Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

"Going back in history, we find that in Europe the secular and religious feasts were driven out of public life by the Reformation, especially the Calvinistic Reformation. Puritanism and middle-class industrialization made a pact against the festive spirit... Thus for these modern people, enlightened Protestantism reduced the liturgies of Christian worship to doctrinal and moral instruction, excluding doxological and hymnological expressions as superflous and merely time-consuming" (Moltmann 1978: 65).

"When the story-teller shows us a new world, he does not merely provide us with fresh material to use in constructing our worlds... His supreme gift is to stimulate and encourage us to pick up our own tools and build with our own materials... using them in our own ways whether those ways be new or old, and accepting the constraints which are our enablements" (Shideler 1976: 356).

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Communication is an important function of religious groups and communities. The very origin of the word 'communication' is linked to such words as 'communicate', 'communion' and 'community' through the dictionary definitions of: to give to another; to share in; participation; hold in common (The Macquarie Dictionary 1981: 385).

While several styles of communication have been used by religious groups and communities - such as prose, poetry, liturgy, dialogue, preaching, story, creed - the dominant model still in use is 'direct' communication based on 'argument', 'persuasion', and some would also add, 'control' (Carey 1989: 15; Freire 1970: 45 - 59).

It is my thesis that religious communication which is narrative has consequences that are different from communication based on argument and persuasion, and is therefore:
(i) more faithful to the general shape of the religious tradition which is Christianity, and
(ii) has more potential to broaden human conversation.

The focus of this research is in two areas:
(i) a 'conversation' with the literature on the several modes of narrative communication, and
(ii) the participation in the life of a group of people from a church congregation, called together to tell and hear personal and community stories.

While 'narrative' can include both written and spoken communication, this study attempts to concentrate on oral narrative communication in a group situation.

Using the research process called social ecology or 'collaborative inquiry', informal small groups of people from one church congregation were established.

The purpose of these groups was to establish an environment where participants could experience and reflect on the consequences of telling and retelling personal and community stories - in an electronic media-saturated culture. Arising out of this experience questions as to the type of community established - as a result of the communications model used - would also be considered.

Behind this thesis are several questions:
* Is narrative the same as 'rhetoric'?
* Is narrative more than a story?
What would a model of religious communication look like if it was shaped by 'poetic' narrative rather than rhetoric?

I hope some of these questions will have been answered by the time my 'conversations' with the current literature on narrative communication is shared.

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It is also an assumption of this thesis that there is a common belief within the community, especially in many religious councils and groups that narrative is subordinate to rhetoric. That to appeal to human sensitivity, feeling, awareness and perception will

(i) result in a "relaxing of intellectual effort rather than a concern for great intellectual penetration and insight" (Meland 1953: 79), and

(ii) be that much further away 'from the truth'.

The first of these can be illustrated by reference to two separate examples from within the life of the **Uniting Church in Australia**.

(i) There are several people in the church, both lay and ordained, who advocate a conservative, charismatic approach to theology and the Bible. Over the years they have become very vocal in the councils of the church.

To spread their message they have formed a society called "Fellowship for Charismatic Renewal for interested persons within the Uniting Church in Australia". Many of its views are expressed in a magazine called **Renewing Australia**, from which the following example is taken.
Journalist Lesley Hicks (Hicks 1990) was interviewing Caroline Jones about her radio program 'Search for meaning'...

"I asked her how she handled those who express a belief system which is, from a Christian standpoint, plain wrong.

Caroline: For example?

Lesley: Well, suppose you had Shirley MacLaine on, espousing reincarnation.

Caroline: Oh, lots of people believe in reincarnation - even some of the Christians talk about reincarnation.

Lesley: But from a biblical point of view, it's just not on.

Caroline: Well, I'm not a Bible scholar.

Lesley: You don't have to know very much about the Bible to know that that is not what it teaches.

Caroline: Well, as I understand it, that is so. I am trying to absorb good teaching - I'm still a learner. I know that there are great gaps in my understanding, and in other people's as well. But I'm not going to argue with people on air. It would, I think, be futile. Arguing doesn't change people's beliefs, anyway... Do you feel that people's beliefs should be challenged?

Lesley: Well, I suppose that where I am coming from is that if A is true, then a conflicting belief B cannot also be true. And a belief in B - say, reincarnation - might be dangerous. Because if you go on with it through to the end of your life, you go into darkness, and not to Christ.

Caroline: Well, that's their problem!

Lesley: Yes, but that troubles me because I care about them - but you would too.

Caroline: Yes, I care about them, but not to the extent that I want them to think the way I think... You might be more literal than I am, too.

Lesley: Yes, I'm sure I am. My whole background...

Caroline: I look for levels of meaning and feeling..."

Jones' model of communication differs from the pattern of most media interviews. Her model is not shaped along adversarial lines.

(ii) A second example comes from a reflection on the decision-making processes of the national Assembly meeting of the Uniting Church in July 1991. Following that meeting several male ministers offered comment on their experience of the processes:
"Argument in debate proceeded not so much by rational discourse but by anecdote, which was the preferred and more successful option. The atmosphere was disturbing and frightening" (Rankin et al. 1991: 4).

And again:

"... when there was debate, it was very often conducted by slogan and anecdote. I have not attended a church council which displayed such a reluctance to engage in rational and vigorous discussion of matters of faith and doctrine. Those who tried to argue theologically on various issues received short shrift, while people with a story to tell were heard with approval" (Rankin et al. 1991: 5).

It would appear their proposal would result in the church's internal discourse becoming increasingly intent on opposition and the problems of disagreement. But as Australian Jesuit Tony Kelly suggests in a different context, but equally applicable, I believe, to the church: "(w)hen the problematic character of the world is dominant, any genuine collaboration becomes impossible" (Kelly 1990: 71). As this thesis will suggest, I tend to agree with Kelly.

The above two examples 'say' a lot. They draw their interest and power from the traditional assumption which has lasted for many centuries, that narrative is second-rate, inferior or subordinate to rhetoric.

For some of these colleagues, narrative has been given a 'dirty' name which, according to English philosopher and radical theologian, Don Cupitt, is not surprising when for many centuries philosophy, religion and science have been hard at work to do just that (Cupitt 1991: 41).
The role of 'story', according to Cupitt, is to show us we all have the task of shaping our own lives as narratives. We "carve out" our own life-stories in alliance or in competition with others who are doing the same. What is 'real' becomes an "endless struggle between many rival stories".

He goes on to suggest

"...truth is the story on top at present. ...the reality that stories produce is an arena over which different stories struggle for supremacy, a space in which different people are attempting... to make their own lives make sense" (Cupitt 1991: 20, 21).

Cupitt further suggests that instead of one orienting story, our lives are a bundle of many, half-finished stories.

"We are and will for the most part remain a lot of loose ends... We cannot now expect to be able to unify our lives under a single master-story, because we do not see how just one story, while still being truly a story, could be uniquely privileged and different in kind from all other stories" (Cupitt 1991: 153).

And there are others who are seeking to change the 'flow of the tide'. In what I feel is a telling comment Sue Kidd suggests that:

"(m)any of us left the storied approach to life at our nursery windows and crossed the threshold into adulthood to more logical, didactic ways of making sense of the world. In a culture that is rational, scientific, and abstract we have lost touch with the intuitive, imaginative, and concrete dimensions which inform story" (Kidd 1989: 21).

As this thesis is set within the experience of some people who are members of a local religious community (congregation), it is important to be able to resonate with Kidd's next comment.
She suggests that as the church has made theology and doctrine the core of our religious expression

"(w)e have become unstoried in the spiritual life as well, distanced from the theoanacies ever happening within and around us. We have lost the ability to probe the soul, to know and refine its experiences" (Kidd 1989: 21).

German theologian Jurgen Moltmann would agree with her, as the spirit of the quotation which heads this chapter would suggest.

So too would others.

Others, such as John Westerhoff, while in genuine sympathy with Kidd goes further and suggests that the shaping of a healthy spiritual life occurs when both our intuition and intellectual modes of consciousness are 'developed' together.

"The current bankruptcy in our spiritual lives is not primarily or only the result of a misplaced, singular concern for the intellectual mode of consciousness, but rather it is in an actual denial of the intuitional mode. It is simply that we have attempted to foster intellectual development at the expense of the intuitional... the benign neglect of the symbolic, mythical, imaginative and emotive aspects of our human life which have limited our spiritual development and crippled us as a people" (Westerhoff 1979: 17).

While process theologian Bernard Meland suggests that a reorientation of thought is needed - one which encourages reflection in a disciplined way but which is different from analytical thinking - aimed at "opening one's conscious awareness to the full impact of the concrete occurrence" (Meland 1969: 292).
Of the formal oral communication styles found within a local congregation, and there are several, bible readings and preaching dominate. However, within these 'oral' events there are differences.

The readings are 'read' oral while the other, preaching, is more likely to be 'spoken' oral "oriented toward a manuscript" and presented "in a lecture style" (Schultze 1990a: 21).

Over the years preaching has left a residue of dissatisfaction with both preacher and congregation. Some scholars have tried to shape new models of preaching - away from the didactic and rhetorical trends of the past to a more relational and/or narrative/story model (Jensen 1980, Lowry 1985).

While admitting that preaching is oral religious communication, it will not be the focus of this study, apart from offering some general comments on the shape of narrative preaching compared with the shape of didactic preaching.

Eugene Lowry has combined both a narrative 'style' and communication theory in the way he shapes his preaching model. He has done this by suggesting that the ordering of ideas (things and nouns) is altogether different from the ordering of experience (action and verbs) (Lowry 1985: 14). In suggesting such a narrative model Lowry lists the two competing polars: ideas and experience.

Those who order ideas will see:

* their task is to organise;
* their form will be structure;
* their focus will be a theme;
* their principle of evaluation will be on substance;
* the product will be an outline;
* the means will be by logic and clarity;
* their goal will be understanding.

Those who order experience will see:

* their task is to shape;
* their form will be a process;
* their focus will be on events;
* their principle of evaluation will be on resolution;
* the product will be a plot;
* the means will be by suspense;
* their goal will be 'a happening'.

Simply put 'ideas' have the feel of this, followed by this, followed by this; 'experience' has the feel of and then, and then, and then.

Rhetoric, ideas and argument, look like a building site with everything fitting into place, one on top of the other in a hierarchy; narrative is more like a map - very horizontal, spread out, offering several alternatives, wide ranging and more like a conversation.

A model of communication which is shaped by narrative is more likely to be about resonating with experiences than seeking to 'inject' information from without or developing "processually in the direction of something beyond itself" (Farrell 1985: 120). For resonating is something which happens from within.
Again, Don Cupitt is suggestive. He says that it is a common mistake to suppose that story (and communication?) has got something to do with the external placing of information in 'the brain'. Rather, story makes us want to identify and 'feel with' the experiences of the characters in the story. A stimulus in our brain

"spreads across its broad surface like the ripples when a stone drops into a pond" (Cupitt 1991: 37).

As the ripples spread out, circles of excitement are set in motion which intersect and weave with existing memories of similar experiences. He says:

"... I am suggesting that what gets imprinted (as a result of each new experience) is something more like a melody or a chain of feelings, which is built up and rounded off. What we remember, and are reminded of, is the emotional flavour or colouring of a previous sequence of excitation which has now been reactivated" (Cupitt 1991: 39).

A similar process has been suggested by the 'founder' of American process philosophy, Alfred North Whitehead. In his 1926 Lowell lectures, delivered in King's Chapel, Boston, and subsequently published under the title Religion in the making, Whitehead suggests that our expression of experiences is an outward and visible "sign" of an inward event. We 'collect' experiences, you might say, and then seek to make sense of them, based on other experiences we have had. As we work through this process

"the recipient extends his apprehension of the ordered universe by penetrating into the inward nature of the originator of the expression" (Whitehead 1926: 118).

According to Whitehead, this creates a "community of intuition". Using the analogy of the tuning fork and the piano,
"(a) note on a tuning fork can elicit a response from a piano. But the piano has already in it the string tuned to the same note. In the same way the expressive sign elicits the existent intuition which would not otherwise emerge into individual distinctiveness" (Whitehead 1926: 118).

Experience resonating with experience in both interpretive and creative ways. Narrative opens up "pathways" to those experiences "facilitating new sequences of excitation" which one day we may wish to make use of, "perhaps in forming an action of our own, or in interpreting someone else's behaviour" (Cupitt 1991: 38 - 39).

As I suggested earlier, this style is different from traditionally accepted rationalistic and rhetorical thought. There we are taught to copy the critic. This thesis highlights another style, suggested by Bernard Meland: we also need to copy the orientation and concern of the creative artist (Meland 1953: 79 - 80).

The premise of this thesis is, therefore:

- **Rhetoric** is a form of direct, "narrowsspeak" (Murray, quoted in Kelly 1990: 18) communication and is "typically disputational... instrumental in its aims" (Farrell 1985: 118) and its "domain tends to be public knowledge oriented toward decision making and civic action (Fisher 1985: 79). It relies on the information-argument model which believes that humans are rational beings and the world can be presented as bits of information which when processed can be transferred from one person to another, or used as power to persuade another to one's point of view;
• **Narrative** is a form of indirect, "wholespeak" (Murray, quoted in Kelly 1990: 18) communication which allows people to resonate with shared experiences - through the telling and listening to stories by 'co-authors' - and arrive at their own conclusions not just the speaker's. Its domain "tends to be personal knowledge and consciousness" (Fisher 1985: 79) and to respect the process and the other person as both capable of and deserving the right to arrive at those conclusions. Imaginations and experiences are 'touched' and revisited.

Therefore, the consequences of narrative communication are likely to be:

(i) different from situations/consequences based on/influenced by 'rhetoric', and

(ii) more helpful in extending human conversation, encouraging a "zest for novel ideas of larger generality" (Loomer 1987: 51) and establishing community.

Likewise, as the dominant culture within the western world is a culture saturated by the electronic media, consisting of both spoken word and image, it is within this cultural experience that we must seek to continue to communicate.

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Approaching this research project I come naturally, with personal and cultural 'stories'.

The 'what' of these stories are...

**First**, I am a white, middleclass, married, anglo-celtic (with a touch of Italian) Australian, protestant, ordained male.
Second, my theological thinking has been shaped by two significant movements within western Christian theological thought.

My earlier years as a theological student were shaped by what is called 'process theology'. But not all process theology. That 'process' thought which has been shaped more by the empirical side of process thought: as offered by the 'first wave' of thinkers such as Henry Nelson Wieman and Bernard Loomer, and the so-called aesthetic side (Dean 1972: 144) as shaped by Bernard Meland, along with such 'second wave' folk as William Dean, Ty Inbody and Bernard Lee.

Some 15 years later I became attracted to 'narrative' theology. Those whose thought I have resonated with (to varying degrees) include: Tom Boomershine, John Shea, C. S. Song and Don Cupitt.

In some way I hope this thesis is a blending of some aspects of process/empirical/aesthetic and narrative thought as they have resonated with me.

Third, my passion for communication actually stems from an involvement with liturgy (See Appendix B). However, of late those whose comments and writings on communication who have assisted me most are Eugene Lowry, Stanley Hopper and James Carey. And my interest in liturgy continues to be shaped by people such as Bernard Lee, Mark Searle and much of the liturgical material from within the feminist movement and such ecumenical communities as Iona (Scotland) and Taize (France), as well as efforts to shape an Australian spirituality.
Fourth, my context for this thesis is a church congregation in a media-saturated society. Stimulating me most in this area is the work of the London based Center for the Study of Communication and Culture (CSCC), and the writings of such people as Marshall McLuhan, William Fore, Pierre Babin and Wesley Carr.

All these have been my constant companions as I have 'conversed' with them and others in the literature research.

But the literature research is only one part of this thesis. The other is sharing with a group of co-researchers in some collaborative research around the experience of storytelling. My task was to establish an environment where we could all experience and reflect on the consequences of telling personal and community stories.

The 'who' of these stories follows in the remainder of the thesis.

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To remain faithful to my task, I have attempted to give the thesis both a narrative and conversational 'shape' so as not to contradict myself too much. In so doing I am mindful of:

(i) in good conversation the 'quest' - of telling and sharing stories - will be different for each participant in the research (multivocal), compared with the demands of the language of traditional research which seem to require ascent to a common result or conclusion (univocal), based - always based - on reason, and

(ii) the traditional attitudes and expectations academia usually have for a thesis.
As well as these I also recall comments Phillip Tompkins made when reviewing Walter Fisher's book on narrative communication:

"... it is fair to ask why a book proposing a new paradigm does not use it to enact its own story" (Tompkins 1988: 139).

While what I offer is not a "new paradigm", I do concede it may be different to what is traditionally expected.

For instance, while the process adopted during this research is:

(i) a small group situation followed by,

(ii) a one-to-one reflection of the small group experience,

the methodology would be to invite a group or groups of people to explore together personal and community stories - to respond to stories with stories and then share some reflections on that experience. Several categories of stories would be offered and responses sought: foundational, collective memory and parable.

Throughout this experience I would see my participation as allowing the stories to have an authenticity of their own rather than to make a separate point or moral, or to produce a certain effect.

During the time of reflection following the storytelling sessions, I would be keen to see if 'awareness' rather than 'understanding' would be the experience of participants. 'Understanding' has to do with 'ideas' and getting to the truth of the matter; 'awareness' is more to do with 'experience' and is more open-ended, tentative and receptive to further experience and inquiry.

Rubem Alves has a phrase with which I support:
"What matters is not what I say but the words that you hear, coming out of your forgotten depths" (Alves 1990: 18).

The so-called conclusions of this thesis therefore, are "not conclusions of certainty". Instead they suggest "likelihoods", attempt to "remain open-ended" and use "consensus" rather than logic and validity (Polkinghorne 1988: 175 - 76). They are an attempt to keep the conversations going rather than closing them down.

"I am not after conclusions", writes Rubem Alves. "Conclusions are meant to shut... Every conclusion brings the thought process to a halt" (Alves 1990: 9). I agree.

This too is different from traditional academic research, but as two empirical process theologians - Bernard Loomer and Bernard Meland - have said:

"Increasingly over the years, I find myself moving in the direction of stories, rather than explication of stories, that is, with the theologies and philosophies. In many respects, theology is the dullest or one of the dullest, of all human disciplines, and this is in part the product of those who produce it..." (Loomer 1976: 75 - 76).

At the end of his article, 'Size is the measure', Loomer offers a story from the Jewish Hasidic storyteller Elie Wiesel and then says:

"Wiesel's conclusion and mine: 'God made man because he loves stories'" (Loomer 1976: 76).

While Bernard Meland, also giving authenticity to this mode of research, writes:
"Learning can be deepened and be made more genuinely human as well as beneficial as a human act if it appropriates the procedures of both creative artist and critic. And I would urge that the weighting be on the former rather than the latter..." (Meland 1953: 81).

This thesis attempts to give such a "weighting".

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One final comment needs to be shared. And this refers to one of the questions which have remained with me as I have shared in the research behind this thesis: is story and narrative the same?

According to some of the scholars with whom I have 'conversed' I feel they would reply it doesn't much matter. Their use of the word 'story' or 'rhetoric' is as a generic term. However, for others they would suggest there is a difference.

In general terms, 'narrative' can refer to any spoken or written presentation. Within this thesis such a suggestion is too broad an understanding.

In a more narrow sense 'narrative' can also refer to the 'results' - to "stories", "myths", "fairytales" and the like.

I feel the overall question is important and therefore I would suggest:

(i) there is a difference between 'story' and 'narrative', and
(ii) it does matter, especially in the way those who share their thoughts on 'narrative' present their suggestions.
Some scholars, for instance, adopt a 'structuralist' worldview of narrative. This seems to be the best known/adopted explanation. Those who have influenced narrative structuralism include Saussure (language as a vast, ahistorical system of signs), Levi-Strauss (myth) and Chomsky (grammar) (Boyd & Salusinszky 1989/90: 19).

In general, what seems essential to this worldview are the 'deep rules' associated with the expression of human experience.

The rules which govern experience are not the result of interaction with the environment but function according to the tenents of logic and are unchanging and static.

"The structuralist position stands within the philosophical tradition of rationalism, which has tried by means of a logically ordered system to give form to human experience" (Polkinghorne 1988: 140).

Others suggest the term 'narrative' may mean a particular story or it may mean the underlying thread or plot line typical of oral narration.

Stanley Hauerwas suggestion that "stories are not told to explain as a theory explains" is, I believe, important for this study. He goes on to suggest:

"We do not tell stories simply because they provide us a more colorful way to say what can be said in a different way, but because there is no other way we can articulate the richness of intentional activity - that is, behavior that is purposeful but not necessary" (Hauerwas 1976: 344).

Throughout this thesis the term narrative is primarily used to suggest the importance given to plot as 'form' - especially in its 'poetic' or
'narrative/symbolic' mode, and when compared to rhetorical 'form' which appears based on analysis and persuasion by argument. Story on the other hand usually refers to an individual story or stories, unless used in a quotation of another's writing. Then the original use is maintained.
Chapter 2
MODELS: WAYS OF SHAPING TALK ABOUT RELIGION AND COMMUNICATION

"Communication stands at the very center of what it means to be human" (Evans 1971: 68)

"Our lives are shaped more by models, metaphors, stories, and myths than by abstract sets of rules and principles" (Navone 1990: 50).

"Religious communication generally must overcome a long addiction to the discursive, the rationalistic, and the prosaic... We should recognize that human nature and human societies are more deeply motivated by images and fabulations than by ideas" (Wilder 1976: 1, 2).

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Models help us to communicate. They give us a way thinking, usually about the unknown in terms of the known. So they have practical value for those who seek to communicate.

Philosopher Max Black has been very influential in discussions surrounding the place of models in contemporary thought.

In his 1962 book, Models and metaphors Black says models provide a 'lens' through which we begin to appreciate "a new subject matter in a new way" (Black 1962: 236). But because models act as a lens or 'filter' they have about them a highly selective characteristic. While both metaphors and models (for to speak of models "already smacks of the metaphorical" (Black 1962: 219)) enable us to make associations with the unfamiliar through the familiar, it also screens or filters out other associations.
"... models... are 'speculative instruments'... (they) bring about a wedding of disparate subjects, by a distinctive operation of transfer of the implications of relatively well-organized cognitive fields. And as with other weddings, their outcomes are unpredictable. Use of a particular model may amount to nothing more than a strained and artificial description of a domain sufficiently known otherwise. But it may also help us to notice what otherwise would be overlooked, to shift the relative emphasis attached to details - in short, to see new connections" (Black 1962: 237).

Another who looks at both scientific and religious models is British language philosopher and theologian Ian Barbour. He suggests that a model is "an imaginative tool for ordering experience, rather than a description of the world" (Barbour 1974: 6) and that models should be taken seriously but not literally. Models remain "hypothetical" (Barbour 1974: 38).

"(Models) are neither literal pictures of reality nor 'useful fictions', but partial and provisional ways of imagining what is not observable; they are symbolic representation of aspects of the world which are not directly accessible to us" (Barbour 1974: 7, see also 27).

Models have a heuristic quality about them because they encourage "modifications in existing theories and the discovery of new phenomena" (Barbour 1974: 7). And because of the 'tentativeness' surrounding the claims for a model Barbour suggests that a greater appreciation of models in religion could be a very positive ecumenical contribution "to tolerance between religious communities" (Barbour 1974: 8).

In science, Barbour suggests there at least four types of models operating:

1. **Experimental** - designed to obtain approximate solutions to practical problems;
2. **Mathematical** - used to make quantitative predictions of particular variables;
3. **Computer** - carry out calculations where specifiable relationships are assumed;

4. **Theoretical** - covering as many aspects of a particular phenomena as possible.

While in religion, models provide both a perspective on the world "and an interpretation of history and human experience".

He continues:

"In particular, religious models are used in the interpretation of distinctive kinds of experience, such as awe and reverence, mystical joy, moral obligation, reorientation and reconciliation, and key historical events" (Barbour 1974: 51).

The process theologian W. Norman Pittenger has also offered some comments on models. In fact he has spent a life time reshaping theology, using the process/social reality model developed by Alfred North Whitehead.

For Pittenger a model provides a focal centre for thinking "and, in consequence, a guide to action". Without such he suggests that we seem "unable to proceed about our business" (Pittenger 1982: 2).

So a model shapes thinking and guides action. It has an "intellectual component but it is much more profoundly a matter of deeply-felt acceptance" (Pittenger 1982: 4). While he uses the word 'model' in preference to 'conception', his favourite word is probably 'picture' because according to him it includes the imaginative and emotional side of our experience. However, any thought that 'picture' relates to a literal interpretation should not be given to Pittenger's usage.
"... a model becomes for us the focus of our thinking, feeling, and willing; it serves as an organizing centre for all that we do and think we are. Above all, it enables us to enter into kinds of experience that apart from it would not be open to our sharing" (Pittenger 1982: 5).

This author also suggests that models have a communal aspect to them. They are not created *ad hoc*; neither do they 'appear from out of nowhere'. Models have a history - a past. And new models 'correct' and 'put into proper perspective' older models.

Models are important; they bring about consequences which are also important.

Both British communications professional and theologian Colin Morris and American theologian Sallie McFague would agree.

Colin Morris agrees with those church scholars who suggest that much of theology, including parts of the New Testament, has dealt with offering 'models' of the church (Morris 1984: 186). Relying on the work of Jesuit Avery Dulles, who offers five such models of the church, Morris extends Dulles' work by suggesting that a model of a church also needs to include the "sort of communication" each model emphasises.

Dulles' models include the church as: (i) institutional; (ii) herald; (iii) communion; (iv) servant, and (v) sacrament.

Each church model emphasises a particular communication model:

- Institutional - the church is the supreme guardian of revelation; doctrine is handed down to the people via a priestly hierarchy;
communication is essentially one-way where the lay people are passive receivers.

- Herald - The Word is sovereign, written in the bible and proclaimed in the sermon; the pulpit dominates the Holy Table.
- Communion - strong mystical and devotional life binds members together; people act as the Spirit leads them.
- Servant - gives the world priority over the church (the world sets the agenda); seeks to listen rather than speak; the church is a 'stream of influence' rather than a discrete structure.
- Sacrament - the church has coherent structure yet not filled with legalist truth or dead tradition; high priority given to the liturgy; employs a wide range of verbal, pictorial and dramatic symbolism; tries to be the message rather than articual a message.

While admitting that all models have their "own language and value system" (Morris 1984: 186) and no one model is completely adequate, Morris does suggest that:

(a) the church as sacrament seems to be "the most fruitful model for the Television Age" (Morris 1984: 191), and
(b) as television is an "electronic story-teller" narrative theology may be the best way of doing theology on television.

He writes:

"If the medium resists those styles of theology based on propositions and abstract concepts, might there be a way forward through what is now called narrative theology - theology as story? For television is an electronic story-teller. It feeds on stories and casts chunks of material in narrative form in order to deal with them effectively" (Morris 1984: 223).
Sallie McFague has been influenced by both the literary and process schools of thought, and we will meet her again later. Much of her writing has been about models and the role they play in our thinking. Indeed her 'metaphorical/ heuristic theology' (McFague 1982, 1987) is based on the place of models and the affect those models have had in shaping orthodox theological thinking.

Agreeing with Black and Barbour, McFague says models help us "organise" our thinking. And 'models' come midway between 'metaphors' and 'concepts' - but not in any hierarchy.

So she suggests

(i) **metaphor** is the way we understand and enlarge our world - and change it;
(ii) **model** is a dominant metaphor; a metaphor which has power;
(iii) **concept** is an idea or a thought which does not create new meaning by relies on conventional, accepted meanings. They rarely show their "metaphorical roots" (McFague 1982: 26).

Models are necessary. They give us something to think about. But they are also dangerous

"for they exclude other ways of thinking and talking, and in so doing they can easily become literalized, that is, identified as the one and only way of understanding a subject (McFague 1982: 24).

As does Barbour, McFague looks at both religion and science and the place models play in both.
One of the most important considerations to come to the surface in science in the last 30 years, according to McFague, is the acknowledgement that the so-called thinking in a scientific way is more like than unlike other ways of thinking.

"The popular view of science as objective, mechanistic, substance oriented, materialistic, and deterministic is an outmoded seventeenth-century view which few scientists now embrace" (McFague 1982: 76).

The by-products of this 'outmoded seventeenth-century view' were:

(i) biblical literalism;
(ii) a science stripped of imagination;
(iii) imagination assigned a ghetto existence in poetry.

In the case of science the new picture which emerged was one which included the worldviews and participation of the scientist in a network of "movements and relationships" (McFague 1982: 78) rather than as a neutral observer.

In the case of religion the new picture to emerge was an acknowledgement that the central role of models "is to provide grids or screens for interpreting (the) relationship between the divine and the human" (McFague 1982: 124 - 125).

McFague continues:

"While the common assumption may be that models are meant mainly... for talking about the nature of God... in fact, the critical models of the great theologians - their root-metaphors - are not about God or about human beings, but are concerned with the relationship between them" (McFague 1982: 125).
As a result, McFague suggests that:

(i) models of different kinds - some concrete and particular; others abstract and general - will appear in religion, and
(ii) many models will be required to express the richness of the human/divine relationship.

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When we turn to 'communication' we will find several models on offer because "communication is (also) a ubiquitous and complex process" (Littlejohn 1978: 21). Each model looks at the communication process from a different perspective or environment, therefore each model is a 'partial construct' rather than a given or enshrined 'truth'.

Models play an important role in communication theory not because one is more 'right' than another, but because some are more 'useful' than others.

Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl (1981) suggest that a model is a "simplified description in graphic form of a piece or reality".

They then go on to say:

"(Models seek) to show the main elements of any structure or process and the relationships between these elements" (McQuail & Windahl 1981: 2).

Using their definition of a model, they suggest there are three characteristics to or functions, of models:

(i) an **organising** function, offering "images of wholes that we might not otherwise perceive";
(ii) a heuristic function, by helping to provide information "in a simplified way... which would otherwise be complicated or ambiguous";

(iii) a probabilities function, which may make it "possible to predict outcomes or the course of events".

And in language with which McFague would agree, they also suggest that offering models can be a risky business:

"It should... be remembered that there are some risks in using models, even for heuristic purposes. They are inevitably incomplete, oversimplified and involve some concealed assumptions" (McQuail & Windahl 1981: 2).

In what could be described as a rough conglomerate, four 'paradigms' covering several communication models have emerged:

(i) mechanistic/linear;
(ii) psychological;
(iii) interpretive-symbolic, and
(iv) pragmatic/systems.

Each will be introduced briefly.

1. Mechanistic/linear:

The communication models within the mechanistic or linear paradigms see communication primarily in terms of the 'sender', the 'channel' and the 'message'. They focus on the information contained in a given utterance.

Perhaps the most basic model was that offered by the American political scientist Harold D. Lasswell who, in 1948 said:
"a convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions: who, says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?" (McQuail & Windahl 1981: 10).

'Convenient' it may have been, but it was convenient only in a certain context. And for Lasswell that context was discovering an effects-oriented model of communication. His interest in this model grew out of investigations he had carried out on the effects of propaganda messages used in World War 1 (Rogers 1986: 97).

My introduction to the mechanistic/linear paradigm came through an exposure to and awareness of what I would call the 'classic' mechanistic model - that offered by Claude Shannon (who spent much of his career as an electrical engineer at Bell Laboratories) and Warren Weaver (of the Rockefeller Foundation).

Their model was published in a 1949 book called The mathematical theory of communication - that communication is a linear, non-interactive (Severin & Tankard 1988: 38), one way process.

Everett Rogers records that this simple "effects-oriented approach to human communication" was accepted "with enthusiasm by communication scholars" and quickly became the "most important turning point in the history of communication science" (Rogers 1986: 83, 85, 86).

The components which made up the model are: source, encoding, signal, decoding and destination, with one dysfunctional factor: noise. The roles
of 'sender' and 'receiver' are clearly separated with the communication 'starting' one end and 'finishing' at another - especially in mass media.

The concept of 'feedback' was not mentioned although students sympathetic to this model point out that Shannon did discuss the idea of a 'correcting device' in his book.

Evaluating the linear models of communication, Rogers says their main problems stem from assumptions about information and how it is transmitted.

"In our everyday experience there is a tendency to treat information as if it could be carried from a source to a receiver the way a bucket carries water, or a hypodermic needle injects a vaccine, or a bullet heads for a target" (Rogers 1986: 197).

Viewed this way, Rogers says, 'information' becomes an object that can be moved around, and the mind becomes a separate entity, separate from the environment in which it exists (Rogers 1986: 197 - 98).

2. Psychological:
A second paradigm includes those models of communication covered by the title psychological. Different from the mechanistic models, the psychological models

"focus on the source-receiver, the individual human being, and delves into the internal cognitive and affective makeup of the communicating agent" (Fisher 1978: 144).

While the 'receiver' is given emphasis in these models, it would also appear that both the 'sender' and 'receiver' are active participants in the
communication process, as both have an opportunity - some would say equal opportunity - to influence.

Moving beyond the mechanistic models, the psychological model seeks to establish how others, who are 'active' rather than 'passive' participants use, for example, the media, and what 'meaning' they attach to that experience.

Those who have adopted a psychological model of communication often apply it to the area of interpersonal communication - especially in the areas of persuasion and attitude change.

Two words seem to be important in these models: 'create' and 'meaning' (Ticehurst 1985). Quoting Berlo's comment that messages are transmittable; meanings are not in the message, Dean Barnlund (in a reprint of his 1962 article) suggests that:

"Communication is man's attempt to cope with his experience, his current mood, his emerging needs... That life becomes intelligible to us - full of beauty or ugliness, hope or despair - is because it is assigned that significance by the experiencing being" (Barnlund 1986: 38).

Therefore for Barnlund, communication arises out of our need to reduce uncertainty, to act effectively and to "strengthen the ego". Communication ceases when meanings are adequate; it is initiated when new meanings are required.

"It admits that meaning in the sender, and the words of the messages, are important, but (my meaning-centered philosophy of communication) regards as most critical the state of mind, the assumptive world and the needs of the listener or observer" (Barnlund 1986: 39).
3. Interpretive/Symbolic:

A third paradigm includes those models of communication which fit the loose conglomerate called interpretive or symbolic.

According to Stephen Littlejohn (1978: 56), symbolic models view communication in terms of the individual, but through 'role taking' where the individual develops her/his potential through social interaction.

In America, symbolic communication (or symbolic interactionism) developed around the thought of George Herbert Mead. Basic to his thought was the notion that an individual is an actor, not a reactor (Blumer 1969: 5) - that women and men create their own environment (meaning) and self, rather than being merely the 'product' of past experiences.

As a result behaviour is not so much a response to what has happened but an interpretation of experience as part of an on-going 'construction of self' - as an "active participant... and an analytical observer" (Fisher 1978: 175).

Herbert Blumer (1969: 2) suggests that symbolic interactionism rests on three basic premises or "root images":

(i) People act toward things (which can be people) on the basis of the meanings the things have for them;

(ii) The meanings things have arise out of the interactions people have with each other, and

(iii) Meanings attached to things are modified as a result of the interpretations given those things following use.
"Symbolic interactionism," writes Blumer,

"...recognizes social interaction to be of vital importance in its own right. This importance lies in the fact that social interaction is a process that forms human conduct instead of being merely a means or setting for the expression or release of human conduct" (Blumer 1969: 8).

Thus, symbolic interaction belongs to the empirical research tradition, especially case studies.

Recent research by symbolic interactionists have included the significance of storytelling. Michal McCall and Judith Wittner's research into the area of life histories (McCall & Wittner 1990) recalls that when members of storytelling groups told or read their life stories aloud, it helped create "new shared understandings" (McCall & Wittner 1990: 62) between them.

"My life history research shows how ordinary people create culture when they tell stories: how the small insignificant events of daily conversation, modeled somewhat artificially in the activities of the storytelling groups I created, coalesce in the broad shifts of cultural understanding we think of as social change" (McCall & Wittner 1990: 62).

As a result of their work McCall and Wittner are critical of those who claim that stories are "cognitively inferior to scientific modes of representation" (McCall & Wittner 1990: 81). They state that symbolic interactionists have benefited from narrative theories in the way they have been challenged to discover

"new ways of presenting and representing knowledge of social life. We see storytelling as the foundation of what we know and how we know it..." (McCall & Wittner 1990: 85).
4. Pragmatic/Systems:

The fourth paradigm includes those models which could be called pragmatic or systems. That is, communication is not something a person 'does' but an event (or system) in which one participates in or becomes a part of.

While it is really a 'what-communication-is-not' sort of definition,

Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson offer the following:

"An individual does not communicate; he engages in or becomes part of communication... In other words, he does not originate communication; he participates in it. Communication as a system, then, is not to be understood on a simple model of action and reaction, however complexly stated. As a system, it is to be comprehended on the transactional level" (Quoted in B. A. Fisher 1982: 39).

B. Aubrey Fisher expands this definition by suggesting the following

"theoretical assumptions" associated with pragmatic communication:

(i) The human being is a social actor;

(ii) Humans create reality through enactment;

(iii) The locus of communication is the relationship created by interaction;

(iv) The maintenance of a relationship requires re-enactment, and

(v) Meanings are interpreted, not assigned.

He writes:

"We have learned communication without being aware of having learned. We develop relationships... without attempting to understand how and why. In short, we take for granted this most basic ability and even avoid attempting to understand it, often preferring instead to think of communication as a manipulative power to wield over others... But communication, pragmatically, is not possessed by a single individual to do with as he/she wills; it is
a capacity for relationship, a skill of enacting a social reality with other humans" (Fisher 1982: 42).

However, it would appear there are at least two characteristics of models within the pragmatic/systems paradigm. For instance (i) open-systems thinking which encourages openness and is open existentially, and (ii) closed-systems thinking because it fosters greater control.

According to Thomas Farrell this open and closed characteristic can be seen in the way 'oral' and 'print' works. In 'oral' communication the performer and the live audience

"...interact on occasions of public verbal performance because the performer responds presently to the audience, whereas the writer's audience (of readers, not auditors) is always absent at the moment of writing and is therefore a fiction in the imagination of the writer as he or she writes... Writing and print thus requires separateness and invite closure" (Farrell 1991: 34).

Where does narrative communication fit into all this? What communication paradigm best 'suits' narrative?

An initial comment would be: narrative does not easily fit any particular paradigm, in any exclusive sense.

If the emphasis was given to the 'indirect' nature of narrative, then due to the heavy emphasis placed on the hearer and the meaning or 'sense' the hearer makes of the message, this would tend to suggest any narrative communication model should be placed within the psychological paradigm.
However, within the oral tradition, narrative would appear to involve two parties: a story (Text) and a storyteller (Author). Thus when we hear a story and say we 'understand' it, we mean we usually have found a satisfactory set of relationships between the world 'created' by the author/storyteller and the world of everyday experiences. Thus, it could be said the paradigm most appropriate to oral narrative is pragmatic/systems.

Those who have sought to answer this question from a literary criticism perspective seem to suggest a slightly more complicated model: a linear speech-act communication model, involving a sender, a message, and a receiver.

"In literature, the sender may be identified with the author, the message with the text, and the receiver with the reader.

Author ———> Text ———> Reader"

(Powell 1990: 9).

The emphasis in this narrative model is on the 'reader' as receiver.

When compared with the four paradigms introduced above, Powell's suggestion seems to have adopted characteristics from both the conglomerates I have named mechanistic/linear and psychological.

Another to suggest an answer is Wallace Martin. He too suggests a "linear communication model" (Martin 1986: 153) to explain narrative - with an emphasis on the 'reader'. While Walter Fisher's mega-narrative model emphasises both 'sender' and 'receiver' as being "full participants" (Fisher 1985: 86) in a co-operative communication process - incorporating many of the characteristics of the interpretive/symbolic and some of the characteristics of the psychological paradigms.
I feel I would not want to insist that 'narrative' be placed in any particular paradigm category. Rather I feel it would be helpful to acknowledge that within narrative communication there is a fluidity between paradigms and this fluidity can influence or shape the communication process in different ways - some of these, I believe, more helpful in extending human conversation and encouraging a 'larger generality' than others might.
"there is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is something which the one man cannot directly communicate to the other" (S. Kierkegaard, quoted in Craddock 1978: 9).

"'Indirection' is the essence of 'witnessing' for Christ. 'Witnessing' for Christ ought to be the most self-effacing thing one can do, but how often it has looked and sounded exhibitionist. It is not the witness's business to pass his own verdict" (Tinsley 1990: 17).

There are two powerful movements in contemporary communication and theological studies: narrative and 'indirect' narrative. Of the two 'indirect' narrative communication has the smaller collection of research material available. Much of this material appears to be applied to religious communication/narrative theology.

What follows is an attempt to collect some of these scattered comments and group them together under a general heading 'indirect narrative', acknowledging that this grouping is a loose arrangement.

However, use of the classification 'indirect' in this thesis, goes beyond the generally accepted realtionships between oral - written; performance - text; face-to-face communication - indirect communication associated with literature studies.

It is also an exploration to see if 'indirect' narrative is a suitable/effective model for religious communication.
In general terms modern indirect communication can be traced back at least to the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855). He is, according to some, the 'apostle of indirect communication' (Tinsley 1980: 165).

Underlying his indirect communication is his use of stories or 'parables'. Indeed, storytelling was a "preoccupation" (Oden 1978: ix) of Kierkegaard.

In the 'Introduction' to a collection of Kierkegaard's parables, theologian Thomas Oden says:

"Kierkegaard has a metaphoric mind. He communicated, and apparently thought, in dramaturgic images. One has the impression that it would have been impossible for him to communicate meaningfully in any other way..." (Oden 1978: ix).

As an author, Kierkegaard used parables for five reasons:

(i) as a "weapon of philosophical conflict" (Oden 1978: xi);
(ii) as a way of disarming the reader by putting him/her in a more receptive frame of mind, thus allowing the 'author' to enter more deeply into personal communication with the 'reader'. Oden suggests that Kierkegaard

"...found that a distinct advantage of parabolic communication is that it does not ask for any assent to systematic presuppositions or for any sacrifice of intellect, nor does it require commitment to any logical rules of procedure. It rather starts concretely with commonly experienced images presented benignly in the form of a narrative, allowing the readers to compare that story with their own perceptions" (Oden 1978: xii).
(iii) the story format was necessary for Kierkegaard to be able to implement his "highly explicit theory and method of indirect communication" (Oden 1978: xii);

(iv) they would entice the hearer/reader into a more profound 'self-awareness', and

(v) they serve 'memory' and 'oral repetition'.

Oden also suggests that Kierkegaard's parables were told not merely to change the mind but instead to change the will.

"...they confront us with a choice between possibilities of self-understanding, so that in the process of having to choose, we discover ourselves, or something of ourselves. Parable is indirect both because it tends to 'deceive the hearer into the truth', and because it inconspicuously requires us to make imaginative choices, so that in doing so we are in some sense offered the possibility of more fully choosing to become ourselves" (Oden 1978: xiii).

One student of the oral communication called preaching - Fred Craddock - has allowed Kierkegaard's thought to shape his model of inductive (or indirect) preaching. At the head of each of the chapters in one of his books on preaching, Craddock offers a Kierkegaard 'text' (see above) which he uses as a way of shaping what he particularly wants to say about preaching in that chapter.

The strength of Kierkegaard's communication model, according to Craddock, is that it:

"respects the hearer as not only capable of but deserving the right to participate in... and arrive at a conclusion that is his own, not just the speaker's" (Craddock 1979: 62).
If the members of the congregation have been able to resonate with the experiences in the sermon then, continues Craddock, it is their conclusion, and the implication for their own situations that is important, not those of the preacher.

In an inductive/indirect Craddock sermon the listener 'completes' the sermon, not the preacher.

Craddock never says he wants to entirely do away with deductive preaching/communication, even though some of his critics seem to have missed this. Rational argument, he claims, is needed to keep any community "self-critical, athletically trim and free from a sloppy sentimentality that can take over in the absence of critical activity" (Craddock 1978: 135). However, what he has tried to suggest, following Kierkegaard, is to replace direct/deductive preaching from its position as the primary method.

What makes communication possible is not a so-called flow of information, but the "general similarity of human experiences".

Another who has reflected on and been influenced by Kierkegaard's model of indirect communication is James Whitehill. About Kierkegaard he says:

"The secret of (Kierkegaard's) indirect communication... is that both communicator and receiver are free of each other: each is in the process of his own becoming and free to appropriate the subjective possibility or to reject it" (Whitehill 1974: 85).

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John Tinsley is one of the few contemporary theologians who has sought to shape a model of communication and evangelism specifically called 'indirect'. Why? He suggests that 'frontal' or 'direct' speech is not only inadmissible in our day and age but that such speech is "profoundly foreign to a Christian mission which seeks its base in the manner of Christ" (Tinsley 1990: 6).

Previously only available in article form, Tinsley's suggestions have now been published in a book - Tell it slant. The christian gospel and its communication.

The title of his book is a quote from part of a poem by Emily Dickinson:

'Tell all the truth but tell it slant
Success in circuit lies' (Quoted in Tinsley 1990: 6).

This book is a collection of lectures, articles and pastoral letters - Tinsley is both an academic and a bishop - mainly between the years 1960 - 1985. In it Tinsley offers his suggestion that christian communication should always be 'indirect'.

"I mean by Christian communication not simply any form of conveying information from one human being to another but that relationship in which human beings achieve their most personal and individual expression, in an atmosphere of freedom and equality... We are concerned with communication as deeply personal interchange through language and gesture and not the impersonal (though informative) announcement of the official communique" (Tinsley 1990: 3).

He suggests that much of the thinking of the church, especially that influenced by the academic mind, is "all towards abstraction" and this
needs to be "turned again and again back into the concrete and the particular" (Tinsley 1990: 95).

And of course he suggests that Jesus of Nazareth's communication style was also 'indirect': that the manner of Jesus' words and actions were as much a part of the gospel as the content.

"The method of Jesus was cryptic, indirect, and allusive. His parabolic and ironic method was central to his purposes because... it 'roused the faculties to act'. This 'indirect' method of Jesus did not impose on others, but submitted itself to their free judgment" (Tinsley 1990: 94).

Reflecting on Tinsley's comments, it appears to me that he substantiates his claim that religious communication should always be indirect because he understands the primary mode of Jesus' communication - parable - as allegorical.

If allegory is the saying of one thing in such a way that it can also mean another, then, Tinsley suggests, Jesus is an allegorist

"...in that he inevitably sees his own times in terms of the story of old Israel, and the story of old Israel in terms of his own time" (Tinsley 1990: 152).

He acknowledges that such a suggestion is likely to be misunderstood due to:

(i) some New testament scholars have become accustomed to seeing allegory as an inferior art-form "used in the interests of some propagandist or moralistic purpose", and

(ii) the 'bad press' given to 18th and 19th century writers who understood allegory as a marginal, decorative extra.
In response, Tinsley claims allegory is an extended metaphor rather than as it is often assumed, an extended simile. The latter is inferior allegory; the former

(i) has its own dramatic unity,
(ii) is convincing in its own right, and
(iii) excites the imagination to transferences of meaning.

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Other biblical and theological scholars have also claimed that the shape of Jesus of Nazareth's communication and that of the early church could be styled 'indirect' narrative.

Amos Wilder, for instance, writing in the mid-1960s, was one of the first contemporary biblical scholars to recognise this. He claimed that the 'how' of Jesus' communication could not be separated from the 'what'.

"If the Gospel was creative in a formal rhetorical aspect, it was also creative in all that has to do with image, symbol and myth. Here, too, the substance of the faith brought forth a new liberation of speech evident in its prodigality of imaginative vehicles. The language-phenomenon which broke into the world with the discourse of Jesus and which continued in the Church arose out of a depth of impulse which imposed plastic expression throughout" (Wilder 1964/71: 118).

Such a 'plastic' nature should help us realise that the language of the New Testament, according to Wilder, is more metaphorical and symbolic than literal or factual. He suggests this

"kind of report of reality - as in a work of art - is more subtle and complex and concrete than in the case of a discursive statement, and therefore more adequate to the matter in hand and to things of importance" (Wilder 1964/71: 125).
John Navone, a Jesuit priest who has been shaping a narrative theology for several years, also alludes to the 'indirect' nature (or to use his term, 'angularity') of religious narrative communication.

"...we know within the limits of our competence and partiality, assured that what we know contributes at least in a slight way to the sum of all the human angles whereby the Word of God is actually, effectively and authentically represented and communicated" (Navone 1990: 99).

While two theologians who have added to the 'indirect' narrative debate through a discussion of metaphor and language, are British theologian-poet Brian Wren, and American feminist theologian Sallie McFague.

Brian Wren is concerned to show that all language - especially religious language - is

"a borrowing from human experience... (and) though language does not determine how we think, it shapes and slants thinking and behavior" (Wren 1989: 3).

Sallie McFague has also suggested that the shape of theology and thus religious communication, needs to be 'indirect'.

McFague strongly suggests religious language becomes idolatrous when we treat it 'literally' and 'direct'.

"...The ancients were less literalistic than we are, aware that truth has many levels and that when one writes the story of an influential person's life, one's perspective will color that story" (McFague 1982: 5).

And again,
"...what religious and theological language is at most is metaphorical forays attempting to express experiences of relating to God" (McFague 1987: 39).

She approvingly quotes British theologian Ian Ramsey who warns that we must always be cautious of talking about God in 'direct' language "as if we had privileged access to the diaries of God's private life" (Quoted in McFague 1982: 7).

Working with what she calls a 'metaphorical/heuristic theology',

McFague seeks to suggest that metaphor:

(i) is both central to human understanding (1982: 31) and

(ii) the 'character' of Jesus' parables.

Thus, a 'metaphorical theology' is in sympathy with a constructivist understanding of all human activities - all language about God is human construction, partial, and relative, and as such "misses the mark" (McFague 1987: 21 - 28) - and is open-ended, tentative, indirect, tensive, iconoclastic and transformative - implying an end to dogmatism and absolutism.

"Theological constructions are 'houses' to live in for a while, with windows partly open and doors ajar; they become prisons when they no longer allow us to come and go, to add a room or take one away - or if necessary, to move out and build a new house (McFague 1987: 27).

As such a 'metaphorical theology' is:

(i) a redesription or "new reading" of reality (McFague 1987: 26) and must remain open to the continuing process of new readings, and

(ii) shaped by story, especially parable.
As a 'redescription' of reality, McFague agrees with Paul Ricoeur that language can renovate and revise our vision of reality. Thus, 'metaphorical theology' is also about 'communication'.

Story, especially parable, re-describes experience through the sequence of orient-disorient-reorient (Ricoeur 1975: 126). That is, a parable begins within the conventionally understood world. But in the course of the telling a "radically different perspective is introduced" (McFague 1987: 46) which disorientes the listener. Finally, through an interaction of both - 'orient' ('is') and 'disorient' ('is not') - a new 'conversation with' or reading of the world is imagined. Out of this 'is' and 'is not' tension the listener is invited, indirectly, to 'play' with this new insight.

A parable then, does not assume an ordered world but, echoing some of the sentiments of process/literary critic Wil Beardslee, perceives order only indirectly and is an

"assault on the accepted conventions, including the social, economic, and mythic structures that people build for their own comfort and security" (McFague 1987: 50).

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Perhaps the areas of religious life which have benefited most from adopting an 'indirect' narrative communication model are:

(i) contemporary spiritual direction, and
(ii) the mass media - especially religious television.

A brief introductory comment about each may be helpful.
1. Spiritual direction

The history of spiritual direction can be traced back to at least the times of the 'desert fathers and mothers' of the fourth and fifth century in Egypt and other areas of the now Middle East: people who moved into the harsh wilderness of the desert in a solitary search for God.

Other expressions of spiritual direction can also be seen in the Benedict monastic life (Middle Ages); the lay, non-monastic life of the Dominicans and Franciscans (12th - 15th century) and the most famous of all, the 'spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola (16th century).

Following the (Roman Catholic) Second Vatican Council in the mid 1960s, spiritual direction was reshaped, away from confession and the application of abstract rules and principles, to a reflecting/listening role of one person (director) to the religious experiences of another (directee).

In describing this reshaping, Janet Ruffing suggests that spiritual directors now

"describe themselves as co-discerners, listeners, companions, midwives, soul-friends, and co-travelers (Ruffing 1989: 16)"

in a mutual and collaborative climate. What each person seeks to do is

"not to out-argue each other but to weigh one another's opinion - to test it out... This cannot be achieved if the participants are merely involved in self-expression and the successful assertion of their own viewpoints" (Ruffing 1989: 48).
Ruffing stresses both the 'narrative' and 'indirect' importance of spiritual direction. While many stories are told in the process one of the other goals of contemporary spiritual direction is to support the directee's

"growth in the spiritual life, helping him or her to become the person he or she desires to be" (Ruffing 1989: 60).

Thus, contemporary spiritual direction takes place in an environment which is non-adversarial and shaped by conversation.

This thesis is premised on the belief that a similar environment is also required for a storytelling group. However, there are two major differences:

(i) spiritual direction is a one-to-one situation; the storytelling experience is a group situation, and
(ii) there is less questioning in a storytelling group than there is in a spiritual direction situation.

2. Mass media (Religious television)

While examples of attempts at 'direct' religious communication can be sited - the American tele-evangelists being one such example (Schultze 1990b; Horsfield 1984) - much of the current media research would question such approach (Hoover 1988).

Over the past 35 years or so, television has been subjected to an increasing amount of academic analysis. Depending on which 'school' of thought is adopted in this analysis, television is seen as the great entertainer, as big business driven for profit only, as an educational tool or as a provider of information (Jensen 1990).
Of course none of these views by themselves need be an adequate description of television. However, while all this 'reflection' has been going on, television has gained center stage as the cultural phenomenon of our times.

And of recent years, media researchers have changed their field of interest, away from the simplistic transmission of information and the resultant 'cause and effect' determinism, and focused more on the role of television as the teller of stories (Newcomb & Alley 1983: 19; White 1987) and the subjective experience of viewers.

While 'television and narrative' will be dealt with in a latter chapter, what is important to note for now is how television has shaped a new language and method of communication.

"The language of the book", writes Derek Weber,

"guided by rationality, deductive organisation and logic, has made way for the language of television. This is a language of image and suggestion. It is a language of narrative and emotion" (Weber 1989: 1).

One of the earliest to alert religious communicators to this change was Martin Marty. He did not name it 'indirect' or 'narrative' communication, but 'pre-evangelism', however, it was shaped in similar ways. For Marty, 'pre-evangelism' "...merely prepares the soil. It intrigues and raises curiosity..." (Marty 1961: 139).

Or borrowing some images from Steve Jacobsen (1989: 4): to move away from a 'shoehorn' analogy - "there is something out there in the world of ideas and mental constructs that I must wedge into people's minds," and
move towards a 'tuning fork' analogy - "my job is not to stick something in people that is some kind of foreign object. It is merely to strike a chord... that will resonate within" and among us.

With the commercial introduction of television a shift has occurred in communications media which is as significant as that when moveable type was introduced to printing.

Acknowledging that television appears to be the major storyteller of our age, while at the same time not requiring 'literate audiences' (Schultze 1990a: 28; Meyrowitz 1985: 254 - 256), current research also tends to suggest that the more 'direct' style of religious communication

"can affect culture only in limited ways, and cannot of itself bring about the totalconversion of society..." (Biernatzki 1991: 25).

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There is much, I feel, to commend 'indirect' narrative communication:

- its pointing to the metaphorical nature of language rather than its literalness;
- to "strike a chord" that will "resonate within";
- an emphasis on collaboration;
- the 'is' and 'is not' dimension of the story called parable;
- its respect for the hearer having the capability and the right to arrive at his/her own conclusions.

However, I do have some concerns.
It would appear that Kierkegaard's use of 'indirect' narrative communication, for example, was for him a tool - as a means to an end - more than it was an authentic mode of communication.

And secondly, 'indirect' narrative communication still seems to be about the advancement of ideas - which is about abstraction rather than the concrete.

But there is another body of thought on narrative - a more generic collection of narrative-shaped thinking - which may offer other suggestions, and to that collection this thesis now turns.
"...story is the best word I can find to designate the key feature and
most distinctive characteristic of human communication. More
than any other, Homo sapiens is the story-telling animal. Unlike
any other, Homo sapiens live in a world erected, experienced, and
conducted largely through many forms and modes of story-telling" (Gerbner 1988: 7).

"Storytelling is nature's way for us of making sense of our
experience and to pass stories on is to create a genetic memory"
(Michael 1991: 33).

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Narrative is about a story and a storyteller. George Gerbner says, as the
above quote indicates, human beings are storytelling animals, because
human beings are constantly shaping and reshaping their experienced
'world'.

And the way human beings have told of those reshaped experiences has
been in myth, folk-tale, legend, allegory, story, epic and parable - to name
just a few. Sometimes that story is told in writing; other times it is part of
the oral/aural tradition. However there are some who believe the oral
story is the real business of storytelling.

Storytelling has its origins in our experiences in dialogue with the natural
world around us. However, experience is never simply a subjective event
(Meland 1962: 210; Barbour 1974: 120); neither is experience purely
objective. Experience is a 'happening' within relationships together with
an accumulation of effects with social consequences.
Everybody's life is full of stories, but not all the stories are interesting. What makes them interesting is the context and the way the stories are told.

As an academic study, narrative linked with communication is a late starter, especially when compared with narrative/education. It would appear that of the tertiary institutions who offer courses relating to 'communication', few do so for narrative communication. Perhaps the exception are the church theological colleges, and then this is 'patchy'. When narrative is offered at a tertiary institution it is usually within a Department of Speech Communication and considered part of rhetoric.

It was in the early 1950s at the San Francisco Langley Porter Clinic when researchers hypothesised that not only were there different hemispheres of the human brain, but that each hemisphere functioned differently.

They suggested that the left hemisphere of the brain connected to the right side of the body. The main functions appear to be "the translation of perception" (Watzlawick 1978: 21) into logical, semantic, analytical representations of reality.

Similarly the right hemisphere of the brain connected to the left side of the body. Its main functions appear very different: artistic, imaginative and relational activities.

Since those days more than 40 years ago numerous scholars and researchers have attempted to either build on these suggestions and 'further the cause', or suggest contradicting or alternative conclusions.
While Robert Ornstein (1972) has popularised this 'psychology of consciousness', others, such as Paul Watzlawick (1978) have suggested the 'two-brain/two-language' theory.

He writes:

"There are... two languages involved. One... is objective, definitional, cerebral, logical, analytic; it is the language of reason, of science, explanation, and interpretation... The other... is much more difficult to define - precisely because it is not the language of definition. We might call it the language of imagery, of metaphor, of pars pro toto, perhaps of symbols, but certainly of synthesis and totality, and not of analytical dissection" (Watzlawick 1978: 14 - 15).

Jerome Bruner would agree. Indeed he would appear to go further and suggest that while both provide distinctive ways of ordering experience or constructing reality, the two are irreducible to one another.

"...what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness" (Bruner 1986: 11).

And then he suggests,

"It has been claimed that the one is a refinement of or an abstraction from the other. But this must be either false or true only in the most unenlightening way" (Bruner 1986: 11).

A model of communication shaped by narrative or storytelling is likely to be a 'right hemisphere' brain activity.

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In 1985 the American Journal of Communication published an issue devoted to the theme of narrative - 'Homo narrans: Storytelling in mass
culture and everyday life'. That feature consisted of six major articles from academics working in the area described as narrative communication.

Six major articles which to my mind were designed to enhance the academic legitimacy of narrative inquiry and indicate its current trends. But six major articles which approached narrative from the mode of rhetoric and as an alternative to the assumed dominant mode - poetic.

One such contributor is Thomas Farrell (1985).

- While he initially establishes there is a difference between oral and written narrative, Farrell's main objective is to discuss the various uses of narration as displayed in two types of communication: conversation and rhetoric.

And while there are similarities between the two, that is both (i) involve "interlocutors, who witness and extend upon the utterances of others", and (ii) are composed of "performative utterances" (Farrell 1985: 115), it is important to Farrell that the differences between them be also noted.

With this in mind Farrell suggests those differences include:

"(Rhetoric) appears to be monologic, partisan, and directed outward... The other (conversation) appears to be dialogic, bipartisan, and disclosed no further than to those in the immediate encounter..." (Farrell 1985: 116).

While rhetoric is disputational and instrumental, it also is expected to 'deepen' hierarchically from introduction through argument(s) to conclusion, and requires the necessity for some 'thinking ahead', that is,
prior preparation by the author. By contrast, conversation ranges widely -
in present past, present present, and present future time.

"... the narrative expectancy of conversation moves horizontally
through encounter-time, rather than hierarchically through levels
of significance... Most of the time, in most encounters, the principle
of continuity requires only that we attend continuously to the
subject of an episode, until the subject is 'exhausted' and thus
shifted... For any conversation, there will be peaks and valleys of
depth and a general growth of knowledge, disclosure, and even
relationship through a discontinuous range of topics" (Farrell 1985: 119).

For Farrell, 'conversation' closely resembles 'narrative'.

- Ernest Bormann (1985) introduces a 'symbolic convergence' or social
  theory of communication which seeks to offer an explanation for the
  establishment of a "group consciousness, with its implied shared
  emotions, motives, and meanings" (Bormann 1985: 128).

Rather than being a narrative model of communication as such, Bormann
seems to use narrative - or more exact, stories and myths - within a
psychological process to establish his theory. Thus:

"When a number of people come to share a cluster of fantasy
themes and types, they may integrate them into a coherent
rhetorical vision of some aspect of their social reality.

"A rhetorical vision is a unified putting-together of the various
scripts that gives the participants a broader view of things"
(Bormann 1985: 133).

Such action provides a "rhetorical means" for many people in the
community to "account for and explain the same experiences or events in
different ways". It results in a "symbolic climate... that allows people to
achieve empathic communion as well as a 'meeting of the minds'"
(Bormann 1985: 134), usually around the use of various key words or slogan or label within a particular time and place.

His theory seems to be an antidote to those who would claim that 'ideas' rather than creative and imaginative interpretations are the unifying factors within group life.

He agrees with Walter Fisher that the narrative paradigm is an alternative to the rational world paradigm. He also suggests that those who are advocates of the latter

"...see an objective world that speakers can mirror in their communication and against which its logic and argument can be tested and evaluated" (Bormann 1985: 135)

and suggests that even though practitioners from both sides may use the same words - such as 'story' and 'myth' - they attach different meanings to them - both positive and negative.

And he also accepts Fisher's suggestions that humans are storytellers adding that they are "social storytellers who share fantasies (that is, 'creative and imaginative shared interpretation of events') and thus build group consciousnesses and create social realities" (Bormann 1985: 136).

- While admitting that the poetic models of communication are "incontestible", and agreeing with those who advocate that "narrative represents a universal medium of human consciousness", John Lucaites and Celeste Condit (1985) suggest that if there is a narrative metacode it would need to be

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"a reconstruction based upon a thoroughgoing account... of the multiple forms and functions of narrative as they are materialized in the discourse of everyday life" (Luaites & Condit 1985: 91).

Such a 'reconstruction' comes from a matrix of three narrative functions: poetic (beauty), dialectic (truth), and rhetorical (power).

As represented by Luaites and Condit the poetic function's primary goal is the expression of beauty; creates a pleasurable or entertaining experience; invites multiplicity of potential interpretations (multivocal); essential characteristic is form, while there is no requirement that it be adapted to the needs of a specific audience.

The primary goal of the dialectic function is the discovery and presentation of a truth; aspires to the status of fact; essential characteristic is content; seeks to transmit knowledge (univocal) and illuminate the factual nature of the universe.

Likewise, the primary goal of rhetoric is what persuasion achieves or the wielding of power; is governed by its ability to prepare an audience for the proof of an argument; invites only one interpretation (univocal) and encourages and enlists the audience's participation in any solution.

The authors are not convinced there is either a unified narrative paradigm or a universal narrative metacode. However, they have been able to introduce a helpful survey of the different functions associated with narrative discourse.
Two political scientists who seek to evaluate political narrative especially as portrayed in media news broadcasts are Lance Bennett and Murray Edelman (1985).

Their concern is that while mass media stories can elicit from audiences powerful responses of belief or disbelief, they tend to do so without empowering the audience for action of change.

Media news stories will either shock, titillate, arouse, amuse, or reassure audiences in an effort to attract the largest possible audience. However, all such stories offered are insulated from one another. The audience may choose which news stories to notice or ignore and this is usually based not on the story's argument or logic but on "people's material and psychological condition" (Bennett & Edelman 1985: 160).

Political narratives, they argue, are "formulaic stories" which "dissolve ambiguity" and resolves differing opinions into "black and white replays of the political dramas of the past" (Bennett & Edelman 1985: 158). This process reinforces the either/or poles of political debate as being "natural and adequate characterizations of reality" (Bennett & Edelman 1985: 159).

Rather than wanting to remove narrative from public discourse the authors attempt to suggest ways to use the narrative shape in more creative and critical ways.

"If stories can be constructed to wall off the senses to the dilemmas and contradictions of social life, perhaps they also can be presented in ways that open up the mind to creative possibilities in ways that provoke intellectual struggle, the resolution of contradiction, and the creation of a more workable human order" (Bennett & Edelman 1985: 161 - 62).
They point out there is a need for a new political narrative which moves away from the heroes and villains approach of much of today's political narrative and offers instead analysis "designed to bring together contradictions and normative dilemmas within the same story". The goal of narrative analysis, they suggest,

"...cannot be either the verification of some one kind of story or the achievement of an ideal speech situation, but rather an understanding of the strains that make alternative narratives inevitable and a recognition of the diversity of human frustrations, aspirations, satisfactions, and imaginative contructions" (Bennett & Edelman 1985: 171).

- Another contributor to the journal's feature is Walter Fisher (1985). In fact for many of the contributors his work is mentioned or discussed in their article usually because it is seen as containing quite radical suggestions.

In giving a brief history of narrative as a communication 'paradigm', Fisher concedes that while *logos* and *mythos* were once united, they have now become separated.

In biblical overtones he writes:

"In the beginning was the word or, more accurately, the *logos*. And in the beginning, *logos* meant story, reason, rationale, conception, discourse, and/or thought... At least this was the case until the time of the pre-Socratic philosophers, Plato, and Aristotle" (Fisher 1985: 74).

As a result of this split *logos* became a specific term applied to philosophical or technical language while *mythos* was further divided into two: poetic and rhetoric.
In this 1985 article he tries to achieve two things:

(i) show how the separation between the rational and the narrational occurred;
(ii) suggest how they can come together again - under the narrative paradigm.

Therefore much of his thesis is designed to show how contemporary narrative communication can

"...be considered a dialectical synthesis of two traditional strands in the history of rhetoric: the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme" (Fisher 1985: 75, also 1984: 2),

thus overcoming the notion of a single mode of human communication.

Near the conclusion Fisher highlights the differences between his concept of narration (people as authors) and the dramatism of Kenneth Burke (people as actors):

"The narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature. It envisions existing institutions as providing 'plots' that are always in the process of re-creation rather than as scripts; it stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (coauthors)" (Fisher 1985: 86).

Because Fisher's work is seen as important by many of the contributors to this feature, a brief reference to other Fisher articles should prove helpful.

In an earlier article Fisher (1984) makes it clear that narrative doesn't just mean
"a fictive composition whose propositions may be true or false and have no necessary relationship to the message of that composition... (It) has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination" (Fisher 1984: 2)

and he offers the narrative paradigm as an alternative to the assumption that communication must always be "argumentative" and "rationalistic".

"The narrative paradigm challenges the notions that human communication - if it is to be considered rhetorical - must be an argumentative form, that reason is to be attributed only to discourse marked by clearly identifiable modes of inference and/or implication, and that the norms for evaluation of rhetorical communication must be rational standards taken essentially from informal or formal logic" (Fisher 1984: 2).

For Fisher the 'rational world paradigm' is well known as it has become foundational to Western thought. It presupposes that:

* humans are essentially rational beings;
* the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is based on argument;
* the conduct of argument is ruled by the dictates of the situation;
* rationality is determined by subject matter knowledge and argumentative ability, and
* the world is a set of 'logical puzzles' which can be resolved through appropriate analysis and application of reason.

In short, Fisher says, the 'rational world paradigm' assumes that argument is the product and process of being human. However, such a paradigm depends on a form of society that requires the participation of "qualified persons in public decision-making" (Fisher 1984: 4) and implies an elitist worldview with "some sort of hierarchical system, a community in which
some persons are qualified to judge and to lead and some other persons are to follow" (Fisher 1984: 9).

By contrast the 'narrative paradigm' presupposes that:

* humans are essentially storytellers;
* the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is 'good reasons';
* the production and practice of good reasons is ruled by matters of history, biography, culture and character;
* rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings - whether the stories as experienced ring true with the stories known to be true in people's lives, and
* the world is a series of stories which must be chosen among.

"In short", he writes:

"...the philosophical ground of the narrative paradigm is ontology. The materials of the narrative paradigm are symbols, signs of consubstantiation, and good reasons, the communicative expressions of social reality" (Fisher 1984: 8).

However it is not until he collected many of his articles and published them in a book (Fisher 1987) and added an extra chapter: 'In retrospect', that we can get a clearer sense of the direction of his paradigm:

(i) that there is merit in adopting the ancient meaning of 'logos' so as to escape "the notion of a single mode of human communication that has exclusive jurisdiction over knowledge" (1987: 193);
(ii) that narrative is the "foundational, conceptual configuration of ideas" for human communication...
(iii) that narrative is "omnipresent in human discourse" (Fisher 1987: 193).
Again he writes:

"We interpret our lives and our literature as stories that emerge within other stories of history, culture, and character - within all of which struggles and conflicts inhere" (Fisher 1987: 193).

- On the other hand, Michael McGee and John Nelson seek to dispel what they see is the "false dichotomy between narrativity and rationality" (McGee & Nelson 1985: 139), especially as advanced by Fisher.

Declaring they argue from a functional perspective they suggest that to "pit" narrative against the rational is, for them, "to repeat the error of the rationalists" (McGee & Nelson 1985: 145).

Suggesting that some previous translations of classical works of rhetoric have not always reflected the 'spirit' of the original writers, they argue that a new understanding of the use of the word narratio in the works of Quintilian, for example, is needed. Instead of translating it as 'narrative', many have used the word 'statement'. To use such a word reflects a culture that "discovers rather than makes truths" and thus misses the "subjective, relative affirmation" intended in the original script.

What is there in the original, they suggest, is an accent on 'narration' rather than 'facts'.

"The story is supposed to persuade: it alleges facts, and it aims no higher than plausibility... Credibility is the issue, not facticity..." (McGee & Nelson 1985: 149).
What is needed now is not a narrative paradigm but an epistemology of narrativity.

Beginning with a study of mythic epistemology as an alternative to the "modern epistemology of non-narrative rationality", they suggest that the character of mythic narration is

"to address community affairs from a popular standpoint - through friendly persuasion rather than authoritative declaration" (McGee & Nelson 1985: 153).

Mythical argument insists that "emotion and imagination - as well as intellect - are not merely unavoidable but legitimate and valuable in public debate.

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As with 'indirect' narrative communication, there is much in the suggestions of the contributors to the "Homo narrans" feature with which I can resonate. That:

- 'narrative' is an alternative to 'rhetoric';
- narrative moves horizontally through time rather than hierarchically;
- narrative is 'multivocal, rhetoric is 'univocal';
- narrative represents a universal medium of human consciousness;
- people are essentially storytellers, authors and co-authors.

However, the position from which some contributors appear to be arguing seems to be the adoption of a broad, inclusive mega-narrative-paradigm. It is my suggestion, on the other hand, that a more limited appreciation of what should be called narrative is really needed.
I am not convinced it would be helpful to reconstruct a 'union' between narrative and the other modes of communication - dialectic and rhetoric, under some narrative megaparadigm. This is despite my acceptance of the suggestion that humans are primarily storytelling animals.

Neither am I convinced that narrative is necessarily grounded in ontology. Rather I would want to join the ranks of those who suggest it is more metaphorical - 'redescribing' the world.

I also wish to aline myself with those who suggest there needs to be a genuine separation between narrative - primary intuitive language as "redescribing reality", and rhetoric - secondary didactic language, which "aims at persuasion" (Ricoeur 1975: 88) through argument.

And any link between rhetoric and narrative should go no further than acknowledging, as does another French religious communication scholar Pierre Babin, that the two need to function in "stereo" - simultaneous but quite different (Babin 1991: 182 - 184).

However, Babin goes on to say symbolic or narrative communication should have priority in an audiovisual or electronic media age - a form of 'affirmative action' - because it represents the best way of "arousing" peoples interiority.

I first met Babin in Manila in the Philippines in 1989. He was presenting a paper on "Communication and participation" as part of the World Association for Christian Communication's first World Communication
Congress which we were attending. During another session of the Congress I had the privilege of sharing in a workshop with him.

In his paper Babin suggested that due mainly to the influence of Descartes the western world has all but glorified the intellect, analysis and organised action. He pointed out that from early childhood we have been "steeped in the underlying notion that ideas govern the world" (Babin 1990: 6). As a result:

(i) communication was interpreted to mean the conveying of information or ideas or doctrine from one (a sender) to another (a receiver), and
(ii) participation meant acting consistently on the idea, in a rational and organised way.

But that was prior to the arrival of electronic technology and the media that technology spawned - audiovisual communication shaped by vibration/modulation.

"The essence of the electronic factor," he suggests, "is stimulation".

"The young generation prefers the excitement of living to ideas. It is less interested in correct thinking than in intense experience... Yesterday we saw the message in terms of intellectual content; today we have the message in terms of stimulant for living" (Babin 1990: 7).

He never argues that it is no longer necessary to analyse, define or rationalise. Instead he suggests that (i) there has been a shift of emphasis rather than any massive rejection of the intellect, and (ii) we should do away with the notion that the language of emotion and symbols constitute a second-rate form of communication.
"Quite the opposite", he writes, "it is the language of the highest form of communication, used by sages and mystics. It is the language of the spirit, superior to communication based on (second level) intellect" (Babin 1990: 8).

And again,

"By giving preference to the language of receptivity and feelings, of great symbolic images, gesture and the voice we can dignify what is most important, namely, inner harmony rather than rationalism" (Babin 1990: 8).

To speak the language of analysis and rational argument is to encourage reflection and discussion. To speak the language of the symbolic and narrative we rouse the emotions, awaken aspirations and "appeal to the desires slumbering in the innermost heart" (Babin 1990: 8).

This thesis therefore suggests that such a style should shape religious communication in the electronic age.
Chapter 5
NARRATIVE AND RELIGION

"We are storytelling animals. As our primitive ancestors sat around the fire carving spearheads and eating blackberries they told stories which in time were woven into a tapestry of myth and legend. Stories told the people of a tribe who they were, where they had been, where they were going, and how to stay friendly with the spirits. To be a person is to have a story" (Keen & Valley-Fox 1989: 1).

"Myths are primarily the property of the community and the life of the individual is shaped in interaction with them. Christian mythic stories concern God. They focus on the relational flow between humankind and Mystery and so are revelatory of both person and God" (Shea 1978a: 74).

Prior to the 1991 General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra (ACT), a group of Australian women met to tell their stories.

Ranjini Rebera writes:

"As the manuscripts came in... a kaleidoscope of colour began to emerge... together they reached out into a dreaming and a visioning that was breathtaking in their boldness and exhilarating in their expression.

"At no stage in the weaving of the stories was there a desire to achieve a perfect harmony of colour. There was never any intention of bringing stories 'up to standard'. There would be stories. There would be the storytellers. That would be its validity and its authenticity" (Rebera 1991: 3 - 4).

Rebera and her colleagues were putting into practice what some of the narrative communication theorists have been advocating. And that is, there is a need to distinguish between descriptive narrative and the more general explanatory narrative (Polkinghorne 1988: 161 - 177). The former resembles a report which describes the stories operating in people's lives
and seeks to understand what the stories are about; the latter presents the
events and episodes of life into stories.

During that World Council of Churches Assembly two major
presentations on the theme of the gathering were presented: one by a well-
known male Orthodox bishop who has spent many years in the
ecumenical movement; the other by a little-known Korean woman
theologian from Ewha Women's University in Seoul.

While both presentations were significant to the life of the Assembly, it
was the second one, by Korean Chung Hyung Kyung that was, and remains,
most memorable. Through dance, music, drama and symbol, Chung
involved herself and her audience in an experience of the heart.

It was, I believe, a watershed experience.

She drew on her experience as a Asian feminist theologian whose
methodology is shaped by liberation theology: inductive, collective and
inclusive. A theology which begins with experience and oral storytelling.

"Storytelling has been women's way of inheriting truth in many
Asian countries because the written, literary world has belonged to
privileged males... The power of storytelling lies in its embodied
truth. Women talked about their concrete, historical life experience
and not about abstract, metaphysical concepts" (Chung 1990: 104).

For Chung stories are the first stage of communication action - moving
from telling, to active listening, to critical social analysis, to theological
reflection. This process comes together through a hermeneutical reflection
called "dialogical imagination" as people, especially Asian women,
"discover from both the bible stories and their people's stories the wisdom needed for their own survival and liberation... With all the insights Asian women theologians have discovered from women's stories, social analysis, and biblical reflection, they critically review from their own perspective the traditional doctrines of Christian theology" (Chung 1990: 107).

Chung is a contemporary theologian who shapes her theology in a narrative fashion. There are several others - some of them dating their 'use' of narrative in theology back to the early 1970s.

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Why religious narrative? Why stories in an electronic age?

Let me share the suggestions of some of those who have written about the power of religious narrative. But first, two stories about 'story'...

(i) Once a number of merchants were travelling across the sea to sell their wares.

One evening they talked together about their dreams of wealth.

One said, "I have the finest gold and silver to trade. I will be rich beyond my wildest dreams."

Another spoke up, "I have the rarest cloth and perfumes from the ends of the earth. I will be wealthier than all of you together."

Others bragged about the value of their grain, their animals, and their jewels. Finally a rather shabbily dressed man said quietly, "I have a cargo worth more than all the riches of the earth. You see, I carry in my memory the stories of our people."

The others laughed at him. "You think you will make a fortune from stories?" The man just smiled.

Later in the voyage a storm began to toss the ship about, finally reducing it to splinters against the rocks near the shore. All the cargo was lost, but the passengers were able to swim to shore.

The merchants who had hoped to become rich were reduced to begging in the street. But the storyteller was welcomed into the
community. Those to whom he told stories saw that he was fed and housed.

Stories really were the most valuable cargo. (Williams 1983/84: 35).

The second story is typical of that told in the Jewish Hasidic tradition.

(ii) 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 armchair, 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. (Bausch 1984: 15 - 16).

Storytelling is "fundamental to humans" (Richards 1991: 7) and is "bedrock human activity" (Shea 1982: 23). John Shea also reminds us there is a rich interweaving to storytelling:

(i) people tell and retell experiences that have more-than-ordinary impact upon them;

(ii) out of the telling and retelling of the experience come convictions and attitudes about life;
(iii) these convictions and attitudes can help create certain sensitivities with people.

A story can awaken stories in others, help them to remember and empower them to tell their own stories (Bausch 1984). Stories do this, according to William Bausch, because they provoke curiosity and compel repetition, evoke right-brain imagination and tenderness, as well as healing.

"Story revisits an old situation in a new way. Story... helps a person to go back, not to change an unchangeable situation, but to reinterpret it creatively" (Bausch 1984: 25).

This doesn't make stories 'magic'. But it does act as an invitation for us to explore how stories reconcile the past, envision the future and redeem the present.

And what excites me more about storytelling is it is an activity which everyone can share in. There is no academic pre-requisite. Stories natural environment is, agreeing with Shea, "the grass roots community" (Shea 1978b: 362). And the 'grass roots community' of this research is a church congregation and the informal stories told by its members - both personal and community stories.

Storytelling invites the hearers to move from being observers to participants.

Sam Keen (1970: 86), a 'disciple' of the cultural anthropologist Joseph Campbell, goes so far as to say that telling stories has a religious function:
"(It) is functionally equivalent to belief in God, and, therefore, 'the death of God' is best understood as modern man's inability to believe that human life is rendered ultimately meaningful by being incorporated into a story."

His call to theology: find a new method for telling stories and for locating the presence of the holy.

"In the non-story we tell in the new world, a man's identity is fashioned by doing rather than remembering; his credentials for acceptance are the skills of a trade rather than the telling of stories" (Keen 1970: 86).

Some of that new work Keen called for more than 20 years ago has commenced, resulting is a kaleidoscope of imagination, story and experience. And Keen has continued to be one of those who have shaped that work. In his most recent book he tells about his own academic journey. The 'argument' shape of philosophical theology, his earlier discipline, is clearly spelt out:

"...I was studying philosophy and honing the weapons of dialectic, debate, and argumentation. By the time I was a practicing Ph.D. my mind was even more skilled than my body in the art of self-defense. As a professor I engaged in daily combat with colleagues and students. I was good at the academic game, enjoyed it, and played to win. I hardly noticed that, over the years, I had gradually adopted a combative stance toward others - the mind and posture of a warrior. I was much better at fighting than at wondering or loving" (Keen 1991: 36).

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Terrance Tilley (1985: 39), in seeking to move beyond stories as decorations or mere illustrations for a Sunday sermon, has identified three modes to stories: myths are stories that set up worlds; parables are stories that upset worlds; actions are realistic stories set within worlds. While the structuralist John Crossan (1975: 59), who is an advocate of parables and
parabolic communication, identifies five: myth establishes world; apologue defends world; action investigates world; satire attacks world, and parable subverts world.

On the other hand, while theologian and communications practitioner Michael Traber (1988: 7 - 9) comes close to Crossan in identifying five shapes or modes to story, he does not share totally Crossan's structuralist ideology.

For Traber stories can be:

* **foundational**: those stories relating to the origins of the community which help to make sense of the present and provide a prospect for the future;

* **collective memory**: about the traditions, the heros and heroines of a community;

* **parable**: exposes issues and challenges with the unexpected;

* **pseudo-story**: covers up issues;

* **counter-stories**: attempt to 'put the record straight'; rebel against the 'established' stories of a community.

He also suggests that humans are compulsive storytellers.

"The story is the oldest structured form of communication, and still the most effective one. People's non-material environment is made up of a host of symbolic constructions, called stories or legends or glorifications of people's history, or origins which are essential elements of all cultures, both oral and mass-mediated" (Traber 1987: 321)."
Adopting a somewhat different position within narrative, Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves offers some radical suggestions about the need to begin a process of "unlearning" and discovering the pure joy of stories.

"... stories are like poems; they are not to be understood. Something which is understood is never repeated. Understanding exhausts the word. It leaves the word empty with nothing left to be said. Once the word is understood it is reduced to silence. "But a story is like a sonata, a love embrace, a poem, a sunset: we want them to be repeated, because their savor is inexhaustible" (Alves 1990: 23 - 24).

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Before moving to another who has spent many years working with narrative, it should also be noted there are those who offer words of caution about giving stories 'magical qualities'.

In several articles Wil Beardslee (Beardslee: 1975, 1987, 1990), influenced by both process theology and literary criticism, has cautioned against adopting a too optimistic stance on story. That while we all need and use stories, in our current 'post-modern culture' the traditional story-patterns are being challenged.

He sees a need for both 'orienting' stories and 'disorienting' stories. The latter he finds in the biblical studies work of Funk and Crossan on the parables, feminist and liberation thinkers; the former he identifies as the traditional Judaeo-Christian story which has formed much of our culture.

What is now needed, according to Beardslee, is a balance between the two:

"...there will always be times when an adequate orienting story challenges us to believe in possibilities that seem too good to be true. While one of the functions of such a story is to enable us to
feel at home in the world, this function must stay in balance with the other one, of promising us that things can be better than we have found out how to make them" (Beardslee 1990: 26).

While Richard Lischer suggests there are definite 'limits' to story, especially for those who, according to him, are story-poor...

"The severely handicapped... the addicted, the poverty stricken, the hungry, the imprisoned, and many other categories of margined people whose lives are structured not by the syntax of story but by immediate needs or bewilderment at the unrelatedness of things" (Lischer 1984: 31).

And should the story be a "comforting story" there is little room, according to him, for "new options" and a "re-imaging of the future".

I feel Beardslee's comments are timely. They also reflect the influence narrative structuralists and literary critics (not to mention process thought) have had on his thought: (i) that there is more than one 'style' or characteristic associated with story, and (ii) the importance with which parable as story needs to be taken.

Lischer's comments are the more intriguing because I feel they can be approached in more than one way.

For instance, Network of Biblical Storytellers member Richard Ward (1992), commenting on Lischer's article, suggests it can be a sobering thought to those of narrative persuasion to hear Lischer's claims - that "there is not as much capacity for understanding narrative out there in the market place as we think there is..."
Lischer's claim that there are some who do not have a story is, I would suggest, limited. Everyone's life is a collection of stories - a series of events that arise out of particular experiences and are woven together anew as we seek to 'redescribe' reality. That these stories are many and often half-finished - fragmentory - does not 'limit' story in my opinion.

However, pondering Lischer's comments further, I wonder if he may also want to suggest some people do not have an opportunity to tell their story as no one will listen to them. If this is the case, does it mean 'story' can only be 'story' when there is someone to listen? And secondly, does he suggest that to tell a story commands 'power', and 'power' is what some/many do not have in our society?

Or, maybe some stories just can not be told. They must remain silent. This I believe, has been the experience of many Australian Aboriginal and American Native (Indian) people as they have begun to discover the stories of their culture in the midst of dominating Western cultures.

While these questions remain, Lischer's comments also bring into focus both Westerhoff's and Babin's suggestions: that a healthy "spiritual life" occurs when the rational and the symbolic remain distinct but are in 'stereo' with each other.

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One person who has attempted to combine narrative, communication theory and new testament theology, specifically within the context of an electronic media-saturated culture, is Thomas Boomershine.
While most of his comments are directed at theology (systematic and philosophical), I believe it would be equally valid to compare his comments with rhetoric for two reasons:

(i) early christians 'adopted' the teaching methods of classical rhetoric very early in the life of the church (Arnold & Frandsen 1984: 6; Conway 1992: 19 - 84), and


On theology Boomershine says it has, in its oral form at least, become oral disputation about propositions and ideas.

"In the modern period, theology has become increasingly conducted in the medium of writing and specifically writing intended to be read in silence. Theology is then... critical reflection on thought or speech about God in the form of argument" (Boomershine 1989a: 6).

Substitute the word 'rhetoric' for 'theology' and most of what Boomershine has said on theology can be applied to rhetoric.

Narrative is about awareness of a primary experience. Rhetoric, on the other hand, is about the level of rationality in experience and, like theology, is a second order activity and/or language.

But Boomershine takes us even further by dividing narrative into two streams: literary narration and oral narration (Boomershine 1988).

In sympathy with Wilder's passion that Jesus was "a voice not a penman, a herald not a scribe" (Wilder 1964/71: 13), Boomershine attempts to reclaim some of the old ground within New Testament hermeneutics - a revised look at form and literary criticism.
His complaint against many of the form critics is that while in the main they accept the biblical narrative circulated as oral narratives before they were written down, there was little or no interest in "the stories as stories" (Boomershine 1989b: 9).

Boomershine wants to take seriously the oral tradition - indeed, to give it an advantage over the written word.

Following McLuhan, Boomershine suggests there has been a significant change in biblical and theological thought due to the arrival of the electronic age - even if the majority of biblical scholars and church leaders are yet to recognise this.

The change: major movements in history are caused by changes in the modes of communication. As a result:

"The task of Biblical interpretation is to render the primary traditions of the Bible meaningful and alive for persons and communities in later, radically different, cultural and historical contexts. The primary communications system of the community provides the context within which Biblical interpretation happens. It determines the values, attitudes, and overall hermeneutical options for the interpretation of the Biblical tradition in that cultural context" (Boomershine 1987a: 145).

Boomershine's work is directed towards biblical interpretation. I want to broaden that out a bit.

To map out the story of communication change a four-stage grid would result:

1. Oral communication: sound, rhythm, melody.
2. Written (script) communication: paper and ink, pen, manuscript.


The transition from (1). Oral to (2). Written, did not result in a transition from sound to silence,

"but from sounds recomposed by a storyteller to sounds read from a manuscript" (Boomershine 1987b: 61).

The transition from (1). Oral to (3). Print, silenced sound for the great majority.

The characteristic action of contemporary printed narrative is "reading a story by sitting alone and looking at the text in silence" (Boomershine 1989b: 12 - 13). The characteristic action of oral narrative is 'sounded words' (Ong 1982: 31) as a storyteller shares her story with others and imaginations are stirred (Sullivan 1982: 129).

An assumption of this thesis, then, is narrative in its written/printed form is different from narrative in its oral form.

This assumption is supported by others who have studied both oral and written languages.

Edmund Carpenter is one such scholar. He suggests that writing

"encouraged an analytical mode of thinking with emphasis upon lineality. Oral languages tended to be polysynthetic, composed of
great, tight conglomerates, like twisted knots, within which images were juxtaposed, insepertely fused..." (Carpenter 1960: 162).

Canadian Marshall McLuhan says:

"...in speech we tend to react to each situation that occurs, reacting in tone and gesture even to our own act of speaking. But writing tends to be a kind of separate or specialist action in which there is little opportunity or call for reaction. The literate man or society develops the tremendous power of acting in any matter with considerable detachment from the feelings or emotional involvement that a nonliterate man or society would experience" (McLuhan 1964: 89).

While David Riesman says that once writing and books become a dominant communication vehicle in a culture, that culture or society can never be the same again.

"Books bring with them detachment and a critical attitude that is not possible in an oral tradition... The book... is an encouragement to isolation" (Riesman 1960: 110 - 112).

The work of Jesuit priest Walter Ong is, I believe, also helpful here. Probably more than any other he has spent a considerable amount of his academic life examining the differences brought about within cultures as a result of the shifts in communication/media models.

In the preface to the published form of his 1964 Terry Foundation Lectures he said while both the Hebrews and early Christians knew both the spoken word as well as the alphabet, for them

"...the Word, even when written, was much closer to the spoken word than it normally is for twentieth-century technological man" (Ong 1967: ix).
For the 'twentieth-century technological' person, the written word seems to have taken over and become the norm, resulting in us being "abject prisoners of the literate culture" (Ong 1967: 18) with little sense of its oral beginnings.

"We have been slow to note... that writing is a derivative of speech, not vice versa, and that speech in its original state has nothing at all to do with writing" (Ong 1967: 21).

He points out that a basic difficulty most people have today is the tendency to regard words as "chiefly or ideally as records". We are inclined to think this way because we

"...think of (words) as... written out or printed. Once we can get over our chirographic-typographic squint here, we can see that the word in its original habitat of sound, which is still its native habitat, is not a record at all. The word is something that happens, an event in the world of sound through which the mind is enabled to relate actuality to itself" (Ong 1967: 22).

While writing and reading are usually solitary activities and can therefore isolate people, oral communication tends to unite people in groups. This community-building aspect of oral communication is due to the spoken word always being an event, a moment in time.

Ong writes:

"Because in its physical constitution as sound, the spoken word proceeds from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, as persons, the spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups" (Ong 1982: 74).

Introduce a printed handout to an audience and ask them the read it, and each reader "enters into his or her own private reading world" resulting in the "unity of the audience (being) shattered, to be re-established only
when oral speech begins again" (Ong 1982: 74). Further, Ong claims that there is no collective noun for 'readers' corresponding to 'audience'.

"To think of readers as a united group, we have to fall back on calling them an 'audience', as though they were in fact listeners" (Ong 1982: 74).

Ong also lists a number of shifts or stages of the word in communication/media:

(i) oral or oral-aural;
(ii) script, from alphabet to alphabetic movable type, and
(iii) electronic.

And while he would agree that new media and/or communication models create new uses rather than replace existing models, both Ong and others would also agree we are now living in an (electronic) media-saturated culture which has brought television to 'centre stage'.

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Responding to the imaginative suggestions of both Alves and Babin, I am of the opinion religious communication needs to change direction. And it should do this by reimagining the 'poetic' in communication.

Indeed, a new mode called 'narrative/symbolic' should be introduced to the 'Homo narrans' conversation and it should replace that mode previously called 'poetic' - be it now in slightly amended form - thus emphasising its narrativity.

Narrative/symbolic communication is genuine inquiry with a well established academic pedigree.
Narrative/symbolic communication and life go together. It has its origins in our experiences in dialogue with the natural world around us.

And narrative/symbolic communication:

- encourages reflection but is different from analytical, rationalistic thinking;
- is heuristic by nature, searching for likely accounts rather than definitions and conclusions;
- establishes an awareness of/communion with the world of the other rather than just seeking after/interpreting meaning;
- has potential to broaden human conversation by repudiating mere individualism, and
- is more faithful to the general shape of the religious tradition which is Christianity.

Religious communication shaped by narrative/symbolic is an invitation rather than an argument. It respects all participants as both capable of and having the right to, arrive at a conclusion which is their own. To hear their own stories coming from within.

And it invites us to move beyond the question: 'How can we transform...?' as if that is something which can happen from without, to discover another: how to exist in it... (Hopper 1992: 40), how to resonate with those self-purifying experiences that generate the power of transformation from within (Song 1992: 38).
Chapter 6
NARRATIVE IN A MEDIA-SATURATED CULTURE

"The newsagent was busy. Several customers had already lined up to be served by the time I got there. Each of them had at least one newspaper or magazine in their hand. Some coins were in their other hand.

"Only one person now in front of me. Then it will be my turn to be served. As she handed over her money she said: 'Oh wait a minute. I'd better check to see if the most important bit is in the paper'. With that she flicked over some pages and out fell a glossy insert. Picking it up she said: 'Ah, yes. It's there!'

"She was holding a copy of the weekly TV guide" (Hunt 1992: 3).

"The question: 'Who tells the stories?' is one of special significance to those working in the church or synagogue in today's media age. ...realising that the world is being imagined for us is an important step toward understanding how electronic communications work and the first step toward applying critical thinking to these communications" (Warren 1992: 18).

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The literary tradition of Australia suggests that we are a community of storytellers.

The two national literary favourites - Henry Lawson and 'Banjo' Paterson - along with such other greats as Patrick White, Frank Hardy, Jack Davis and Thomas Keneally, still influence and shape our self-understanding of who we are.

While newer writers such as Sally Morgan, Helen Garner, Elizabeth Jolley and Peter Carey, film makers such as Peter Weir, Gillian Armstrong and
George Miller, and songs mainly from 'country' and 'folk' singers, carry forward this 'Australian narrative' in both challenging and assuring ways.

There is now in Australia a renewed sense of Australian 'folk culture'.

While some of this 'Australiana' tradition may be dismissed as an attempt to return to romanticism (for a commercial gain), such a dismissal should not lose sight of the ability of this folk culture to shape people's worldviews. For folk culture - even within mass culture - always remains close to the grassroots of society, localised and unsophisticated - when compare to elitist or 'high culture'. For folk culture deals "directly with the concrete world intensely familiar to its audience..." (Real 1977: 7).

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Australian society in the last decade of the 20th century is a society saturated by what some claim is the first 'universal culture' - mass media. Radio, newspapers, magazines, outdoor posters, television...

The medium which is seen as having the most influence, is television. "Its influence", writes Colin Morris, reflecting on society from a British perspective, "is all-pervasive. It is not simply a device like a vacuum cleaner which serves us; it is an environment that wraps us around like a blanket" (Morris 1984: 9).

On the other hand, television is "a murky world to most church people" according to New Zealander and former World Council of Churches director of communication, John Bluck. Yet it is the medium which has taken over many of the social roles previously held by the church.
"It's TV commentators... more often than bishops and pastors who tell us who we are and where to look for saints and sinners. It's the daily diet of news bulletins that shapes our view of what's most urgent, important and attractive. And it's the programmes we watch for fun that reveal our deepest sympathies" (Bluck 1989: 44).

Television, invented in 1923, came some 5,000 years after the invention of writing but only 450 years after the invention of print/moveable type. It arrived in Australia in 1956, some 14 years after it became a commercial viability in the USA and just in time for the Olympic Games which were to be held in Melbourne (Vic).

Television transmission in Australia up until the mid 1970s was in 'black and white'. Then 'colour' was introduced. And the Australian population started to buy television sets all over again!

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Television communicates through sound and images. Several of those who have studied television also claim it's essence is as a narrative medium. Television is "at its best when it tells stories," claims Angela Tilby (1991: 98).

In a detailed annotated bibliography Robert White of the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture suggests television is society's storyteller and myth-maker.

"Producers know that we come to an evening of TV to relax and they tend to translate news, documentary, sport, etc. into folktale formats to entertain us. But producers also know that we bring with us, in the back of our consciousness, nagging worries about how rising crime rates or economic depression may affect our personal lives. Deeper mythical themes respond to these perennial human anxieties" (White 1987: 1).
Roger Silverstone would agree, but he would go further.

Adopting what would appear to be a structuralist (Levi-Straussian) model of narrative, Silverstone suggests that television's

"primary mechanism... is narrative, and that it is through a study of this code, the rules according to which stories are told, both fictional and non-fictional, that much will be learnt about the nature of television as a whole" (Silverstone 1981: 8).

If one is to succeed in television then, according to Silverstone, it becomes essential to learn the specific narrative 'language' of television. And this 'language' emerges out of the tradition of folktale, myth and entertainment - a rich oral tradition informed by "the knowledge of commonsense" (Silverstone u.d.: 14).

Silverstone suggests that television 'language' is based on its oral rather than written narrative order or form. Stories are told according to conventions and rules. By way of comparison, Silverstone refers to the research of Albert Lord and agrees that mediaeval singers, for example, used both memory and form to sing their tales. While every performance was just that little bit different, it still could be said to be the same song or tale because the same structure was followed.

"The singers learn not whole songs... but units and rules for their construction. Singers, therefore, have the freedom to construct each time they are called upon to sing a new tale, but yet that tale is sufficiently familiar for them to be able to construct it satisfactorily and for the audience to follow" (Silverstone 1981: 43).

Television, as part of the oral narrative tradition, is no more than a magnification of the everyday culture of oral communication. No doubt it
is an oral tradition different from the orality of pre-literate societies, but none-the-less, oral.

"Television is supremely a story-telling medium; the structures that generate its texts... are significantly those of narrative. These narrative patterns are not the product of print technology, but pre-date it, and television in re-affirming them re-establishes the centrality of oral culture in our experience" (Silverstone 1981: 44).

What viewers make of the events and things they see on television is, according to Silverstone, still "a thorny problem". But what is clear is the continuing importance of narrative.

In a later paper which explores the narrative and mythic role of television documentary, Silverstone suggests that

"(t)he stuff of television is the stuff of gossip, rumour and fantasy. It is implicated in our dreams and in our identities, as individuals and as members of communities. We use television to organise our experience, to help us create order in our world. We take it for granted, but it seems to have become an essential part of our everyday lives" (Silverstone 1987: 4).

Wesley Carr (1990) says the modern mass media, especially television, perform three significant tasks. They:

(i) shape the notion of the world by which people live and orient themselves;
(ii) become the place where values are embodied, and
(iii) express the essence of contemporary culture which in the past was assigned to other "symbol-bearing institutions".

He writes:
"The mass media... both restructure the world which we inhabit and reorder our ability to realize what we perceive. In a sense, therefore, they now constitute the primary world we inhabit and to which we contribute" (Carr 1990: 16).

While American Gregor Goethals (1990) points out the media's role of restructuring the world is not often accepted as the 'everyday commonsense' opinion. She suggests that film, photography, and especially television all appear to have for many, a special "claim" on truth and authenticity, thus supporting the "false notion that these media are innocent observers" as reality unfolds.

"(They)... appear to unveil material existence and join viewers in a one-to-one relationship to it. The presence of the mediator is not so readily detected... We assume that the camera lens, like that of our own eye, is a transparent agent through which the world yields its palpable truths" (Goethals 1990: 126).

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In today's culture the world of public affairs, politics and current events - otherwise known as 'news' - enjoys a "privileged and prestigious position in our culture's hierarchy of values" (Hartley 1982: 5).

For television licensees, news is considered to be the 'flagship' of the station. For many viewers news stories are now their major information source.

As part of a wide-ranging analysis of news and bias in news, Robert White surveyed several scholarly opinions. Two which received only slight reference but are none-the-less important, are the suggestions of John Hulteng (1979) and Mark Levy (1977).
Hulteng suggests that "audience research tells TV producers that viewers want lively, entertaining TV newscasts, brief reports, lots of action, and not much detail" (White 1980: 9), while Levy's two major conclusions as to why people view TV news are (i) a desire to be informed, and (ii) reassurance that "the viewers own life is not so bad after all and that the nation's problems are under control or being solved" (White 1980: 9).

But what is 'news'?

News has traditionally been known as the gathering of 'stories'. Journalists still write stories and 'spike' them, if in their opinion, they are 'not a story' that can be used (told or read or printed).

Keith Windschuttle (1988) suggests that a survey of media studies would show there are at least four models of media 'news'.

1. The free market model:
News is an objective body of truth about the world.

The journalist's task is to discover the events which occur "and report them in prose or on film as faithfully as possible" (Windschuttle 1988: 261) according to certain important criteria: public interest.

2. The manipulative model:
News is that which is in the interests of the owner.

The journalist's task becomes that of mere hack "churning out propaganda that suits the needs of their employers". But more than that: "they cover up the truth about society, presenting the existing social order
as the best of all possible worlds and either suppress or ridicule alternative viewpoints" (Windschuttle 1988: 263).

3. The bureaucratic model:

News is an organised response to a series of routine bureaucratic processes. The journalist's task is less gathering and writing up news events and more (i) the covering of various 'rounds' - police, airport, industrial, political, and (ii) receiving a considerable amount of comment and/or information from media releases issued by public relations and publicity firms.

4. The ideological consensus model:

News is neither a reflection of society nor a distortion of the world. Rather it is a "broad but selective interpretation of society through a (powerful and) mediating ideology" (Windschuttle 1988: 270).

The journalist's task is to both define what the significant news events are and offer interpretations as to how to understand those events.

All four models are criticised by Windschuttle for being flawed. As an alternative Windschuttle attempts to broaden out the issue from 'what is news?' to 'why news is consumed?' For that he suggests it becomes necessary to focus on the audience. But

"...we have to reject any simple view that news is merely a straightforward reflection of reality. ...news should be seen like other forms of popular culture... as a cultural expression originating within the experience of (people themselves)..."
And then identifying favourably with Claude Levi-Strauss, Windschuttle suggests:

"I want to argue that a great deal of what comprises the news are the myths of our time... What happens when a journalist recognizes a 'good news story' is that he or she is bringing his own humanity and socialization to bear on a particular set of events, and picking up, instinctively, the mythical elements of his own culture. The journalist's 'news sense' is the process of identifying and satisfying the demands of his audience for myth" (Windschuttle 1988: 275 - 281).

Another Australian, media studies academic Ian Clements (1986) divides 'news' into three categories: newscasts, feature, and issue journalism.

**Newscasts** are the most familiar. They have become important programs for licensees and are usually placed in prime time slots. Each newscast tends to cram a large number of stories into each (usually) 30-minute telecast. "Unfortunately," writes Clemments, "the most important stories of the day, mainly political or economic, receive the same narrow focus as the latest TAB robbery" (Clements 1986: 5).

**Feature** news programs, such as the Nine Network program *60 Minutes*, focuses on a particular problem or social sore "as suggestive of the whole". While Clements says it is a "plausible technique" he goes on to suggest that it "resurrects the old economists' fallacy that the macrocosm is the microcosm writ large" (Clements 1986: 5).

**Issue journalism** tries to go beyond the feature program by looking at the wider problems and their causes - often extremely complex to say the least - but many such programs "show little inclination to go beyond the studio discussion and rarely has a technique been more abused. Panels of
politicians, trade unionists, academics, and industrialists, will seldom succeed in 30 minutes in communicating anything but confusion" (Clements 1986: 5 - 6).

While most of what he says is critical of both news and journalism, Clements suggests a more creative option would be to integrate news/current affairs into one department with clearly defined but inter-related roles and functions. But to do this licensees and journalists would have to admit that the "idea of purely factual reporting, which supposedly by-passes all problems of interpretation... is an empty myth" (Clements 1986: 7). That is, all journalists interpret. The result is ironic:

"...most broadcast journalism is partial. It favours the views of one group at the expense of those of another. In the main it reflects the views of the repositories of power: government, political parties, business, trade unions... As a result of trying to drive a wedge between fact and interpretation, most journalists adopt restrictive and simplistic news values" (Clements 1986: 7).

This particular issue is also examined by Elizabeth Bird and Robert Dardenne (1988) who state that most news journalists argue that what they are doing is objective reporting of reality ('hard news'), and not constructing reality, which narrative ('soft news') is seen to be. Reasons for this argument often comes from the journalists in particular - who see their work as "steeped in the ideology of objective reality" (Bird & Dardenne 1988: 82) and the news media in general, due in part to the privileged status given to news "as reality and truth".

However, according to Bird and Dardenne to adopt such arguments "has held back productive discussion of the narrative qualities of news" (Bird & Dardenne 1988: 69) in at least two ways:
(i) It has allowed the 'transmission model' of news - from professionals who have the news, to the audience who do not - to dominate, and has largely prevented any study of the news as a "unified body that exhibits clear themes and patterns."

(ii) It has allowed a 'split' to occur between stories, based on content. That is, it is accepted "that 'hard' news is informative and factual (and therefore about reality and truth), while 'soft' news is diverting (and about entertainment)."

On this second issue they suggest:

"This perception blinds us to the way narrative devices are used in all news writing, maintaining the illusion that the structural devices used in hard news are merely neutral techniques that act as a conduit for events to become information, rather than ways in which a particular kind of narrative text is created" (Bird & Dardenne 1988: 69).

In defence of their position they argue that considering news as narrative does not:

(i) negate the value of news;
(ii) imply that news does not inform;
(iii) downplay the role played in news gathering by journalists.

But they do agree that their news worldview does introduce another dimension to news,

"...one in which the stories of news transcends their traditional functions of informing and explaining" (Bird & Dardenne 1988: 69).

That is, while the specific information may change - names, dates, places - the narrative framework or 'form' into which this information fits does
not change, and it is this framework that may 'communicate' more than
the individual parts.

"While news is not fiction" they suggest, "it is a story about reality, not
reality itself" (Bird & Dardenne 1988: 82). At the same time they
approvingly quote Gail Tuchman's 1976 article in the Journal of
Communication that being a journalist who deals with facts and being a
storyteller who tells tales are not exclusive activities.

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Perhaps the person who has helped shape more church communication
policy statements and denominational communication departments than
anyone else is William Fore. Fore has held two significant positions
during his many years in communication - president of the international
World Association for Christian Communication, as well as heading the
Communication Commission of the National Council of Churches (USA)
for 24 years.

He describes television as offering the viewer 'pictures' or 'images' of
reality. For some viewers though, this reality is seen as the "really real".
Just how real, Fore tells a story about an encounter the author and
producer of the 1970s TV sitcom 'Gilligan's Island', had with a
commander of the US Coast Guard.

It appears several naval and air force bases had received telegrams from
"concerned citizens" demanding something be done about a group of USA
citizens whom they had seen on the TV and who were stranded on a
Pacific island.
Fore comments:

"...if some adults, even a few, believed 'Gilligan's Island' was real, imagine the effect other television programs have, programs which place much greater emphasis upon reality" (Fore 1987: 56).

Mass media in general, and TV in particular, provide the stories and images that "explain to us who we are, what we can do, what we cannot do, who as nations we once were and who we can be - in other words, the worldview that explains, unites, and guides our lives" (Fore 1990: 51).

Pamela Mitchell agrees.

"Although (television) is not the sole communicator and does not replace other forms, it has centrality, both as a medium or form and as an institution that influences us" (Mitchell 1990: 100).

Calling on the research work of George Gerbner at the Annenberg School of Communication, Fore presents five central worldviews from television and "from which most of the images and symbols" in our society spring.

1. The fittest survive:
The fittest are the powerful, middle-class, white, male who are rewarded "with TV images of happiness".

2. Power and decision making start at the centre and move out:
Power and decision making happens by other people, for and/or to other people, especially in the areas of politics, economics and entertainment, resulting in an homogenisation of our society (Meyrowitz 1985), reducing most of us to the non-powerful edges.
3. **Happiness consists of limitless material acquisition:**
The TV world-view tells us that we are basically good (except for those
times when we have bad breath or wrinkled skin or broken nails);
happiness is the chief end of life, and that "happiness consists in obtaining
material goods" (Fore 1987: 67) - reinforcing the claim that commercial TV
is designed to 'maximize sales'.

4. **Progress is an inherent good:**
Everything is turned into a commodity and each member of the audience
is turned into a consumer.

5. **There exists a free flow of information:**
The fact is there is not a free flow of information, or opinions. Radical or
nonconformist points of view "have almost no opportunity to find
expression in mass television" (Fore 1987: 66).

He reserves his strongest criticism for 'commercial' television:

"...commercial television simply is not designed to maximize
communication. It is designed to maximize sales. It is structured to
meet the needs of the sponsors, not the needs of the audience.
Therefore, communication is one-way, and individuals in the
audience are treated as things to be 'influenced' in ways that have
nothing to do with their needs or their life histories" (Fore 1987: 71).

Fore's view reflects the general climate of opinion about television and its
'tainted' influence on us. And his comments are echoed by many others
for many reasons (Noone 1987; Postman 1985).

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Our society is being shaped and reshaped more by television than by any
It would also appear that 'common sense' would have us accept that with the introduction of a new medium, this introduction is in some sort of hierarchial order with what has gone before. That is, the movement is from oral to writing to print to electronic.

But I wish to suggest there is more discontinuity than continuity between 'print' and 'electronic'. I wish to suggest that 'electronic', especially television, is closer to 'oral' than to 'print'. That is, oral communication is usually closer to experience than is print - the latter indicative of a more reflective and critical stance "detached from the immediacy of experience" (Boomershine 1990: 72). Likewise, television is more compatible with the language of experience through sounds and images than to critical reflection (Inbody 1990: 91).

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The church in general and religious communication in particular, needs to take seriously narrative already present within culture. As Wesley Carr suggests, we live in a media-saturated environment. That environment is a "holding context" (Carr 1990: 96 - 105) shaped by stories. Thus who tells the stories becomes important.

And rather than supporting the notion that narrative is an inferior way of redescribing experience or gaining knowledge, there is a need to learn from much of the present 'conversation' with those who 'use' narrative, as offered in this thesis and seek ways of enabling the 'grassroots' of the church - members of a congregation - to experience an environment shaped by personal and community stories. To attempt to shape such an environment and tell the story of that experience, follows.
Chapter 7
THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

"In talking about social ecology we talk a lot about the experience of day-to-day living in the world. So it is not surprising that it is the experience of doing science that is given primacy over discussions about the 'nature' of science.

"However, the doing of science does not equate with the doing of social ecology because our actions as social ecologists are not limited to those of the scientific domain. My own view is that social ecology is a braiding of doings (and reflections on those doings); a braiding of the scientific and the artistic" (Russell 1991: 1).

"...science, like the humanities, like literature, is an affair of the imagination" (Black 1962: 243).

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The suggestion of this thesis that the multivocal context of telling and retelling of stories as a primary way to do research, is to suggest a different methodology than that traditionally associated with research - even when that research is aesthetically-based.

However, this thesis has been shaped by two worldviews called 'narrative inquiry', especially 'poetic', and 'social ecology' - the latter as practiced at the University of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury, Social Ecology Centre. Narrative inquiry has a long intellectual history. Much of that has already been demonstrated in other chapters of this thesis. Yet as I have discovered such a methodology has suffered due to this methodology being unrecognised by those charged with intellectual inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin 1990: 2 - 14).
To begin with, such a research methodology takes experience seriously, tends to be collaborative, qualitative and conducted in natural situations rather than a laboratory. As a result, 'story' comes to the surface.

In what I consider to be an excellent overview of 'narrative inquiry' as it relates to the study of education, Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin suggests:

"(t)he central value of narrative inquiry is its quality as subject matter. Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990: 10).

Where narrative inquiry and social ecology share common ground is in the general notion: how to study the ways humans experience the world.

Social ecology, while very similar to narrative inquiry, appears to be still evolving.

Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins (Reason & Hawkins 1988: 79), speaking from a position of inquiry similar to social ecology, suggest such a methodology can open two basic modes of approaching experience:

(i) explanation, and
(ii) expression.

The characteristics of explanation include classifying, conceptualising and building theories from experience. The researcher or inquirer 'stands back' from the research and 'discovers' or 'invents' concepts and relates these to a theoretical model. It is essentially an analytical approach.
On the other hand the characteristics of expression is the importance of 'meaning' and the acknowledgment of the role of the researcher in the life of the research.

"Meaning is part and parcel of all experience... We work with the meaning of the experience when we tell stories, write and act in plays, write poems, meditate, create pictures, enter psychotherapy... When we partake of life we create meaning; the purpose of life is making meaning" (Reason & Hawkins 1988: 80).

Rather than being in competition with each other, Reason and Hawkins suggests 'explanation' and 'expression' are two poles of dialectic. What is needed is the creation of 'space' between them "for dialogue and for dialectical development" (Reason & Hawkins 1988: 85).

But while I have great sympathy for their suggestions the focus of this thesis is not on 'understanding' but rather with 'awareness'. And any conclusions are not likely to be 'the truth' or 'definite answers', but resemble 'likely accounts' thus broadening human communication.

Paraphrasing some words of Eugine King, narrative is not just about interpreting a meaning "as if clarifying what the other" was trying to say is all that matters, but is also about establishing an awareness of/communion with "the world of the other, appreciating the horizons within which the other lives, feeling empathy for the feelings that form part of the other's experience", and "sensing the network of social relationships that support or bind the other" (King 1982: 16).

David Russell, pointing to the agenda of a social ecologist, comes closer to the spirit of both narrative inquiry and social ecology. He says the social ecologist:
"... strives to marry science, art, and religion in all that she does. The very nature of this marriage is such that it acts as a bulwark against a tendency in our culture to value literalism above all other expressions of meaning" (Russell u.d.: 1).

Later, and perhaps a little braver, he suggests a definition:

"Social ecology is 'action for change' informed by an ecologically ethical imperative. The vehicle is participatory research (researchers and clients are co-learners and co-researchers) with the focus being on the connecting relationships rather than on the people, or other elements, per se" (Russell 1988: 62).

In her latest book, Gregor Goethals (1990) tells a story which I believe expresses the spirit of 'social ecology' - collaborative inquiry; conversations with others who genuinely share in and help shape the research; a passion for the cause; solitary work; peer-group reflection.

She was commissioned to design a set of mosaic panels for a wall in a Jewish temple. The panels were to be 40 feet in length.

"... I consulted first with the rabbi and members of the building committee. As a preparatory step we met often to reflect upon the symbols of faith that were most valued by the congregation.

"As our discussions continued, these leaders gradually agreed that the major themes were praise, covenant, justice, and lamentation. This gave me the symbolism to work with.

As she commenced to experiment with various designs, and explore the inherent beauty and expressive character" of the Hebrew alphabet, she also began to discuss her work with all the different groups within the congregation. As a result of this sharing
"... I became convinced that the design for the large rectangular wall should feature Hebrew characters. But how? In what sort of composition? ... In the midst of this intensive, isolated period, I showed some of the compositions to a friend, a young architect from Israel. I began to discuss the project with him, selecting the design I thought strongest and most fitting for the space.

"He liked the design very much, but I remember most vividly his additional remarks: 'Hebrew is a musical, poetic language. The four words you are using - praise, covenant, justice, and lamentation - almost ask to be joined together in a phrase'.

"His comments instantly triggered an idea that had been forming intuitively in my mind. 'That's it!' I exclaimed. 'We'll turn the whole wall into a song of praise and lamentation'...

"From the Psalms we selected two phrases that include the four chosen symbolic themes. The congregation was enthusiastic...

(Goethals 1990: 199 - 201).

This style of research stands in sharp contrast to traditional, rationalistic models.

While recognising people have a wide diversity of values, beliefs and viewpoints, it encourages the researchers to share with and participate in the process rather than remain objective and outside the process.

It encourages optimism about 'gentle change' (Bird 1989: 1) while at the same time does not compel all those involved to contribute in identical ways (Reason 1988: 222).

While the term 'social ecology' may be new to some in Australia, other expressions of the method can be seen in other guises - 'action research' (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988) for example.
What they have in common is that the research is participatory, collaborative, personal and starts with small groups. They recognise we are social beings and that

"we are members of groups - active participants in the living, local and concrete process of constructing and reconstructing the language, activities and relationships which constitute and reconstitute the culture of the groups of which we are members" (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988: 17).

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One of the focuses of this research thesis is the establishment of and participation in small group experiences with people from a church congregation - the Cherrybrook Uniting Church.

The Cherrybrook congregation is a Sydney (NSW) suburban congregation, and has had a varied and interesting history. The congregation was one of four in the Pennant Hills parish - a state which changed in January 1992 when the multi-congregation parish was divided into three separate parishes. For the first time in its history, Cherrybrook was a parish in its own right. However, this newly gained status is somewhat fragile due to the 'tight' economic position it finds itself in.

The present worship centre, which was first opened in January 1889, was renovated in 1991 at a cost of nearly $100,000. In 1889 the building cost just on £1,000 to erect. Funds were received from donations and from a pew rent - 10 shillings for centre pews and 6 shillings for side pews.

The building was described as "a handsome structure... a fine building in the modernised Gothic style, of brick, with red bands and cement facings."
50 feet in length by 30 feet in breadth, with sitting accommodation for a congregation of 250" (Quoted in Barker & Hawkins 1983: 96).

Features of the inside of the church was a circular coloured-glass window in a Gothic frame, a simplified version of a great rose window of the mediaeval cathedrals, the roof-lining of hoop-pine laid in a diagonal 'light and shade' pattern and the pulpit and communion rail - both made from kauri.

By modern standards the pulpit is large and follows the Wesleyan tradition of being more a preaching bench than an upright pulpit. This new pulpit was similar in construction to the one which occupied the smaller chapel. Called a 'rostrum', it went the full width of the chapel - some 18 feet wide. When the 1889 church building was being planned "there was discussion amongst the Trustees as to whether this old rostrum should be moved into the new church" (Barker & Hawkins 1983: 53) but they decided against it. However what they ended up with in the 1889 church could to the untrained easily have been that 1845 rostrum - such was its size.

While the pulpit has undergone some slight modification over the years, it was also the centre of at times heated discussion during the 1991 renovation plans. Several in the congregation wanted it to be cut down and made smaller in size thus symbolically moving away from an older pattern of preaching "when the authority structure was vastly different" (Reid 1967: 57) from today, however after much debate the 'traditionalists' won the day. The pulpit and communion rail remains close to the original 1889 design.
A second building - a small hall - (previously a chapel) was built in 1845. This smaller building was built in simplicity of style,

"a plain preaching-house just as John Wesley had decreed for his followers in England 80 years before. It was 30 feet long and 18 feet wide, with a roof of wooden shingles. The hewn stone blocks were all one foot thick, some three foot long by one foot wide..." (Barker & Hawkins 1983: 53).

The first congregation was made up of ex-convicts and free settlers from Britain who were beginning farms on the untouched timbered land...

"Of the fourteen families (of the Wesleyan Society in Pennant Hills in 1845), five were exconvicts: William Moore was free by servitude by 1807, Thomas Thompson by 1824, and John Dale by 1828; Francis Allsop Snr. was on a ticket-of-leave in 1828, and John Pogson was still on a conditional pardon in 1841. William Lutherborrow and Joseph Harrison were the sons of convicts and Hannah Russell the wife of a convict... The Wesleyan Society would have accepted all on an equal footing; its only demand on its people was that they attempt to lead a life of holiness every day of their lives" (Barker & Hawkins 1983: 59).

Both buildings are set within a pioneers cemetery, face a busy suburban road, and have heritage preservation orders over them.

For most of the congregation's history it was a small, rural member of the Methodist Church, attached to several regional parishes at one time or another. It voted to enter the Uniting Church at the time of church union in 1977.

Like so many other rural churches over the years its membership went into decline until it was left with only a handful of faithful, elderly people with one or two younger families who had begun to move into the area from other congregations.

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However, as the orchards and hillsides which surrounded the church buildings were sold and turned into a large housing estate, the congregation found itself in the middle of a domestic building boom, with more than 15,000 people moving in to the area in less than 10 years.

Over the years 1985 - 91 the congregation grew in numbers to a point where accommodation, character, leadership and a sense of mission become issues or problems for its leaders and members. A small congregation had become a much larger one with what I feel is interpreted by several lay people as both a facilities problem and a leadership crisis.

The stories I hear told during meetings and in informal 'after church' discussion relate more to the experiences of the past - either at Cherrybrook, or when members were in previous congregations. When the 'local' stories have been told they have tended to come from the few who have memory of congregational life prior to the present congregation, and on some occasions the telling of these stories appear to have been told to ensure the pattern of the past continues into the present and beyond.

Some attempts have been made to develop a sense of belonging and community within the congregation by establishing small 'nurture' groups, however while some participants in these groups have enjoyed their involvement, the groups themselves appear to be struggling with limited success.
It is from among this congregation, where both I and my wife are members, that two small storytelling (collaborative) groups were established where we told personal, and sought to tell, community stories.

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Some narrative models of sharing with congregations and/or religious communities, which I believe are compatible with 'social ecology', guided my initial shaping of the research. The reason for choosing to examine these models is because these authors have worked in and given emphasis to, similar contexts to my research context.

One is the work presently being done by Australian, Don Carrington (Carrington & Hogarth 1989); the other by American James Hopewell (1987).

Carrington, also a Uniting Church minister, has spent many years working with Aboriginal community development workers and church leaders.

Observing that many past community development projects had 'weakened' the Aboriginal people, rather than 'empowering' them, Carrington began offering workshops based on a narrative paradigm. In those workshops the "apparent foolishness of stories" became the catalyst "in a process of affirming self-worth" - as the participants became 'subjects' in control of their own history, rather than as 'objects' of yet another development project.

"In engaging in stories told by facilitators and in sharing their own stories they caught a vision of tribal Aboriginal people actively engaging in self-development projects. Some in fact gained the
confidence to become theologians in their own communities" (Carrington & Hogarth 1989: 1).

Carrington's model is based on 11 sessions which included storytelling - biblical, non-biblical and biographical; story mapping, bible study, discussions around context specific needs, and a time of sharing Aboriginal myths and stories from the 'dreamtime'.

"The educational philosophy... is based on narrative and praxis approaches to community development and to doing theology. The method requires that a seminar or workshop begin by catalyzing an agenda from the leaders and people who are the participants.

"This methodology is necessarily life-based, problem-centred or alternatively a situational model of curriculum development activity evolving by cooperative planning between faculty and participants... In relation to the Bible and theology the starting point for reflection is the life of the people, not scripture per se or doctrine. Theology becomes the second act. Bible stories become open-ended invitations to explore further" (Carrington & Hogarth 1989: 13).

From my own experience of the Uniting Church and the models many ministers and officials at synod (State) and assembly (national) sectors appear to work with, Carrington's 'paradigm shift' is significant within much church work.

I also resonate with what Russell (1987) has offered by way of comment on stories and change, because I believe what Russell has described, Carrington has attempted to enflesh:

"The skillful use of story telling effects second-order change because it facilitates an outcome that is of a totally different class. The common sense approach to change, which deals with 'more of the same' or with proposing the 'opposite' to what is currently not working, rather than alleviating the problem, intensifies it. Storytelling introduces a different dimension. It carries the
'problem' beyond the boundaries of the situation as currently defined" (Russell 1987: 3).

However, Carrington's model choice is also understandable. Many, if not the majority of the people with whom he works are Australian Aboriginal, Pacific Islanders and southern Asian - people of a primary oral tradition (Ong 1982: 11), rather than a literary tradition.

"...context-specific life stories were basically the evocative guides in the project proposal. The rest of the week's activities grew out of this daily schedule creating a constant dialectic oscillating between discovering new dimensions of community experience and the further recreation of the pictures 'mapping' factors and forces at work in their home communities" (Carrington & Hogarth 1989: 13).

The other and more structuralist model comes from the late James Hopewell who relates to both storytelling and congregational structures. While he offers comment on the prevailing models of congregational analysis, he is wanting to advocate a symbolic or narrative model

"because it has been dangerously underrepresented in works that analyze the local church" (Hopewell 1987: 32).

Hopewell presents four models for analysing congregations:

(i) contextual - concentration on demographic features; social ideas and forces at work in the world at large;

(ii) mechanistic - frequently provide numerical and functional facts; a favourite with many 'church growth' advocates;

(iii) organicist - wholistic, all parts count; interpersonal and emotional attributes of the members;

(iv) symbolic - express the views, values and motivations of the congregation; culture, idiom and identity; narrative.
"So unexpectedly complex is the congregation that it requires comprehension from four quite different perspectives. It can not be correctly understood without an exploration of the textual qualities that tie it to its larger context. Nor does its function become clear without analysis of the mechanismic qualities that trace its dynamics and performance. Nor does this household of God come to life without organicist attention to its growth in community. And the observation of a congregation's symbolic interaction discloses its identity and web of meanings" (Hopewell 1987: 31 - 32).

However, it is the fourth model, narrative/symbolic, that Hopewell seeks to represent.

"Story expresses the intricacy of congregational life. Though widely regarded as merely a form of entertainment or illustration, stories are an essential account of social experience" (Hopewell 1987: 46).

He offers three features of the fundamental relationship between congregational life and narrative:

1. The congregation's self-perception is primarily narrative in form.

2. The congregation's communication among its members is primarily by story. "It is seldom propositional... gossip, the informal expression of stories about other people, constitutes a prevalent form of parish communication" (Hopewell 1987: 48).

3. By its own congregating, the congregation participates in narrative structures of the world's societies.

His research has led him to offer what I believe is an important comment:

"Only narrative is sufficient to amplify the unique accents of a congregation's idiom, sufficiently intricate to explain the congregation's constitutive power, and sufficiently comprehensive to link congregational events and meanings" (Hopewell 1987: 50 - 51).
An important connecting thread in his thesis is the influence of 'worldviews' or world images held by parishioners.

According to Hopewell, exploring the congregation's 'worldviews' can be gained from participant observation and guided interview verified by a questionnaire.

Four categories of worldview images emerge from his inquiry:

(a) **canonic** (reliance on an authoritative interpretation of the world);
(b) **empiric** (reliance on data objectively verifiable through one's own five senses;
(c) **gnostic** (reliance on an intuited process of a world that develops from dissipation toward unity, and
(d) **charismatic** (reliance on evidence of a transcendent spirit personally encountered).

He admits that his categories:

(i) do not exhaust the richness of parish worldview;
(ii) that 'worldview' is not adequately conveyed in quantitative measures, and
(iii) the 'worldview' categories are nonhierarchical and nondevelopmental.

However, by discovering a congregation's story and worldviews

"a congregation beckons its members to share a corporate life that challenges their excessively private identities. Stories knit people together into large wholes. Stories give people a collective character that repudiates individualism" (Hopewell 1987: 187).
Chapter 8

SHAPING THE RESEARCH

"We meet our colleagues, family, friends, intimates, acquaintances, strangers, and exchange stories, overtly and covertly... Even when we try to escape narrative, as when we listen to music or do mathematics, we tend to lapse... Humankind cannot bear very much abstraction or discursive reasoning. The stories of our days and the stories in our days are joined in that autobiography we are all engaged in making and remaking." (Hardy 1975: 4).

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Being a member of the Cherrybrook congregation for some years, many were aware I was engaged in some research studies.

I had discussed it with some of them in small group situations, and, when required to make a presentation of Stage One of my research to faculty members and peers, I had done so in the context of a special worship service (Appendix B) within that congregation.

That service was shaped as a result of liturgical work which I had initiated - an ongoing project spanning 25 years - as well as working with a number of people from the congregation in a small group situation where the liturgy was 'enfleshed'.

As a result of both my involvement and at times leadership role, I believe I am accorded a fair degree of acceptance and trust by members.

Aware that most people had come to the Cherrybrook congregation from other places and congregations, and would therefore bring different values, beliefs and experiences (worldviews), and intrigued by Hopewell's suggestion of a 'worldview' questionnaire, I set about inviting a number
of people from the congregation to fill in a copy of his (slightly adapted) questionnaire (Appendix A). They were chosen at random from those involved in the worship life of the congregation.

In all, I distributed 25 copies of the questionnaire (approximately one quarter of the number of confirmed members on the official roll of the Cherrybrook congregation at that time) and received a 100% return.

Using Hopewell's four categories of worldview images listed previously (see page 115), I was able to gather some impressions about each person as well as plot out the worldview or general belief orientation of each of the 10 males and the 15 females.

Because the four categories of the questionnaire can be paired into opposites - canonic/agnostic; empiric/charismatic - the worldviews of the participants can be shown in graphic form.

(i) Cherrybrook

In graphic form the responses from the ten (10) males looked like this.

(Illustration No. C1)
In similar graphic format, the responses from the 15 females looked like this.

(Illustration No. C2)

Together, the grid took on the shape of a 'sweep' between the empiric/canonic worldviews.

(Illustration No. C3)

Based on his experiences, Hopewell found people tended to cluster with others who see the world as they do. While using a smaller number of people in my sample than did Hopewell, this suggestion is also consistent with the Cherrybrook experience. There is, even with the small numbers
participating, a clear favouritism shown towards the empiric/canonic worldviews than to other worldviews or belief orientations.

Following another of Hopewell's suggestions I then arranged to 'test' the Cherrybrook response by sharing the questionnaire with four other Uniting Church congregations in the district. Three of these congregations were former members, with Cherrybrook, of the larger Pennant Hills Parish; the fourth was a congregation of a neighbouring parish.

Three of the congregations to receive the questionnaire are all situated within four to five kilometres of the Cherrybrook worship centre. The four congregation is approximately six to seven kilometres away on the other side of a main highway.

A total of 25 questionnaires were delivered to and distributed by three congregations: Boundary Road, Pennant Hills; Hillcrest Road and Thornley. The fourth congregation, Bethleham, West Pennant Hills also received 25 questionnaires but distributed only 24.

Three of these congregations are of comparable size to the Cherrybrook congregation; one, Boundary Road, Pennant Hills is a slightly larger congregation, numerically.

Distribution was by random selection, by invitation to those who attended a worship service. In each place the local minister read a prepared 'announcement' inviting participation. I was personally known in three of the congregations - having led a worship service within the congregation in the past two years. I was not known in the fourth congregation.
The results of that experience were as follows:

(ii) Boundary Road, Pennant Hills.

Of the questionnaires distributed, 15 or 64% were returned. Of the 15, nine (9) were from females and six (6) from males.

In graphic form the response from the nine (9) females can be represented as such.

(Illustration No. B1).

The response from the six (6) males can also be represented in a similar way.

(Illustration No. B2).
Together, the responses show a 'sweep' through the empiric/canonic boardering on the charismatic.

(Illustration No. B3).

(iii) Hillcrest Road/Thornley.

Of the questionnaires distributed, 18 or 72% were returned. Of the 18, eight (8) were from females and ten (10) from males. Together these two congregations make a parish.

In graphic form the responses from the eight (8) females looked like this.

(Illustration No. HT1).
In similar graphic format, the responses from the ten (10) males looked like this.

(Illustration No. HT2).

Together the grid took on the shape of a 'sweep' between the empiric/canonic worldviews with some slight movement bordering on the gnostic.

(Illustration No. HT3).

(iv) **Bethlehem, West Pennant Hills.**

Of the 24 questionnaires distributed, only twelve (12) or 50% were returned. Of that number three (3) were from males and nine (9) from females, however one of the female responses was informal - the person
had indicated more than one answer on several of the questions in the questionnaire and therefore could not be considered.

The three (3) male responses can be represented in graphic format.

(Illustration No. WPH1).

The eight (8) females responses considered was graphed as such.

(Illustration No. WPH2).

While the combined response shows a 'sweep' between empiric/canoninc (see over page).
Of those people surveyed in the five congregations, it can generally be stated that all favoured or operated out of a worldview 'sweep' or belief orientation between empiric and canonic. That is, a worldview which according to Hopewell, relies on:

(i) empiric - data objectively verifiable through one's own five senses (realism) and expressed in stories which move "away from assertions about divine presences and powers and toward the scientific understanding of the world's regularity... Only in rational observation of reality... can (a) reliable indication of the nature of the world be found" (Hopewell 1987: 82);

and

(ii) canonic - authoritative interpretation of a world pattern especially the Bible (obedience) and expressed in stories which tell of God's control of life.

"For canonic Protestants the inviolable canon is God's word, the Holy Scripture. Roman Catholics who are canonic may find a similar integrity in the church's traditional teaching authority" (Hopewell 1987: 79).
Thus I felt such a worldview could affect the members from Cherrybrook decision to be or not be involved in a storytelling group - given the individuals apparent priority for 'order'.

Earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 7, page 110) I made the observation that the Cherrybrook congregation was in a state of "flux" with several issues such as mission, leadership and character becoming major concerns for many.

Pausing for a moment to look briefly at the issue of 'leadership', it would appear from my observation and the comments/stories being told, many people feel there is insufficient positive leadership being shown by minister and the elders council. People of the congregation feel they are floundering, lacking any clear example or direction.

Noting Hopewell has identified that the worldviews of canonic and empiric are shaped by a reliance on both authority and information, to offer a leadership style which does not first link or include (i) aspects of clear direction and, (ii) a flow of information sharing, is likely to cause anxiety leading to discontent within the Cherrybrook congregation. Such links or the lack of them, can substantially shape the life of the congregation.

The second stage in the shaping of my research was to invite several people, by personal letter (Appendix D), to consider joining a storytelling group - to 'share in a research journey'.

As stories have always been a significant part of the religious tradition, I was keen to establish an environment where people in small groups
might tell and retell personal and community stories. Part of that letter of invitation read:

"How can we do this together? Well, as stories are the central core of my research, we can share our own stories:

* of and from our personal past,
* from our personal present.

"As I am inviting several to join this research group (approx. 12 people), and as we will all be from the Cherrybrook Uniting Church congregation, (so we should already know each other) we can also share the stories:

* of our congregation's (Cherrybrook's) past and present,
* from previous congregations we have been involved in".

In an attempt to offer an explanation of 'social ecology', my letter said:

"The research method we use at Hawkesbury is called 'social ecology', but it is also known by several other names: collaborative research or action research.

"Despite the several names I guess this method of research means it is done WITH other people, rather than research done ON or TO other people. And then reflecting on that research".

I also attempted to share with them some comments on the likely time involved and the shape the groups might take:
"As I write this note to you, I am again excited by all the possibilities such a sharing together might bring.

"But I must state from the outset, we will not be able to do all this in one or two meetings together. While we would need to discuss this, I feel we would need to spend at least eight sessions together. These meetings or times together, would have to be in the evening and lasting 1 1/2 to 2 hours each. So I am asking for what might be considered a reasonably substantial commitment from you.

"I am offering to enter into a covenant with you as an expression of my willingness to give these times together my priority".

And I was keen to seek their permission to record our times together...

"During our sharing together, I would ask your permission to tape our conversations. I would also ask you to keep a journal (or diary) from the time you decide to join this group until we have finished meeting together.

"Why tape the conversations? To help me as I reflect on the research method. Why keep a journal? It will enable us all to discover how we have travelled on this journey".

Of the 26 people invited, nine were able or willing to participate. However, following the first meeting one member pulled out of the meetings for genuine health reasons.
The remaining eight of us met over the next 12 weeks - a total of eight times - meeting in each others homes during evenings. Of the group three were male and five were female. The age range was approximately from mid 30s to late 40s. There were two married couples. All had completed the Hopewell 'worldview' questionnaire.

Towards the end of the life of the group, feelings of grief were expressed by several at the prospect of the group coming to an end. And there were requests that I consider inviting others to join another group. Some of the group even suggested they would like their spouse to join such a group.

Another group was formed.

A few weeks after the end of this group, I again approached each member by letter, to seek an opportunity to meet and reflect with them on their experiences of the group...

"On our last evening together, I expressed the hope of meeting with you, individually, and sharing some of the comments and feelings expressed in your diary.

"Hence, I hope you will feel free to be able to meet with me - for approximately one hour - to talk, answer some questions - and ask some if you wish - and share some things based on your experiences in the group, your diary and your memory".

A similar pattern of written invitation and personal contact after worship was used to invite members to join a second storytelling group. By far the
majority of people to receive this second invitation had also received an invitation to join the first group.

Part of that invitation is noted here:

"...Eight of us met eight times and from comments made during an evaluation time/interview following, all enjoyed what proved to be a new experience, and found it very worth while.

"As a result I am trying to organise another group. Thus, this note is to invite you to consider joining me and about six to eight others from the Cherrybrook Uniting Church congregation in a second storytelling group.

"Those being invited will not have been involved in the first group - apart from myself".

Again I set out the purpose of the group so as to meet some of the expectations many would have.

"What will we be doing in such a group? Well... as stories are the core of my research, we will share our own stories. Stories from our personal past and personal present. As we will all be associated with Cherrybrook Uniting, I also hope we can share some 'congregational' type stories and even look at a parable or two as well."
"This group is not a counselling group, neither is it a heavy reflective group. We will be telling our stories and sharing others stories about memories, events, family, etc.".

The invitation contained similar expectations of membership by me.

"To enable us to share this experience I would suggest we all enter into a covenant with each other that:

* we would only meet when all of us can meet together;
* meet each time for approx. 1 1/2 hours, for eight times - not necessarily weekly;
* each keep a journal or diary (which may also be a new experience for some).

"During our sharing together, I would ask your permission to tape our conversations. Why? To help me reflect on the research method. However, all members of the group would have access to the tapes if they would like to".

Of the 12 to receive an invitation, four, (plus myself) formed the second group, which met a total of six times. The group consisted of three males and two females. The age range was approximately from the mid 30s to the early 70s. Again, all had completed the 'worldview' questionnaire.

As with the first group, we decided to rotate our places of meetings.

A feature of this group was the involvement of some of the spouses from the first group. While they responded to an invitation to form a group,
they did so having also seen and experienced the reaction of their spouse to the first group.

Only one member of the group did not have a spouse in the previous group.
Chapter 9
EXPERIENCING 'STORY' IN A GROUP SITUATION

"The purpose of religious discourse... is not to communicate doctrinal propositions but to stir up in the other person resonances of experiences similar to those which the religious storyteller himself or herself has had... Religion as story leaps from imagination to imagination and only then, if at all, from intellect to intellect.

"Storytelling and reflection do not add to experience something new that is not in them but, rather, draw out of the experience and make explicit hints of meaning which are already there" (Greeley 1988: 67, 90).

oo0oo

At the first storytelling group meeting I was nervous. So too were others.
My original intention was to make sure the process as detailed in my research outline would be followed. However, as this reflection will show, this was to quickly change.

What follows is a random selection of some of those comments. They are offered in 'oral' writing, including false starts, interruptions and comments by others which appear in () a bracket. They have not been 'polished' or re-shaped for presentation in written form but remain in their conversational shape. Neither do they convey the tone of voice, gestures or the groping for words so much a part of oral communication.

My purpose for including them this way in this thesis is:
(i) it is not my intention to interpret or analyse in detail what they have said, but to be a 'midwife' by giving them the space and permission to offer their own genuine feelings and comments;
(ii) they - Ruth, Elizabeth, Andrew, Bradley, Meg, Shirley, Ray, Bill, Dot., Heather and Lyn - should be acknowledged as co-researchers who, with me, commenced on a journey of sharing, discovery and learning, and
(iii) the stories told during this small group experience should not be regarded as raw data from which to construct interpretations through analysis, but rather they are already the results of what the participants believe and value - examples along the way of shaping a living story, a worldview.

Another reason for the random selection is that not everyone contributed in exactly the same way. Some on occasions were quiet, saying little or nothing. Others were more vocal. One or two even admitted to being very tired some weeks, yet came to the group because they had made a commitment to the group.

And to give my co-researchers even more freedom I have changed their names.

oo0oo

When the first group met for the second time we spent a few moments reflecting on the experience of the first gathering. Some participants expressed very positive feelings, others hesitation, even a little fear of participating in the group. But fragile bonds of trust were being shaped.

(i) Bradley: I was probably the most reserved last week. In fact Heather was most surprised I came... but I learned a lot last week. I learned a lot about how the group would perform, who was in the group...
Being away (for work) this week I came back thinking: "What are
you going to do." Coming back from Melbourne on the plane, I was quite looking forward to it, although it was going to be a real rush to get here. There was a looking forward to meeting the same people and starting to share experiences and stories that at times would not come out in normal conversation... and that's the sort of thing, I think, only after one session... that if there was a 'circle' last week of people getting to move towards the centre of it, I was still on the periphery, very much so... and it struck me like that.

(ii) Shirley: I'm looking forward to tonight but I'm still at a bit of a loss how it is going to go, how it is going to develop... I know it is going to be storytelling but I'm still interested in how its going to happen. I don't really know what to expect...

My comment was to invite them to image the metaphor of a journey... a journey which is not just about going from point A to point B, as if travelling along a free-way from Sydney to Brisbane, but a trip which takes in some of the tourist sites and places along the way... A trip which doesn't use the free-ways, but travels the back roads, up and down hills, stopping in the small towns. It's taking note of everything that happens between here and there as being important and all part of the journey.

Such an open-ended or multivocal approach didn't allay all the fears:

(iii) Lyn: I find that a little threatening to be honest. I felt that last week too. This group is not a study group, it is not a sharing group... if we had come along expecting anything definite... it's so long since I done that, I find this a complete change.
But it did allow some to claim a sense of freedom:

**Meg:** I would find it threatening if it were a study group because I feel I would have to... yes, I would have to be able to think equally to somebody else, whereas in a group like this... I don't feel there is any structure around it, consequently I am here to relax.

**Bradley:** I think that was one of the concerns I had last week... you know there could be a lot of soul bearing (laughter)... you know a lot of facts and to affirm people (laughter) and that's not my style at all (other comments: No...) and it really wasn't. No... it's not that sort of thing, and certainly nothing threatening about it. That it really is a time for storytelling and maybe from that, getting to know people better.

Having the benefit of hindsight and listening to some tapes, I am now aware that for the first couple of sessions with the first group, I had sought some reflection on previous gatherings as we begun the new experience. This suggestion tended to either halt or slow down the conversations.

On one such occasion Ruth did offer some personal comments:

(iv) **Ruth:** Before we go too far further down the line I want to talk about, um, reaction to the first meeting, because I went home feeling really happy. And during the course of the hour and a half, or what ever it was, I had a real... several times I had a real sense of elation, and I think... When I thought about why did I feel like that, it was because I think more than anything else I value real contact with real people (so do I) so that its not just dependant on the
manners of the situation or the politics or the policy or the duties or the... you know...

Meg: It's part of the...

Ruth: ...function of the thing, it's just the people - people to people. And I really think that it's a most exciting patch of life... (Mm) and the prospect of seeing that is happening (laugh) (Mm)... ah, to me is a real treat...

As that meeting progressed, several things happened:

(i) the expectations I had for myself, changed, and
(ii) my expectations of the group changed.

As none had been involved in a similar group before, the experience of telling and listening to stories became an important reason for existence in itself. And the group decided two things would happen:

(i) we would meet in each others homes rather than in just one place, and
(ii) we would not meet on any night when a group member could not attend.

Both these decisions significantly shaped the group's life.

During the first meeting of the group I also distributed a copy of Ann Shakespeare's article (Shakespeare 1988) based on Michael Traber's paper on the categories of stories.
By the second week, some of the members moved from being just story listeners and began to tell stories of events which had happened to them... (See Appendix C: Meg's story). I remember sitting back and just watching and listening. It was true! Stories engage people. They bring people together - lives in touch with experiences other than their own. And they encourage other people to share their stories...

"Propositions are statements on a page; stories are events in a life. Doctrine is the material of texts; story is the stuff of life"

(Bausch 1984: 28).

I was sharing some of my reflections on my trip to Ireland the year before. Just prior to leaving on my trip I had contacted an uncle and he had told my that my paternal grandfather's brother had been the engineer on the "Flying Scotsman"...

(v) Rex: ...Now I only found that out, literally a week or so before I actually went overseas. My uncle told me that when he was giving me some information... But I have never found out why they went to Ireland. Dad and others of the family were born there and then they came out to Australia (Mm)... And that's the other thing I have found in our family. There is just so much we have not shared, we have not talked about... there are just slabs of time (Mm) where we have no idea (Mm). It was not talked about. (Mm)

My individual story about not knowing or sharing family stories quickly moved from being just an individual story to being "part of a collective" (Reason & Hawkins 1988: 93). It triggered the following responses:

Meg: I made some tapes of my father, talking, about his family, because dad's now 92, and he lived, of course, at a time just so
different to ours, and about 10 years ago or so, I started making tapes... Him telling me about where he first worked and... he remembers all the (Mm) details, names of the men he worked for, with, and what shop... and what happened, and all these facts about himself, and I've found it very, very interesting (Mm).

Shirley: Yes, my father, over the last 12 months, has been writing his life story (Yes, Mm), just for his family (Yes, wonderful). He's probably written out 150 foolscap pages (Mm) and the last time I went up there, he let me read it. It's not quite finished. I have got a completely (laughter) new view of my dad now. There are things I cried and laughed... I was shocked. I mean... and he prefers not to discuss it. He said he doesn't want to discuss it. He says it is for everyone to read. (He doesn't want to talk about it. Mm). That's fine. Look... I don't know whether to feel sorry for him... some of it is so sad, yet some of it's so happy (Mm). He achieved so much, and I would have never known all this if dad hadn't written it down (Mm, Yes). I can't believe how much he has achieved, but the sadness in his life has been incredible. I never knew about it. All those years I was growing up as a child (Mm) and the things he had to go through (Mm), and we never knew about it (Mm).

Lyn: My father's family lived in Kent and they were bombed continually in the war, and he said: I don't want to talk about it with you all. It was very horrible and (Mm) I don't want to discuss it.

When Shirley and I reflected on our experiences of the group later, she again told me the story of her father writing his story... but this time in the
repeating of her story, Shirley included much more (See Appendix C: Shirley's story).

I asked Shirley if she remembered when she told her story to the group...

(vi) **Shirley:** No... not really. I can't...

**Rex:** Let... let me tell you when you told it. (Mm) you told it at the second meeting... *(silence)*

**Shirley:** Did I really?

**Rex:** Mm.

**Shirley:** Goodness me... That shocks me, because I didn't feel comfortable... I didn't think I felt comfortable in the second meeting...(Mm) none at all. By about the third... maybe I felt a bit more comfortable (Mm). I felt a bit threatened because I don't feel I, like don't speak really well. I... I know I have a lot of good ideas up here *(pointing to her head)*, I know that, and I'm fairly confident um, about how I feel about things, and when I... but I don't feel it comes out here *(pointing to her mouth)* *(Right)*...

Similar experiences such as linking and listening to other experiences, happened in the second storytelling group.

On one occasion I mentioned I could resonate with what Andrew had said about some people being very angry as a result of termination at work:
Rex: Um... it's not that many weeks ago that, ah, Elizabeth was sacked from her job, and um... I think she found it difficult for the first... Oh probably the first week I suppose (Mm) to, um, to make the necessary adjustment to ah, the fact that um, she had been sacked, and then to make the adjustment was she wasn't going to work, and then to make the adjustment... we all had to make adjustments about reduced income (Mm), ah and those sorts of things. But... yeah, it certainly affected her self-esteem (Mm)... and um, I'm sure it does everyone's...

Heather: I think she did well to cope in a week!

Rex: *(Voice over comments)* I'm not saying she made that adjustment (No)... 

Heather: But she was making it...

Rex: But she was beginning...

Andrew: She was very angry for a week... then she stopped chucking dishes *(laughter)*... Well I remember once, as a young man, I went to the State Rail Authority... in those days it was called that... to apply for a job as a station assistant (Yes)... I like trains, but I didn't like them that much *(laughter)* and ah... anyway I went and I was refused a job because I had pimples...

Rex: You were refused a job because you had what...?

Andrew: Acne.
Rex: Acne? (What?)

Andrew: And when I went and looked at the station staff and various (talking over)... and I got more and more (golly) depressed when I saw (Yeap) the ones they had employed (Yes) and they had knocked me back (Yeah) and I was so angry, and I felt... I really got very depressed because then I thought they didn't think I was as good as them, and I didn't think they were much good (yes), you know (Yes) what railway station staff (Yes) used to be like (Yes), Mm) 30 years ago, you know, they were pretty terrible (Mm, Mm)... that put me in a very depressed situation. Mind you, I think it was God's care of me that I got rejected because I went on to do much better things with (laughter)... if I had gone into State Rail I would not have been able to...

Heather: Actually I know how you feel... soon after we were married we moved to Shepparton, in central Victoria, and so I had to leave my work because radiotherapy is only conducted in large capital cities... or in large centers, and so I thought I'd do anything, so I went to Campbell's soup factory, to apply for a job and the guy wouldn't employ me because I was too... I had too much intelligence for the job, and I... I nearly hit him (laughter)... If he hadn't had two cute little twin boys (Did you say how would you know?) in the Sunday... in church, I would have hit him (laughter). I was so angry. I thought how dare he... decide... you know, that I could sit at home and be bored rather than stir tomato soup (Mm, laughter)... Yea. I ended up getting a job teaching at the local technical college... (Mm).
Later on in this exchange Dot joined in. While Andrew and Heather had said they were angry about not getting a job, Dot began to show some 'anger' with members in the group...

(ii) **Dot:** (Speaking quietly...) I think you're very... all very lucky you (louder) females these days who can go out to work, and not be bored, and get something to do to keep you going (Mm)... I would like a few more people around to do some voluntary work, but... whenever you want some people to do things they're all working, but um... in my day you just didn't work. A school teacher got married... if a school teacher got married, that was it! (Mm) You got married, you left work, and (Mm) that was it (Mm). And um... very boring I can tell you...

**Rex:** So you were a school teacher were you?

**Dot:** No, I wasn't a school teacher, I was in office work, (Yes) but I still left work when I got married (Yes, yes) because my husband said no, no wife of mine is going to.. plan to work, and that was the general (Mm) attitude (Mm) in those days, and I was bored stiff. I remember lying on the floor... weeping just because I didn't... (Mm) I had done everything I could possibly do inside, we had a table and two chairs and a bedroom suite, and...

**Heather:** Did you have children?

**Dot:** No...
Heather: Even before you had children you weren't allowed to work?

Dot: No. No.

Bill: My sister never worked. My mother never worked...

Dot: No. No. (a lot of talking over)... you know, a table and two chairs and a bedroom suite and you do all that you can do out in the yard, you dig up other people's rubbish that they buried there before you came (laughter), and you get rid of that and you do this and you do that... what else do you do? (Mm, Mm) Nothing... so um...

Heather: Then that would have been an advantage then, Dot?

Dot: To be able to work?

Heather: Yes, to have had that choice...

Dot: Yes, yes, yes. Jack can see it now that there... (Mm) there was a disadvantage, in it you know... I mean, I wish you could turn back the clock (Mm, Mm)... even in latter years... in... 17 years ago I went off and did a bit of voluntary work... I've also done voluntary work, when I've been able, but um... since the kids were off my hands...

Andrew: Really, part of that was male pride, wasn't it... (yes)

Dot: I suppose it... yes, (Mm) yes (Mm)... (talking over)....
Heather: Its... its very controlling (male pride) not letting the woman work. I mean... it's to a lesser extent today (That's right) but people who don't work today are very much controlled...

An environment was established so a group of people could share in storytelling. For the most part, oral/aural storytelling. While all had been involved in small groups before, it was the first time any of them had been members of a storytelling group.

The life of the group developed and enlarged as participants shared experiences through reflection and recollection. With each shared experience, a new experience shaped the group further. The group's life was never static...

"Every encounter with a story is present event" (Wiggins 1975: 19).

Bill offered some insight into the group on this experience of 'community' when we shared some reflections later:

(i) Bill: ... its not until you can actually sit down with someone and you can talk and be part... and it was a very close group that we had, um, restricting the numbers to five (Yes) um, meant that we were able to get a little bit closer and we each had more to say (laughter) (Yes) um... but you just get to know them better because you are actually spending time talking with them on something a little bit more than just (Mm) 'how's it going? what are you doing? what are you up to?' sort of thing... you are actually getting to know them as a person. And in addition to that um, the stories we were telling were quite often personal stories. Whenever someone tells a story about
themselves or about their past um, they always (pause) tell it in a
certain way, I suppose that tells everybody else not just about them
as they were in the story, but as they are are now (Yes) (laughter). So,
I suppose in that way I got to know them (Mm), not so much what
they said, but how they said it and how we reacted (Mm). That was
more than anything how I got to know them.

And Meg noted in her journal:

(ii) **Meg:** Story nights are very warm and enjoyable now. We are
beginning to trust each other and it's so interesting to hear Lyn,
Shirley and Bradley, also to hear Rex and Elizabeth talk. They have
all been very shadowy figures to me and now are becoming real
people!

To participate in such an experience was, for me, a privilege.
Chapter 10

REFLECTING ON THE EXPERIENCE OF PERSONAL STORIES AND PARABLES

"... being a self entails having a story. Self-knowledge, like all other knowledge, is recollection, as ancient wisdom testified... We understand backwards, Kierkegaard says, but we live forwards" (Crites 1986: 162, 165).

"A story commands our attention much more than a lecture about stories. We often remember the stories we heard in a lecture or a sermon even though we cannot remember why they were told in the first place" (Hauerwas 1976: 339).

Following the storytelling group meetings, I made arrangements to interview each member, inviting them to reflect on their experience based on memory and the contents of their journal.

Personal reflections on my experience as a member of the two personal storytelling groups will be offered separately. What follows are some general reflections by my co-research colleagues on their experiences. Where there was dialogue as part of that reflection, it is included. So too I have tried to indicate the pauses and comments from both teller and listener, as the conversation progressed.

I asked my colleagues to share some of their experiences of the group:

(i)  Lyn: I was talking to Shirley on Sunday, about various people in the congregation who are unhappy and are staying away... There seems to be a real fear that the Baptists will take some of our congregation... it came up at the recent congregational meeting when a few of us spoke our minds. And Shirley wondered if some,
particularly of the older ladies had been part of the story group, if they would not have felt so threatened and if they would have been happier to look for some change within the congregation, than what they are... they are currently being very defensive about it. And I had the same feeling. It had occurred to me just last week, the people within the story group, and also the nurture group, were prepared to talk about this in a fairly honest way, or more honest way, than people who didn't know each other quite as well as we all knew each other. She and I both had the same feeling...

Later in our conversation, when we were sharing some of the entries Lyn had recorded in her journal, she commented:

Lyn: ... another thing I've commented several times about how refreshing it was to have a group situation that wasn't threatening (yes) and that was enjoyable, and... and I felt myself wishing that a lot of other people in the congregation could be in a group situation like that (yes), um... instead of having interminable, factual meetings, which are always threatening (yes), Mm... and that's something that would never have occurred to me before. I would never have even thought of, (right) there was a way of having a non-threatening (right) gathering (yes) of people from different backgrounds (yes, sharing their experiences...) just sharing... sharing, but sharing in a way that wasn't threatening. All the sharing groups I have ever been in right from when I was a teenager, we were always pushing ourselves to see a bit further (right) into ourselves (yes), whereas this didn't... I don't think you intended to start off like that, you didn't intend that to happen particularly, you just wanted to see what would happen (Mm) with that particular type of
sharing (that's...), is that right? (Yes). You weren't sure exactly what would evolve.

**Rex:** No, I didn't know what would happen (Mm) in the group...

(ii) **Bradley:** ... After sharing in this experience of the storytelling group, I have used this experience in some lectures on quality and team building...

**Rex:** How did you do that?

**Bradley:** Well, there's a section in it, and it talks about when you are working with people and getting close to them, it goes from sharing of information to sharing of ideas, and as the group works better together you get to a trust situation. What I was saying was you don't find this process in many working experiences. I told them, 'it's strange, but I have just come from a group - a friend was doing a masters in communication - and I was asked to participate in a group along with some other people who I knew but not that closely, and over a period of eight weeks of storytelling and sharing, you could see from the exchange of information to the exchange of ideas, to values exchange to trust, build up through the group. And I said it obviously happens when people are working in teams, and that's what I think we had - a team that was very much at one... And I think I have used stories more in the lectures I have given since.

(iii) **Ruth:** I enjoyed it a lot, and I think I would rate it really high as an entertaining, interesting, useful inter-people activity, because I like
things that are structured enough for shy people to know what to do next, but also have the freedom in them for the people to be who they are, and I feel that has both these.

I asked her to share a little more on what she meant by 'entertaining'...

**Ruth**: Entertaining in the sense of recreational or... I meant it in its powerful sense of the word really... To me to be truly entertaining it needs to be not a waste of time, to be of interest and have some kind of real value. And... we did such a lot of laughing... It was fun as well as being moving and sometimes to the extent of being almost overpowering at times. You know, when you felt someone else's strong feeling about something coming over... I think there was a big range of feelings, and that in itself was interesting... One of the moments that really slayed me, more than any other, was when Bradley told of his trip, coming to Australia as a 21 year old migrant... with his entire family's disapproval behind him, and the air hostess saying that devastating remark: 'do you want to wait till your parents come back or will you have dinner now?...' That really shocked me just realising the kind of loneliness that would involve... I was very interested in that... Some of the things Shirley said... her mother dying and... I think the fact the people were all recounting significant life experiences, even the funny one, were all significant things... They didn't have to be traumatic... but some were powerfully emotional without a tear being shed... although I think I shed a few tears as well.
Shirley: I felt by the end of the group, I felt that... I really knew that none of those people would repeat anything I'd said, which was great...

Rex: So you thought there was, um... an honesty in the group...?

Shirley: Yes, I (Trusted)... Yeah, I trusted every single person in that group never to repeat a thing I'd said (Yes), and so maybe... it didn't worry me so much I guess... I guess by then they knew I get all tongue-tied when I try to say things... that's why I use my hands a lot, because I never feel my mouth is doing the job properly... I actually felt really close to those people when I left...

The conversation continued along general lines and then Shirley made the following observation:

Shirley: ... after the first week I can distinctly remember still, after the first week I can remember writing in my diary 'what am I doing here?' I mean, I was... I was still a little more comfortable (Right) but I was still very confused because that night we really didn't get into the nitty-gritty. We talked basically...

Rex: We talked about my course...

Shirley: So, after the first group... but there was no doubt then that I wouldn't be going back. I mean, I had committed myself and there was no way... but definitely by the second week, I mean, it was just a matter of you went and enjoyed yourself. I.. I enjoyed it. It probably, yeah, probably after the second time, when we actually did
something that second time then I knew what... but I must admit
every week I came back I kept thinking, we are not really telling the
stories Rex would like. I thought there was too much... chat. I mean
I enjoyed it, I liked that, but I got the feeling all the time that it was...
not what you wanted. (Mm Mm) I think probably well into the
group, maybe towards the end of the group I didn't, but well into
the group...

Elizabeth said she had mixed feelings about joining the group.

(v) Eliz.: ... I went along reluctant, the bigger part of me saying I didn't
want to be there, ah, not sure what I was letting myself in for or felt
that I had nothing to contribute to a storytelling group, so I went
along with these sorts of feelings.

Rex: And how long did those feelings last?

Eliz.: Oh, it was a couple of sessions before I actually realised that...
um, that I perhaps could contribute something to the group, um,
that I wasn't going to be put into the position of feeling threatened...
I don't as a rule like groups because I always feel a little bit
threatened in a group. Um, I guess this was one of the concerns that
I had um, and not knowing all the members of the group... some of
them I did know and others I just knew to say hello and perhaps a
little bit more, so these were the sorts of feelings I went along with.

Rex: If they were some of the feelings you had at the beginning,
what sort of feelings did you have at the end?
Eliz.: Well, I had ah, changed my feelings quite a lot because towards the end I was enjoying it and um, was a little disappointed when our period of time had come to an end (Mm) which surprised me with the way I started off with the way I finished. Ah, I guess that in that period of time I hadn't been threatened, ah, and I had got to know the other members of the group whom I didn't know so well, and um, we were all there on an equal footing rather than some being better than others and having more to contribute. We all had something to say, maybe it might not have been every night (Mm), but we all had um, times when we could contribute or identify with stories that had been told, or... so that it was really participation by everyone over the period of time.

Sharing with colleagues in the second storytelling group, I found all but one centred their comments around an additional factor: an expectation of the group influenced by the fact they had a spouse in the previous storytelling group.

(i) Bill: I found it interesting... You know, it was... I found it relaxing. (Right). Ah... I found it, um... a situation I could get to know some other people on a different level, than you wouldn't otherwise get to know them, (Mm, Mm) um... It was interesting to get to know Dot, for example, ah... and Andrew. I think I already knew Heather fairly well from the nurture group, but it was interesting just to see another side of Dot and Andrew, and yourself, although again I had known you fairly well through nurture group (Mm) um... so I found that part of it interesting. The stories facilitated that... I don't think the stories meant a great deal as such... I think it was more the interaction (Right) that was more interesting. Not so much that
someone had a story to tell, but... but something was said which led to something else and it brought out something (Mm, Mm)... we all interacted very well and that... that I think was the thing I can remember as being the best part of it...

And his thoughts when he was invited to join a storytelling group...

**Bill:** I was a bit reticent actually to start with because I knew that Lyn had gone through it and I knew there was a fair time commitment... when time is fairly precious *(laughter)*. I know that sounds silly but um, as you get older and the kids get older we work harder... I just value my time *(Yeap)* more *(Yeap)* than I used to, and um...

**Rex:** I sensed that a couple of times in our meetings when you were quite insistent that we... that you weren't available to meet *(smile)* on an occasion because it would have been three nights out, or something like that.

**Bill:** Yes. Well it's... that's just the way it is unfortunately. We, were leading busier lives ourselves (Mm) you know, Lyn and I are both involved in leading young groups (Mm), Boy's Brigade and JY's and (Mm), the kids are busy. We've got our own interests... I'm now taking on the treasurership (Mm) of the church and that's going to take up a bit of time... It all adds up and um, if you don't allow enough time for all those other things then you're not really being fair to the original commitment. I knew that by committing myself to this group that there would be an imposition on my time, but I, I felt that it was something that was going to be worthwhile, it was
going to assist you in your studies, um I didn't know I don't think, at the time who the people were... I had an idea, by process of elimination (laughter) (Mm) but um, oh no, I really didn't go into it thinking that I was going to come out, you know, with a diploma or something, you know what I mean (Mm)... with some final goal or anything (Mm)... I knew it was a participatory group and that I was prepared to participate, so that's how I felt (Mm). I was a little reticent but, but I knew there was some up side, so...

Rex: How long were you reticent for?

Bill: Only up until the point that I actually decided to accept it, to come along (Right). I don't think I was reticent from that point onwards (Right), not even at the first meeting... Once I had made my commitment that was it.

Heather was very reflective with her comments, and offered them with some pain. They were very personal, and she didn't want her comments to be made very 'public'.

(ii) Heather: (Sigh) I felt... I felt a little bit disappointed that... I didn't feel other people had the same enthusiasm or outlook that I had, to the group. And I think the fact that perhaps it needed one or two more people to really get the full benefit from it. I think as a group we really were just starting to get going when it was time to stop. I didn't feel we moved from a beginning to a middle to a conclusion. We seemed to have stopped just before we got to the middle which was really a shame... (Short silence). But I found it a really interesting experience in getting to know those people, though
(Right). Um... all of them were people I thought I knew fairly well, um... the stories they told gave a tremendous insight into them as people, Dot in particular, I found um... I learnt a lot of things about Dot, some of them I found quite stunning, quite concerning... um, it was an interesting experience because um, because of what I learnt about them as people. I don't really remember much about the stories, but... their telling of them revealed about themselves, I thought.

A little later on in our conversation Heather shared her feelings about the group and her experiences of the members, in quite a personal way. The trigger for these comments was my letter requesting some time for her and I to reflect on our experiences of the group.

Heather: I felt uncomfortable, um...

Rex: Because...?

Heather: Because, ah... its a small group, and ah... I was reacting very much then to people um, and I didn't really feel justified in talking about my reactions because I was... I felt that it perhaps was unfair to them.

Rex: How did you react? Did you get angry?

Heather: Some of them I empathised... or identified with their situation and when they were expressing anger about certain things, ah... I understood that, and was surprised that we had that in common. And it was probably something I was never going to find
out that we had in common, through any other way, probably. (Mm). Um... there was some I reacted to um... ah, with anger, and... I, I then had to look at why I was angry, um... so that was a good learning experience for me, uh... and I think I have been able to relate better to that person in coming to terms with how I felt with whatever they've said, um...

Another difference between the two groups was while both agreed not to meet on any one night if a member was unable to attend, the second group did meet on two successive occasions when Andrew could not be present, and once when Dot could not attend.

The first occasion when Andrew couldn't be there was when he had to, at the last minute, go interstate due to the death of a very close friend; the second time was with the Christmas break getting closer and despite all attempts to the contrary, the group decided to have its last meeting to suit the majority rather than all.

(iii) Andrew: (Our group) was much smaller than the first one and um... it wasn't continuous in um, the same membership throughout, so I think that was probably a little disruptive to it (Right) and different from your normal pattern, um... but I think people enjoyed having time to relate. We didn't have as large a group as the previous one (No), but never-the-less I think people did relate and I appreciated others points of view on things. I thought it was a valuable exercise.

The only member of the second group not to have had a spouse share in the previous storytelling group, was Dot. She was also the oldest from
both groups and missed one group meeting - when her husband suffered a heart attack.

When asked how she felt about joining a "thing called a storytelling group"...

(iv) **Dot:** Oh... I don't know. I thought why me, but if it was going to help Rex well, maybe I can do it (Mm)... Yeah, that's what... I had no idea what storytelling was (Right) really, not as you take it. You take it as anything as storytelling; I take storytelling as stories (Mm) you know...

**Rex:** Fictional stories, you're talking about?

**Dot:** Mm... (Mm) Yeah. But we went into that the first night (Yes).

**Rex:** OK. How did you find the weeks you were involved in the storytelling group?

**Dot:** Oh... nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing... I would call exciting, um... as I've put down here (in her journal): 'just like any lounge room conversation' (Right) I put it down to (Mm)... um, just stumped you there (laughter), yes...

**Rex:** So you weren't um... weren't too fussed about it?

**Dot:** No, I wasn't too fussed about it. I wouldn't say I was turned on by it, or anything else. Um... I guess I learnt a few things, about other
people (Right), um... not a lot. It would be interesting to know what you learnt (Mm), really. Did you get what you wanted out of it?

I replied that I wanted to offer a group experience where we all shared in it, rather than me setting up a group just for my benefit...

Dot: Oh... I thought we were there for a purpose, to help you do what ever you... getting from it to do, and um... and some of the conversations just went on, I wondered how on earth you were going to get anything out of it (Right)... yes... I don't know, I guess... were you analysing anybody as you went along...? You said that wasn't the purpose...

Rex: No, no I didn't, I didn't psychoanalyse anybody (No), I mean, that's not my field, I'm not qualified, um... it wasn't the purpose of the group (No) for any of that...

Dot: But I guess you found out a few things about people?

Rex: Ah... yes (Mm) did you? I think you said you found out a few things about people too, is that right?

Dot: Yes... a lot, not a lot... as I've got written down here something like 'typically Andrew!' (laughter) you know, I mean... you meet them every week so you feel you know them, to a degree (Mm)... um, Yeah well they were all... I was the only older person. You were (Yes) all others were at another level as far as age goes, might have been... could have been more interesting perhaps. I don't know... I know I sounded off once or twice about old fashioned things, and

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that sort of thing. I don't know if that gave you any insight into what had been... um, 20 Years earlier than what they knew about... I don't know, if you had said 'come again' I'd say 'Oh no, go get somebody else' (Right).

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During those conversations with my co-researchers I raised the question of group ownership. I was very conscious during the two storytelling groups that I was making an effort for the group to be 'our' group, not just 'my' group. As part of the reflecting I included the direct question: "Did you feel it was 'my' group or 'our' group?"

Dot's comments have already been noted above. Other observations were also offered. Ruth found a sense of bonding in the group as a result of the experience.

(i) **Ruth:** Initially I was worrying about whether we were doing what the study required. I couldn't see what the ultimate outcomes of the group were likely to be at that stage...

**Rex:** This is earlier on?

**Ruth:** Yes... ah, I couldn't tell if we were doing it or not, if you know what I mean... ah...

**Rex:** Did that anxiety... ah, fade?

**Ruth:** It well, ah, it got so I didn't care if we did the study or not after a while, I was just enjoying myself (laughter)... (Right). And I
figured that you were a big boy and if it wasn't what you wanted you'd tell us... or if you wanted to change the line of it and if we could, we would (Mm). But I think there was a kind of bonding among the people that... and I found personally, in different degrees with different people. I think I have found some friends for life as a consequence. I'm sure, certainly in so far as it got to me, um... I think the bonding in the group itself took over from the other concerns, like, 'am I getting on with so-and-so?' disappeared into the distance, along with 'are we really doing what Rex wants?'...

For others my role seemed to move from facilitator to intitiator to member.

(ii) Bradley: The first two sessions it was Rex Hunt's group (Right, right). After that it was a group (right), very much a group. And you were if you like the facilitator but part of the group (right) and that's the role I saw you in at the end... as a facilitator (Mm) rather than a leader (Mm).

(iii) Bill: ...I thought everyone was keen to participate... I don't think there was any holding back (Mm).

Rex: Was it 'my' group or was it 'our' group?

Bill: Oh... I think you did a good job of leading the group, um, you know I was conscious, I was always conscious that you were leading the group. That it was your group. Ah, I didn't feel that it was (pause) a self generated group (Mm). I always had the impression and the feeling that it was your group and that you were leading it
but, but that you did it in such a way where it was not very intrusive (Mm), but I always felt you had to start the ball rolling (Mm). I wasn't prepared to start the ball rolling (Yes...)

**Rex:** I found that with the second group, that, um... in fact it occurred to me I wonder what would happen if I didn't say anything, to start, perhaps who might (Yes). Certainly with the first group I was um... but with the second group...

**Bill:** It was just the way I found it (Yes). I wasn't prepared to start the ball rolling (Mm), but I, I asked a few clarifying quest... (questions) questions along the way (Yes, yes). Should we be doing this? Or should we be doing that (Mm) so that we knew what we should be doing, basically. I think that sort of meant that you had enough input, that you left a little bit out so that there was still enough enquiry and (Mm)... you know what I mean? You weren't too 'this is what we are going to do, and we're going to do it this way'... (Yes). You just said enough for us to take over (Mm), so once we got going each night, I think we were OK. But I always felt you were the one that needed to kick it off. (Did you...) Part of my logical mind, I suppose (laughter).

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For the majority in both groups, keeping a journal was a new experience. In the first group I circulated a copy of Tristine Rainer's book *The new diary*, which prompted the following interesting exchange... interesting, because it touches on both the written and oral word, and people's perceptions about them.

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For Ruth 'oral words' were temporary - and reflected unfinished 'thought'; Ray felt action and decision was made real in the act of writing more so than just in the moment of speaking...

(i) **Ruth:** ...having had a look at this diary book I came... it has a lot of suggestions about running a diary, and I've only read it quickly - the first hundred pages I think I'm up to - um... It had a lot of things in it that kind of irritated me... I kind of thought they were a bit 'thingy', but a suggestion I thought was really good was writing down... in about a dozen captions, major things in your life. I thought, what an interesting... (Yes)

**Meg:** Like what?

**Ruth:** Things you do. Well this was... one fellow wrote down major stages of his father's life. He was trying to understand his father, I think, and he wrote down: 1. Mother ran away - father's mother; 2. assumption of responsibility for siblings; 3. Youthful, professional success; 4. Romance and marriage; 5. Children; 6. Growing success and the reward; 7. Disillusionment and the search for meaning; 8. Attempted escape into charity work; *(laughter)* 9. Failure at attempt to give it all up and start again; 10. Sickness and dying. And when he had finished looking at his father's... trying to see... it kind of put a different perspective on... his father, and that was only in 10 points... And I just thought what an interesting way to sort of... *(Mm)* talking about journeys and *(Yes, Mm)* looking where your life is going, and then I thought, and I didn't write one down, this was only in the last stage and I haven't had time to write since then... I started to think what would I write... and some of the things I
decided... the first things that came to me, I decided against writing. And I thought: Oh that's interesting... and I think it's the same sort of thing about the tape running (during our sessions), a sort of feeling of: do I want this thought to be persisted with or do I want to just think it now and let it go forever, sort of thing.

**Shirley:** I'd forgotten about the tape...

**Ruth:** I said it would worry me. But that was just one thought... well that was one style of journaling, and I thought it was worth while (Yes)... you could go back and look at the different bits and see what you're made of then and why you chose them, I s'pose, or why you chose them (Mm)...

**Meg:** Yes, I think you brought up an interesting point when you said you were editing, because... (talk-over comment) because there will be things that will come up in your mind that your conscious mind would not think was important, and consequently if you put it ahead of something like: getting married, or whatever, (Mm) it would seem (Mm) insulting or wrong or what have you, but there is a reason for those things.

**Ruth:** Well my reason was really um... that I didn't want to write it down. I mean I didn't really mind thinking about it but I really didn't want to write it down...

**Lyn:** I don't mind writing it down... expressing something I'm not entirely happy with... is that what you mean?
Ruth: Mm, that first thing, yes. But I just sort of noticed that that's what I had done... it was a kind of process...

Ray: But you hadn't. You haven't done it at all because...

Ruth: I haven't got round to writing any of it down but I've already made some decisions about what I will write when I write, sort of thing...

Ray: Yes, but you haven't done it because... to a large extent that's one of the failures of people, you see, ah, (laugh) unless you articulate something it's very hard to do it talking to yourself, so to speak... Thinking things allows you to do the journey and do all the side trips at the same time, and until you get to the point of saying I have to crystallise this into a form that, you know... and the only real way you can do that is to write it down. Until you really do do that, (Yes) you really haven't come to grips with the thing at all.

Meg: There are different ways of looking at it...

Ruth: Yes, I think there are different ways of looking at that... um, I think saying it to somebody else or... um, is also a commitment to the idea, and people see you as having that idea attached to you and so on, what ever it is, you know... an expressed opinion or what ever... it becomes part of you in other peoples minds, where as if it is only in yours you don't have to own it.

Other comments on journal keeping included:
(i) **Heather:** I found *(keeping a journal)* a really worthwhile experience. I've never done it before and um... and really, Christmas came and, because I was working, and we've been on holiday since, I haven't done anything so far as the journal is concerned, but I really intend, um, now we are about to get back into a routine again, to, to write more often in a journal, because I just found it a very um, positive experience, um... um... I, I wrote in it, not just things to do with ah... the storytelling group, but um... after church meetings and... and any other special events that had been *(Mm)* significant, um... And I felt it was really um... very helpful. At times it allowed me to get, um... what's the word, um... not get rid of, but um...

**Rex:** To work through?

**Heather:** Maybe work through... some feelings. Maybe to get to an end-point a little bit more *(Mm)* seriously or quickly, um... and maybe even to, in, in actually writing it down and then reading it later, having insights that perhaps I hadn't... hadn't been as obvious in the first instance *(Mm, Mm)*. Ah... yes, I found that really positive, really positive...

(ii) **Dot:** *(it was the first time)...* I suppose it is. I started to do a diary once but I found... no, I'm not doing that. I did it for a couple of days and then I would say, nothings happened today *(Mm)* sort of thing. I've got to get my diary out to find out what I did yesterday *(Right)*, I can't remember, it just goes, unless there is anything I have to carry on with *(Mm)*, you know...

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Rex: So was it a positive experience, or a negative experience this time keeping a journal.

Dot: Oh... I don't know (pause)...

Rex: How did you feel about it?

Dot: Well I did it because you asked us to do it (Mm), ah, just reading it back through now, um, it just recalls some of the things we did, but... were they worth recalling? I don't know...

(iii) Shirley: Well, I was really good with the diary for a while, and then, I don't know, I was slack with that so I really can't... I did that for about, nearly two thirds of the way through, so I was a bit crabby with myself about that, towards the end...

and then she went on to share some comments about meeting in others homes and not meeting when anyone could not be there.

Shirley: (Meeting in others homes) was normal for me...

Rex: It's not 'normal' though that we won't hold a meeting if someone can't come.

Shirley: No. (Pause). You're right. But that was interesting, wasn't it. Yeah... I wonder why we did that, though, because normally if you... yes (pause)... I'm just wondering why we did that? What made us do that?
Rex: Well, we did that so everyone could feel they belonged, they were important (Yeah, I guess)... and it wasn't...

Shirley: Because that was not easy.

Rex: No, that wasn't easy, was it...

Shirley: ...because a lot of people had commitments (Yes) yes, and husbands working and (and some)...

Rex: And some had to put off those commitments to put a commitment to the group (Yeap)... Did you find yourself in that situation?

Shirley: Yeah, definitely, because see, I had to arrange baby-sitting a couple of times... and that's why I was happy for it to stop (Mm), because Peter works a lot of ni... not a lot of nights, (Mm) but he works nights regularly (Mm) and that did make it difficult because um, I knew Ruth knew the rosters - I didn't always know Peter's roster, so of course if any knew their husbands were working we had it at their place (Mm), so that made it a bit difficult for me because I had to arrange (Mm) baby-sitting with other people (Mm) and that's probably why I... no that is why I said at the end I had had enough, (Mm) and I really couldn't do it (Mm) any more...

Of the males in both groups, only one attempted to keep a journal - and then they were rough notes.

(iv) Bill: ... I didn't keep a diary, I'll confess (laughter)...

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Rex: Why not?

Bill: Probably because I, I just didn't have time (Mm). That was probably the major reason. I didn't have time...

Andrew: (Pause) Well, I think there were two reasons (why I didn't keep a journal), one, I didn't have much time, I was really running, I mean I, I'd just arrive at the meeting and then when I left the meeting I was straight onto the next thing. I came home and did things (Mm) for work and get ready for the next day, and so on... I do a lot of writing but it's not of a journal-type nature, and I'm not one to do that. I mean, I would really have to work... ah, I mean I have written a diary once in my life... that was when I was 18... I wrote a diary for nine months (Mm) religiously, kept it up daily because I travelled overseas, and um... but that's the last time I ever have (Mm) and um, (pause)... when I write a letter when I'm away it's more likely to be a postcard than a letter because there is so much I would want to say it's pointless just picking out small bits (right) I feel it's a waste of time... it's better to wait till I get home then talk about it, and what sticks in your mind is important and what falls by the way-side probably didn't need to be told anyway (Mm).

Keeping a journal was part of an attempt to work to a 'covenant'. So too was agreeing not to meet when a member of the group was not available. This agreement was honoured by the first group (and found to be important), but it was found hard to keep in the second group.
(i) **Eliz.**: I think this arrangement worked quite well, um and if we hadn't met as a full group, there would have been parts of it missing for people and um, I think it was important that we all be there, and share each others stories because in some instances there was... people told things about themselves that we would never have known about under normal circumstances (Mm), and that would have been a missing part for people who weren't there, when other members shared these with us (Mm).

**Rex**: So it could make involvement that much more difficult, you feel?

**Eliz.**: Yes, and it would be incomplete for some people (right) if they hadn't been there (Mm) and they had missed out. There would have been sections... perhaps someone's story they would never have known (but others...) but others would have, and I think... that was part and parcel of our... the success of our group was that we were all there to experience and to share with one another...

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Of all the stories within the religious tradition, parables are the traditional ones associated with the Christian religion or 'church'. Reflecting back on my 'conversations' with theologian Sallie McFague, parables are "Jesus' most characteristic form of teaching" (1982: 15).

In both groups members were invited to select a parable from the Bible and tell it to the group.
While everyone told their parable, most viewed parables in different ways. For Elizabeth it was 'story' connecting and/or resonating with events from her past...

(i) **Eliz.:** That was quite an interesting evening...

**Rex:** In what way?

**Eliz.:** Um, ah I guess we looked at... in some instances we could see the parables in a different light, ah, I think I can recall we each chose a different one to relate... I know Bradley and I chose the same one.

**Rex:** Do you remember which one you chose?

**Eliz.:** I think it was the one about the 'Sower...'

**Rex:** And do you know why you chose that parable?

**Eliz.:** Oh, probably chose it because I liked the idea of the farmer sowing the seed... reminded me of my childhood growing up on the farm, and I could identify with the farmer sowing the seeds and some growing and some not... possibly why I chose that parable... looking back into the past, my past anyway.

For others, expectations seemed to 'get in the way'. The feeling seemed to be we were now listening to a different sort of story and it had to be treated differently.
Most wanted to analyse it or look for its 'hidden' meaning rather than allowing it to release similar experiences and tell of them. However talking about the experience was to prove difficult for some.

(ii) **Meg:** That was very interesting! I'd thought I had studied parables and, and I thought I knew what parables were but every time you come up against a, and I say 'against' the parables (Mm) because they are really very challenging, every time you do it you find there's more to a parable than um, you had thought about before (Mm).

**Ray:** I thought we left that too quickly...

**Meg:** Yes, it was inconclusive (Right).

**Ray:** You know, I though we could have spent, um, you know another night or two (right) definitely, you know.

**Meg:** Mm. I felt so (Right).

**Rex:** Could you tease that out a bit more for me please, Ray?

**Ray:** Well I felt that um, I felt that the... we only looked at a few, maybe only two or three... and there was no time to get into any depth in terms of getting the views of the group (Right) other than um, a different perspective perhaps in terms of you know, the parables. Certainly to some extent the um, using your earlier comments, that is to say, er, look (Mm) here it is, you make (Mm) something of that (Mm). Don't... I'm not going to give you my
predigested (Mm, Mm) concept (meaning) er, there's something here for you, you know, and I throw it there in front of you and you look at it now. Now, I would have been happier to have seen that develop more (Mm) with the group developing more in terms of their feeling about it, and one in particular, a comment that Ruth made was interesting that night and stuck with me, and that was, er, her sort of throw away line of a difficulty of er, um, with that story about Martha (Oh yes). Remember. (Yes). Now, she didn't... she let it out there (Yes), other than to say that she had always had difficulty with it, you know. (Mm). Here is a difficult question (Yes). Now, that was interesting. Why...

**Rex:** But nothing else happened..

**Ray** No, no, no.

**Rex:** Nobody else sort of said, 'yes I have difficulty too because it reminds me of... There wasn't that (No)... was there?

**Meg:** You see, I thought about that at the time but I didn't have difficulty with it, for the same reason (Yes) because I'm more like that. You see I'd rather sit at his feet and listen than I would wash up or get the... you know, although in actual fact if I were her I would probably be racing round trying to do that and feeling very frantic (Yes), because I'd want to be there (Yes) hearing every word (Yes).
Ray: But that one was very interesting. It's like as you say, it seemed to me on that night (Mm) that suddenly that ball got thrown in the air and it, it didn't...

Meg: Didn't come down...

Ray: It never landed...

Bill's comment reminds me that if my expectations or hopes were not always met, that didn't mean others didn't resonate with what they heard or felt.

(iii) Bill: I also found that having to look at the parables was interesting. I didn't know... maybe I'm a bit slow, but I didn't quite understand the concept that you were getting at to start with, but...

Rex: That they be told as stories?

Bill: Yes

Rex: As opposed to us digging into (Yes, that's right) and looking for hidden meanings (Yes)

Bill: Once I got the gist of what you were doing I thought that was quite (Mm), quite good... that each person had something different... and I suppose, that each person looks at things differently, is challenging, so that was interesting to have that part of it (Mm, Mm), not just presenting something and, like you present a paper at a Board meeting (laughter) (Mm). Sometimes there's no discussion,
or very little discussion (Mm) because it is such a clinical sort of thing - research everything and at the end of it all there really is only one option (Mm), whereas with this there was discussion and different points of view... no one was right and no one was wrong (Right), you know.

However, the discussion I had with Bradley following the group meetings reflects my feelings about the parable sessions and the over-riding control non-narrative worldviews can have on many people.

(iv) Bradley: Isn't (analysing) just a function of where we live and what we do currently because there is so much analysis of the news, on the TV and in the newspaper, that when you hear something, it's not what you hear, right, it's the reason behind it (Mm).

Rex: But we didn't do that with anybody else's story...

Bradley: No. We didn't. We didn't. But maybe because... because the others were personal and these... (Right) these are the facts (Mm) in a written form (Mm)... I do think we tend to analyse things a lot.

Rex: I just wondered whether or not, because it was 'parables' (Mm), we immediately put that into a 'church' context (Mm) and not a 'personal' context?

Bradley: Could well be right, yes...
Rex: ...parables are related to church, (Yes) are related to reading the Bible, is related to sermons...

Bradley: And not related to daily...

Rex: And not related to stories (Yes).

Bradley: Could well be, Rex. Could well be. I hadn't thought of that. Yes... I think... people came, I think, most probably thinking 'well it's a bit different' (Mm) and... and really what do we want... and people said 'Oh well, thinking about the 'Sower', this is what it means in today's world (Mm) rather than saying 'that was a story' (Mm)...

Rex: When in actual fact, ah, your story of... the story of the prodigal son (Mm) um, reminds me of the time I was going to leave home, um, triggered (Mm) those sorts (Mm) of things (Mm)... so we become if you like the prodigal son (yeap) because we happen to leave, leave home and take a trip (Mm) and come to a new country (Mm) and to set up (Mm)... ah, those sorts of things, ah, sort of didn't (Mm) happen... and that, ah... that says a lot of things to me, not about the group, but about how we have institutionalised and formalised stories within the church (Mm)... that we've lost... we've lost the excitement of stories (spontaneity perhaps)... Yeah... it's always received as a reading (yeap) not as a story (yeap)...

Bradley: I think also, one of the real things about the stories we heard from one another was their newness (right). There was something exciting about (Yes) them. Something we hadn't heard
before... heck this is good I must listen... (Mm), but a parable (Mm)... well we have heard them since we were... you know, and the same things (Mm), and you begin to put them in a box, that this you know, this is... this is just words (Mm)... and, and after ever parable in church, whether in Sunday school or where ever, most probably there's a dissertation on the meaning of the parable (Mm) in so many cases (Mm) and I think, you know, it's in that box (Mm)... That was the one thing about our stories... the newness...

**Rex:** The surprise...

**Bradley:** Yes. Yes.

Reflecting a little more on what Bradley has said, 'newness' and 'surprise' for me says a lot about 'parable'. And it is this characteristic of 'parable' that Sallie McFague says makes 'parable' metaphorical rather than symbolic.

In some of the earlier drafts of this thesis I feel I didn't appreciate the 'depth' of what McFague is saying here. It wasn't until I continued to reflect on the suggestions of others, such as Terry Tilley, Roger Silverstone and Joseph Campbell did I begin to appreciate more fully the power of 'myth' verses the power of 'parable'.

McFague suggests the latter - symbolic (myth) - is characteristic of the catholic sensibility which rests on a profound similarity beneath the surface dissimilarities; the former - metaphorical (parable) - is characteristic of the protestant sensibility which tends to see dissimilarity, distinction and tension.
"One critical difference between symbolic and metaphorical statements is that the latter always contain the whisper, 'it is and it is not'" (McFague 1982: 13).

McFague’s comment appears to be consistent with the critical comments of Tilley and Silverstone when compared with Campbell’s stance.

Tilley says a myth "sets up' a world for people to dwell in or constitutes a tradition for people to live in".

He goes on:

"To label a story a myth in this sense is not to label it false (or true), but to recognize that the story does certain work and evokes certain sorts of responses" (Tilley 1985: 40).

Silverstone adds that "the everyday-life world and the world of common sense is... not a questioning world. It is preoccupied with its own security, anxious about its boundaries, content with the answers of myth" (Silverstone 1987: 4).

In the record of his discussions with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell (1988: 31) says myths have four functions:

(i) mystical - experiencing awe;
(ii) cosmological- showing the way things are, but allowing for there still to be mystery;
(iii) sociological - supporting and validating a certain social order, and
(iv) pedagogical - how to live.
Campbell's gift is to connect us to the similarities in all myths - the so-called 'catholic' way of experiencing reality. What he did not appear to do is to take up the second connection. He didn't connect with the differences - which is the so-called 'protestant' way of experiencing reality.

At this point the Cherrybrook experience seems to have had more in common with 'myth' than 'parable'. We were 'surprised' - pleasantly surprised - by the personal stories and resonated with the experiences in them. We were not surprised or disoriented/reoriented by the biblical parables and analysed rather than made connections.

Finally, another difference between the personal storytelling and the parable-telling was almost overlooked by me.

The storytelling was just that - telling. The parable-telling was parable-reading... Except in only one instance, each read their parable rather than told it.

The action of reading the parables changed the experience and the group. Becoming aware of this has validated for me yet again the comments of Walter Ong on what happens when you introduce a printed/written handout to an audience (or small group): "writing (and thus reading written material) estructures consciousness" (Ong 1982: 78 - 116).

It also tends to lessen spontaneity, so characteristic of oral/aural communication/storytelling.
Chapter 11
REFLECTING ON THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY STORIES

"It is in learning to value the history of a particular people and in owning or claiming that story that a community can be instructed and guided to an awareness of its identity in the present... The meaning thus derived ensures that the people view their present circumstances not as fixed and given but as a drama which is still being played out to its end" (Grierson 1984: 104).

"A vital congregation is one whose self-understanding is not reduced to data and programs but which instead is nurtured by its persistent attention to the stories by which it identifies itself" (Hopewell 1987: 193).

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During both storytelling group experiences, another 'style' of story was attempted - the telling of community stories, with the community being stories of/from the congregation.

When asked if anyone knew the 'community stories' it was generally interpreted as a request for the historical stories. Thus the most common suggestion was that others - 'the oldies' - should be asked.

There was little sense of 'let's discover them and re-weave them for our times'. Of those who made comment Ruth's feelings were very interesting.

(i) Ruth: My feeling is absolutely dead against doing that (Mm), I've got a real, um... I get angry at the prospect of being obliged to do that.

Ruth went on to describe a visit to a city church to listen to a musical concert. As she sat in this old, historic church...
Ruth: ...the church worried me. The church is covered... the walls are covered with memorials to people from anything up to 150 years ago (Yeah), and you know, I sat in that church and I thought to myself 'why don't they go away and leave us alone!' It was really awful, and I think I feel like that at our church... I think why don't they go away and leave us alone, even though we have only two stickers on the wall, there is that graveyard down the back (Mm), and we... I feel that we are being asked to conform, or we are expected to be confined, by our past, and I don't want to be (Mm), and I know, I know there are other aspects to the past but in my mind at the moment, all that represents to me is... ah, what the church has been and how people want to keep us back (Yes) and I just can't do that (no). I'm not too brilliant at thinking up another way to do it, but I can't do that, you know, and think... I don't know whether the others have, in the group, have such a conscious negative about that as I do, or whether mine was enough to restrain that... or what, but it is true there was a strange blank on that point.

My immediate response was to recall a quote I had heard on ABC radio by a Queensland (retired) English Literature professor - a quote attributed to the Australian writer Henry Lawson.

In a conversation on writer Lawson with Ian McNamara of 'Australia all over' (ABC Radio) fame, this retired professor suggested Lawson often said that we usually resurrect the dead, in stone, to crucify the living.

Drawing on several personal parish experiences I easily resonated with the feeling in those words...
But it wasn't until several months later when I was again casually flicking through Rubem Alves' book (1990), that some words lept off the page at me.

"Their stories... were a transfiguration of resurrection of a dead past, by the power of their present experience of dreaming" (Alves 1990: 68).

Let me tell the story.

During his 1990 Edward Cadbury Lecture given in the University of Birmingham (England), Alves told a story of a boy who found the body of a dead man washed up on the edge of his village.

There is only one thing to do with the dead: they must be buried. In that village it was the custom for the women to prepared the dead for burial, so the women began to clean the body in preparation for the funeral.

As they did, the women began to talk and ponder the dead stranger.

He was tall... and would have had to bend his head to enter their houses; his voice... was it like a whisper or like thunder; his hands... they were big. Did they play with children or sail the seas or know how to caress and embrace a woman's body.

The women laughed

"and were surprised as they realized that the funeral had become resurrection: a moment in their flesh, dreams, long believed to be dead, returning, ashes becoming fire, forbidden desires emerging to the surface of their skins, their bodies alive again..." (Alves 1990: 23).
The husbands, waiting outside, and watching what was happening, became jealous of the drowned man as they realized that he had power which they did not have.

Alves says:

"The story ends by telling that they finally buried the dead man. But the village was never the same" (Alves 1990: 23).

But then he offers this, I think, powerful comment - made all the more powerful because it is printed in 'oral writing':

"Did you understand the story? I hope not. If you did it is because you have succeeded in digesting it. But stories are like poems; they are not to be understood. Something which is understood is never repeated. Understanding exhausts the word. It leaves the word empty with nothing left to be said. Once the word is understood it is reduced to silence.

"But a story is like a sonata, a love embrace, a poem, a sunset: we want them to be repeated, because their savor is inexhaustible" (Alves 1990: 23 - 24).

Alves has placed the story of the dead man in a lecture/chapter titled 'Silence'. The dead man said nothing. The villagers could say nothing about the dead man. Yet, Alves says, it was out of this silence that new words were heard.

"It seemed that they were telling stories about the dead man. But... the stories they told about the dead man were stories about themselves: their dreams being resurrected from the graveyard where they had been buried..." (Alves 1990: 34).
Two lectures/chapters later, in 'What really happened', Alves again takes up the 'dead man' story.

Still in story mode he suggests that as a result of the 'dead man' experience two models of research were developed: one of "historical inspiration" which wanted to establish the facts; the other of "hermeneutical inspiration" which sought to look at his words and the meanings that were in his mind when he spoke them.

The first model of research produced a "overwhelming mass of historical studies" based on the proposition that "the past is the foundation of the present and that the present is intelligible only as a consequence of the past" (Alves 1990: 67).

This was in stark contrast to the second model of research - the "unspoken theory of the villagers". For them the beginning of time was not a thing of the past, but the present.

"The villagers had... a curious way of understanding time. As against the familiarly known chronological order of events, in which past comes before the present, they believed that the past comes into existence as a sort of reverberation of the present... Their stories... were a transfiguration of resurrection of a dead past, by the power of their present experience of dreaming" (Alves 1990: 68).

The first model asks 'what is truth?' and replies 'it is written!' They were/are fundamentalists.

The second model... the villagers told stories about the dead man "and for them that sufficed. If their stories transformed them into winged creatures, what other proofs should be required?" (Alves 1990: 69). To
know the dead man is to know his benefits! For the villagers "truth is not a historical event, lost in the past, but the resurrection of the dead, in the present" (Alves 1990: 70).

Such was my resonating with this story that the reverberations were exploding in my body. Sure I still had questions and doubts and excitement I wanted to share and explore with Alves, especially around 'meaning' verses 'a seeking of experiences of being alive', but I also felt that maybe the methodology of my own research was again being confirmed. People telling and listening to personal and community stories, and replying with other/more stories... and allowing this new telling to open possibilities in the present... and being enlivened by that experience.

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The apparent difficulty for members of the storytelling groups to tell community stories - especially congregational stories - suggests several possibilities:

(i) As all but one person in the groups had been a short-term member of the congregational community, having moved to this community from another within four years, there seemed to be little interest in learning the local stories. Based on personal experiences I would suggest this could be related to the fact that in a few years - (the average length of stay in the Cherrybrook community is three years) - the family could be moving on to another community and/or congregational community; and

(ii) 'Common sense' tells us that memory is related to events in the past and the storage of factual information about those events.
• While it may be only a small contribution, I have attempted to respond to this lack of relating to the congregational stories by contextualising some people and events within the eucharistic liturgy.

In the traditional liturgy The (Great) Prayer of Thanksgiving recounts the story of Jesus' life and death. In telling this story participants in the liturgy are invited to "join the thankful praise from the whole church" (Duba 1982: 101). The content of the liturgy remains biblically based.

"Presider
In time beyond our dreaming
you hovered over the water revealing
yourself in fire and storm and precious law.

You created us,
women and men, in your likeness,
and placed us on this earth,
with its minerals and waters,
flowers and fruits,
living creatures of grace and beauty!

You showed Noah a rainbow;
you gave strength to Moses to free his people,
and taught Miriam to sing;
you gave courage to Esther
and loyalty to Ruth.

We praise you, O God.

"All
We praise you, O God" (Appendix B).

In the liturgy shaped for use during this research project, two opportunities were given for people to reflect on and make links with, others - either from the congregational or personal past - in addition to the biblical story. This is a significant change.

The first invitation is to link with the story of the congregation. To quote from that liturgy:

"(Mention here is made of local pioneers in the faith.)

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"Presider You gave piety and a love of teaching children to
Hannah Thompson,
and the gift of music to Lewis Pogson;
you gave compassion in times of sorrow to Mary and
James Purser;
preaching to John Purchase,
and faithful attendance to Susannah Harvey.
We praise you, O God.

"All We praise you, O God (Appendix B).

The second invitation is to link with those who have helped shape our
personal faith story. To quote again from that liturgy:

"(Mention here is made of those who have helped shape our own
faith journey)

"Presider We praise you, O God.
"All We praise you, O God" (Appendix B).

Whenever I have used these or similar words in a liturgy there has always
been a very positive response from people, both from those with a
memory of the past and from those who do not have that memory.

A further example of this from another perspective... I well remember a
story Tom Boomershine tells in his book Story journey which reflects this
new possibility for learning community/congregational stories. The
reason why I remember it so well is that while I was attending a religious
communication conference in Nashville, Tennessee in 1990, I had a so-
called typical 'American working breakfast' with two people who were
working with 'narrative' in church situations. One was an educator and
storyteller; the other a seminary lecturer whose wife, Louise Mahan, was
as it turns out, the minister mentioned in Boomershine's story.

Louise had attended a storytelling workshop in 1985. Two years prior to
this she had become parish minister of a congregation which had suffered
the loss of their church in a fire. For two years they had been fighting and arguing with the insurance company. With every small victory seemed to come two other defeats.

During the workshop the group told the parable of The Sower. Commenting on the parable she says she had always disliked the parable - because she had always thought of herself (in allegorical terms) as 'dirt'.

"But as I learned it and told it and told it and heard it told, it suddenly came to me that I was not dirt, but the sower, and that my congregation was filled with sowers" (Quoted in Boomershine 1988: 195).

With great excitement she returned to her congregation and on the first Sunday following the workshop, told the congregation the parable of The Sower.

"They were immediately engaged by the telling instead of the reading. Then I asked them to line it back to me. They looked at me strangely... (but) they lined it back to me twice" (Quoted in Boomershine 1988: 195).

Then she preached on the parable and about being sowers rather than dirt

"...and that we had been sowing seeds for two years and most had fallen on packed down soil or rocky soil or among thorns, but that some had fallen on good soil and we had seen some results of that and that we would see more results in the future.

"We were all encouraged, lifted up, by the story. We used it over and over. It became our story. We used it in worship, on a big banner, at meetings. Everytime we got bad news (which was often) someone would tell the story... We don't need the story much anymore. Our building is going up... We'll need a new story for the new people of God that we will be. But I know that without the parable of the sower (we) would have disappeared" (Quoted in Boomershine 1988: 196).
An 'imaginative' story which opened new possibilities for a community/group of people. And a 'community' story which goes beyond the 'common sense' response that memory is about the storage of facts and information, to the response that memory is an act of imagination.

- The most common response from the latter is along the lines that it is good to be reminded of people and events from the past 'as it helps us remember we are not always doing something which others haven't also had to do or consider'.

Facing the issue that memory is (only) the storage of information about the past is, however, perhaps a greater challenge, but not without others who have also faced that challenge.

One such person is Edmund Bolles. He suggests that:

(i) memory is active rather than just a passive security box or filing cabinet for so-called factual things past, and
(ii) we distort, combine, and reorganise our memories.

"Remembering", notes Bolles, "is an act of imagination... (it) is a creative, constructive process..." (Bolles 1988: xi).

Bolles' work on memory as an act of imagination is interesting - and I believe liberating. While he offers a valuable history of 'memory studies', it is when he begins to offer some comments on memory's role in enabling us to make sense of our worlds of experience that he is the most challenging. To do so he initiates a conversation on memory in three steps or links of a chain:

(i) Emotional memory,
(ii) Factual memory,

(iii) Interpretive memory.

Some introductory notes on these three links may be helpful.

(i) Emotional memory.
Memory is like a chain. Emotional memory is the first link. It creates a desire to know. Thus we remember what we understand; we understand what we pay attention to; we pay attention to what we want.

Memory begins with an 'emotional association' - of pleasure or pain. It helps us learn about ourselves. But memory doesn't stay there.

(ii) Factual memory.
Factual memory is the second link in the chain. It allows us to associate things/events outside ourselves. We see something and it reminds us of something else. Recall and recognition, while remaining separate, play an important role.

Factual memory does not enable us to learn about ourselves. "It takes us as we are and judges the world in our terms" (Bolles 1988: 58).

(iii) Interpretive memory.
Interpretive memory remembers meanings rather than experiences.
Bolles suggests:

"(p)eople interpret events, and they remember their interpretations rather than some more objective account... We remember things according to our understanding of what happened, not according to the way something really occurred" (Bolles 1988: 66, 72).
Thus, interpretive memory organises both the past and the present. And the way people do this organising is through what has been designated as 'chunking'.

Bolles again is helpful:

"(w)e have many tools for preserving the past, but chunks imply that, at best, our memories can do no better than our insights. When we remember something, our minds do not consult some file cabinet to check a dossier containing a fixed truth. We imagine what happened in the past and then we believe our own construction" (Bolles 1988: 83).

It is interpretive memory which makes humans different from other creatures. But it is the chain of emotional, factual and interpretive memory which surprises and enriches us as humans as we seek to cope in the present.

Intrigued by Bolles' comments on memory, a group of six storytellers belonging to the Maine (USA) Chapter of the Network of Biblical Storytellers (NOBS) (Parker et al. 1992: 47) decided to participate in an experiment. They agreed to look at one of the Old Testament stories - the healing of Naaman the Syrian (ii Kings 5).

The experience raised some "provocative questions" - most of which go beyond the scope of these introductory notes and thesis. However, at the end of their experiment they concluded that memory as imagination rather than as storage "fits much of our experience as a network in learning stories" and "the stories were told... without an intense period of storage followed by anxious retrieval" (Parker et al. 1992: 50 - 51).
And what is the 'experience' of learning stories? May I offer a few pregnant suggestions to come from this research project.

First, storytelling is about sharing and resonating with both personal and community stories. As such it is a 'multivocal' activity. And built into the experience is the freedom to arrive at more than one opinion or interpretation.

Second, being a present experience, storylearning and storytelling attempt to take seriously the 'authorship' quality of stories both past and present. And this 'authorship' is shaped to a large extent by the many experiences and interpretations of the worlds of the author, rather than suggesting there is only one world to be experienced, and therefore only one story to tell.

And third, storytelling respects the hearers of the story as being capable of and deserving the right to arrive at a conclusion which is their own, and not just that of the teller's.

All these are suggestive of:

(i) a different awareness of the role of memory;

(ii) a different purpose and educational experience for storytelling than that associated with much traditional group Bible study and liturgical practice, and

(iii) the need for a more collaborative environment in which to share storied experiences - including the 'environment' called public worship with its use of liturgy.
"People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive" (Campbell 1988: 5).

It is my belief that as a result of the storytelling experience which has shaped this thesis, participants shared in both 'self-construction' (Shoemaker 1991) and a 'redescription' of reality (McFague 1987).

I want to suggest further that not only did the stories provide an experience for remembering the past events in their lives, but the telling of the stories also encouraged the participants to allow their lives to remain open to the continuing process of new experiences and new readings.

The stories were an 'invitation' rather than an 'argument'. As James Wiggins suggests:

"(a) story invites one to tell one's own personal and collective stories in response. Stories evoke other stories. The importance of stories lies ultimately less in what is told than in how whatever is told gets told. The temptation is always to stop - to stop listening, to stop responding, to stop storying..." (Wiggins 1975: 20).

Process theologian Bernard Loomer confirms the spirit of this invitation. Couching his comments within a discussion about the need to listen and analyze rather than to argue point by point, Loomer says it is better to
"... hear the other out, to let the other be, to help the other become even greater than he is. To do this without fear, without being insecure, without feeling threatened... to provide the conditions and atmosphere by which that other person in his point of view can become more fully what he is to become" (Loomer 1976: 72)

is a sign of the strength and stature "of a person's soul".

While criticism and comment may come, they will come later. And then the criticism is likely to be quite different:

"... as I say, by that time you will be addressing quite a different individual, and you, yourself, doing the addressing will be quite a different individual, because you cannot, I think, deeply live with another without having that other become part of the very fiber of your being" (Loomer 1976: 72).

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During our time of reflection together some of my co-researchers offered opinions on what they thought might happen if the group was to meet again. Lyn's comments are interesting because she begins to suggest the issue of 'differences'...

(i) Lyn: ...you know, if we were to have this group now, even following all the water that has flowed under the bridge in the last eight weeks (yes), 12 weeks (yes) I think we would probably come up with a different... I think we would have a more heated group now, I'm positive we would...

Rex: A more heated gro...

Lyn: A more heated group.
Rex: Oh, right. Why... would you say that?

Lyn: Well... I think as we drew towards the end of this group (Mm) we started to discuss... just a few of us, not in the group but at other times (Mm) what actually is happening to our congregation (right), and people started to say to me: 'Oh, so-and-so hasn't been; so-and-so hasn't been and, I think the congregation is falling off', and I actually picked that up (Mm), I hadn't noticed it. But in the last two or three weeks I'd been beginning to think, yes they're right. It is happening. People aren't (so you're finding yourself...) coming (looking around and observing...) I'm, I'm being much more penetrating in what I'm picking up from what people are saying, instead of thinking, oh, everything's going along quite OK (Mm). Um, I think if we had the group again with the same people (Mm) we would then get into a more um, perhaps more threatening situation...

Rex: More threatening, or more purposeful?

Lyn: Probably more purposeful, but I don't think we would enjoy it as much (No. Mm).

Rex: It would be interesting... interesting to check that out to see whether or not... because we were able to develop a sense of trust (Mm) whether or not that trust would still be there...

Lyn: I think it would be
Rex: ...if we could share our stories of (what we think is happening) what is happening, and then check them out with other people in the group... (Mm) and enabling them to say 'this is what I feel' and 'this is what I'd do' and...

Lyn: Well I've done that with Heather and Shirley anyway in the last week (right) um, because I was very upset about things (at the church) and I (right)... and this is suddenly 'Wow, this is happening and I don't like it' and I hadn't realised (Mm) um... (pause) yes, I don't know, I... it's just my feeling we would get into a much deeper level (yes) next time round...

(ii) Eliz.: ... I would have liked to have continued on, whether we met on a weekly... at times that was a bit hard to fit in for everyone, um, even fortnightly. I think monthly we may have lost something... fortnightly may have been easier to have worked in, but um, I feel now we have had a break um, it would be nice to get together again as a group, but then whether it would be the same um, I don't know because sometimes you can't always go back to what you had before. You come back and we've all probably... perhaps grown a bit more in other ways and um, it may be hard to go back to what we have just finished.

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The subject of differences or possible conflict was addressed in another group situation in which I participated.

During the early months of 1993 a new Australian Community called the Wellspring Community, invited John Bell, from the Iona Community in
Scotland, to lead two worship workshops in Sydney during his Australian visit.

As part of the workshop "Liturgy and life" discussion revolved around the forthcoming ANZAC Day celebrations. Several members of the 15-member group mentioned that such a day led to both confusion and at times heated differences of opinion within members of the church.

Relating his experiences of Remembrance Day in Great Britain, John Bell shared a liturgical reflection which he had written for such an occasion, with the group. What is important for this thesis is the story of how he arrived at the finished reflection.

He approached four people and invited them to tell him their stories about war. Of the four people he chose, one spoke about his involvement in World War 1, another about the involvement of members of the family in World War 2, a third about their father being a conscientious objector during World War 2, and finally to a young person who "was only 19".

Taking the four accounts Bell then edited and shaped them into a reflection using the mode of dialogue. When the dialogue was read during the Sunday service, each part was read by a person from roughly the same age group as the original people. Then following the dialogue a biblical passage was read.

The purpose of such a reflection? To move beyond a model of communication which encourages argument and debate by adversaries to
an experience of awareness of people as people who hold different opinions shaped by different experiences.

When the workshop broke into small groups I found myself in a group of five: a student candidate for the ministry, an organist, a lecturer in liturgy with a background in New Testament studies, a parish minister with research/post-graduate New Testament training, and myself.

We shared our comments on both the experience of hearing the dialogue and of the model. Most of my group seemed to feel the model required a creative and imaginative 'mind', and while it worked around the issue of war, it may not work with other issues such as abortion.

While agreeing with the need for creativity and imagination, I was not prepared to give up on the model at all and stated I felt story had more potential for awareness and gentle change, even when sharing strong, personal and emotional issues such as abortion than my colleagues were prepared to grant it.

When the large group reconvened reflection on the small group discussions took place, including a sharing of the comments from our group. Bell listened and then suggested that he believed such a model could still work with the issue of abortion. He said he would again approach three or four people who held different opinions on the issue: a right-to-life member, a counsellor, a woman who had had an abortion and a person who was pro-choice.

Their 'stories' would be edited in a dialogue reflection with a suitable biblical passage read following the dialogue.
I resonated with what Bell said. I accept that each issue needs to be handled with great care and sensitivity, but I am confident, based on the experiences arising out of the storytelling groups at Cherrybrook and the 'conversations' I have had with the narrative literature, that the use of story instead of persuasion by argument is a more suitable communication model when dealing with most, but especially with, contentious issues.

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Two other storytelling experiences also need to be mentioned.

Earlier in this thesis I mentioned the research initiated by Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins. Part of their experience occurred in a small group situation (Reason & Hawkins 1988: 89 - 95). Fourteen people from Bath met over two days "in the spirit of co-operative inquiry". They were invited to explore their "experience of gender, using storytelling as a vehicle".

Commenting on the experience they said:

"Through this workshop we learned a lot, both about how groups may be helped to use the storytelling method, and also about the one particular method this group evolved for itself" (Reason & Hawkins 1988: 89).

At the start of the workshop people exhibited an almost hunger for stories, but they primarily saw themselves as story-listeners rather than storytellers. But when the first story was told it was easier for the others to join in the experience.

Following the workshop one participant, Anne, commented:
"I am very confused. I don't know what I have found/discovered/learned. But I think we went further than in a debate or discussion. By not intellectualizing there was much more depth to it" (Reason & Hawkins 1988: 93).

And then a little later on:

"The concept of the story turned out to be a device which freed us from argumentation, discussion on abstract levels and moralizing and theorizing and provided quite a different means of communication which is rare but lead to a depth of communication we should value" (Reason & Hawkins 1988: 95).

Since that initial experience Reason and others have used storytelling as inquiry in other ways and settings:

(i) inviting members of a community to tell of their involvement in that community, and

(ii) in business settings exploring organisational culture.

The method which evolved from the life of the Bath group was similar to that which evolved in the Cherrybrook experience: the main approach was to respond to stories with stories.

And an important observation to that process evolved: stories told by individuals quickly became part of the group's present experience.

Sam Keen also has a story with which I can resonate and which comes very close to the 'personal storytelling' experience of this collaborative inquiry.
For several years, says Keen, a group of men met every Wednesday night, to talk - about their romances, failed marriages, war stories... It grew out of a chance meeting in a coffee shop by two of them.

The group, he recalls, began in desperation and loneliness. But before long,

"between the caffeine and the conversation we were wrapped in a warm cocoon that felt suspiciously like the missing intimacy we had been searching for with women" (Keen 1991: 175).

Following that first meeting/experience the two of them concluded they should "do this more often". But not only that, they each knew other men whom they thought would like to join. Thus began their men's group.

Over the years others joined their group, while many outside the group observed "the profound effect the group has had on its members". Several have asked what they did that was so "powerful". Keen suggests:

"The superficial answer is that we don't do anything except talk about the things that matter the most to us, and listen to each other. We laugh a lot. We challenge each other. But a more profound answer is that almost by accident we discovered the missing ingredient that is as necessary to the health of the male psyche as vitamin C is to the health of the body - the virtue of community" (Keen 1991: 176).

Keen not only discovered but established an environment where the "wounds of the warrior psyche" could be healed. But then in a comment which is important for my research, he says:

"... I have learned that men's loneliness is a measurement of the degree to which we have ignored the fundamental truth of interdependence. In devoting ourselves to getting, spending, and being entertained, we simply forget that we inevitably feel alienated
when we do not live within a circle of friends, within the arms of the family, within the conversation of a community. There is no way we can recover a secure sense of manhood without rediscovering the bonds that unite us to others and reaffirming our fidelity to the 'We' that is an essential part of 'I'” (Keen 1991: 176).

My co-researchers in the storytelling groups were both male and female, but I believe the experiences which we shared and reflected on would lead me to suggest we would agree with Keen's comments, be they offered in slightly amended form: 'that there is no way we can recover a secure sense of our humanity without rediscovering the bonds that unite us to others and reaffirming our fidelity to the "we" that is an essential part of the "I".'

What was discovered from our storytelling experiences and what Keen's men's group and the Bath experiences of Reason and Hawkins confirm, is when an appropriate environment is created, people can and will endure the "vulnerability of diminished defensiveness" (Cox & Theilgaard 1987: 7), share experiences in the form of 'story' and reshape their personal worldviews from an 'as-I-understand-it' viewpoint to include an 'as-others-understand-it' worldview.

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During the time of this research I was approached by a work colleague to share in some discussions with him about forming storytelling groups throughout the Uniting Church. He was aware of my research into this area and hoped I would be able to offer some comments which would be considered as part of a new educational program the church nationally was keen to introduce.
While this event does not have direct contact with the Cherrybrook experience, the paper which I prepared and offered on that occasion arises out of the Cherrybrook experience. For that reason I include it here.

The program is called Christians in everyday life (CEL) and is a process rather than a fully packaged study program (although it does have an 'education' philosophy within it). According to the editor of the series, Colville Crowe, CEL values very highly:

* each person's experiences of being Christian,
* the value of being in a small group situation where people listen to and support each other.

By early 1992 two booklets in the series had been published. The first introduced the CEL series and encouraged people "to focus on our experiences by telling our stories" (Crowe 1991: 4). The second invited participants to reflect on the environment - to tell stories "about our world - the particular places and features of it that are special for each of us" (Crowe 1992a: 4).

In each booklet there are notes to assist the leader of each group. My particular task was to offer suggestions on both the process of storytelling groups and the role of the leader.

Reflecting on the Cherrybrook experience I suggested the groups needed an enabler rather than a traditional 'leader' usually associated with a study group.

In part I suggested:
"People will tell and retell experiences that have invoked a more-than-ordinary 'impression' upon them. But, the way the stories are told is an oral way, which is very different to the way we use story in a written form. In a group situation people will be sharing oral stories rather than written, polished stories.

"An oral story will often contain incomplete sentences and many pauses and breaks. That is, as people tell their story, others resonate with the experiences. 'Mm' and 'yeah' and 'right' will be verbal expressions as the 'hearer' participates with the 'teller' and weaves meaning. These comments and pauses should be allowed to happen. Oral communication is about sound, rhythm, melody, like "twisted knots". Written and/or polished stories bring with them a detachment and a critical attitude.

"And people will link other's stories with their own experiences... 'That reminds me of...' is a common form of linking one story with another".

I then sought to offer some suggestions which could be shaped into notes for any 'leader' of a CEL storytelling/study group.

"1. I have found it helpful to include music early on in the meeting - eg. taped music from the Taize community;
2. Sharing your expectations and purpose of the group can remove some - only some - of the anxieties from people;
3. A story from your experience can help others in the group feel comfortable and can act as an invitation to continue the story flow;
4. Few of us have or are only one story. Instead, we are many unfinished stories;"

I wasn't sure if the keeping of a journal was to be part of the CEL experience, so I included some suggestions about journal keeping - again arising out of the Cherrybrook experience.

"5. Only some will have ever kept a journal before. While for some this will resemble a diary with daily events and feelings recorded, others may find the model offered by T. Rainer in her book The new diary (1978) as more appropriate - that is, looking at significant events in your life;

"6. There is a need to establish whether the journals are for personal use only, or if they are to be shared with members of the group at a later date;"

In both the Cherrybrook experience and on other occasions I have invited people to use the image of going on a journey when they become involved in a storytelling group. I suggested that again here:

"7. An image to begin with: invite members to share in a journey. But instead of travelling along the freeways and highways - which are about arriving at destinations; invite them to take their time, enjoy the back roads and scenery. The trip is important, not just arriving somewhere;"

And finally, reflecting on both Cherrybrook and some of the 'conversations' I have had with authors on the 'narrative indirect' communication tradition...
8. Each member of the group, then, is in the process of becoming and therefore is not only capable of but deserving the right to participate in and arrive at a 'conclusion' of their own rather than that of the 'leader'.

It would appear my CEL colleagues have found the suggestions from the Cherrybrook experience helpful, as some of these comments helped shape the leader's notes in the third issue of the CEL series (Crowe 1992b: 26 - 27).
Chapter 13
AN 'UNCONCLUDING' WORD

"Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on others' dreams. More serious, still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival" (J. V. Taylor, quoted in Cowan 1987: 53).

"I remember, long time ago... I became a friend to a poet. And I brought my texts for him to read. 'Too much light', he remarked, as if his eyes had been hurt by clarity. 'Let's mix a bit of mist to your ideas, a bit of darkness to the argument, a bit of blurriness to the contours... Don't you know that a clear idea brings the conversation to a halt, whereas one unclear idea gives wings to the words and the conversation never ends?" (Alves 1990: 9).

oo0oo

Humans are storytelling creatures. We live in and out of stories as we attempt to redescribe and make sense of our experiences.

Narrative is a "significant mode of human communication, a bearer of culture, and a potentially profound and far-reaching educational" (Moore 1988: 1) and research methodology, especially when combined with social ecology.

Our stories are more than just raw data. Likewise they always provide more 'food for thought' than they have 'digested'. In our quest for making sense of our experiences we continually listen to the stories of others, hoping to hear of experiences which resonate with our own. Out of this meeting of experiences and reflection we weave and redescribe our 'world'.

Sometimes we may feel healed or nurtured by the experience. Other times our worldviews are challenged and our life seems to be a collection of
half-finished stories. The 'truth' of stories rests not on analyses of data but the lifeliness of the experience.

Maybe this is what makes stories so infectious - their resemblance to life itself. For stories are addressed to the body, not just the brain. And the knowledge they represent can not be reduced to abstract rules, logical propositions or statements of fact.

Not only that, but as Christian Michael suggests, echoing Kierkegaard,

"stories work subversively, to change our ways of thinking about things" (Michael 1991: 33).

How? Social ecologist David Russell suggests that storytelling introduces a different dimension: it carries "the 'problem' beyond the boundaries of the situation currently defined" away from "more of the same" or "proposing the 'opposite' to what is currently" under consideration (Russell 1987: 3). While theologian Rubem Alves says stories enable us to move beyond conclusions. For him conclusions are meant to shut down the conversation. "Every conclusion", he writes, "brings the thought process to a halt" (Alves 1990: 8 - 9). But storytelling allows the process to continue.

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This thesis suggests religious communication needs to overcome a long addiction to the discursive, the rationalistic, and the prosaic (Wilder 1976: 1) if it is to survive in an audiovisual, electronic media age. For the 'language' of the electronic media age is shaped more by story, by image and by drama than persuasion by argument and logic.
The Christian religion, despite its rationalist tendencies, is a story-sharing religion. Its founder Jesus of Nazareth, was a gifted storyteller - part of Israel's long storytelling tradition. So too were many others in the early church. In listening to and telling the stories of Jesus, the early Christians "made connections" between these stories and their own lives which "made clear to them how God was present" (Boomershine 1988: 19) in the concrete experiences of living.

But it would also appear that as the Christian religion began to encounter other faiths and worldviews, 'story' was gradually replaced by rationalism and persuasion by argument - 'classical rhetoric'. Specifically, storytelling in theology "lost ground during the last three hundred years. The rationalism of the Enlight(en)ment tended to infect the Christian community with an intellectualism which emphasized the head rather than the heart" (Treston 1986: 5).

While in the area of education and public communication there were few fresh starts. Instead the early church simply added their own specific religious training onto the already existing system. This system was heavily influenced by classical rhetoric. Subsequently the communication influenced 'lifestyles' and 'life processes'.

Over the years this influence has continued to such a degree that for many, an appeal to narrative and the intuitive is regarded with intellectual disdain. This has resulted in less listening, less 'walking on holy ground' and more talking - at.

Another environment needs to be sponsored for religious communication. One which suggests how "to compose new stories and
sing new melodies which resonate with the stories and songs of the
people" (Treston 1986: 5).

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Grassroots, grassroots, grassroots... not my words by those of the
Australian biologist and process thinker Charles Birch (Birch 1989: 74 - 75).
Seven times in only two paragraphs of no more than 250 words, Birch
suggests it is when groups at the grassroots of society become active, there
can be political hope for the future of society.

"I think the grassroots movements could transform the world. I
have no longer any faith in the politicians providing the answers
but I think we can help them to discover the answers" (Birch 1989:
75).

While his comments are offered within the context of political action, I
believe the spirit of what he says could also be applied to religious
communication and the Christian church.

This thesis has suggested that when another kind of environment is
established around the religious communication mode called
'narrative/symbolic', people from the 'grassroots' of the church are more
likely to share personal stories and experiences and respond in
significantly different ways than they do when another environment is
offered or other modes of communication are used.

There is no academic pre-requisite for the use of such a communication
mode. It is an invitation rather than an argument.

It invites us to move from being mere observers to participants - authors
and co-authors.
It invites us to move beyond seeking to change or influence others, as if that is something which can be imposed, to discovering how to exist in and resonate with those experiences that encourage awareness of and transformation from within.

And it invites us to convert opposition into contrast. For a contrast is "larger than a compromise" while at the same time "a contrast is relational, holding difference together" (Moore 1993: 8).

However, while the environment in this project enabled the sharing of personal stories, other factors or worldviews seemed to impede the sharing of and resonating with parables and community stories.

The past experiences of parables as vehicles of doctrine and as preaching and teaching devices requiring analysis, seemed to over-ride the participants ability to connect with them as life experiences and resonate with them as stories. While this surprised me it also confirmed Hopewell's suggestions that worldviews styled 'empiric' and 'canonic' are worldviews seeking order from evidence or authority rather than from life experiences.

While the experience of telling community stories on the other hand, was seen as either attempts at controlling the present or linking with past facts and events - as memory, thus preventing any sense of connecting experiences with imagination.

But for all this the participants in the groups did share in storytelling and story-listening, and both enjoyed that experience and allowed themselves
to be open to moments of vulnerability with others. This indicates to me that worldviews should not be used as labels to describe a person or congregation or be regarded as 'conclusions', but rather as explorations... unfinished 'stories' as part of a personal or community journey still in progress.

Such an awareness is, I believe, a first step in shaping a broader human conversation of larger generality.

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In general religious communication needs to be modelled on a new awareness of what it means to be human. An awareness that human nature and human societies are more deeply nurtured and motivated by stories and imagination - 'wholespeak' - than by argument, ideas or conclusions - 'narroowseak'.

Such a suggestion will require the church to move away from the current dominate communication model and reimagine a different model. Such a change is encouraged in this thesis.

'Narrative/symbolic' religious communication attempts to offer such a reimagined model and vision for the church in an audiovisual, multimedia age, for it suggests there is more of a discontinuity of communication links between literate and electronic societies, than continuity - a challenging situation for a 'literate' church to be in.

This thesis also suggests our lives are made up of many unfinished stories. In itself this thesis shares in this 'truth' by being an unending word... reflecting more closely the nature which is story and as an attempt to both
start and keep the conversation going rather than closing it down with 'conclusions of certainty'.

It is not primarily or only the result of a misplaced, singular concern for explanations, debates or arguments, or even "formulas of great uniformity" (Babin 1991: 29) which have controlled our present religious communication models, limited our spiritual growth and crippled us as a people. It is more the downgrading, even the denial of the intuitive, the creative, the imaginative.

Religious communication has its roots in poetry and storytelling and when it strays too far from these it can become analytical, rationalistic and ultimately, sterile. Religious communication needs to sense the spirit of what some say liturgy is about - that it is meant to "engage the mind imagining rather than the mind thinking" (Collins 1992: 31, my emphasis), although I would want to go further than Collins and suggest - to also engage the eyes and the face and the hands and the gut... the body - for religious communication is about more than mere consciousness.

For before the tradition or the creed or the argument or the idea was the experience of flesh-and-blood people, and the story of that experience.
BIBLIOGRAPHY:


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Appendix A

WORLD VIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

I need your help! (Yes, it’s part of my Masters work...)

Listed in these pages is a series of questions about God and human situations that different Christians answer in different ways.

I would like very much for you to consider sharing in this questionnaire.

To do so, all you have to do is choose ONE answer from each item that would come CLOSER to your own opinion THAN ANY OTHER.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Each is only your answer. Be sure to only ONE box in each question.

This complete questionnaire is a modification of that designed by James Hopewell, and his authorship and design of Sections 1 - 3 of the questionnaire is gratefully acknowledged.

Rev Rex A E Hunt
(02) 484 5499

SECTION 1:

1. At its best my faith is:
   (a) □ concerned for humanity’s highest values
   (b) □ filled with the Holy Spirit
   (c) □ born again in Christ
   (d) □ aware of my own divinity

2. When I die:
   (a) □ God will continue to bless and keep me
   (b) □ I shall be with Christ
   (c) □ I journey on toward greater oneness with God
   (d) □ what will be, will be

3. When I see a picture of a starving child, I think that:
   (a) □ if everyone did God’s will, this would not happen
   (b) □ the child is nevertheless a spiritual being nourished in other ways
   (c) □ we live in an unfair society
   (d) □ God is with her/him and can ease her/his troubles

4. I feel I mature as I:
   (a) □ seek and receive God’s gifts
   (b) □ follow God’s plan for me
   (c) □ learn to love
   (d) □ realize the divine potential within me

5. Jesus Christ provides:
   (a) □ salvation from my sin
(b) □ miraculous power in my own life
(c) □ an example of life in tune with the absolute
(d) □ freedom and self-reliance

6. I get in touch with God primarily through:
   (a) □ deep study of the bible
   (b) □ experiences of God's presence with me
   (c) □ close human relationships
   (d) □ shutting out the world and communing with my innermost self

7. Worship is most meaningful:
   (a) □ at times of mystery and silence
   (b) □ when the Word is faithfully heard
   (c) □ in the midst of a caring community
   (d) □ when God's spirit is manifested

8. When a young mother has cancer:
   (a) □ I know she could find real peace in the bible
   (b) □ I know that life often contains great suffering
   (c) □ I must realise that all things work together for highest good
   (d) □ I pray that God will heal her

9. Were a person close to me dying, I would:
   (a) □ find strength to persevere
   (b) □ expect comfort from God
   (c) □ recognise how divine life sheds the limits of this world
   (d) □ stress the importance of the state of that person's salvation

10. In the worst times of my life I find:
    (a) □ the divinity within me shows my troubles to be less crucial
    (b) □ comfort in verses from the bible
    (c) □ patience until better times
    (d) □ God blessing me in new ways

11. Some non-Christian people claim the ability to predict the future. I think:
    (a) □ these predictions may reflect their contact with universal intelligence
    (b) □ they are empowered by the devil
    (c) □ they are probably mistaken
    (d) □ the only disclosure of the future is that written in Christian scripture

12. I would like the next minister of my church to be gifted in:
    (a) □ presenting sound Christian doctrine
    (b) □ bringing in God's power
    (c) □ deepening our fellowship with each other
    (d) □ uncovering the untapped powers of the mind

13. In the future I want to:
    (a) □ ask God for all the blessings God has in store for me
    (b) □ cultivate deeper levels of consciousness
    (c) □ really get into the bible
    (d) □ be honestly who I am
14. As I see it, the world:
   (a) ☐ contains a mixture of good and bad
   (b) ☐ is only the surface expression of divine reality
   (c) ☐ is the place where God is emerging victorious
   (d) ☐ would improve were we to fulfill the mission God has given us

15. When someone I knew died, I was basically:
   (a) ☐ consoled that death is an illusion of this world
   (b) ☐ thankful for (or concerned about) the person’s relation with Christ
   (c) ☐ strengthened by God’s closeness
   (d) ☐ troubled by the loss

16. God enters my life most decisively in:
   (a) ☐ my deep commitments
   (b) ☐ answers to prayers
   (c) ☐ the peace and harmony I discover
   (d) ☐ the rules by which to lead a good life

17. After I got acquainted with the new minister in my church, I hope that we would:
   (a) ☐ see each other as ordinary friends
   (b) ☐ share testimony about our wonderful growth in Christ
   (c) ☐ explore the signs that reveal God’s truth
   (d) ☐ learn together from God’s scripture

18. As a citizen I follow the laws of my country because:
   (a) ☐ disobedience obscures the divine pattern
   (b) ☐ I agree with the laws
   (c) ☐ God blesses those who pray and obey
   (d) ☐ I am to obey the authorities

19. God speaks to me:
   (a) ☐ through the words of the bible
   (b) ☐ through the power I share with all of life
   (c) ☐ through meaningful human relationships
   (d) ☐ sometimes directly

20. When someone I love is very ill, I pray that this person:
   (a) ☐ be miraculously healed
   (b) ☐ accept the will of God in this situation
   (c) ☐ gain awareness of healing participation in divine perfection
   (d) ☐ be skillfully cared for by doctors

21. Satan (or the devil) is:
   (a) ☐ an old way of talking about evil in the world
   (b) ☐ a name for the illusion that blocks full consciousness
   (c) ☐ the ruler of the damned
   (d) ☐ active in individuals today

22. Were my family to suffer financial loss, I would:
   (a) ☐ look for God to change the situation
23. Earlier this year a neighbour complained that a ghost was in her house. I think that:

(a) ☐ it could be a demon and be driven away by the power of Christ
(b) ☐ she should move beyond such negative forms of thought
(c) ☐ such a strange occurrence should lead her to God
(d) ☐ there is probably a scientific explanation for her experience

24. When someone grows senile, I think that this situation is:

(a) ☐ part of God’s will that someday we may understand
(b) ☐ a temporary condition not truly showing his continuing progress toward God
(c) ☐ still ripe for God’s blessing that person
(d) ☐ just an unfortunate fact of life

25. During the 1990s our nation:

(a) ☐ will be faced with critical decisions
(b) ☐ could escape its present level of discord
(c) ☐ will be punished if it fails to live up to its covenant with God
(d) ☐ must claim the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit

26. To me a horoscope drawn up by an expert:

(a) ☐ is dangerous because it brings ungodly powers into your life
(b) ☐ is wrong because God, not the stars, determines my life
(c) ☐ may be helpful
(d) ☐ may be entertaining but is otherwise worthless

27. In listening to a sermon I feel dissatisfied unless the minister preaches:

(a) ☐ about our unity with God
(b) ☐ a spirit-filled message
(c) ☐ a convicting message from the bible
(d) ☐ with reference to everyday situations

Thank you for sharing in this section of the questionnaire. Now to score your work...
SECTION 2:

1. Check you have answered all questions.

2. Circle the letter of the answer that you gave to each question. If you left that question unanswered, mark an ‘x’ in the space provided at the end of each line.

3. At the bottom of each column write the number of responses you circled in that column. Your total number of responses should add up to 27.

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SECTION 3:  (Please leave this section, but move to Section 4)

To chart your score:

a. **Determine the horizontal axis**
   - If canonic score is larger than gnostic:
     
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     \text{Count toward} \\
     \text{Ca pole}
     \end{array}
     \]

   - If gnostic is larger than canonic:
     
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     \begin{array}{c}
     \text{Gn score} \\
     \text{less Ca score} \\
     \text{Count toward} \\
     \text{Gn pole}
     \end{array}
     \]

b. **Determine the vertical axis**
   - If empiric is greater than charismatic:
     
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     \text{less Ch score} \\
     \text{Count toward} \\
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SECTION 4:

And just a few more questions to help me paint a picture of people who have answered this questionnaire...

1. Male ☐ Female ☐ Today's date:.................................

2. Age group
   ☐ under 20 years
   ☐ 21 - 30
   ☐ 31 - 40
   ☐ 41 - 50
   ☐ 51 - 60
   ☐ 61 - 70
   ☐ over 71 years

3. Baptised member ☐ Confirmed member ☐ Adherent ☐

4. I have been attending Cherrybrook Uniting Church/(other Uniting Church) for ............... years

5. I attend worship services
   ☐ once a week
   ☐ once a fortnight
   ☐ monthly
   ☐ 3 or 4 times a year
   ☐ on special occasions
   ☐ other times ..........................................................

6. I have been living in Cherrybrook (or other) ...................... suburb for ........ years. I moved to my present address in 19........ from ..................................................

Thank you again. Your help is much appreciated.
Appendix B

When it was announced that we would be expected to make a presentation on the area of the thesis as part of Phase One, I sought to link that presentation with a service of worship I had been asked to lead at the Cherrybrook congregation.

It is with this congregation I hoped to work with during the research stage of the thesis.

Following confirmation from my supervisor, I requested permission of the local Council of Elders of the Cherrybrook congregation (Uniting Church) to celebrate an additional service of the eucharist on 21 October. This permission was given and I was invited to prepare an article on the service for publication in the congregation's monthly newsletter.

Supervisors and some of the members of the Masters group were invited to attend the 'celebration' and join in a meal together following.

Within the congregation was a Worship Committee, and I indicated I would like to work with them to plan the service.

I met with the group on four occasions prior to the service:

(i) Initial meeting, introducing them to the printed liturgy from the thesis, inviting them to share with me in enfleshing that liturgy. They all expressed an eagerness to share in the experience;
(ii) storytelling;
(iii) Looking at the two horizons - the setting of the story and our contemporary setting - of the story;
(iv) enfleshing the liturgy with music, prayers, images.

Following the second meeting with the group I prepared a document "Enfleshing the liturgy". I felt there was a need for this as some members of the committee were not present at the second meeting.

ENFLESHING THE LITURGY
Some notes to members of the Worship Committee, reflecting on the shaping of the liturgy for 21 October, 1990.

1. We are all storytellers.
Members shared in a fun time of storytelling. Working in pairs, an imaginary story was told by one of the pair, added to by the other person from time to time. This addition had to be incorporated into the story.

After a short time the roles were reversed.

We are storytellers. Only sometimes we don't remember that.
2. The gospel as storytelling.
Copies of the gospel reading for 21 October 1990 was distributed. Matthew 22: 15 - 22.

The reading was told as a story. Each was invited to learn the story and then take turns in telling the story. We were supported in our telling by a partner and then by the group.

The gospel story begins to come alive.

3. Initial responses.
Each person was invited to give their initial response to the story. Not analysed and deatiled responses, just the immediate feelings.

To let the images surface rather than 'get the message'.
(a) what impression did you have?
(b) what words grabbed your attention?
(c) what feelings were experienced?
(d) what mood did the story evoke in you?

About our experiences. This is not so much about the story, but about us who have heard and told the story.

4. The story upon its own horizon.
There can be no genuine 'conversation' with the story if we do not first place it 'back there, when'.

(a) An attempt to discredit Jesus:
   (i) Does Jesus side with the Zealots who claim no contact with the Romans at all?
   (ii) Or is he on the side of those who collaborate with the Romans?
   (iii) Has he just given up?

(b) Goes beyond the terms of the question. Demands the (Jews) should also return to God what belongs to God.

(c) Their question has rebounded on them, according to Matthew, catching them in smug complacency.

5. Share meanings 'out front'.
   "the sense of the text is not behind the text (its historical origins) but in front of it (the world it opens up)"

We listen with new ears, see with new eyes. Ours is a different horizon. New responses (nearness) to the story.

6. Enfleshing the liturgy.
"not an act of imparting information or influence, but the creation, representation, and celebration of shared belief"

The following is a copy of the liturgy celebrated on Sunday 21 October 1990, as part of my Phase One presentation.

Missing from this edition is the liturgy of the Sacrament of Baptism. This sacrament became a part of the liturgy at the last moment, at the request of the parish minister (for pastoral reasons) but is not included here as it was not part of the shared work of the group responsible for shaping the celebration.

LITURGY FOR THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE

Greeting:
Liturgist Greetings to the church gathered here in Cherrybrook.
To you who have been called to be a holy people,
Grace to you and peace from the God of Sarah and of Abraham,
the Son, born of Mary,
and the Holy Spirit who broods over us as a mother over her children.

People Grace and peace be with you.

Opening Sentences:
Liturgist The world belongs to God,
All the earth and all its people.
Liturgist How good and how lovely it is to live together in unity.
All Liturgist Love and faith come together,
All justice and peace join hands.
Liturgist If the Lord’s disciples keep silent
All these stones would shout aloud.
Liturgist God, open our lips
All and our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

Hymn:

Shaping the celebration:

Liturgist In the beginning,
when it was very dark
God said, "Let there be light"

All
And there was light.

(The sign of light. A candle is lit).

Liturgist
In the beginning,
when it was very quiet,
the Word was with God
All
And what God was, the Word was.

(The sign of the Word. An open bible is placed on the Ambo).

Liturgist
When the time was right
God sent the son.
All
He came among us, he was one of us.

(The sign of the Son. A cross is placed in its holder).

Meditation:
"Celebration" by Kathy Gregory

Music of celebration: (Sung by the choir)
"O magnify the Lord" by Camille Saint-Saens

Introduction to readings:
Liturgist
Let us listen for the word of God.

Let us hear again the stories from our religious tradition:
from the narratives and songs of the Hebrew people;
and from the writings of the early church - the apostles and disciples, women and men - as recorded in Matthew's account of the gospel...

Old Testament: Ruth 1: 6 - 11a; 16 - 22

Responsive Psalm: Psalm 146

Hymn:

Gospel: Matthew 22: 15 - 22

Reader
God of good news, God of surprises,
your word is a lamp to our feet
and a light upon our path.
All
Reader
May your word live in us
All
and bear much fruit to your glory.
Homily:

Silence:

A contemporary liturgical affirmation:

Liturgist  Friends,
          once again we have heard the invitation to
          respond to God's word.

          Let us stand and share together an
          affirmation of our faith.

          All  We believe that where people are
          gathered together in love
          God is present
          and good things happen
          and life is full.

          We believe that we are immersed in
          mystery
          that our lives are more than they seem
          that we belong to each other
          and to a universe of great
          creative energies, whose source
          and destiny is God.

          We believe that God is after us
          that Godself is calling to us
          from the depth of human life.

          We believe that God took a risk
          and became human in Jesus.

          In and with Jesus we believe that each
          one of us is situated in the love of God
          and the pattern of our life
          will be the pattern of Jesus -
          through death and resurrection.

          We believe that the Spirit of Peace
          is present with us, the church,
          as we gather to celebrate
          our common existence,
          the resurrection of Jesus,
          and the fidelity of God.

          And most deeply we believe that in our
          struggle to love
          we incarnate God in the world.
And so aware of mystery and wonder, 
caught in friendship and laughter 
we become speechless before the 
joy in our hearts 
and celebrate the sacredness of 
life in the eucharist.

Prayers of the people: 
(At the conclusion of each petition...)

Liturgist   Lord, hear our prayer 
All         and let us be your answer to prayer.

(Following the last petition, the following Collect is prayed...)

Liturgist   Help us, compassionate God 
           lest we make our prayers a substitute for what we 
           should do with our lives; 
           what our prayers begin, may our lives 
           continue.
All         Amen.

Offering:

Dedication of gifts: 
Liturgist   As a river without an outlet becomes 
           stagnant, 
           so a life which receives but does not 
           give, becomes polluted and sour.

           As we give, we know we will be 
           refreshed and cleansed as well as 
           being a blessing to others.
All         May we be such a blessing. Amen.

Hymn:

Confession and reconciliation:

Presider    Friends 
            we are about to set the table 
            share in the sacred story and 
            celebrate the feast of the resurrection.

            But we have been reminded 
            that when we bring our gift to the table 
            if our brother or sister has anything against us, 
            we must leave our gift
and first cleanse our hands for the giving.

Let us then pray that the Lord create
a clean heart in us.

Silence:

Presider  Loving and caring God,
you have searched us out and known us,
all that we are is open to you.

(Pause)

Presider  Look not upon our sin but upon our faith.
Break down all barriers which we erect
against your love.
Cover us with the blanket of your peace.
And let your justice reach to the ends of the earth.

All  We turn to you, O God;
we renounce evil;
we claim your love;
we choose to be made whole.

Presider  When our prayers are like a back-of-Bourke
paddock, and our spirits like spinifex

All  Forgive us, and drench us with a
downpour of mercy!

Presider  When we take things for granted and gratitude
goes to sleep

All  Forgive us, and put a new song on our tongues.

Presider  When life's abrasive pressures fray us,
loosening our hold on life around us

All  Forgive us, and tell us again about magpies and
pink heath and a God who loves and seeks after
us.

Presider  When our selfishness begrudges love and we
become obsessed with our own needs,
when we walk away from neighbours in need
and share in the world's prejudice, warfare
and greed:

All  Forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin
against us.

Presider  Let us pray in the Spirit
even as we have been taught to pray:
All

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name
your kingdom come
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sin
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours, now and for ever.
Amen.

Sign of Peace:
Presider
May the peace of the risen Lord be with you
always.
All
And also with you.

(After all have exchanged the sign of peace)

Presider
Christ's great love for us, is beyond our
understanding, yet Christ's word is clear:
our sin is forgiven.
All
Thanks be to God.

Doxology: (Sung) -
All
Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures here below,
Praise God above, you heavenly hosts,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

(During the doxology the bread and the wine is presented and
placed on the Table)

Thanksgiving:
Presider
Gracious God, we praise you and give you thanks.
All
It is right to give our thanks and praise.
Presider
In time beyond our dreaming you hovered over
the water revealing yourself in fire and storm
and precious law.
You created us, women and men, in your
likeness,
and placed us on this earth,
with its minerals and waters, flowers and
fruits, living creatures of grace and beauty!
You showed Noah a rainbow; you gave strength
to Moses to free his people,
and taught Miriam to sing;
you gave courage to Esther
and loyalty to Ruth.
We praise you, O God.
We praise you, O God.

All

(Mention here is made of local pioneers in the faith.)

Presider You gave piety and a love of teaching children to Hannah Thompson,
and the gift of music to Lewis Pogson;
you gave compassion in times of sorrow to Mary and James Purser;
preaching to John Purchase,
and faithful attendance to Susannah Harvey.
We praise you, O God.
We praise you, O God.

All

(Mention here is made of those who have helped shape our own faith)

Presider We praise you, O God.
All We praise you, O God.

Presider In the fullness of your mercy you became one
with us in Jesus Christ.
He rejoiced with those who rejoiced
and wept with those who wept.
To the despairing he spoke a word of hope;
to the sick he gave healing;
to the rejected he was a friend.

Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition
he was nailed to a cross, suffering the depths of human pain.

But he was lifted from the grave and restored to
life, breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to eternal life.

And so, with Elizabeth who prophesied your
birth,
Martha who confessed you as the Christ,
and James and John who sought to follow in
your way,
we praise you saying:
All
Holy, holy, holy, vulnerable God, heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Presider
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God,
Hosanna in the highest.

Presider
Compassionate God, your spirit gives us confidence, removes our fears, and enables us to come before you, to do as your Son requested us to do in his memory.

All
Bless us, Lord, and these your gifts.

Presider
We take bread and give you thanks.
We break the bread...
    rip it, hurt it and crush it...
We break the bread and say:
This is my body.

We pour a cup of wine and give you thanks.
We share the cup among us and drink the new and everlasting covenant...
    new promise, new lease of life, new gift of God...
We share the cup, blood poured out for sin's forgiveness.

As we eat the one bread and share the one cup, we experience anew the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All
We remember his death,
we celebrate his resurrection,
we await his coming glory.

Presider
Come now, tender spirit of God, brood over these bodily things,
that we and these may be signs of life and love to each other.

All
Only your peaceful presence can nourish us in faith,
bind us together in love,
and fill us with resurrection hope,
so we might share in your service to all the world.
Alleluia. Amen.

Bread and wine:

Presider
Holy things for God's holy people.

All
Happy are we to be invited to this supper.
Presider  And they recognised him in the breaking of the bread.

Communion: (Bread and wine).

Prayers after communion:

Liturgist  God of love and compassion,
           may the celebration of the wonder and the
           mystery of your presence, strengthen and enable
           us to be the body of your Son, Jesus the Christ.
           Amen.

All

Hymn:

Blessing:

Presider  May you live forever
People    May you live forever
Presider  in the name of love.
People    in the name of love.

Presider  May you love forever
People    May you love forever
Presider  in the name of life.
People    in the name of life.

Presider  Called by God
People    Called by God
Presider  filled with the spirit
People    filled with the spirit
Presider  compassionate and faithful
People    compassionate and faithful
Presider  rejoicing always
People    rejoicing always,
Presider  may you live in love
People    may you live in love
People    forever. Amen.

Dismissal:

Liturgist  You have been strengthened by Word and bread,
           for the service of all.
           Be what you have seen;
           offer who you are
           that they may say of us even as they said of our
           ancestors:
           "See how they love one another".

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Presider

Go in peace, in the name of our
creating
liberating,
nurturing God.
Blessed be God for ever!

All

Recessional music:
Appendix C

PERSONAL STORIES...

Enclosed are some of the stories which formed part of the storytelling experience. They are recorded in their 'oral' state with other comments recorded in () brackets.

I thank my co-researchers Ruth, Ray, Elizabeth, Dot, Andrew, Bradley, Meg, Shirley, Bill, Heather and Lyn for their sharing, love and support.

ooo0oo

Meg's Story...
I had an interesting experience during the week... I mean this sort of thing happens all the way through my week, but I've never thought of the fact we were sharing stories... But I was waiting in the chemist for a whole lot of prescriptions to be made up and I was talking to one of the girls who works there and something come up that she was engaged, and she had been married before and it had been a disaster, and so on... which I knew. And I was congratulating her on her engagement... and we got to talking and, you know, I shared the fact with her I'd been married before many years ago, and... you know, we chatted for five minutes while the prescriptions were being made up. And I thought to myself, Aha, stories... (laughter). I've never heard of them as stories before... but it was very interesting. You know, it was a real time of sharing...

Ruth: Interesting you put the label 'chat' on that, because I wouldn't count that as a chat...

Meg: No, well, it's not the sort of chat you would normally have, that's quite true. And it came out, um, through her telling me about... I knew about the break up of her marriage, about the sort of marriage it had been, and the thought of getting married again was a bit frightening and so on. You know, it sort of came up like that... But I did genuinely feel we did achieve something. When I walked out of the chemist shop, I guess because it is not something I talk about... and, um, I doubt if she does much either. There was nobody else in the shop either. And it was, um, I have always liked this girl and I know she feels the same, but we have never talked about that before.

Ruth: It is interesting how circumstances just work like that, isn't it...
Meg: She was interested to know that 33 years later I was still married to the second person, you see. I think she was a bit worried that second marriages might be very shaky...

Shirley's Story...
I knew dad was writing his life story because his step-daughter had encouraged him to write it, because she had only got to know him recently, and she said he had had a really interesting life, and that he actually should write it down on paper. And he had never really thought about it before because he was quiet a good writer (Mm) and um... so he just wrote it down just basically for his family (Mm) just... and he wrote hundreds of pages... foolscap pages about his life, and it started off a little about his childhood, a lot of it during the war - his war years, a little bit pre-war years, but a lot about the war years, and then after he was married, and I just see dad now in a completely different light because he had the most tragic life, and I never knew (Mm) had tragic it was.

Rex: You said that you felt sad for him?

Shirley: I did, because... I just sought of thought of dad as dad (Mm), and I've never really thought of what kind of life he'd had. It was just dad was a happy fellow (Mm) and he went through life that... he went through the war and until I read that - he did six years and a lot of that was in real action - (Mm) and just reading that it was terrible and its had an everlasting effect on him, (Mm) just from his story. A terrible... just a real effect. Just different things have happened - seeing people killed in front of him, and then he went on then... my mother died at 48 so dad wasn't much older, and when I read that I knew that would have made him sad (Mm) because I was with him when that happened but, the way he wrote it.

Rex: How old would you have been then?

Shirley: I was 18.

Rex: Oh right...

Shirley: And he wrote that and I cried. I mean, it was just awful. He said how he felt, how he had turned to drink, which I didn't even know! (Mm) So he said he was drinking too much, and um...

Rex: So you really learned a lot about your father (Oh yes) you didn't know...

Shirley: Oh yea... but before that, I didn't know either he actually killed somebody, accidently. He... just before, I think my mother was pregnant with me and um... and he was working at a softdrink factory (Mm) and um, he backed a truck (Mm) um to a loading dock and there was a man behind it - his best friend (Oh dear) and he killed... and it was all of that
(Mm) and he had never talked about it. And in the story he said, I forget the words he used but what he meant was, 'I'm telling you this but I don't want to talk about it'.

**Rex:** Right. So you haven't had the chance to...

**Shirley:** I have never said anything about (OK)... I did say to him: 'Oh dad, you've had a tough life' or something like that. I tried to keep it (yes) low-key, and he said: 'Mm, but I'm not complaining' or something like that (Right). But it was just that I learnt so much. And I do feel sad now for him and... it's probably made me appreciate him more... and since that, I've told him I loved him. Isn't that funny... (Mm) You know, I um... I mean I do love him, and I've always have, but I never really told him I love him... probably as a little kid I did. (Yes) But I have told him everytime I say good-bye to him now, I sort of say, 'I love you dad' and kind of... and I kind of think, golly...

**Rex:** So reading his story (Oh) has changed you in the sense of your perception of him?

**Shirley:** Oh yes, I just appreciate now, (Yes) so much more, what he's done for me (Right)... He's always been a great dad and everything, and I did appreciate it but, I appreciate it even more because all that... he had all that heart ache (Yea) and could never share it (Yea) with any of us, even after mum died and... I sought of think now, how lonely he must have felt when mum died, because he was alone then for ten years after she died... because he couldn't talk about... he didn't feel he couldn't talk about any of those things with us...

**Rex's Story...**

I have always wanted to go to Iona, ever since a former local parish minister told a group of us 30 years ago about the Community. Iona's history goes back to the time of St Columba who first landed on this small island on the west coast of Scotland in 563 AD. So last year, when I was on study leave, I went to Scotland (Lovely place) and went to Iona. I soon found out that Iona is not easy to get to, but a friend took me to Oban by car. From there I caught a ferry to Craignure, a bus to Fionnphort, on the west coast of Mull, and another ferry across the Sound of Iona to the Island itself. I was fortunate to be able to stay in the Abbey itself. Dating back to the 16th century, this former Benedictine Abbey has been rebuilt, due mainly to the work and vision of Rev Dr George MacLeod (now Lord MacLeod of Fiuinary) of the Church of Scotland who, with a group of unemployed men from Glasgow, commenced the restoration work in the early 1930s. Work on the Abbey was completed in 1967. Prior to going to Iona, I found out they had a pilgrimage round the island every Wednesday so I made sure I was there on a Wednesday. About 35 of us - Americans, British, Scots, Canadians and Australians...
Bradley: Were there any other Australians there?

Rex: Yes. I met one lass. She was from Sydney. She was working at the Abbey as a... waitress. We assembled outside the Abbey at St Martin's cross... one of two celtic crosses... you know, they are a cross with a circle on it (Yes, Mm). We met outside the Abbey... St Martin's cross has stood there for more than 11 centuries, which I found pretty hard to comprehend (Yes)...

Ruth: Yes. If things are 80 or 100 years old (Yes) here, we think they are old (Yes, Mm).

Rex: It also reminded us of an important difference between Celtic christianity and the western form. Celts worshipped outside, in the fields. Western christianity built special places and called people inside, away from nature. I remember that Philip, um... our guide, told us about Celtic worship and then led us in a simple celtic prayer. It went something like: Lord, as I milk my cow, and the milk runs into my bucket (laughter), and we drink this milk, sustain us all with your everlasting love and protection (Simple! Nice). From St Martin's cross we made our way to the 13th century Augustinian Nunnery. In contrast to the rebuilt Abbey, the Nunnery is in ruins. As Philip pointed out, history has provided us with an almost exclusive focus on the Abbey, to the neglect of the Nunnery and the work of women religious on the island. As we paused and prayed, giving thanks for the goodness of God's creation, we also confessed and sought forgiveness for the way the ministry of women has been neglected in much of the life of the church (Yes), and pledged to work for a great integration of the masculine and the feminine, (Mm) of matter and spirit. That was pretty special for me (Yes, Mm). Our walk to the Marble Quarry on the... ah, south-east corner of the island was to be our next and first leg of the pilgrimage. As we moved through the fields of grass and heather, across water washes and down steep cliffs, the group began to string out into twos and threes. Often the group ahead would be out of sight (Bit of a worry! Laughter) and we had to look for pieces of broken heather and footprints in the mud to find our way. When we arrived at the quarry we had to go past a whole stack of rusting machinery... looked like a bit of a tip, really. The quarry is the site of the beautiful and famous green and white marble. The alter in the Abbey chapel came from this quarry. But we also saw that in the process of cutting the beautiful marble... from some of the oldest rocks in the world... the rocks were broken and destroyed. So the quarry was both a place of beauty and destruction, you know! Here we reflected for a while on our place in creation and what we often do to creation. Then about half a mile to the west was the smooth, pebbled beach of St Columba Bay. Legend has it that Columba landed on this beach on Pentecost Day, 563 AD, having been expelled from Ireland. He was to travel as far away... so far that when he turned to look towards Ireland, he could not see it (Too much fog! Laughter). Um... he and his monks buried their boat on the beach, and then climbed a hill a little further west. When he looked toward Ireland,
Ireland could not be seen. So he turned his back on his home country and headed north east across the island of Iona. That hill is called, Car... can't pronounce it, but it means "hill with your back to Ireland" (Mm. Lovely). Thinking about Columba's journey, we were invited to reflect on our own life's journey (Yes) then, naming some thing or event we wished to 'leave behind', we threw one of the smooth pebbles into the sea, turned our backs on the bay, and made our way to The Mhachair which is the island Common where we shared lunch and had a bit of a rest. It was good to sit for a while (Laughter). Moving from the Common we made our way north to the Hermit's Cell - a ring of rocks set in a secluded place and according to Philip, probably 14 hundred years old. Just a little bit away from the cell... and I've got some photos of this (Yes) were three rows of rocks. As a monk approached the Hermit, very likely to have been Columba himself, the monk did so by stepping over the rows of rocks (Mm), pausing at each row to offer prayer (Mm) to the Trinity. Instead of prayer we spent our time in and around what remained of the cell... in silence. Then came the climb to Dun 1, the highest point on the island. By this time I can assure you my legs were aching (laughter) and I was feeling very tired (Mm. Sure it didn't kill you Rexie... Laughter). No, I survived, even if it was only just. By the time we reached to top, the effort was worth while. We were rewarded with truly magnificent views of the rugged Scottish coastline...

Ray: That's the Hebrides, isn't it?

Rex: Yes... Robbie Louis Stevenson wrote 'Kidnapped'... it was based on the area (Mm). I looked out on the island of Staffa - an island of incredible volcanic rock formation, and the Scottish end of the Giant's Causeway which begins in Ireland... and remembered I had been that end a week ago... A beautiful world (Yes), but as we also recalled, a world of fear, aggression and power (Mm). The walk down Dun 1 back to the Abbey was slippery and reasonably fast. And then our pilgrimage was over. We gathered in the grounds of the Abbey, but not in front of the crosses, but in the oldest building on Iona - St Oran's Chapel, built in a graveyard. Inside the chapel, as well as in the graveyard itself, um... were many headstones. Most were of tribal chiefs and foundation members of the Community. The Saints... (Yes). Again we were reminded that our pilgrimage of that day was just one day of our life journey. As those who had gone before us have left us this place, this world, to care for and protect, we um... had to work and pray that what we leave behind us for others will be of value (Mm). I remember as I prepared to leave Iona the next day I wrote in my journal, um... "I must leave this place... no it was the day before, after I had finished the pilgrimage... um, "I must leave but I'm not ready to leave and would have liked very much to have stayed much longer. I wonder if I will ever be able to return..." (You will. Mm).
Bill’s Story...
It was interesting to listen to some of the stories that Dot had to say. You know, she... she’s obviously a lot older than me, and Heather... I’m not sure... she’s probable a lot... still a lot older than Andrew and yourself as well, so...

Rex: And Andrew's older than me...

Bill: Some of the stories (laughter), some of the stories she was talking about, sort of went back a little bit further, um - she was talking about, um, I keep on remembering this story about her when she went to stay away, how she would travel and things were so different in those days (Mm)... I don't know why, it just strikes a cord with me, um... some of the other stories... Heather would tell some stories when she was living in Melbourne - she was working, was she working in Mel... outside of Melbourne as a... um, how she was working in a hospital environment...

Rex: ...in Ballarat.

Bill: ...in Ballarat, and that brought back memories of, well Lyn being a Physio and working in hospitals and, and um... and I did the audit of a hospital once, I don't think I mentioned that, but (Mm)... Lyn was working at the same hospital (Right) and we would drive to work together, and um... yea, some of those stories did strike a cord within me... Some of the stories I told (Pause) some of the grieving stories were... important for me to tell. I told a story about my sister-in-law, who died (Mm), um... (pause) I think that that... that was an important thing for me to tell the group, how I felt (Mm), and... I think some of their stories of grief in their lives (Mm) um, were resonated on that (Mm)... I can't remember... I think I told the story about when I was suspended from school, I'm not sure if I did... anyway, when I was suspended from school virtually led me to getting involved in the church. I mean I’ve always been involved in the church, 'cause mum and dad went into, to Wesley Central Mission in Brisbane... I was christened there, I was...

Rex: Is that Albert Street church now?

Bill: Albert Street, yea... I was confirmed there, I went through the Sunday school... but I had gone away from the church, you know, mum and dad would go to church on a Sunday and my brother and I would stay home, and the girl... my two sisters would go... this was happening since I was in about Grade 9 or 10... in Grade 12 I was suspended from school for playing cards... in class. There were about a couple of things; I'd nicked off from school one afternoon, um... caught smoking underneath one of the halls... this all happened within about a three week period... boom, boom, boom, and they made an example of me. It's just classical... I'd never been in any trouble in all that time and... anyway, just before Easter... in fact it was the week before Easter that I was suspended, and mum and dad, dad decided to book me in to a Christian camp over Easter, went up to Cunningham's
Gap... I was quite... interested in it and actually stood up at one of (Mm) the sessions... It was in the time when, um, not Godspell but Jesus Christ Superstar was, was around (Mm), in fact it was probably that was the year it was released, or something (Mm), and um, there was a lot of emphasis on that (Mm), but I stood up (Mm) and spoke to someone after and (Mm) that was basically my conversion if you (Mm) want to say it, but I actually... from that point onwards started to go back to church (Mm)... didn't do a great deal that year, um... I went on a few other Christian camps and we went on a beach camp. For a couple of years I was heavily involved in some of the beach camps. We had a... also... I started going to college they started up a youth group, a senior youth group, and that... sort of rolled along... I was a leader of that group one year (Mm), I think in the second year (Mm), so that sort of started me down... I don't think I told the group that story, but...

Rex: No, I don't remember it.

Bill: ...it was a story that I, I was ready to tell at any time, but it was (Mm)... but I don't think anybody got down to the level of talking of their conversion or their coming to know (Mm) Christ. And I think because I've been involved in the church for such a long period of time there's really no particular time of conversion (Mm)... but that stands out to me as being a turning point (Yes) more than a... it's not a, not a conversion in my mind. I've never gone forward to an altar or (Mm) laid myself down (Mm) or anything (Mm)... that was an opportunity and I stood up and (Mm)... but it was a turning point, at a crisis point in my life, (Mm, yea, Mm). I always look back on it as a point of where it gave me strength (Mm) where I've been able to go on from that. I've done something useful with my life (Mm). I could have... continued on smoking under the hall and doing all those sorts of things, but (Mm) it was just a turning point. I decided to still be myself but do other things (Mm)... I was as frightened as hell (laughter), I was (laughter)... I was deadly frightened (laughter)... It was a Grammar school that I was suspended from (Oh I see) and um, during my period of suspension... the headmaster went on a real binge... I was off for one week, the week including Easter, but... there was a couple of days there that were Easter anyway so I suppose it was only three or four days... but ah, when I got back to school I found out that two others had been suspended and one had been expelled from the school (Mm), so it was quite a... lively time at the school at the time, so I pulled my head right in and (Laughter, Mm) and didn't put it out of line (Mm, Mm). So that was a good disciplining (Mm) for me (Mm). We've got a book... it's called Discipline while you can (laughter, Right) and it um, says if you don't discipline children as they're growing, when they are adults you've got Buckley's chance (Mm). So that was a good experience for me (Mm) in terms of discipline and understanding what it meant and (Mm) how it should be applied, but (Mm, Mm) I've never forgotten what (Mm, laughter, No)... and now we have a 20 year reunion, coming up this year, for people that graduated ah, in 1972 (Mm) which is when I did my final year at school (Mm), so yes, coming up at Easter this year...
Rex: Easter this year is 20 years since you were expelled (laughter)...

Bill: Suspended...

Rex: Sorry, suspended (laughter)... well we must have a celebration at Easter time (laughter)...

Andrew's Story...
That reminds me of a story when Rodney was three months old and we were going to Jindabyne and we were going down the freeway to Mittagong and all of a sudden something went wrong with the Commodore that I had at the time, and um, it would only go... it just kept accelerating and there's a limit to how far (laughter...) and we were quite some kilometers from Mittagong (laughter) and we could have been doing 400 by the time we got there (laughter) and um, anyway we stopped in Mittagong, and it was a Sunday morning and we, I had to be there for a staff conference at Jindabyne... We rang the NRMA and they came and they said: 'Oh, it's... I forget what it was. It was something or other... um, and they said 'Oh there's a fellow in town that's good at that, um we'll tow it down there'. And they towed it down to this absolutely shocking old shed, weatherboard shed (laughter) no paint on it, rusty (laughter) tin roof and it was full of junk, the floor was grease everywhere. And this kid turned up and he looked like... one of the local kids round here... about 16, and goodness, you know (Mm)... Anyhow, um, I said: 'Is there anywhere my wife can go to feed the baby' and we were just surrounded by junk and grease, you know, and this little three month old baby in a white shawl, you know, and Ruth's dressed appropriately (laughter), and he said: 'Oh sure, we'll put her up on the hoist (laughter)... in the car on the hoist in this bloody old shed, and she feed the baby up there (laughter) while we worked under the car (laughter), (what a scream) and she was ah, sort of a bit unsure up near the ceiling...

Dot: She wouldn't have wanted to go to the toilet or something (Yes, laughter)

Andrew: She couldn't even have jumped out (laughter)...um, and she wasn't sure she would come down quickly (laughter) either, if the cylinder went or something (laughter). And it came back down and he fixed it and it went like a song, you know. He was really, really good, and ah... there are a few lessons in that (Mm) you know, the kid had enough sense to know that was a good place for her to go, it was (Mm) the only clean place (Yeah) to stay where she was, and up there she had privacy (Yeah) (Sensible), plus to have trust in him that he knew how to fix it (Yes), and I really didn't. When I saw him he looked too young (Mm) and he did, he knew what he was doing (Mm) and it never played up again (Mm)...

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Heather's Story...
...thinking about your story on Scotland... As I grew up my mother had a very dear friend who's husband was Scottish, and I was very fond of him. He was a lovely man... a lovely couple actually. I was very fond of them both. She died of cancer quite young... but we were very fond of this uncle, and um, he talked very lovingly about Scotland. He obviously still had very close ties to it... heart ties to it. And I was always dying to go to Scotland, you know, this image of Scotland. I didn't... there was nothing concrete, but there was just something that was very special about Scotland that I had got from, from him (Mm). And I was so disappointed when I got there (Mm) because it wasn't (laughter) barren (Yes) and though I had no actual... picture of what it was going to be, it wasn't (Mm) the message (Yes)

Andrew: Special for him because he (noise over...) 

Heather: Special to him (comments) yes, yes, but it couldn't be that special to me (Mm) and um, it was such a disappointment...

Dot's Story...
...my dad was a wonderful person. A man of few words as far as I was concerned. He was a wonderful person... he was on the land... A bit of history. My granddaughter wanted to know history because she is just finishing her third year nursing and, they had a social studies section, and they had a choice of something and her choice was Australian History, and one of her assignments was go and talk to grandparents and find out some of your background... So come round one Sunday and we stuck a tape in a player and we started talking (Mm) so I went back to my dad and my grandparents before that (Mm)... His father was an Englishman, um, and when he was six his grandfather died with TB and um, he was in... his mother was the youngest of 13 children and um, so he was farmed out amongst all his aunts and uncles, then. Typical... subsequently she married another fellow and he only lasted three years and he died... he was another Englishman with a grown up family, I think, This was way back in 19.. 18.. dad was born in 1882, so it was the end of the century (Mm). And he went of to Dorrigo timber cutting, because they found he had a spot on his lung, or something, so he was sent away to the country (Mm) you see, for good, healthy (Mm) lifestyle, and ah, he married... by that time he had met mum at Summerhill Congregational Church and, ah, correspondence went between them and he came down and married her, and for their honeymoon they got on the little boat and went up to Boambee on the little boat and then up to Dorrigo by horse and sulky, or something else I presume, away to a little couple room cottage way out in timber country (Mm). At Dorrigo... they didn't stay there so very very long, and he bought a property at Mangrove Mountain... and the trees I gather weren't very... they definitely weren't productive and a lot of work had to be done on them. He had a cousin up there, and um, he came back and worked for his uncle in Parramatta who was a mason... Mason Avenue, Parramatta

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(Right). Yea, um, because his grandfather started the first newspaper in Parramatta (Mm)... came out in 1841, so um... came out on an assisted passage for the 'Herald', and um, he worked for his uncle there in... and that's when my brother was born during that period, and then they went up to Mangrove to ah, to live, and then when war broke out he left our property, Rosehill, moved up to Keston... to look after a property while the two brothers went off to the war (That would be the first World War?) The first world war, Mm. Now he... ah, when I was talking to Kathy I thought now why didn't he got to the war, but because it was probably due to this (spot on the lung) spot (Yeah) on the lung that he didn't get conscripted, so he stayed at home and looked after the property, that was already producing, for these two brothers. Now I've got a letter that was... come from the Front too that was written by one of these brothers (Mm) to him asking how things were going, and so on and so forth, and um... he stayed on at Mangrove producing fruit then... ah, until Mary was born 18... 1943, and the meantime of course he was, he looked after... he was Secretary of the Fruit Growers Association, the Mangrove Co-op, the Hall Committee, ah, you name it, you know (Mm) dad was it... Returning Officer for elections and so on, and then he was Shire President for ten years, and um, the night Mary was born, that was war time of course, he found he couldn't carry on alone because the only assistance he had had gone off to the war, the second world war, I mean, and they moved into Gosford then, and he... he... he got involved with scouting... as a... on the committee, background committee, and ah, Hospital Board... he was most upset when... he was well over 70 by this time, but they brought in a law that nobody could stay on a hospital board when they were over 70, so (laughter) he was made redundant (Mm) and ah, he... he was a remarkable man... he loved the grand kids... would take them walking and um, they'll tell you. Talk to Mary, she'll tell... about 'pa' (Mm) and the things he did for them, and that sort of thing. He was a fellow everybody like and a fellow everyone came to for advice (Mm) (Mm) ah...
Appendix D

Letter of invitation to first group...

17 February 1991

14 Beechwood Parade
Cherrybrook NSW 2126
Phone: 484 5499

Dear

It has now been some time since I first indicated to you and others my interest in story and storytelling.

Some have even shared in a special liturgy which was shaped by story (or narrative).

My passion for story has led me to undertake some university post-grad. work: a Masters degree at the University of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury. The general area of my thesis is that of communication - especially as it relates to the telling and retelling of stories and myths, and their relationship to change.

The research method we use at Hawkesbury is called 'social ecology', but it is also known by several other names: collaborative research or action research. Despite the several names I guess this method of research means it is done WITH other people, rather than research done ON or TO other people. And then reflecting on that research.

I would like you to consider joining me on this research journey.

How can we do this together? Well, as stories are the central core of my research, we can share our own stories:

* of and from our personal past,
* from our personal present.

As I am inviting several to join this research group (approx. 12 people), and as we will all be from the Cherrybrook Uniting Church congregation, (so we should already know each other) we can also share the stories:

* of our congregation's (Cherrybrook's) past and present,
* from previous congregations we have been involved in.

During these times together I will also be keen for us all to consider:

* how the story was formed,
* what our present story means to us,
* how we might be open to new ideas, new images, which would require us to consider changing the meanings we presently attach to 'experience', and shared through our story/stories.

So we will be sharing 'foundational stories', 'collective stories', 'myths' and 'parables'.

As I write this note to you, I am again excited by all the possibilities such a sharing together might bring.

But I must state from the outset, we will not be able to do all this in one or two meetings together. While we would need to discuss this, I feel we would need to spend at least eight sessions together. These meetings or times together, would have to be in the evening and lasting 1 1/2 to 2 hours each. So I am asking for what might be considered a reasonably substantial commitment from you.

I am offering to enter into a covenant with you as an expression of my willingness to give these times together my priority.

During our sharing together, I would ask your permission to tape our conversations. I would also ask you to keep a journal (or diary) from the time you decide to join this group until we have finished meeting together.

Why tape the conversations? To help me as I reflect on the research method. Why keep a journal? It will enable us all to discover how we have travelled on this journey.

Well... this invitation is made in the hope you will be both curious by what I have offered as well as excited by us all sharing in a new experience based on trust and relationships.

I really hope you will be able to accept this invitation and I look forward to your early reply, as I would like to suggest we start meeting as a group within the next two weeks.

Please be encouraged to ring and discuss any questions or concerns/issues you may have, with me. Immediately you let me know you are willing to join the group, I would like to arrange our first get together.

Sincerely,

Rex A E Hunt
Letter of invitation to second group...

Rev Rex A E Hunt
14 Beechwood Parade
Cherrybrook NSW 2126
Phone: (02) 484 5499

5 September 1991

Dear

Earlier this year I invited several people from our congregation to join me as a partner in a storytelling group.

This activity was part of some research I am doing towards a masters degree at the University of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury.

Eight of us met eight times and from comments made during an evaluation time/interview following, all enjoyed what proved to be a new experience, and found it very worth while.

As a result I am trying to organise another group. Thus, this note is to invite you to consider joining me and about six to eight others from the Cherrybrook Uniting Church congregation in a second storytelling group.

Those being invited will not have been involved in the first group - apart from myself.

What will we be doing in such a group? Well... as stories are the core of my research, we will share our own stories. Stories from our personal past and personal present. As we will all be associated with Cherrybrook Uniting, I also hope we can share some 'congregational' type stories and even look at a parable or two as well.

This group is not a counselling group, neither is it a heavy reflective group. We will be telling our stories and sharing others stories about memories, events, family, etc.

To enable us to share this experience I would suggest we all enter into a covenant with each other that:
* we would only meet when all of us can meet together;
* meet each time for approx. 1 1/2 hours, for eight times - not necessarily weekly;
* each keep a journal or diary (which may also be a new experience for some).

During our sharing together, I would ask your permission to tape our conversations. Why? To help me reflect on the research method.

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However, all members of the group would have access to the tapes if they would like to.

The research method we use at Hawkesbury is called 'social ecology', but it is also known by several other names. Research by this method is not done ON people, but WITH people, so my invitation to you is to invite you to become a partner with me in experiencing story.

This invitation is made in the hope you will be both curious by what I have offered and maybe even heard as a result of the first group, as well as excited by being involved in what can be a very rewarding experience based on trust and relationships.

As time is moving on and the end of the year is fast approaching, I would like the group to have its first gathering on Monday 16 September, 8.00pm at our home.

I really hope you will be able to accept this invitation and I look forward to your early reply.

Please give me a ring and discuss any questions or concerns/issues you may have, with me. I am more than happy to chat with you.

Sincerely,

Rex A E Hunt
PHILOMYTHES:
RELIGIOUS NARRATIVE COMMUNICATION
IN AN ELECTRONIC AGE

Rex A E Hunt

Submitted to
Faculty of Agriculture, Horticulture and
Social Ecology
University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury
1993

for the degree of
Master of Science (Honours)
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
Declaration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(S) ........................................
Rex A E Hunt
May 1993
Summary

PHILOMYTHES: RELIGIOUS NARRATIVE COMMUNICATION IN AN ELECTRONIC AGE

It is my thesis that religious communication which is shaped by narrative has consequences that are different from communication based on persuasion by argument.

While 'narrative' can include both written and spoken communication, this study attempts to concentrate on oral narrative communication in a group situation within a local church congregation.

It is also an assumption of this thesis that there is a common belief narrative is subordinate to rhetoric. This thesis sets out to suggest otherwise: that while both provide distinctive ways of ordering experience the two are irreducible to one another. Thus there is a need to reimagine the narrative communication debate.

This thesis suggests this reimagining be called 'narrative/symbolic' - thus emphasising its narrativity.

Narrative/symbolic communication:
• encourages reflection but is different from analytical, rationalistic thinking;
• is heuristic by nature, searching for likely accounts rather than definitions and conclusions;
• establishes an awareness of/communion with the world of the other rather than just seeking after/interpreting meaning;
• has potential to broaden human conversation by repudiating mere individualism, and
• is more faithful to the general shape of the religious tradition which is Christianity.

Such a 'style' should shape religious communication in the electronic media-saturated age.
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