BECOMING A BIBLICAL STORYTELLER

In the context of the history of Biblical narration, the process of becoming a Biblical storyteller now is both a restoration and a revolution. To tell Biblical stories is to restore them to their original medium: sound transmitted by memory and produced in a community. But, for citizens of the modern world, the process of mastering a new medium of Biblical narration is a revolution. We, as products of the twentieth century, have primarily been trained to study Biblical narratives in the media world of silent print. The skills that are needed in this medium are those of objective textual analysis, facility in the use of basic methodological and reference tools, and the integration of the results with the basic disciplines of Christian thought, such as theology and history. Biblical storytelling requires that these skills be integrated into a radically different set of skills and abilities. Like learning to write or to be an interviewer on television, Biblical storytelling requires the mastery of skills associated with a new medium.

The purpose of this chapter will be to outline an approach to becoming a Biblical storyteller. It will survey some of the basic areas of knowledge and skill that are involved in learning to tell Biblical stories. Obviously, it is impossible to learn to tell stories from a book. The focus here will be, therefore, on the description of the essential areas of knowledge and skill rather than on "how to" do it.

The process of becoming a Biblical storyteller can be described in relation to the steps in learning to tell a Biblical story. Those steps are: memorization of the story, exploring the story in its original context, exploring the story in its present context, and telling the story.

Memorizing a Biblical Story

In order for a story to be told, it must be remembered. But the process of memorization is often a difficult hurdle for a prospective Biblical storyteller to jump. Identifying the sources of a problem can sometimes make it easier to solve and some of the sources of our problems with memorizing Biblical stories can be specified.

The natural processes for the memorization of literature, such as Biblical narratives have been eliminated from our lives. Those processes are used every day by advertisers, whose livelihood depends upon their ability to make people remember proverbs such as, "You deserve a break today" and "Have a Coke and a smile." Through repetition, vivid visual and aural associations, and the use of music, advertisers create processes of memorization that indelibly plant various jingles in the minds of millions of people. But Biblical narratives are no longer repeated regularly, associated with vivid visual and aural images, or sung. In contrast to food and beverage advertisements, the easy way of learning Biblical stories is unavailable to us.

The situation is even further complicated by the negative associations of memorizing the Bible for many people in present-day culture. The primary function of Biblical memorization in recent times has been the mastery of "proof texts," which

can then be used in disputation. Memorized proof texts have often been used in a hostile and even self-righteous manner that has been extremely alienating. The "sword drill," a euphemism for drills in Biblical memorization, symbolizes the spirit of this hermeneutical system. Of course, there have also been legitimate devotional and educational goals in the memorization of individual Bible verses, which need to be recognized by those for whom memorized proof texts are offensive. Nevertheless, the reaction against memorization of the Bible has, at least in part, been a response to this method of Biblical interpretation. However, while this reaction is understandable, there is no necessary connection between memorization of the Bible and a "proof text" hermeneutic. Those who memorize Mozart, Shakespeare, or Woody Guthrie rarely cite them as proof texts.

In fact, however, memorization is a natural and relatively simple step in the process of stories becoming a living part of community life. The ongoing oral tradition of jokes which are told, remembered and passed on is a living example of the relative ease with which stories can be memorized. And once a Biblical story is known thoroughly and is in the memory, a new level of freedom is created. As with a good joke, the Biblical story becomes a potential resource for personal and community interaction. But, in contrast to most jokes, the Biblical story also becomes a potential source for remembering the actions of God. Nevertheless, many persons find memorization difficult and intimidating. An understanding of how our memories work may help to minimize those difficulties.

The Structure of Human Memory

Our understanding of human memory has been substantially advanced by recent research, particularly during the last decade. Roberta Klatzky has produced a clear and comprehensive synthesis of the results of that work in her recent book, Human Memory, which can serve as the focus for a brief survey of the basic components of memory.[1] According to Klatzky, the theory that best explains the research data is that there are three memory stores in which information is held for some period of time: sensory registers, short-term memory, and long-term memory.

Sensory Registers - Sensory registers are those centers in the brain where the data from each of the senses is recorded or registered. There are separate registers for each of the senses. The individual sensory registers are indiscriminate and continually register everything that is perceived by that sense. These registers briefly retain information until it can be put into a new form and sent further into the memory system.[2]

The sense data from the sensory registers is sorted in two major ways: attention and pattern recognition. Attention involves the selection of the sense data that are interesting. The classic example of attention is the party. One is involved in a boring conversation and a more interesting conversation is overheard elsewhere in the room. While continuing to listen with one ear, it is possible to pay attention to the sounds of the other conversation. Or one can note the attractive man or woman who has just come in or be distracted by a distinctive perfume. If managed poorly, one's

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present conversation partner may detect what is happening. But, if managed well, no one else knows the center of one's attention. That is, there is a constant parade of sense data being registered in our minds, but only those data that gain our attention will be remembered. In order to remember something, therefore, it helps to pay attention.

The other process which sorts the data from the sensory registers is pattern recognition. Pattern recognition is the matching of incoming sense data with information already stored in long-term memory. The process converts the raw data into meaningful information by integrating it with known patterns. As Klatzky observes, "The importance of pattern recognition is easy to see. Just think of what might happen if you failed to categorize incoming visual information as "a bear" and instead categorized it as "a horse." Such a failure of recognition system could be fatal."[3] Thus, pattern recognition exercises are a critical part of the training of pilots and pro football quarterbacks, whose careers depend on instant and accurate pattern recognition. Sense data that is not recognized tends to be ignored and, therefore, forgotten. One sign of the complexity of pattern recognition is the present inability of computer manufacturers to develop a machine that can read handwriting. The virtually infinite variety of ways in which persons write letters is literally incomprehensible to a machine whose pattern recognition capabilities are limited.

<u>Short-term memory</u> - The second major center in the structure of human memory is short-term memory. If the memory is conceived as a workshop, short-term memory is the workbench on which materials provided by the sensory registers are worked on. Only a limited number of items can be held on the workbench at one time. Present research indicates that the limit is seven items, with possible extension up to ten. Any additional items cannot be held in short term memory. Thus, a telephone number has seven numbers or, with an area code, ten. This limited capacity of short-term memory is one of the sources of the distinction between short and long-term memory.

However, while a limited number of items can be held in short term memory, those items can be of any size, ranging from a single number to an entire series of complex chess moves. The phenomenon of associating or stacking a series of data together is called "chunking." On the workbench, a chunk is a group of data which are held together as a single item. For example, the dash after the third number in a phone number makes it possible for the groups of three and four numbers to be chunked into two rather than seven items, which is easier to remember. The same principle applies to the memorization of words. Groups of words can be associated with each other and memorized as a single verse or line. Thus, one of the ways in which people memorize large amounts of material quickly is by chunking groups of words, concepts, or numbers together.

As its name indicates, short-term memory is heavily influenced by time. It deteriorates rapidly and proportionally with the passage of time. A set of numbers or words is forgotten in a matter of seconds, unless reinforced or stored in some way. Also, short-term memory is subject to interference from sense data which are

registered either before or after the recording of something in short term memory. If, for example, an operator gives me a phone number and someone nearby yells, "Watch out" and I turn around to look, I will almost certainly need to call the operator back. The interference of this new data effectively erases the number from my short-term memory.

Repetition or rehearsal reinforces short-term memory by keeping an item in the working memory and increasing the opportunities for meaningful encoding and storage in long term memory. Rehearsal is, therefore, a primary strategy by which data are memorized. Whether rehearsal strengthens memory because of the frequency of repetition or because of more active processing which occurs during the rehearsal is unclear. Thus, repeating a person's name after it is heard is a good idea, but it may still be forgotten unless it is actively associated with something that will enable the name to be retrieved from long term memory.

Long-term memory - Long-term memory is the most complex working center of memory and the discussion here can only summarize some highlights of the data which Klatzky has drawn together. To continue the workbench analogy, long-term memory can be conceived as the shelves in a workroom on which items are neatly stacked. There are three basic processes that make it possible for us to think using the data stored in our memories: encoding, storage, and retrieval. The data is encoded by being associated with concepts or related events, stored in the memory bank, and then retrieved.[4] The key to long term memory for storytellers is, first of all, learning to recognize and to create codes or patterns in the narratives and then to retrieve the stories by drawing on those associations. In one sense, therefore, the secret to long-term memory is the retrieval system by which items are taken off the shelves and used. Most materials that have been learned are present in long term memory, but many cannot be retrieved until a link or association is discovered.

For example, radio stations have learned that discovering memory associations is pleasurable for many listeners. Every weekend there are stations that devote their entire schedule to playing hit songs from the 40's, 50's, and 60's. Each of these songs has the potential to provide a memory hook for listeners. The song provides a connection with memories long forgotten that come flooding back as the events, persons, and feelings associated with that song are remembered.

Another instance of the power of long-term memory associations happened recently to me. My wife and I were driving in the country and the distinctive smell of burning leaves was in the air. Since burning leaves has been forbidden in the cities in which we have lived as adults, that smell brought back a whole series of memories for us of the small towns in which we grew up: fall football games, hay rides, and raking leaves in Indian summer. Thus, sounds, sights, and smells are sensory data that can back long forgotten memories. That experience, so full of delight and melancholy, is long-term memory at work.

Long-term memory is dependent, therefore, on retrieval. The process of retrieval is, in turn, dependent on associations or connections with the data in long-

term memory. There are two primary types of associations or codes: semantic and episodic. Semantic associations are related to the meanings and sounds of words. Materials are encoded and stored in long-term memory in relation to concepts or sounds. Thus, poetry and songs are remembered easily because of the many lines of semantic association that are built into the sounds and concepts of a poem or song. A dictionary or an encyclopedia is organized according to semantic associations. Semantic associations that are exaggerated or unusual tend to be more easily remembered than associations that are more commonplace.

Jesus' teachings are excellent examples of this principle at work. Many of his sayings are memorable because they are both exaggerated and surprising: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off…"; "Why do you seek to pick the splinter out of your brother's eye and do not see the log that is in your own eye?"; "Blessed are the poor…cursed are the rich?" Furthermore, there are many repeated words that provide hooks for semantic associations. Whether or not one agrees with these sayings, they are difficult to forget.

Episodic associations are the relationships between episodes in an event. These materials are stored by the succession of data in time, rather than by their conceptual relationship. They are related by what came before and after, rather than by what is similar or dissimilar. This is how events from earlier in our lives are remembered. It is also the way in which we organize history. Relating materials to the course of events enables us to store the data in our memories. The president of United Theological Seminary where I now teach, John Knecht, has a phenomenal episodic memory. He can remember the details of events thirty to fifty years ago including names of persons he barely knew, specific details about the weather or the location, and the sequence in which things happened. I have been astonished while watching him remember minute details of past events. He identifies a benchmark in the past and then traces the associations with that event episodically, both forwards and backwards in time. Nate Shaw, the black, Alabama farmer whose memories comprise the book, All God's Dangers, had a similar capability to remember details of events long past by episodic association.

The episodic or semantic links with the materials stored in long-term memory make it possible for those memories to be brought back to consciousness and used. To use the workshop analogy, the shelves of long-term memory are organized according to syntactical and episodic classifications of material. The associations of long-term memory are retrieval systems which make it possible to take those stored items off the shelves and use them. In contrast to short-term memory, there are no known limits to long-term memory. And long term memory is much less subject to interference than short term memory.

Thus, in the light of recent memory research, there appear to be three closely related but distinct aspects of human memory. The possibility of remembering a Biblical narrative depends upon the effective functioning of each part of the system. Therefore, we can explore some of the basic principles of memorizing Biblical stories

in relation to each of these three centers of working memory: sensory registers, short term memory and long term memory.

<u>Some Guidelines for Memorizing Biblical Stories</u>

<u>Sensory registers</u> - Since a Biblical story is a series of sounds, the primary sensory register for remembering the story is the aural register which records sounds. The first step is then to listen to the story and to pay attention to its sounds. It can be told either by someone else or by oneself. Thus, the most important element in learning Biblical stories is to be exposed to the sounds of the stories. If the story can be associated with a rhythm or with a melody, the sounds of the story will be enriched and the number of aural associations increased. It is a custom in the memorization of the Koran, for example, for students to rock back and forth and to chant. The rhythm of the rocking and the melody of the chant thereby reinforce the sounds of the words themselves.

However, if other sensory registers are stimulated, there will be more available associations for retention in short and long term memory. It is also helpful, therefore, to activate other sensory registers. Thus, it is a good idea to make or look at a written copy of the story. Making an outline or chart of the story makes it possible to get a visual picture of a narrative and to clarify the structure or skeleton of the story. Physical involvement activates another part of the memory system. Walking around, gesturing, or acting out the elements of the story establishes muscular or motor associations with the story.

An orthodox or Hasidic yeshiva is an educational institution for the memorization of tradition, particularly the Talmud. And, as Chaim Potok has described in his book, <u>The Chosen</u>, the yeshiva is a place of utter bedlam to an outsider.[5] Each man sits in front of a table with a book on it, chanting out loud and rocking back and forth as he reads. It is a place for the study of the tradition as sounds rather than sights. The notion of someone saying "Shhh!" is utterly unthinkable. It would eliminate the possibility of experiencing the material being studied. However, such a place is ideally designed to stimulate the sensory registers that make possible memorization of oral tradition.

A general principle is, therefore, that the engagement of the sensory registers with as much breadth and attentive intensity as possible is most likely to facilitate a lasting memory of a Biblical story.

<u>Short-term memory</u> - The retention of a story in short-term memory depends, first of all, on rehearsal. The reinforcement of a story in short term memory by some degree of repetition is generally, though not necessarily, helpful. There are situations in which a story can be heard once and, if told and heard well, can be remembered. But, as a general rule, a name or a story must be rehearsed in order to be remembered.

In memorizing Biblical stories, the grouping of words together in sense groups, sentences, episodes, and stories makes a marked difference in efficiency and retention. Each of these units can be a "chunk" which will make it possible to hold more elements of the story in short term memory. Thus, rather than learning a story word-for-word, it is better to learn it in word groups. The most natural way of learning a story is to either read aloud or listen to a small group of words and then to repeat them immediately. The larger the chunks that can be handled, the quicker the story can be learned. Once the elements of the story have been repeated from memory in smaller groups, the next stage is to tell the whole story. The sooner this is done, the better.

Furthermore, an essential element in memorization of a story is pattern recognition. The stories need to be encoded in relation to meaningful patterns that are either discovered in the stories themselves or are imaginatively created. The identification of patterns and of memory associations makes it possible for the story to be stored and retrieved from long-term memory.

A general principle is that short-term memory is reinforced by repetition of the story in chunks that are as large as possible. These chunks need to progress from groups of words to, at least, sentences, but hopefully to episodes and even whole stories. The relating of these chunks of material to patterns or codes facilitates long-term memory.

Long-term memory - The storage and retrieval of a story from long-term memory is dependent on establishing semantic and episodic links that can be used in recalling the story. Any semantic or episodic characteristics of the story that can be identified are, therefore, potential retrieval mechanisms. Furthermore, the construction of images associated with the story can provide important links with the elements of the story. Thus, to see a Biblical story in the mind as a series of scenes can often be an important aid to remembering the story.

However, the most important links are the connections between the words themselves and the semantic and episodic structures of the story. In this sense, memorizing a Biblical story is learning to think through a story as a story. Thus, telling the story from memory is a process of thinking in which the links of the story's semantic and episodic structure provide the logical connections. Storytelling is learning to think in narrative logic.

A general principle is, therefore, that long term memory is dependent upon the recognition and recording of semantic and episodic structures or patterns in the story. These links make possible the long-term retrieval of the story. The process of memorizing a Biblical story involves the learning and recalling of the narrative logic of the story.

Thus, an understanding of the structures of memory is helpful in clarifying some basic principles in memorizing a Biblical story. But the identification of semantic and episodic structures in Biblical narratives is an essential step in

facilitating long-term memory of the stories. The next step in this discussion of becoming a Biblical storyteller is, therefore, to sketch some of the mnemonic structures that can be identified in Biblical stories.

Mnemonic Structures in Biblical Narratives

The key to memorizing Biblical stories easily is to identify the semantic and episodic structures of the narratives. This makes it possible to organize the stories in meaningful 'chunks' of narrative and to establish connections between those chunks. Furthermore, Biblical stories which are stored in long-term memory with semantic and episodic associations are more likely to be permanently retrievable.

Learning Biblical stories can be compared to making a patchwork quilt. The patches are gathered together as individual pieces and then sewn together by a series of threads. The patches are the episodes of the story and the threads are the verbal connections of parallelism and assonance which tie the episodes together into a story. The two primary mnemonic structures which need to be identified in a Biblical narrative are then the episodes and the verbal threads.

The status of the following description of the mnemonic structures of Biblical narratives needs to be clarified. This description is essentially a hypothesis that has grown out of my research on, first of all, Mark's passion and resurrection narrative and, then, a wide range of Biblical narratives. The goal of this research has been to clarify the units in which Biblical narratives were composed. But, while the hypothesis has been generally confirmed in my own research, it has been neither comprehensively presented nor tested in a scholarly forum. Thus, the most that can be claimed now is that this hypothesis describes a way in which the organizing structures of Biblical narratives can be understood.

However, as a means for enabling persons to memorize Biblical narratives, the hypothesis works. In my teaching of Biblical narratives, it has been continually confirmed that the division of the narratives into episodes facilitates memorization to an extraordinary degree. The difference between people who seek to memorize the stories using the episodic structures and those who do not is graphic. Therefore, while more research will be needed to prove or disprove the hypothesis, it is now a possibility that makes it much easier to memorize Biblical stories and is, therefore, a structure that needs to be described. Appendix I is a more detailed discussion of the hypothesis and includes an episodic outline of a series of Biblical narratives. Because of the status of the hypothesis, however, it is presented here as a way of analyzing Biblical stories that makes them easier to remember. The hypothesis will be briefly summarized and two representative stories will be analyzed, the eating of the forbidden fruit in Genesis and Peter's denial in Mark.

The Episode

The basic hypothesis is that Biblical stories are composed of a series of small units, which can be called episodes. The episode is composed of two, three, and,

occasionally, four sentences. The sentences can be of virtually any length from one word to more than forty. The episodes of a particular story often tend to have the same number of sentences. But many stories are composed of a combination of two and three sentence episodes. In this case, the two sentence episodes tend to occur at the beginning and end of the story.

The episode usually has a clearly marked beginning and ending. Characteristic features of episode beginnings are: a description of time or place, a new character, an expanded description of a person or event, and verbal parallelism with the beginning or ending of other episodes in the story. Episodes often end with sentences that are either very short or very long in comparison with other sentences in the story. As with episode beginnings, so also episode endings are often marked by parallelism with other episode beginnings and endings.

The content of an episode is a unified part of a larger event or speech. The episodes of speeches tend to treat a particular theme or topic while the episodes of stories describe an aspect or moment of the event. The episode is, therefore, a chunk of the story which can be remembered as a single piece. A Biblical story is built by connecting a series of episodes which function as modules or building blocks. The individual stories are then tied together to form longer stories such as the stories of Abraham, the exodus, the reign of Saul, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, the episodes of Biblical stories can function as the episodic mnemonic structure for the storage and retrieval of the stories from long-term memory.

<u>The Verbal Thread</u>

The episodes are tied together by verbal connections which link the episodes to one another. A verbal thread is a repetition or variation of two or more words. It is then a repetition of sounds which are either identical or similar. A verbal thread is often the verbal component of parallelism between sentences in an episode or a story. Verbal threads have several patterns or functions which can be more specifically identified.

<u>Quotations</u> - One type of verbal thread is a quotation of either an earlier statement in the narrative or some phrase from earlier in the tradition. Stories in the Gospels, for example, frequently quote phrases from the Old Testament, which was their Scripture.

<u>Phrases</u> - The most frequent verbal thread is the repetition of two or more key words from an earlier statement in the story. This kind of verbal thread generally provides the connections between the major motifs of the longer stories in the tradition. Thus, the motifs of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, the murmuring of the people of Israel, and the announcement and fulfillment of the passion prophecies are structural elements in the Biblical narratives in which they occur.

<u>Key Words</u> - Occasionally, a key word can function as a verbal thread by establishing a connection with an earlier element in the story. In the Gospel narratives, for example, the name, Christ, links the story with the traditions of the anointed ones of Israel such as David and Saul and with the major events of the narrative itself (Peter's confession, the trial before the Sanhedrin, etc.).

<u>Structural Verbal Threads</u> - In some instances, the verbal threads in a later story are connected with phrases drawn from the beginning to the end of an earlier story. Such a series of verbal threads weaves a. structural link between the two stories. Thus, Mark's story of the preparations for Passover (14:12-16) has structural connections with the preparations for the triumphal entry (11:1-6) and with the preparations for the first Passover (Ex. 12:21-28). Also the story of Elisha raising the son of the Shunnamite woman (2 Kings 4:8-37) has extensive structural connections with the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:8-24).

Thus, the identification of the episodes and verbal threads of a Biblical story can make it easier to store and retrieve the story from long-term memory. How then does one identify these structures in a Biblical narrative? When available, a story which has been analyzed and printed in episodic units is the easiest way. And, as noted above, an initial analysis of some Biblical narratives is outlined in Appendix I. However, this work has only begun and will not be completed for some time. With many Biblical stories, therefore, it will be necessary to do the analysis yourself. And, while there are complexities which cannot be easily resolved in many stories, the basic characteristics are relatively simple and can be recognized easily.

We will analyze a section of the Yahwist's creation story (Gen. 3:1-13) and of Mark's passion narrative (Mark 14:66-72) using the RSV translation. I would recommend that you do your own hypothetical analysis before reading the analysis here. If you do, I would suggest the following process: 1) read the story aloud and underline any verbal threads or repeated elements in the story; 2) mark characteristic episode beginnings and endings such as descriptions of time and place, a new theme or character; 3) make a decision about the episodes of the story and mark them. If you do not, please look at a typical Biblical text while reading the analysis. A text of each story arranged in episodes and with the verbal threads underlined and connected will follow a brief summary of the major episodic and semantic connections.

The Genesis story has several clear marks of episode beginnings. The serpent is introduced as a new character (3:1) and the Lord God is reintroduced into the story after the eating of the fruit (3:8). The description of the woman's examination of the fruit describes a new time in the story (3:6), as does the introduction of the Lord God walking "in the cool of the day." (3:8) The beginnings of the conversation episodes are clearly indicated by the parallelism in each conversation. The first is begun by the serpent and the second by the Lord God. Thus, the episode beginnings, other than those which introduce the new characters, are the statements of the serpent and the Lord God (3:4; 11; 13).

The verbal threads tie the episodes together. Only a few of the many can be pointed out. The first episode is tied together by the phrase "You shall not eat of… tree… of the garden"(3:1-3). The first episode is connected to the second by the antithetical parallelism: "lest you die/you will not die." The endings of the second and third episodes are also in antithetical parallelism: "… your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5)/"the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (3:7). The endings of the last episodes are connected by the same words, "I ate" (3:1 2-13).

Thus, the story written in episodes would be as follows:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die.
For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

He said, "Who told you that you were naked?
Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." (Gen 3: 1-13)

The story of Peter's denial has similar marks of episode beginnings and endings. The descriptions of time and place occur in the naming of the courtyard (14:66), the gateway (14:68b), "after a little while" (14:70b) and the crowing of the cock "immediately" (14:72). The new characters who are introduced are the maid (14:66), the bystanders (14:69, 70b), and the cock (14:72). As can be seen, there are conflicting marks of episode beginnings in the second episode, with both a new place and a new character, "the bystanders," being described. But, in the context of the synonymous parallelism between the endings of the first two episodes, "he denied it" (14:68, 70), the second episode clearly begins with Peter going out into the gateway. The other verbal threads are also easily identified: the maid and "one of them"
(14:69,70). Furthermore, the last episode has a major verbal thread which connects the end of this story with Jesus' prophecy of Peter's denial earlier in the story: "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times" (14:30).

Thus, the story of Peter's denial in episodes:

And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maids of the high priest came; and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him, and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus."

But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean."

And he went out into the gateway.

And the maid saw him, and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them."

But again he denied it.

And after a little while again the bystanders said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean."

But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak."

And immediately the cock crowed a second time.

And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times."

And he broke down and wept. (Mark 14:66-72)

The content of the episodes follows the basic sequence of events: the three denials and Peter's response. In the Genesis story, the same is true. The episodes describe the serpent's question, the serpent's challenge, the eating of the fruit, the Lord God's arrival, and his questioning of the man and the woman. The structure of the episodes, therefore, can be retrieved by remembering the sequence of events. And the verbal threads provide a series of semantic associations that reinforce and enrich the connections between the episodes.

Of course, the episodes of most Biblical stories are more difficult to identify than these. And disagreements about the episodes of specific stories will undoubtedly continue and even increase. But, regardless of whether the analysis is right or wrong at some particular point, doing the division into episodes and identifying the verbal threads will make it easier to learn the stories.

The basic steps in memorizing a Biblical story are implicit in this analysis of the correlation between the structure of memory and the structure of Biblical stories.
1) Hear the story. This can be done either by reading it aloud, repeating it back to someone else, or making a tape recording. It is imperative that the sensory register for sound in the brain be activated.
2) Listen for, identify, and master the structure of the story. There are various ways of doing this: making an outline, writing out the text in episodes, repeating the story in word groups, sentences, and episodes. It is essential to avoid trying to memorize the story as a series of individual words and to concentrate instead on the structural elements of the story which provide the framework for storage and retrieval from long term memory. Once the structure is in mind, the particular words of the story can be chunked in relation to the structure. This is reinforced by rehearsal. The story needs to be repeated several times, perhaps taking it up a sentence, an episode, or several parallel episodes at a time.
3) Tell the story. As soon as possible, the story should be told to someone else. Even if it does not go well and parts of the story are forgotten, the telling reinforces the memory and builds a new set of associations from the response of the listener. It is often helpful to invite someone who is hearing a Biblical story told for the first time to refresh your memory.

This outline reflects one of the oldest and most widely known educational processes in the history of education. It has been known for thousands of years that the best way to learn to recite something from memory is to hear it, to study it, to learn it by intelligent repetition, and then to tell it. Thus, until this century, the meetings of a school class were called "recitations."

A basic question in relation to the memorization of Biblical stories is the question of accuracy. To what degree is it important to learn the story word-for-word? Or is it all right to learn the general structure of the story and then improvise it anew each time it is told? In general, the manner in which a Biblical story is told depends on the setting. If the story is a Scripture lesson in public worship, it is important that the story be told virtually word for word. But, if the story is being told in the context of a

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sermon, a lecture, or an informal gathering, then improvisation is often fully appropriate. However, the process of improvisation in storytelling is like improvisation in jazz. It is only possible to improvise well after mastering the song. Improvising requires prior mastery. The same is true of Biblical storytelling. In the absence of thorough mastery, the story will be poorly told and central elements will be forgotten.

But, in the present age of multiple translations, it is no longer essential that the words of the stories be a verbatim repetition of a text. If one were perhaps going to recite the Greek or the Hebrew text, a verbatim retelling might be an appropriate goal. For most purposes, a telling of Biblical stories that makes a serious attempt to be faithful to the story itself is fully appropriate. A general guideline for the initial stages of learning a story is to aim for 75% to 85% verbal accuracy, without either omitting or adding anything of major importance. After careful memorization, however, it is my opinion that improvisation and adaptation of the story to each new telling is part of the life of storytelling.

Memorizing stories is an unfamiliar process for us. And most people initially resist or are, at least, anxious about trying. But people have remarkable capabilities to remember the stories when they learn them in a manner that corresponds to the way human memories work. Most people are amazed at both how easy it is to memorize the stories and at how well they remember them. And, once the story is thoroughly internalized, it is a permanent, long-term source for the life of the spirit and for sharing with others.

Exploring a Biblical Story as a Story

The process of bringing a Biblical story to life as a story involves the transformation of the marks on the page into a story that is told. In this sense, storytelling is a resurrection of the Biblical narratives from the captivity of writing to a new life as a living story. A natural step in this process is to study the story in its original context to discover its meaning then.

Theoretically, all the resources of historical critical study of the Scriptures are a resource for this exploration. Dictionaries, commentaries and monographs provide basic information about the background of the stories, the history of the period and of the traditions themselves, and the guiding concepts of the communities and individuals who created and edited the stories. Lexicons and concordances make it possible to clarify the meaning of the words of the stories. All of this information helps to bring the story to life. The more that is known about the world of the story, the more it will grow in meaning.

However, while these tools can be helpful, the methods of historical criticism that have been used in the past are also problematic for an exploration of the Biblical stories as stories. As Hans Frei has made clear, the focus on "meaning as reference" has resulted in the loss of the meaning of the stories as stories. Thus, the focus on the recovery of the theological ideas implicit in the story makes the story

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itself into an illustration of ideas. The story becomes a rhetorical vehicle or means by which the ideas are transmitted or concretized. And, if the only alternative to a theological interpretation of the narrative is a historical reading, the meaningfulness of the stories as stories is dependent on their historical reliability. In this sense, fundamentalists and modernists are dealing in different ways with the results of a common presupposition.

The problem for Biblical storytellers is to find a new way of utilizing the basic tools of Biblical exegesis for the study of the stories as stories. At this point in history, there are relatively few helps available. There is a great deal of analysis of the theological and historical meaning of the narratives, but very little analysis of the narrative meaning. And the resources that are available treat the narratives as literature rather than as stories to be told. The recovery of Biblical storytelling depends, therefore, on becoming aware of the characteristics of the stories as oral narratives that can be known through the study of the existing manuscripts. The purpose of this next section is to outline some of the characteristics of the stories as stories.

The Biblical Stories as Stories

First, the basic characteristics of a story need to be described. A story is sounds. Sounds have volume, tempo, pitch, and beginnings and endings. Thus, the study of the story as a story aims at a clearer understanding of the character of the story's sounds. For example, a primary consideration in a story is the relationship between sound and silence. Listening for the pauses that mark the literary units of the story is, as we have seen above, an essential step in learning a story.

Furthermore, a story has characters and a plot or sequence of events. In a story, relationships are established with the characters of the story. In general, sympathetic relationships are established with the heroes and heroines of the story and a high degree of identification is created. The relationships with the enemies in the story are hostile and distant; alienation characterizes the relationships to these characters. The plot creates expectations and hopes about the events that are imminent. Good plots are characterized, therefore, by a tantalizing web of possibilities and by surprising twists and turns in the course of events.

A story is told by a storyteller. The storyteller, then and now, has attitudes toward the characters and events of the story. Those attitudes reflect the storyteller's ethical norms which, in turn, form the basis for the judgments that are made during the course of the story. A storyteller also has a distinctive style. And, regardless of whether or not the story was composed by the storyteller, the storyteller's style shapes the character of the story when it is told.

A story is told by a storyteller to an audience. In telling the story, the storyteller makes a series of appeals to the listeners. These include such appeals as: to stay awake, to make appropriate judgments about the characters and events of the story, to identify and sympathize with the main character and to be hostile towards the ene-

mies, and to enter into the mysteries and riddles of the story. The audience is always free to accept or reject these invitations of the storyteller. And, at the most basic level, that is the freedom to get up and leave or to stay and listen.

While these aspects of the story are only implicit in the manuscripts and cannot always be discovered in detail, there are many aspects of the Biblical stories as stories that can be recognized and described. A major part of the task is to begin to sensitize our ears to listen. Thus, I greatly enjoy pre-concert lectures or demonstrations, such as Leonard Bernstein used to do on television. He would describe and play some of the major themes of, for example, Bach's St. Matthew Passion and point out the shape of their development in the course of the piece. with this prelude freshly in mind, I could then hear things I would never have perceived before and understand the music at a deeper level. Similarly, our task is to identify the characteristics of the recordings of Biblical storytelling events that are before our eyes and ears when we read Biblical narrative manuscripts.

<u>Volume and Tone</u>

One of the ironies of listening to the recital of Biblical narrative in pulpit reading is the degree to which readers will frequently ignore the explicit instructions in the story about how it is to be told. For example, in the story of Jesus' crucifixion, Mark reports that Jesus "cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'"(15:34). This is the storytelling equivalent of a "ff" (very loud) sign in a musical score. But I have rarely heard the story read with any marked increase in volume for Jesus' words. This instruction is widely used in Biblical narrative to indicate the volume of the statement which follows (Jotham's parable, Judges 9:7; the medium at Endor, I Samuel 29:12; II Samuel 18:28; Daniel 6:20; Mark 1:27; 5:7; 15:34; Luke 1:42; 4:33; 8:28; 23:46; John 11:43; Acts 7:60; 14:10; 16:28; 26:24). These instructions are explicit evidence of the wide range of volume that was used in the telling of Biblical stories. But there are other indications of volume that are implicit. Thus, in the story of David's cutting off Saul's robe in the cave (I Samuel 24), there is a conversation between David and his men inside the cave, which must be told in an extremely quiet, whispering tone in order to convey the atmosphere in the cave. This is followed by David and Saul calling to each other apparently from some distance. These speeches need to be told in a loud voice to concretize the character of their communication. And the contrast between the intense quiet of the conversation in the cave and the equally intense volume of the shouted conversation outside is part of the story's power. Thus, not only are there explicit instructions about the volume of the story at some points, but there are also implicit indications at many other places in the Biblical narratives.

In addition to volume, there are also explicit indications of tone: anger, grief, trembling, love. After the cleansing of the leper, for example, Mark reports that Jesus "sternly charged him" (Mk. 5:6-7); this is only one of hundreds of instances in which the attitude or tone of a direct address is explicitly described. And, once again, there are even more instances in which the tone is implied, but not directly stated. These indications of the volume and tone of the stories are like the stage directions in a

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play or the volume markings in a musical score. They are markings which help to direct the telling of the story.

<u>Tempo</u>

Biblical narratives are generally read as if there were no variations in the tempo or speed of the words. But one of the functions of the episode and of variations in sentence length is to vary the tempo. The principle is relatively simple. A sentence is marked by the pause to take a breath. In some long sentences, it may be necessary to take a breath at a half waypoint as well. But, in sound, the beginning and ending of a sentence are marked by the pauses to breathe. If there are two or three words in a sentence, that sentence will naturally be said more slowly than a sentence in which there are thirty or forty words. While it may not be possible to say the whole sentence in one breath, the effect of a long sentence is to speed up the tempo in which the words are read. The singing of canticles is an example of this practice. If only one or two syllables are sung on a note, they are sung deliberately. But, if fifteen or twenty syllables are to be sung on a note, the speed increases.

The same is true of the episodes and sentences of Biblical stories. Episodes and sentences that are short tend to be slow, while episodes and sentences that are long are faster. And this variation in tempo supports the meaning of the story. That is, there is a correlation between the speed of the elements of the story and their over-all effect. The parable of the prodigal son is a clear example of this. The following is part of the parable arranged in episodes:

And he arose and came to his father.

But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had com passion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry.

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to make merry.

Now his elder son was in the field.

And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant.

And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted
calf, because he has received him safe and sound."

But he was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and entreated him.

But he answered his father, "Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never
disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make
merry with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you
killed for him the fatted calf!"

And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive;
he was lost, and is found. (Luke 15:20-32)

As the episodic analysis makes clear, there is a direct correlation between the
length of the episodes/sentences and the atmosphere. Thus, the two longest
sentences/episodes are the verbal explosions of, first, the father's joy and second,
the elder son's anger. The length of the sentences/episodes suggests that Jesus
told them quite rapidly in order to convey the intensity of their speeches. The final
sentence of the celebration episode, however, is climactically short and, therefore,
slower: "And they began to make merry." As a result, there is a major pause before
the introduction of the elder brother.

In the elder brother half of the parable, the episodes are shorter (two
sentences rather than three) as are also the sentences. Thus, there is a marked
contrast between the father's announcement of the celebration and the elder son's
coming in from the field and hearing the feast in progress. The slower tempo makes
it possible to build the suspense about what will happen next. The shortest episode
in the parable describes the elder brother's anger and the entreaty of the father. Both
are full of emotional conflict. The slow pace of the episode makes it possible to fully
register the emotional dynamics of this confrontation. The verbal thread which
connects the ending of both halves of the parable (dead/alive; lost/found) also poses
the major issue of the parable: how will those who identify with the elder son
respond?

There is no substitute for reading the parable aloud in order to experience the
impact of the changes in tempo in conveying the dynamics of the parable. But the
function of the episodes and sentence length in relation to tempo can be seen as
well as heard. In this parable, the tempo changes are rather abrupt. But, in other
stories, the length of the episodes/sentences can create a gradual change in tempo.
The ending of Mark is a good example.

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In the RSV, Mark 16:8 is punctuated as only one sentence. But an episodic analysis of the resurrection narrative in Mark suggests that it should be punctuated as four sentences in two episodes:[6]

And they went out and fled from the tomb.

For trembling and astonishment had come upon them.

And they said nothing to anyone.

For they were afraid.

These episodes are markedly shorter than those which precede them. And, as can be seen as well as heard, they get shorter and shorter. In the original Greek, the degree of this shortening is even more striking. The final sentences have six, six, four, and, finally, two words. This indicates that Mark built to a climax by progressively slowing down and emphasizing each word more and more emphatically as he came to the provocative end of his story.

Thus, by observing the relative length of the sentences and of the episodes, one can identify some aspects of the tempo of Biblical stories.

<u>Pauses</u>

The ending of Mark, like the ending of Jonah, is a classic instance of the so-called "pregnant pause." This phrase describes that moment of silence which is full of ambiguity and life. The creation of these moments of silence in which the implications of the story resonate through time is a characteristic feature of Biblical narrative. Eric Auerbach, in his comparison of Biblical narrative style with the Homeric narrative style, argues that thoughts and feelings in the Homeric style are completed expressed. But, in Biblical narrative, thoughts and feelings are generally unexpressed and are rather "suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches.,,7 As Auerbach has recognized, the suggestiveness of silence in Biblical narrative is at the heart of its distinctive style. Auerbach discusses two stories, the binding of Isaac and Peter's denial, as his examples and they will serve well for a discussion of the pause in Biblical storytelling.

The central section of the binding of Isaac, analyzed in episodes, is as follows:

Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go
    yonder and worship, and come again to you."

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac, his son; and
    he took in his hand the fire and the knife; so they went both of them together.

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And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son;" so they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."

He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (Gen. 22:5-12)

As can be seen, the pauses at the end of the first two episodes come after the poignant refrain, "so they went both of them together" which concludes the episodes. The thoughts and feelings of both Abraham and Isaac are only suggested in the silence that follows this verbal picture of father and son, each of whom deeply loves the other, going up the mountain to the sacrifice.

But the most graphic and dramatic pause is after the shortest phrase in the narrative. In Hebrew, there is a half pause midway through each sentence. If the pause were indicated with a comma in English, the sentence would be: "Then Abraham put forth his hand and took the knife, to slay his son." In Hebrew, this second half of the sentence, "to slay his son" is only two words; furthermore, the whole sentence is the shortest in the narrative. The shortening builds the climax. The pause between the episodes is, therefore, the moment of ultimate suspense as the knife is poised to kill Isaac, Abraham's only son. The thoughts and feelings are never expressed but, by being unexpressed, are all the more present. The function of the pauses, therefore, is to provide time for the emotion of the moment to be felt by the audience and shared with the storyteller.

In Peter's denial, a similar function of the pauses between the episodes can be heard (see above for the story in episodes). In this case, the first two episodes end with the key phrase, "he denied it."(Mark 14:68, 70) The pause marks the number of denials so that the audience can count them in the interim. The third episode does not repeat this phrase but instead ends with Peter's vehement

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statement, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." In this climactic third pause, the prophecy is fulfilled. The silence between the episodes anticipates the crowing of the cock for the second time. The final episode of the story ends with an extremely short sentence, in Greek only three words; if connected with hyphens in English: "And breaking-down, he-wept." Peter's feelings are not described, but are only suggested by his action. It is in the silence of the pause which ends this story that the unexpressed thoughts and feelings suggested by these climactic words can be felt and known. The pause marks the end of the story in time. And, in the silence, Peter's past and the listener's future converge in the only time that ever is in story: now.

<u>Ambiguity</u>

Dealing with ambiguity is one of the problems created by the pauses of Biblical narratives. And learning to allow or even to heighten ambiguity is one of the most difficult tasks for a modern Biblical storyteller. Many Biblical stories, including most of the truly great ones, end with ambiguity. But we have tended, as modern interpreters of the Bible, to focus on those elements of the Bible as a whole and of the individual stories that are clear. We are trained to look for the relatively unambiguous instances of historical evidence or theological doctrine in the various stages of the history of the Biblical tradition. Only such instances will count as evidence for the reconstruction of a historical sequence of events or a trend of theological thought. A clear and relatively unambiguous meaning is best for evidence in almost any theological or historical argument. Anything else is of minimal value.

However, many of the Biblical stories, including many of the parables of Jesus, may have as their goal a profound and multi-faceted ambiguity. In such a story, the meaning is left unresolved precisely because it may require the listener to enter into the story and choose a meaning. Often, in Biblical interpretation, we try to make the story clear and unambiguous. As a result, there is an almost irresistible temptation for storytellers to clarify things that are ambiguous in Biblical narratives rather than to respect and honor the enormous fertility of the narratives. Somehow, the image of a Biblical narrative as a mother-to-be, nine and a half months pregnant, is uniquely appropriate. And I have witnessed, though not experienced other than with books, that such ambiguities are uncomfortable.

The time when this temptation to end the discomfort of ambiguity is greatest at the end of a story. The temptation is to add one more comment to tell the people what it means. This temptation is related to the tradition of "the moral" for which the opening line is: "The moral of the story is…" But, rather than a moral, it may be a truth. This is the danger of the way in which the stories have been interpreted in preaching. The stories are read and their meaning then described in the sermon. But, in fact, the effect of this discomfort with ambiguity is to reduce the meaning of the stories to whatever element of their meaning may be selected by the storyteller. Generally, the meaning will then become whatever is most compatible with the doctrinal orientation, whether conservative or liberal, of the storyteller.

Examples of this acid test for a prospective Biblical storyteller are legion. Any Biblical story is a candidate for being reduced to a moral or theological point. But the toughest tests are those narratives that are truly ambiguous. For example, the second story of Jesus walking on the water in Mark ends with two narrative comments explaining why the disciples were amazed: "For they did not understand about the loaves but their hearts were hardened" (Mark 6:52). Later, in the Gospel, Jesus again questions the disciples about the loaves:

Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?

Do you not yet perceive or understand?

Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?

And do you not remember?

When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?"

They said to him, "Twelve."

"And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?"

And they said to him, "Seven."

And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8: 17-21)

Neither the disciples in the story nor Mark's audience could have fully understood. Indeed, even a partial answer to the questions that are posed here is reserved until the Last Supper (see Mark 14:22-25). Only there does Jesus state that the bread is his body. The significance of the seven and the twelve baskets, however, remains ambiguous and is never clarified in the narrative.

And, even as the ambiguity about the bread is cleared up, new elements of ambiguity are introduced. For example, why does Jesus take a vow not to drink wine until the Kingdom comes? Who are "the many" for whom his blood is poured out? And, if the Gospel ends at 16:8, profound ambiguities are introduced at the end of the Gospel: did the women tell the story? Why were they afraid? Mark is not the only narrative of the New Testament to end with ambiguity. The same is true at the end of Acts. Paul is in Rome and the possibility of his imminent execution is implied, but the story ends on this note:

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And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered. (Acts 28:30)

What happened to Paul after the two years? The details of his martyrdom remain shrouded in mystery.

Thus, a modern Biblical storyteller needs the strength to resist the temptation to jump in and clarify the ambiguity. People expect and even want this, especially from a minister or a teacher. The implicit question is: "O.K., that's a nice story. But what does it mean?" It takes a great deal of confidence in the power of the stories themselves to come to the end of a parable or a narrative and to allow the ambiguity to be. However, if one recognizes that this combination of clarity and mystery is the goal of the story, it can be honored and even celebrated. To delight in the riddle of God's government over all creation, to invite others to revel in the enriched mystery of God's gracefulness, to enjoy exploring the ambiguities on the playground of God's time and space - this is to become a Biblical storyteller.

<u>Narrative Comments</u>

One of the primary means by which a storyteller establishes community with the audience is by addressing them directly and giving them inside information. The most direct way of doing this is a narrative comment. A narrative comment occurs when the narrator interrupts his description of the story's action and makes a comment. In effect, the narrator says, "Hold it! Let me tell you something that will help you understand what is happening." As a result, narrative comments draw the audience and the narrator closer together. Like the commentary segments on network news programs by David Brinkley or Bill Moyers, these comments are an opportunity to stand back and comment on the current events of the story.

Narrative comments in Biblical narratives are relatively brief in comparison to the modern novel, in which narrative commentary can extend for pages. The briefest form is a parenthetical comment or appositive, marked by commas, such as: "he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon…" (Mark 1: 16), or "Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God…"(15:43). These brief comments provide supplementary data about the persons and places of the stories.

Another type of narrative comment is what might be called background. This form of narrative commentary often occurs at the beginning of a sentence or as a separate episode prior to a major narrative action. Descriptions of time and place are often in this form. Thus, in the midst of the story of Jonathan's single-handed attack on the Philistines, the narrator interrupts the story to give geographical background information:

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In the pass, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side; the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh.

The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba. (I Samuel 14:4-5)

The degree of detail reported here provides an opportunity for the narrator to draw a verbal picture for his listeners and to make clear the heroic scale of Jonathan's exploit. To use another contemporary analogy, this is the type of commentary that tour guides provide for tourists. And the bond that is established between the narrator and the listeners is like that which is formed between a group of travelers and a good guide.

A similar form of narrative comment is translations. The evangelists often translate Aramaic or Hebrew terms into Greek; for example, "he said to her, 'Talitha cumi, which means, "Little girl, I say to say, arise" (Mark 5: 41); "Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" (Matt. 27:46) Just as a translator is a welcome friend when one does not know the language being spoken, so also are Mark and Matthew helpful to their audiences when they translate foreign words.

A frequent form of narrative commentary in the Gospels is an explanation of something surprising or puzzling in the story. Thus, Luke explains why Jairus, an elder in the synagogue, fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house: "For he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying"(Luke 8:42). Later, in his version of the same tradition, Mark explains why the woman with a flow of blood touched Jesus' garment: "For she said, 'If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well'"(Mark 5:28). From these comments, a storyteller now can identify the elements of the story which the ancient audiences found surprising and in need of explanation. Also, to recognize narrative comments and to use them as opportunities to establish close communication with the audience is a key to the art of the Biblical storyteller.

In addition to recognizing the narrative comments that are present in the narratives themselves, Biblical storytellers now can also use narrative comments to provide needed information for contemporary audiences. I remember telling the story of the Garasene demoniac, in which the legion of demons enters a head of swine (Mark 5:1-20), to a local church in Ohio in which there were a lot of farmers. As I was describing the herd of swine feeding on the hillside, it occurred to me that it might be difficult for some of those farmers to rejoice at the report of two thousand hogs plunging headlong into the sea and being drowned. For that reason, I explained to them that pigs were unclean animals for the Jews and that the swine in this story were like rats or "the big bad wolf." With this background, I was then able to tell the story with appropriate enthusiasm. Commentary such as this can easily become oppressive and overwhelm the story itself. But such comments are often

both necessary and helpful. When appropriately done, narrative comments are an opportunity for building a close relationship with the listeners.

Norms of Judgment

As I experienced with the congregation of farmers, a primary factor in the relationship between the storyteller and the audience is a series of implicit negotiations about norms. This is complicated by the fact that, in telling an ancient story, we, as contemporary storytellers, are in effect identifying with ancient storytellers and making their norms our own. Thus, in telling Mark's story to this congregation, I was in danger of uncritically identifying with Mark's norms that pigs are unclean animals at whose death we can rejoice. If I had, it would have created distance between me as the storyteller and my audience since they in no way shared Mark's evaluation of swing and the desirability of their mass destruction. In telling Biblical stories, therefore, it is essential to be aware of the norms of judgment that are operative in the story itself and in the relationship between oneself as the storyteller and the listeners. Negotiating those norms in a variety of ways is another dimension of Biblical storytelling.

This dimension of Biblical storytelling is only a somewhat more complicated instance of a fact known by every storyteller: there are certain boundaries that you cannot cross without losing your audience. The limits of what is acceptable to the audience establish the boundaries within which the story can be told. All good comedians know this tension and live their lives walking a tightrope between what is outrageously funny and what is simply vulgar, offensive, or dumb. A storyteller must be aware of those fine lines of ethical evaluation.

As the Gerasene demoniac story shows, the norms which are implicit in Biblical narratives are often in radical discontinuity with the norms of both our culture and our religion. In Biblical narratives, for example, there is a steady and relatively consistent norm that the people of Israel have been chosen by God and that everybody else is the enemy. Much of the time it is easy to identify with that norm and enter into that world. Thus, it is generally no problem to identify with David against Goliath and to rejoice at David's victory. But, even in this story, David's cutting off Goliath's head and bringing it to Jerusalem verges on the vindictive and grotesque. The story of Jael, who drove a tent peg through the head of Sisera as he lay asleep in her tent so that, as the New English Bible translates, "his brains oozed out on the ground, his limbs twitched, and he died" (Judges 4:21), may be more difficult. And, in the context of massacres of innocent civilians in violation of the rules of modern warfare, the constant motif in Joshua 10 and 11 that the people of Israel, in city after city, "put its people and every living thing in it to the sword…" is potentially offensive. The ancient concept of the ban in which the utter destruction of every living thing in a defeated city was a religious obligation is no longer a shared value in our faith tradition. It may be that we can come to understand it, perhaps even sympathetically, but most Jews and Christians no longer share it. It is an ancient norm. The same is true in relation to many of the cleanliness laws. We no

longer believe that a woman who is in the midst of her menstrual period makes everything that she touches unclean.

The problem for a modern Biblical storyteller is, therefore, that the norms of the ancient storyteller, with which you are inevitably identified through telling the story, are often in radical discontinuity with both your own norms and those of your audience. One way of dealing with this problem is to ignore the stories in which those discontinuities are more extreme. Thus, the stories of the assassination of Eglon (Judges 3:15-30), the daughters of Lot tricking their father into getting them pregnant (Gen. 19:30-38), the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine whom he then cut in twelve pieces and sent to the twelve tribes (Judges 19) - these are among the many Biblical stories that are rarely told or read and are not included in children's Bible story books. This strategy, however, only reinforces our schizophrenic attitude towards the Bible. These same types of stories are acceptable in other settings. But the Bible is to be a source of great religious truths rather than a source of real human experience.

There are better ways of approaching this problem of the discontinuity between the norms of Biblical stories and our own. One approach is to recognize these differences and to seek to understand the norms and values of the Biblical stories as deeply as possible. If the norms are understood, the values of the stories can be related to elements of contemporary experience that people do understand. Thus, while pigs may not be unclean animals to most Christians today, rats or roaches are. When the connection is made with animals that are culturally repulsive in our context, people can understand the norms of the story more sympathetically.

In many Biblical narratives, however, this problem is particularly severe because of the ways in which persons today regard the characters of the stories. In Christian churches, it is extremely difficult, for example, for the parable of the Pharisee and the publican to be heard appropriately. The norm of virtually any Christian audience today is that the Pharisee was the villain; tax collectors are primarily associated with agents of the Internal Revenue Service who, while hardly popular heroes, are people trying to do a hard job conscientiously. It is very difficult for us to share the norm of Luke and his audience that the Pharisee was a faithful and pious believer and the tax collector a traitor and profiteer. And, while associating the Pharisee with a good Methodist, Presbyterian, or evangelical and the tax collector with a government employee running a dope ring for the Mafia may help, it never fully works. There is no substitute, therefore, for seeking to understand the norms of the stories in their original cultural context. But, at the same time, it is necessary to search for correlations with which contemporary audiences can sympathetically and appropriately relate to the norms of the story.

A Biblical storyteller needs, therefore, to have a four-way antenna in order to perceive the various levels of interaction that are generated in telling a Biblical story. One interaction is the relationship between the ancient and the modern storyteller. When you learn a Biblical narrator's tale and repeat his words, you inevitably establish a relationship with that person and his norms. A modern storyteller must

understand and, as much as possible, identify with the norms of the ancient storyteller. But there will inevitably be points of difference that need to be recognized.

A second interaction is the relationship between the norms of the original storyteller/audience and the present-day audience. There is a much greater degree of distance here. A storyteller must be aware of and deal with those differences. This involves both knowing as much as possible about the original audience and its norms as well as being sensitive to the norms of the present audience. Furthermore, with different Biblical stories in different periods of Israel's history, the norms of the ancient storytellers and audiences differ. So also, different audiences now will have different attitudes. It is for this reason that every telling of a Biblical is distinctive. Different things happen as different storytellers and audiences now interact with the Biblical storytellers and the implied audiences to whom they told the stories. The issue, therefore, is not whether the interaction exists but only how one will deal with it.

Finally, there is the relationship between the storyteller and the present audience. In one sense, the Biblical storyteller and audience are implicit in the Biblical story itself. Therefore, the story becomes the context for an interaction between a modern storyteller and audience. In most instances, the storyteller will be far more committed to and interested in the biblical stories than the audience. Often a modern audience is somewhat skeptical about the Biblical stories and of anyone who would tell them. Another possibility is that the audience has a sentimental attachment to Bible stories and will listen with an underlying commitment to saying, "Isn't it nice that this person is telling the stories of the Bible from memory?" In either case, the norms the audience brings to the story must be overcome or left behind before the story can be authentically heard.

A concrete example may help to clarify the dynamics of these levels of interaction. In the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), Jesus goes to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Mark's listeners would have known that this was enemy territory. "The territory of Tyre and Sidon" does not have those connotations for most audiences today, although the current conflicts between Israel and Lebanon can provide an analogy. Therefore, the storyteller must enable the modern audience to make that judgment.
The woman comes in and falls at Jesus' feet. Mark explains, in a narrative comment, that she was a Syro-Phoenician, a Greek by birth. He thereby establishes with his audience that, in some sense, this woman was Jesus' enemy. When she asks Jesus to heal her daughter, his initial response is extremely hostile: "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"(Mark 5:27). And, in the context of the Syrians' persecution of Jews under Antiochus Epiphanies (see I and II Maccabees), his response to such an apparently arrogant request is fully appropriate. There are several levels of complexity here. The ancient audience's attitudes towards Syrians is one dimension that has already been noted. The other is attitudes toward dogs. Dogs in the first century were not affectionately regarded like dogs in the age of Lassie. While the beginnings of domestication had taken place, dogs were widely despised and even regarded as unclean. Once again, the modern

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storyteller must somehow make this clear so that the present audience can share the ancient audience's norms. The woman responds by accepting the insult and saying, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Jesus' response to her humility and acceptance of the justice of his implicit accusation is wholly positive: "For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter" (Mark 5: 29). A final dimension of this story is that Mark's audience may have had mixed reactions to this act of kindness to one of the enemies of Israel. The controversial character of the story is quite clear in Luke's story of Jesus' synagogue sermon in which a similar proclamation of the extension of the blessings of the Kingdom to a woman in Sidon almost causes Jesus' death (Luke 4:16-30). Thus, a storyteller now needs to deal with the interaction between the various norms that are operative in the telling of this story in order to communicate the conflict and reconciliation in this conversation.

Distance

The dynamics of distance in a storytelling event are the patterns of relationship between the various persons who are involved in the story: the narrator, the characters of the story, and the audience. In the relationship between the narrator and the audience, narrative comments and elements of humor tend to draw the narrator and the audience more closely together. Likewise, a slow and boring style in which there is an excessive appeal for seriousness can create a growing alienation between the storyteller and the listeners. As has been discussed earlier, this relationship is full of dynamics that can partly only be learned by telling stories. For the moment, therefore, it will suffice to observe that this is a critical relationship. Unless the storyteller and the listeners get together, the story will not be fully heard.

But the dynamics of distance in relation to the characters of the stories can be clarified. And, since the primary dynamics of relationship between the narrator and the listener's focus on the characters of the story, it is of major importance. A Biblical storyteller needs, first of all, to be able to identify the dynamics of distance in the characterizations in the original telling of the story. Once there is a clear understanding of the dynamics of distance that were intended, one can seek to facilitate those relationships in the telling of the story to an audience now.

How then does one identify the dynamics of distance in characterizations? In the story of David and Goliath, the relationships to the characters are crystal clear. This is the description of Goliath:

And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coatof mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.

And he had greaves of bronze upon his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.

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And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed
     six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him.

He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come outto draw up for
     battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul?

Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.

If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail
     against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us."

And the philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man, that we
may fight together."

When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the philistine, theywere dismayed and
greatly afraid.
     (I Sam. 17:4-11)

The description has two parts. The first is a description of his offensive and
defensive weapons. His height is intimidating and the size and quality of his
offensive weapons are awesome by the standards the day. Furthermore, the
description of his defenses makes it clear that he is invulnerable to attack. In the
context of the warfare of this age, therefore, he is described as the ultimate war
machine. The second part is his defiant speech in which he challenges a man of
Israel to fight with him. This speech aims at total intimidation. And the final sentence
describes the effect of the characterization: dismay and great fear. As is implied by
the repetition of the challenge for forty mornings and evenings (I Sam. 17:16), no
Israelite was willing to fight with Goliath. The effect of this characterization is to
create distance in relation to Goliath. He becomes an extremely hostile and intimi-
dating character who is truly an enemy.

David's characterization is precisely the reverse. He is introduced in the story
as the youngest son (17:12), who is criticized and mocked by his elder brother, Eliab
(17:28-29). David demonstrates great courage in his conversation with Saul (17:31-
37). His preparations for the battle are both comic and ominous. After trying on
Saul's armor (17:38-39), he puts on his shepherd's clothes and selects five smooth
stones. The comparison between the five stones and Goliath's war machine is
almost pathetic. The appeals in the story are, therefore, to sympathize with David.
This identification is increased by his confident response to Goliath's mockery
(17:45-47). Thus, the preparations for the battle in the story are complete. The
appeals for alienation from Goliath and for sympathy with David, the boy of faith, are
in place. And, as can be witnessed in the telling of this story to any child, the
dynamics of distance in these characterizations are polar opposites. This was my
youngest son's favorite Biblical story for years. The recognition of these
characteristics of the story makes it possible to bring these narrative forces into play
in the telling of the story.

Similar characterizations of the good and the bad, the hero or heroine and the villain and villainess, are widespread in Biblical narrative. Moses and Pharaoh, Samson and Delilah, Esther and Haman, Jael and Sisera, Shadrach/Mishach/Abednego and Nebuchadnezzar - all of these are highly polarized characterizations in which the dynamics of distance are similar to David and Goliath. These extreme polarities in characterization are equally present in contemporary movies. The "western" is a classic instance of a good guy and a bad guy with escalating appeals for identification with a good guy and alienation from a bad guy leading up to a gun fight in which the bad guy is killed. The names change but the basic narrative structures remain the same.

In many Biblical narratives, however, the dynamics of distance are much more ambiguous and have more than one dimension. The characterization of David is a graphic example. Thus, the story of David and Bathsheba is full of appeals for alienation from David. Having committed adultery with Bathsheba and gotten her pregnant, he brings Uriah home from the battle. When Uriah admirably refuses to sleep with his wife in order to keep his vow of abstinence during the battle, David arranges his death. In the confrontation between Nathan and David, therefore, David is clearly the villain. The norms of judgment in relation to David in this part of the story are extremely negative. David does repent and a whole new series of appeals for identification with him are made. But David is, in no sense, a wholly sympathetic character.

The dynamics of distance are often quite complex in a Biblical narrative. Therefore, a brief description of the things to look and listen for in relation to Biblical characterizations may help to facilitate the analysis of the dynamics of distance in the stories.

Preparation or introduction - The introduction of a character establishes the initial relationship. If the introduction is positive and sympathetic as in the case of David, who is introduced from the perspective of the prophet, Samuel, (I Sam. 16:12) as a young man who was "ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome", the relationship tends to be maintained. This is directly analogous to the function of introductions to friends or the introduction of a speaker.

Norms of judgment - The evaluation of the character's words and actions in relation to the operative norms of the story influences the relationship to the character. If the norms require a negative evaluation of the character's actions or words, Lhat will tend to create alienation from the character; so also, the judgment that a character has acted or spoken rightly tends to draw the audience closer to the character.

Narrative point of view - The perspective from which the character is described by the storyteller controls the degree of insight into a particular character's motives and feelings. An inside view in which the character's perceptions or feelings are described is a powerful means for creating sympathy and identification with a character.

<u>Narrative commentary</u> - Since the audience tends to give the narrator great authority, a narrative comment about a character has a great influence on the distance relationship. The narrator's sympathetic description of David and his comments about his motivations, therefore, greatly increase David's attractiveness as a character.

<u>Comments by characters in the story</u> - If an enemy, like Goliath, makes a derogatory statement about a character such as David, the effect will be an increase in identification with David. So also a positive comment about a character by a hero, such as Jonathan's statements about David, will have the same effect. Likewise, Samuel's condemnation of Saul is a clear example of the power of a respected character in the story to influence the relationship to another character in the story.

<u>Recurring elements</u> - The motifs or recurring elements in a characterization also influence distance and establish a character's basic profile. Thus, the priests in Mark are always seeking to kill Jesus while he is always healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and suffering in obedience to God's will. Observing the repeated notes that are sounded in relation to a character will help, therefore, to clarify the dynamics of a particular characterization.

The great Biblical storytellers are those who are able to recreate in modern situations the same basic dynamics of distance that were present in the original stories. As a storyteller, being aware of these dynamics in relation to the characters of the story is one of the most important elements of the art of storytelling. Biblical stories have richly nuanced and highly complex characters. In fact, the depth and the complexity of the characters is one of the greatest strengths of Biblical storytelling.

<u>Humor and Delight</u>

We tend to think of laughter in relation to comedy and jokes. There are virtually no jokes or comedy in Biblical narrative. There is, however, a high degree of humor and delight in Biblical storytelling. Thus, while the story of Baalam's ass (Numbers 22) is extremely funny, it is neither a joke nor is it comedy. There is great delight in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and in Jesus' victories over the demons, but it is not comedy. These stories instead appeal for celebration and for sharing delight in the actions of God.

The spirit of Biblical storytelling is a spirit of good humor and joy in the telling of the stories. Thus, Miriam's singing after Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the celebration of the people of Israel at the victories of David, and the delight of the crowd in Jesus' healings are all connected by a common spirit. The sheer delight and enthusiasm that is generated by remembering and looking forward to the victories of God over the powers of evil is at the heart of Biblical storytelling. The invitation that is implicit in these stories is an invitation to rejoice in God's actions.

An instance of this delight in the Gospels is in the characterization of the crowd in the early sections of Mark's Gospel. For example, at the end of the story of the paralytic, the crowd's response is "We never saw anything like this!" (Mark 2:12) It is an expression of utter delight and joy. They whoop for joy. The response that is invited is like laughing at children who are having a wonderfully good time playing together. It is very difficult to remain sour and dour in such an atmosphere.

The difficulty in many parts of the church, however, is to give and receive permission to respond with laughter and delight. The Bible is associated with seriousness. Thus, even when an appropriate appeal for delight is given, some church groups will reject it and remain serious. My hope is that the building of a storytelling tradition will make it possible for us all to enjoy and celebrate God's actions. But the problem is only another sign of the degree to which the stories of God's deeds have ceased to be stories and have become a source of ideas to be treated in a serious manner.

In this section, therefore, we have explored some characteristics of Biblical stories as stories in their original context. The discussion is only a beginning that is offered with the hope that it will facilitate a renewed appreciation of the Biblical storytelling tradition.

Identifying with the Story

Becoming a Biblical storyteller is more than memorization of the words and exploring the story in its original context. It is possible to learn the story, study it intensively in the ancient world and tell it in an antiquarian manner. In order for any story event to be alive, a storyteller must identify with the story being told.
Eric Havelock has described the educational experience of oral culture and of a storyteller in ancient Greece who was required to learn the history of the people:[8]

> This over-all body of experience (we shall avoid the word 'knowledge') is incorporated in a rhythmic narrative or set of narratives which he memorises and which is subject to recall in his memory. Such is poetic tradition, essentially something he accepts uncritically, or else it fails to survive in his living memory. Its acceptance and retention are made psychologically possible by a mechanism of self-surrender to the poetic performance, and of selfidentification with the situation and the stories related in the performance. Only when the spell is fully effective can his mnemonic powers be fully mobilised. His receptivity to the tradition has thus, from the standpoint of inner psychology, a degree of automatism which however is counter-balanced by a direct and unfettered capacity for action, in accordance with the paradigms he has absorbed.

In order to develop a thinking self who could critically separate himself from his memories, Plato, according to Havelock, "had to destroy the immemorial habit of self-identification with the oral tradition."[9]

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Thus, Havelock argues that this intellectual detachment from the oral tradition was an essential part of the transition from oral to writing culture.

Havelock's description clarifies both the need for identification with the story and the fundamental difficulty in doing that for educated persons today. The identification of the self with the story is essential to effective storytelling. The difference between a story which emerges from out of a person's deepest identity and a story that is merely a set of memorized words is the difference between meaning and boredom, a living story and a dead one. It is necessary, therefore, to rediscover what Havelock calls "the immemorial habit of self-identification with the oral tradition."[10] In other words, the story must be not just a Biblical story. It also must be my story.

The problem is that contemporary methods of critical Biblical study place a high premium on detachment. Walter wink has defined the problem in relation to objectivism which he calls, "the academic ideal of detached observation of phenomena without interference by emotions, will, interests, or bias."[11] If Havelock is right, this ideal can be traced back to the formation of the original academy by Plato and to the formation of the world of knowledge that characterized writing. That is, in order to explore the processes of identification with the story, it will be necessary to modify this tradition of detachment and objectivity as an ideological posture. It needs to be seen, as Wink has suggested, as a stage in an on-going dialectic of identification or fusion with the story, detachment or distancing, and a return to communion.[12]

The problem of objectivism as an ideology is blatantly clear when Biblical traditions are recited, particularly from memory. Anyone who has heard someone coldly and dispassionately reciting the words of the Bible from memory knows the problem. In contrast, I remember someone telling me about Dr. James Muilenburg's reading of the 23rd Psalm at the funeral of Dr. Wilhelm Pauck's wife in James Chapel at Union Theological Seminary. My friend reported that Muilenburg read it with utter simplicity and intensity, repeating each word lovingly and with a certain sense of awe. Each nuance of the psalm was full of emotional meaning and multi-faceted memories, first for him and, through him, for the whole congregation. The recital of the Psalm was a moment of comfort and grief, affirmation and mourning, solace and celebration. That is the difference between mere repetition and the full reliving of the Word of God.

As this story makes clear, the identification with the story begins with the self but must also include the community. The storyteller tells the story out of both personal and communal experience. Given the need to discover both individual and communal connections, how does one explore the various levels of identification? The general answer is that the story is connected with similar experiences. Thus, Havelock describes the response of Socrates to a question about death:[13]

> You ask me how should one confront death? Well, you remember Achilles after the death of Patroclus; how his mother came to him -she was a goddess,

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you know - and what he said to her about his duty and what she said to him and how he replied again to her.

The same could be said in the context of the communities of Israel. They also faced the crises of their lives by remembering the response of David to the deaths of Jonathan or Absalom or the response of the disciples to the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is, they thought about the experiences of their lives by remembering similar experiences in the stories of the oral tradition. The patterns of identification were determined by the connections with the common experiences of life.

Identification with the feelings of the characters is one dimension of the process. The exploration of points of connection follows the same pattern as Socrates, but in reverse. For example, when have I felt grief such as that of David at the death of Jonathan or Absalom or of the women at the tomb? When have I expressed defiance such as David when he confronted Goliath? When have I felt compassion for someone who is afflicted such as Jesus felt for the leper? For me to tell the story of Saul pleading with Samuel or of Jesus in Gethsemane, I must identify with them to some degree. The mechanism of that identification is the connection between my story and their story. It is certainly true that I cannot feel what they felt. Yet, if I am going to tell their story as my own, I must make it my own by pouring the experiences of my life into the mould provided by the story. Furthermore, feelings associated with the words of the characters will be presented through my telling of the story. The only question is what those feelings are (boredom, indifference, anger, love) and whether they are appropriate or inappropriate to the story.

A similar dynamic is implicit in the exploration of communal identification. When, for example, have we as a community grieved over a fallen leader like David or Jesus? My first memory is the funerals of Martin Luther King and John Kennedy. When have we as a community felt compassion for victims of senseless injury or illness? My first association is the people of Lebanon, Vietnam, and Cambodia. These points of communal connection can be in relation to family experiences, a congregation, a nation, a racial group, or humankind. But, regardless of the group that is chosen, the identification of communal experiences with the Biblical stories will help to provide a point of identification with the story.

Another way of establishing connections with a character is to write an internal dialogue with the character. The introduction of this process has been described by Walter Wink in a manner that merits extensive quotation. This is how he introduces the written dialogue with the "woman with the ointment" in the story of Jesus' dinner in the home of Simon, the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50):[14]

> In order that we might get as deeply in touch with this woman in us as possible, I'd like to suggest that you write a dialogue between yourself and this woman as an inner aspect of yourself. We're not asking about the woman two thousand years ago. Don't ask her what Jesus was like, how she felt, and so on. Ask her to tell you about yourself, about how you have treated her, but also about the new life that she has found through Jesus. Talk to the woman in you, the woman whom this story has, as it were, put inside you. This

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woman is especially helpful as an inner wisdom guide because she not only knows what it means to be a sinner and a deviant who misuses her own sexual nature, but she has also experienced the inrush of forgiveness and love and is capable of boundless abandon to the Giver of life. As such she can tell us about that part of ourselves which we have rejected or repressed, or which has been declared deviant by us or by society. Don't try to control her voice. Let her say whatever she chooses. I start out by writing in the margin, "Me:" and I address her, possible ask her a question; and then I put in the margin, "Woman:" and let her answer me however she wants. Try to give her complete freedom and autonomy to speak. You may feel that it's impossible, that you are talking to yourself. Try to silence that inner doubt and just let it flow. Let her say anything she wants to say, and let it come from anywhere that it wants to come from in yourself, and reflect on it only when you're finished.

The value of this dialogue is that one can discover points of identification with the characters that would never become clear through reflecting similar experiences. The process helps to surface subconscious levels of identification of which one is not aware.

The most difficult character with whom to identify is Jesus. There are special dynamics in relation to the characterization of Jesus. In describing exercises that can involve the more intuitive and emotional aspects of ourselves, Walter Wink has also cautioned against exercises that involve identifying with Jesus because of the tendency to identify with the hero in a story. The result is, as he says, "a kind of messianic inflation."[15] This is a danger with role plays and other types of single identification exercises. But, in storytelling, the storyteller presents all the characters. Furthermore, the storyteller never ceases to be, first and always, the person who she or he is. There is never any pretending that the storyteller has become the character. Rather the storyteller presents and tells about the character. These processes of identification or character discovery are done with all the characters, not just Jesus. Indeed, in storytelling, persons often do not identify sufficiently with Jesus to make him a human and believable character. Thus, while a messianic identification can be a problem, the character of story, in contrast to drama, creates an entirely different set of dynamics.

Another way of exploring modes of identification with the story is through music. I often find that listening to Beethoven or Stravinsky or Shostakovich can help me to discover the dynamics of the story.
Thus, to search for the music that expresses the story is a way of searching for the way in which the story is to be told. It is often hard to generate the emotion of the story out of oneself or out of identification with one's own experiences. The emotion arises in the interaction between the story, myself, and the context in which I am telling the story. Somehow, music provides a natural and freeing context in which the emotion of the story can be both discovered and expressed. The music creates an atmosphere and a rhythm for the story.

Thus, one dimension of becoming a Biblical storyteller is identifying with the stories as my stories. This process involves the exploration of the full range of connections between my story and the Biblical story. Before a storyteller can make the stories alive for someone else, they must first be alive for the storyteller. The issue is integrity, the integrity of the storyteller and the integrity of the stories. If the stories have been made an integral part of the storyteller's own experience that will be evident. If there is discontinuity and an absence of real connection, the story will be phony and unreal.

Telling the Story

The goal of the process of becoming a Biblical storyteller is to tell the story. The telling of the story itself is a launching forth on an adventure, a probe into the mysteries of an unknown space and time. There is a meaning that happens sometimes in the telling that far exceeds any statement of the theme or idea. But, since it does not always happen, there is always a degree of risk and, therefore, of fear in telling a Biblical story.

The fears that others have experienced are, for example: a feeling of inadequacy in dealing with holy words, a fear of rejection or boredom, a fear of forgetting, or a sense of feeling strange and a little weird. These happen to everyone and some of them are justified. People have walked out or been bored. I have forgotten and have been perceived by others as more than a little weird. Indeed, I have recently had an experience of telling Biblical stories in which I felt the possibility of bodily attack. Furthermore, we are not alone in these feelings. My conclusion is that Mark intentionally ended his gospel with the report that the women fled from the tomb and said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. Mark ended there in order to shock people who were afraid to tell the stories into reflection about this response.[16] We are, therefore, not alone in our feelings about telling a story. Fear has been a problem for Biblical storytellers for centuries.

The irony is that the fears, while not wholly unfounded, are so insignificant in comparison to the joy of the telling. The definition of the purpose of humanity in the Westminster Confession is fully applicable to the purpose of telling Biblical stories: "The chief end of man is to enjoy God and to glorify him forever." This is the promise of telling Biblical stories: to enjoy God's actions and ways and to glorify God in the telling of the stories of his deeds. Biblical storytelling is an opportunity for joy and for the discovery of new ways of seeing and hearing through the mists of human experience. In the end, however, there is only one way to find the joy of Biblical storytelling and that is to tell the story.

The story can be told by using a captive audience. The husband of one of my students recently told me, "I was both relieved and disappointed when the course was over because my wife made me listen to her tell the stories every night before we went to sleep." But, more often than a sleepy spouse, a close friend or children will generally welcome the chance to share a story. It is perhaps wise to choose a relatively non-threatening situation for a first effort at Biblical storytelling. But many

people launch forth more or less immediately into telling the story to a congregation or to a class of students. But, regardless of the listeners, it is necessary for a Biblical storyteller to tell the stories regularly and often.

Telling Biblical stories is often deeply meaningful in response to particular needs. The telling of the Biblical story becomes a new perspective from which a current situation can be perceived. I remember asking Keith Russell in a workshop at New York Theological Seminary to tell me the story of the healing of the paralytic at a time when I was totally blocked on a writing project. As he told me the story, the whole context of my problem changed and I saw it in a new light. I was accepting the appropriateness of my paralysis because I was dealing with past failures and the shame I felt about them. I simply needed to accept the forgiveness and get up and start writing. And, when I got back to the typewriter, I remembered the story and was able to start writing again.

It is important to beware of magic in Biblical storytelling. Some people seize on Biblical stories as if they were magical formulas. And if those magical incantations are rightly recited, then whatever the magician wants will happen. A magical use of Biblical stories assumes that the stories are a source of power for the person who tells them through which the powers of good and evil can be controlled. This is essentially an effort to manipulate or control God. The power is then assumed to be in the words or in the storyteller. Such a use of the stories is magic, not storytelling. In magic, energy is focused on making something happen that is desired by the magician. In storytelling, energy is focused on opening possibilities for new sight and new hearing in which the freedom of God and the listener is honored.

The motivation of the storytellers of Israel has always been to honor the actions of God. They had experienced something of supreme significance and value. Through telling the story of the event, therefore, the possibility was created that God's deeds might be remembered and made present. Thus, a Biblical story was and is told in a spirit of awe and wonder at the power and grace of God. The recognition is always present that the power is in no sense controlled by the person or even by the story. The spirit of storytelling is a spirit of anticipation and hope in which the future is left radically open. The story is told as a gift given first by God and then by the storyteller to anyone who chooses to receive it.

Telling the stories involves listening. Biblical storytelling is like sonar. Sonar operates by sending out sounds which bounce back; the unknown object or the right direction is determined by listening to those echoes. So also, storytelling is guided by the waves of resonance that are reflected back as the energy of the story reaches out and encounters time and space. Whether the story is told to a person or a group, the words of the story are sent out into an unknown void. Even if the person is known intimately, the storyteller does not know how this story will affect the listener. The direction of the story is shaped then by listening. Those resonances also echo through time reflecting the responses of those who have heard the story in the past and those who will hear it in the future.

There are occasions when time collapses during the telling of a Biblical story. The ancient events and the future of the cosmos are concentrated in the present moment of the story. The clouds part for a moment and the mysteries of the past and the future are dimly but truly perceived. These moments of revelation are the promise of Biblical storytelling and are, I believe, a true experience of God's action in history.

The most appropriate word to describe those moments is communion. In the midst of the deepest pain, there is a sense of joy and delight. This joy is related to a sense of togetherness, of being joined together across barriers that are otherwise present. These barriers are the divisions of race, culture, language, sex, and class. They are also the distances that separate us from God. At times in the story, those barriers and distances simply disappear. In Biblical storytelling, when it fully happened in its own distinctness, a new community is formed. In this community, there is communion and peace with God and with all those who share the story. In those moments, which are totally beyond human control, God becomes present in the telling of the story. The new community is then formed by those who participate in what God is doing. Those moments are the supreme gifts of Biblical storytelling. They are the hope and the promise of becoming a Biblical storyteller.

NOTES

1   Roberta Klatzky, <u>Human Memory</u>, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1980).
2   See Klatzky, pp. 9-10, 27-44.
3   <u>Ibid</u>., p. 10; also see pp. 44-70.
4   For a discussion of the various theories that have been offered to explain long term memory, see Klatzky, pp. 178-196.
5   Chaim Potok, <u>The Chosen</u> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967).
6   See Thomas E. Boomershine and Gilbert L. Bartholomew, "The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8" in <u>JBL</u> 100 (1981), pp. 213-223.
7   Eric Havelock, <u>Mimesis</u> (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 11.
8   Eric Havelock, <u>Preface to Plato</u> (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1963), pp. 198-99.
9   Havelock, p. 201.
10 Havelock, p. 201.
11 Walter Wink, <u>The Bible in Human Transformation</u> (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 5.
12 See Wink, pp. 19-35, for an excellent outline of a dialectical process of identification and reflection that accurately describes an integration of critical study with the processes of storytelling.
13 Havelock, p. 176.
14 Walter Win, <u>Transforming Bible Study</u> (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), pp. 115-16.
15 Wink, p. 113.