. Storytelling is something you do with children or with the uneducated. But story was the most basic form of thought in the Biblical communities. The storytellers were the thinkers. So also today - think of Tolstoy, Faulkner, Solzhenitsyn, Joyce. Story is simply a different way of thinking that has its own rules.

The dominant experience of God. God is a character, a person. He does things and has feelings; thus, the wrath of God, the loving kindness of God. God is known in words and actions; he is heard through his word and is observed in deeds that can then be told to our children.

Thus, orality was the original media world of Biblical narrative and of the authoritative forms of the Word of God. But there was a major mass media change between about 500 BC to 100 AD. Writing became more widely read and manuscripts became the most advanced medium of mass communication. Now the Scriptures rather than being told from memory were read from a text. The primary occasion for Biblical narration in manuscript culture was public readings of the manuscripts. This was the primary mode of publication for all forms of written literature in the ancient world. Thus, a Roman poet would publish by organizing a public reading of his poetry. The earliest record of the public reading of a Biblical manuscript in Israel was Josiah's reading of Deuteronomy (II Kings 23); then after the exile, Ezra gathered the people together and read the Law to them. And this occasion created a new primary form of organization, the congregation. Prior to the exile, there were no synagogues, only the tribes, the nation, the Temple. Synagogues were formed, probably during the exile, for public reading of the Biblical manuscripts. Thus, the congregation, whether a synagogue or a church, was an organization for public reading of the Scriptures. And it remains much the same today, though the centrality of the reading of the Scriptures is often unrecognized. In a Methodist church I recently attended with regularity, it often occupied less than 3 minutes of the service.

The manuscripts were read aloud in a chant or trope. That tradition is maintained in Judaism; a cantor chants the Scriptures. In order to read the texts, you had to memorize them. In an ancient manuscript, there is no punctuation, no breaks between words, and all the letters are either large or small. You can see why it was necessary then to know the text very well in order to read it. The readings were highly expressive because of the music but more formal in structure, with less spontaneity and with no change in the actual words. The stories were recited exactly as they were recorded in the manuscript.

The story was fixed in writing.

The methods of interpretation also underwent a major revolution in this period. As Christianity moved into the Hellenistic World, the stories were interpreted in terms of the ideas in the stories rather than by being retold. The stories became instances or concrete illustrations of ideas, of theological truths.

If you're going to interpret a story you talk about the ideas illustrated in the story. You might say, for example, "Now I want to discuss the truths that present in this story and I will outline them in three points." And then you might develop the ideas that are present in the story with illustrations from contemporary experience. This is a perfectly legitimate and characteristic pattern of interpretation which only began in this period of history.

The characteristic pattern of Biblical interpretation throughout this period of manuscript culture was allegorical interpretation. The stories no longer had their primary meaning as descriptions of events; they were allegories of great truths. In allegory the meaning of a story is tied to ideas and arguments rather than to events. And it was in this period that theology was formed as a discipline for the interpretation of the revelatory acts of God in Israel and in Jesus Christ. God is experienced as an idea, a being. God is one who is immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent. What would these words have meant to the people who told the stories originally? Nothing. But the church fathers had to interpret the stories in a way that could be understood and valued in the context of their age. Listen to the story now in the media world of manuscript culture.

The next major media revolution was the development of print. This created another major change in the interpretation of Biblical narrative. Out of this revolution Protestantism was born. The characteristic occasion for print experience of Biblical narratives was private reading. Individuals now had access to the stories. You could sit by yourself or with your family and read the stories of the revelation of God. It was right there, in front of your own eyes, not way up there in the pulpit. This is the Word of God!

Memorization continued but was less important. Editing of the manuscripts made reading easier so that memorization was no longer a necessity. But people read the Bible aloud all the time. And the stories were read aloud extensively in the Protestant churches. For example, the Congregational churches of New England would frequently

have Scripture readings that would go on for an hour. As a result, people did memorize lots of stories and they could tell them; but overall, memorization declined.

The role of emotion also changed. With Protestantism, chant was virtually eliminated. Reading became more down to earth and personal. There was less expressiveness and even more focus on ideas.

The unity of the community was broken. People increasingly sat and read to themselves. Interpretations multiplied and denominations began to be formed. The disagreements varied but the underlying logic was the same: "The text says this." "No, it says that." "Well, what are we going to do about it." "I will not compromise." "Neither will I." "Let's split and form a denomination." Thus, a group of likeminded people who shared a common interpretation of Scripture became the organizational structure of Christianity.

In this period there was a massive reaction against allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures and a growing focus on literal interpretation. A literal interpretation called attention to the plain, simple meaning of the words. Literal interpretation develops when you can look at the letters. "Look at it. What does it say? It means what it says." This was combined in Luther and the other reformers with a figural style of interpretation that drew connections between the broad images and figures of Biblical revelation. Thus the image or figures of sacrifice: Abraham and Isaac prefigured Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary.

In this context, the characteristic experience of God was highly personal. One of the resolutions of Protestantism is the feeling of closeness to God, of accessibility to the divine mysteries through the Scriptures. The experience of God's grace for me was primary.

The next major change in the medium of Biblical narrative happened over several hundred years between approximately 1700 and 1900 or so. Print began to be read in silence rather than aloud as was the virtually universal practice prior to this. Thus, books through the 18th century and even in the 19th century have the first word on the next page printed at the right hand bottom of the page. It made it possible to pronounce the word as you turned the page. But, during this period, books began to be read in silence. This was in some ways the most revolutionary transformation of Biblical narrative. Now Biblical stories could be experienced without any sounds but only as a document to be studied in silence. Thus, we sit and we look at the text without making any sounds. It is a revolution! Before this, Biblical stories were always sounds.

In the world of silent print, memory is irrelevant, a dumb waste of time. Why memorize? You can look it up in the book. Thus, memorization has been virtually eliminated from education including Christian education.

Emotion? Alien to right recital. Emotion has virtually been eliminated from public recital of Biblical narratives.

The characteristic organizational pattern of this period is the fundamentalist-modernist split and the split between scholarship and the people. What has happened is that, ironically, the movement that gave the Scriptures to the people has virtually taken them away. The study of Biblical narrative has increasingly become the province of Biblical scholars who alone are the ones who can use the highly complex methods for studying them. Increasingly, the people of our churches neither read nor study the Bible. This problem is related to the mode of interpretation that has developed in the world of silent print. This development is described best by Hans Frei in his book The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. It is a very difficult but extremely important book. Frei demonstrates that Biblical criticism in the late 17th century began to define the meaning of Biblical narratives as reference, as documentary sources for the construction of history and theology. Thus, you study the documents and describe the development and interrelationship of the implicit theologies. This becomes a theology of the New Testament. Or you tell the story of what really happened: the quest of the historical Jesus. On the basis of the existing documentary evidence, you reconstruct the most probable historical facts. Biblical narratives are interpreted then as printed references, as documentation. And as one who is thoroughly involved in this style of Biblical interpretation, documentation is at the heart of Biblical scholarship. Footnotes, that's the way you do it. Try to interpret a Biblical story without footnotes or documentation and you won't get to first base. It is an essential characteristic of the ways of thinking in this media world.

In this context, God is experienced as either highly personal especially in those movements that have rejected historical criticism, or as highly abstract. As the stories become increasingly distant and alien from the people, so does God become increasingly distant. God may be one who acts but it is in a mode of theology and history that is hard for the folks to relate to.

In the context of this history, our situation is clarified. We as Christians have been through major changes in media at least three times in our history. In the midst of each of these media transitions, equally major changes have taken place in our life and ways of thinking. But, in each instance, the pioneers of the faith have found ways to use the new medium as a means for making the revelation of God in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ available in the medium of the age.

I propose, therefore a program of research and action that has two basic components: the rediscovery of Biblical storytelling as the original medium of our religion and an aggressive effort to find ways to use the dominant mass medium of our age as a means for the presentation and interpretation of Biblical revelation.

Let me outline some steps we can take to reappropriate the Biblical storytelling tradition. First of all, we need to recognize that it is false to assume that we no longer live in an oral culture. While oral communication is no longer the dominant medium of mass communication, the primary groups of our culture and our Church are groups in which oral communication is the dominant medium. Thus, the family, the school class, and the congregation are all predominantly oral cultures. Oral modes of communication are fully appropriate in these groups. Thus, the basic patterns of Biblical storytelling in oral cultures were as follows. There was retelling of the stories in various communities: the family, the nation, the place of worship. Memorization was essential; everyone was involved in learning and telling the stories. Emotional expressiveness and spontaneity was integral to telling and hearing the stories. Interpretation was by retelling the story in new situations and by the steady exploration of storytelling as a way of thinking. God was experienced as a character and person known in word and deed. In order to explore again this source of meaning we need then to do the following things:

1. Tell the stories frequently in various settings and learn how to participate as a community in storytelling events.
2. Learn to tell the stories from memory. The function of memory is not only to record the story; it is also to make it your own and to make it come alive in the telling.
3. Everyone in the community needs to learn and tell the stories. A primary function of education in the community is to teach the children the stories and to enable them to develop the knowledge and skills so that they can tell the stories. This must begin with parents telling the stories to their children.
4. Emotional expression and getting in touch with the feelings implicit in the narratives and in ourselves in response to the stories is essential.
5. Patterns of community organization that unify rather than fracture need to be explored: major covenant festivals in which the stories are recited and media events in which the community remembers common stories together.
6. Methods of interpretation - we need to rediscover and develop narrative methods of interpretation. This will require a new relationship between Biblical scholars and the people of the church. They must work as partners in a common task which can only be accomplished if each does his or her job well. This will include the need for scholars to learn and model ways of telling the stories. The development of narrative theology, of a storytelling approach to preaching, and of narrative interpretation of the Gospels are all signs that this is beginning to happen.

Let me give you an example of narrative interpretation. The ending of Mark which we have now studied made no sense as a manuscript. The great majority of scholars for the past 1900 years have concluded that Mark could not possibly have intended to end his Gospel in this manner. Thus, two early Christian editors added more satisfactory endings to the text. And then there have been a whole series of speculations about

what happened to the ending: the last page of the codex was torn off; Mark had a heart attack before he could finish; the original ending was transposed into an earlier story in the Gospel, the transfiguration. A narrative analysis on the other hand suggests that Mark was simply ending on the same theme as the other evangelists: the summons to the apostolic mission to proclaim the Gospel. Matthew and Luke did this by emphasizing the positive: the disciples are sent forth with a glorious commission. In Mark and John, the story ends with the problem of disciples who run away and say nothing: the women in Mark and Peter in John 21. The style of Mark and John is to eliminate the negative while that of Matthew and Luke is to accentuate the positive. But both are seeking the same end: to empower their listeners to become aggressive apostles.

This suggestion about the ending of Mark, which you can read about more extensively in two articles on the ending of Mark that are being published in the next issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, is a step in a major change that is happening in Biblical and theological thought. When I began my intensive work on Biblical narrative in 1967, I was, as far as I knew, the only person in the world working on Biblical storytelling and narrative criticism. My dissertation was extremely controversial. But in the last 10 years there has been a virtual explosion of interest in narrative: narrative theology, storytelling in preaching, storytelling in ministry and in the culture in general. Since I began doing Biblical story workshops four years ago with my students at New York Theological Seminary where I was teaching, literally thousands of people have become involved in Biblical storytelling. It is happening.

And underlying this movement is a response to a basic need: the need to experience and know God. Through storytelling in both electronic media and in personal interchange, God is experienced as both a character/person and as a being. There is a new integration of the experience of God that draws together the various elements of God's self-revelation in our history. Finally, God is the author of the stories and is the power behind Biblical storytelling.

To summarize, the basic theory is that new life and vitality for our churches will grow out of a reappropriation of the original form and medium of God's Word as story. Everyone in the community needs to learn, understand, and tell the stories in ministry. You as pastors are the key figures in that development. I as a Biblical scholar, join hands with you. And we must join hands with all of your people to form a network of Biblical storytellers. This is then the first part of the program of action that I would propose out of the analysis of our past.

The second part of the program is both equally important and difficult. We as the orthodox Christian church must move aggressively into television. And as we do move into television the basic content of our programming needs to be precisely what the most important element of our programming in each previous media age has been: the Word of God as recorded in the Scriptures. As you think about how would you present the Scriptures on television you can see why the methods of presentation and

transmission that have been developed in print culture are such a problem. Imagine putting a Bible study group or a scholar reading a Biblical exegesis lecture on TV. It would be boring! I know, I have done it.

We will have to learn new methods of presentation and interpretation. That is a primary task for Biblical scholarship in this age.

And let me outline for you some of the possibilities, some of my dreams about the ministry of the Word of God in television. The key elements are a partnership between local churches and conferences and a national international television network developed by the United Methodist Church. The television programs like the local programs need to be organized around Biblical stories. Possible program series are:

- a) an exegetical program for pastors and teachers as a resource for sermon preparation.
- b) a series of programs for persons who are alone or hospitalized developed by both the denomination and the local congregations in each area.
- c) a series of youth programs developed and run by young people chanting Biblical stories to rock and roll rhythms and tunes and exploring events of interest to them~
- d) a series on the captive churches in Latin America and in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union persecuted by authoritarian regimes of both right and left in which they are enabled to tell their stories. The most critical component in this is that we get to know those who are our enemies, the wonderful people of the Soviet Union, the descendants of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky and Tschaikovsky.
- e) a series of programs in which we week by week live through and retell in a variety of cultural styles the great stories of the Bible. Persons from allover the world-Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, young and old, can learn and tell the same stories and share their meaning for themselves and for us all.

I could go on and on. I wake up nights besieged with ideas of the possibilities that are before us, possibilities for ministry to those who are our enemies, to those who are sick, alone, and in prison, and for building and strengthening the church.

These are only ideas that have grown out of thinking about our situation within the basic models of the original oral context of the Word of God. There are many more and these will have to be refined and developed. But they are simply there to be done if we have the vision and the commitment to do it. Someone will do it, because the Word of God demands it. Somehow God will make it possible that His Word will be proclaimed in electronic media in a way that is faithful. And obviously I am not satisfied with what is being done now. I must say though that I respect and celebrate the vision and courage of those who have developed television ministries.

We now in the United Methodist Church in Ohio have an unprecedented opportunity. We are part of a major denomination that is beginning a concerted effort to

develop a television ministry. And we in Ohio have the possibility of developing and testing some of the basic models that will emerge. At United Theological Seminary we have the combination of a theological and Biblical research team that is beginning to think together about this new age and a television production team that is capable of producing quality programs. In our conferences we have the organizational structure in which the oral network can be developed which would in turn both feed and be resourced by a television ministry. In our conference communications staff, we have the experience and capability to implement extensive experimental programs.

In addition to the potential of this new age for the connectional system, there is also a danger. The connectional system depends on effective communication particularly at the level of the general boards and agencies. At this point, our national and international connection is almost wholly dependent on print as a means of communication between the boards and agencies of the church and the people of the denomination. Their declining credibility and leadership capability is one of the symptoms of the decline in the denomination as a whole. As print continues to decline in its power as a means of mass communication, the continued dependence on this medium will probably have a similar effect on those who communicate in that medium. Thus, a television presence is needed in order to make possible effective communication within the connection as well as to facilitate the proclamation of the Gospel to those outside the Church.

In light of the history that I have outlined, it is my conclusion that the development of a television ministry integrally related to the Word of God is the single most important area for us to explore as a denomination in our age. Out of a reappropriation of the Word of God in our churches will flow the energy and commitment that will make possible a strengthening of the church and of our mission. And let me state one fact—we have tended to think that television is something that we are competing against. That has been true. And we have made many mistakes in television. But, every congregation and denominational group that has moved aggressively into television has grown and been energized by that development. I am convinced that the same would be true for our conferences and our denomination. But, as you can see, I do not believe in television for television's sake. There is nothing magical about the medium as is true of every other medium. It is only when we use television faithfully as a medium for the transmission and interpretation of the Word of God that we will be faithful to our ordination, to our calling to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations. But if we do that together, what opportunities lay before us. This is a great time to be alive as ministers of the Gospel. We live in one of the most exciting times in all of the history of the Church, in one of the watershed periods of our life as a people. This is then both an analysis of the past and a programmatic outline for the future. I invite you all to become Biblical storytellers, to teach your people to become Biblical storytellers, and to participate energetically in our corporate effort to tell the stories of God's deeds to our children in television.