

“As I began to peruse William J. Bausch’s *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, a pleasant surprise was in store for me. Scholarship was there, superbly so—but so was the heart! I read the book with consuming interest and growing delight. The research was monumental, yet the workmanship while scholarly was not pedantic. Bill Bausch has compiled a treasury of stories from which one may draw things new and old. It is a cellar filled with vintage wine!”

JOHN R. AURELIO

*author of Story Sunday and
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“Preachers and church educators always ask, ‘Where can I get some stories?’ The answer is Bill Bausch’s new book. Here is a work on narrative theology which combines theory and practice. It brings together philosophical insights into the storytelling process and stories galore!”

JOHN SHEA

*author of Stories of God and
An Experience Named Spirit*

“Bill Bausch has made a valuable contribution to the role of storytelling and imagination within our ministry efforts. His book should assist us all to understand the theology of storytelling, and to become better storytellers.”

YOUTH MINISTRY RESOURCE NETWORK

“Recommended for liturgists, catechists, pastors, and parents.”

NATIONAL BULLETIN ON LITURGY

“By providing examples for every theory, and theory for every example, the book itself becomes an excellent teacher. It completes and fleshes out much contemporary writing on story, and puts the best sources in our hands in just one volume.”

MARIA HARRIS

Andover Newton Theological School

“It is storytellers like Bill Bausch who will keep the faith alive in our highly rational, scientific, and theological secular culture.”

DENNIS GEANEY, OSA

co-author of Parish Celebrations

“Bausch not only informs, but nurtures the reader. I think this book is a must for pastors and church educators.”

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“This is a volume that one would like to see in the hands of every priest, to enrich the sources of his pastoral care and homiletic effectiveness.”

AGNES CUNNINGHAM, S.S.C.M.

St. Mary of the Lake Seminary

Storytelling
Imagination and Faith

William J. Bausch

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PREFACE

It's been some thirty years since *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* was published. Because it was well received then, and because even to this day some ask permission to privately reprint it for use in schools and private groups, it seemed opportune to offer it again publically.

The intervening years have more insistently supported the book's main thesis, namely, that even in age where many schools have dropped the humanities, practical secular rationalism rules and "objective" science is the norm of discourse and thought, stories matter. Stories remain the repositories of our successes and failures, our dreams and our hopes, our faith and despair. And we remember them.

In 2005 the American Film Institute asked some 1,500 film artists, critics and historians to come up with a list of the most famous movie quotes. Here are the first ten:

"Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn"

"I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse"

"I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I could've been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am."

"Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore"

“Here’s looking at you, kid.”

“Go ahead, make my day.”

“All right, Mr. DeMille, I’m ready for my close-up.”

“May the Force be with you.”

Other famous quotes included:

“You talking to me?”

“The stuff dreams are made of.”

“E.T. phone home.”

“I’m as mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore!”

That most of you, I suspect, could identify the movies these quotes came from is a tribute to the power of the cinema to tell a memorably good story whose images, message and dialogue stick with you. That’s why stories rule and why it is no surprise to realize that religion’s origin, birthed in an oral society, is story and that imagination is faith’s primal language.

This, then, is what you will find in this book as the following original introduction will explain: stories, secular and sacred, that provoke, entertain, entice and challenge.

I want to thank the publisher, Jim Knipper, for his labor in bringing this book once more to the public.

FR. BILL BAUSCH

Easter 2015

INTRODUCTION

It's Story Time

“Once upon a time” is no time and every time. It is the standard phrase which introduces us to other worlds and to our own world that connects humanity to a common story and storyteller. That is why storytelling and story listening are so congenial, for, in one way or another, we are hearing about ourselves. John and Mary Harrell, in *To Tell of Gideon*, go so far as to say that “storytelling is so natural to human beings it suggests a definition: we are the creatures who think in stories.” But you would never know it.

We are trained to think rather in propositions. Analytical thinking in our computer age is the ideal, an ideal that is amply rewarded. In the religious tradition in which I am writing, Roman Catholicism, creeds and catechisms have dominated our thought patterns, especially since the lives of the Saints have fallen on hard times. Yet, in all areas of life, it seems that there is a reaction setting in. More and more we hear about the imaginative. More and more the art of storytelling is making itself felt and is undergoing a revival in our day.

The National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling in Jonesboro, Tennessee lists more than 170 professional storytellers in its directory. This does not include the countless part-time amateurs, nor the countless storytellers who are so by nature and nurture. Why this revival in the secular realm?

Some suggest that the revival is a reaction to television, which lacks any personal contact. Perhaps it is a reaction to the loneliness which so many people feel in their lives. Perhaps it is linked to the renewal of interest in traditional values. Maybe, too, in a society where more and more words are “processed” by computer printouts, the story gains more popularity because it engages the mind and permits a savoring of words.

Whatever the reasons for story’s revival in the secular world, there are many reasons for its revival in the religious world as we shall see. Fundamentally, all of the reasons are going to boil down to William James’ remark made almost a century ago, “I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue.” Indeed, there is a distinct interest in story today; the phrase “theology of story” is becoming more common. And the interest is not just in so-called religious tales, but in tales of all sorts; not just in the normative stories enshrined in our Scriptures and oral traditions, but also in folklore and fairy tale. There is a new awareness of what Rosemary Haughton wrote in *Tales From Eternity*:

Fairy stories are never deliberately symbolic, yet they embody mankind’s shrewdest and most realistic insights into human nature. We can use them to orientate ourselves in the present, and discover which way to go. They can help us to do this because they also link us to our Christian past, link the Christian past to its pagan prehistory, and link it also to its equally “pagan” sub-cultures. They throw a bridge from us to our contemporaries who are not Christians and to our successors in the faith and in the world. With the help of the typical figures which embody its perennial philosophy we may rediscover the [G]ospel values which have become obscured and uncertain under the influence of recent cultural changes. We may set about developing a Christian life which, faced with unique challenges, is human, contemporary, uncompromising and hopeful. Fairy tales can open our minds to the human, and make us able to hear more sharply the demand for the transformation of the human into its own completeness in Christ.

To “rediscover the Gospel values” and to find our “completeness in Christ” in stories, sacred and profane, are what this book is all about. This is why I first entered Nathan’s Legacy as the title because, in spite of all current evidence to the contrary, we stand in his tradition. Nathan is the Jewish prophet who told a secular story to catch the conscience of the King. “Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, ‘Once upon a time there were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor’” (2 Samuel 12).

Nor is Nathan alone. He, the rest of the prophets, and in fact all of the sacred writers, as we shall see, thought and wrote in terms of stories. Our heritage is one of story and our master, Jesus, was known for his stories. There is no doubt that through Jesus we are Nathan’s people, nor that the stories of our tradition are “Cezanne’s apple” — the reference here being to Paul Tillich’s famous statement that “An apple of Cezanne has more presence of ultimate reality than a picture of Jesus by Hoffman.” True enough. It is story and all related art forms that touch us at our deepest levels and convince us of truth.

How do we change the vision of people? It is love that art and religion have most in common. The artist convinces us of the truth by dealing with us holistically. Artists try to make us feel the truth. Good art gets the truth inside us on a level deeper than the surface of our minds. On this level, truth is most irresistible. The mind may not only resist the truth, but may even accept it and keep it at a personal distance. Logical convictions are not necessarily existential imperatives. The artist makes us nostalgic for the beauty we have missed, the life we have forfeited, the meaning which somehow eluded our grasp. Art haunts us with the spectre of a lost humanity and bids us return to paradise.²

As we pursue these thoughts, however, there are two important points to make. The first is that in this book I shall be giving a great deal of emphasis to the imaginative and the story. This is deliberate. It is a counteraction to the undue emphasis placed for so long on the rational and the logical in religion. However, I have no desire to set

up an opposition between reason and imagination. Both the intellectual and the intuitive must be affirmed. There is no intention of creating a disdain for the logical, the rational, and the analytical. I do not want to be caught in John Dewey's remark, "Only the psychology that has separated things, which in reality belong together holds that scientists and philosophers think while poets and painters follow their feelings."

In churchy terminology, the tension between thought and feeling is expressed as the tension between creed and story:

There is a tension between creed and story. The former is too precise for the latter. The latter is too variegated and too rich for the former. Both are inevitable in a religious heritage, though their different perspectives lead to the possibility of conflict — not merely conflict between different creeds based on different interpretations of the primary story, but also conflicts between creed believers and story believers. A belief system without creed may be too amorphous to survive in a propositional culture like our own. But a belief system without a story may lack human vitality. Both story and creed are simple. The former is a direct result of the experience. Story is nothing more than an attempt to resonate and represent that experience, while creed, far removed from experience, is a result of philosophical refinement and purification and distillation of the experience.³

The second point refers to a hidden premise. Even though it is not apparent nor the term ever mentioned, I am writing from the perspective of a parish priest. This is to say that beneath all the words and chapters in this book lies the conviction that the parish is the fundamental place of story for the average person. It is here that the Larger Story is proclaimed in the various liturgies and paraliturgies. It is here that our personal stories are counterpointed against this Larger Story, where we whisper them in the Sacraments of Reconciliation, birth them in Baptism, affirm them in Confirmation, celebrate them in the Eucharist, and so on. The parish is the space

and place in which storytelling and story healing take place for most people. This is the hidden agenda implicit in this book.

The book's outline is fairly direct. We shall start out by examining the whole shift from the doctrinal proposition we have known in our Church in the past to what is called narrative theology. From this we proceed to examine the thirteen general characteristics of story, and its six paradoxes. Next, we briefly trace our storytelling history within our Christian tradition, moving from there to see Scripture itself primarily as a story, a whole anthology of them as a matter of fact. From here we look at the stories Jesus told with all of their impact, challenge, and invitation. Then there is our story counterpointed against the sacred story itself and, finally, there is a word on spiritual-ity and story. Such is the general outline of this book.

There are a little under one hundred anecdotes, illustrations, poems, jokes, and stories in this book. Early on, I made the decision, I hope agreeable to the reader, not to separate them from the rest of the book in indented or small type. For one thing, it would grate on the eye too much since there are so many of them. But, more importantly, I did not want the stories to be seen as illustrations of the text. The stories *are* the text. All the rest is commentary.

But what about the stories themselves? Here I had to choose those that were not only pertinent and illustrative, but also reasonably brief. This means that I had to pass over many, many fine and more profound stories. So the choice is, within these limitations, strictly personal and idiosyncratic, especially in my tendency to turn to children's stories. Since this is a book intended for the general, popular audience, I wanted to be sure that we wouldn't all get a headache trying to figure out some marvelous, yet dense tale.

There are two final points to be made. One is that it will be evident that, although I borrow from other traditions, especially from the Jewish one, I am writing from a Catholic perspective. The second point is one of gratitude. There is a heavy indebtedness to Reverend John Shea whose pioneering work in *Stories of God* and *Stories of*

Faith, plus his lectures at Boston College, have set us all to thinking about our story past. I am especially indebted to him for using some of his outlined topics in Chapters 7, 8, and 10 and his guidance in thought development. There is also a debt owed to Methodist minister Reverend Belden Lane. I am indebted to him for the outlined topics in Chapter 4 and partly in Chapter 2. I wish to openly express my gratitude to both of these men.

I must further express my gratitude to the people of St. Mary's, Colts Neck, N.J., who allowed me to practice on them with a course on the theology and spirituality of story, to Noreen Juliano who patiently typed the manuscript, and to all the world's storytellers and story listeners who remind us daily that we are indeed the inheritors of Nathan's legacy.

1

THE EMERGENCE OF NARRATIVE THEOLOGY

When the Israelites heard the first word of the Law in the Ten Commandments, so the old rabbinical story goes, they swooned. Their souls left them. So the word returned to God and cried out “O Sovereign of the Universe, You live eternally and Your Law lives eternally. But you have sent me to the dead. They are all dead!” Thereupon, God had mercy and made his word more palatable.¹ This story has two points. First, the Word of God is indeed powerful. It is God’s very self; “who can endure God’s presence”? Secondly, to make God’s Word-Presence more palatable, God hit upon a solution: God retold it in stories.

Why? Is there something in a story that in its very nature expresses the way and mind of God more than any other expression? Is it because a story is an intractable “knowledge-energy” which links one person to another, one generation to another and ultimately, links all to God? Is story in fact—spoken, written, enacted, painted, sculpted, drawn, sung—an echo of our origin, a tradition-bond to our beginnings, a resonance of something pristine? Jewish tradition openly says ‘yes.’

When the great Rabbi Israel Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There, he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the

miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: “Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer,” and again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Rabbi Moshe-leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say, “I do not know how to light the fire. I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.” It was sufficient, and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his arm-chair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: “I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient.” And it was sufficient. God made man because he loves stories.²

All of this seems to say that God’s story and our stories are somehow original experiences. Maybe that’s where our “image and likeness” resides: we’re paragraphs to the same story. In due time, however, something happened to our mutual stories. It was inevitable, and indeed necessary. People, gifted with intelligence by that same story-God, began to reflect on our mutual stories. In due time they began to draw conclusions, and finally (and rightly), they codified such conclusions into propositions, systems, and creeds. The result has been what we call systematic theology. Be it quickly noted, however, that such theology is not the raw experience of our stories in themselves. It is an intellectual sorting out of the experiences in order to talk about them philosophically. This is a good and needed thing, and gives the professionals the necessary categories and vocabulary to speak to one another, and then to teach us. Nevertheless, there are two severe drawbacks to such a development, drawbacks in which we are only recently trying to overcome. One drawback is that any such systematiz-ing must necessarily be done in current modes of thought, and is based on the suppositions of past or current philosophies — and these are limited and conditioned. Codified systematic theology is wedded to a specific system which affects its conclusions

and expressions. Secondly, all systematic theologies, to this extent, are closed off to others with different assumptions and groundings, and therefore are only a piece of the whole. So, for both of these reasons the systematic theologies are limited, dated, partial.

Then, too, there is the growing dissatisfaction with any logical, philosophizing approach that leaves out a more holistic pattern of our story. Amos Wilder, in his important book *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination*, tells us that it is at the level of the imagination in which the issues of religion and world experiences must be handled. He challenges what he calls our “long addiction to the discursive, the rationalistic and the prosaic.” He calls for a greater use of the imagination, for it is “a necessary component of all profound knowing and celebration...it is at the level of imagination that any full engagement with life takes place.” He criticizes “the stultifying axiom that genuine truth or insight or wisdom must be limited to that which can be stated in discursive prose, in denotative language, stripped as far as possible of all connotative suggestion, in ‘clear ideas,’ in short, in statement or description of a scientific character.”³

Thomas Driver says the same thing in *Patterns of Grace*:

A number of theologians recently have become interested in the importance of stories. They sense that all our logical, scientific, and theological discourse is secondary. I share this belief. I have long thought that theology is to religious narrative as literary criticism is to literature—commentary upon a more basic form of expression.... I am one of a number of theologians today who believes that theology has, in the course of time, removed itself too far from its roots in narrative. I find myself not only agreeing that theology originates in stories (and should itself tell more of them), but also thinking that all knowledge comes from a mode of understanding that is dramatic. Far from merely illustrating truths we already know [in] some other way, the dramatic imagination is the means whereby we get started in any knowledge whatsoever.⁴

Sallie McFague adds her voice: “Where theology becomes overly abstract, conceptual and systematic, it separates thought and life, belief and practice, words and their embodiment, making it more difficult, if not impossible, for us to believe in our hearts what we confess with our lips.”⁵

The result of all this is the tendency today to appreciate systematic theology, but to also realize that it is only commentary about the original event (“secondary process thinking”). The tendency is to get closer to the way the raw event was first transmitted: by way of myth, metaphor, and story. This is because, sooner or later, if we work far enough behind the theology, we’re going to get down to the story. “Well,” we’ll say, “what *originally* happened was that this man or woman had an experience in the desert ... there was this vision, this voice....” We’re going to get into narrative language that will not only explain, but also compel and challenge. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son ...” (Hebrews 1:1 – 2). And how did the Son speak to us? He told stories.

It should be further noted here that when Jesus did speak in stories, he was not engaging in a unique method of teaching. He was, in fact, simply following the common practices of his culture, which was a story culture. As Scripture scholar Eugene LaVerdiere says:

Notice how the Gospels are filled with stories and sayings. It’s one thing to understand the context of the stories Jesus told. It’s quite another to understand how stories functioned in ancient life.

When we ask a question, we expect a direct answer. We don’t expect to be told a story... And yet, a story was an appropriate way of responding in Jesus’ context. No one appears in the least puzzled. How can we appreciate this without a good grasp of a culture in which stories play an enormous role?⁶

Incidentally, not only are the theologians having second thoughts about the ability of systematic theology to tell the whole story of faith,

but so are the liturgists. They are slowly moving away from what has been a too literal and too logical reform of text and rubric to a greater use of the metaphorical, the story, the imaginative. Liturgist Jake Empereur, for example, suggests that the liturgical experience ought to be displayed less in terms of levels of logic than in terms of levels of the imagination, following John Dominic Crossan's four stages of the magical, literal, metaphoric, and the paradoxical. He writes:

The poetic aspect of the liturgy is now recognized as intrinsic and all pervasive in language, ritual and environment. It is not to be accepted as mere decoration.... Hopefully the age of reason in liturgy has passed. The purpose of storytelling as well as any other form of fantasy is to break the imperialism of the one-dimensional meaning in the liturgy.⁷

Theologian Ken Meltz reflects this same thought when he says, "Our liturgical renewal has not fully succeeded because it has lost sight of what could be called the 'affective' dimension of liturgy."

To the extent, then, that we go back to the "first" ways that God spoke through prophets (in sign, symbol, metaphor, and anecdote) and by God's Son (in parables), to that extent that we are moving into what is called narrative theology, or the theology of storytelling. It is going back to the original language to hear it, not as a text or as a science dissertation, but as poetry and story and all the other categories that people strain to use as a way to express the inexpressible. Or, to put it another way, narrative theology is a takeoff on John Robinson's remark that "the approach to truth for our generation starts from life rather than dogma." Life is made up of wild dreams, half-seen visions, impulses, and nameless shadows that we relate to in our stories. All theologies, therefore, must somehow tap into and reflect life and point to story, and all stories are ultimately theological.

All stories are meant to be "theological." Humankind needs theolog-ical stories because human beings are fundamentally interpersonal and because, if the Christian God's promise

is true, then humankind is fundamentally related to God as person. Since story is the only means by which the interpersonal reality of humankind can be expressed in its cognitive and affective fullness and since our relationship to God is fundamentally interpersonal, it follows that storytelling and story listening provide the most appropriate means of enabling us to live in this relationship.⁸

Nor must we suppose that it is just the certified “sacred” stories of a particular Canon like the Bible that we must tap into. Although the Biblical stories remain normative, all human stories have meaning hidden beneath the layers, and which evoke subtle or overt responses from us. This is why today we read theology as literature, and we acknowledge that literature is a vehicle for theology.⁹

It is interesting to note, by the way, that the Jewish tradition tended to follow the course of storytelling rather than creed and doctrine. The Jewish rabbis were quite restrained in writing down any kind of finished, systematic theology. They refrained from hammering their insights and thoughts into creeds. They simply expounded on the great daily reality of God as they perceived God, and they tended to speak of this immediacy rather than some future theological development. Therefore, they kept the homiletic and storytelling quality of expression about God and Israel’s experience with God in everyday life. They simply allowed the story to grow and to be retold a hundred different ways as people needed the story. To this extent, Judaism largely comes down to us in sayings, sermons, and stories rather than in books of theology, and, as I said, in an ongoing reformulation like a constant spring that feeds an ever-changing river. Thus:

DA pagan once asked Rabbi Joshua ben Qarehah “Why, of all things, did God choose the humble thornbush as the place from which to speak with Moses?”

The rabbi replied: “If He had chosen a carob tree or a mulberry bush, you would have asked me the same question. Yet it is impossible to

let you go away empty-handed. That is why I am telling you that God chose the humble thornbush—to teach you that there is no place on earth bereft of the Divine Presence, not even a thornbush.”¹⁰

This story finds its retelling in the story of Calvary. It prompts the remark that one of the essential meanings of that terrible and horrendous scene, of a man hanging on a tree, is that there is no place where the Divine presence can not dwell. Calvary’s tree is Moses’ thornbush.

A spiritual and racial descendant of Rabbi Joshua ben Qarehah expresses the same reality in another retelling, the hanging of a young boy in a Nazi concentration camp on his tree:

The SS seemed more preoccupied, more disturbed than usual. To hang a young boy in front of thousands of spectators was no light matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was lividly pale, almost calm, biting his lips. The gallows threw its shadow over him. The three victims mounted together onto the chairs. The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses. “Long live liberty!” cried the two adults.

But the child was silent.

“Where is God? Where is He?” someone behind me asked. At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over. Total silence throughout the camp. On the horizon the sun was setting. “Bare your heads!” yelled the head of the camp. His voice was raucous. We were weeping.

“Cover your heads.”

Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive....

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look at him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him.

His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet glazed. Behind me, I heard the same man asking: “Where is God now?” And I heard a voice within me answer him: “Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows...”¹¹

We have three versions of the same story, and each one far more powerful than any “bottom line” text or creed. “He suffered under Pontius Pilate, died and was buried” is a good catechetical summary, but no substitute for the original metaphors of darkening skies, falling rocks, ghostly appearances, and the primal scream of forsakenness. Systematic theology rightfully philosophizes on these ultimate mysteries and sheds light on them, but it is the story that carries power, that asks, “What do you think?” or better, “How does it move you? What truth did you encounter? Do you see hope in your own death here?”

There are other factors that have led us back to narrative theology. One is the shift to what is called “low” Christology from “high” Christology, which sees Jesus as very high up, God’s only-begotten Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the pre-existent One who dropped into this world like someone from another planet to bring to us certain revealed truths. This is the Jesus who walks on water, performs miracles, speaks long Johannine sentences. This is the imperial Pantocrator. But if such high Christology tends to stress Jesus’ Divinity, low Christology stresses his humanity. Jesus is not the one who brings us an alien grace from heaven; rather, he is the one who unveils domestic grace on earth. He does not so much hand down foreign truths, as he uncovers ordinary truths. He does not so much reveal mystery from above, as unmask it below in everyday life. This is the Jesus who not only is transfigured on Mount Tabor and hears the heavenly voice, but the Jesus who hugs kids, cries over a friend’s death, and tells homely stories from everyday Palestinian life—and all the while unveiling the effable mystery and love which permeates them all.

The high Christology obviously tends very much toward propositions, formulas, and creeds, and it was this posture which dominated

the first ecumenical councils of the Church. But low Christology just as obviously tends very much toward stories as the synoptic Gospels reveal. We must remember that the Gospels are a response to a very bewildered first generation of Christians who were suddenly bereft of the presence of one who held them together, healed their rifts, and moved their spirits. They were desperate for comfort, and for some kind of contact with Jesus. So they did what we would do—and what we actually do at the death of a parent or friend: they sat around the table and asked the original witnesses to tell them once more the stories and deeds of Jesus. It was in this telling, as in all good stories, that they sensed his presence once again. The spirit of Jesus was rekindled. This wasn't hard to do for the witnesses. There was much to tell, and Jesus was in fact a fascinating person. So the stories began—and so did the faith. That's how the faith got started: in storytelling. That's what was recorded (though not everything, as John reminds us) in the Gospels: stories of and about Jesus, and the impact that he made upon people. The controversies of later centuries over Christology and the constant philosophizing and theologizing soon overshadowed the pristine story form; however, it left us with a firm legacy of an in-tellectual and creedal approach to faith. But now in our day, there is a need to get back to the original situation, a need once more to return to the Rabbi of Nazareth and his imaginative stories. Back to the source, as they say, a source filled with Magi and vineyards, and embarrassed bridal parties and wicked servants, calculating masters and thick headed disciples, and a personality so compelling that only metaphor, poetry, and story could do it justice.

Another factor in the emergence of storytelling has been the impact of modern science. Research, as well as common sense, tells us that we are not all "head." In spite of prejudice and to the contrary, we have been and are influenced mightily by an active imaginative life. We move daily in a world of images, myths, symbols, and dreams. These, it is maintained, are as much if not more, vehicles of truth about ourselves and our world as any flat-minded rationalism bequeathed to us by the seventeenth-century Enlightenment. As a

matter of fact, science itself is beginning to concede this. “Research in neuropsychiatry and the physiology of the brain reveals an extraordinary range in the power of human knowing, especially with reference to intuitive, metaphysical, and symbolic knowledge.”¹² Lewis Thomas, who wrote the engaging *The Medusa and the Snail*, brings a sense of poetry and imagination to the “hard” science of biology, and he is not an exception. He went to the zoo one day and saw a group of otters and beavers in action. He was swept away from his position as scientist, and was pulled into the mystery of what he saw before him.

I was transfixed. As I now recall it, there was only one sensation in my head, pure elation mixed with amazement at such perfection. Swept off my feet, I floated from one side to the other, swiveling my brain, staring astounded at the beavers, then at the otters.... I wanted no part of the science of beavers and otters.... I wished for no news about the physiology of their breathing, the coordination of their muscles, their vision, their endocrine systems, their digestive tracts.... All I asked for was the full hairy complexity, then in front of my eyes, of whole, intact beavers and otters in motion... : I came away from the zoo with something, a piece of news about myself .. the behavior released in us, by such confrontations, is, essentially, a surprised affection. It is compulsory behavior and we can avoid it only by straining with the full power of our conscious minds, making up conscious excuses all the way. Left to ourselves, mechanistic and autonomic, we hanker for friends.¹³

A subatomic physicist writes:

Probing inside the atom, scientists ... could no longer rely on logic and common sense. Atomic physics provided the scientists with the first glimpses of the essential nature of things. Like the mystics, physicists are now dealing with a non-sensory experience of reality and, like the mystics, they had to face the paradoxical aspects of this experience.¹⁴

Finally, Sallie McFague summarizes well how science is forced to turn to story, imagery, and metaphor to describe its work:

When we turn to the sciences, whether mathematics or the natural or social sciences, we also find metaphor to be central. Perhaps it is most surprising to those who suppose that metaphor belongs only in the arts and religion to discover it at the most basic level in mathematics: the numerical analogue. Seeing the similar number among otherwise disparate entities is a metaphorical act, as in six apples, six moons, six ideas, six generous acts. In the social sciences, the ubiquity of metaphor is obvious: the human being has been seen as a child of God, as half-angel and half-beast, as a machine; the state has been viewed as an organism and a mechanism; the brain has been understood through the metaphor of the computer and vice versa. When one turns to physics, the evidence for the importance of metaphor in the form of models is extensive.... Jacob Bronowski speaks for many philosophers of science when he insists that ideas in science, as in any other field, are derived from images....¹⁵

The point in all these quotations is to demonstrate that, even in so-called “pure science,” high imagery abounds and, indeed, is so necessary that conversation and dialogue are impossible without it. It is the increasing awareness of much of the “poetic” and metaphorical language of science that has sharpened our own awareness of the poetic and storytelling qualities inherent in religion.

Psychology also has added its insight. It has shown us that the dream side of us, the wild side, the shadow side, carries truth. Or, to use a kind of catchall word we have already seen, imagination carries truth. In fact, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur sees the imagination as the one genuine means by which often contradictory elements can be held in tension at many levels. He sees the imagination, along with speculative knowledge, as a genuine and essential ingredient in all acts of creative knowledge. J.R.R. Tolkien distinguishes between two worlds, the primary world of the universe created by God, and the

secondary world created by the imagination of human beings. These worlds, he says, are no less real. "What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator.'"

There are whole systems in the East that hold that dreams, for example, are the one clue to reality, that the whole of reality is not to be confined to our waking hours alone. Our waking state may be just one level of consciousness in a multi-leveled dream world. Dream is a path to a heightened consciousness and many modern psychoanalysts hold that dream is the royal road to the unconscious, a voice of inner truth. Ann Faraday comments:

The psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung, who centered most of his work on dream, told of a conversation he had with a chief of the Pueblo Indians called Ochwiah Bianco. Jung asked the chief's opinion of the white man and was told that it was not a very high one. White people, said Ochwiah Bianco, seem always upset, always looking for something, with the result that their faces are covered with wrinkles. He added that white men must be crazy because they think with their heads, and it is well known that only crazy people do that. Jung asked in surprise how the Indian thought, to which Ochwiah Bianco replied that naturally he thought with his heart.

In our culture we not only train our children to think with their heads but we actively discourage them from listening to their hearts, even though we pay lip service to the power of feelings in human life....

It is precisely because dreams help us get ourselves together that I have called them "thoughts of the heart...." I have in my casebook countless examples of dreams revealing a split between head and heart.... In every case the thoughts of the heart are pressing for recognition, and if we ignore them, we shall try to solve our problems in useless and destructive ways.¹⁶

Jung indeed saw human beings as having a spiritual nature, as well as a biological one (the only one Freud saw), and that dreams express

our living reality and essence. Dreams carry truth and they make sense, not logical sense but mythological, story sense.

In psychoanalysis people tell their dreams to uncover hidden truth. They also tell their stories, which to the trained analyst, tells him or her where they are and what they are repressing. Story revisits an old situation in a new way. Story, as we shall see later, helps the person to go back. This is not to change an unchangeable situation, but to reinterpret it creatively. As depth psychologist James Hillman says:

The stories are means of finding oneself in events that might not otherwise make psychological sense at all.... My practice shows me rather that the more attuned and experienced is the imaginative side of personality, the less threatening the irrational, the less necessity for repression, and therefore, the less actual pathology acted out in literal, daily events. Story-awareness provides a better way than clinical-awareness for coming to terms with one's own case history.¹⁷

So dreams, myths, symbols, imagination—all are related and all find their best expression in art, especially in the art of storytelling. The artist and the storyteller, therefore, become our guides in the pursuit of truth as do the philosophers and the theologians. This truism is another reason why we are looking at a theology of story. As Flannery O'Connor says, "A higher paradox confounds emotion as well as reason and there are long periods in the lives of us and of the saints when the truth as revealed by faith is hideous, emotionally disturbing, downright repulsive."¹⁸ And that "higher paradox" that confounds both emotion and reason is dealt with in the story. And it is dealt with most forcefully, not by the theologians, but by those authors who are masters of the human paradox itself. This is why the mythologist Joseph Campbell writes:

Dante, Aquinas, Augustine ...were not bad scientists making mis-statements about the weather, or neurotics reading dreams into the stars, but masters of the human spirit teaching

a wisdom of death and life. And the thesaurus of the myth-motifs was their vocabulary. They brooded on the state of man, and through their broodings came to Wisdom; ... motifs of folk tale and myth are derived from the reservoirs of dream and vision. On the dream level such images represent the total state of the individual dreaming psyche.... But clarified of personal distortions and profounded—by poets, prophets, visionaries—they become symbolic of the spiritual norm for Man the Microcosm.”¹⁹

A final factor in storytelling’s emergence is the impact of feminism. Maria Harris reminds us that women’s imagination is now being granted its proper place in the religious education field, so long dominated by the experience of men. Along with men, women are adding their own perspectives and giving a proper balance to many fields. It is their voice, their writings, and their approach to life that is having its impact on theology, as well. They are increasingly contributors to narrative theology. It is also significant that many storytellers, in fact, are women. Stephen Simmer, who teaches at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, New York, comments that most of the original storytellers in history have been women, and that “many stories can be interpreted as a search for the feminine values that are missing in a patriarchal society.” In her book, *Gift from the Sea*, Anne Morrow Lindbergh expresses this idea beautifully:

Moon shell, who named you? Some intuitive woman I like to think. I shall give you another name—*island shell*. I cannot live forever on my island. But I can take you back to my desk in Connecticut. You will sit there and fasten your single eye upon me. You will make me think, with your smooth circles winding inward to the tiny core, of the island I lived on for a few weeks. You will say to me “solitude.” You will remind me that I must try to be alone for part of each year, even a week or a few days; and for part of each day, even for an hour or a few minutes in order to keep my core, my center, my island quality. You will remind me that unless I keep the island quality intact somewhere within me, I will have little to give ... to my friends

or the world at large. You will remind me that woman must be still, as the axis of a wheel, in the midst of her activities; that she must be the pioneer in achieving this stillness, not only for her own salvation, but for the salvation of family life, of society, perhaps even of our civilization.²⁰

In this connection we might remember that in the *Odyssey* Odysseus many times received help and insights from women, and it is no accident that his whole journey is toward his feminine counterpart, Penelope. In symbolic terms, he is coming home to his own feminine side. To this extent he becomes a symbol, in turn, of a movement within the Church today, for many centuries a male preserve, toward the feminine. This is seen not only in the revival of narrative story, but also in the revival of various charismatic expressions. Carl Jung could have been writing of the Church when he said:

We might compare masculinity and femininity ... to a particular store of substances of which, in the first half of life, unequal use is made. A man consumes his large supply of masculine substance and has left over only the smaller amount of feminine substance which he must now put to use.²¹

The revival of storytelling may well be the novel use of the feminine side by a Church which has, at this point in history, exhausted its masculine side.

So it comes to this. Systematic theology engages the intellect; storytelling engages the heart and, indeed, the whole person. Systematic theology is a later reflection on the Christ story; the story is the first expression of Christ. Logic is one avenue of truth, however limited. Imagination as myth and story is another avenue, but one that involves, disturbs and challenges us and as such is to be preferred. The Romantic poets, in many ways the forerunners of narrative theology, tell us this. Thus, for example, read William Wordsworth:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:

Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God, I'd rather be
A Pagan sucked in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

Propositions are statements on a page; stories are events in a life. Doctrine is the material of texts; story is the stuff of life. "He was rejected" is a clear and firm statement of fact and there it rests. "He came unto his own and his own received him not" is a bit more catchy and poetic. But "there was no room for them in the inn" with its contextual richness of a cave, angels, Magi, shepherds, and an exotic star, is story. It will not let us forget, as time has demonstrated, the person written about: his life, rejection, and death. Theology is a secondhand reflection of such an event; story is the unspeakable event's first voice.