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Narrating identity: securing adequacy to tradition and experience

Alexander Porter

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An abstract of a thesis entitled

Narrating Identity: Securing Adequacy to Tradition and Experience

by Alexander Porter M.A. (Oxon.)

This thesis, an exercise in practical theology directed to the pastoral needs of the ecclesial community, develops critical practices intended to facilitate the renewal of Christian self-constitutive discourse. The thesis affirms the value of attention to the category of 'narrative' in *systematic* theology - 'narrative theology' - but seeks to demonstrate the decisiveness of attention to story in the sphere of *applied* theology. It is argued that there is a need for a thoroughgoing demonstration of the difference attention to story might make in the concrete existential situations confronting Christians. Thus, the thesis is concerned to develop a methodology that will facilitate the appropriation of a securely, authentically Christian self-understanding in the midst of the ordinary social world. This naturally involves definition of key terms in narratological theory. Having established how the narrative form functions in a self-constitutive manner in both self-directed and other-directed discourse, claims that narrative is either a necessary or inherently virtuous mode of discourse are rejected. The practice of story-telling - 'narration' - that grounds the narrative is identified as the truly significant thing.

Specifically *Christian* self-constitutive narration which can ground authentically Christian narrative discourse is identified as maximally adequate to the intra- and extra-ecclesial experience of the subject or the community and to the inner intention and 'imaginative vocabulary' of the Christian tradition. However, it is argued that these basic criteria are overshadowed by the requirement that Christian narration be carried on in awareness of the approaching 'eschatological horizon'. That is, the decisively Christian belief that life is lived toward a specific eschatological fulfilment incompletely grasped in the present, yet with radical implications for existence 'here and now'. The particular implications of this for Christian narration are drawn out. Solutions to the problems apparently set up by these principles are offered such that a detailed 'discipline of narration' is developed, which is then tested in hypothetical 'real life' situations and examined in relation to wider questions of Christian belief and practice.

The Thirtieth of July, a.d. 2003.

Narrating Identity:
Securing Adequacy to Tradition and Experience

Alexander Porter M.A. (Oxon.).
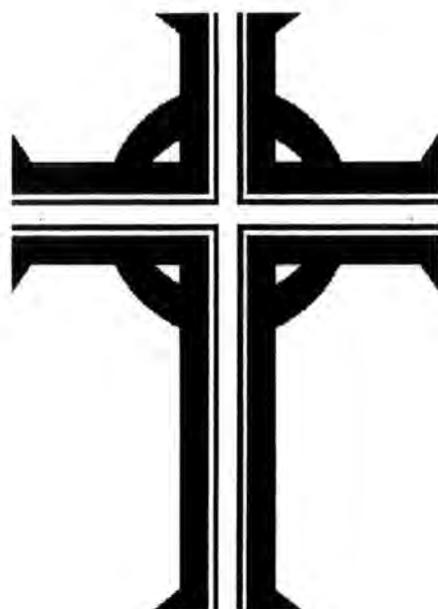
A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Durham in accordance with the University's regulations, following research in the Department of Theology.

The Thirtieth of July, anno Domini 2003.

Table of Contents.

This is a wholly original thesis; none of the material contained in it has been submitted before for any degree or for any other purpose at the University of Durham or elsewhere.

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<u>Acknowledgements.</u>

Introduction.

'Narration' as a Category in Applied Theology.

The notion of 'narrative' as a category for theological reflection, the subject of many inflated claims and counter-claims a generation ago,[1] has subsequently generated a sophisticated, insightful literature.[2] Thus, the original proposals of theorists including Frei,[3] Ricouer[4] and Hauerwas[5] have been sifted such that as well as attempts to do 'narrative theology' we have a substantial body of reflection concerned with developing a typology of narrative or 'narrativist'[6] theologies.[7] The new departure is new no longer. Ideas at the core of the 'turn to story' such as that of finding ones faith-

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[1] An insightful summary of disputes over the value of 'narrative' as a controlling category for theological reflection in the 1970s and 1980s is provided by Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory L. Jones in their introduction to the indispensable collection *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

[2] A useful bibliography that includes continental as well as Anglo-American contributions to the debates over narrative in theology is provided in Sauter, Gerhard and Barton, John (eds.), *Revelation and Story: Narrative Theology and the Centrality of Story* (Aldershot: Avebury, 2000), pp.189-198.

[3] Principally Frei, Hans W., *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Hermeneutics* (London: Yale University Press, 1974); *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); 'The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break' in McConnell, F. (ed.), *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* (New York: O.U.P., 1986); *Theology and Narrative - Selected Essays*, ed. Hunsinger, George and Placher, William C. (New York: O.U.P., 1993). Frei's influential accounts of how we can encounter Christ in his narrative and be transformed by that encounter, and of how we can read scripture as a complex narrative whole are to be found in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*.

[4] This thesis does not deal in detail with Ricouer's work, but his contributions to the discussion of narrative and religion would be indispensable to any more general treatment of these themes. Key primary works include *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., trans. McLaughlin, Kathleen and Pellauer, David (London: University of Chicago Press, 1983-1988), *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, trans. Pellauer, David, ed. Wallace, Mark I. (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress, 1995). See also Reagan, Charles E. and Stewart, David (eds.), *Paul Ricouer: An Anthology of His Work* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), pp.211-245; Vanhoozer, Kevin J., *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricouer: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1990).

[5] Hauerwas' theological reflection (principally on social and ethical questions) does not begin with the conviction that the category of narrative or a particular narrative is somehow important in itself. Rather his position is that 'narrative' is vital as a critical tool for Christian self-understanding, and that 'virtues' as opposed to 'situations' or 'decisions' enable us to understand the Christian narrative. My work here is in broad sympathy with his. One of his books in particular has been of general influence: Hauerwas, Stanley, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1988).

[6] A term employed by Gerard Loughlin in his *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), *passim*, to identify those theologians who use the category of narrative to advance to new insights, rather than expound previously existing options in reflection upon self-identity.

[7] See in particular Comstock, Gary L., 'Two Types of Narrative Theology' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987), pp.687-717; Frei, Hans W. '"Narrative" in Christian and Modern Reading' in Marshall, Bruce D. (ed.), *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp.148-163.

centred identity in continuity with the imaginative vocabulary of particular, traditional intra-ecclesial narratives, have been developed in a variety of ways. Most notable for this student of the 'turn to story' in contemporary theology have been the development of new, post-post-critical practices of engagement with scripture[8] and the idea of the sacramental incorporation of the self into the enacted narrative. These two approaches have found insightful expositions in the writings of an American Protestant and an English Roman Catholic theologian respectively, Hans Frei and Gerard Loughlin.[9] This is but a further demonstration of the growth to maturity of interest in narratology as part of the apparatus of biblical criticism and systematic theology.

The question upon which this thesis turns is not *whether* theologians and churchpeople generally should attend to narrative as a category. Neither is it the better, because more nuanced, question of *which* narratives should be thought decisive, *when*. I have already noted that these are questions that have been (and continue to be) put with profit. It is not in the fields of systematic or philosophical theology or biblical studies that there is evidence of a dearth of serious thought about narrative. What remains, for those of us who are content that this addition to academic theology is a fruitful one, is not only to extend debate in the academic sphere, but also to demonstrate at all points how and why this study matters in the sphere of practical, applied theology.

It would, of course, be a gross exaggeration to assert that other theologians who have treated narrative have entirely disregarded the practical application of the conclusions

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[8] I do not use this coinage in my detailed discussion of some of Frei's work, but I do believe it exactly, if a little awkwardly, captures the essence of his approach to scripture. Pre-critical readings handled scripture freely, but within a (developing) traditional horizon; critical readings claimed the freedom to use the apparatus of scholarship to derive meanings and emphases which had not been privileged by the believing community; post-critical readings may be characterised as attempts to return scripture to the community as a completely adequate (if not unproblematically true) imaginative universe perennially made real by the community inhabiting or living out their tradition. Frei, in my view, represents a further departure in that he seeks in a way fully cognizant of other phases of reflection, to privilege encounter with the narrative-form text in itself and *not only* as received in community as the decisive, self-transformative encounter. As well as Frei's work, compare Polanyi, Michael, 'The Stability of Beliefs' in *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 3 (1952), pp.217-232; Ricouer, Paul, *The Symbol of Evil*, trans. Buchanan, E. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p.349. The two latter works offer influential definitions of post-critical thought, which may be contrasted with Frei's approach. Hefner, Philip, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1993) provides further discussion of Ricouer extensive contribution here.
[9] See in particular Loughlin, op.cit.

they draw in the field of systematics. However, it is my contention that despite a laudable concern to hold the abstract and the applied together in theory, the latter is too often treated as a mere consequence of the former. In much systematic treatment of narrative there is present the dangerous assumption that if only people could be brought to acknowledge, to see, that this or that story is central to faith, then the transformation of the self in which the life of faith consists will somehow follow naturally. Yet there is no necessary connection between knowing or seeing and 'doing', the living out of religious meaning. Therefore, as a matter of pastoral care, it is necessary to supply an account of how concentration upon the category of narrative can make a difference in the real situations of existence - in the concrete social, personal and communal dimensions of Christian life.

The claim of originality I make for this thesis is that it provides just such a demonstration of how narrative - understood as a well-defined category in reflection upon Christian existence - offers a series of transforming perspectives upon those real situations in which Christians find themselves. Naturally, the thesis is developed partly in discussion with those who have been identified as 'narrative theologians'. Yet this is not a work of narrative theology as such. The consuming interest here is in making my understanding of the category of narrative available as a dynamic principle for the transformation of the self in terms of the imaginative vocabulary particular to various modes of Christian faith. Thus the leading idea here, for all I will have much to say about particular narratives, is that of *narration*.

I identify significant Christian narration - narration that facilitates the transformation of the self - as one particular pattern of faithful story-telling among several available within the developing Christian tradition. This pattern I define, in brief, as a weaving together of intra-ecclesial tradition with extra-ecclesial experience distinguished from other story-telling not only by adherence to the specific contents of each, but also by the principle that Christian story should be informed powerfully by an approaching, incompletely grasped eschatological future. It is by narrating a situation forward into that future that one establishes the imaginative possibility of a transformed situation as something that can be 'lived towards' and reorients oneself in terms of the new life that becomes one's telos.

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Since the concept of narration, of story-telling, admits of many different senses, the first of my four chapters takes up issues of definition raised by my basic claim in order to secure a foundation for what follows. It is here that I offer my accounts of why stories are told and the types of relation that can exist between stories, narrators and audiences. Here too I raise what I consider the key problems for any attempt to do significant narration - those of truth, authority and the possibility of change or development. In essence, I identify the capacity of a practice of narration to reorient oneself or one's community (to God, to the world, to past and foreign understandings) as the most compelling reason for contemporary Christians to think about story-telling. The remainder of the chapter investigates more deeply how such transforming reorientation through narration might operate, and indeed has operated during phases of the Church's history.

In the second chapter, I complete the theoretical grounding for the new project of narration by disclosing its epistemological basis and identifying three particular loci of narration, wherein extra-ecclesial experience and intra-ecclesial tradition might be integrated. The opening section of this chapter consists in a discussion of how narration can function to inform self-identity in the particular situations of the ordinary social world. This is complemented by sections dealing with narration in what I term 'mainstream' and 'marginal' communal settings. Together, these three sections allow for full reflection upon the practical issues of truth, authority and change through analysis of actual stories told both within and beyond Christian communal contexts. The conclusions reached here furnish a basis for determining what are, in particular cases, the best stories available for Christians to tell about themselves.

The purpose of my third chapter is to work through in detail the differences that significant narration might make in three specific, hypothetical cases. Each of these deals with a different range of intra-ecclesial tradition and extra-ecclesial experience, each operates at a different level of focus within reflection upon the development of the imaginative possibility of an authentically Christian self-identity. Thus, I discuss a homosexual Christian man, a contemporary conversion experience and the problematic situation of a particular Anglican parish church. In each case a movement

is traced from a given, problematic situation, through a narration of that situation, to a transformed, transforming perspective on that situation. Thus is the means of integrating tradition with experience according to canons of truth, authority and development both viable and faithful teased out. By the end of this chapter, the new, fruitful mode of reflection upon Christian life for which I argue is articulated fully.

My final chapter is used as an opportunity to think through how the conclusions reached in earlier chapters might affect the life of the Church if extended beyond questions of personal and communal identity. Mindful of the need for clarity of focus here, I offer discussions dealing with 'the difference' that might be made to the internal, communal life of the Church considered as a corporate entity, to ministry to wider society and to inter-faith dialogue. These things are, however, problematic in different ways across the world. This point allows me to use my final chapter to expand further on the local, ad hoc, developmental nature of significant narration when considered as a means for carrying on a lived religion and to locate it amidst other theological projects.

The reader will, I hope, be clear, that while I situate the Christian subject and his community in the universe of discourse analysis,[10] this remains a theological project. Throughout the thesis, I approach Christian subjects and communities as in need of a methodology, which, because it involves a disposition and a way of living life I term a discipline, with which to renew their self-constitutive discourse. The project of narration, I submit, supplies that formal method but its content will be drawn, as Christian identity has always been drawn and as I affirm consistently, from the endlessly renewed interplay of tradition, experience and individual imagination that defies final encapsulation in one particular model of discourse.

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[10] A potentially ambiguous term, which I understand in Stubbs' sense to refer to the attempt 'to study the organisation of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts'. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers. See Stubbs, Michael, *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.1.

Chapter One.

Narration for Renewal.

1.1. Introductory Remarks:

In this first chapter, I offer my detailed accounts of the concepts around which the thesis is organised. The first third of the chapter is taken up with issues of definition and with the initial phases of my central argument that Christians should, as a pastoral matter of urgency, focus upon identifying a normative practice of narration. Introducing and defining the category of narrative and attendant terminology in their relevance to self-constitutive discourse, I go on to make the case that it is attention to the lived practice of integrative, transformative narration rather than to the formal category or to any particular story that should be considered of decisive importance for Christian existence. The normative practice of narration is given a preliminary definition, before I acknowledge a series of problems this definition seems to set up within the business of formulating self-constitutive discourse, to be addressed in subsequent chapters.

The middle phase of the chapter gives further content to the idea of narration as a practice involving integration and transformation of self-constitutive discourse. Drawing in particular on patterns I identify in the Synoptic gospels, I disclose the basic model of integrative narration as what I term 're-telling', narrating existing narratives anew. By this, I understand the 'expansion' or 'extension' of a 'narrative frame' given in the tradition in the light of the experience of the contemporary audience. I acknowledge and explore the great differences between the situation of the authors of the gospels and their original audiences from those of our contemporaries. I am nevertheless able to demonstrate significant senses in which the model of narration they offer to us remains viable for contemporary subjects and communities seeking to re-formulate their self-constitutive discourse.

The final part of this first chapter examines the problem of experience that is difficult to involve with an existing narrative frame because it confronts the tradition, and

those who would maintain their commitment to the tradition, as something wholly *new*. This is a twofold problem and the discussion is divided accordingly into treatments of phases of experience that unsettle the tradition because they are radically particular and those that are literally, radically new, respectively. Through engagement with traditional practices and modern scholarship, two further models of integrative, transformative narration – which I term 'mediating' and 'dialogical' narration are developed to deal with these forms of experience.

1.2. Narration: Some Definitions and Problems:

1.2.a. Preliminary Remarks:

During early infancy perception, the basic attribute of consciousness, occurs in a more or less uncomplicated fashion through the immediate deliverances of the senses.[11] However, the mature self perceives reality in far more sophisticated ways. We might identify a secondary 'encoding' stage in which experiential events are processed such that they might be retained in memory, re-experienced, re-evaluated and ultimately re-appropriated, to be distinguished from the initial, perceptual stage of experience. This secondary process is the foundation of the formulation of that reflexive, internal self-constitutive discourse by which we identify ourselves to ourselves. It would, however, be an error to see the stages as other than *dialectically* related since the coding of experience seems to have an effect on what goes on at the perceptual stage as well. When the subject watches a street scene, hears a piece of music, makes love or eats dinner they will always already be correlating at least some aspects of these experiences and forming new constructions of signification that will inform the self-constitutive discourse, the sense of self. Yet perhaps 'correlation' is the wrong term here, suggesting as it does a delayed mental checking procedure that does not seem characteristic of the immediacy of normal experience. When the subject sees an (unfamiliar) picture, for example, most of the evocations that accompany the experience are not drawn out over time as if the object were some Proustian

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[11] This is not to deny the possibility that although infants lack full access to the characteristics of mature selfhood that allow perception of a highly abstract character (such as language) until after some years of post-natal development, they might be predisposed to - or 'hard-wired' for - these things.

mnemonic. Rather, the picture is perceived *as – experienced as –* the sum of novel sensory content *and* all those other subjective features. Perception, it can reasonably be claimed, brings substantial content and meaning to any given event.

Although it is evident that some of that with which the subject approaches reality is more or less private,[12] appeal to peculiar individual experience cannot possibly describe exhaustively all that is brought to bear in perception and subsequent acts of intellection including the development of self-constitutive discourse. Research suggests that each subject shares a vast range of what might be termed experiential preconceptions with others who have shared many similar experiences; in other words, with fellow members of the communities, which are also communities of understanding, to which they belong.[13]

It is plausible to maintain that shared communal norms of thought reach into every area of human experience. It has been argued, for example, that colour-perception is significantly conditioned by communal expectations. The cultural relativist theory of colour perception associated with Sapir and Whorf[14] states that the signification of a colour name depends not on some basic feature of the world (or human vision), but on the position of the name within the structure of the semantic space of colours in the relevant language. Since - it is claimed - every language is semantically arbitrary relative to every other, what one person means by 'green' *cannot* be quite the same as what someone in a different communal (semantic) context would mean. Berlin, Kay, and others who argue that colour perception is basic and independent of culture have challenged this aspect of the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis'.[15] Yet I would argue that it is supported by theoretical considerations such as the fact that if language 'A' has terms

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[12] This is not only true of unusual or traumatic experience such as that expressed in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Everyone will have a vast array of associations and significations created in circumstances no more unusual than the young Proust's enjoyment of a madeleine.

[13] Of course, the content of shared preconceptions will not be restricted to that which supplies their experiential base. Experiences that are thought to be common to a whole group will naturally be made the subject of public discussion and analysis and the new abstract understandings that come from this will in turn become elements of the communal world-view.

[14] The essential text here is Whorf, Benjamin L., *Language, Thought and Reality* (Boston: M.I.T. Press, 1956); for further analysis of the debate see also Rosch, Eleanor, 'Linguistic Relativity' in Johnson-Laird, P.N. and Wason, P.C. (eds.), *Thinking: Readings in Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1985), pp.501-519, pp.501-502.

[15] Berlin, Brent and Kay, Paul, *Basic Colour Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1991); Rosch, op.cit., in Johnson-Laird and Wason, op.cit., p.519.

analogous to 'yellow' and 'blue', but language 'B' has in addition terms analogous to 'turquoise' and 'lime', then speakers of 'B' will inevitably have a reduced sphere of denotation of 'green' relative to speakers of 'A'.

Communal norms are, then, a powerful lens through which experience is understood; and this extends beyond the perceptual stage to the more complex understandings that become leading themes within self-constitutive discourse, including cultural and religious commitments. This latter point is perhaps most clearly to be discerned in the very different ways in which various communities 'read' resources that are more or less equally available to all. The relatively recent emergence into academic discourse of voices from communities that had hitherto been marginalized has demonstrated that however full the 'objective' record may be in terms of texts, testimonies and artefacts, events in history are frequently 'contested'. This is not simply a matter of contemporary understandings being projected anachronistically onto a history which was not shaped by those understandings, as the detractors of political correctness claim.[16] Although that is an aspect of the disputes between advocates of differing communal understandings of the same events, significant disagreement can also obtain about very recent, public history. We see this in the quite radically opposed ways in which the biographies of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and General Augusto Pinochet of Chile are received by different groups of our contemporaries. To most Roman Catholics[17] and many more besides[18] Mother Teresa was a living saint, an exemplar of compassion, but there are those who regard her with the deepest suspicion because her concern for the poor did not pass over into a political commitment to social justice and was informed by conservative Roman Catholicism.[19] Contrariwise, although liberals revile Pinochet's rule as anti-democratic, dictatorial

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[16] O'Keeffe, Dennis, *Political Correctness and Public Finance* (London: I.E.A., 1999), pp.23-26.

[17] In 1999, following Mother Teresa's death in 1997, Pope John Paul II waived the customary five-year waiting period that is usually observed before the process of beatification, ongoing at the time of writing, is begun.

[18] Mother Teresa was awarded the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize for her extraordinary efforts and achievements in bringing relief to the suffering.

[19] In the 1994 Channel 4 documentary 'Hell's Angel' the journalist Christopher Hitchens accused Mother Teresa and her order of medical incompetence and of preaching 'prostration' to the poor. She also attracted criticism for her vocal opposition, voiced in the 1979 Nobel acceptance speech, to contraception and abortion.

and terrorist, a significant minority of Chileans and some foreign supporters revere him as the man who saved his country from ruinous socialism.[20]

Since each subject is involved in multiple communities, and the norms proper to all of these will play some part in shaping experience, it follows that the sense of self-identity that is rooted in our experience and concomitant understandings will likewise be informed by this variety of belongings. Further, communal discourse can reinforce or undercut as well as inform self-constitutive discourse because it is in community that self-referential statements take on the nature of commitments to a sense of self that exists potentially in the future as well as being partially actualised in the present. In existing socially, one opens large parts of ones identity to others through ones actions and decisions. In doing so, one establishes the other as a scrutineer of oneself through time and, in becoming aware of this type of relation, begins to scrutinise oneself seriously as well. This fact complicates the notion of self-identity. It is clear that self-constitutive discourse must involve the negotiation of the relations (to oneself, to others, to existential commitments and to the life of the future) one has established by one's previous existence, as well as integration of the subject's distinct, perspectival, communally-derived and subjective experiences and understandings.

Raising the general question of relatedness leads me to acknowledge the more particular point that 'simple' participation in a discourse community may not be decisive for self-identity; the subject's role or status in the relevant discourse community can often be of more import. Thus, in the case of a family group, those involved will not (usually) conceive of themselves primarily as 'members of family X' but as 'A's mother', 'B's husband', 'C's sister' and so on. This kind of status differentiation extends across an unexpectedly broad range of types of community. For example, although the community of language users is scarcely analogous to a family, meaningful distinctions can nevertheless be drawn between the positions of literate and illiterate members, native speakers, and second-language speakers and between concomitant self-understandings. There is also the interesting case of the

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[20] On July 9th 2001, following three years of legal proceedings in Britain, Chile and elsewhere Pinochet was found medically unfit to stand trial by a Chilean court after months of house arrest; murder charges against him had already been dropped. Thus, the competing claims of his supporters and detractors are unlikely ever to be formally tested.

subject who participates in a community by rejecting the tradition of that community. Particularity is an essential component of human experience and therefore of authentic self-constitutive discourse and self-identity.

The inevitability of participation in discourse communities, and the fact that they can cut against as well as reinforce subjective experience, becomes most important for questions of human self-identity when different communities to which the subject belongs exercise countervailing or apparently contradictory influences. This happens most starkly at those points when two or more potential self-identities are opposed within consciousness. Those points at which one series of understandings is rejected in favour of, subordinated to, or qualified, by another usually afford the fullest opportunities to describe the formation and development of self-identity.[21] These are the points in existence that demonstrate most clearly the need for a strategy according to which divergent subjective experiences, intra-communal experiences, commitments and forms of relation, with the understandings derived from them, can be re-integrated within self-constitutive discourse.

I submit that the discursive form best suited to what we now require is the narrative. A moment's consideration suggests the principal reason why the category of narrative must be central to academic reflection on self-identity: it is already an essential component of ordinary reflection on self-identity. Any answer to the question of how we are to explain a given action, statement or belief that is disclosive of personal identity presupposes some prior answer to a question of the type 'what is he doing'? When we consider the PhD. candidate whom we see sitting down at a desk to work on his or her thesis, we know that his or her motivations for doing so at a particular time could be various. Which of these motivations is most important in the particular case? The answer to that question cannot be reached simply by reviewing all of the relevant person's experiences to date (assuming these to be publicly accessible) or knowing the nature of the discourse communities in which they participate. Data of that sort supply

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[21] Many of the very greatest writers of fiction rich in what are sometimes called 'three-dimensional' (that is, realistic) characters have recognised this fact and taken the fault-lines in their creations' imagined experiences as the frame of their novels. This is perhaps most obviously true of the type of literary Modernism associated with authors such as Proust, Joyce, Mann, Dostoevsky, and the Virginia Woolf of *Mrs Dalloway*.

person's experiences to date (assuming these to be publicly accessible) or knowing the nature of the discourse communities in which they participate. Data of that sort supply no basis for differentiation between specific cases. It is necessary instead to find a pattern in the person's experience that identifies in a pertinent fashion the dominant motives, influences and character traits at work in their lives. This pattern will consist in the way in which some events become means of interpreting the person's whole life.

The fact that the pattern which is disclosive of self-identity is very readily given in narrative form is evident from the nature of getting to know another person, a process in which we attempt to pass on the hermeneutical keys to our lives and acquire the hermeneutical keys to theirs. In carrying on this process, we relate narratives in which certain decisive experiences, forms of belonging and commitment are given enhanced importance as a means of explication and related to the totality of our experience as themes running through the account.

Thus far, I have asserted the naturalness of privileging narrative and will go on to detail the reasons why, from a Christian perspective, it might be useful to do so. I have, however, made no claim that narrative is strictly a *necessary* concept in reflection on self-identity and this will be no part of my argument here. For, in the first place, it is not the case that *everyone always* construes questions of identity in narrative terms. In the second place, I find the claim that non-narrative self-constitutive discourse is necessarily impoverished unpersuasive. In the third place, and this is perhaps most pertinent here, it is plain that there is nothing inherently virtuous about narrative discourse. The general human problem of self-integration and the more particularly Christian issue of self-transformation in terms of faith commitments are not to be addressed merely by proposing that we 'tell stories' or indeed by going deeper into the category to investigate sub-categories privileged in our tradition such as biography or scriptural narrative. The potential of the narrative form is not to be realised until it is wedded to a specific practice. This is the point at which I aim when I identify narration - not narrative - as the valuable thing; we shall return to this point at length shortly.

For the present, let us concede that it is undeniable that there are people who construct their self-constitutive discourse in largely non-narrative terms.[22] Indeed, we have a non-pejorative term for some of these people - 'pragmatists'. The strictly reactive species of pragmatist who sees life as a series of situations to be managed rather than principles to be worked out will tend not to construe their identity as a continuous narrative, for to do so would be to pose bothersome questions of self-consistency. As the case of Meursault in Camus' *L'Etranger*[23] - who really does seem to live life as a series of discrete moments - demonstrates, this can render social existence extremely difficult.[24] But this is an extreme case, and many a pragmatist will avoid giving 'hostages' to society or to the future in the way that Meursault apparently cannot. One could also adduce examples of Christians or others who have made 'principled' existential commitments who understand themselves in this sort of way.[25] To make a conviction of personal salvation through Christ central to one's self-identity will not necessarily involve narrating a biography predicated upon that conviction. The hypothetical believer might think along different, non-narrative lines: 'I believe *x*, therefore in this particular situation I am constrained to do *y*', without ever seriously examining the structure of the relationship between *y* and antecedent and subsequent situations.

I dispute neither the reality of such 'pragmatic' rather than narrative-form versions of self-constitutive discourse nor the possibility of a Christian existence in those terms. I argue merely that formulating a self-constitutive discourse through narration is a far more sure, secure way of ensuring adequacy to all the contents of experience. A narrative scheme takes what is to be narrated as always already somehow related -

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[22] It is possible that people in the contemporary west in general are less likely to 'tell' as many identity narratives as once they did, since many of the institutions that supplied such narratives have broken down or experienced a loss of public confidence.

[23] I use the original French title here as I find the usual British English and American English 'translations', *The Outsider* and *The Stranger* respectively, unsatisfactory. 'The Misfit' might be better, but then there are senses in which Meursault is no more a misfit than he is an outsider or a 'stranger' (whatever that is intended to mean). Part of the force of the book is derived from the fact that much of Meursault's life - his friendships and his relationship with Marie - are 'normal' if not purely conventional. Perhaps 'The Unconventional' is a better suggestion. The Penguin translation of the text itself, at least, is good: Camus, Albert, *The Outsider* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

[24] Josipovici, Gabriel, *The World and the Book* (Frogmore: Paladin, 1973), p.285.

[25] This seems to have been true of Albert Schweitzer, who understood his diverse, controversial career as guided by a principle of loving life and hating death and destruction; Brabazon, James, *Alfred Schweitzer: A Comprehensive Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1976), pp.251, 469-471.

with this relation to be explicated in the narrative ('related' in the other sense) - rather than as a mass of divergent commitments making contrary or even mutually unintelligible claims in each situation. Meursault is a fascinating character, but the Christian and true humanist sees his as a tragic case, though for different reasons from the convention-bound person. Meursault dies because of his refusal to bow to conventions that are meaningless to him, but he is placed in the fatal situation by an inability to construe his past actions as intimately connected with and meaningful for *him*. Though an extreme case, Meursault is not a lunatic: he is right to insist that our actions are not fully our own except in some mechanical sense (no matter what the court says) until we ourselves own them. If Christian existence involves self-transformation, a scheme of self-constitutive discourse in which this kind of total disjunction cannot occur is urgently required as a pastoral necessity.

1.2.b. Narrators, Narration and Narratives:

I have insisted from the first on the practicality of my aims here, and if it is necessary now to treat narratological terminology I do so only in order to add clarity to subsequent phases of the discussion. The pastoral availability of the project of narration being developed here should not be thought to depend in any way on access to the principles of narratological theory.

All narratives begin with an author. The author is the real (that is, 'real life') origin of all narrators, narrations and narratives. The narrator, in contradistinction from the author, is that voice within the narration who tells the narrative. In stating this, I have introduced a distinction that might appear perplexing in the context of the current work. How, if we are interested in *self-constitutive* discourse, can we separate author and narrator? Serious conceptual problems seem to threaten at once. For if, as we have affirmed, our discourse is self-constitutive, if in 'relating' ourselves we are 're-creating' ourselves, surely the subject, the author, and the subject-within-the-narration, the narrator, must be identical? Perhaps this distinction, useful in discussion of literature, can play no useful role here.

That is not so, however; the usefulness of the distinction between author and narrator is readily apparent when we reflect on the conceptual space between existence and its narration. Narration of oneself - even if not conceived of, as here, as something that is lived out as well as taking place within consciousness - is not simply the act of putting forth a mental, verbal or textual facsimile of one's experiences, understandings, commitments and relations. As we have said, narrating identity involves exercising a creative function of selectivity in order to establish an interpretative pattern that elucidates the whole. This will be so whether the discourse is inward, reflexive, self-directed or an act of external communication, for the need for the hermeneutic key to identity is similar in the cases both of self-understanding and communication of oneself to the other. Thus, self-constitutive discourse is neither a shadow of nor a simple abbreviation of reality, but a new creation. On this understanding, in ontological terms the subject is both author and narrator, but the two terms should not be collapsed into one another. The author who undertakes the narration is only *potentially* identical with the narrator who exists within the narration.[26] The two terms are most easily to be distinguished when the author seeks to narrate his orientation to the future. He may or may not be living out that orientation in the present situation, but he defines himself as narrator in its terms.

In narratological theory, the narrator functions to establish communicative contact with the audience (who may of course, accepting the idea of self-directed discourse, be or include the author). In literature, it is usually the narrator who manages the exposition, deciding what is to be told, how it is to be told and what is to be left out. In self-constitutive discourse these functions are exercised by the author. Thus, the distinction between the subject and the potential-subject-within-the-text, useful elsewhere, will not be important in our discussion of the management of narration.

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[26] This statement should not be taken to imply that - contrary to what has been assumed elsewhere here - relatively straightforward communication between people is impossible. We can and do offer our self-constitutive discourse to others, and they can certainly come to know us through it, though they know us, as it were, indirectly, through the complex of signification that is our public self rather than by somehow sharing directly in our existence. All language has something of this character. The situation is *apparently* more complicated for the other when we orient ourselves to the future in our discourse, because there are not necessarily any 'real' facts in our existence that could notionally be consulted to verify our discourse. Of course, this 'problem' is illusory: few facts about a subject are public in such a way that the other can get to them 'behind' discourse. Moreover, in this specific case, the 'facts' are - unless the subject is a liar - being created by ongoing existence, although they remain necessarily 'incomplete' in the present.

A word about audiences is perhaps necessary here. In much literary theory it is a commonplace that the role of the audience is as central as that of the author. In a sense, there is a case to be made that audiences are more important than the author. For while the author is, to the extent that he is self-aware, the master of the narrative at the time of narration, once this is done he releases his creation to audiences who will construe it anew with each reading. It is the reception of the work by audiences that allows the curious process in which authors are effaced from history while narrators and characters 'live on' to take place. Thus, while the author creates something to a significant degree independent of himself in the process of narration, external audiences create something similarly independent of that narration in their acts of reading, hearing and so on. Having acknowledged this point, I will not dwell upon it here, though we will have more to say on this point in discussion of how subjects can receive narratives not their own into their narrated self-constitutive discourse.

A final point to be made about authors and narrators at this stage is that they may be multiple. This is obviously true of the narrators we meet with in literature. One thinks immediately of the complexity of a book like *Dracula*,[27] where the narrative unfolds variously from the perspectives of Jonathan Harker, Mina Murray (later Harker), Lucy Westenra, Dr.Seward and, occasionally, Van Helsing and *The Dailygraph*. Multiple narrators might be less usual in subjective self-constitutive discourse, but could very well be supremely appropriate to the communication of meaning in certain cases. There may - for example - be several narratives embedded within one over-arching, 'first-order', narrative frame, each of which is narrated by a narrator who represents the author, the subject, at a particular time of life. There can, of course, be no question of multiple *authors* in the case of subjective self-constitutive, but that would be natural where communal rather than personal identity is to be narrated. Extended discussion of this possibility is offered below, in Chapter Three.

The narrative is the story articulated by the author's narration, the process of formulating a structured whole of meaningful signs. The term 'narrative' is preferred

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[27] Stoker, Bram, *Dracula* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994).

to story here because in ordinary discourse the latter so frequently connotes a *fictional* narrative (all narratives are *fictive*, 'made' rather than 'given'). A narrative (or story) consists in a sequence of events and actions involving agents, who may or may not include the narrator.[28] Events include natural and non-natural happenings such as the experience of ageing, a journey or a medical emergency. Action refers more specifically to intentional acts. In many of the theoretical works, agents that are given specific identities are termed 'characters'.

The narrative may be defined further as a device for communicating or elucidating meaning through a patterned and essentially continuous progression of ideas. This further definition serves to differentiate narrative from other forms of discourse. The point ought not to be pressed too far, however, as it is common for a narrative frame to contain other, embedded, narratives and even other forms of discourse. In this connection we might consider the genealogies in the Old Testament and two of the gospels, for example. However, in general it is true to say that narrative is aesthetically and existentially appealing whereas propositional discourse is not.[29] The nature of this appeal lies partly in the evocative quality of narrative and partly in the imaginative play of words and ideas, a characteristic it shares with poetry.

As far as the communication of meaning is concerned, narrative is to be distinguished from the chronicle form, where any structure that obtains is provided by temporal succession. Temporal succession *is* important in the kind of narratives we will attend to, narratives of personal and communal being which are predicated in large part on human experience (in which temporality at least in the sense of historicity is usually given). However, narratives also communicate meaning through structural devices that are far more sophisticated than mere attempts to reflect the temporal structure of either individual experience or of a received, traditional worldview. Loughlin brings this point out well in *Telling God's Story*[30] where he supplies a taxonomy of aesthetic

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[28] In literature, the narrator can be a character within the development of the narrative or external to it, though not of course to the 'narrative world' which the author creates.

[29] It may be that propositional discourse can have the beauty some would attribute to a well-worked mathematical theorem, but this sort of beauty is only minimally self-involving. Such beauty is akin to the abstract beauty of architecture rather than the beauty of another person, which invites at least the desire for self-involvement.

[30] Loughlin, Gerard, *Telling God's Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.52-63.

devices employed in narration to add stresses, point authorial intention, signify double meanings and so on.

Narrative is not to be confused with illustration. Narratives can, as so frequently in literature as indeed in the parables of Christ, be used to illustrate. However, we also narrate not so much to illustrate as to affirm, to set out, who we are and how we are disposed in the world.

Further characteristics of the narrative form will emerge in the following discussion, but at this juncture perhaps the principal point to be stressed is that the 'value' of a narrative is entirely dependent upon the quality of the narration which grounds it. Narrative can be uninformative, deceptive or poorly integrative of experience. In literature, all of this may be a part of the authorial intention. The story may be told by the narrator to put the audience in a position of irony, where they know more of the narrative, of the fate of the characters or of the motivations of other characters than the characters do themselves.[31] Alternatively, the narrator may function such as to put the audience in a position of suspense, knowing only as much as the character or characters do.[32] Readings (or hearings) and re-readings can of course alter the place of the audience relative to the narrative. Where the narrator is in some real sense a character whom the audience can know, it may be a part of the authorial intention to have the narrator intrude their fictional personality, opinions or prejudices into the narrative.[33] While it would certainly be possible for the subject, or indeed a community functioning together as authors, to communicate their self-identity in these

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[31] Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga would seem to me to exemplify this point.

[32] This is often used where the story itself depends upon 'discovery', as, for example, in Vincent McDonnell's tale of tragic childhoods revisited *Imagination of the Heart* (Dingle, Ireland: Brandon, 1995).

[33] A very complex case of this is to be found in Scott's novel *Old Mortality* (Oxford: OUP, 1993). The first-order narrator here is the fictitious frame character Cleishbotham, presenting a novel written by his equally fictitious colleague Pattieson, supposedly based on a series of anecdotes collected from a historical figure nicknamed 'Old Mortality'. This man was one of the few surviving radical Calvinists, descendants of the 'Whig' party in the novel. Yet, the story 'he' tells does not accord with a Whig view of history. The message of the novel, which is sympathetic to the Tory Claverhouse, is that the religious passions of seventeenth century Scotland have passed away, preserved only in the memories of such anachronisms as the eponymous character. What Scott seems to be about is seeking to validate his own nineteenth century pro-Union views by placing something like them in the 'mouth' of a narrator who in reality would have been highly unlikely to share them. The same authorial trickery is not uncommon in nineteenth century novels; for a still more spectacular example see Maturin, Charles, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, intro. Chris Baldick (Oxford: OUP, 1989), pp.xiii-xiv.

sorts of ways externally (and there may be good hermeneutical reasons for doing so), they are not options in reflexive self-constitutive discourse. The author may, as we shall see, seek to play cat-and-mouse with himself in his self-constitutive discourse for all sorts of reasons. However, this is impermissible in the project of narration under discussion here, where what is aimed at is a form of self-understanding that can ground self-transformation. Without an adequate grasp of the real situation, the starting point for self-transformation, this could not be realised.

Only when narrative is deployed within the context of a disciplined practice – a specific practice of narration – can its potential to facilitate self-integration in the highest degree will be realised. If narrative is the useful structure, then narration is the dynamic act by which that structure is constructed, communicated and - in the course of both - made available for appropriation.

1.2.c. Basic Criteria of Adequacy for Christian Self-Constitutive Narration:

If Christian narration is to engage the problem of being Christian in the contemporary situation, it must begin with recognition of three basic regulative criteria. In the first place, there is the perennial requirement that Christian discourse engage with contemporary experience. The second consideration for contemporary Christian discourse has to do with the foregrounding of Christian tradition, understood in the broadest sense to encompass the doctrines, aesthetic motifs and patterns of life that are proper to the Church or to the local ecclesial community in which the life of the Church is actually realised. The final requirement is that narration be not only relevant to the contemporary situation and rooted in the imaginative universe of the tradition, but such as to ground future self-realisation and self-transformation.

The requirement that Christian discourse engage with contemporary experience will not be decisive for all areas of Christian discourse. If one evaluates prevailing patterns of life and understandings as either essentially valueless, or so ideologically suspect as to be unable to ground serious reflection, or both, there are conservative *and*

postmodernist[34] cases to be made for some phases of Christian reflection going on in conscious separation from the concrete experience of contemporary existence.[35] However, I would argue that this is never an option for narrated self-constitutive discourse, which necessarily takes as its frame of reference the world as it confronts the subject or the community, the world in which the subject or the community must function.

The second consideration for contemporary Christian discourse has to do with the foregrounding of Christian tradition, but is very far from being a matter of attention to 'tradition for tradition's sake' born out of some historical loyalty. As the record of the believing community's historical meditation upon its existence, Christian tradition *is* valuable in itself. However, tradition is no less the record of a great diversity of experiences and experientially derived understandings quite beyond those of the subject or the particular community. As such, the struggle to appropriate the tradition on its own terms, without distortion, compels a rich non-solipsistic, non-reductive reworking of self-constitutive discourse.

Christian discourse about the self that takes the existential situation seriously should thus be such as to maximise the contemporary experiential content and the traditional content of self-understanding at any point. Thus, the two considerations above may be stated as two basic, regulative criteria of adequacy for the project of narration. In the first place, narration intended as a renewal of Christian self-constitutive discourse should be predicated upon and expressed in the terms of contemporary experience. In the second place, such narration should take seriously the present context, but in such a way as to foreground Christian tradition. These two criteria will inevitably set up or preserve tensions within reflection upon Christian self-identity from time to time.

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[34] Some theorists of postmodernity advocate the assertion of an axiomatic ideological scheme in order to escape the chaos of what Williams calls the 'non-historical fixity of post-modernism'; Williams, R., *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989), p.35. Compare Williams, ibid., p.123; Bell, D., *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p.29; Anderson, Perry, 'Modernity and Revolution' in *New Left Review* 144 (1984), pp.96-113.

[35] The latter is the declared aim in Taylor, Mark C., *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.16.

The first criterion charges Christian discourse to be adequate to the contemporary situation by appropriating and re-working the motifs, narratives and concerns which emerge from late modern experience. Since in many contemporary societies participation in the ordinary, extra-ecclesial world carries no definite existential telos,[36] the criterion here is a simple one of fullness – narration is most adequate when it engages maximally with the experiential content of the subject or community's existence. Those engaged in the project of narration could meet this criterion in a relatively straightforward way. Where contemporary experience presents a simple imaginative challenge to the relevant received tradition, such experience can be regarded as a series of questions that may be answered through a re-application of the tradition in a new area.

The first criterion demands that everything should be translated into the terms of contemporary experience, but the second criterion provides recognition that some elements of Christian tradition *cannot* be translated without a diminution of their confessional meaning and continued application. However, there are two senses of tradition at work here. In the first place, we have to consider the great repository of traditional motifs, precepts and indeed narratives that has accumulated over the centuries and may be re-applied in contemporary discourse in order to address contemporary concerns. This is the Christian imaginative vocabulary. More important than this content, however, is the formal requirement that Christian self-constitutive discourse continues to exhibit the inner meaning of the gospel as realised in the subject or community's existence. In this sense, doing narration that is adequate to tradition means establishing a discourse that deliberately preserves traditional priorities and traditional categories[37] as far as possible, while expressing the meaning of Christian identity in contemporary terms.

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[36] That is, the societal norms that obtain in many contemporary societies are to a significant extent contested or matters of personal or group choice. This is true of the urbanised areas of South and Southeast Asia, of Latin America and of parts of Africa just as much as of the liberal, developed world.

[37] At this point I do not mean to suggest that the framework of Christian faith is uncontested; of course, different ecclesial communities have different priorities and different theological approaches to shared beliefs. However, to the extent that these denominations, or their members, recognise each other as fellow believers they can engage in a mutually instructive conversation about the catholic faith and draw from this shared stock of imaginative options.

Concern with adequacy to traditional *intention* must control application of the Christian imaginative vocabulary, since it is only through the former that the latter retains a confessional meaning.[38] Without continuity of traditional intention, the traditional imaginative vocabulary is just so many complexes of signs and signifiers available to be deployed arbitrarily. Ultimately, then, the criterion of adequacy to tradition is much more than one of attention to tradition. Rather, it is an insistence upon attention to tradition *directed to* conformity to contemporary Christian truth. This criterion will be met most satisfactorily where narration consists in an appropriation of modern experience, represented in terms of the Christian imaginative vocabulary as far as possible, developing towards an existential telos that is consistent with a valid development of traditional priorities and understandings. We shall return to questions of 'validity' in narration at greater length. For the present let us note that commitment to our second criterion will presumably involve a deliberately *critical* appropriation of contemporary, extra-ecclesial concerns wherever these threaten to marginalise or render vacuous elements of the traditional intention. This need not constrain us to a conservative handling of the traditional imaginative vocabulary. It must, however, involve narration being done in awareness of what a Christian existential telos, the horizon of Christian narration, might be.

Given the breadth of the Christian tradition and the particularity of the subjective and communal experiences which Christians seek to construe in its light, it would probably be vain even to attempt to suggest what, in detail, the content of the existential telos to which Christian narration should be directed would be. It is perfectly possible, however, to suggest the parameters of the existential telos. In each case, this should be no less than a new vision of the world and the place of the author within it predicated upon the visions of renewed reality we meet with in the tradition. In each case, this will be informed by the particular reception of the tradition with which the subject or community operates. The application of that version of the Christian imaginative vocabulary will in turn be controlled, as we have suggested, by the 'rules' with which the tradition suggests we shape our religious imagination. These extend beyond creedal and doctrinal principles to include what we have termed the

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[38] For discussion of how fidelity to the inner core or intention of the tradition might be maintained see our discussion below in Chapter Two.

'traditional intention': traditional interpretations, priorities and categories of understanding. So much, for the present, for the *content* of the Christian existential telos.

There is, however, a further element to the Christian existential telos that remains to be discussed. If - as we have consistently affirmed - the project of narration under discussion here is not an intellectual exercise comparable with the production of a work of literature but a lived practice of self-realisation through self-identification, then it is appropriate to talk of the *style* as well as the content of the narration. We must identify not only in *what* the narration might consist and to *what end* it might be directed, but also *how* it will be conceived of and lived out.

In part, of course, this 'how', this question of appropriate style, is to be answered by reference to our first two criteria of adequacy to extra-ecclesial experience and intra-ecclesial tradition. To narrate one's self-identity in the terms of experiences not one's own is wrong (though, as we shall see, commonplace); similarly, to narrate one's self-identity in terms of peripherally traditional categories such as 'nobility' or 'eroticism' would be at least problematic. However, to narrate one's self-identity as a Christian also involves an acceptance of some sort that the end of one's own narrative and of the grand meta-narrative of which scripture and tradition give glimpses are not, in any uncomplicated way, under one's own control. We live into an eschatological future which remains, for now, ultimately unknowable. The implications of this for the project of narration are not to be exhausted with the language of the tradition - as, for example, the affirmation that we ought to live humbly because that is one of the marks of Christ's true disciples - because the tradition is developing into the future with us. Recognising that Christian narration has an eschatological horizon compels us to claim, to seize, to entirely appropriate what time is left to us (a traditional image once more, but an effective one I hope). This in turn, I submit, issues in a remarkable creative freedom that makes self-transformation possible. A freedom that encourages us to posit transformed selves in the future - tomorrow, in a generation, in the life of the resurrection - while remaining faithful in the present and seeking to import into those future selves the interplay of experience and tradition through which we as Christian selves are *presently* constituted. In our narratological terms, we may wish to

posit this transformed self as the narrator of some phases of our self-constitutive narrative.

1.2.d. Some Problems with the Basic Criteria of Adequacy Considered:

The three principles discussed above are the basic regulative criteria for the project of narration envisaged here. Let us now examine some preliminary objections to their application to Christian self-constitutive discourse. The purpose of the discussion here is not to examine the basic criteria exhaustively, but to suggest areas in which they must be supplemented by further work if a discipline of narration is to be capable of achieving the kind of transformed self-understanding I have pointed towards.

The first area of difficulty for our basic criteria lies in what I will term *problems of truth*; these are of several sorts. Consider first what might be termed the *problem of recognition*: do we really know whereof we speak? Both tradition and contemporary experience are subject to internal as well as mutual critique. Traditional understandings might be undermined not only by juxtaposition with the deliverances of modernity but by internal debate within the ecclesial community.[39] Some postmodernist readings of history deny the validity of 'objective', hegemonic accounts of history, suggesting that the phenomena of history will be differently, perspectivally construed, even by those who have rejected the radical perspectives of Christianity.[40] The existence of these possibilities suggests that we should be highly cautious when seeking to apply the criteria. The criteria are not unproblematic, in that they require us first to be sure we know whereof we speak when we discuss 'tradition' or 'experience' in this or that situation.

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[39] It must be recognised that although debate within the Church is always ongoing, many phases of this debate are sparked by happenings in the wider world. We shall have more to say on this point in Chapter Two, when we come to discuss the place of the institutional Church within the ordinary social world.

[40] Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), passim; Marcus, George E. and Fischer, Michael M.J., (eds.) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique. An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.147.

Our advocacy of a self-identity construed in terms of the integration of tradition and experience under the eschatological horizon raises a further problem about truth in narration, which might be termed the *problem of honesty*. In the first place, it could be objected that it is not clear that narrated self-understanding would necessarily be *psychologically* positive. If a subject is well integrated through a scheme of narration, they are by our reasoning therefore able to claim that their self-understanding is adequate to both tradition and experience, and so potentially in a good position to begin living towards the future in terms of self-transformation. Nevertheless, might not the subject actually be hampered in the practical business of existence by this requirement that self-identity be narrated in full, 'honest' terms: that is, in terms of negative as well as positive experience? If the criteria are judged so burdensome as to inhibit the development of self-identity by tying the subject into endless self-examination, they are valueless.

I concede the point made by psychotherapists of many schools that it is often extremely burdensome to confront one's real situation with all its pain,[41] but to advocate narrated self-understanding is not to insist that people remind themselves of every self-constitutive experience that they can lay claim to. That is a route to existential solipsism as well as psychological torment. I would not advocate rejection of the myriad strategies whereby people 'bracket' aspects of consciousness and experience in order to sustain their functioning in the everyday world.[42] Yet, ultimately these strategies seek escape rather than resolution through development. Thus, they should at least be set in a context where a comprehensive, narrated self-understanding is the goal such that they can serve their expeditious function without establishing patterns of estrangement of problematic experiences or commitments from self-identity.

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[41] Compare the 'client-centred' approach of Biermann-Ratjen, op.cit., pp.121-123; the existential approach of Yalom, Irvin D., *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp.112-115; the interpersonal approach of Rounsaville, Bruce J. and Chevron, Eve, 'Interpersonal Psychotherapy: Clinical Application' in Rush, A. John (ed.), *Short-term Psychotherapies for Depression: Behavioral, Interpersonal, Cognitive and Psychodynamic Approaches* (Chichester: John Wilby & Sons, 1982), pp.107-142, p.118.

[42] It is arguable that only those who lead a contemplative life apart from the world could realistically attempt to live in full consciousness of themselves and their past experience. Assuming this, to prescribe such a totally aware self-consciousness as normative for all would be automatically to exclude the majority from the possibility of adequate self-identity as it has been set out here.

There is, however, a more fundamental problem of honesty that simply advocating a turn to narration as the normative mode of self-constitutive discourse cannot address. Put in its starkest terms – people have a tendency to fantasise. Not, in most cases, a tendency to outrageous mendacity and not, in most cases, a tendency that is rooted in some psychological problem. Fantasy can be a highly creative force or, on the analogy of dreams, a useful temporary escape from the more oppressive elements of reality. However, where fantasy enters self-constitutive discourse as a result of the quite valid impulse to 're-invent' oneself going astray, it becomes deeply unhelpful. Attempting to exist in artificial terms - other than when on is in a highly unusual situation divorced from 'normal life' - quite clearly cannot ground a project of self-transformation. Somehow, the discipline of narration must find a way to address this *problem of fantasy.*

Autobiographical and other, extra-subjective narratives we meet with in literature frequently raise a further point about truth in narration - the *problem of totalization.* This problem may be stated as follows. Where does valid integration of divergent experiences and commitments and valid transformation in terms of the creative freedom of the eschatological horizon end and violence to the significance of one of these elements in terms of another begin? Totalization occurs where one of the motifs that emerge from subjective experience or from the tradition comes to dominate in self-constitutive discourse such that other aspects of experience and tradition are not merely ordered at a lower level of emphasis but neglected.

Privileging of the narrative form may go some way toward resisting the problem of totalization. For in narration it is possible to explicate identity in terms of leading themes whose meaning are sought *through connection with* other themes. However, if this is to happen there must be an initial admission by the narrator that perceived tension between divergent experiences, commitments understandings is a price to be paid for taking all seriously. Now the problem becomes how to explicate that tension, how to incorporate acknowledgement of it as part of the narration.[43]

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[43] For an insightful discussion of the possibility of taking apparently radically incompatible commitments seriously see Stroup, George W., 'The Coherence of the Gospel in an Incoherent World' in Kraftchick, Steven J. et al. (eds.), *Biblical Theology: Problems and Perspectives* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp.235-246. Stroup posits a notion of 'apocalyptic coherence', wherein the

This tension raised by the apparently divergent nature of elements within self-identity raises not only the problem of totalization but also, when considered from another perspective, the *problem of change*. That is, the question of when is it appropriate to exercise the radical, creative freedom offered by living under the eschatological horizon. Assuming that, because we seek a sense of self that is adequate to reality, we are not always free to resolve tensions and difficulties within self-identity by an *arbitrary* imaginative act, what will provide us with certainty that those imaginative departures we do make are *not* arbitrary?

The issue of imaginative freedom, touched on above, leads us to consideration of wider questions of change or revisability in self-identity. Substantial revisions in self-identity occur in fact whenever one's experience leads one to adjust one's self-understanding and understanding of one's place in the world. Religious conversion is an excellent example here because it involves making a radical commitment to a discourse community that in many respects stands over as challenge against the other discourse communities in which one is involved.[44] Thus, the model of self-understanding with which one operates must be capable of accounting for such shifts. Otherwise, one's self-understanding is liable to be riven with disjunctions. Past self-constitutive experiences and commitments will be alienated from present self-constitutive discourse.

These problems of truth and change in narration are in several cases also *problems of authority*. Specifically, the problems of finding loci of credible authority outside the subjective consciousness or local, communal norms that can shield the project of narration from charges of pure subjectivism, solipsism and, again, arbitrariness. However, our basic criteria also raise further problems of authority. In the first place, there is the *problem of yielding*. I regard the different approaches to contemporary experience and ecclesial tradition called forth by the criteria set out above as tools to

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commitments (he discusses Jewish historical memory and faith in a loving God) are retained but the issue of their final coherence is left in God's hands. See esp. p.241.

[44] In fact, the decision of conversion usually involves commitments to a whole series of inter-related discourse communities. If one is a Christian these may include the local church whose ministry brought one to faith, the denomination into which one is received and - more vaguely no doubt - the whole Church and even the whole 'religious' mass of humanity who reject purely secular perspectives on reality.

be used turn and turnabout in the course of a single project. Sometimes the understandings derived from extra-ecclesial experience will have to yield, sometimes those understandings received in the tradition will have to give way, if the whole self-constitutive narration is to be adequate to both. But how is the hypothetical subject to know what should yield, when?

One final problem of authority raised by the criteria is the *problem of choice* between a multiplicity of potentially valid renewals of self-constitutive discourse. There might be a number of narrations open to each subject or community that would all adequately reflect their self-constitutive experience and commitments to tradition. However, since it is often useful for the individual or group to have a relatively clear vision of themselves, it might be thought desirable that we have a principle according to which one might choose between the various adequate, integrative discourses.

In Chapter Three I will return at length to these problems of truth, change or revisability and authority in narration. There I will argue the case that they can be overcome through processes of critical engagement with the various communal loci of encounter between tradition, experience, and imaginative freedom. The remainder of this chapter, however, will be devoted to explicating in more detail the essential premise of the project of narration: the concept of integrative and transformative renewal of self-constitutive discourse.

1.3. Renewal through 'Re-telling':

1.3.a. Preliminary Remarks:

Here, beginning to look in more detail at integrative, transformative narration, I examine the idea of such narration as a 're-telling' – an imaginative expansion of a given traditional 'narrative frame' in the terms of contemporary experience. The focus in this section is upon how contemporary subjects, and communities participating in an authorial project together, can ensure that their repristination of the traditional narrative frame is precisely a renewal rather than a distortion.

Since I conceive of this thesis as a work of pastoral, practical theology I have not sought to ground my case for the project of narration in biblical or systematic theology. I have admitted candidly that narration is not an inevitable or necessary mode of self-constitutive discourse. The case for narration must be made out, it is not to be discovered in an unambiguous, univocal tradition or in scripture. Let us now admit, indeed, that much of scripture is *not* narrative in form[45] and becomes part of narratives about Christian existence only through processes of audience appropriation and re-appropriation within the believing community. The great pioneer of narratological study of scripture, Hans Frei, appreciated this point insufficiently, his admission that the Bible cannot be reduced to one type of literature[46] notwithstanding.[47] Nevertheless, there are elements of both scripture and tradition that undergird points already made about the project of narration. Moreover – despite their emergence from a pre-critical milieu – these elements of our inheritance can function as exemplars for the application of the basic criteria. I would appeal to readers to recognise my limited aims here. I do not set out to provide an exhaustive discussion of narration as 're-telling' as evidenced through Christian history and I confine my discussion to the Synoptic gospels, for reasons of economy.

1.3.b. Re-telling in the Synoptic Gospels:

When contemporary Christians turn to scripture, their principal interest is usually in the figure of Christ. For our purposes, Christ may be said to inform Christian self-constitutive discourse in two senses. First, then, in the gospels at least Christ's biography figures unambiguously as an exemplar for Christian self-constitutive discourse. Frei's notion of the 'unsubstitutable' is essential here: Christ was (or

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[45] The canonical Old and New Testaments include many literary forms besides narrative - law code (Leviticus, Deuteronomy), genealogical table (Gen.5:1-32 and elsewhere, Num.26:5-61 and elsewhere), poetry (Psalms), epistle (the Pauline corpus and elsewhere) and so on. Of course, many principally narrative-form texts contain non-narrative elements and vice versa.

[46] Frei, Hans, 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal' in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. Hunsinger, George and Placher, William C. (Oxford: O.U.P., 1993), p.43.

[47] Frei proposes the use of an 'organizing principle' whereby the New Testament canon apart from the Gospels is read as commentary on those four narratives. That method could yield insights, but why introduce it at all and thereby risk self-deception with regard to one's handling of the texts? Better surely to seek the coherence of the texts in the existential project of narration where the texts, like other traditional and experiential resources, become part of *our* narrated wholes, than to read them in a limiting, ahistorical fashion.

became) himself and no other in historically unrepeatable circumstances,[48] yet the patterns of meaning made available within his story are made available to us indirectly through the gospels.[49] Frei errs in supposing that the narrative will only have Christological meaning if it is told with a focus on its soteriological 'final sequence'.[50] In truth, the authors of the gospels disclose the fact that Christ should be determinative of the content of Christian identity by depicting the life of the proto-Christian disciples as, essentially, one of following him.[51] Thus, in these texts narratives of discipleship are revealed, and revealed as consisting most essentially in stories of committed obedience and imitation.[52] Here the 'sense' of the gospel narratives is clear; however, whilst conceding this point readily we must be cautious about the inferences we draw from it, for it is not at all clear that for us walking in the way of Christ means or *can* mean anything like what it meant for the authors of the gospels.

Even within the New Testament, alongside and earlier than the gospels, there is substantial evidence of Christians recognising their 'distance' from Christ and consequent need to mediate *his* narrative through others. Narratives about Christ may well have been central to the *thought* of Paul, for example, but this is *not* true of his message, since he offers himself as an exemplar far more often than he offers Christ.[53] At a far greater remove from Christ than Paul's communities,[54] we too will need to go

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[48] Frei, Hans, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutic Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp.86ff., esp.p.139.

[49] Ibid., pp.138, 143.

[50] Frei argues for the heaviest possible non-reductive focus upon the Resurrection; ibid.,pp.142-143. I would agree that there can be no adequate Christology without the Resurrection, but question whether such a heavy focus is appropriate for a believing community whose experience of the Resurrection in its fullness is only one of remembrance and hope.

[51] The evangelists also use the original disciples to explore many other issues in post-Easter discipleship. Thus, for example, the author of the Second Gospel often has Christ address his disciples in terms which include a circle wider than the original audience, as at Mk.13:37: 'And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake'. For more on this point see Hurtado, Larry W. 'Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark - and Beyond' in Longenecker, op.cit., pp.9-29, esp. pp.9-17. See also Malbon, E.S. 'Disciples/ Crowds/ Whoever: Markan Characters and Readers' in *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1986), pp.104-130.

[52] Of course, each evangelist elaborates this common essence of discipleship in different ways according to their particular concerns.

[53] This feature of Paul's writings becomes pointed in the preference for celibacy he expresses at 1.Cor.7:7a: 'I wish that all were as I myself am.'. Here the apostle could have offered Christ as an exemplar but evidently elects not to.

[54] For further discussion of imitative and other conceptions of Christian identity in the Pauline corpus see Hawthorne, Gerald F., 'The Imitation of Christ: Discipleship in Philippians' in Longenecker, Richard N. *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), pp.163-179

out from the root narratives we inherit through the tradition to discover and re-discover the way of Christ in non-traditional contexts if we are to formulate adequate Christian self-constitutive discourse.

A particularly intriguing way in which such re-discovery might be brought about is suggested by the second sense in which the Christ of the Synoptic gospels (at least) functions to inform Christian self-constitutive discourse. The Christ figures which the Synoptics depict, as well as being problematic (because remote) exemplars for narrated Christian identity, offer us narrative as a supremely versatile tool for the *ongoing* exploration of what it means to understand one's self in terms of a narration predicated upon the traditional motif of discipleship. This offer, which we see made initially in some of the parables, was taken up by the Synoptic evangelists who redacted the relevant pericopae. Attention to many of the storied parables will amply demonstrate the points I want to make about Christ as teacher offering Christians a kind of narrative 'frame', an hermeneutic principle which can be used by authors to involve the foundational experiences of the primitive Church in post-Easter experience and bring the two into an integrated relationship.

Consider, then, a 'literal sense' interpretation of the Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan. The author – whether that is the named evangelist tradition identifies as the narrator or another - places this parable in the mouth of Christ as narrator of an embedded narrative as a response to the lawyer's question 'and who is my neighbour?' (Lk.10:29).[55] The import of this parabolic embedded narrative is clear - from the narrator's perspective [Christ's] anyone can be the other who is worthy of as much love as oneself, even the one to whom dislike attaches.[56] What is equally clear is that Christ has adopted a very particular method of teaching about ways of being which must be normative for his disciples. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we see the fundamental qualities of the narrative frame that the Christ of the Synoptics offers.

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and Belleville, Linda L. "'Imitate Me Just as I Imitate Christ": Discipleship in the Corinthian Correspondence' in Longenecker, op.cit., pp.120-142.

[55] We may infer that this was a deliberate editorial choice rather than a matter of inherited record from the fact that in neither Mark nor Matthew does the question meet with this parabolic response. The absence of the parable from those gospels suggests it derives from the 'special' Lukan tradition.

[56] There may, of course, be further theological insights to be drawn from Christ's specific allusions to Jerusalem, Jericho, the Samaritan and so on.

Christ enables his audience to discern and appropriate his gospel in their cultural situation by making a story which is *evocative* because adequate to contemporary experience. It is *significant* because it imports Christ's religious message into the situation. It is *liberating* for the audience because the familiar and unfamiliar meet in an integrated whole that bespeaks a new vision of life.

The story is rich with 'local colour' - the 'robbers', the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan, the wayside inn, the washing of wounds with wine and the sum of two *denarii*.[57] In the original context in which the parable was spoken, each of these appeals to the experience of the initial audience would have leant familiarity to this embedded narrative - even though the narrator's message is as radical as his language is homely. The story introduces essential unities; an unfamiliar message is made intelligible in a familiar context and various aspects of Christ's teaching are brought into relation. The neighbour question is answered in a way that involves prophetic denunciation of the Jewish establishment and a new openness to outcasts as well as unqualified other-regard. Ultimately the parable consists in a narrated passage from old understandings to new without significant disjunctions or confusions. In my view, the author emphasises this latter point about the efficacy of narrative as a means to altering self-perception in taking care to supply us with the lawyer's correct answer to Jesus' question about the meaning of his story (Lk.10:36-37).[58]

I do not want to spend much more time discussing the narrative quality of this parable; let me pause only to admit that there may be a need for some caution in the construal of the sense of the lawyer's correct answer. The parable has from time to time been interpreted in ways other than that I offer above. The 'one who showed him mercy'[59] is, I take it, the Samaritan;[60] however, an alternative, Augustinian, reading

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[57] Lk.10:35. According to the N.R.S.V. this sum represented two days wages for a labourer. The munificence of the Samaritan serves to heighten appreciation of his generosity and his exemplary other-regard.

[58] The fact that the story is supposed to work a change in self-perception and disposition is further highlighted by the Lukan Christ's injunction: 'Go and do likewise' (Lk.10:37).

[59] Lk.10:30-34.

[60] Lk.10:36 - 'which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man...' is read most straightforwardly as an invitation to a choice between the Levite, the priest and the Samaritan. Of the other characters only the inn-keeper, who is *wholly under the direction of the Samaritan*, is portrayed positively.

might find the ultimate significance of the parable by looking to the innkeeper and his premises as symbolic of the Church[61] and *its* mercy.[62] On this allegorical understanding, the parable retains the character of a narrated passage from old to new understandings. However, the point about acceptance of the radically other which the inclusion of the Samaritan character suggests (to me) is of less interest than the radical acceptance of all which life in the Church offers as symbolised by the welcoming inn.[63]

Each Synoptic evangelist expands the narrative frame, the bare tradition of the proto-Church in the same sort of way, extending it to afford an account of (at least) the whole of Christ's public ministry.[64] Equally, however, all three 're-tell' the narrative they derive from their various sources[65] in ways which are adequate to different experiences, to different construals of Jewish and Hellenic ideas and to subtly different visions of the future. It is impossible for us to reconstruct the circumstances of the composition of any gospel and thus we must exercise great care when we take any of their particular details as evidence of a particular authorial strategy. It is reasonable, for example, to ascribe Mark's 'missing' ending[66] to an overall concern to

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[61] On the alternative reading, the inn-keeper shows conspicuous mercy beyond the direction of the Samaritan by (presumably) agreeing to tend to the man even after the Samaritan's generous payment has been exhausted, trusting in the latter's word.

[62] This sort of reading is suggested by Augustine in *Hom.* 31. Augustine's original allegorical (and highly fanciful) reading sees the victim as Adam, the Samaritan as Christ, the Inn as the Church and the innkeeper as the apostle Paul!

[63] An allegorical understanding could also read the contrast between the merciless Levite and priest and the inn as the place of acceptance and concern as making a point about the location of the Church in the fabric of the 'ordinary' world, not something set apart as Levites and priests of that day were held to be.

[64] Mark's gospel covers the public ministry and - in some sense - the events surrounding the resurrection. Matthew adds some infancy narratives, the ministry of John the Baptist and an unambiguous account of the resurrection. Luke adds the birth of John the Baptist, different infancy narratives and an unambiguous account of the resurrection and ascension.

[65] These sources are lost to us and may never have existed in other than an oral form, so it is incorrect to assume that there was some single Christian proto-narrative apart from the life of Christ and the experiences of his disciples. However, the parallels between the Synoptics allow us to deduce that some of the earliest Christian groups shared a substantial body of tradition. Compare Goehring, James E. et al. (eds.) *Gospel Origins and Christian Beginnings* (Sonoma, CA.: Polebridge, 1990).

[66] The so-called 'shorter' and 'longer' endings which extend the gospel past 16:8 are relatively poorly attested and regarded widely as late additions. Mk.16:8 concludes the gospel with a promise of a resurrection appearance in Galilee, but with 'terror and amazement' and - crucially - silence on the part of the women. The shorter ending merely has the women reporting back to 'those around Peter' and an allusion to a missionary commission from the risen Christ. The longer ending refers to three appearances and the ascension and points forward to the ongoing, Christ-filled life of the Church.

keep Christ 'mysterious'[67] or to an ironic strategy that would force his original audience to locate themselves in relation to the narrative,[68] perhaps as the heirs of the women's broken silence. However, we cannot *know* that one of these possibilities conforms to the original, authorial intention.[69] Thus, as Fowl maintains,[70] when we speak of a particular evangelist's construction of a narrative we must really be saying more about the ways that the believing community as audience should understand or has understood the Synoptic texts than about authorial intention.[71] In so far as we are in touch with the foundational experiences alluded to in the text, it is through analogous intra-ecclesial experiences of being spirit-guided community and through the trust we place in tradition and scholarship.[72]

We may now look in detail at some of the possibilities for re-telling, for expansion of the narrative frame, offered by the Synoptic evangelists. What emerges most forcefully from a comparative reading of these texts, I believe, is the fact that the ancient Church which received them and formalised the canon saw each, different as they are,[73] as an adequate and therefore authoritative telling of *the* gospel.[74] The

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[67] Evidenced also by the theme of the messianic secret, the frequent depiction of Christ irrupting into a situation as if from nowhere (witness his appearances 'immediately') and the lack of any detail about his young life. For detailed discussion of the messianic secret and other aspects of the mysteriousness of the Markan Christ, Hengel, Martin, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, trans. Bowden, John (London: S.C.M. Press, 1985), pp.1-30.

[68] Larry Hurtado offers a version of this thesis: Hurtado, op.cit., in Longenecker, op.cit. p.27.

[69] For detailed discussion of the time of origin and situation of Mark's gospel see Hengel, op.cit., pp.41-45.

[70] Fowl, op.cit., p.4.

[71] Indeed, using the terms 'evangelist' or 'author' in the singular can be contentious. There is, for example, no absolute agreement that Mark's gospel is substantially the work of one hand. Schmithals offers a radical redaction-critical approach in which the evangelist has corrupted an earlier text by introducing the messianic secret and other follies. See Schmithals, Walter *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 2 vols. (*Oekumenischer Taschenbuch Kommentar*, 1979), vol. 1, pp.21-70. Other major scholars, notably Pesch, are closer to the traditional view that the evangelist was the principal compositor of Mark's gospel and a substantially faithful witness to received testimony.

[72] This view is associated with Frei and Lindbeck. Frei, Hans, 'The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break' in McConnell, F. (ed.) *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* (New York: O.U.P., 1986), pp.36-77; Lindbeck, George, 'The Story Shaped Church: Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation' in Fowl, S.E. (ed.), *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp.39-52.

[73] To be more precise, there were probably two impulses at work in the primitive Church's handling of the gospels (and other texts). A conservative attitude (and hostility to Marcion) led to each being valued as a communication of the gospel; however, the desire for 'more information' seems to have led to a relative lack of interest in Mark as compared with Matthew and Luke. For detailed discussion see Hengel, Martin, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, trans. Bowden, John (London: S.C.M. Press, 2000), pp.38-47.

[74] The same was probably true of the Fourth Gospel, but that text is not germane to our arguments here for reasons given above.

substantial differences between them are not such as to render them mutually contradictory,[75] but nor are they merely a matter of length or language. Each evangelist imports special concerns into their narration such as to render them authentic translations of the gospel adequate to the original tradition that are yet also something more.

We have already alluded to some features of the narrative which Mark's gospel offers, notably its abbreviated character and the depiction - initially at least - of Christ as a mystery.[76] These seem to be very far from accidental; they are apparently central to the message the author seeks to convey. Ancient tradition regarded this gospel as the work of an assistant to Peter[77] who wrote down his oral gospel, perhaps combining it with that taught by Paul after the martyrdom of those two great apostles in Italy,[78] or at least after the end of Peter's public preaching in Rome.[79] The balance of modern scholarship suggests a date some time before, but not very long before, the destruction of the Temple in August 70.[80] Tradition and scholarship agree, therefore, that the author must have been writing in an atmosphere of great urgency, perhaps even an atmosphere of crisis - occasioned principally by the ending (in martyrdom) of the apostolic age or by the threat to the heart of Judaism. Assuming this background, Mark's gospel begins to appear as a perfectly adequate narration in terms of contemporary experience. Now talk of its 'abbreviated' nature can be seen to go rather off target. The clipped, staccato style is of more than aesthetic interest,[81] for it raises

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[75] This would not be anything like so true if we extended our review to include the Fourth Gospel. Very substantial differences between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel include, for example, the fact that the author of the latter omits any reference to Christ's institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. See Brown, David, *The Word to Set You Free* (London, S.P.C.K., 1995), pp.146-150.

[76] By the time of blind Bartimaeus' confession of Christ as 'Jesus, Son of David' at Mk.10:47 it no longer makes sense to speak of a messianic *secret*.

[77] According to the 'anti-Marcionite prologue' to the gospel; cited Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, p.3.

[78] Irenaeus in *Against the Heresies*, 3,1,1.

[79] Clement of Alexandria in *Hypotyposes*, book 6; cited Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, p.4.

[80] The principal evidence for this sort of dating, of course, is the vagueness of the references to the destruction of the Temple in Mk.13. Some scholars, however, notably Robinson, J.A.T. in his *Redating the New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1976) would go earlier. Robinson suggests a dating of between 45 and 60.

[81] The discontinuities within the gospel could tempt the scholar to conclude that this gospel is not truly a narrative; however, for the reasons given here I regard these as stylistic devices *within* the narrative. Bryan suggests that if Mark is read with its supposed oral origin in mind we begin to gain an idea of a structure in terms of the musicality of oral narration, which is quite different to that of a literary narrative; Bryan, Christopher, *A Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel in its Literary and Cultural Settings* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1993), pp.82-83.

in the audience of the gospel a sense of urgency, a sense that time is short and that decisive action is required now.[82] The author underlines this point by explicitly linking the very end of the world with the threatened outrage of the Temple precincts.[83]

In this context, the evangelist's move to attach a powerful sense of alterity to Christ is rather more comprehensible than before. No doubt several things are going on here, but the mysterious quality of the Markan Christ serves above all to further radicalise the choice between identity as disciple or as a lost soul, with which he seeks to confront his audience.[84] The suddenness of Christ's appearance(s) coupled with his awesome (if sometimes deliberately concealed) authority[85] underline the newness of the choice of identity that he offers. Into the morbid situation of crisis that scholarship suggests was the experience of this author's original audience breaks a Christ who is a counter-crisis - the Christ of disjunction and upheaval *and of life*. The Christ of proto-traditional belief is reconceived for those who would hand on the tradition in terms of leading aspects of their extra-traditional experience.

By the time Matthew's gospel was written, the concerns that informed the re-telling of the proto-narrative gleaned from the author's sources had altered. No doubt, his community had also endured periods of crisis,[86] but the author does not narrate the Christ-event in a way that directly addresses this historical aspect of primitive

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[82] Fowler, Robert M., *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress, 1991), pp.134-135 suggests that the staccato rhythm of the gospel invites participation in its narrative through 'filling in the gaps'. Conceding this critical point only enriches the case for regarding the Second Gospel as a text requiring decision. Existential decision is the ultimate form of urgent participation

[83] Mk. 13:14ff. The phrase 'in those days' at 13:24 implies a lack of temporal separation between the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world.

[84] Note here, however, that whilst Mark's demand that the decision of discipleship be made is stark and uncompromising his view of discipleship as such is not unsophisticated. As his account of Peter's three-fold denial (Mk.14:29-31; 66-72), where Peter is clearly representative of all disciples - 'And all of them said the same' (Mk.14:31b), shows that the evangelist countenances the possibility of failure and restoration.

[85] Witness Mk.4:41 'Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

[86] Patte, Daniel, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), p.13, is unusually sceptical about historical reconstruction of the gospel's origins. For a more positive, mainstream view see Stanton, Graham N., *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), p.45. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes original concerns with estrangement from the synagogue and resultant conflicts to varying degrees, e.g., Keener, Craig S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), pp.46-51.

Christian experience. Reading the First Gospel in the light of our scholarship, a twenty-first century audience gets the sense that this author has reached a stage of reflection beyond that evidenced in Mark's gospel. The necessity of immediate decision, whilst still a concern,[87] has been replaced as the principal focus by a desire to locate Christ and discipleship within the specifically religious imagination of contemporary Jews.[88] Thus, we find the evangelist organising the traditions containing Christ's teaching into five major blocs[89] reminiscent of the Pentateuch.[90] Christ is the new Moses who goes up another mountain to bring another, final, word from God.[91] The author is able to show how, with the benefit of a re-telling, the imaginative world constituted by the discourse communities of contemporary Judaism remains an appropriate context for thinking about the new thing that has happened. He does this not only by loosely patterning Christ's activity upon that of Moses, but also by introducing the principles of 'perfection' and 'righteousness' such that the old law is not overthrown, but taken up into a still more glorious expression of God's great purpose for man. This is the sense, I believe, of the two difficult passages (Mt.5:18)[92] and (Mt.5:48).[93]

This author does not argue for a new legalism; the passages (Mt.5:18) and (Mt.5:48) have to do with the idea that the fulfilment of the law is in an identity which knows no bounds to commitment, even those imposed by scrupulous observance.[94] The author ends his gospel with the still more radical prospect that ultimately, in Christ, the

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[87] This is my understanding of Mt.8:21-22. The urgency of Christ's call is such that it abrogates even the most serious social and religious obligations - such as honouring one's deceased father.

[88] Matthew's gospel, like Luke's gospel, reflects a realisation that the consummation of things will be (has been) deferred. Witness the closing verse of the gospel in which Christ promises the disciples to be with them 'until the end of the age'. For discussion of Luke's eschatological awareness see below, pp.14-15.

[89] The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5-7), a mission discourse (Mt.10), a community discourse (Mt.18), the discourse against the scribes and Pharisees (Mt.23) and an apocalyptic discourse (Mt.24).

[90] Note also that the evangelist makes very heavy use of quotations from the Old Testament, particularly from Isaiah. Witness, for example, Mt.3:3; 14-16.

[91] Mt.5:1.

[92] 'For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished'; compare Keener, op.cit., p.178.

[93] 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect', compare ibid., p.205.

[94] On this point it may be instructive to compare Matthew's gospel with the epistle to the Hebrews, which makes similar points while focussing on the Jewish patriarchs and the sacerdotal functions of the priesthood rather than on legal observance. By affirming traditional Jewish ideas about patriarchs and priests and their functions but with the caveat that Christ has fulfilled what was hitherto only promised or foreshadowed, the author of Hebrews offers his audience a way in which to reinterpret their Jewish faith radically which would nevertheless be intelligible to them.

transformed Jewish identity will be made available to Gentiles too.[95] This must have been of great significance for the Jewish Christians whom, it is presumed,[96] constituted the initial audience and whom we may reasonably assume would have been anxious at the apparent dilution of the Jewish character of the Church.[97] The author of the First Gospel achieves a re-presentation of traditional convictions in terms of familiar communal certainties, but no less important is the fact that he opens both to a future phase of full reconciliation.

The author of Luke's gospel was concerned, like the authors of the First and Second gospels, to locate the traditional themes of Christ and self-commitment to him within a particular range of human experience. However, on our post-critical reading this evangelist does not take up the problems of apparent crisis or the struggle for coherent Jewish-Christian identity so much as he seeks to show his original audience how it is possible to reconcile true discipleship with taking seriously one's present *social* situation. Unsurprisingly, in consequence, for modern audiences with ready access to both, Luke's gospel can appear as a counter-weight to Mark's gospel.

Consider first the author's apparent deep concern with the historicity of the events and teachings he narrates, as evidenced particularly in the passages (Lk.2:1-2)[98] and (Lk.3:1-2),[99] which purport to date the birth of Christ and the beginning of the Baptist's ministry. My reading is that these details were not included in an attempt to 'prove' something to the original audience of the gospel as today one might attempt to

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[95] This is the sense of the commission to 'make disciples of all nations': Mt.28:19. The acceptance of Gentiles into the fellowship of those who are in Christ is also arguably prefigured in the evangelist's inclusion of Gentiles or converts in Christ's genealogy (Tamar, Rahab and Ruth - Mt.1:3-6) and the place of honour accorded the 'wise men'. 'Wise men' is a translation of 'Magi'; in historical fact the Magi were a pre-Zoroastrian caste of astrologers who later (by the time of Christ) became important within Zoroastrianism.

[96] Further evidence for this contention other than that already adduced is found in the ancient tradition of Irenaeus, who says that 'Matthew compiled the sayings in the Hebrew language...'; cited Hengel, *The Four Gospels*, op. cit., p.68. However, this cannot refer to the *canonical* First Gospel, since that is obviously based in large part on the Second Gospel's Greek original.

[97] Keener, op.cit., p.2.

[98] 'In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria'.

[99] 'In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness'.

prove that one had witnessed an historical event by supplying one's audience with privileged historical data.[100] That may have been one level on which these details were intended by the author to appeal to the original audience, but what the precision here lends the events described in the mind of this reader is not credibility so much as *concreteness*.[101] Why should the author have been concerned to achieve this? There is a clue in his handling of the blocs of material that deal with the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world.[102] Whereas the author of Mark's gospel juxtaposes these, this author separates them with the qualification that '...and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled'. It seems that by the time of writing this later author's community, his original audience and the presumed source of many of his understandings, had reached a realisation that the end of things would be (had been, indeed) deferred. The author needed to affirm the possibility of Christian existence between the times of promise and fulfilment in his narration of the gospel.

Luke's Gospel is a story in which the basic demand for commitment to Christ goes beyond a call for radical alteration of one's self-identity to include discussion of what this might mean in terms of *existing* social relations. The story has as one of its major themes the highly pragmatic idea that the Roman world is neither inherently evil nor irrelevant, but rather the proper 'inheritance' of the Christian communities within it. Thus, in this evangelist's version of the First Gospel's Sermon on the Mount[103] - the so-called Sermon on the Plain[104] - it is straightforwardly 'you who are poor'[105] who are called blessed rather than the Matthean 'poor in spirit'.[106] Alone of all the evangelists, this author has his Christ promise Paradise to one of the criminals who shares his

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[100] Barrett, C.K., *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (London: Epworth, 1961), pp.9ff.

[101] The details of Lk.2:1-2 are problematic from a historical point of view; Marshall, I. Howard, *Luke: Theologian and Historian* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zandorvan, 1989), pp.99-104. *Narratologically*, however, they function to tie the evangelist's account into issues of power and status on a (real) world scale; Green, Joel B., *The Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), p.125. The details of Lk.3:1-2 likewise serve to locate the narrative, and salvation history, within the world identified by the individuals mentioned; ibid., p.166, even though the details are dubious historically; Meier, John P., *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol.1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp.383-386.

[102] Lk.21:5-33.

[103] Mt.5:1-7:29.

[104] Lk.6:17-49.

[105] Lk.6:20.

[106] Mt.5:3.

death.[107] The evangelist's relatively positive view of the Roman world[108] is apparent in many details but is evidenced most forcefully when he narrates the episodes which lead up to the crucifixion. Pilate, perhaps the most obvious Roman target for vilification, is represented in a more favourable light than in the other gospels - although he will not stand out against those calling for Christ's death, he repeatedly affirms the condemned man's innocence.[109] The episode in which the Roman soldiers abuse Christ after his arrest is deliberately suppressed by the author, or so a post-critical reading suggests, since it is attested in Mark's 'source' gospel.[110]

The authors of the Synoptic gospels offer the believing community more than three texts that are repositories of revelation. Beyond this, they point toward the basic imaginative freedom that, as we have seen, has often been overlooked by the post-Enlightenment Church. These authors extended the narrative frame that they record Christ as offering in (some of) the parables such as to preserve and even enhance the valuable qualities we discerned in the parabolic form in our earlier analysis of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The evangelists re-told what they had heard about Christ and his earliest disciples such as to involve the post-Easter experiences of their original audiences whilst largely preserving the situatedness of the more primitive Jesus movement in its own historical and experiential context (so far as this was known to them). In doing so, they developed stories that integrated two increasingly divergent streams of experience, cohered past and present religious understandings and offered imaginative liberation to those initial audiences whose experiences of Judaism and civil life (for example) seemed to militate against the appropriation of a secure identity as a disciple of the Risen Christ. It is necessary for Christians today to seek to tell similar stories from within their own existential situations. There are important obstacles in the way, however, besides the difficulty of ensuring that the

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[107] Lk.23:39-43. The evangelist is consistent in depicting Christ as accepting of outsiders in his society - women, sinners (Lk.7:37-50) and so on.

[108] It is easy to understand why some early Christians might have felt at least ambivalence about the Roman authorities - they were persecutors who presided over a pagan 'dominion of darkness' (Col.1:13), yet in many areas of life they provided good order and a semblance of justice: the *Pax Romana* which facilitated the missionary wanderings of Paul and others.

[109] Lk.23:4;14;22. For purposes of comparison - The Matthean Pilate makes no attempt to reason with the leaders of the Jews (Mt.27:15-26), the Markan Pilate is similar (Mk.15:1-15), while the Johannine Pilate wants to save Christ but is too cowardly to do so (Jn.18:28-19:24, esp. Jn.19:8).

[110] Compare Mk.15:16-20. The episode is also attested in Matthew's gospel (Mt.27:27-31).

narratives privileged are genuinely adequate to contemporary experience and the content of the life of faith.

1.3.c. Integrative 'Re-telling' as a Contemporary Possibility:

The authors of the gospels had a singular privilege in their attempts to communicate narratives conducing to Christian self-identity in that they could tell *and* re-tell the stories of Christ and his earliest disciples within a single narrative frame. Plainly, contemporary Christians do not have the evangelists' freedom to 'abolish' the historical period of divergent experience such as to show Christ as our literal contemporary. Frei is right to recognise that abolishing history such as to try to find Christ just as he appears in the gospels in our world does not bridge the historical divide, but renders Christian discourse worse than anachronistic by situating it in an ahistorical realm of fantasy.[111] Not only is this possibility undesirable, it is probably literally *impossible* for many of those audiences who receive scripture today. We have already affirmed that our reading of the gospels, and other canonical texts, is self-consciously post-critical. The post-critical mind will not be satisfied with new myth making that purports to be something else, this fact must have profound consequences for the project of narration.

Contemporary narrations of Christian self-constitutive discourse cannot, for the post-critical person, substitute for the foundational narratives we find in the gospels and the other authoritative texts of the tradition in the same way that the gospels could, for their original audiences, substitute for the proto-narratives we assume lie behind them. Thus, contemporary expansions of traditional narrative frames must be regarded as subsidiary to the authoritative texts of the tradition - a series of routes 'into' or 'back to' the insights they contain, extended and refreshed by new forms, tropes and images. The believing community affirms that Christ lives now, but lives as ascended Lord not as the teacher from Nazareth or within this or that contemporary man of sorrows. Thus the gospels and other authoritative texts must remain authoritative, augmented but not supplanted by new narratives.

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[111] Frei, op.cit., esp. p.82.

The foregoing emphatically does not mean that new narratives that use the device of a Christ-type character are to be rejected. Historically, to be 'Christ-like' has been seen as a legitimate expression of discipleship. Yet it is clear these narratives are valuable only in so far as they cast sidelights on the possible meaning and way of Christ in the world *today*.[112] They are useful only as far as they function as species of the narratives that spring from the experience of elements of the historical Christ's continuing earthly body - the Church. That is to say, those narratives that point up the meaning of (aspects of) Christian faith in contemporary situations and which demonstrate the possibility and nature of Christian identity in particular cases.

Remythologising the gospel is not an option. Throughout much of the Church's history it was possible to construct Christian narrative against a background of willingness to believe, a trusting (though not necessarily credulous) faith. Thus, in the Mediaeval period in particular, myths attaching to the triumphant power of saints and relics gained wide currency in a series of societies whose members felt themselves and the very continuance of Christian civilisation to be under threat from real and imagined foes both within and without - Jews, Muslims, demons, plagues and so forth.

David Brown has suggested,[113] persuasively in my view, that in the medieval context myths like the 'discovery' of the bodies of the 'three kings' in 1158 and their actual solemn interment in Cologne Cathedral spoke to the people of that age quite as effectively as the evangelists would have done to their audiences.[114] However, there has been a revolution in the western imagination since that period and it would *now* be fruitless to insist on saturating self-constitutive discourse with traditional Christian tropes and images that have lost their appeal.

How then can we have the same confidence in our re-tellings of Christian narrative that the evangelist's communities had in theirs? In his instructive little book, *The*

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[112] Frei, op.cit., pp.82-84.

[113] Brown, *The Word*, op.cit., p.109.

[114] Brown points out that the identification of the three corpses as kings of various ages and races all served to highlight the timeless truth that the gospel has universal applicability regardless of social or other status. Ibid., p.9.

Novelist and the Passion Story[115] F.W.Dillistone makes a series of suggestions that I want to pursue here. He argues that an author who wishes to involve the gospel in the contemporary situation should 'write about his contemporary world openly and frankly but with the essential pattern of the Passion narrative forming the inner framework of his own story'.[116] Dillistone also goes on to cite A.A.Mendilow[117] in an effort to demonstrate how - more generally - a community might judge whether or not a particular narrative has the character of being true to its foundational experiences though in some respects diverging from them. It is argued that the narrative may be judged so if a thoughtful member of the audience can:

> 1. 'feel the whole work as a symbol of something wider and deeper than the actual theme, something that sets up... reverberations that invest the particular human problem treated with universal [communal] significance'.

> 2. 'recognise in the relations of the parts to one another and to the whole some underlying principle, corresponding so closely to the conception of the theme as to appear inevitable'.[118]

Here we have a rudimentary basis on which subjects and communities might regulate their narration in the same sort of way as the authors of the gospels. New narratives will be judged authentically Christian if they are wedded recognisably in content and overall priority (or relation of parts to whole)[119] to that which the believing community has previously accepted as a legitimate part of its tradition of re-telling. Where the believing audience can recognise the traditional intention in an expanded narrative frame, there is an authentic re-telling rather than a distortion.

1.3.d. Concluding Remarks:

In this section, we have seen the first sense in which integrative, transformative narration is to be understood: the expansion or extension of traditional narrative

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[115] Dillistone, F.W., *The Novelist and the Passion Story* (London: Collins, 1960).
[116] Ibid., p.19. See also pp.19-21.
[117] Dillistone draws on Mendilow's *Time and the Novel*. Ibid., p.22.
[118] Ibid., p.22.
[119] I avoid the term 'form' as I am not concerned merely with the distinction between narrative and non-narrative discourse, in discussion of which I have depended upon that term, but also with issues of emphasis and so on.

frames to speak in terms appropriate to the contemporary, experiential situation. It now remains to discuss modes of experience that are less amenable to narration conceived of as 're-telling'.

1.4. Renewal through New Narratives:

1.4.a. Preliminary Remarks:

To this point we have spoken as if integrating the tradition of the believing community with contemporary experience is always a question of working on a relationship that may have failed due to failures of imagination, but exists at least potentially. This account is, however, incomplete. Some contemporary experience will always have a quality of radical newness[120] that makes a response to it in terms of traditional Christian self-constitutive discourse deeply problematic. Where there is no relatively uncontroversial 'fit' between the traditional and other schemes of understanding, expansion of a given traditional narrative frame is a project without a clear starting point.

Here the specific conditions of contemporary existence render a perennial problem more severe. In the past, the problem of radical newness was posed chiefly by subjective attempts to appropriate the believing community's traditional certainties; completely new *categories* of trans-subjective experience appeared but rarely.[121] In our period it seems possible that quite new categories of experience will confront each successive generation In this section, then, I pass from consideration of 're-telling', reworking traditional narratives in the light of new experiences, to approach the

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[120] Given the generally developmental nature of human history it is improbable that any experience will be entirely new in the sense of being in no way prefigured, anticipated or influenced by what has gone before. This is a commonplace in much ordinary thinking about history. However, it is appropriate to describe an experiential category as 'radically' new if it has the potential to radically transform a significant area of existence. The significant test of radical newness, then, is not some objective standard of originality so much as that of how it impacts upon a subject.

[121] This is not to claim that prior to the modern era enormous shifts in the nature of existence and attendant understandings did not take place. With particular reference to the history of Christian self-constitutive discourse we might identify, for example, political events such as the destruction of Jerusalem, the Constantinian settlement, the collapse of Rome, the rise of feudalism, the coming of Islam, the crusades, the (eventual) fall of Constantinople and the conquest of South America. In the modern period, of course, such shifts have occurred at a more dramatic pace.

narration of adequate self-constitutive discourse the other way about, looking at how extra-traditional experience might be made to mean in terms of the tradition. I do so with particular emphasis on the 'test' cases of radically new, distinctively contemporary experience and understandings. I will begin, however, by treating the perennially renewed problem of encounter between subjective experience and traditional Christian certainties.

1.4.b. Mediating Narration and Radically Particular Experience:

We have seen that attempts at *direct* translation of the primitive roots of Christian self-constitutive 'as if' Christ lived now are inappropriate because they deny the historical quality of Christian belief. Indirect translation through 're-telling', which brings the concerns of the tradition to bear without denying its historical character, is difficult but less problematic. However, we have also seen that, as in the case of Paul's offer of his own biography as an exemplar, for instance, there has existed alongside the practise of re-telling a practice of *mediating* narration wherein tradition and extra-traditional experience are brought together through a set of third terms. I submit that mediating narration can continue to function as an excellent means to evolving a discourse that involves the experiential particularity of the subject with the tradition in a way that is adequate to each.

One of the reasons for the development of the cult of saints in the medieval Church was that it answered a need among contemporary Christians for (auto-) biographical resources that the tradition lacked.[122] Brown points out that already by this point in Church history believers found Christ's supreme exemplar remote in terms of spatial, temporal and metaphysical 'distance'.[123] However, if Christ were seen not as sole exemplar but rather as the head of a body of examples of authentic Christian identity then every Christian who perceived themselves as discontinuous with Christ could yet feel in imaginative continuity with the life of faith he originally modelled, as made

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[122] The pre-medieval origin of the cult of saints probably lay in an institutionalised popular conviction that martyrs should receive the special reward of immediate translation into the company of Christ. For discussion, and early exceptions to the 'martyrs only' doctrine, see Perham, Michael, *The Communion of Saints: An Examination of the Place of the Christian Dead in the Belief, Worship and Calendars of the Church* (London: S.P.C.K., 1980), pp.xi, 19-24.

[123] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, pp.80-81.

particular to their station in life by this or that saint.[124] In the contemporary situation and particularly among Protestants the cult of saints has dwindled due in part to a general imaginative alienation from traditional Christian discourse.[125] Even where a particular cult remains the focus of a great deal of devotion, as with Roman Catholic devotion to the Virgin, the saint may not be revered for their exemplification of a particular form of Christian identity.[126] However, all this does not argue to a decline in the need of believers for exemplary stories of faithful existence in which tradition and contemporary existence are mutually involved through a narration of Christian existence as a series of lived convictions. These are still urgently required if our contemporaries are to have imaginative starting points for self-constitutive narratives adequate to all of our basic criteria.

Whereas the medieval Church concentrated upon saints as archetypes of particular ways of being Christian, the contemporary Church has used Christian and other[127] heroes who may not have been formally canonised to the same end.[128] Thus, we find figures such as Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa of Calcutta presented as examples of profound Christian witness in the late modern situation.[129] There is a problem, here, however, in that figures of this type - at least as conventionally presented - offer types of Christian being that exacerbate rather than

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[124] This phenomenon would explain the popularity of mythical saints – their cults grew out of dire imaginative need. Thus, St. George functioned as an archetype for Christian soldiers, a phenomenon scarcely known in the early church, St. Margaret of Antioch (who was disgorged unharmed by a dragon) became patroness of the fearful state of childbirth, and so on.

[125] For discussion of Protestant and Catholic theological differences see Anderson, H.George et al. (eds.), *The One Mediator, The Saints, And Mary* (Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Fortress, 1992).

[126] Marian devotion is problematic here. Traditional Roman Catholics seeking to present an ideal of motherhood and of the qualities either of submission to or co-operation with God often point to the Virgin. However, many of those who revere her most deeply are celibate men for whom she cannot be an exemplar of Christian being, though she may of course be held to embody certain virtues which are available to them.

[127] I add this qualification to take in figures such as Mohandas K. Gandhi and Nelson Mandela who, while not actually Christian, are held up as exemplars of certain 'Christian' values.

[128] For illuminating discussion of modern developments in hagiography and hagiology, including the extra-ecclesial context, see Binfield, Clyde (ed.), *Sainthood Revisioned: Studies in Hagiography and Biography* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), esp. pp.11-15.

[129] In Mother Teresa's case, Pope John Paul II even went so far as to dispense with the usual five year waiting period after death before allowing the process of her beatification, which at the time of writing is well advanced, to begin. For a scholarly, yet quasi-hagiographic treatment of a Protestant hero, see Fairclough, Adam, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

ameliorate the usual problems of imaginative alienation from Christian discourse.[130] Very few Christian heroes are exempted from this quasi-hagiographic treatment, though one counter-example might be Niemöller.[131] These heroes are undeniably attractive, but their magnificence consists in a standing-out against crises into which they were thrust or which they courageously entered. Like the saints, extraordinary Christians who emerge from extraordinary situations have something to say to ordinary believers whenever *inspiration* is needed, but they do not offer a model for integrated existence as a contemporary Christian, let alone particular models appropriate to particular patterns of status in the ordinary world. In short, they fail as consistently useful mediating exemplars because their biographies do not exemplify the tensions involved in reconciling the demands of our two criteria, except as things already overcome.

Some might doubt my reading of the use of the biographies of the Christian heroes, which admittedly draws on a familiar sharp dichotomy between saints and laity.[132] Astell puts the argument that radical loyalty to the tradition or scripture is always required in every situation.[133] This is surely true but I would ask whether - except in highly unusual situations - reflection on the heroes actually makes this mode of discipleship available in a way that can be appropriated by a wide audience, as Astell and her colleagues seem to believe.[134] The point here is to find a way to be loyal to the

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[130] In conventional presentations, the Christian heroes are depicted as no less perfect that the medieval saints. Paradoxically, it might help believers to appropriate the virtues of the heroes if they were presented more honestly as the flawed (in limited respects) people that they were. Our knowledge that Martin Luther King had difficulty with marital fidelity does not render him useless as an exemplar, but rather serves to remind us that even Christians caught in the snares of modernity can be called to saintliness and martyrdom.

[131] Biographers such as Bentley and Bergen have conceded that the younger Niemöller was an anti-Semite who could talk of 'racial purity' in Hitlerian terms and a member of the German Christian movement. See Bentley, James, *Martin Niemöller* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1984), p.45; Bergen, Doris L., *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996)., p.13. It may be that Niemöller is treated differently from the other heroes so consistently because the historical record of his early 'dark side' is incontrovertible and because he lived long enough to 'manage' popular perceptions of the trajectory of his career such that any suppression would be unnecessary.

[132] For a useful bibliographic note on the vast body of literature which treats 'laity' and 'sanctity' as quite distinct terms see Head, Thomas, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans 800-1200* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1990), n.33, p.14.

[133] Astell, Ann W. (ed.), *Lay Sanctity, Medieval and Modern: A Search for Models* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), pp.1, 19-26.

[134] Ibid., pp.23-24; Mitchell, Donald W., 'A Life Between Two Fires: Chiara Lubich and Lay Sanctity' in ibid., pp.173-189, pp.179-181.

tradition in *every* situation, not simply when one is called out of one's ordinary existence by dramatic events.

I submit that we should look to the possibilities contained within the very readily available narrated biographies of ordinary members of the believing community. I do not have in mind something like McClendon's project of 'biographical theology' here.[135] His attempts to expound traditional doctrines through narrations of the biographies of other, heroic Christians are flawed in the same way that all such treatments which focus too heavily on the extraordinary must be.[136] In an interview toward the end of his life, he did recognise the need for exemplars particular to the situation of those who might be forever caught between the sorts of demand our criteria encapsulate.[137] However, he went on to argue that saints can provide such models, that saints 'represent the Christian life lived out in a given time and place, with all of its faults and flaws - and saints have always got those as well as the glories and hopes'. The latter point, I submit, simply does not bear scrutiny. For the ordinary subject, the best exemplars of adequate self-understanding are other people who are facing precisely the same sorts of challenges as the subject and responding to it creatively in ways that would also be available to him or her. Saints and heroes provide models of more particular, limited usefulness. As Hughes has it, in contemplating mediating narration for the transformation of autobiography:

> 'We need more than the old, old stories - the ones we know word for word, the ones whose endings no longer take us by surprise, the ones time and familiarity have all but sucked the life out of... We need to pass along the songs and parables we discover within ourselves, from our own experiences'.[138]

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[135] McClendon Jr., James W., *Biography as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974).

[136] McClendon uses, for example, the biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to illustrate social ethics and that of Dorothy Day to illustrate resurrection ethics. See Myers, Ched, 'Embodying the 'Great Story': An Interview With James W. McClendon' in *The Witness* (Dec. 2000). Such an approach adds to the problem of remote exemplars by refusing to discuss them as concrete individuals whose experience was complex and very far from one-dimensional or one-directional.

[137] McClendon observed: 'Perhaps one of the mistakes that Roman Catholics make is to try to press too hard for universal saints and thus pay too little attention to the flexible possibilities of local saints'. Ibid.

[138] Hughes, Ina, 'Tell Me A Story, and I Will Remember: Doing Theology Through Personal Narrative' in *The Witness* (Dec. 2000).

Endorsing a recommendation such as this will require me to say something of communal practice, which I will do in the next chapter. Remaining for the present in the theoretical mode let us turn now from the problem of radical particularity in subjective late modern experience to the trans-subjective problem of radical newness.

1.4.c. Dialogical Narration and Radically New Experience:

Radically new categories of experience will not touch every subject in the contemporary context in the same way. Certainly, it is possible to live within this context and yet have one's decisive experience in ways that are relatively conventional and well understood.[139] However, since mine is a practical, pastoral project I must seek to offer models of narration that, taken together, are as inclusive of as many different species of contemporary experience as possible. As such, I am bound to include the experience of the radically new in my discussion. As Wentzel van Huysteen argues, this is far from merely a matter of offering the Church a means of enhancing its own ability to cope intelligently with a changing world,.[140] It is also an outworking of the divine commission to bring the way of Christ to bear in all the existential situations in which the Church is present. Work on this latter, practical, ethical, rather Niebuhrian dimension of Christian response to the radically new is already advanced in the work of Moltmann[141] and Monsma and his colleagues.[142]

Whereas with some contemporary experience narrators have integrative patterns readily to hand in the inherited practices of re-telling, this is not so of *radically* new trans-subjective experience. Moreover, in being *trans-subjective*, this type of experience is obviously unsuitable for appropriation under the pattern of mediating narration predicated upon exemplary narratives. Radically new, trans-subjective experience defies appropriation through the creative, imaginative development of

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[139] Barnett, H.G., *Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1953) , pp.378-410, differentiates between types of 'acceptors' and 'rejectors' who will live differently in the face of the radically new.

[140] Wentzel van Huysteen, J., *Duet or Duel?: Theology and Science in a Postmodern World* (London: S.C.M., 1998), pp.xvii-xviii.

[141] Moltmann, Jürgen, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, trans. Kohl, Margaret (London: S.C.M., 1999).

[142] Monsma, Steven V. (ed.), *Responsible Technology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), pp.1-9.

existing narrative schemes. What is required at this point is some account of the principles according to which a wholly new synthesis of tradition and experience might be narrated. In the course of my research, I have identified a relevant (albeit partial) model of how subjects and communities might exercise their imaginative resources in a way that is adequate to our basic regulative criteria.

Few would dispute that computers, particularly given the advent of the 'Internet', are a distinctively new feature of contemporary experience in the developed world at least. But are they radically, *problematically* new? Do they require wholly new forms of response from those who would, because they must in order to be adequate to their reality, appropriate them as part of their self-constitutive discourse? These were the questions set the Science, Medicine, and Technology committee of the Church of England's Board of Social Responsibility in 1997. I read their published report *Cybernauts Awake!*[143] as opening up great possibilities for the incorporation through narration of the radically new into integrative, transformative self-constitutive discourse.[144]

The committee's approach to the subject of their investigation can be described relatively simply; however, it was undergirded at every point by debate among a small panel of Christian scholars.[145] Ecclesial and analogous communities will not always be able to replicate these conditions in all cases, and to the extent that this would exclude the perspectives of insightful believers who are not theologians to seek to do so would be an error. However, it is appropriate at this point to acknowledge the need of scholars rooted in the intellectually rigorous side of the tradition to play a leading,

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[143] Burke, D. et al., *Cybernauts Awake!: Ethical and Spiritual Implications of Computers, Information Technology and the Internet* (London: Church House, 1999). Also available via the Internet at [http://www.org.sciteb2/starcourse/cyber] (18-12-2001). Unless specified otherwise, references here are to the unpaginated Internet version of the report; this is, however, substantially the same as the published print version.

[144] Note that the committee were not directly concerned with the possibilities of narration, but with being adequate to the ethical challenge of developing computing technology; what follows is my narratological interpretation of their work.

[145] Most of the nine contributors to the report were members of the Church of England. They included specialists in Theology, such as the philosopher and theologian Dr. D. Leal (of Brasenose college, Oxford University), and in computing, such as Professor S.P. Jones (former head of the Department of Computer Science at Glasgow University) and the head of the project Professor D. Burke (special advisor to the House of Commons' Science and Technology Select Committee).

guiding role in communal narration at least, particularly where the experience that must be appropriated is of a perplexing character.[146]

The committee's approach consisted in three principal stages of reflection: description; narrated, responsive restatement of certain Christian commitments; and integrative narration.[147] First, the relevant contemporary experience is described and criticised such that its newness and ethical and imaginative possibilities are fully disclosed. Second, the general issues that the experience raises become the occasions for a narrated restatement of Christian belief. Finally, a new story that offers practical guidance to believers in transforming their participation in the new experience and management of the new understandings attendant upon it is narrated. It is now necessary to describe how the three-stage plan unfolds in *Cybernauts Awake!* in order to substantiate the claim I have made that it opens up the possibility of narration that is adequately integrative of radically new categories of experience with traditional commitments.

The committee discusses the radically new quality of 'cyberspace' in a familiar way, with reference to its 'pervasive' and 'profound' impact upon contemporary ways of living and indeed of understanding the world about us and the nature of, for example, communication.[148] The notion that computers are pervasive, though not yet all pervasive, is relatively uncontroversial and so is established by a few simple, factual observations. We know that much media, banking, medicine, transport and personal communication are all now to a very large degree dependent upon computing power. The claim that these latter features of contemporary existence are *profoundly* important is less obvious, however, and argument to establish this predominates in the preliminary stages of the report. Three aspects of the use of computers are made much of here.

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[146] For discussion of the 'Christian scholar' *as such* playing a distinctive role *outside* the believing community see Marsden, George M., *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1997).

[147] Note that this three stage methodology is not set out explicitly in the introductory passages of the report; it is my own summary of the approach I read there.

[148] Burke et al., op.cit.

In the first place, the authors point out that electronic mail (Email), 'ubiquitous' mobile telephones, video conferencing, Internet 'chat rooms', personal websites and bulletin boards have all opened up quite new ways of communicating rather than simply enhancing what is already familiar.[149] For example, the Internet allows geographically dispersed interest groups to be formed as never before. Email (usually) facilitates personal contact by ensuring that the intended recipient of a message will receive it regardless of where they are when it is sent. Such developments can take positive or negative forms. The speed, reliability and inexpensive mass communication that Email represents have been harnessed by groups of friends, but also by those seeking to disseminate unsolicited offensive, pornographic, political and advertising material.

The second profoundly new quality of computers is that they can affect human perceptions of reality.[150] Alongside other accounts of reality as physical, spiritual, material, and ideal - for example - we are now familiar with the notion of a 'virtual' reality, an imaginary space which permits real but entirely disembodied access to information and communication. At present, attempts to give virtual reality a visual aspect are well-advanced, though attempts to include other sensory aspects are as yet extremely limited.[151] However, these already play an important part in such diverse and important elements of modern existence as cinema,[152] architecture[153] and pilot and driver training.

The most profoundly new quality of computers and computing power that the committee identifies is their capacity to occasion a *real* 'death of distance'.[154] The notion of cyberspace allows us to imagine a dimension in which agents interact without regard to physical constraints. It is not yet true to say that subjects can fully inhabit this reality. Cyberspace must integrate the body if it is ever to be a complete

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[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Currently, the closest form of online interaction to the fully immersive virtual reality envisaged by novelists such as William Gibson are the 'virtual worlds' discussed in Dodge, Martin, and Kitchin, Rob, *Mapping Cyberspace* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.153-165. Compare Gibson, William, *Neuromancer* (London: Harper Collins, 1984) and *Virtual Light* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).
[152] Anders, Peter, *Envisioning Cyberspace: Designing 3D Electronic Spaces* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999), p.87
[153] Ibid., p.205-206.

dimension of human existence and it does not do so yet, although 'video-conferencing' does at least allow a far greater (visual) appreciation of the other's 'body language' than telephonic communication. However, late modern computing technologies also ground real changes in the nature, exercise, and perception of power and authority.[155] Computing power appears to be making possible concentrations of power that were hitherto physically unattainable. A small group or even an individual can take decisions and communicate them instantly to the other side of the world where they affect the lives and livelihoods of thousands. Moreover, they can (usually) do so confident in the knowledge that the recipient of their communication will have received it just exactly as it was sent, without having to raise issues of authentication or struggle with problems of deterioration.[156] But computers do not simply add to the power of the wealthy, the influential and the strong, they can also be used to empower those physically and materially remote from existing centres of power. This is not just a new version of the old adage that knowledge is power; computers have already been used by individuals and small nations to challenge global corporations and frustrate the wartime strategies of superpowers by undermining their communications.[157]

I would suggest that the report is if anything too cautious and that we could go further. Consider, for example, the fact that two features of the new technologies - the anonymity of agents on the Internet[158] and the remarkable facility of children with them - have already allowed youths to assume an authority in debate and the

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[154] Burke et al., op.cit.

[155] For detailed discussion, see Hague, Barry N., and Loader, Brian D. (eds.), *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age*; esp. Malina, Anna, 'Perspectives of Citizen Democratisation and Alienation in the Virtual Public Sphere' in ibid., pp.23-38.

[156] It is, of course, possible to 'forge' an Email, just as it has always been technically possible to forge a letter. However, in normal cases of communication such deception is not an issue. It is possible for an Email or any other piece of digitally encrypted data to be corrupted in transfer just as it is possible for a letter to be lost or destroyed. However, a corrupted Email will not be confusing or misleading, as a damaged letter would be, it is simply unreadable.

[157] This was achieved through non-aggressive means in the United Nations' sponsored Kosovo campaign against Serbia in 1998. Faced with a single, consistently anti-Serbian, pro-allied viewpoint in older global news media, the Serbian government, its allies and independent journalists used the Internet to disseminate alternative perspectives and eyewitness news and provoke wider debate. This conflict has been called the 'first Internet war'; see Lasica, J.D., 'Conveying the War in Human Terms' in *American Journalism Review* (June 1999).

[158] For extensive information about and discussion of this fact see 'Anonymous Communication on the Internet', an ongoing project of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Directorate for Science and Policy Programs which is exploring issues in on-line anonymity and pseudonymity. Available via the Internet at [http://www.aaas.org/spp/anon] (18-12-2001).

dispensation of advice that is not warranted by any otherwise familiar forms of life experience, education or training.[159] This is not a shift in power or authority so much as it is an enriching of our whole understanding of what those concepts can mean.

Having disclosed computing, or at least those aspects of it which can be subsumed under the new idea of cyberspace, as radically new the authors proceed to use the issues it raises to interrogate the tradition and re-present traditional commitments in a summary form. Those issues are ones of communication, distance, otherness, drawing together, and authority; they open up imaginative possibilities of disembodied existence, communication, and community that transcend or trivialise distance, time (in certain senses), and received wisdom. Seen in terms of these issues, the whole Christian tradition can be summarised under the heads of divine intention and human action.

God created the world and humanity within it, therefore humanity's proper disposition lies in conformity to God's will. God has created man free, but intends that this freedom be used in positive response to him. This will include radical respect for the rest of his creation, expressible in human existence through the creation of loving, non-exclusive communities and similarly responsible relationships. In reality, man has turned away from God by failing to construct such communities. However, God has renewed the possibility of them and therefore of right relationship to him by coming among us as the man Jesus Christ. Jesus took upon himself in a way that transcends space and time all the barriers between man and man and so between man and God through his teaching - which opens the way to universal peace and reconciliation[160] - and his atoning self-sacrifice on the cross. By this act, God enables us to live in a full loving relationship with him and with each other in and through Christ. Our isolation and fear are thereby overcome as we are called into mutual dependence, giving and receiving forgiveness. The love God has shown in Christ demands that we abandon our self-centredness and help those in need. This, in broad terms, is what the universal

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[159] Youths can - for example - assume an identity and, without having to prove their identity or otherwise 'qualify' themselves - trade in stocks and shares, offer medical and legal advice, request and make social and sexual advances and so on.

[160] The authors of the report point out that Christ's teaching is a call to foreshadow the reign of heaven upon earth; Burke et al., op.cit.

tradition of the whole believing community has to say to the issues raised by the advent of cyberspace.

The voices of a particular phase of contemporary experience and of the tradition have been made to speak clearly to their common concerns; now it remains to look for their narrated synthesis (if possible) or mutual correction (where necessary). I judge the attempt of the committee to achieve such integration through a new narration of the relationships of God, man, and technology essentially successful.[161] I will not, of course, reproduce the whole here, but some quotation is required in order to give a sense of the committee's achievement and to provide a basis for what negative criticism I do wish to make. Thus:

'Reconciliation takes place between people in forgiving relationships. Cyberspace contains vast quantities of information about individuals... the moulds into which information in cyberspace may have put people are inappropriate to proper relationships, and they have to be put to one side in our dealings...

Jesus... attended to those people who were excluded by the Jewish law, bringing them into a new community, and rejecting none... if they were willing to accept his teaching. 'Blessed... are those who hear the word of God and keep it'[162] Christians are called to be willing to give up false ideas of who is inside and who is outside...

...if cyberspace becomes important to living, we should worry about any who are excluded... It is like an exclusive club, barred to those without the means of entry, the very opposite of Jesus' intention... [We have made laws to] enforce inclusivity in the past... The same need is there for cyberspace[163]

...the recognition of frailty brings careful consideration to what actions are appropriate in cyberspace. Email allows those with the fragility of warped minds to meet and so find recognition...As a result they might not see their own fragility, only their discovery of one kind of (wrongly perceived) normality among others.

...God does not force people into belief. Free will is shown not only

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[161] My researches indicate that the report was universally well received as at least helpful.

[162] Lk. 11:28

[163] At the time of writing (6-10-2001), the British Government has a stated commitment to ensuring universal access to the Internet by 2005. In practice, of course, this is likely to mean wider provision of computers in public libraries, job centres and so on which will not resolve the issue of division between those who have immediate, private, potentially unlimited access and others.

in human action but also in our recognition of God. In many crucial scenes in the Bible, God manifests his deepest knowledge of humanity by inquiry and consent. ...

Wherever freedom is denied... by the misuse of information, humanity is denied. In cyberspace, this is easy to do inadvertently, for example, with data records of individuals...

...So much of cyberspace appears to challenge the qualities described as the fruits of the Spirit, such as gentleness and forbearance. For example, cyberspace offers the possibility of desires being fulfilled instantly, before we have the opportunity to exercise the restraint on personal desire that Christian ethics demands... The nature of the medium of cyberspace may discourage consideration of the effects of our actions on others, when we are miles away, linked only through digital signals rather than being face to face. The fruits of the Spirit may seem far away and difficult to express meaningfully. Nevertheless, Christians are called to recognise that fullness of humanity includes showing those qualities, even in cyberspace.'[164]

The 'story' that the committee tells is not the fruit of straightforward narration. It does not unfold through history as subjective self-constitutive discourse and the narratives authored by communities do. The sense of time which participation in reflection upon the tradition imparts is multi-faceted and has historically given rise to endless debates about whether God is inside or outside time, whether history runs to a plan and so on.[165] The committee's treatment of time is confusing in that it is equally multi-faceted, but only so can it be adequate to the unfathomable nature of the traditional notion of a God who sits easily to time. Only so can it be adequate to the very different but no less strange notions of time and (near) timelessness that participation in the contemporary experience of cyberspace imparts. The committee's work is then,

[164] I have abridged only lightly here, in order to allow the work of the committee to be judged fairly. This portion of the report, as others, is available in its full form in Burke et al., op. cit. at [http://www.starcourse.org/scitteb2/starcourse/cyber].

[165] According to Isa. 57:15 God is the 'high and lofty one who inhabits eternity', but how are we to conceive of the eternity of this God who has intercourse with 'timely' men and yet seems free of the shackles we associate with our 'timely' existence? Oscar Cullmann contends that the Bible knows only linear time, and thus we must conceive of God as merely everlasting. Barr argues that Cullmann's reading rests on word-for-word literalism rather than a reading of the sense of biblical *statements* and that the Bible can allow for belief in God as timeless. See Cullmann, Oscar, *Christ and Time* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1962); Barr, James, *Biblical Words for Time* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1962). For further discussion of this and related issues see Craig, William L., 'God, Time and Eternity' in *Religious Studies* 14 (1979), pp.497-503 and 'God and Real Time' in *Religious Studies* 26 (1990), pp.335-347.

adequate to the phases of tradition and experience it was intended to integrate in a new, mutually illuminating fashion.

To be sure, there are passages where the narrative offered by the committee veers towards propositional discourse and the effort to create a coherent, narrated way of perceiving the aspects of self-identity under discussion falters under the perceived need to argue an ethical point.[166] It is true that in this respect the committee's account is 'half-digested',[167] only 'on the way' to being a truly integrative, significant and imaginatively liberating narrative. To recognise this, however, is merely to affirm that in the committee's work, we find an embrace both of imaginative freedom and the experience of limitation and incompleteness, the two aspects of narration done in consciousness of the eschatological horizon to Christian discourse.

1.4.d. Concluding Remarks:

In this chapter, we have seen in what the project of narration consists. We have demonstrated that it is possible to reappropriate traditional commitments without distortion through an extension of the narrative frame inherited in the tradition in terms of contemporary experience, a practice of renewal evidently as old as the Christian tradition itself. We have seen, further, how it is possible to integrate tradition with experience adequately through a repristination of the similarly venerable model of *mediating* narration. Finally, we have developed a *dialogical model* that could allow the integration of radically new, trans-subjective experience with the tradition of the believing community.

It now remains to address the series of problems to do with truth, change or revisability and authority in narration that we have already identified, in order to demonstrate not merely the theoretical worth but also the practical viability of the

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[166] This is the case, for example, when the committee begin to speak of the necessity for social inclusion. Here the imaginative and evocative tone of the narration gives way to a rather legalistic form of reasoning in which old forms of social organisation are given dominion over the new imaginative realities of cyberspace.

[167] I favour this unusual term, as it seems to me to do justice to the unfinished, open, only half-synthesised nature of a new integrative narration that has not been worked over repeatedly such as to dissolve initially meaningful tensions.

project of narration as a resource for our contemporaries. In the next chapter, I discuss integrative narration in terms of three communal loci of encounter between Christian tradition, contemporary experience and the creative imagination. Focussing by turns upon what I term the general, social world and 'mainstream' and 'marginal' ecclesial communities respectively I aim to demonstrate how a critical awareness of the functioning of these loci of encounter offers us ways through the problems raised by commitment to our basic criteria.

Chapter Two.

Establishing the Criteria for Good Narration.

2.1. Introductory Remarks:

This chapter consists essentially in an attempt to overcome the problems raised by the preliminary account of the project of narration given in Chapter One. It is my contention here that a critical examination of those social settings in which renewal of self-constitutive discourse can take place allows us to better understand and in several cases answer these questions of truth, change and authority in narration. Thus, in the first part of the chapter my concern is with narration in the ordinary (that is, extra-ecclesial), social world. Here, I demonstrate that the renewal of self-constitutive discourse is strengthened by a commitment to full social participation, to a commitment to total concern. Strengthened, that is, by binding the authorial subject or community in a dialogical, interlocutory relationship with other subjective or communal authors and their foreign or alien discourses. Such a relationship, I argue will fructify the project of narration, providing bases for self-examination that allow us to overcome what I have termed the problems of truth: of recognition, honesty, fantasy and totalization.

The remainder of the chapter moves within the Church to establish how social engagement there helps to answer questions of change and authority raised in Chapter One. The discussion here is divided between consideration of what I term 'mainstream' and 'marginal' ecclesial communities. Critical engagement with each of these, I argue, has much to contribute to the discipline of narration.

It should be clear that the thrust of this Chapter is an argument for the centrality to the project of narration of the idea of 'rootedness' in society, more specifically in the dialogical encounters we have through our participation in the social world. A caveat, then, before entering this phase of the discussion. We have already insisted upon the creative imagination as the engine of renewal of self-constitutive discourse and characterised imaginative freedom as part of the appropriate 'style' of Christian

narration carried on under the eschatological horizon. Nothing that is said here about the importance of engagement with what is beyond the authorial subject or the community should be construed as necessarily limiting this imaginative freedom to seize the future and reinterpret the past. Social engagement of the various kinds to be discussed here does, I argue, enable the author to evaluate their construal of tradition and experience more fully and, where appropriately, dispassionately than otherwise. However, the transformative power of renewed self-constitutive discourse depends ultimately upon that discourse being appropriated - owned - in acts of imagination.

2.2. Truth: Narration in the Social World

2.2.a. Preliminary Remarks:

We have already observed that in many contemporary societies – our own, those of Western Europe, North America and the Pacific rim are chiefly in view - ordinary social existence carries no definite existential telos. This is not, of course, to suggest that members of such societies are devoid of existential commitments and positive understandings. What is clear, however, is that in such societies meanings and understandings are *contested*. It is true that certain societal understandings continue to retain almost hegemonic status, given cognitive authority by the few institutions that retain widespread public respect or the ability to shape public understandings – the law and judicial system on one hand and the print media on the other, for example. Yet there is no single, shared 'frame of reference' in these societies. This is perhaps particularly the case when self-constitutive discourse is in view. For good or ill, and there are powerful cases to be argued in both directions,[168] many of our contemporaries no longer have a sense that there are normative ways of being or self-understanding in such powerfully self-constitutive areas as family life, patterns of employment, political allegiance, human sexuality or, of course, religious belief. Where we and our contemporaries do subscribe wholeheartedly to norms in these areas, we tend to derive them from other, narrower discourse communities.

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[168] The decay of shared norms has occurred in step with the extension of social freedoms.

This extreme opening up of society as a space for the contest of understandings, as great as perhaps, if not more threatening than, any witnessed in the modern period, does not diminish the value of critical engagement with the social world as an element of the discipline of narration. Christian commitment to the tradition and awareness that life is lived under the eschatological horizon render it inappropriate to look to societal norms for guidance on questions of authority and change in self-constitutive narration. To do so would be to elevate our first criterion of adequacy to experience at the cost of other, necessary, elements of authentically Christian self-constitutive discourse. However, the interplay of understandings in which one engages if one fully participates in society does involve one in re-evaluation of one's own understandings. This is of incalculable value in seeking answers to the questions of truth set up by our basic criteria.

In this section, I will look at three distinguishable levels of self-constitutive discourse: 'social', 'instrumental' and 'institutional' discourse. Whilst all three will be discussed here as forms of external discourse, they are also reflexive and thus 'self-constitutive' because - let us remind ourselves - in relating oneself anew to the world and to the other one orients oneself differently within one's own understanding, recreating oneself. We have already discussed some elements of social discourse, including the idea of getting to know another person by narrating one's own identity and becoming an audience to their corresponding narration.

Instrumental self-constitutive discourse consists in constructing one's own identity and sense of relation to the world and others in a given situation in order to achieve a defined goal. It differs from social discourse chiefly in not having the quality of being 'open ended'. Beale provides a useful working definition when he says that instrumental discourse is 'the kind of discourse whose primary aim is the governance, guidance, control, or execution of human activities'.[169]

Institutional self-constitutive discourse is the construction of oneself and ones wider relationships that comes about through involvement in the inevitable structures of

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[169] Beale, Walter H., *A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric* (Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p.94.

society. It differs from social discourse in being closed in a variety of ways, and from instrumental discourse in having no single defined goal except the successful perpetuation of the discourse including concomitant actions and desired outcomes. These three areas and the self-perceptions they generate are, of course, overlapping and interpenetrating, but by treating each discretely I hope to be able to bring out fully what engagement in the ordinary social world can contribute to a Christian practice of narration.

An initial word of clarification is necessary here. Throughout, I have affirmed that communities as well as individual subjects can and should exercise the authorial function such as to engage in the project of renewal of self-constitutive discourse. We are, however, perhaps less used to thinking of communities participating in 'social' situations, employing 'instrumental' discourse or being bound by institutions other than those created within themselves. Yet, to the extent that it is possible for one community to address another – and Christians embrace this possibility in inter-faith dialogue, for example - or to exist discretely alongside other communities within a shared social space – surely a very familiar concept - it does make good sense to conceive of a community as a social actor. I hope it is clear that what is said here can apply quite equally, if differently, to both the authorial subject and to the community that acts in a participative, collective way as a corporate author.

2.2.b. Social and Instrumental Discourse:

Neither social nor instrumental public discourse operates in a straightforward way to absolute (or ideally absolute) and public (or ostensibly public) rules and so the two may, for our purposes, be bracketed together. These forms of discourse do occur, of course, in situations where discourse is heavily laden with more or less publicly understood rules. Discourse within a business environment, for example, operates to a series of rules dictated by business necessity, hierarchies among those participating and the regulations laid down by the market and the institutions of wider society (such as employment rights legislation). Even in such environments, however, where it occurs social and instrumental discourse is freer than the institutional discourse we shall discuss later. It is also important to differentiate between rules that seek to

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dispose authors and audiences positively and rules that are merely parameters. Parameters do specify the boundaries of what is acceptable, but do not commit an authorial subject or community to highly particular forms of discourse at specific times in narrowly specified situations.

Social self-constitutive discourse divides in turn into phatic discourse[170] and the communicative discourse we have already discussed at some length. Phatic discourse[171] is discourse used to share feelings or to establish a mood of sociability rather than to communicate information or ideas. Because basic discourse below the level of full communication (which implies authorial imparting of, audience reception of or dialogical exchange of information) is often a first step in establishing a relationship, or rules for a relationship, it is characterised by a stock of conventional utterances which break silences. These utterances, which in our society would conventionally include enquiries or affirmations about the weather, personal health, appearance and so on help to establish the participants in a situation where they could, potentially, engage in mutual exchange. Phatic discourse is sometimes overlooked in literature, where the interest is often in existing relationships moving towards a given end. However, examples abound; consider the following beautifully observed exchange from F.Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*:

> "A tray of cocktails floated at us through the twilight, and we sat down at a table with the two girls in yellow and three men, each one introduced to us as Mr. Mumble.
> 'Do you come to these parties often?' inquired Jordan of the girl beside her.
> 'The last one was the one I met you at' answered the girl in an alert confident voice. She turned to her companion: 'Wasn't it for you Lucille?"[172]

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[170] This mode of discourse was given the name 'phatic communion' by Malinowski in his study of the speech and customs of the Trobriand Islanders. He described it as a means by which 'ties of union are created by the mere exchange of words'. See Malinowski, Bronislaw, 'The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages' in *The Meaning of Meaning*, ed. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989), pp. 306ff., p.315.

[171] I continue to use the more general term 'discourse' here rather than 'speech', because readers familiar with communicating via the Internet, particularly in 'chat rooms' will be aware that phatic strategies may be used in electronic communication as well as ordinary speech situations.

[172] Scott Fitzgerald, F., *The Great Gatsby* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.46.

Phatic discourse, then, represents the attempt to relate to another individual or to re-establish a relationship after a hiatus in communication (in this minimal sense it has a self-constitutive function). If this relationship develops, then communicative discourse may take over.

To the extent that phatic discourse lacks content it resists profitable analysis; for the purposes of formulating a discipline for the renewal of self-constitutive discourse there is little to be gained by looking at the content of the phrase 'nice weather we're having'! However, like other simple conversational statements that do have some positive content such as the simple question, 'are you all right?', phatic discourse points towards the importance of *disposition* in discourse. Identifying this form of discourse as an essential component of and, most importantly, preliminary to ordinary conversational speech highlights the necessity for authorial subjects and communities to approach social engagement in a particular series of ways. The ordinary social world is assuredly the inescapable milieu of most subjects and discourse communities.[173] Yet, if what is beyond the individual or the community is approached either with indifference or in a negative fashion, then that exchange of understandings which functions as a necessary test of the validity of this or that particular self-constitutive narration cannot take place. A disposition of openness, a willingness to situate oneself or one's community in the receptive position of the audience, does not necessitate a jettisoning of one's commitment to be adequate to one's own experience and tradition. Indeed, as we have seen, audiences ordinarily receive the discourse of the author only to reshape it according to their own understandings and perhaps incorporate it in narratives they may go on to create.

Concentration upon the significance of phatic discourse and the disposition of committed engagement in social existence it ushers in would, I submit, go a significant way towards addressing one of the problems of truth raised in Chapter One, which we termed the *problem of fantasy*. With this disposition in place, the business of existence itself can exercise a corrective influence upon the imaginative

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[173] This would not, however, be the case for a small number of groups who choose to isolate themselves from the ordinary social world or are somehow excluded from it. Such groups would include religious bodies that choose to withdraw from the world, certain categories of prisoner and the mentally ill.

construction of self-identity. For then the more radically discontinuous from the actual situation one's self-understanding becomes, the more one is pressured to supply this deficit by one's increasing inability to function in the relevant discourse communities.[174] The more deceitful one becomes, the more a sense of guilt will direct one to an honest re-integration of one's experience.[175] Of course, these types of reaction require management in order to remain positive forces and this is an issue we will return to when we discuss authority in narration later in this chapter.

In the communicative discourse that tends to follow phatic discourse, the positive self-constitutive element we are chiefly interested in is much more to the fore. The differences between these two modes of social discourse are, I hope, quite clear, but there remains much to say about communicative discourse. Critical engagement with the fact of phatic discourse directs the authorial subject or community to attend in the attitude of audience to what is other. Once this is accomplished, the communicative discourse of the other supplies the positive content that functions to critique the audience's existing understandings of experience, tradition or indeed the narration in which they, now as author, are already engaged upon. Let us explore some of the ways in which this happens in the social world.

Consider one of the simplest non-reflexive forms of communicative discourse: interpersonal conversation. It may not be clear how this can supply a corrective critique. The claim here is certainly not that the other, however identified, supplies a deficit in the subject's own self-understanding or understanding of the world (though that may be so in particular cases). Rather, I suggest that once the disposition of committed social engagement is in place, conversation with the other necessitates a positive attempt to communicate one's own understandings and to test these against

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[174] Rogers' idea of a basic disposition toward reconciling the self with an existential telos of selfhood is basically sound; Rogers, C.R., 'A Theory of Therapy, Personality and Interpersonal Relationships, as Developed in the Client-Centred Framework' in Koch, S. (ed.), *Psychology: A Study of a Science*, vol.3: *Formulations of the Person and the Social Context* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp.184-256, pp.198-200. However, my reading of certain feminists suggests that Rogers give insufficient weight to the linguistic – social – construction of the existential telos. See Griffin, S., *Made from this Earth: Selections from her Writings* (London: The Women's Press, 1982), p.168; Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex which is Not One*, trans. Porter, Catherine (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp.86-85.
[175] For further discussion, see Hawtin, Sarah and Moore, Judy, 'Empowerment or Collusion? The Social Context of Person-Centred Therapy' in Thorne and Lambers, op.cit., pp.91-105, p.96.

those of the other. Precisely, a positive attempt to address seriously the *problem of recognition*; to establish 'whereof we speak'. This is not to suggest that all conversation, or all significant conversation, should have the character of academic debate. Something as apparently inconsequential as a conversation between two friends in a public house about an absent third friend would, I think, be sufficient to make my point. Consider the following hypothetical exchange - a discrete unit of a wider conversation between two close friends:

- 'Did you see Dave last night? Was he out?'
- 'No, he never comes out these days does he, since he started seeing Sophie'.
- 'Oh... I thought you were supposed to be going to that party with him?
- 'Yeah... he wasn't feeling too good apparently'.

Even with no privileged information about the hypothetical background to this case, we can see that a subtle reshaping of understandings could be provoked by the conversation. The second speaker answers the first in a way that defines his attitude to their friend's girlfriend. The inconsistency in what he says suggests he is hostile to this girl to the point where he is prepared to misrepresent the situation. An uncommitted engagement on the part of the first speaker, which construed the exchange almost as phatic discourse, would miss this point. A committed engagement in dialogue, however, would lead the first speaker to consider the matrix of relationships at issue and her place within them carefully. What are the reasons for this hostility? How will it affect the wider circle of friends? Is their absent friend aware of this tension? How - and here is a question of the sort we would be most concerned to ask – could or should the exchange affect the course of this conversation and the disposition of the first speaker toward the others implicated? A crucial point here is that one entirely valid option for the first speaker would be to resolve these questions in a considered decision that *no* major alteration in her disposition or her understandings is necessary. There is no necessity that the first speaker simply defers to her interlocutor. However, by placing herself authentically in the receptive position of the audience – which, once more, is also a creative position - she embraces the unfamiliar perspective of her interlocutor such that it can function to interrogate her construal of the realities touched on in the conversation.

The communal analogue for the kind of ordinary conversation between individual subjects discussed above would, I take it, be the business of negotiation between communities to share a social space amicably. Our society, in which (fortunately) highly divergent discourse communities are not so polarised that inter-communal dialogue is deeply problematic, has developed a series of institutions to facilitate this negotiation. Among the most complex, of course, because it involves communities of understanding forming, combining and recombining through the activity of incalculable numbers of agencies, is our political system. However, we see something weakly analogous going on at a much more readily comprehensible level when, for example, two local clubs want to use the same municipal facilities for their meetings.

Examples of interpersonal and intercommunal communication of the sort suggested above will usually bring about only local, minor adjustments to the self-constitutive discourse of those concerned. Since the points at issue are merely minor, local ones, they are unlikely to occasion major revisions in self-understanding. These have the potential to come about where the authorial subject or community is involved through the disposition of committed social engagement with the clash of grand narratives, radically opposed viewpoints or worldviews. As Stroup points out, in an era of mass communication this is actually a daily possibility for many of our contemporaries.[176]

Engaging in instrumental discourse represents a shift in disposition from that proper to communicative discourse. Whereas, as we have seen, the appropriate disposition for communicative discourse is first that of the receptive audience and only then that of the author, our own instrumental discourse begins from the authorial standpoint. When we engage in self-constitutive discourse in this mode we are not opening ourselves to a free exchange with an interlocutor so much as we are seeking to positively affect the response either of a reflexive or more usually of an external audience. That is, we are seeking to close off certain avenues of response and suggest others. A few examples of instrumental self-constitutive discourse may be useful here. Consider, variously, the discourse of the young person attempting to impress respected peers; that of the teacher attempting to communicate with a difficult class;

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[176] Stroup, George W., *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p.16.

that of a pressure group putting their version of events or of a series of publicly available fact and figures to a decision-making authority. The more coherent and complete their discourse, the more it is self-evidently rooted not merely in their intellection but in their life experiences and the way in which they are disposed to the present and future, the nearer they will approach to realising the goals of their instrumental discourse.

This is not to claim, implausibly, that in all cases a full, coherent instrumental self-constitutive discourse will achieve the authorial subject or community's goals simply in virtue of being thus complete. Instrumental discourse of the types described above may yet founder upon given-ness, the facticity, of external realities. However, where what is aimed at is total self-articulation, not merely self-articulation to meet this or that local and temporary situation, this facticity should be taken up into the author's self-constitutive discourse as part of their experience of reality. This will be the case with the project of narration as envisaged here, which is a species of instrumental discourse in that it is directed to self-realisation and self-transformation in the terms of Christian faith.

The value of critical evaluation of instrumental discourse for the development of a discipline of narration lies in the discovery that realisation, self-realisation if self-constitutive discourse is in view, is more nearly complete the more elements of the self it involves. The lesson of critical engagement with instrumental discourse is that to alienate aspects of one's experience or one's tradition from within one's self-constitutive narration is to imperil, defer or at least weaken the possibility of self-realisation. This is not absolutely the case in external communication, of course, since the 'complete' public self may not involve all elements of the self. It is emphatically the case in reflexive self-constitutive discourse where all elements of the self are laid bare. Critical evaluation of the nature of self-constitutive discourse, then, commits us to the totality of the contents of our selfhood and so goes some way toward resisting the *problem of totalization.*

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2.2.c. Institutional Discourse:

Two quite distinct senses of the concept of institutional discourse are familiar features of debate about contemporary society. One is a tool of certain types of crude socio-political polemic, the other a more genuinely interesting tool of discourse analysis. The first of these senses, met with most frequently perhaps among those who conceive of themselves as offering a radical critique of existing institutions, understands the term to refer quite to the discourse authored by 'institutions'.[177] We are familiar with denunciations of the institutional discourse of such modern bogeys as the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, Roman Catholicism, the G8 group, 'the media', 'the new right', 'the liberal left' and so on. Here, it seems, merely to identify a given body or discourse community as an 'institution' is to set it over against the authentic, the human, the free, the right, the true in the same sort of way as young people once demonised 'the Establishment'. It follows that whatever an institution has to 'say' is necessarily valueless. This is an uninteresting sense of the concept of institutional discourse and need not detain us further here, though we will return to it in passing in our discussion of the Church as institution in the next section of this chapter.

The second and more significant sense of institutional discourse takes the term to refer to the discourse particular to those *within* institutionalised situations.[178] That is, the modes of discourse proper to participation in social environments where relationships are highly determined by detailed, publicly understood rules. For the individual subject, these situations might include formal teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, vicar-parishioner and lawyer-client relationships. For the community, these situations might include the relationships established by law and precedent between government agencies and community groups, the state and religious denominations or employers and employees.

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[177] See, for example, Mac An Ghaill, Mairtin and Haywood, Chris, 'The End of Anti-oppressive Education?: A Differentialist Critique' in *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, vol.7; 1 (Wallingford: Triangle, 1997), pp.21-34.

[178] See, for example, Pelsmaekers, Katja and Geluykens Ronald (eds.) 'Analyzing Institutional Discourse: Selected Papers from ISFW6' in *Interface: Journal of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 10;1 (Brussels: Vlekho, 1995), pp.145ff.

In their study *The Homeless Mind*,[179] Peter Berger and his co-authors offer a largely persuasive analysis of the bureaucratic state, a feature of many contemporary societies[180] in which institutional self-constitutive discourse arguably reaches its apogee. The arguments of *The Homeless Mind* offer us a way in to the question of what critical engagement with institutional discourse can offer to a discipline of narration for the renewal of self-constitutive discourse.

The animating idea in the book is that the experience of participation in situations characterised by bureaucracy inculcates habits of mind that tend away from the appropriation of a religious self-understanding by, for example, reinforcing secular concepts of personhood and relationship that lack any transcendent component, problematizing the mysterious and so on. Assuming (reasonably) that the important - because universal - perspective upon the bureaucratic system is that of its clients,[181] Berger et al. argue that participation in the discourse of a bureaucracy functions to shape consciousness in two sorts of ways. In the first place, it requires a certain sort of working knowledge, but since bureaucracy is a feature of much social experience, this in turn imparts a series of ideas about the nature of reality generally. Berger et al. characterise the working knowledge of the bureaucratic system formed through participation in its discourse as follows. The first major notion in the individual's knowledge of the bureaucratic system is competence.[182] Each agency within it is competent only for their assigned sphere of life and is supposed to have appropriate expertise. This presupposes the notion of referral,[183] by which individual bureaucrats must relinquish concern with anything that is not strictly within their purview. An allied notion is that of correct procedure; bureaucracy is assumed to operate within rational rules and sequences that are known or knowable.[184] There is finally a general

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[179] Berger, Peter L., Berger, Brigitte and Kellner, Hansfried. *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, Pelican, 1974).

[180] The authors were writing some years before Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in America began their attempts to 'roll back' or 'shrink' the involvement of the state in national life, but the extent to which those politicians succeeded in reducing the scope of the bureaucratic state should not be exaggerated. In Britain, for example, it only went as far as ending the involvement of the state in industry as a major employer.

[181] Berger *et al.*, op. cit., p.45. Clearly, even those who operate bureaucracies are themselves clients during some phases of their existence.

[182] Ibid., p.46.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid., p.47.

notion of anonymity, with any breach of this anonymity through the intrusion of individual concern defined as not only irrelevant but also corrupt.[185]

The consciousness which knowledge of the bureaucratic system imparts is, then, of a highly particular kind. It privileges orderliness, with other areas of human experience viewed as confusions waiting to be defined and categorised as components of the bureaucracy's view of reality. Thus the bureaucratic system is 'fixating rather than innovating',[186] presuming fixed characteristics in that which it deals with and comprehensibility, transparency and predictability in the way aspects of this relate.[187] In moral terms, the bureaucratic system sets a high value on the general expectation of justice, while excluding certain categories of person (such as criminals or foreigners) from access to this expectation. Annexed to this is a sense that anonymity is 'intrinsically defined and morally legitimated' as a principle of social relation.

Though, I submit, illuminating, the points made by Berger et al. cannot be accepted uncritically. While endorsing the general argument, I want to offer some important qualifications. First, however, let us establish what the arguments of Berger et al. as stated can contribute to our understanding of the significance of critical engagement with institutional (bureaucratic) discourse for any developing discipline of narration. The principal significance of the argument of *The Homeless Mind*, in my view, is to function as a warning against the substitution of an ideology for a commitment to the complexity of reality. Identifying the kind of normative discourse at which classic, statist bureaucracy aims, Berger et al. demonstrate how through seeking to maximise what is positive (or at least effective) in a limited range of situations we risk totalising the virtues of that thing to the exclusion of other goods, other realities.

It would, however, be an error to suppose that all contemporary people accept bureaucracy and appropriate the understandings it tends to as elements in their self-constitutive discourse in a *simple* fashion. Indeed, one irony of contemporary existence is that bureaucracy continues to be extended to ever more aspects of life at a

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[185] Ibid., p.48.
[186] Ibid., p.51.
[187] Ibid., p.52.

time when it is also widely perceived as flawed and limiting.[188] This perception is evidenced in such popular British notions as the tedious 'pen-pusher', the 'grey' civil servant and acutely frustrating and unhelpful 'customer help-lines' and 'care-lines'. Thus, *pace* Berger, we are obliged to distinguish really quite sharply between 'surface' rejection of bureaucracy[189] and a deeper perception that bureaucracy - for all its repeatedly disclosed weaknesses - is a 'right way' of ordering human affairs.[190] With the insights of feminism in mind, we might also introduce a further differentiation based upon the ways *different groups* experience *particular bureaucracies*.[191]

The series of discontents with and rejections of bureaucracy familiar from our observation of contemporary society points to a happy truth about institutional discourse. Fortunately, no such discourse has ever established hegemony over those involved in it such that other forms of self-constitutive discourse have been entirely excluded from the institutional situation. One general criticism of the approach offered by Berger et.al. that could be made is that they attend too much to public, and insufficiently to private, existence. Yet private, communicative discourse flourishes in bureaucratic or other institutional contexts where the rules of institutional discourse are ambiguous, contested or breaking down. We see this, for example, in something so apparently inconsequential as a flirtatious exchange between staff member and customer or client across a counter in a bank or government building. Such 'rebellious' discourse frequently supplies much of the 'colour' and tension in the fiction of generations whose society was (at least outwardly) more stratified and bound by codes that institutionalised certain behaviours than our own. Thus, in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*, the following decisive exchange between William Crimsworth and Edward Crimsworth, the employer who has mistreated him:

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[188] Page, Edward C., *Political Authority and Bureaucratic Power: A Comparative Analysis* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp.6-7.

[189] I suspect that this division did not obtain so strongly prior to the upheavals of the 1950s and 1960s, when implicit trust in 'The Establishment', with which bureaucratic practice is closely identified, largely broke down.

[190] This notion of bureaucracy as a necessary evil is attested early in Finer, Herman, 'Critics of Bureaucracy' in *Political Science Quarterly* 60 (1945), pp.100-112, p.110.

[191] For a nuanced view of gender in relation to bureaucracy see Ramsay, Karen and Parker, Martin, 'Gender, Bureaucracy and Organizational Culture' in Savage, Mike and Witz, Anne (eds.), *Gender and Bureaucracy* (Oxford: Blackwell / The Sociological Review, 1992), pp.253-278. For other feminist perspectives, see Watson, Sophie, 'Femocratic Feminisms' in ibid., pp.186-204.

'After an odd and long stare at me... he seemed to bethink himself that, after all, his money gave him sufficient superiority over a beggar like me...

'Take your hat' said he. 'Take what belongs to you and go out at that door... If ever I hear of you setting foot on an inch of ground that belongs to me, I'll hire a man to cane you'.

'It is not likely you'll have the chance; once off your premises, what temptation can I have to return to them? I leave a prison, I leave a tyrant; I leave what is worse than the worst that can lie before me, so no fear of my coming back".[192]

Critical evaluation of this secondary, 'counter-institutional' self-constitutive discourse demonstrates a point we have stressed before: coherence and completion are to be sought, but finality in discourse is deadening.

2.2.d. Concluding Remarks:

We have seen how critical engagement with patterns of discourse in the social world issues in a disposition of committed engagement with the discourse of the other and an impulse towards coherence in ones own discourse guided by wariness about imposing an inauthentic finality upon discourse. These will be valuable elements within the discipline of narration. However, authorial subjects and communities are far from autonomous social actors; all exist within more positively defined and defining social spaces. For the Christian subject, considered as Christian, this space will most usually be the local ecclesial community that mediates the tradition. For the Christian community, the local ecclesial community for example, it may be the wider discourse community of denomination, Church or simply 'religious people'. Let us turn now to consider self-constitutive discourse as it takes place *within* Christian social spaces.

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[192] Brontë, Charlotte, *The Professor and Emma: A Fragment* (Letchworth: Everyman, 1975), p.36.

2.3. Authority: Narration in the Mainstream of Christian Existence

2.3.a. Preliminary Remarks:

When the renewal of self-constitutive discourse is under discussion, it is important to establish not only what a certain ecclesial community is committed to now, but also how it will approach the ongoing project of authoring communal discourse and how it will evaluate the subjective discourse authored by members and others. In this question lies an essential point of differentiation I want to draw between what I will term 'mainstream' and 'marginal' believing communities.

Mainstream communities approach the renewal of their discourse with a cautious attitude. In actual cases, this might indeed be a function of existing core beliefs. We may observe that the institution of the Roman Catholic church, for example, is unlikely to act radically because of its vast body of dogma and labyrinthine structure. A local house church will be under no such constraints. However, the correlation between ecclesial doctrine and practice and attitudes toward the renewal of discourse is not exact. Ecclesial communities that characteristically seek the steady evolution and augmentation of their discourse have been subject to radical renewals;[193] marginal communities that privilege innovation have passed through phases of retrenchment.[194] The validity of our dual typology of communal attitudes should not obscure the fact that in actual communities the two types of communal approach may exist side by side, or successively.

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[193] This was true of Roman Catholicism in parts of South America during the first flowering of Liberation Theology, which found its echo in Rome itself in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and its denunciations of liberal capitalism. Compare Hillar, Marian, 'Liberation Theology: Religious Response to Social Problems. A Survey' in Hillar, M. and Leuchtag, H.R., *Humanism and Social Issues* (Houston, TX.: American Humanist Association, 1993), pp.35-52, pp.37, 39.

[194] A good contemporary example from the American context is the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was founded in the period 1787-1816 as a radical departure from more conventional Methodism privileging the experience of black people and integrating new forms of liturgy and social action, but which is now perceived as a highly institutionalised, conservative denomination. See Raboteau, Albert J., 'African Methodist Episcopal Church in Lippy, Charles H. and Williams, Peter W., (eds.) *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, vol.1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998), pp.635-648. Compare Harris, Hamil R. and Broadway, Bill, 'Getting Out of Zion' in *Washington Post*. (19-9-99).

2.3.b. Reflection on Self-Constitutive Discourse:

The mainstream believing community gives content to Christian self-constitutive discourse in both negative and positive ways. Negatively, it does so by identifying the traditional intention as *this* and no other; positively, through its perennial making available of the diversity of the tradition. Members of the mainstream believing community will, therefore, regard it as having the authority to regulate narration and the resources to refresh the imaginative possibilities of Christian identity. This authority is also likely to receive limited endorsement from non-participants in the community: members of other mainstream believing communities who recognise a common orthodoxy or orthopraxy, members of marginal communities constituted in rebellion against a 'mother' community, non-believers seeking to identify 'the Church' with a sociological reality. The mainstream believing community has a role to play in the shaping of discourse that is both familiar and widely endorsed within late modern society. The question must now be how far that role is consistent with the kind of renewal of self-constitutive discourse envisaged here.

We recognise that when the normative quality of a particular narration is under discussion the mainstream believing community – as the principal repository of tradition as a lived reality in the contemporary context - must play a principal role. I agree with Hough and Cobb that it is through encounter with the mainstream believing community that most subjects are likely to derive their knowledge of the tradition, and of how that tradition should be communicated.[195] However, surely one of the principal difficulties in appropriating the tradition within self-constitutive discourse for our contemporaries consists in the widespread alienation from conventional Christian discourse that is a feature of many contemporary societies. Thus, it is not at all clear to me that a community normally concerned to be cautious in its renewal of Christian discourse can - given prevailing conditions - be a leading agent in the *positive* renewal of reflection upon self-identity. I would submit, in general terms, that where mainstream ecclesial communities have sought to do this either at denominational or local level they have achieved only partial success at

heavy cost and in any case has lagged far behind wider society and marginal groups which stand in a much freer relationship to existing norms of communal discourse. This point may be amply demonstrated with reference to the case of women's ordination to the priesthood or ministry, particularly as played out in the Church of England.

The pressure for the Church of England to renew its discourse here came initially not from within but from without, from the challenge of the extra-traditional experience of the society in which the church is located. The post-war western world has increasingly, though not unambiguously or easily, come to see that women are and should be recognised as fundamentally of equal worth and ability with men. Long before women were ordained in the Church of England their membership of the professions, entry to the universities, suffrage and right to sit in Parliament had been aspects of the experience of churchpeople and others alike. Other, historically less cautious Christian communities, such as the Methodists, not to mention a few members of the Anglican Communion, had recognised this within their practice.[196] This blunt fact suggests that the mainstream believing community was slow to change even where the remoteness of its discourse from that of the world was demonstrably due to historical shifts rather than the world's increasing viciousness.

In 1992, The Church of England's general synod eventually decided that women should be admitted to the priesthood, a decision subsequently confirmed by Act of Parliament such that 1,200 women were ordained as priests in 1994. What is most interesting for our purposes is the fact that even by this stage no *integration* of the arguments on both sides that could prevent dissension had been achieved. Accordingly, the church instituted an elaborate series of provisions - including the

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[195] Hough, Jr., Joseph C. and Cobb, Jr., John B., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico, C.A.: Scholars Press, 1985), pp.49-76. Hough and Cobb rightly see the mainstream ('main-line') believing community as incarnating a series of 'guiding images' of Christian being.
[196] A few dates will serve to illustrate that over a long period supporters of women's ordination have fought and won their case in all churches except the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox, but nowhere have mainstream believing communities yielded speedily and gladly. The Congregationalists ordained their first women minister in 1856, the Methodists admitted women as full ministers in 1956 after having admitted them as preachers before the turn of the century. The Baptists have ordained women since the 1920's; the first regularly ordained Anglican women priests were created in Hong Kong in 1971; German Lutheran women gained full clerical equality with men (after a long and complicated progress toward it) in 1978.

rights of parishes and clergy opposed to the ordination of women as priests to choose alternative episcopal oversight - designed to allow freedom of conscience in the church. Moreover, there was no provision for the ordination of women as bishops. This cautious approach to the renewal of communal discourse prevented outright schism in the Church of England and in that respect must be deemed a success. Nevertheless, I contend that the whole episode demonstrates the unsuitability of mainstream ecclesial communities as such to embark upon the creative renewal of self-constitutive discourse. I do not argue here that the Church of England acted incorrectly in compromising. I merely suggest that as an *institution* committed to a cautious handling of its communal discourse it did not have the freedom to be radically imaginative and so should not have attempted radical renewal while the issue of women's ordination remained strongly contested by numerous adherents of the tradition.[197]

Pace Robin Gill,[198] I would argue that the mainstream believing community is best conceived of as standing in a sense at the beginning and end points of a hermeneutic journey which it equips its members to travel but should not attempt itself. The mainstream believing community is the authority that will set the parameters for good narration, inculcate what we have termed the discipline of narration, offer up narrative frames to its members. Likewise, it will be the mainstream community that judges whether the fruits of narration can be accepted as in continuity with the tradition, as a valid expression of the traditional intention. An indispensable role, then, but not (in

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[197] I realise, of course, that whenever the institutional Church's understanding shifts there will always be some believers who are 'left behind' and so the institutional Church should not move only as fast as the conscience of its most conservative member, otherwise it would not move at all and should have remained content with slavery and the like. There is no clear formula for determining when the conclusions reached by individual subjects should begin to alter the institutional church's discourse except, perhaps, where the former acts as an index of how far the latter has failed to make the tradition available in such a way as to be appropriated without risking inadequacy to other self-constitutive experience.

[198] Gill argues, as I do, that mainstream Christian communities are often better 'harbingers and carriers' of Christian commitments than exemplars of them. See Gill, Robin, 'Churches as Moral Communities' in Gill, Robin, op.cit.,pp.357-371. However, his concern is not with the particular existential conditions of late modernity so much as with the frequently observed, *perennial* divergence between confessional statements and communal practice. It is this, he believes, which prevents mainstream communities from assuming first place in the dynamic task of renewing Christian discourse. I am sceptical of some of the details of his analysis - in particular his unqualified objection to communities being 'socially constrained' (p.357), which carries an implication than all respect for late modernity amounts to *unnecessary* capitulation to the secular world. I heartily endorse his point that we must distinguish sharply between the theoretical or potential and actual status of Christian communities.

the high degree that some would favour) a positive, creative, *innovative* one. Yet, the role of the mainstream believing community need not dwindle to the (still profound) tasks of faithfully handing on the gospel and other traditional resources and saying 'yea' or 'nay' to the efforts of authors struggling to renew their self-constitutive discourse. There are many positive, even innovative, steps the mainstream believing community could take to better fulfil the role of authoritative guide I recommend for it under the present existential conditions.

2.3.c. Privileging Historicity, Community, and Particularity in Practice:

Considering the project of narration in view here, a significant way in which the believing community could be disposed as a guide would be by exhibiting a positive emphasis on concrete historicity and actuality throughout its discourse. This claim might appear incoherent after the previous chapter's stress upon the role of the creative imagination, but the reverse is true. There exists a distinction between total constraint by perceived objective historical fact and respect for historicity and actuality.[199] If - as we suggested will be necessary - authors must occasionally bracket given experiential fact in pursuit of transformed self-identity then they have a dangerous freedom which could lead as well to self-deception as to adequate, authentic Christian being. However, in a sense the mainstream believing community just as such is already a bulwark against the species of self-deception that most concerns us here: self-deception which leads to self-perception that is inadequate to one or other of our criteria.

As a local *community of friends* with some *common experience*, the mainstream believing community can function as an implicit challenge to the distortion of past experience by individual members. Thus, the believing community is a repository of the *experiential memory* of that community over against its members. Kemp has shown in his monographic study of St.James's Anglican Church, Piccadilly,[200] that as

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[199] This is emphasised in narration, which seeks to give an account of experiential actuality but - because it allows for the re-reading of experiential actuality - may result in a storied account which incorporates understandings not present in the original context upon which the narrative is predicated.

[200] Kemp, Daren, *The Christaquarians? A Sociology of Christians in the New Age* (2001), doctoral thesis (original version accepted at King's College, London, 2000) published via the Internet at [http://www.christaquarian.net] (14-6-2001).

a living *network of belief* the community can ask productive questions of members about the conformity of their construal of the tradition to those of neighbours, colleagues, church leaders and others.[201] Thus, the believing community is a repository of the *traditional memory* of its members. These two aspects of the communal existence of the institutional Church stand as safeguards against those species of inadequacy to the content of experience and tradition, descent into existential and religious solipsism.[202] However, they will only do so where they are given enhanced prominence in the formal teaching, study, and corporate practice of the mainstream believing community.

Within contemporary theology, there is a large body of ethical reflection on what it means to live in community with others.[203] More significant for our purposes since their work bears upon the formation of Christian identity as well as its expression in action, are those theologians who have focussed attention on how the believing community as audience receives and recreates tradition, including scripture, as living resources for its faith. Brown deals with this issue at some length in his recent *Imagination* series of books.[204] Other significant names include Grenz, McGrath, MacIntyre and Bellah. Grenz has described theology as a conversation in which the primary voice is scripture, but the participants are the entire faith community, past and present.[205] He criticises the way in which Luther's *sola scriptura* principle became distorted such that scripture was transformed from a living text into the object of

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[201] We should not expect homogeneity of belief within a congregation, of course, but Kemp's paper shows that continued attendance at a particular church tends markedly to the appropriation of norms of belief there; ibid, p. 36.

[202] Empiricist philosophers (in particular) who accept an account of consciousness as essentially private - such as Mill, Bertrand Russell and A.J. Ayer - generally assume some form of the 'argument from analogy' as a mechanism for avoiding solipsism. Their reasoning runs that although one cannot know the existence of other minds, one can deduce their existence from the fact of other bodies which operate like ours, which we know to be controlled by a mind. This fails as a philosophical argument because it begs so many questions, but works as a piece of applied psychology. Existence within a believing community, which entails participation in it, meshes one's intellection about one's self and beliefs with communal norms thus preventing true *self*-deception.

[203] Few if any contemporary theologians follow Kierkegaard in being sceptical or suspicious of the role of historical community just as such in the formation of Christian discourse.

[204] See Brown, David, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: O.U.P., 2000); *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* (Oxford: O.U.P., 2000), *passim.*

[205] Grenz, Stanley, 'Articulating the Christian Belief-mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism' in Stackhouse, John G. (ed.), *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation about Theological Method* (Vancouver: Baker Books, 1999), pp.121ff. For an extended attempt by Grenz to realise this conversational model see his *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

systematising scholarship.[206] He makes communal tradition basic by seeing tradition as the whole enterprise by which the Christian community interprets scripture.[207] McGrath's stress is on learning from the understanding of past theologians rather than on observing how their cultural and philosophical assumptions affected their reading of scripture.[208] Brown, Grenz and McGrath are very different in their approaches, but each in his own way supplies an understanding of the importance of the communal dimension for areas of Christian life beyond the ethical and devotional.

There are grounds for caution here, of course, as well as affirmation. The move to root narration within the life and practice of the community, which is essential for the reasons considered here, should not be taken as a heavy constraint upon the practice of narration. If narration finds an ideal starting place amidst the 'guiding images'[209] supplied, ideally, by the mainstream believing community, yet it might be that faithfulness to one or other of our criteria of adequacy will see the fruit of that narration emerge as something which in important respects sits ill with received communal certainties. I am confident that *very* strong communitarian emphases upon the *normativity* of the communal such as Bellah's (in his later work) imperil the necessary, salvific location of *final* (temporal) authority over the formation of self-constitutive discourse within imaginative subjectivity.[210] This is a point to which otherwise perceptive theorists of narration and community, such as Macintyre, do not allow sufficient serious consideration.[211]

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[206] Ibid., p.124.

[207] Ibid., p.126

[208] For McGrath's discussion of how one theologian in particular shaped wider understandings see his *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp.250-251, 261: 'to study Calvin is not merely to study the past – it is also to gain a deeper understanding of the present. Modern… culture continues to be shaped by memories of the past'.

[209] Hough and Cobb, op.cit., pp.49-76.

[210] For a succinct summary of Bellah's position on the individual in community, which totally fails to allow for the possibility of final authority belonging with the human subject see Bellah, Robert N. 'Community Properly Understood: A Defense of 'Democratic Communitarianism' in *The Responsive Community* 6 (1995), pp.

[211] Macintyre brings out part of the point well: 'Notice that rebellion against any identity is always one possible mode of expressing it… Note also that the fact that the self has to find its moral identity through communities… does not entail that the self has to accept the moral limitations… of those forms of community'; Macintyre, op.cit., p.221. However, at p.218, Macintyre insists that being in community we must always, even if in rebellion, be 'accountable' to our peers. This represents a circumscription of the radical freedom to renew subjective, self-constitutive discourse that may from time to time be a legitimate choice. The 'prophetic' possibility of self-renewal at the price of communal incomprehension is brought out well in Brady, Bernard V., *The Moral Bond of Community: Justice and Discourse in Christian Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998), pp.46-47.

If emphasis on concrete historicity is necessary at one level in order to safeguard individual believers, it is equally necessary to prevent the believing community itself becoming a mediator of distorted or impoverished identity narrative.[212] Most ecclesial communities belong to wider national or international denominations or traditions and these affiliations will play some role. However, such affiliations can tend rather to preserve the integrity of the particular denominational tradition than to open up the rich resources of the whole Christian tradition to believers.[213] Thus, in order to make the fullest range of insights into the life of faith available to its members, the mainstream believing community must look with the dispassionate historian's eye at the circumstances in which churches have emerged, merged and separated such as to be able to engage with other Christian traditions as *other*, but not erroneous.[214] The ecumenical movement shows the way in this often difficult task.[215] We should not, however, make the mistake of construing all interdenominational enterprises as similarly helpful in this connection.[216]

Having privileged the *communal* aspect of the mainstream believing community's part in the project of narration thus far, and spoken in terms of a repository of *communal* memory, we must now recall the fact that there are very few discourse communities where membership implies a status undifferentiated from that of other members of the community.[217] As far as this is determinative of experience, the mainstream believing community should respect particularity in its discourse and so ground narration that

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[212] History supplies us with plentiful examples of local believing communities losing any imaginative contact with the wider Church, with practical results that can be appalling for the believers concerned, the Church and the wider culture. Compare Bergen, D., op.cit.

[213] That is not so true where the denomination is engaged in ecumenical work, as in the case of the Anglican-Roman Catholic and Anglican-Methodist dialogues, or where outward-looking theologians who are deeply engaged in the life of the universal Church serve the denomination.

[214] For an instructive exercise in relativizing the 'traditions that divide' before the 'tradition that unites' see Pelikan, Jaroslav, 'The Traditions that Divide, the Tradition that Unites' in Cunningham, Lawrence (ed.), *Ecumenism: Present Realities and Future Prospects* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), pp.1-23.

[215] For example, although Anglican-Roman Catholic discussions have not produced union, the two churches have issued numerous documents affirming mutual respect and some shared beliefs. Witness documents such as *The Gift of Authority* (1998), produced by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, in which agreed principles of universal primacy and conciliarity are set out.

[216] Gill points out that interdenominational groups such as the Gay Christian Movement and Christian CND have provoked counter-movements, increasing the internal disunity of the Church; Gill, op.cit., pp.367-368.

[217] Here as elsewhere I understand a person's status within a community to mean their social situation relative to other members – their social particularity if you will. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, consideration of issues of power and formal hierarchy.

does likewise. I am sceptical of attempts by Douglas Davies to present a unified theory of status within believing communities based, as clerical and spiritual authority probably *is*, upon perceived access to sources of religious 'power'.[218] In many believing communities, a great diversity of other important differences in status will obtain due to factors predicated upon self-constitutive experience that has little to do with intra-ecclesial experience. These might include gender, age, and educational background, for example.[219]

There are good grounds for supposing that in some local, temporary situations recognition of individual particularity should not be a high priority on the mainstream believing community's agenda. From time to time, a stress of this sort might be divisive and enervating of the believing community.[220] However in areas such as Northern Ireland and the Balkans, removing emphasis from communal narratives by emphasising the particular identity of the individual might serve to undermine inter-communal, inter-religious strife. Generally, then, wherever particularity can be recognised without doing extreme violence to the community this should occur, for it represents an attempt to fulfil our criterion of adequacy to the fullness of experience.

The rudiments of a conceptual framework for this attention to the particular already exist in scripture in the Pauline teaching about diversity of gifts and roles within the Church[221] and in the academy in the development of theologies of the laity by Feucht and others.[222] There is also some practical precedent in the existing funerary and

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[218] Davies, Douglas, *Meaning and Salvation in Religious Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), p.9.

[219] This is not to claim that the believing community simply takes over categories of status from the wider culture. Davies rightly insists that 'it is quite possible for the religious imagination to invert... [social ideals] or otherwise transform them into quite diverse patterns...'. Ibid., p.9.

[220] For example, in parts of the United States where church membership tends largely to run along ethnic lines and the local church is often a focus for an ethnic community, emphasis on the individual members of the believing community could potentially sap the positive strength inherent in communal solidarity while contributing little to building inter-ethnic, inter-church understanding.

[221] 1Cor.12. Note also 1 Pet.4:10: 'Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms'. The language of (spiritual) 'gifts' might seem to make these passages a flimsy basis on which to build *general* claims about particularity of identity within the believing community. Note, however, the contexts of 4:10 – surrounding verses speak in similar terms of the more ordinary aspects of church life, including 'hospitality', speech and service.

[222] Feucht, Oscar E., *Everyone a Minister. A Guide to Churchmanship: For Laity and Clergy* (London: Concordia: 1979). Although Feucht is chiefly interested in lay participation in evangelism and pastoral work he develops the idea that there is a distinctively Christian way of being particular to each person

(adult) baptismal rites of the Church of England and other denominations, where personal testimony or testimony on behalf of another person are sometimes encouraged as integral parts of the believing community's common worship. A better example yet, perhaps, is offered by the 'harvest festival',[223] in which members of the congregation are each invited in turn to lay their 'gifts' symbolically before God (usually upon a table that serves as a representative altar).[224] However, to the extent that these communal celebrations are concerned with shaping self-constitutive discourse at all[225] they mark significant points in particular lives, rather than the significant particularity of individual lives. It remains to extend the principle of affirmation of diversity within the believing community that is present in embryonic form in these elements of Church life such that it becomes axiomatic for all discourse about integrated self-perception. The preaching of scripture, liturgical performance, ethical discourse, the offering of personal testimony and the way that the institutional Church marks the calendar are all areas where this sort of transformation has begun and could be carried on.[226]

2.3.d. Concluding Remarks:

In this section, we have seen how the mainstream believing community can exercise its authority to support the project of narration. For reasons particular to contemporary

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at every time. Witness: 'Unless the average church member has a sense of being called *where he is every day of his life*, he has too low an estimate of himself' [italics mine], p.26.

[223] Many of the customs associated with the harvest festival (such as decorating the church with home-grown produce) have been traced to early Victorian innovations by Revd. Robert Hawker of Morwenstow in Cornwall. Hawker stands as an excellent example of a churchman who developed the practice of his church to better integrate the intra- and extra-ecclesial experiences of its members.

[224] In England in former times, of course, the harvest festival was a service of thanksgiving for rural, farming communities and it is in such communities that the tradition remains strong. However, I have attended several services in urban areas where the congregation is invited to 'offer' produce in the sense of real food parcels or charitable donations and to consider these the portion of the yield of their particular occupation which is due to God. Considered thus, the harvest festival functions to integrate charity with the concrete realities of ordinary, economic life.

[225] It could be argued that funerary rites, baptismal rites and the harvest festival are all concerned much more with proclamation of God's presence in various situations than with explication of that presence in terms of its significance for self-identity, although the latter is certainly not entirely lacking in any of the three.

[226] There should be no question of making suitability to the imaginative and existential conditions of late modernity determinative for the content of faith and ecclesial practice. I advocate a genuine shift of emphasis, but in the context of a no less genuine commitment to traditional Christian norms. The ugly movement which evacuated German Protestant church life of much of its confessional content to better facilitate the appropriation of a culturally 'appropriate' 'German Christian' identity stands as a warning from history here; Bergen, op.cit., pp.47-51.

existential conditions - principally alienation from conventional Christian discourse - the mainstream believing community that must hand on the tradition inviolate is unlikely to be the most successful author of its renewal. This task will fall to authorial subjects and communities within the broad believing community, the church, whose efforts the institution of the church may then deliberate upon. However, the mainstream believing community remains - at least ideally - the home of these individuals and other communities. As such, it can function to discourage self-deception, and religious and existential solipsism among those seeking to imaginatively appropriate the possibility of Christian being by encouraging certain modes of self- and communal understanding through its formal discourse and its practice.[227] It also has a role to play in disclosing that possibility as a potential source of human satisfaction. Thus, the mainstream believing community strengthens the intellectual, epistemological, moral and aesthetic resources that equip the individual to integrate their Christian convictions with their extra-ecclesial experience in a new imaginative synthesis.

2.4. Change: Narration at the Margins of Christian Existence

Marginal believing communities, for our purposes, are those ecclesial and other believing communities which do not share the mainstream, cautious, approach to the renewal of communal discourse. Contemporary marginal communities tend to originate in some form of departure from a mainstream community whose discourse was perceived to be radically incomplete or otherwise in need of radical reworking in the face of experiential realities and distinctive reflection upon shared communal tradition.[228] In this respect, then, the marginal approach to the renewal of discourse originates in, is of a piece with, and sustains unorthodox approaches to more basic

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[227] This point is well brought out by Murray in relation to the practice of worship: 'worship in general...is always a form of drama - it is 'a thing done'. It is an externalising of an idea or a conviction or a memory by the use of sight and sound and order'. Murray, V., op.cit, p.257.

[228] This departure can take the form of reaction as well as pure innovation, as fissile evangelical Protestantism and Archbishop Lefebvre's group show. Lefebvre founded the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) in 1970 as a response to Vatican II, which he regarded as embracing neo-Modernist and Protestant tendencies in defiance of the ancient traditions of the Roman Catholic church. After a lengthy period of controversy, centred upon his celebration of the (traditional Latin) Mass and direction of his seminary students, Lefebvre was finally excommunicated in 1988 after ordaining four priests in defiance of the Pope's expressed wishes. SSPX continues as a 'traditionalist' schismatic body.

issues of doctrinal commitment and ecclesial discipline. Note, however, the distinction between communities that are widely perceived as marginal within the spectrum of Christian belief and yet have evolved an approach to their peculiar communal discourse that is no longer radical and those (usually newer) communities in which marginal beliefs continue to be served by a marginal approach to communal discourse. The 'Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints' (Mormons) is an excellent example of the first sub-type; the Ugandan 'Holy Spirit Movement / Lord's Resistance Army' is an example of the second.[229] Mormonism's original approach to orthodox Christian belief and its own flurry of additional 'revelations' was highly flexible, reflecting the needs of a young, much tested community, but in the twentieth century it evolved a mainstream approach to its communal discourse, which has been codified and systematised.[230] The same could be said of movements such as ('General Conference') Seventh Day Adventism[231] and Spiritualism.[232] By contrast, the 'Holy Spirit Movement / Lord's Resistance Army' and comparable 'African Indigenous Churches'[233] continue to radically rework their discourse in the midst of ongoing (largely self-induced) situations of crisis analogous to those the Mormons have long since left behind.

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[229] The 'Holy Spirit Movement' founded in Uganda by reformed prostitute Alice Lakwena is typical of what the Institute for the Study of American Religion terms 'African Indigenous Churches'. Lakwena's followers were encouraged to smear 'bullet-proof' magic ointment on their bodies and confront government troops in the name of Christ. Hundreds died but the movement survived as the 'Lord's Resistance Army', an extremely violent militia which is fighting a revolutionary war in the hope of governing Uganda in accordance with the Ten Commandments. Here strange new forms of indigenous tribal warrior culture and belief in magic have come to dominate the narratives of belief told by members at the expense of what the orthodox Church would regard as core gospel commitments.

[230] The Mormons originated in the peculiar religious ferment of upstate New York in 1830. Thus, the part played by this environment in the life of the syncretic religion's founder, the erstwhile 'treasure-digger' Joseph Smith, is reflected in Mormonism's characteristically nineteenth-century American interests in quasi-Masonic ritual, philosophical materialism and America's continental destiny. See Alexander, Thomas G., 'The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology' in *Sunstone* 6 (1999), available via the Internet at URL: [http://www.lds-mormon.com/changod.shtml] (10-1-2002).

[231] Piepkorn, Arthur Karl, *Profiles in Belief: The Religious Bodies of the United States and Canada*, vol. IV, *Evangelical, Fundamentalist and other Christian Bodies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp.153-157.

[232] Hazelgrove, Jenny, *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.3-4 reports on the development of a stable, critical approach to 'psychical' phenomena within the movement and its consequences for belief.

[233] I.S.A.R. estimates that 5,000 such groups have arisen in sub-Saharan Africa in the past century. Quoted press release, Integrated Regional Information Networks, 25th March, 2000.

For those concerned with the unity of the Church, the emergence of marginal believing communities will always be a matter of regret. However, concerns about ecumenical unity and about the malignity of some fringe groups should not obscure four facts. First, the move to breach may sometimes be born of an impulse later judged valid (theologically sound) by orthodoxy – witness the case of the ordination of women. Second, the impulse to breach may yield insight even where it does not result in a final disruption of an existing believing community – witness much post-colonial theology. We may look to the achievements of certain African and Asian[234] theologians who have sought to draw their communities into the gospel narratives of Christian being through recasting elements of these in terms which foreground - but do not pass theological control to - local, extra-traditional experience.[235] Third, the movement away from unity in the pursuit of a more radically adequate discourse or practice is not always one way or final. The histories of the Methodist[236] and the United Reformed Churches[237] in the United Kingdom demonstrate this. Finally, the characteristically marginal, experimental approach to the renewal of discourse is not itself without great potential when considered in the context of the effort to secure good narration. Even where reconciliation between mainstream and margins seems

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[234] In Asia no less than in Africa local conditions have spawned problematic hybrids of tradition and extra-ecclesial experience. Useful discussions are to be found in Yamamori, Tetsunao and Charles R. Taber (eds), *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* (Pasadena CA.: William Carey Library, 1975). For a specific case study see Adams, Daniel J. 'Ancestors, Folk Religion and Korean Christianity' in Mullins, Mark R. and Richard Fox Young (eds.), *Perspectives on Christianity in Japan and Korea: The Gospel and Culture in East Asia* (Lewston NY: Edwin Mellen, 1995), pp.95-114.

[235] Kosuke Koyama comments 'Theology in Asia is... not... a mere counter-concept to theology in the West. It must respond primarily to the biblical proclamation of Christ and not to western theology. This is the basic orientation relevant to what Asian theologians call responsible contextualization of theology'. Kosuke Koyama, 'Asian Theology', in Ford, David (ed.) *The Modern Theologians* vol.II (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.217. Koyama discusses his own work and that of Stanley J. Samartha (India), Choan-Seng Song (Taiwan) and Hyun Younghak (Korea) as examples of this 'responsible contextualization of theology', p. 218ff.

[236] Compare Corrie, Robert, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), pp.44-76, 248-292; Turner, J.M., 'Methodism in England 1900-1932' in Davies, Rupert et al. (eds.), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol.3 (London: Epworth, 1983), pp.337-340.

[237] The origins of the United Reformed Church lie in a series of individual and group secessions from the Church of England at the time of the English reformation by early Presbyterians and Congregationalists (or Independents). After a high point under the Commonwealth, these groups declined (many into Unitarianism) during the eighteenth century and remained in a fissile, disunited state despite revival by Methodist preachers. However, by 1972 shared social concerns led to the formation of a united church in England, which was augmented by the accession of other small groups in 1981.

unlikely or even impossible, there is a possibility that the mainstream could be enriched by consideration of the experiences of marginal communities.[238]

In this section I will show, with the use of a case study drawn from a marginal community of the second, authentically marginal, sub-type, how this form of approach to communal discourse yields insights that might augment the project of narration valuably. I aim, above all, to show that it is where a radically imaginative approach to the renewal of self-constitutive discourse is allowed to rule that some of the most creative and engaging narratives will emerge. However, I will also be careful to show that the discourse of marginal communities can, in its freedom, tend toward a serious failure of our criteria of adequacy to the fullness of experience and tradition.

3.3.b. Case Study: The Metropolitan Community Church.:

Our case study is drawn from the publications of the controversial United Federation of Metropolitan Community Churches (U.F.M.C.C.), also known as the Metropolitan Church and Metropolitan Community Church. Although many U.S. Christians disdain the U.F.M.C.C.,[239] it has achieved significant recognition at national level and within the ecumenical movement. The organisation's founder 'Rev. Elder' Troy D. Perry has been involved in several White House conferences on AIDS and 'hate crimes'; it was granted Official Observer status to the seventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991.[240] One of the publicity sheets that the organisation

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[238] For example, the Mormon notion that the *Book Of Mormon*, certain other documents and perhaps even the speech of those anointed by God have equal status with the two Testaments, while repugnant to Christians in detail, does serve to recall the institutional Church to consideration of the possibility of ongoing revelation.

[239] Christian members of the so-called 'religious right' execrate the U.F.M.C.C. Particularly strident voices have emerged from the controversial 'ex-Gay' movement, which claims to offer 'freedom' from homosexuality through religious conversion or (sometimes as well as) psychological therapy. The ex-Gay movement is composed of a number of highly active groups including 'Exodus International' (whose director, Joe Dallas, was a member of U.F.M.C.C.), 'Homosexuals Anonymous' and the 'National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuals'. For further information on these and the movement in general see Degon, John, *A Selected Bibliography of Material of the Ex-Gay Movement*, available via the Internet at URL:[http://slisweb.lis.wisc.edu/~jcherney/degon.html] (9-12-2001).

[240] See document *Facts and Information about Revd. Troy D. Perry and the Ministry of UFMCC* (Los Angeles: 2000), p.3. Available via the Internet at URL:[http://www.ufmcc.com] (9-12-2001).

distributes through the Internet[241] declares the nature of the extra-traditional, self-constitutive experience that is basic for members of the church:

> 'M.C.C.... a Christian denomination with a primary, affirming ministry to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered[242] persons and their friends and families... founded in and reaching beyond the Gay and Lesbian communities... We serve among those seeking and celebrating the integration of their spirituality and sexuality'.[243]

The U.F.M.C.C. is indeed committed to celebrating homosexual identity, for as well as marriage services all U.F.M.C.C. member congregations offer what are termed 'Holy Unions', effectively same-sex marriages.[244] Here then is a clear breach between a version of Christian identity heavily determined by 'gay' experience and what has traditionally been received as normative.[245]

The passage quoted above demonstrates amply that the U.F.M.C.C.'s leadership goes about the business of negotiation between - integration of - the Christian tradition and gay experience in a highly self-aware fashion. Given this explicit concern with integration and our discussion thus far, it is perhaps unsurprising that the church supplies narrative-form accounts of the experiences and understandings that brought it into being. The San Francisco church's document *Coming Out* charts the historical sufferings of homosexual people and hails the 'Gay Rights' movement of the 1960s and after as the challenge which spurs the Church to realise the full implications of its

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[241] 'Marginal' groups such as the U.F.M.C.C. seem to thrive on the Internet and find in it a series of valuable tools for building virtual communal solidarity and establishing bases for real communal action. McKenna, K.Y.A., and J.A. Bargh, 'Coming Out in the Age of the Internet: Identity "Demarginalization" through Virtual Group Participation' in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75(1998), pp.670-694, p.681.

[242] The term 'transgendered' is used, principally in the United States, to designate those who believe their physical sexual characteristics are the opposite of their 'real' sexual identity. Such people often end as transsexuals, a term reserved for those who have had 'gender reassignment surgery'.

[243] Ibid., p.4.

[244] The term 'marriage' is avoided scrupulously, but there is no admission that such unions are not equal in status to heterosexual matrimony.

[245] There are no independent statistics concerning the religious background of M.C.C. members, but their publications stress that members are drawn from all religious backgrounds and none – principally from mainstream Christian churches. This is borne out by the statistics of the Los Angeles M.C.C. for 1998, available via the Internet at URL:[http://www.hmnet.ucla.edu/queerla/projects/Lindsey.html] (2-12-2001). Although the L.A.M.C.C congregation in that year was drawn from members of over twenty religious denominations only six - R.C., Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian and Pentecostal Assemblies of God - supplied more than ten members. It should be noted that in the U.S. all these bodies maintain an official prohibition on homosexual practice.

gospel of unconditional love.[246] The narrative is then 'brought up to date' by tracing the positive response to this challenge across many other U.S. church bodies including Billy Graham's evangelical mission and Roman Catholicism.[247] In this context, the U.F.M.C.C. is presented as timely, a prophetic Christian body rather than an illegitimate departure from the tradition. The authors of *Coming Out* also seek to connect these communal, historical threads with those of personal sexuality and spirituality. The special alienation many gay people feel toward religious institutions based on personal experiences of 'religious homophobia' is acknowledged fully.[248] However, a prayer is offered that the personal crisis involved in 'coming out' as a gay person in a still hostile world might mark the advent of a 'spiritual coming out' which will culminate in an 'active, prayerful relationship with God'.[249]

Several of the features of the narrative with which the U.F.M.C.C. seeks to legitimise its departure from familiar construals of the tradition are immediately recognisable as in continuity with liberal theological thought. Thus, we see a liberal notion of the gospel as the unambiguous proclamation of loving acceptance. There is a bold affirmation that 'every...individual...who identifies themselves as Christian [should] no longer tolerate the use of racism, sexism, homophobia or any other issue as a weapon to separate anyone from Jesus Christ'.[250] This is coupled with the proposition familiar from some existentialist theology that the gospel must somehow be rescued from the Church, or the Church from itself, if Christianity is to be an authentic possibility for contemporary people.

Neither of these U.F.M.C.C positions is unexceptionable. For example, as Ford recognises, it could well be that the insistence that no Christian should seek to cut others off from Christ must be balanced by a warning that – according to the teachings

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[246] *Coming Out*, op.cit., pp.2-3.

[247] Ibid., p.2-3. Graham is quoted as saying, on a visit to San Francisco in 1997: 'What I... preach about... is the love of God. People need to know that God loves them no matter what their ethnic background or sexual orientation'. Graham could, of course, endorse the reality and difficulty of a homosexual orientation *without* endorsing a gay lifestyle. This is the position of the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops' (N.C.C.B.) Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth's pastoral letter *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers* in 1997. The full text of this letter was published as N.C.C.B., ibid. (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1997).

[248] *Coming Out*, op.cit, p.1.

[249] Ibid., p.1.

of Christ[251] and Paul[252] as recorded in scripture – there are ways of being which can cut a person off from salvation (if never from Christ's concern).[253] Moreover, as O'Donovan demonstrates, criticism of the tradition from the margins, the place of present alienation and disquiet, invites accusations of solipsism and crudeness.[254] However, despite the fact that it embraces these problematic theological positions the narrative in view is not unimpressive.

There is an imaginative richness to the church's foundational narrative that compels serious appraisal and enables it to answer many of O'Donovan's stern questions.[255] The narrative provides a genuinely impressive exemplar of discourse constructed in awareness of the eschatological horizon, with the responsibility to appropriate reality through creative acts of imagination that this carries. We are also bound to note that it represents an effective, reasonably full integration of tradition and experience. Although in the document *Coming Out* the content of the tradition is handled somewhat reductively, nevertheless a serious attempt is made to engage with historical actuality and to connect the development of the tradition with that of the community and the individuals within it. The authors of this narrative elaborate a tradition-derived narrative frame - that of 'salvation history' - reaching out beyond the experiences of their community to appropriate developments in the wider Church and attempting to show how their communal narrative has an analogue within the spiritual life of the individual. Moreover, this drawing together of experiences is carried on in

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[250] Ibid., p.3.

[251] Mt.18:57.

[252] 1.Cor. 10:23-24 - "'All things are lawful' but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful' but not all things build up'.

[253] For Ford, the most grievous sins are a disposition of disobedience before God and actions which deter others from sacramental fellowship with Christ; Ford, David F., *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1999), pp.164, 201, 266,274: 'there are delights that do not harmonize with love'. These are precisely the ways in which homosexuality has been understood by those who do not construe it as an authentic Christian option. For a historical overview of 'unforgivable' sin see Coate, Mary Anne, *Sin, Guilt and Forgiveness: The Hidden Dimensions of a Pastoral Process* (London: S.P.C.K., 1994), pp.31, n.21, p.46.

[254] O'Donovan offers this criticism of marginal perspectives: 'The feeling of invigorating new departure is due in considerable measure to the loss of antecedents from our view. Occasionally our contemporaries seize on moments in the tradition and identify their importance... But by and large the tradition... has been eclipsed by the shadow of the modern period'; O'Donovan, Oliver, 'Political Theology, Tradition and Modernity' in Rowlands, Christopher (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1999), pp.235-247, p.235. For the argument put the other way about, critiquing *dilettante* use of extra-traditional tropes, see Kee, Alistair, *Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1990), pp.257-267.

[255] Ibid., p.247.

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part through a renewal of Christian themes and images, which though unfamiliar does not affront one as something forced or otherwise unpersuasive.

A very fine example of the renewal of traditional themes is to be found in the way the authors of *Coming Out* handle the imagery of the cross. One might expect the U.F.M.C.C. to identify gay victims of rejection and cruelty with the suffering, crucified Christ[256] but here something quite different happens.[257] Far from being treated conventionally as the emblem of Christ's passion, the cross is problematised as the symbol of the Church that has sought to persecute gay people. Thus, the cross becomes again, as we may suppose it was for the original audience of the gospel,[258] an emblem of shame and pain. An emblem that conceals *as well as* represents the revelatory, divine triumph in which the believing community can only participate after a period of internal struggle. Here the U.F.M.C.C. has departed from much contemporary Christian self-constitutive discourse not through novelty but by reaching back into the tradition to uncover a recessive theme that mainstream Christianity tends to overlook. The development here is reminiscent of those feminist approaches to traditional themes Loades approves, where the intention is to *re*-read in order to recover historical or theological insights.[259]

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[256] In my view, any move to identification such as this exchanges the profound theological truth that through Christ's sufferings God completely comprehends human suffering from a human perspective for a more immediately comforting but far more deeply problematic thought.

[257] Surprisingly little is made of Christ's suffering in M.C.C. literature. The tropology of 'love', 'acceptance' and 'liberation' predominates. As well as *Coming Out* see the documents *U.F.M.C.C. Statement of Faith* (U.F.M.C.C. World Center) and *But is it Christian?* (East London M.C.C.), available via the Internet at [http://www.mccel.demon.co.uk/What%20we%20believe.htm] and [http://www.ufmcc.com/state.htm] (2-7-2001).

[258] Child, Heather and Colles, Dorothy, *Christian Symbols Ancient and Modern: A Handbook for Students* (London: G.Bell & Sons, 1971), pp.10-20.

[259] For the necessity of women and by extension other historically marginalized groups doing their reading in full consciousness of their historical particularity see Loades, Ann, *Feminist Theology: Voices from the Past* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), pp.193-194. Compare Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, 'Missionaries, Apostles, Co-workers: Romans 16 and the Reconstruction of Women's Early Christian History' in Loades, Ann (ed.), *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: S.P.C.K., 1996), pp.56-71; West, Angela, 'Sex and Salvation: A Christian Feminist Bible Study on 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:39' in ibid., pp.72-80.

3.3.c. Case Study: The Metropolitan Church – *Edwin's Story*:

We are fortunate in that the various congregations that compose the U.F.M.C.C. are generally enthusiastic about foregrounding narrated personal testimony, a position consistent with the organisation's novel doctrine of the authority of individual conscience.[260] Let us now consider one such autobiographical testimony in an attempt to see how far it represents a valid integration of traditional themes of discipleship with a modern person's experience.[261] Here we will not be concerned with strict, formal continuity with the traditional imaginative vocabulary but rather with evidence of an orientation of the self which might make appropriation of the traditional intention possible and determinative for future self-understanding. Our case study - *Edwin's Story*[262] - is drawn from the literature distributed by the San Francisco congregation.

The Puerto Rican subject of *Edwin's Story* narrates the foundational portion of his autobiography in considerable detail, covering the period from his sexual awakening to his initial commitment to the U.F.M.C.C. and taking in apparently significant experiences including early encounters with the tradition. The author recalls overwhelming feelings of sexual excitement, first experienced at age four when playing 'physician' with another male child, which recurred during his childhood and caused him to withdraw from his classmates in confusion and become an introverted child. His introspection found some outlet in the fervent Pentecostal religious life of the mainstream believing community to which his parents belonged, but at this point Christianity - as represented in the child's mind by his brutal father - was a terror as

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[260] The document *Coming Out* frames a quite specific doctrine of progressive revelation. The Bible is in some undefined sense the word of God, but is *subordinate to* the words that God speaks to us 'through' the Soul 'all the time' by means of 'feelings and thoughts'. These personal communications with God, which are not subject to the scrutiny or correction of the witness of the believing community (this is made clear), are the authoritative guide to authentic Christian being, to what is 'true and right'. In other words, one's self-understanding as a member of the believing community is to be formed entirely according to the lights of one's own conscience from the content that one's own reflection upon one's particular experience supplies. *Coming Out*, op.cit., pp.3-4.

[261] For other, extended personal testimonies of gay Christian experience see Boyd, Malcolm and Nancy Wilson (eds.), *Amazing Grace: Stories of Lesbian and Gay Faith* (Freedom, CA.: Crossing Press, 1991) and Glaser, Chris, *Uncommon Calling: One Man's Struggle to Serve the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

[262] Edwin -, (surname withheld), *Edwin's Story*, available via the Internet at URL:[http://www.mccsf.org/coming_out] (9-12-2001).

well as a consolation, the principal fear being that God would 'discover' his 'covert inner world'.[263]

Adolescence brought a deepening sense of isolation as the subject's peers began 'wooing girls' while he remained 'glacially apathetic'.[264] However, at the age of sixteen the subject found some real sense of self-worth through academic success and service in the community. He states: 'my life was reaching self-realisation, except for one thing, my sexual orientation' and reports a conviction that his homosexual orientation was an undeserved punishment from God.[265] This represents his first, unsuccessful attempt to integrate tradition and experience within self-constitutive discourse through narration.

Unsatisfied with this narration of his experience, the subject determined to seek a solution to his inner torment through study and academic enquiry. He entered a seminary and encountered Liberation Theology, through which he came to see his extremely negative self-integration as an invention of the institutional believing community that required radical re-examination. At this point, a decision was reached to: 'think for myself, to doubt whatever the church taught, always researching and confirming and, if still in doubt, to remain hesitant until I could freely choose what to believe.'[266] Here we see the beginnings of a new narration, one characterised by determination to be adequate to subjective experience even at the price of compromising aspects of the tradition.

Some two years later, having completed his studies, the subject immigrated to California and became involved with a research project in a Hispanic church. Challenged to be open about his sexual orientation by a college professor he 'came out' to himself, became sexually active on the 'cruising'[267] scene and shortly

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[263] Ibid., p.2.
[264] Ibid., p.2.
[265] Ibid., p.3.
[266] Ibid., p.3. Note that this somewhat reductive reading of liberation theology lends support to the M.C.C.'s doctrine of the sovereignty of individual subjectivity.
[267] This term is used by many homosexuals to refer to the practice of looking for casual sexual encounters in public spaces. See Berlant, Lauren and Warner, Michael, 'Sex in Public' in *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1998), pp.547-566, p.562; Bell, David and Binnie, Jon, *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p.86.

afterwards attended his first U.F.M.C.C. service. Here, overcome by emotion, he found: 'that one can be gay and experience the divine in a graceful way like no one that has never been at the margins can'.[268] In 1997, on the day Lutherans commemorate Luther's nailing up of the ninety-five theses, the subject nailed a rainbow flag[269] to the altar of his church 'as a statement of reconciliation between my calling to be a minister and my identity as a gay man'. In our terms, we could describe this as a statement of the conviction that it is possible to integrate the tradition and the intra-ecclesial experience of vocation with the experience of a sexually active, homosexual lifestyle. During that same service, the subject challenged church members to re-examine the 'selective literalism' of their use of the Bible and, meeting with hostility, left the congregation never to return.[270] The narrative ends with the subject joining the local U.F.M.C.C. and experiencing a transcendent sense of 'joy and freedom' in holding hands with another man there; in an epilogue this unnamed person is described in terms which evoke the presence of Christ.[271]

Our judgement of the value of this narration will be determined to a large extent by the prior judgements we make about the subject's authorial intention. Significant sections of the account evidence a thoroughgoing re-reading of pre-conversion experience in the light of later experience. This is both inevitable and in many respects desirable; however, where it takes place such that the original character of the experience is not viewed from a new perspective but evacuated in order to support that perspective there must be a suspicion of self-deception. On a positive reading, *Edwin's Story* is an attempt to achieve the necessary fine balance between these two possibilities. The subject's desire to re-integrate something painful in the light of new, comforting understandings opens a door to a kind of bold re-reading of experience and tradition which - while threatening to lapse into inadequacy to our criteria - also opens up the possibility of meeting them in quite new, unexpected ways. Thus, on one

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[268] *Edwin's Story*, op.cit., p.4.
[269] The rainbow and rainbow colours are often used in the United States, Europe and elsewhere as symbols of 'gay liberation' or 'gay pride'. The rainbow flag first appeared in the 1978 San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day March. The original was designed by local artist Gilbert Baker in response to a perceived need for a highly recognisable, perennial symbol. Prior to this adaptation, other counter-cultural groups such as the hippies and the Black Power movement had used the rainbow as a symbol.
[270] *Edwin's Story*, op.cit., p.4.
[271] Ibid., p.5.

hand, there is little evidence that participation in the marginal Christian community of the U.F.M.C.C. has exercised a countervailing influence to affirm the concrete nature of experience as, we hope, participation in a mainstream believing community would. On the other, however, there is evidence of the great power of the imagination to draw out new, positive meaning from experience that had hitherto been self-destructive because prohibitive of the appropriation and integration either of traditional commitments or of the subject's experience of himself as a sexual being.

Consider the subject's recollection of his initial homosexual awakening at the age of four. He recalls with absolute clarity the name, age and physical appearance of his playmate, the nature of their game and the physical thrill it produced in him, remarking 'Wilson was an amazing Puerto Rican beauty, not to be missed even at such an early age'.[272] If the latter statement is read as making an implicit claim that something like a *mature* homosexual identity was established in the subject at the age of four,[273] then there must be a strong suspicion of self-deception and therefore of inadequacy to the actuality of that experience. Any such claim would be controversial at best.[274] It is pertinent to ask, 'who is the narrator here'? The language and clarity of recollection exhibited all tend - I submit - rather to the conclusion that this event has been reworked in the imagination such that it is fully consistent with the self-identity of an adult gay man. The narrator not only speaks in that person's voice, but reflects that person's understandings. Admitting this, the account appears not as inadequate to the subject's youthful experience but precisely as adequate to that experience as elaborated through the further experience of mature reflection. This is equally true of other passages having to do with the subject's youthful sexuality. Thus:

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[272] Ibid., p.2.

[273] Unresolved tensions between 'essentialist' readings of homosexuality such as this and opposing 'constructionist' views inform all areas of public discourse about homosexuality; Bell and Binnie, op.cit., pp.41-44. The present Prime Minister has endorsed the essentialist view; Blair, Anthony, *New Britain: My Vision for a Young Country* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), p.186. Compare Money, John, 'Genetic and Chromosomal Aspects of Homosexual Etiology' in Marmor, J. (ed.), *Homosexual Behaviour* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p.66: 'There is no evidence to support the hypothesis that homosexuals or bisexuals of any degree or type are chromosomally discrepant from heterosexuals'. The clear implication is that sexual preference is predominantly a socially learned response, not an orientation fixed from the outset by genetic or hormonal factors.

[274] The problem here is not the claim that sexuality was recognisably present at age four, which is uncontroversial; Hughes, Fergus, P. et al., *Human Development across the Life Span* (Oxford: Macmillan, 1991), pp.135-139. The controversial claim lies in the crude essentialism of the idea that a mature sexual identity could be established at that age; ibid., p.139.

'Oh my God! What a view... two ravishing blond young high
school students were also getting ready. They both stared at each
other's bodies in ways at the time I did not understand, yet envied.
While yearning for their aroused sensual experience, I became curious,
yet stimulated by the device of flesh... that stood out like the torch in
the hands of the statue of liberty from their muscular bodies.'[275]

Protestations of incomprehension notwithstanding, it is apparent that here the
confusion of the child is not being reported straightforwardly 'as if' the subject were
still a child with a child's perceptions. The erotic gaze of the homosexual man has in
fact replaced childish confusion. The narrative voice is clearly if not entirely
unambiguously that of the adult. If this element of the autobiography is read as a
simple report of historical actuality then patently it represents a reduction of the
subject's experience of homosexual orientation to that endorsed by the U.F.M.C.C.
This kind of reduction would amount to a serious failure to be adequate to the actual
contents of experience. If, on the other hand, the narration is taken as the fruit of re-
readings of youthful experience this objection rather disappears. On this
understanding, the only difficult question to be answered is whether the integrative
narration and the re-reading of experience upon which it depends has preserved
enough of those aspects of the original experience which unsettled the subject and
made a re-reading necessary. Questions of this sort are unlikely to be settled in
abstraction from the communal setting(s) in which self-constitutive discourse takes on
its fullest meaning.

Having raised the possibility of self-deception and consequent inadequacy to the
contents of experience, we must now own that inadequacy to the contents of the
tradition is a more likely possibility in the self-constitutive discourse of marginal
communities. This is hardly surprising, since marginal communities are largely
defined by a willingness to exercise imaginative freedom to serve the requirements of
the particular group. However, it should not be denied that *Edwin's Story* represents
some sort of significant engagement with the wider Church and the particular,
Pentecostal development of its tradition. The Pentecostal church, its teachings and its
reinforcing structures (such as domestic piety) provide the imaginative space in which
the subject dwells for much of the narrative and into which his experience of his

sexuality is intruded such as to precipitate crises in his self-understanding. The most significant points of integration between the subject's personal experience and his encounter with the tradition are his use of the Lutheran celebration to proclaim his own self-integration and his occasional use of biblical language[276] or the language of vocation.[277] In these cases, the traditional events and words become the occasions within a lived narration of self-identity through which ideas hitherto regarded by some as quite alien to the tradition are communicated.

With O'Donovan in mind, it might be argued that any continuity with the tradition here is purely formal. Consider, for example, how far nailing a rainbow flag to an altar is a faithful act. It is a meaningful act accomplished in a 'Christian' space, but does it represent the fruit of valid integration of traditional understandings of sexual identity and gay experience? It could be argued that in fact this act is neatly symbolic of a clumsy juxtaposition of two potentially self-constitutive streams at the expense of one, the tradition. Yet, *Edwin's Story* demonstrates at least the possibility of subjects whose experience is apparently alien to the tradition finding in it a means to the integration and articulation of that experience and their spiritual aspirations through the exercise of the imaginative faculty.

The accounts which the U.F.M.C.C. offer represent attempts to narrate Christian self-identity in terms of a form of contemporary experience which otherwise threatens to exclude Christian identity as a possibility for substantial numbers of our contemporaries. The members of the U.F.M.C.C. seek to counter the notion that Christianity presents the world, particularly those self-identifying as homosexual, with a bleak, oppressive, joyless vision of human identity. As far as they seek to bring their experience to bear on traditional commitments with a corrective intention, to upset what they consider a wrong development of the Christian tradition that disbars gay people from faith-full identity, the members of the U.F.M.C.C. are not in error. It is possible that they should be censured, however, for occasionally totalising their extra-traditional experience such that the tradition is not considered seriously as a resource

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[275] *Edwin's Story*, op.cit., p.2.
[276] Ibid., p.4: "...many gays... have gone to the blood of the lamb and discovered that Jesus does want to liberate them, yes, but liberate them from the oppression of dogmatic religious institutions...".
[277] Ibid., p.4: 'my calling to be a minister'.

for expressing and analysing this experience. Where this occurs authentic, integrated narrations pass over into mere juxtapositions of tradition with experience. It is possible, too, that the U.F.M.C.C.'s distance from the mainstream believing community has closed off certain developments of the tradition from its members that could be of great value in their particular struggle to renew self-constitutive discourse. It is surprising, for example, to find no appreciation of the sexually ambiguous lives and writings of many saints, the 'sexual' content of which can be difficult to comprehend other than through the lens of gay experience.[278]

2.4.d. Concluding Remarks:

Our discussion of the U.F.M.C.C. tends to the conclusion that marginal ecclesial communities are impoverished by their distance from mainstream communities, where the tradition is appropriated in a fuller form. This tends toward a failure to be adequate to the tradition. However, our discussion has also disclosed the vitality of the imagination of these communities and the fact that much of their communal life consists in exploring the risky freedom in which the project of renewal of self-constitutive discourse through narration consists. To preserve this value as a resource for all, we must engage critically with the discourse of marginal believing communities. We should attend to their explorations of the relation between tradition and (their) experience as contributions to the discourse of the *whole* Church, without making the false assumption that this appreciation necessitates a decision of existential commitment. Then we can embrace the new imaginative possibilities marginal believing communities offer the project of narration – the vital, animating spirit of change - while continuing to lament the disunity of the Church and unacceptable developments of tradition or experience.

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[278] Admitting gay contemporaries as fellow Christians allows the late modern believer to appreciate without the otherwise inevitable senses of unease or falsity the passionate writings of saints such as Aelred of Rievaulx and Anselm on the companionable love of men. Of course, to anachronistically identify either of these figures in terms of our own categories of sexual identity is deeply problematic but the fact remains that their writings are most intelligible when set in the context of homosexual orientation. See Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. ME Laker (Kalamazoo, MI.: Cistercian Publications, 1977), esp. p.21; McGuire, Brian P., 'Love, Friendship and Sex in the Eleventh Century: The Experience of Anselm' in *Studia Theologia* 28 (1974), pp.111-155.

Chapter Three.

Towards Transformative Christian Narration.

3.1. Introductory Remarks:

I am confident that my theoretical account of the project of narration and the possibilities it opens up is well made out and firmly grounded. It remains, however, to demonstrate what the fruit of the project might actually *look* like in practice; that is, to show what sort of narratives might emerge from the practice of narration as detailed in earlier chapters. The purpose of the project of narration is precisely to enable authorial subjects and communities to appropriate, to own and integrate, their specific experience and tradition in an imaginative act as a basis for transformed self-constitutive discourse. As such, I cannot offer authentic 'first person' narration here without confining myself to the content of my own experience, which, I feel, is either insufficiently rich or too particular to allow me to demonstrate the promise of the project of narration. Thus, I will confine myself to the more modest, achievable, task of *describing* what *hypothetical* subjects and communities might include within the architecture of their narrations.

Three hypothetical cases are taken as starting points for the discussion in this chapter: those of a homosexual Christian man, a subject of a 'conversion experience' and a rural Anglican ecclesial community. Thus, the chapter moves from the immediate mode of self-constitutive discourse – autobiography - to take in two further modes – narration of a specific, identity-defining event and the biography of a local ecclesial community. Three different levels of specific focus for Christian self-constitutive discourse are dealt with through discussions of relevant experience and tradition; all three culminating in an attempt to describe in what the realisation of the project of narration might consist in each case.

At every point, I will be concerned to show more than the fact that narration can achieve an integrative synthesis of the tradition and certain extra-traditional experience. That in itself would be no great achievement since reductive and

otherwise distorting readings may bring the two together without being authentically integrative of or adequate to each. My aim, rather, is to show that when pursued in a way consistently informed by fidelity to our criteria for good narration, as elaborated in earlier chapters, narration allows for *change* in self-identity and an openness to *self-transformation in the future*. Let us turn now to see how this could be achieved in our first hypothetical case, that of a young homosexual man.

3.2. Self-Understanding: A Homosexual Christian Man:

3.2.a. Preliminary Remarks.

To begin with, let me concede that to describe homosexual experience as 'extra-traditional' is not entirely unproblematic. There *is* a great deal of resistance to the acceptance of homosexuality including sexual expression in many contemporary ecclesial communities. This view is common among conservative evangelicals,[279] within the strictly orthodox wing of Roman Catholicism,[280] and is represented in my own church by, for example, the thinking evidenced in the *St. Andrew's Day Statement*.[281] Yet, there is also evidence that these attitudes of what might be termed 'principled intolerance' are not in strict continuity with an unchanging, unambiguous tradition. We should not imagine that there is *no* traditional narrative frame available to Christian people of homosexual orientation; the question is rather whether what is available meets the cases of our homosexual contemporaries.

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[279] In America, the U.S. National Association of Evangelicals, which consists of c.40 conservative Protestant denominations, accepts civil rights for homosexuals but opposes attempts to grant 'special consideration to such individuals based upon their 'sexual orientation''. It is strongly opposed to forcing churches to adhere to civil rights legislation that would grant job protection to homosexuals. See Melton, Gordon, J., *Homosexuality: Official Statements from Religious Bodies and Ecumenical Organizations* (London: Gale Research, 1991), pp.141-142. In the U.K., The Evangelical Alliance has links to the web pages of 'ex-gay' groups which are members of the Alliance on its website. See URL: [http://www.eauk.org/contentmanager/content/information/wholenessinfo.cfm] (12-12-2001).

[280] During the Jubilee 2000 celebrations in Rome Pope John Paul II, angered by the presence in the city of homosexual activists celebrating 'World Pride Rome 2000', told the faithful in St.Peter's square that homosexuality is 'against nature's laws' and 'objectively disordered'.

[281] Issued by seven senior members of the Church of England in 1995, the statement rules out any alternatives to (heterosexual) marriage and 'singleness'. It is available via the Internet at URL: [http://www.episcopalian.org/EU/dispatches/andrews.htm] (10-10-2001).

Contemporary believers who can accept the active homosexual lifestyle as an authentic possibility for Christian self-identity[282] tend to do so as part of a wider and determinedly liberal approach to sexuality.[283] However, Boswell,[284] Ramey Mollenkott and Scanzoni[285] have argued that in past ages parts of the Church tolerated or even welcomed practising homosexuals within their communities. This would be consistent with other historical shifts in Christian reflection on sexual identity including, for example, changing ideas about divorce,[286] contraception,[287] the purpose of marriage[288] and indeed with a general move from relative indifference about sexuality to something like an obsession.[289]

We should be well advised, therefore, to regard acceptance of homosexual identity that includes genital expression as something that has - from time to time - existed as a recessive theme within the tradition; something which, occasionally in history, positive, Christian narratives have been constructed about. That homosexual identity does not form any real part of the *mainstream* tradition today should not blind us to

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[282] See, variously, Spong, John S., *Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); Thatcher, Adrian, *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Manual* (London: SPCK, 1993); Wink, Walter (ed.), *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress, 1999).

[283] In the liberal view of sexuality, (most) restriction of the self, including of sexuality, is seen as a denial of human being. This is opposed to what Davies and Loughlin term the 'traditional reticent' view in which subjective self-interest is subordinated to the creation of social structures; Davies, and Loughlin, op.cit, p.8. For further examples of avowedly non-liberal theology that is accepting of homosexuality, see Bawer, Bruce (ed.) *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy* (London: Free Press, 1996).

[284] Boswell, John, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1981); *The Marriage of Likeness: Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (London: Harper Collins, 1995).

[285] Ramey Mollenkott, Virginia and Letha Scanzoni, *Is the Homosexual my Neighbor?: Another Christian View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

[286] Pospishil, Victor J., *Divorce and Remarriage: Towards a New Catholic Teaching* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), pp.13-14; 49-54. Pospishil focuses on the development of two divergent traditions in the East and West, later supplemented by the Protestant traditions. For discussion of changes in the way that the relevant New Testament texts have been handled see Heth, William A. and Wenham, Gordon J., *Jesus and Divorce* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), pp.19-23; 45-98; 153-196.

[287] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, pp.219-220; Noonan, John T. Jr., *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp.5-6.

[288] In the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* (1662) marriage is said to be 'ordained' 'for the procreation of children', 'for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication' and 'for the mutual society, help and comfort'. In *Common Worship*, the order of these 'goods of marriage' is altered, the list reading: 'the delight and tenderness of sexual union', 'joyful commitment to the end of their lives' and 'the foundation of family life'.

[289] Brown traces this through an illuminating discussion of how the possible sexual component of Mary Magdalene's relationship with Christ has been variously handled over time; Brown, op.cit., pp.33-35.

the fact that it has been differently appropriated by those committed to the tradition in the past. Acknowledgement of this fact opens two significant possibilities. First, that homosexual experience inclusive of genital expression could perhaps be a part of a self-constitutive discourse that is no less adequate to the tradition than to contemporary experience. Second, that the traditional imaginative vocabulary may yet contain resources that could facilitate the creative leap to acceptance of homosexual experience within a scheme of Christian self-understanding.

However, what does not seem to be available at present in the tradition is a relevant, readily assimilable narrative frame. Or rather, such narrative frames *are* available to our homosexual contemporaries, but principally in the discourse of theological liberals whom, it could be argued, have insufficient regard for the principle of adequacy to tradition. Fortunately, we have other models of integration besides that characterised by extension of the tradition-derived narrative frame. I submit that the models of mediating narration and, in particular, dialogical narration, can both be of value here.

3.2.b. Description of Extra-traditional Experience:

Something as complex as sexual identity will, I submit, vary quite substantially from subject to subject. As this is so, I cannot proceed further without specifying *which* elements of experience this experimental narration is supposed to deal with. This in turn involves me in a commitment to specifying a hypothetical subject. For it is indubitably the case that sexuality is in part a function of, in part mediated by, subjective psychological factors and the context in which the individual grows up and has their existence.[290] Let me, then, offer a series of 'starting points' that will form the framework of the hypothetical subject's sexual experience and self-understanding.

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[290] There is a considerable body of still controversial research indicating that homosexual orientation sometimes has genetic or other physical signifiers, but my research indicates that none of the advocates of this position go on to argue that sexual identity is not largely a matter of nurture and individual psychology. See, in particular, Hamer D.H. et al., 'A linkage between DNA markers on the X chromosome and male sexual orientation'. *Science* 261 (1993), pp. 321-327; Hamer, D.H. et al., 'Linkage between Sexual Orientation and Chromosome Xq28 in Males but not in Females' in *Nature Genetics* 11 (1995), pp. 248-256; Turner W.J, 'Comments on Discordant Monozygotic Twinning in Homosexuality' in *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (1994), pp. 115-119.

Each of these must somehow be included within the final autobiography if it is to fulfil our criteria for good, adequate narration.[291] I take it that in real cases the subject might proceed in a similar way. In seeking to renew their self-constitutive discourse they would review and meditate upon their experience, assisted by the 'memory' and expectations of the discourse communities to which they belong, focussing particularly on whatever is potentially problematic.[292]

Let us say that our hypothetical subject 'James' is a white, homosexual Englishman in his middle twenties. He comes from a stable, prosperous - though not religious - family, is highly educated, and has a comfortable life as a newly qualified barrister. He has never doubted that he is homosexual, has made his family aware of this with little resulting upset.[293] He has had several male sexual partners - not least through his involvement with the 'gay scene'.[294] That involvement has now ended, however; in large part because James is in a romantic relationship of a year's duration with a man similar to himself.

James has become interested in Christianity through (heterosexual) friends he met at university who are committed churchgoers. Indeed, he has become an occasional churchgoer at his local Anglican church, a volunteer at a church-run youth club and even thought seriously about the possibility of homosexual marriage. However, despite all this James has not broached the issue of his sexual identity with other members of the ecclesial community. He is not ashamed of his sexuality, but feels that it is too early in his burgeoning relationship with the Church to 'rock the boat'. Most of James' homosexual friends, including his partner, are perplexed by but not

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[291] In setting out these starting points, I have, as far as possible, included aspects of my own subjective experience in order to import into them a sense of actuality.

[292] The reader will recall the principle of discernment that I outlined in Chapter Two. This states that in any situation it is extra-traditional, late modern experience (and attendant understandings) that might imperil the imaginative possibility of the appropriation of Christian self-identity that are to be given the highest priority within reflection upon the renewal of self-constitutive discourse.

[293] This aspect of the hypothetical subject's biography might strike a false note for some readers. However, although the 'coming out' process is very difficult for some homosexual people - as in *Edwin's Story* - this is not uniformly the case. Research suggests that family support groups such as Parent and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) help to make the process less traumatic; see 'Policy Statement on Homosexuality and Adolescence' in *Pediatrics* 92 (1993), pp.631-634.

[294] Gay pubs, bars and nightclubs are notorious for casual promiscuity. This aspect of homosexual existence is conceded by most pro-homosexual academics; witness Edwards, Tim, *Erotics and Politics: Gay Male Sexuality, Masculinity and Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.110.

especially hostile to his involvement with the Church, which they regard as irrelevant to their lives. James must go through the difficult process of trying to reconcile his homosexuality (and other self-constitutive experiences) with the tradition in a way that gives full weight to each if his self-identity is not to advance in a way that is prey to breakdown, with possible consequent self-loathing or loss of faith. Not merely narration, then, but narration of a character that can equip James for life in the future, is what is required.

For him, James' experience of his sexuality is not self-deforming but straightforwardly 'normal'. Nevertheless, it may be subjected to internal as well as external critique, both of which will be necessary if the necessity for the transformation of his self-constitutive discourse is to become a meaningful reality within his imagination. However, there will be little room for the transformation of self-constitutive discourse here until the subject grasps the possibility that such transformation is required. Positive renewal of self-constitutive discourse, then, must begin with James finding a way to own his experience without totalising the understandings he has hitherto derived from it such as to exclude imaginative advance. He must make space for the tradition to speak. This could be done by attending to conservative readings of homosexuality, but as we have noted the tradition is by no means univocal here. However, I submit that James could also find a basis for the self-questioning upon which an adequate renewal of self-identity in the commitment to serious engagement with the other we have identified as a necessary part of the discipline of narration.

Although James has experienced his homosexual lifestyle as something unproblematic, indeed fulfilling, this is not an understanding which all of his contemporaries would be willing to endorse. Quite beyond the believing community, and beyond any analogous religious community,[295] there are many people who not only find homosexuality alien to their own experience but also dispute that it is other

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[295] The existence of antipathy towards homosexuality among atheists and agnostics, as well as among members of religious communities which have traditionally privileged heterosexual identity, is amply evidenced by the continuing resistance of many in the armed forces to serving alongside known homosexuals. Compare Halley, Janet E., *Don't: A Reader's Guide to the Military's Anti-Gay Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) and Scott, Wilbur and Sandra Carson Stanley (eds.), *Gays and Lesbians in the Military: Issues, Concerns and Contrasts* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994).

than the fruit of a psychosexual pathology or immaturity.[296] Homosexuality is a contested issue in the late modern world.[297] Debates rage (literally) between politicians and military chiefs about 'gays in the military'; between teachers and others about 'Clause 28';[298] between campaigners for 'public decency' and the makers of television programmes such as 'Queer as Folk'.[299] Negative understandings of homosexuality are at a great remove from James', and he could never be expected to endorse them; indeed, for him to do so would be a species of dishonesty. However, the mere fact that such accounts of homosexuality are widely held by many of James' contemporaries should be sufficient to convince him that his sexuality is not 'normal' in an *unproblematic* way.[300] James may conclude in the course of reflection upon his self-understanding that his initial self-perception was correct. However, *admitting* a *possible* basis for self-questioning through taking seriously alien perspectives at least makes room for a potentially transforming tradition to speak to the subject's self-identity and so for the possibility of a revisable self-understanding that can meet the eventuality of change successfully.

Our hypothetical case could be subjected to other types of internal critique that would 'shake the foundations' of James' certainty about his self-constitutive experience.

[296] This idea was a commonplace in psychology, as well as sections of popular opinion, until the publication of the first 'Kinsey report' in 1948, which introduced the notion that *all* people are classifiable in terms of sexual identity on a continuum from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality (both accounted rare). See Kinsey, Alfred, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (London: W.B.Saunders Co., 1948). Contemporary mainstream psychologists and psychiatrists tend not to classify homosexuality as pathological; see for example the American Psychological Association's policy statements on homosexuality, available via the Internet at [URL: http://www.apa.org/pi/statemen.html] (10-11-2001). This does not mean that academic debate on the subject has been exhausted. For example, from an 'evolutionary psychology' perspective it would be possible to describe the *exclusive* homosexuality of our subject as pathological since his sexual existence serves no evolutionary purpose.

[297] As well as the debates listed in the main body of the text consider that, for example, homosexual couples in Britain have no right of automatic inheritance and there is no official, civil register of such unions. These facts suggest that many aspects of British society are still structured such as to deny the equal validity of homosexual identity with heterosexuality, despite the liberal professions of leading politicians. The contested nature of homosexual identity is not always acknowledged, it seems.

[298] This clause in legislation covering local government in the U.K., known by various names, prohibits the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools. For records of the most recent Westminster debates see *Hansard* (5-7-2000). Clause 28 has been repealed in Scotland, but not in England and Wales.

[299] 'Queer as Folk' is a contentious series about the lives of three successful, glamorous, Mancunian homosexual people - Stuart, Vince and Nathan, which was first broadcast on Channel 4 in 1998. It attracted mainstream conservative criticism for its frank portrayal of homosexual intercourse and for appearing to endorse a promiscuous lifestyle that includes the teenager Nathan.

There are grounds for questioning whether his experience of his sexuality as essentially unproblematic is not in large measure a function of his liberal upbringing or his wealth and privilege (both of which can insulate the subject from some of the harsh realities of existence). There must also be a concern that James has not seen fit to share his sexual identity openly with other members of the believing community.[301] In actuality, questions of all these sorts arise naturally in the experience of subjects as they test their own self-understanding against prevailing communal norms, or indeed the alternative communal norms which contemporary communications and patterns of life and work familiarise us with. Once more, I do not argue that either in our hypothetical case or more generally allowing such questions to speak in one's self-constitutive discourse will necessarily lead to a jettisoning of the original reading of experience, which may be quite correct. Admitting the possibility of legitimate critique does, however, allow the possibility of the revision of self-constitutive discourse.

3.2.c. Preliminary Discussion of Tradition:

When our subject James passes from consideration of his own experience to consider how the tradition might bear upon the question of his sexual identity, many hermeneutic and integrative strategies are open to him. In terms of integration, the approaches of evangelical, conservative Protestantism and orthodox Roman Catholicism, on one hand, and of bodies like the U.F.M.C.C., on the other, represent the limit points of the range of strategies. James could, then, deny his homosexual orientation and the fulfilment and so on that this has brought him in the past. Alternatively, he could deny that involvement with a Christian believing community necessarily involves the homosexual person in a difficult process of self-examination

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[300] Indeed, I would argue that for most openly homosexual people the experience of having one's sexual identity questioned must be a fairly routine one - albeit one which might not be appropriated because the mode of questioning suggests intolerance and bigotry rather than insightful critique.

[301] Responsibility for a failure of this sort is rarely due purely to deficiencies on the part of the subject, however. A fully open relationship between members of a given discourse community requires, minimally, a high degree of tolerance of those who deviate from existing communal mores. Despite the quite definite nature of Christian traditional commitments, the believing community should be capable of affording the member who is perceived as recalcitrant a high degree of understanding and some latitude of behaviour on the basis of the second great commandment and its Pauline developments (see, e.g., Gal. 6:1-5; Rom. 14:13-14). Certain New Testament texts do suggest, however, that there should be limitations upon this generosity within the believing community - witness 1 Cor. 6:11, for example.

within the Church.[302] However, neither of these extreme options is available within the experiential parameters of our hypothetical case since in the terms of this case each would represent a failure to meet our criteria for good narration. Some sort of *via media* is needed, then; I will attempt to offer one here by calling upon both mediating and dialogical models of narration. Note that in actual cases such a broad approach - useful here for purposes of demonstration - might not be necessary in order to achieve the imaginative integration of extra-traditional experience with traditional commitments.

Let us begin, as James might, by reviewing what the tradition says about sexual identity, specifically homosexual identity experienced as something positive. In looking back across the developing tradition to establish how 'homosexuality' has been read in the past I am, of course, veering toward anachronism. The idea of people as heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual is a relatively recent development.[303] Where the tradition touches on homosexuality it is usually upon homosexual behaviour, the psychosexual side is rarely to the fore. However, it is these biblical and post-biblical texts that deal with these acts that are most usually invoked in contemporary discussions of homosexuality.[304] Moreover, whatever the shifts in the constellation of concepts around same-sex romantic and genital love, it remains the case that these are phenomena known in some fashion to the relevant authors. All that is required here is a frank admission that in reading centuries old treatments of homosexuality we are always already interpreting in our own terms.

At the biblical root of the traditional understanding of homosexuality, there is ambiguity, as we saw in our discussion of the U.F.M.C.C.'s document *Coming Out*,[305] and elsewhere. It seems more than possible that Christ, Paul and the relevant Old

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[302] The U.F.M.C.C. represent joining the - their - believing community as an escape from self-doubt into self-acceptance. A more mainstream Christian view would be that membership of the believing community supplies the possibility and imaginative resources for adequate self-acceptance, but that this might well involve the Christian in ongoing, even lifelong, self-questioning.

[303] Nissinen, Marti, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*, trans. Kirsti Sjerna (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress, 1998), pp.v-vi.

[304] Understandable but regrettable. Proof texts on homosexuality are limited in number and in apparent immediate reference. The texts must be read as parts of the much larger biblical worldview, which consistently portrays only marriage and, in the New Testament, celibacy as acceptable versions of sexual existence.

[305] See above, pp.139-140.

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Testament authors disapproved of exclusively homosexual existence since it very definitely falls outside of the various modes of sexual existence which they more or less enthusiastically approve - marriage and celibacy in the New Testament, and marriage of various types in the Old Testament.[306] However, there is no *clear* and *consistent* biblical denunciation of homosexuality.[307] Even the most apparently unambiguous passages – Lev.18:22; 20:13[308] and Rom. 1:26-27[309] – could be read, *pace* the U.F.M.C.C., Boswell and others, as condemning things quite other in kind than James' experience of homosexuality. It might well be suggested, for example, that the Leviticus passages are concerned principally with offences against concepts of ritual purity[310] and that Paul was interested specifically in *heterosexuals* who abandon the pleasure they are entitled to by virtue of their own 'natures' for one to which they are not entitled.[311] Thus, without constructing a dubious argument from silence, James could take nothing from the biblical texts except the idea that while the authors of scripture did not endorse homosexuality, their disapprobation seems to have been exercised in a socio-religious context that may not resemble that of late

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[306] For discussion of the various types of marriage - monogamy, polygyny, levirate marriage, concubinage and so on – referenced in the Old Testament see Preuss, Horst D., *Old Testament Theology*, *vol.1* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1995), p.103ff.; Pedersen, Johannes, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, *vol.2* (London: O.U.P., 1959), p.60ff. As with the authors of the Old Testament, so still today (orthodox) Judaism views marriage as a religious obligation and affords no special role to celibacy.

[307] I do not want to claim that homosexuality is not really at issue even in those passages which have been understood to address it, but rather that the interpretation of these passages for the late modern context is complicated very seriously by the clear presence in these texts or their contexts of *other* concerns or specific socio-religious contexts.

[308] These two passages are clearly linked; the first, part of a list of prohibitions on sexual relations, states that homosexuality of a particular sort is a violation of the holiness code. The second, part of a corresponding list of penalties, states how this homosexual offence should be punished. Thus, 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination' and 'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them'.

[309] 'Because of this [idolatry], God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversions.' Note that the final saying alone raises many intriguing questions of interpretation.

[310] Leviticus could also be read as condemning the unproductivity of human seed involved in homosexual relations - a Jewish but not a Christian concern - or as being in some way to do with the alien religious practice of (homosexual) cult prostitution. Either of these readings might ground a setting aside of this text in the late modern situation. Any use of Leviticus in Christian discourse should, of course, be informed by the notion of the Law's partial abrogation in Christ – see Col.2:16.

[311] For this reading of Rom.1:26-27 see, for example, Boswell, op.cit., pp.109-112.

modernity.[312] In order to give traditional content to his autobiography James would need to turn from scripture to the subsequent, developing tradition.

I cannot endorse John Boswell's claim that as late as the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was no perceived conflict between Christian self-understanding and homosexual identity,[313] but there is a germ of truth in his argument. Boswell overlooks or seeks to explain away condemnations of what is very obviously homosexual love as well as homosexual practice by some of the patristic writers, including Chrysostom (d.407).[314] Nevertheless, it is true that what late modern people would remark as 'typically' homosexual self-expression saturates the literature of the earlier Middle Ages,[315] evidencing a Christian social context in which very strong same sex affection was endorsed.[316] The most popular secular work of the period, the Arthurian cycle,[317] incorporates innumerable references to same sex lovers (of a sort). The Knights of the Round Table weep for joy when they are reunited, routinely kiss

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[312] For a counter-view, see Gagnon, Robert A., *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), esp. pp.341-483. Gagnon argues that biblical prohibitions *become newly relevant* in our socio-religious context where to endorse homosexual love is to endorse promiscuity, exploitation and so on. There is a weight of intellect behind Gagnon's arguments, but they are over-determined by a highly negative view of the moral capacities of homosexual people; see esp.pp.469-485.

[313] Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, pp. 169-206, 269-302.

[314] Ibid., esp. pp.119-136. In *Against Opponents of Monastic Life*, Chrysostom rages: 'A certain new and illicit love has entered our lives, an ugly and incurable disease has appeared, the most severe of all plagues has been hurled down, a new and insufferable crime has been devised'. Cited ibid., p.47.

[315] There is, of course, no such thing as a typical homosexual or a typical heterosexual. The stereotypes of campness, sentimentality, pettiness and so on that attach to homosexual men have validity only where these men have (consciously or unconsciously) assumed such an identity the better to convey their sense of separateness from the heterosexual mainstream. However, certain patterns of affective behaviour can set a context for certain (quite separate) patterns of sexual existence. Thus, for example, while there is nothing inherently homosexual about two men holding hands or embracing, these are patterns of behaviour that (in Britain at least) can very easily be construed as having homosexual content, whereas other equally intimate behaviours such as passionate conversation are not.

[316] Compare Boswell, *The Marriage*, p.280.

[317] According to Matarasso, the Arthurian cycle received its final medieval form in the early thirteenth century but incorporates much that is earlier. It has a spiritual dimension, of course, and the 'Quest of the Holy Grail' element is tinged with mystical insight, but it was primarily a series of works intended for the entertainment of the court rather than the edification of the cloister. Matarasso, P.M. (trans. and ed.), *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), esp. p.25 and Sommer, H. Oskar, (ed.), *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1908-1916), which remains the definitive critical edition.

and embrace[318] and so on and pursue one another's company with an ardour that is quite strange to late modern (heterosexual) sensibilities.[319]

The endorsement of same sex love, though not necessarily of what James would ever have experienced, also found its way into the early medieval Church. St. Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-1167), in particular, writes of his youth as a time when he thought of nothing but loving and being loved by men. He became a Cistercian abbot, and incorporated his love for men into his Christian life by encouraging monks to love each other, not just generally but individually and passionately. He cited the examples of Jesus and the beloved disciple as guidance for this. 'Jesus himself', Aelred said, 'in everything like us... patient and compassionate with others in every matter, transfigured this sort of love through the expression of his own love, for he allowed only one - not all - to recline on his breast as a sign of his special love'.[320]

After the turn of the twelfth century Christian tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality, or of apparent homosexual practice, seems to have disappeared rapidly. At the start of the twelfth century, there was a great upsurge in popular intolerance, but this *cannot* be equated with a rediscovery or renewal of adherence to the root of the tradition for reasons that we have seen. There were also at this time violent outbursts against Jews,[321] Muslims, and witches. Women were suddenly excluded from power structures to which they had previously had access - no longer educated, for example, as once they had been. Many double monasteries for men and women were closed. Fear and suspicion seem to have been the order of the day, and it is in this context that antipathy toward homosexuality as such became a clear part of

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[318] Ibid. p.32: 'Delightedly he woke them, and when they saw who it was they embraced and kissed him; and that was but a beginning of the joy which each showed unto each'.

[319] Once the quest of the Grail is under way, Gawain does his utmost to catch up with Galahad. He is consistently thwarted by fate, however, since he is unworthy to be joined with the Good Knight. Matarasso, op.cit., p.76: 'I swear that if God gave me to find him I should never leave his side, if he but loved my company as I should his' and elsewhere.

[320] Aelred, op.cit., p.67.

[321] In 1180, the Jews were expelled from France. In England in the 12th century, there were no laws against Jews as such, though they suffered periodic mistreatment, but by the end of the 13th century (1290), the Jews had been officially expelled from the Kingdom under Edward I. For further discussion see Hindley, Geoffrey, *The Book of Magna Carta* (London: Guild, 1990), pp.99-114; Mundill, Robin R., *England's Jewish Solution: Experiment and Expulsion 1262-1290* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1998).

the tradition, whereas previously it had been present only rather ambiguously (and never universally).

During this time, there were many popular diatribes against homosexual people, which in some respects recall those heard in late modern society - suggesting, for example, that they molest children and violate natural law.[322] Within a single century, between the period of 1250 and 1350, almost every European state passed civil laws demanding the death penalty for homosexual practice. Speculation on the reasons for this need not be entirely idle. It is surely worth noting, for example, that this was an increasingly fearful age, with Europe beset by economic decline and the Black Death. What is certain, however, is that this popular reaction affected the development of the tradition a great deal, just as later in the modern period the hostility of the tradition was to inform wider social attitudes. In the early 'penitentials', for example, homosexual relations had been regarded, where they were explicitly disapproved of, as comparable to heterosexual fornication for married people.[323] During the 13th century, because of the popular reaction, synods pronounced against homosexuality[324] and writers including Thomas Aquinas tried to portray it as one of the very worst sins.[325]

The attitudes to homosexuality that came to the fore in the thirteenth century have remained, apart from recent liberal projects, largely unchanged through the development of the tradition during the modern age. However, these negative attitudes

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[322] Jordan, Mark D., *The Ethics of Sex* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.81-82.

[323] Ibid., pp.81-82. Jordan does note, however, an attempt to single out homosexual acts by Peter Damian as early as 1050.

[324] Third Lateran (1179) recommended confinement to a monastery as penance for sodomy for clerics and excommunication for laity, and this recommendation was incorporated into the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX in 1234. A spate of local synods, many from northern France (Paris, 1196 and 1212; Rouen, 1214 and 1235; Bezier, 1246; Le Mans 1247; Clermont 1268) followed with similar legislation against sodomy. Further ecclesiastical restrictions can be found in monastic regulations; the Dominicans, Carthusians and Cistercians all focused on building prisons for sodomites by the beginning of the thirteenth century. For extended discussion see Bullough, Vern L. and James Brundage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1982); Richards, Jeffrey, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990), esp. p.143.

[325] My reading of Aquinas is based largely upon that offered by Smith, Janet E. in her 'Aquinas's Natural Law Theory and Homosexuality', available via the Internet at [URL:http://www.udallas.edu/phildept/smith/Articles,%20mine/set%20of%20mine/Aquinas'%20Natural%20Law%20Th eory%20and%20Homosexuality.htm].

do not represent anything that is indispensable to the tradition. How could they, when for a longer period than it has been definitely hostile the tradition was rather indifferent to homosexual identity? Much of the contemporary Church is prepared to allow for (or forgive) pre-marital sex, divorce and other derogations from the apparent dominical institution of strict celibacy or lifelong marriage which it receives as the root of its understanding of human sexual identity *because* it attends in a dialogical fashion to the exigencies of late modern experience. If those within the mainstream believing community who are committed to the tradition can handle it with sufficient freedom that it continues to be a living reality in the lives of those heterosexuals who 'fall short', the law of love must surely compel them to extend the same privilege to homosexuals.[326] Ecclesial communities have changed their 'practical' stance on issues such as pre-marital sex in the light of experience; further, they have changed their *formal* teaching on separate issues such as usury and slavery[327] (on which matters the New Testament *is* clear) in the light of experience. Thus, they can and should change some elements of their evaluation of homosexuality.

I have sought here to offer a preliminary account of relevant Christian tradition of the kind that our hypothetical subject James might use to get beyond the perceived radical incompatibility between his positive experience of his sexual identity and the 'traditional' rejection of homosexuality. I submit that my interpretative account of the tradition opens an imaginative space for the integration of the two streams of self-constitutive experience by undermining the received wisdom that commitment to the core of the Christian tradition necessarily disbars homosexuals from the believing community. Note, however, that I have not sought to handle the tradition reductively. I have not sought to claim any biblical or theological *sanction* for the *straightforwardly* positive evaluation of late modern homosexual identity[328] and have,

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[326] In the same way, those homosexual people who express their sexuality in ways that flout the commitments that are genuinely inseparable from any version of the tradition, including - for example - the rejection of promiscuity - stand under an equal condemnation with heterosexuals who do so.

[327] For a detailed version of the argument linking these accomplished changes with a possible change in attitudes towards homosexuality see Corvino, John, 'The Bible Condemned Usurers, Too' in *Harvard Lesbian and Gay Review*, Autumn (1996).

[328] For attempts to do so on the basis of the David and Jonathan story in 1 and 2 Sam. see Horner, Tom, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times* (Philadelphia, PA.: Westminster, 1978), pp.26-39; Terrien, Samuel, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia, PA.: Fortress, 1985), p.169. For counters to these specific readings see Nissinen, op.cit., pp.55-56.

of course, preserved heterosexual marriage and celibacy as the two normative states for Christian sexual identity. I have, further, established precisely where the discourse of the believing community might function to critique James's experience by drawing attention to the traditional rejection of promiscuity, which would be an element of our hypothetical subject's past experience through his involvement with the 'gay scene'.

Our hypothetical subject James now has a newly constructed narrative frame within which to go about the business of re-integrating the demands of his subjective experience and his commitment to the tradition. Preliminary narration of tradition of the sort offered here, predicated upon an account of extra-traditional self-constitutive experience, allows the subject to find a potential space for this reappropriation in the tradition's *historical* ambiguity toward homosexuality and *present* liberal attitudes toward many comparable problematic states of sexual identity.

At this point, however, there is little content to James's autobiographical narrative beyond what was already present before the narration of tradition. He requires, or at least could benefit from, a series of imaginative strategies that would allow him to own his experience in a positive Christian way, rather than merely accepting himself as he is while disdaining some aspects of past experience as inconsistent with membership of the believing community. Until this is accomplished, the renewal of self-constitutive discourse remains but partial, a way to construe oneself in terms of what is currently given rather than a way of reaching forward to a new existential telos. James in particular would benefit from finding ways to see what positive role he and other gay people could have within the believing community,[329] to approach the issue of 'coming out' within the believing community and to re-evaluate past, un-Christian behaviour. Such ways of understanding are made available by another narrative strategy - mediating narration.

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[329] As we have seen, the tradition, properly conceived of, does seem to allow for the possibility of a homosexual Christian identity. However, since there is no positive traditional sanction for such an identity there must be a concern that the homosexual person in the mainstream believing community will always understand themselves in terms of 'tolerance' rather than of glad acceptance. While in actual cases where the homosexual person is not genuinely welcomed this might be unavoidable, it remains the case that mere tolerance is an inadequate basis for a life lived with the existential telos of total self-giving to God and to the other. Finding one's particular 'gift' within the believing community locates one as - in scriptural metaphor - a true member of the one body of which Christ is the head.

There are, as our historical review and other discussions have shown, a range of self-validating stories available to people who have experiences both of homosexual identity and commitment to the tradition. However, the point is not to tell a story - *any* story - which includes both but to tell the *best possible* story, one which reflects the fullest possible range of our hypothetical subject James' experience in a way which does not totalise any one element and therefore is likely to be capable of application and imaginative revision in every situation.

James is apparently a difficult case in that he is concerned to validate himself and his experience as a *practicing* homosexual within the mainstream believing community. There are few existing narratives told within the believing community that affirm the worth of active homosexual people as such, but it is not difficult to see how James could fashion these. He could, for example, 'explain away' the apparent hostility of the tradition by privileging contemporary communal norms or by arguing that the ethics of the Bible are 'ideal' and not 'real' and so compromise with it is a proper part of Christian life.[330] Moreover, countless accounts of other, earlier liberative projects are available and these could serve as template for renewed self-understanding. This is not to claim that the historical experiences of women and hitherto marginalized ethnic groups (for example) are anything more than weakly analogous to those of homosexual people,[331] merely to point out their value as a resource for homosexual people seeking to find a sense of *their* perhaps quite different place within the believing community.

It is likely that James could also derive a sense of place and belonging by attending to exemplary autobiographies. We have repeatedly warned against the dangers of self-deception inherent in renewing self-constitutive discourse in terms of anachronistic or otherwise inappropriate exemplars. Here, however, it is possible to admit that James could look to the careers of 'homosexual' and other sexually problematic Christians in the past to find *inspiration* for living 'differently' within the 'normal' community.

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[330] We should naturally expect such a move to be made only *after* serious reflection upon the tradition over against other sources of content for self-constitutive discourse. Without this, self-constitutive discourse would lapse into inadequacy to our second criterion.

[331] A claim of this sort would, I assume, be offensive in some of its details to women and others members of historically marginalized groups within the believing community who cannot accept that homosexual identity is an authentic Christian option..

More useful still would be the biographies of other ordinary, late modern homosexual people who have already undertaken the hard task of being adequate to their experience and the tradition simultaneously. While these are not made available widely within the mainstream churches, they are accessible through the publications of marginal groups such as the U.F.M.C.C.[332] Such biographies would be, surely, a principal resource for James in his search for fresh, immediately relevant perspectives on opening his sexual identity to other Christians and re-evaluating his past promiscuity. Well-known homosexual Christians, such as Dag Hammarskjöld,[333] Benjamin Britten[334] and W.H. Auden,[335] have, of course, been treated in literary biographies that are very widely available.

3.2.d. Integrative Narration for Adequate Self-Constitutive Discourse:

I am now ready to embark upon the most ambitious phase of my strategy thus far, an attempt to realise the project of narration for the renewal of adequate self-constitutive discourse in the hypothetical terms of our case. I will not recap the full range of experience that this narration must take in since I trust that this has been well to the fore in the discussion to this point. Suffice it to say, then, that the goal of this sub-section is to describe the precise content of an autobiography that would prove adequate to a positive experience of homosexual identity and to a commitment to respect traditional insights into the status of homosexuality by uniting both in a new, mutually illuminating and corrective imaginative synthesis.

James would be well advised to begin his spiritual autobiography with an affirmation that such a thing is possible for him. As we have seen, narration of one's identity as in continuity with the mainstream Christian tradition becomes an imaginative possibility

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[332] One very helpful book here is O'Neill, Craig and Kathleen Ritter, *Coming Out Within: Stages of Spiritual Awakening for Lesbians and Gay Men* (New York: Harper Collin, 1992). Using an eight-stage model dependent upon and illustrated with real case histories, the authors explore the experience of loss as a catalyst for personal and spiritual transformation and growth within the believing community.

[333] Hammarskjöld was celibate and did not broadcast his sexual orientation, this leads van Dusen – unusually - to doubt his homosexuality whereas most biographers acknowledge it. See Urquhart, Brian, *Hammarskjold* (London: Bodley Head, 1973); compare van Dusen, Henry P., *Dag Hammarskjöld: A Biographical Interpretation of 'Markings'* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967).

[334] Britten had a long-term, committed relationship with the tenor Peter Pears; Oliver, Michael, *Benjamin Britten* (London: Phaidon, 1996).

for homosexual people once the received understandings of the 'gay community' and those Christians who represent homosexuality as utterly repugnant to the tradition are shaken by the mutual interrogation to which we are opened by committed social engagement. A storied version of our discussion to this point, then, perhaps with the addition of details about precisely how and when the subject grasped the possibility of an adequately Christian self-understanding, would serve to locate the ground of his spiritual autobiography within the history of his experience and self-understanding. This prolegomenon complete, James could pass with assurance to a more conventional autobiographical narrative.

James should describe his youth, including his sexual awakening, in terms that reflect his own circumstances. Thus, there could be little in the way of lament over serious repression or confusion. These experiences do not fall within the parameters of our hypothetical case as described above, and so to borrow them from the testimonies of other homosexual people would be to introduce an element of untruthfulness. Should James wish to represent his youth authentically as somehow problematic, he might instead have to tell a story of loving acceptance that is by turns positive and negative. We should expect, on one hand, a description of the relief of life in a home where parental love and understanding was always available even when other experience (of schoolboy bullying or taunting, perhaps) proved traumatic. This reflects the nature of the self-constitutive experience under discussion as it was experienced *at the time*. However, we should expect this to be balanced by an admission that, *in retrospect*, from the perspective of the adult's existential commitments, the loving and accepting home environment was deficient in that it did not mediate a knowledge of the Christian tradition, and misleading in that it bred a sense of *easy* - even arrogant - self-acceptance. James must be careful to distinguish the narrative voices he uses to articulate his experience.

The idea of life as a search for self-acceptance and acceptance by others that was bought at a price neither too costly (at the price of self-deformation) nor too cheap (without self-examination) could at this point become an organising motif for James'

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[335] See the discussion of Auden below.

autobiographical narration.[336] Admitting the imposition of such a scheme to be part of the retrospective gaze of the Christian adult seeking self-integration, James could perhaps elaborate this motif both in terms of human experience generally and the Christian way of discipleship in particular. For it reappears repeatedly through world history in accounts of those seeking liberation and in the history of the Church in accounts of those struggling to be adequate to the tradition or their conscience in perilous circumstances. Thus, James could represent himself to himself by analogy with, for example, African-Americans struggling for a place in the mainstream of U.S. society which would allow them full civic participation *and* their own cultural identity, or with women seeking ordination in the churches who faced similar problems.

As far as adequate representation of adult existence is concerned, James would need above all to provide accounts of his developing sexuality and his movement toward the believing community. The two could be narrated in a great variety of ways. The purely contemporaneous perspective is not really an option, because this only supplies the experiential 'raw material', which must then be re-appropriated imaginatively in order to serve the end of integrated renewal of self-constitutive discourse. The retrospective perspective is better since it can introduce James's commitment to the tradition into his accounts of all his past experience and reflection. Thus, this retrospective narration of autobiography aims consistently at self-integration of a sort. There is perhaps a danger in this kind of narration that the tradition could come to distort self-awareness such that extra-traditional experience is inadequately treated. We should certainly expect this danger to be countered by James's existence within communal settings that function to recall him to the reality of his past existence. Even so, a version of narration that incorporated *both* the contemporaneous *and* the retrospective perspectives would be more satisfactory than a purely diachronic reading. This could be achieved by means of some sort of authorial commentary. James would narrate his experience as if in terms of contemporary reporting, glossing it so as to reflect the transformation of his self-understanding in the light of his new-

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[336] This is, of course, only one possible way of conceiving of one's growth as a Christian. Yet, it is certainly not one which would be appropriate only for homosexual people or others at the margins; self-respect and searching self-examination are surely required of all Christians.

found commitment to the Christian tradition. Thus, we might expect something like the following:

> 'I became sexually active in my late 'teens, after meeting other gay men
> at University. I was not traumatised by this experience and most
> of my partners remained friends, which helped me toward a sense
> that my feelings - though different from those of the majority –
> were shared with and understood by many others. However, looking
> back I regret that I had no spiritual adviser who could have helped me
> to see self-acceptance as about far more than enjoying sexual pleasure
> without guilt or self-disgust. I am glad that I found happiness by becoming
> an active gay man, but sorry that I did so when I was too naïve or blinkered
> to appreciate the joy of living in the way of Jesus and that aspects of me
> therefore remained unfulfilled. Becoming a Christian has not changed
> my sexuality, but it has changed the nature of my commitment to my
> partner and how I see that developing'.

Finding a way to integrate one's own particular qualities and past experiences into one's sense of oneself as a member of the believing community is an absolutely indispensable part of the project of narration for the renewal of self-constitutive discourse. This being so, we should expect James to locate himself within a web of stories which identify his personal characteristics and development to the present from the perspective of life, love and service within his church. As a complement to these, we might also find him telling confessional narratives from a - *his* - definitely homosexual perspective. This depends, of course, on whether there could - or should - be a distinctive homosexual Christian perspective on traditional commitments that homosexual people share with the wider believing community. There *may*, for example, be an insightful homosexual reading of the figure of the Virgin,[337] or of the relationships between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple[338] or Peter.[339] If this seems improbable, let us recall the existence of a great variety of earlier liberative readings

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[337] At least, there would seem to be something in the baroque piety that attaches to the Virgin that could appeal to 'camp' homosexual men.

[338] The idea that Jesus and the Beloved Disciple were homosexual partners is a familiar theme within 'gay Christian' discourse. For a rare insightful, creative application of this otherwise deeply problematic idea, see Goss, Robert E., 'The Beloved Disciple: A Queer Bereavement Narrative in the Time of AIDS' in Goss, Robert E. and West, Mona (eds.) *Take Back the Word: Reading of the Bible* (Cleveland, NJ: Pilgrim Press, 2000).

[339] Peter's relationship with Christ in the Synoptic Gospels, by turns loving and marred by misunderstanding or rejection, could be understood on the analogue of a homosexual man 'coming out' to heterosexual male friends.

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of elements of the tradition that are now quite widely accepted.[340] Given the complexity of individual experience these confessional narratives, elements of the autobiographical whole, could be of an almost infinitely various nature.

Homosexual identity is a major feature of James's experience that must be addressed in detail in his autobiography, but it is not the *whole* of his extra-traditional experience and to represent it as such would be a distortion. This is a particularly important point given that concentration upon sexuality as an absolutely central issue in human self-identity seems to be a relatively recent development of Christian and wider reflection. As far as sexual and allied models of being are concerned, James could perhaps understand himself in relation to younger Christians by analogy with an uncle, since clearly the parental model of self-understanding would not be particularly appropriate. Yet, other issues besides sexual identity certainly could and should speak in our subject's self-understanding as part of the believing community.

We have described James as a wealthy, well-educated lawyer and in so doing identified three elements of his extra-traditional experience which could be re-appropriated in terms of Christian vocation. We have already observed that he volunteers his spare time at a church-run youth club (which sits well with the avuncular theme, incidentally), and thus he might be well disposed toward dispensing his many gifts charitably. Were this so, James would find the roles of benefactor, teacher, guide, defender of the innocent and so forth available within the traditional imaginative vocabulary and ready for employment in the articulation of his self-identity as a Christian. He might also, by extension, look to the biographies of other Christians who have lived out these roles successfully in order the better to imagine what their realisation might involve. The tradition is, of course, rich in inspirational examples of self-sacrifice and generosity. To give a specific example, the autobiography of a figure such as the Roman Catholic priest and theologian John McNeill[341] would present James with many imaginative resources for the integrative narration of his self-understanding as a sexually active homosexual man.

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[340] Witness, for example, McFague, Sallie, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1987), which argues for feminist 'models' of God as mother, lover and friend.
[341] McNeill's book *The Church and the Homosexual* (New York: Beacon Press, 1993), originally published in 1976, broke open the question of homosexuality in the Roman Catholic church. In 1978 at

McNeill's published autobiography *Both Feet Firmly Planted in Midair: My Spiritual Journey*[342] presents a picture of traditional Catholic piety from the perspective of a rather elderly homosexual clergyman. As such, one might expect that much of the experience it relates would be of little interest or use to our young, lay subject James and indeed this is so. There are descriptions of saints' days, chaplaincy, favourite prayers, retreats, church obligations, and obedience to authority. There is an in-depth account of McNeill's (eventual) agonising decision to differ with church officials.[343] McNeill's story is in many of its details one of very traditional piety; yet from that story there emerges a very contemporary spirituality of fidelity to the Holy Spirit speaking in one's own heart which James could appropriate in an attempt to tell his story in a way adequate to all its elements.

McNeill's life story exemplifies the principle that we have advanced in our discussion of our James's case; namely, that the experience of gay and lesbian people themselves must be at the centre of their reception of the tradition if their self-constitutive discourse is to be genuinely adequate to our criteria for good narration. McNeill's autobiography also serves as a manual on spiritual growth. The spirituality that he portrays is immediately accessible to the late modern person not able to appropriate the tradition's more obscure developments. There are no visions, no heavenly voices, no ecstatic experiences, and no altered states of consciousness. McNeill's foundational experiences are those of ordinary people like James, including the stresses and strains of family life, neurotic quirks, accidents of history and the struggle to maintain ideals.

We have already noted the availability of literary biographies of other, well-known homosexual Christians. Here, James might derive much benefit from the life-story of W.H. Auden. Apart from his literary gifts, Auden was a practicing Anglican[344] and a

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a Vatican meeting of the world's Jesuit leaders, Pope John Paul II denounced McNeill by name. McNeill was subsequently silenced and in respectful obedience he maintained silence until speaking out again in 1986 against the Vatican's declaration that homosexuality is to be considered objectively as a disorder.

[342] McNeill, John J., *Both Feet Firmly Planted in Midair: My Spiritual Journey* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

[343] This decision was precipitated by the events of 1986; see footnote 727.

[344] For the importance of his faith to Auden, see Davenport-Hines, Richard, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), pp.29-31, 201-204. Buell alleges an element of posturing in many of Auden's

sexually active homosexual. The value of his example for James lies in the fact that he too moved from promiscuity to monogamy after falling in love with his life-long companion Chester Kallman. Dorothy Farnan relates that this relationship was life changing for Auden,[345] that it enhanced his poetry, brought him companionship and joy[346] and unleashed his great capacity to love devotedly. A useful if not uncomplicated model for James in his reflection upon life with his partner.[347]

3.2.e. Concluding Remarks:

We have seen how the project of narration could function not only to ground but also to supply the content of an autobiography in which experience and traditional commitments are adequately integrated. Using narratological strategies and principles detailed earlier in this thesis, we have shown that our hypothetical subject James could come to understand the two apparently incompatible guiding themes of his existence as compatible elements of a single, Christian self-constitutive discourse. The example chosen here, that of a homosexual man drawn to the mainstream believing community, was a hard test for claims made earlier for the value of the project of narration. However, I am confident that although debates over the *ethical* and *metaphysical* status of homosexuality, and especially that of homosexual practice, will continue among Christians, I have established the possibility of a homosexual person understanding themselves as a Christian in a way adequate to our criteria for good narration. James could, on this basis, go on to develop his relationship with the believing community and his relationship with his partner as two mutually informative parts of an integrated, Christian existential telos.

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beliefs but offers little to substantiate this charge; Buell, Frederick, *W.H. Auden as a Social Poet* (London: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp.42-43.

[345] Farnan, Dorothy, *Auden in Love* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p.15.

[346] The companionship and joy must have been a little diluted, however, by Kallman's persistent infidelities.

[347] For further discussion see Callan, Edward, *Auden: A Carnival of Intellect* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1983), *passim*.

3.3. Crisis: A Conversion Experience:

3.3.a. Preliminary Remarks:

In the previous section, we saw how enduring themes within experience can be brought together with the tradition of the ecclesial community in an interpenetrating, mutually informative fashion that can ground a securely and authentically Christian sense of self and corresponding orientation to the future. Of course, not all experience that is accounted decisive for the development of self-identity is construed in the same way as abiding factors like sexuality. Very many of us believe we can identify experiences more significant than mere reactions to or perceptions of random external events that, whatever the subsequent endurance of their influence upon us, irrupted into existence with apparent suddenness. The experience of falling in love can be of this order, as can a Christian 'conversion experience' - the focus of this section. Whether in fact these experiences are quite so irreducible as we perceive them to have been is a significant question. However, it is far less problematic to state that such perceptions do exist, and thus inform the way in which the relevant experiences are appropriated within our self-constitutive discourse.

The term 'conversion experience' will be given content below, when I come to specify the hypothetical subject's range of experience. It should be sufficient, initially, to state that for the purposes of making my argument for the project of narration in as full a way as possible, I have imagined a case very different from the one discussed previously. As well as discussing a particular experiential event, rather than general experiential themes, I want to explore how narration can deal with experience that threatens to do violence to existing self-constitutive discourse, rather than merely complicating, challenging or enriching it. My vehicle for doing so is an exploration of conversion from one positive set of religious beliefs to another. Here, unlike in the previous case, the imaginative vocabulary of the Christian tradition is at least potentially not a challenging addition to or corrective of self-constitutive discourse so much as it is a replacement for, a displacing of, another imaginative vocabulary. Whereas on our construal James was in fact living as a homosexual Christian man, but lacked an adequate understanding of this identity that could ground his development

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as such, we will find our next hypothetical subject unable even to hold his problematic experiences together 'in parallel' let alone as parts of an integrated whole. Here again, though, the goal of the project of narration will be precisely a successful re-integration of experiences and understandings that will permit an effective re-orientation of the self.

3.3.b. Description of Extra-traditional Experience:

Once more, as in the previous section, I am obliged to specify an hypothetical subject, for the project of narration is concerned not with theological abstractions, but with the discourse that forms and informs particular subjects and communities. Dealing once more with an individual, and bound, as I feel I am by my own range of experience, to talk about a young man, I have nevertheless sought to introduce as many features that will differentiate this case from the previous one as possible.

Let us say, then, that our hypothetical subject is a man of Sikh background in his early twenties. Tariq is taking a 'gap' year between leaving his university and starting work as a draughtsman in his uncle's architectural practice in Birmingham, his home town, where he hopes to obtain professional training and, ultimately, accreditation. Tariq, 'Terry' to some of his friends, is in some respects a rather commonplace person - like many of his friends and contemporaries both Asian and white British he is intending to defer leaving home until he can afford to, spends much of his income and time socialising and is a keen footballer and cricketer. Bright and concerned about his future, Tariq would never be thought of as a deep thinker. However, he has from an early age had a deep reverence for his Sikh ancestry. His father, who attends the gurdwara infrequently, attributes this to the attentions lavished on Tariq as a boy by his maternal grandfather (now deceased), a would-be traditional Asian patriarch with a deep commitment both to Sikhism and the Sikh community. The remainder of Tariq's extended family, to none of whom he is especially close, exhibit a similarly diverse range of religious experiences. Most of Tariq's relatives of his father's generation share the same emotional but not especially religious attachment to Sikhism, but there are a few in that generation and several more in the succeeding one who have discovered or rediscovered a more deeply held faith.

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Until recently, Tariq could have been numbered among this group of his relatives, but of late he has begun to have doubts about the religion of his birth. From an early age he understood that, more so perhaps even than Judaism, his is a 'this worldly' religion focussed upon serving God through ethical conduct. This aspect of Sikhism still has great appeal for him, and he remains proud that he became a Khalsa (joined 'the Khalsa') in the Amrit ceremony as a teenager. He still considers himself one who puts aside his own ego in order to honour the memory of Guru Gobind Singh through the way he lives his life, as he promised to do. The difficulties Tariq has are more specifically 'religious' in nature.

Having, as a person interested in religious questions and a young 'man of the world', looked at other religious beliefs, Tariq finds some aspects of Christianity more attractive than their counterparts in Sikhism. In particular, he finds the universalism of Christianity more appealing than the approach of Sikhism, which claims to teach the truth while accepting the validity of other faiths. He finds the idea of the incarnate Son of God bizarre, but appreciates the radicalness of the claim this idea seems to make on human conduct. Tariq is quite clear in his own mind, though, that he prefers Sikh ideas of community to the essentially irreligious lives of many of his nominally Christian friends; it is no part of his aspiration to be 'like' these non-Sikhs.

Essentially, though he may not express it in these terms, Tariq is a naturally 'spiritual' person on a journey away from one set of religious convictions to another. We meet him at an early stage of that journey. Looking beyond Sikhism to Christianity, he is nevertheless unsure (as we should expect) about much that he is learned about Christian belief and quite unattracted, certainly in religious terms, by the non-Sikh culture around him. In actuality, this range of personal experience could issue in a diversity of narrations, which could ground many different sorts of existential choices. Tariq might, for example, continue to think of himself as a Sikh, but merely congratulate himself on his broad-mindedness. He might come to understand all religions as somehow valid, or as essentially one, and so begin to construct an idiosyncratic religious viewpoint of his own. He might equally come to the decision that whatever the ethical merits of the various faiths, their claims to be 'the truth' are mutually contradictory and so begin to fall away from any particular religious

commitment. In order to test the value of the project of integrative narration let us assume that Tariq understands himself to be undergoing some kind of conversion experience, an experience that demands he be true to his positive experience of Sikhism, while appropriating his increasing sense of commitment to the Christian faith.

The idea of the 'conversion experience' is, of course, a highly controversial one. It excites heated debate within the ecclesial community between evangelicals, conservatives and liberals - all of whom have different understandings of what the term means and how essential it is to Christian self-constitutive discourse. There are those, a few within the Church and many more beyond it, who discount any claim that there is something extra-subjective going on in any such experience. They would argue that even the most radical and sudden shift in religious thinking must be explicable purely in terms of psychological factors present over time long before the apparent event. The experience described here, though, would not seem to be touched by those sorts of debate.

Tariq knows that, while theologians might describe his experience in terms of a divine plan and psychologists in terms of a blizzard of secular concepts, his experience is *both* a this-worldly one *and* (in terms of its religious significance for him) something transcendent. Tariq will freely concede that it is his abiding interest in religious questions generally that led him to investigate other traditions, engendering the first movement toward Christianity. He can concede too that the key to his particular attraction to Christianity may, in a superficial paradox, lie in the attraction he was brought up to feel, authentically felt and in many senses still feels for the ethical dimension of Sikhism. That is, he sees in Christianity - though not in 'Christian' society or the Church to which he remains a stranger - a more radical, transcendent call to live life in obedience to God's will than that offered by the measured, almost stoical precepts of Sikhism. He does not conceive of the changes in his thinking in terms of the road to Damascus, but his sense that he is in the midst of conversion meaningful to both him and God is no less real for all that.

A serious problem for Tariq, and one that the discipline of narration would be expected to address and ultimately equip him with tools enabling resolution in the future, is that he does not have the conceptual framework to account for this change. Were he at all willing to discard the fullness of his experience prior to the beginning of his change in religious attitudes he could simply exchange his identity for that of someone to whom Sikhism and the Sikh community are alien, and Christianity the familiar thing. But, for a complex of reasons rooted in the spiritual as well as the personal, Tariq is not willing to do that. The project of narration counsels against any such 'easy' option of course, because any self-constitutive discourse that is not integrative of at least the principal themes within existence can scarcely ground self-transformation in the future in the terms of Christian faith. When Tariq turns to the tradition, then, he requires some sort of model which will enable him to articulate the newness of his commitment to Christianity, without issuing in some sort of damaging spiritual and personal amnesia.

3.3.c. Preliminary Discussion of Tradition:

There is of course no single doctrine of conversion available within the tradition, and the subject has been very variously handled by theologians and others. There may be testimonies of Sikhs who have converted to Christianity, but this author is unfamiliar with them. What are readily available in the scriptural root of the tradition, however, are a range of narrative frames that Tariq could, outsider to the ecclesial community that he remains at present, access by reading the Bible and bring to bear upon his own situation.

Both Testaments express the idea of conversion as one of returning after having turned away from God. We might quote (Is.55:7) as illustrating this leading biblical idea, thus:

> '...let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon'.

It is the same sort of idea that it is at work in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk.15:11-32), where we are shown a Father who seeks the return of his errant

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children, and there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. However, this is a more characteristically Old Testamental idea, for there is a sense in which it sums up the whole message of the Jewish prophets. They declared themselves to be proclaiming God's word to a benighted Israel, whose only hope was return to God in their hearts. This is, of course , the continued significance of the ritual of the Day of Atonement, where fasting and (symbolic) affliction are the outward, sacramental evidences of inward repentance and spiritual rehabilitation.

There is an obvious move to be made here, and it would be a false one. Tempting though it is for the Christian, in particular perhaps the missionary or the recent convert, to situate other faith communities to God and the Church in the same relation as errant Israel, that imaginative move would not be true to the case under discussion, nor to actual, analogous cases. The symbolism of Israel and the Church *might* be a useful element of the imaginative vocabulary for Tariq, since it points toward one (partial) truth superseded by another, fuller truth. However, I am not certain that we have met him at a point where he would be comfortable with characterising the religion of his birth in this fashion. Still less useful is the idea of 'returning' to a God from whom he, or his community, had turned. Tariq's experience is one of discovery; to say that he is 'rediscovering' a God he knew all along is so divergent from the actuality of his experience as to be positively nonsensical.

There is, however, a second, less corporate, biblical view of conversion that might be of use to Tariq: the theme of finding or gaining life. At least from the time of the Deuteronomic writings, we find Old Testament authors confronting their audiences with a choice between the 'way' of life and goodness and the 'way' of death and evil. This doctrine of a radical choice between two ways is taken up as a leading theme within the gospels, in passages such as (Mt.7:13-14).[348] The idea of the two ways is an essential imaginative concept for understanding the nature of the choice that a commitment to Christian faith entails. However, it holds an obvious danger for Tariq

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[348] 'Enter in at the narrow gate: for the gate is wide and the way is broad that lead to destruction, and many go that way: because narrow is the gate and narrow the way, which lead to life, and there are few that find it'.

in that it could lead him to misconstrue Sikhism as the way of evil. A better conception of Christianity mediating life is that of 'dying and rising' with Christ.

There are strains of thought in the New Testament that seem to imply that not only the death of Jesus but, rather, his whole life of humiliation and service (predicated, of course, on his death), is the instrument of man's redemption. This is the kenotic view of Christology and redemption found most notably in the letter to Philemon. The New Testament sets forth the work of atonement both as an event in time and also as an example to be followed (e.g. Phil.2:5-9) and (1Pet.2:21-24). More deeply, however, and more importantly for the subjective appropriation of Christian identity, it declares it to be an experience in which all must participate if they are to find life (Mt.16:24-25). The New Testament quite clearly places the human need for the reconciliation made possible by the Christ-event in three contexts - in terms of relation to God, to others and to oneself. The principle of life-through-death holds good in all three.

The 'Godward' aspect can be said to stem from a view of God as holy, just, demanding, righteous, yet loving and merciful, a view of sin as rebellion, falling short and also a defined view of religion. This is illustrated in the Lukan parable of the Pharisee and the Taxgatherer. To the Pharisee, religion is a duty to be performed, whereas for the Taxgatherer who Christ approves (Lk.18:4) it has to do with restoration of a relationship.

The principle of life-through-death may also be seen to operate in the realm of human relationships: it is the secret of fellowship within the community of disciples, the root of the ecclesial community. The trouble with the resentful elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son is that he cannot, or will not, abase himself sufficiently to welcome his brother home. It is evident here that he could never be reconciled to his brother without a disposition of self-abnegation motivated by love; his failure to exhibit this disposition demonstrates how far he is not merely from his brother, but from his *father* too.

The final, subjective aspect of the principle of life-through-death may be illustrated by reference to (Rom.6:7-8). It is only by the process of death and rebirth, set out so

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clearly in these verses, that person can achieve self-integration. As we have repeatedly affirmed - no one can become spiritually mature until they have seen themselves in their actuality - both positive and negative - and integrated themselves as such.

Considered thus, the principle of life-through-death would seem to offer Tariq an excellent narrative frame within which to construe his changing religious understandings. The basic themes of 'death' and 'life' are sufficient to characterise the newness of the departure he is making. However, the principle, as elaborated here, is also sufficiently nuanced to allow our hypothetical subject a series of means by which to import his residual and by no means unimportant commitments to his Sikh ancestry and other extra-traditional experience into the new self-constitutive discourse he will formulate and direct to a Christian existential telos.

Thus, for example, the ideas of God, religion and sin we found in the new Testament can all variously - through the principle of life-through-death - become organising themes in Tariq's narrative capable of articulating his complex feelings about his ancestry as well as his burgeoning commitment to Christianity. We should expect our hypothetical subject, therefore, to talk of God as the one God believed in by Sikhs and Christians - an area where he has not 'changed'. At the same time, we would expect him to express his changed views of religion and sin, by perhaps, pointing to his conviction that sin can best be overcome not by right living just as such, but by right living inspired not by communal regulations but by a transcendent vision of man in God's image.

There are certainly other models of conversion and Christian experience available within the tradition - consider the ideas of entering the covenant, or of atonement through suffering. However, I am confident that we have identified a narrative frame that will permit our hypothetical subject to renew his self-constitutive discourse successfully.

3.3.d. Integrative Narration for Adequate Self-Constitutive Discourse:

As in the case of our previous hypothetical subject, James, we should be wary of reducing Tariq's case to 'the problem', as if the narration with which he might integrate his experience of a move away from Sikhism to Christianity could somehow be adequate if it referred just to the religious question at issue. As we have seen, Tariq's case is a complex one, drawing in familial loyalties and social experience as well as religious commitment.

Thus, just as we said James would do well to begin his narration with an affirmation that the narrative he wanted to tell is a possible one, so Tariq should begin by making clear to himself what he is about. Tariq does not want to exchange his life to date for something wholly other, but only (though this is in itself a step of enormous significance) to revise his religious identity. Since the theme of belonging to the Sikh community, in a social sense, will presumably continue through Tariq's life, this must be both a major part of the content of the narrative, but could also be an organising principle. Tariq's is an experience of change *and* of continuity. While we have identified the scriptural idea of life-through-death as a useful means for our hypothetical subject to address his developing religious convictions, the theme of relation to the Sikh community could function as an over-arching theme of the narrative.

We have suggested that Tariq's personal commitment to the Sikh faith came about in large part due to the influence of his deceased grandfather. This relationship, presumably still important to Tariq, is one that could be undermined by his new religious ideas if they were (mis-)understood to involve a negation of his involvement with Sikhism. In order to prevent this, Tariq might open his narration with an account of the relationship, describing not just his grandfather's religious convictions but all those other qualities for which he is well-remembered. In so doing, Tariq would affirm the value of his grandfather - doubly removed from him by death and now by diverging religious views - but also personalise and individualise the theme of a separation that must inevitably be hurtful, but is not in any simple sense a rejection.

The strands of continuity that run through Tariq's life are not, of course, solely to do with his family, they extend to many of his beliefs too. In order to be adequate to the content of his own experience, Tariq would be required to stress his ongoing reverence for Sikh ethical teaching and for the communal life with which he is familiar. Making this kind of personal stand is difficult: it would in fact be easier to exchange the old for the new, to swallow up the legitimate claims of past experience in the promise of a new beginning. It is necessary for Tariq, however. To affect an uncritical embrace of Christianity, still more one of 'Christian' society, would very likely result in much personal unhappiness and possibly in the loss of any genuine religious commitment at all. Tariq must construe himself in the terms of his own experience if his journey toward his new existential telos is to be successful. Attempting to live in the terms of other, alien experience can never ground self-transformation.

In relating himself to himself in terms of relationship to his community, Tariq should also attempt to integrate the fact that perceptions of him, and not just his perceptions, are changing and liable to change further. Unlike James, who has found a settled way of life but requires a means of articulating this to himself, Tariq is very much on a journey to a new existential situation. This journey is liable to be complicated by those within the Sikh community who regard his new religious convictions as tantamount to betrayal, perhaps even to capitulation to 'western' society in its totality - which, as we have seen, is very far from the case. Since tensions arising from this type of (mis-) perception are likely to be features of Tariq's future experience and may even be besetting him at this early stage, his narration of his experience must be such as to arm him against them.

There can, of course, be no question that Tariq's narration of his experience will be a difficult one; living out that narration will be still more difficult. What is required, in sum, is a definiteness about the familiar (the family, other existing relationships, Sikh ethics and communal values) that will bring stability to Tariq's life as he opens himself up to the consequences - both positive and negative - of his embrace of Christianity. With regard to the faith he is moving towards, however, there can be no such definiteness - Tariq is at an early stage of conversion, and it may not yet be

appropriate for him to self-identify as a Christian, certainly not if in so doing he feels he has 'replaced' his Sikh identity.

It follows that what Tariq must say about Christianity will be positive, certainly, but much more open-ended and tentative than what he will say about other areas of his life. Uncertainty should be freely confessed, certainty spoken of only in terms of the goal of the spiritual quest that has already wrought change in his life. However, it is imperative if Tariq is to develop towards an identity centred upon Christian faith, that his narration include a commitment to something that can nourish that development. As an outsider to the ecclesial community, Tariq must nevertheless express how he expects or hopes his relationship to the community of other Christians will develop. Only with this clearly in view can he hope to make the necessary transition from being an authentic member of one community to being an authentic part of two. Only when his sense of himself as such is secure can he begin to admit into his narration the possibility that Sikhism and Christianity can be mutually, fruitfully, interrogative.

3.3.e. Concluding Remarks:

Once more we have seen how for an individual subject a disciplined practice of narration might facilitate the integration of divergent and potentially self-deforming streams of experience. However, it remains to make the case that this can be achieved by communities as such too, where issues of authorship and the narrator's voice are obviously different. It is to this question that we turn in the remainder of this chapter.

3.4. Community: An Anglican Parish Church:

3.4.a. Preliminary Remarks:

Contemporary churches are in an analogous position to the hypothetical subjects discussed earlier in this chapter: forever necessarily 'in' contemporary society, yet set apart from it by a commitment to a special, ecclesial community predicated upon the Christian tradition. Those churches and theologians who seek to reject contemporary understandings will tend to conceive of the relationship as essentially 'one-way', the

ecclesial community standing over as critic, guide and so on against the wider community. Likewise, there are churches and theologians who have conceived of the relationship largely in terms of positive response to the 'lead' given by the wider community, with the church viewed as pupil or auditor as well as teacher. Approaches that are more comprehensive have also been offered, which accept the possible relevance of some proportion of both sorts of relationship to contemporary religion and society.[349] However, I would contend that in terms of the project of narration as outlined here a genuine balance that gives *equal weight* to both approaches *in all normal circumstances* is required. The self-identity of believers is in practice informed both by what they experience *as* church and by the experience they bring *to* the church. Thus, if communal, ecclesial discourse is to be adequate to contemporary Christian existence – and no less to our criteria for good narration – it must be guided *equally* by the notions of being 'a part' of and yet 'apart' from the wider community. To do otherwise would be to offer a model of ecclesial existence that will prove untenable as communal and individual experience develops, with potentially self-deforming consequences.

The analogy between individual and ecclesial or other communal biography is useful, but ought not to be pressed too far. Christian communal biography must of course comprehend the experience of individual participants in it, but it is much more than an agglomeration of individual narratives, having an independent imaginative reality as the narration of what we do and who we are *together*. Historically, Christians have addressed the necessity of formulating a specifically communal discourse in two principal ways, focussing either upon the church as already constituted by its members before God or on the fact of that coming together.[350]

In the first model of ecclesial existence, the believing community is treated as another corporate subject over and above individual believers. This approach has an extremely venerable lineage, we meet with it in various, embryonic forms in Matthew's

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[349] Historically this position is set out most clearly in the Augsburg Confession's sixteenth article, which reserves a special place for 'civil ordinances' (family and the state) as divine institutions intended to preserve 'good order'.

[350] These two very general approaches have of course been worked out under very many tropes and images. See, for example, Dulles, Avery, *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988).

gospel,[351] the Pauline[352] (and possibly deutero-Pauline)[353] literature and the book of Revelation.[354] It seems probable that these New Testament authors took over the idea of the church (or Church) as a subject whose biography could in principle[355] at least be written, as well as much of the imagery in which they couched their discussion of the Church, from contemporary Jewish discourse about Israel.[356]

Perhaps the most well-developed version of this approach to be observed today is that offered by the Roman Catholic tradition, whose clergy still use the vocabulary of the Church as 'Mater et Magistra'[357] routinely. I would disagree strongly with any suggestion that this is an exclusively Roman Catholic approach, though that tradition has made perhaps the fullest use of it through history in a diversity of ways including models of the Church as political society, sacrament and body of Christ. The self-identity of the Salvation Army amply demonstrates how Protestants too have found emphasis upon monolithic images of the church, in this case as a great army, useful. In Protestant theology, versions of the idea are evidenced among academic

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[351] Matthew is the only evangelist to use the term church - *ekklesia* - and does so once in the sense of a local, particular community (Mt.18:17), once in the sense of the universal Church (Mt.16:18). In the latter we have a sense of the Church as a building, built by Christ.

[352] See, for example, Rom. 12:5: '...we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another'. Note, however, that as with other New Testament authors Paul rarely understands *ekklesia* (and cognate terms) to refer to a universal institution rather than a local believing community. A few texts do, however, suggest a more generalised understanding; witness, e.g., 1Cor.15:9; Gal.1:3.

[353] The idea that some of the Pauline epistles are 'deutero-Pauline' or otherwise derive from the apostle only indirectly is more or less accepted by most liberals and rejected by most conservatives. Thus Perrin argues that the language, style and concepts of Colossians diverge too sharply form indisputably Pauline literature to be authentic. Kummel, however, is able to argue the other case. See Perrin, Norman and Duling, Dennis *The New Testament: An Introduction, Proclamation and Paranesis, Myth and History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), pp.121-123; Kummel, Werner Georg, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975). pp.342-345. Similar cases can be made out for other epistles. What is certain is that Ephesians and Colossians build on images held to be originally Pauline to describe the church as a body of which Christ is the head.

[354] The imagery of Revelation is somewhat confused and confusing. God's people can appear variously as a family of one mother (Rev.12:17), a city *and* a bride (Rev.21:2; 21:9-10) and so on.

[355] In the New Testament itself there is no consistent attempt to narrate a biography of the Church from its formation to its consummation in the eschatological end-time. The New Testament authors all had other and more specific concerns than this. For an excellent bibliographical note on New Testament ecclesiology see Küng, Hans, *The Church*, trans. Ockenden, Ray and Ockenden, Rosaleen (London: Burns and Oates, 1968), n.3, p.17.

[356] Indeed, in the New Testament 'Israel' is occasionally used as a designation for the Church (Gal.6:16), though elsewhere it refers to the Jewish people (e.g. Rom.11:26).

[357] This was the title of the 1961 encyclical of Pope John XXIII on social progress, which opens: 'Mother and Teacher of all nations - such is the Catholic Church in the mind of her Founder, Jesus Christ; to hold the world in an embrace of love, that men, in every age, should find in her their own completeness in a higher order of living, and their ultimate salvation'. Note the thoroughgoing personification of the Church.

theologians such as David Willis who are prepared to speak of the possibility of 'Christomorphic'[358] Christian communities. However, the Roman Catholic church is remarkable in that it has not only identified the church as a monolithic subject whose biography could *in principle* be narrated, but also identified a very limited centre of narratological authority and so raised the possibility of a finally authoritative, existent narrative. Within Roman Catholicism, the clergy and theologians who are the privileged custodians of sacred tradition are usually understood[359] to form a caste of privileged authors, culminating in a single authoritative figure such as the Pope.[360] That caste of authors,[361] and the Pope as their head,[362] may even be represented as speaking in the place of the ultimate, divine narrator of the Church's biography.

In the second model of ecclesial existence, churches and ultimately the Church are regarded as gatherings of disciples, all of whom have something to contribute to authoring the discourse predicated upon their life together. The participatory approach substitutes polyphony of authorial voices from the community for the single, authoritative author or limited caste of authors. The formulation of the narration is held to emerge through a more or less open, dialogical process. Unsurprisingly, this version is popular among many contemporary theologians with a liberative agenda,[363] though not necessarily to the exclusion of *some* transcendent image of the Church,[364]

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[358] Thus Willis, David, in 'Sacraments as Visible Words' in *Theology Today* 37 (1980), pp.444-457; p.452: 'By hearing the gospel, repenting, and confessing Christ as Lord, they are included in his reconciled and reconciling body in a public and overt way. This overt act of confession and baptism is not the end of conversion; it is... the beginning of lives in which they continually experience the need to repent and receive forgiveness as they mature in their Christomorphic service'.

[359] For a Roman Catholic dissenter's position see Küng, op.cit., pp.401-402.

[360] The *Magisterium* of the Roman Catholic church – its teaching authority – consists in the Pope, Cardinals and Bishops acting together to preserve the 'deposit of faith' under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, within this collegial structure the Pope has primacy.

[361] *General* infallibility was defined by the First Vatican Council of 1870 as the dogma that '...everything must be believed that is contained in the written word of God or in tradition, and that is proposed by the Church as a divinely revealed object of belief either in a solemn decree or in her ordinary, universal teaching'. Thus, together, the bishops can describe the faith infallibly.

[362] *Papal* infallibility was defined by the First Vatican Council of 1870 as the dogma that the Pope, when he speaks on matters of faith and morals *ex cathedra*, does not have the possibility of error, being guarded from this by the Holy Spirit. Infallibility of this sort has only been invoked once (at the promulgation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary by Pius XII in 1950). This can reasonably be represented as the Pope alone speaking with a divine authority (in virtue of his office, not his person).

[363] Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (London: S.C.M, 1980), p.759; Gutierrez, Gustavo, *The Power of the Poor in History* (London: S.C.M., 1983), p.193.

[364] The concern of liberative theologians with fraternity and sorority is balanced in the most interesting works by a concern with divine-human filiation, which allows us to say that their discourse about the ecclesial community is not exhausted by analysis of the participative existence in which such

However, it too has a venerable pedigree within Protestant thought[365] and, as a recessive theme (until recently), within more conservative Roman Catholic thought.[366] The participatory model might have something more to commend it than the alternative in the contemporary context. For in order to reflect adequately the experience of many contemporary believers it is necessary to include such issues as their historical exclusion from full participation in the discourse of the believing community. Embracing a thoroughly egalitarian, participatory vision of communal life, and communal authorship, would be one important means to securing that religious goal. This is also, of course, a goal of the project of narration in as much as genuine comprehensiveness is required in the narratives that emerge from it. Thus, although we note alternative ways of doing ecclesial biography, a participatory approach will be employed here. That approach may of course produce more than one possible narrative, and here as elsewhere it will be necessary to adjudicate between them by asking which will fit the author (here, the authorial community) best for life in the future.

3.4.b. Description of Extra-traditional Experience:

Against Julian Barnes, I maintain that there are few sights more reminiscent of the England of patriotic myth, and of the physical reality of the Church of England, than the venerable steeple of the rural parish church.[367] However, it is well known that many such parish churches have difficulties in attracting substantial congregations, even where the wider local community is reasonably large.[368] Thompson assures us

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communities are constituted. Compare Carroll, Denis, *What is Liberation Theology?* (Leominster: Fowler Wright, no date), p.56.

[365] Davies, Horton, *The English Free Churches* (London: O.U.P., 1963).

[366] In the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*, article 8 and elsewhere (1964) the Roman Catholic church is spoken of as a 'pilgrim people', but this participative model is used alongside language which evokes hierarchical and corporate subject models.

[367] Barnes finds no place for country churches in his amusing list of fifty quintessentially English images. See Barnes, Julian, *England, England* (London: Picador, 1999), pp.83-85.

[368] There are rural churches which can no longer attract substantial congregations because the wider communities which once 'fed' them have largely disappeared, either through the historical decline of a village's population or through the phenomenon of absentee property ownership. In these cases, I would argue that the remaining churchgoers might well need to reenvision their communal identity but that the empty pews beside them, being a mere accident of history, should not be decisive in the renewal of their discourse. For evidence of the popular perception of the Church of England and Christianity in the United Kingdom generally as moribund see Combe, Victoria, ''Christianity is nearly vanquished' in

that this is by no means uniformly the case,[369] but Maxtone-Graham's studies suggest that the point holds generally.[370] In this section, I want to describe just such a church, or rather, the congregation which forms the believing community within that church and which must tackle the problem of renewing its shared, communal biography. For ease of reference, I shall call the hypothetical community 'St.Luke's'.

Individual Christian autobiographies are narrated in terms of the - in principle - straightforward imaginative encounter between individual subjective experience and the tradition of the ecclesial community. By contrast, communal biographies constructed on the dialogical, participatory model which we have adopted will be informed by *many* levels and layers of encounter between very many sorts of experience and construals of tradition. These *might* be described exhaustively, perhaps according to a continuum from the formal and constant (P.C.C. meetings, preaching from the pulpit) to the informal and accidental (ladies' coffee mornings, family discussions). However, given the constraints of space operating here it will be impossible to identify *every* relevant level of experience. I hope in any case to show that this is unnecessary for the purposes of demonstration of the potential of the project of narration as it bears upon the ecclesial community of St. Luke's.

St.Luke's is a fine rural parish church, situated in one of the northern counties amidst farming land, chiefly sheep-farming country. The farmers of the sizeable village in which it is located were hard hit by reversals including the foot and mouth epidemic of 2000-2001. Yet in spite of the foot and mouth crisis, the village managed to continue to support two public houses, a small shop, a tearoom and a post office, helped by day-trippers from nearby cities, campers and those walkers who were

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Britain' in *The Daily Telegraph* (6-9-2001), which reports the expression of similar sentiments in more nuanced terms by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster.
[369] Thompson, Damian, 'The Village Church Struggles for Survival' in *The Daily Telegraph* (27-12-2000) Thompson reports that some parishes which have reasserted their traditional connection with the farming community by means of 'Plough Sunday' and so on have significantly expanded their congregations. He cites the conviction of Revd. Jeremy Martineau, rural officer for the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, who says: 'At a time when farmers feel that politicians have let them down, they really value their age-old connection with the Church.' Thompson reports further that 'Micro-tourism' has become a lifeline for dioceses such as Norwich, burdened with scores of quaint but isolated churches whose parishes consist mostly of unpopulated fields.
[370] Maxtone-Graham, Ysenda, *The Church Hesitant: A Portrait of the Church of England Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), pp.123-239.

prepared to brave the disease control restrictions.[371] In many ways, the congregation and their relatively youthful vicar, a man with a wife and young family who also looks after two other churches, are fortunate. The fabric of the church is sound thanks to solid rebuilding in Victorian times. The congregation maintains meaningful links with the wider community through its support for the small village school and a youth club.[372] These links pay dividends at the popular Christmas, Easter and harvest thanksgiving services.[373] There are even occasional weddings every so often during the summer months.

St.Luke's, then, is a parish church that is far from moribund. However, its young vicar and some among his small regular congregation fear that this is a state of affairs that might not be far off. With a very few exceptions, the regular congregation is elderly[374] and there are few younger people joining as worshippers. The elderly faithful (most of them women, many of them widows) can all remember back a generation or two when, here at least, the church was the social hub of village life and no family would fail to attend at least occasionally.[375] That has now changed completely, as for most of the village the church is only visited two or three times a year, and then only because of a special rite of passage or holiday event. The problem facing the congregation is as follows. How should a body of people whose traditional, communal self-perception as participants in the normative heart of wider communal life is increasingly out of step with the reality of their own experience, and that of the wider community in which they are located, renew their communal self-understanding? What will be their sense of place within, and over against, the wider community in the future? In seeking

[371] I take these details from the real case of Edale in the Hope Valley in Derbyshire. Edale is typical of villages in that locale.

[372] Maxtone-Graham, op.cit., p.136: 'parish churches have wonderful relationships with local schools'.

[373] It is still true that British people in general turn to religion in some way at the high points of the Christian calendar. A 2001 survey by the polling organisation Opinion Research Business found that 43% of the *adults* sampled would go to one or more church services over the Christmas period, 51% would buy an advent calendar and 49% make a special donation to charity. Cited Petre, Jonathan and Southam, Hazel, 'Traditional Christmas is alive and well as worship thrives' in *The Sunday Telegraph* (16-12-2001).

[374] This is likely to be true of all mainstream churches in England today. The 1998 English Church Attendance Survey found that of 3,714,000 regular churchgoers 927,000 were over 65 and 885,000 were between 45 and 64. The figures for younger age groups were proportionally lower, excepting only children (under 15), for whom the figure is 717,000. Figures are published in Brierley, Phillip, *Religious Trends 2: 2000/2001* (London: Christian Research & HarperCollins Religious, 1999).

to address these problems, the congregation will need to address the principal points of contact, or significant *absence* of contact between the ecclesial community and the village in which it is located. The success of their new narration of communal identity cannot be measured by increased commitment to the church in the village alone, it must, crucially, allow them to think of themselves in a positive way that *sustains* and *makes sense of* their increasingly marginalized community within the village.

David Edwards has recently suggested that part of the Church of England's problem in failing to renew its self-constitutive discourse is a preoccupation with organising its own intra-ecclesial life.[376] This position is widely endorsed by leading ecclesiologists including Gill[377] and Carr.[378] If their contention is correct, and holds for parish as well as denominational life as Carr at least believes,[379] then perhaps the focus here should not be on what the congregation is doing but upon what the village is doing, *including* members of the church. I would dispute Edwards' argument, however. It is my contention that churches require more and richer intra-ecclesial discourse, *provided* this is done consistently in the realisation that just as the church is part within, part without society, so society is part within the church. Statistically and topographically late modern society includes the ecclesial community, but *imaginatively* the ecclesial community should include late modern society even when it is engaged upon specifically devotional reflection. There is also the obvious point that only the ecclesial community has the existential motivation to reflect positively on the relation of church (as such) and wider society,[380] so discourse that is authentically inclusive of both must start with the ecclesial community.

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[375] This is the experience reported by members of the congregation in Edale. However, I accept the conclusion of Robin Gill (among others) that the phenomenon of the empty church is not an exclusively modern one. See Gill, Robin, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London: S.P.C.K., 1993).

[376] Edwards, David, review of Hannaford, Robert (ed.), *A Church for the 21ˢᵗ Century: The Church of England Today and Tomorrow: An Agenda for the Future* (London: Gracewing, 1998) in *Church Times* (Feb. 1999).

[377] Gill, Robin, *Vision for Growth* (London: S.P.C.K., 1993), p.12.

[378] Carr, Wesley, 'Is there a Future for the Church of England?' in Carr, Wesley, *Say One For Me: The Church of England in the Next Decade* (London: S.P.C.K., 1992), pp.1-6.

[379] Ibid., p.7.

[380] Of course, as recent British Government proposals to increase the number of 'faith-based' schools demonstrate, it is possible for those beyond the ecclesial community to think positively about the relation of church and community in an *instrumental* sense.

I have consistently resisted any notion that fellow participants in discourse communities are somehow homogenous. This point becomes pertinent once more in reference to the present case. At least *six* important intra-communal experientially-derived perspectives on the community's life exist among those who are to share in the authorial enterprise, and these are likely to be divergent at several points. These are the forms of experience which the three types of participant in the discourse community of St.Luke's bring to their life as church and as parishioners within the village; in other words, the intra- and extra-ecclesial experiences of the vicar (and other clergy), the regular churchgoers and the occasional churchgoers. Through these networks of experience, the congregation is located within the virtual continua of diocese and locality and the horizontal continuum of ecclesial participation within the village. Their conjunction constitutes the life of the congregation itself.

Perhaps it is not readily apparent why I want to speak of six important ranges of experience here. A simpler model would locate all of the congregation, and perhaps other parishioners as well, upon two more or less closely related continua of 'belonging' to the congregation and 'commitment' to the tradition, with absolute adherence to tradition and church and indifference to tradition and church the polar opposites. However, it is not at all clear that such measurement would be helpful here because it is not at all clear that everyone at St.Luke's would believe or be committed *in the same sorts of way*. A superficial view of any congregation would see the vicar, the 'man of God', as most traditional in his beliefs and most committed to the church, followed by the regular churchgoers, followed by the occasional churchgoers. In some actual cases this might be correct, but it need not necessarily obtain and will never do so in a wholly unambiguous form.

We have already mentioned that the vicar at St.Luke's is younger than many of his flock;[381] he is more likely to have come from outside the local area[382] and certain to have some degree of special training or education.[383] All of these factors might serve

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[381] By no means always the case of Church of England clergy. Many non-stipendiary ministers are elderly people living on pensions; Furlong, Monica, *Church of England: The State it's In* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000), p.261.

[382] Highly probable; Maxtone-Graham, op.cit., pp.55-56.

[383] This discontinuity between the experiences and perspectives of priests and their congregations may go some way to explaining the findings of Francis, L.J. and Rutledge, C.J.F. in their 'Are Rural Clergy

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to make the vicar, versed in biblical criticism and developments such as the Alpha Course[384] and the introduction of *Common Worship*[385] *less* traditional in outlook than his congregation. If, like the preponderance of General Synod, he is an evangelical or a liberal,[386] he might have more difficulty as the incumbent of a rural parish than would an Anglo-Catholic for whom the entire world is seen aesthetically as saturated with religious possibility.[387] Evangelicals flourish in more urban areas,[388] but they are likely to regard bell ringing and fetes as a distraction from spreading the Gospel. They will inevitably have little respect for the implicit religion of village life and for those who visit the church only occasionally yet still feel it belongs to them. Liberal clergy, on the other hand, like the idea that the parish encompasses non-churchgoers.[389] Yet, they have little sympathy with suspicion of women priests and their views on such issues as hunting may be very different from those of their parishioners.[390] Our vicar, then, despite his 'establishment' position, might be *less* committed to the tradition as it was received in the village and less immediately interested in the life of the village and its church than his congregation. His experience might tend to a narration of church life that emphasises change and the need for renewal.

By contrast, the elderly women in the congregation might be more likely to value continuity rather than innovation. Erikson et al.[391] and Biggs[392] contend that

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in the Church of England under Greater Stress? A Study in Empirical Theology', *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 11 (2000), pp.173-191. Francis and Rutledge conclude that rural clergy are likely to have lower senses of personal accomplishment than their peers elsewhere.

[384] The Alpha Course is a programme that covers basic Christian beliefs through a series of talks, meals and discussions. All the mainstream Christian churches in England support it. It originated twenty years ago, based upon books by the former atheist Nicky Gumbel. Jon Ronson reports: 'at a cautious estimate, in Britain alone and in less than a decade, a quarter of a million agnostics have found God through Gumbel', 'Catch Me if You Can', *The Guardian* (21-10-2000).

[385] From 2000, the Church of England has been producing a series of new documents known collectively as *Common Worship*, which are intended as a complement to the 1928 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

[386] These party labels disguise divisions among evangelical and liberals, but the point hold generally; Furlong, op.cit., pp.328-334; 336-339.

[387] Ibid., p.327.

[388] Evangelicals also seem historically to have been most *interested* in the challenges of urban existence; Sine, Tom, 'What British Evangelicals Do Right: The Highly Effective (and Visible) Ministry of England's Evangelical Alliance' in *Christianity Today* 40 (1996), p.28.

[389] This is a matter of respect for individual conscience, however, and is to be distinguished from the embracing vision of Anglo-Catholicism; Furlong, op.cit., p.339.

[390] Furlong, op.cit., p.340.

[391] Erikson, E.H. et.al., *Vital Involvements in Old Age* (Norton: New York, 1986), p.26.

[392] Biggs, Simon, *Understanding Ageing: Images, Attitudes and Professional Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), pp.60-61.

imposition or discovery of continuity on or within experience is an important strategy for coping with ageing. Beaver suggests that the concerns of elderly churchgoers will be more with symbolic touchstones such as the prayer book,[393] the hymns sung and their own places within the believing community than with self-transformation or the debates that occupy Anglicanism generally.[394] If this picture is correct then to the extent that the regular churchgoers can embrace renewal of their vision of the church, it is likely to be in terms of a *recovery* or *reconstruction* of historical successes. I would insist, however, that these authorities err in supposing that a desire for continuity precludes all acceptance of change. Dittman-Kohli's 1990 study suggests that 'the elderly change their standards, becoming more self-accepting and [valuing] more highly what is still available.[395] Intimations of mortality might well tend to a feeling that rigid adherence to tradition is no longer all-important, that only community and love really matter 'in the end' and so to a generous, accepting spirituality. The extra-ecclesial experience of being part of a family[396] who are cherished but who have little connection with the church[397] might tend similarly to a conviction that it is not what happens on Sunday mornings that matters so much as how the church can be church even for those who never attend.

The occasional churchgoers too might prove surprising. Lack of regular attendance is not necessarily a mark of lack of belief or interest in the church.[398] Younger people who probably work, shop and to a large extent socialise outside the village are unlikely to regard its church as the principal focus of their spiritual lives, but they might well value it in the same spirit as those who lament the loss of other, ill-used

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[393] *Common Worship* preserves much more of the language of Cranmer than the unpopular 1980 *A.S.B.* did.

[394] Thompson quotes Dr Bill Beaver, the Church of England's communications director: 'For a quarter of a century, rural parishes sat biding their time waiting for the traditional services to come back - and now they have'. He argues further that 'you can tinker with parish boundaries all you like, but all our research tells us that country people want to know where their priest is. And they are not, repeat not, interested in debates about homosexuality'. Thompson, op.cit.

[395] Dittman-Kohli, F., 'The Construction of Meaning in Old Age' in *Ageing and Society* 10 (1990), pp.278-294; p.278. A similar conclusion is reached in Atchley, Robert C., *Aging: Continuity and Change* (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1983).

[396] Atchley estimates that 75% of older people are grandparents; Atchley, op.cit., p.201.

[397] There is also the experience of those who are without family to consider, but they might feel similarly about friends, relations and others. For further discussion, see ibid., pp.203-209.

[398] Maxtone-Graham, op.cit., pp.125-126; Furlong, op.cit., pp.217-218.

village services.[399] They are also likely to be the parishioners who have most contact with the church in their *extra*-ecclesial experience through the institution of the village school. Middle-aged people who are no more regular in their church attendance are likely to 'support' the church in a similar way. Additional, extra-ecclesial factors in their feeling for the church might be the remembrance of the lives of their parents, in which the church featured,[400] and the valuing of symbols of stability which tends to come with middle life. Younger and middle-aged occasional churchgoers might be, therefore, the parishioners who cling most tenaciously to the marks of tradition and continuity in the face of the village's developing life.[401]

I have no intention of seeking to adjudicate *between* any of the perspectives sketched above, or discussing their merits in relation to other more peripherally relevant perspectives that a lengthier study could include such as those of the diocesan bishop or the parishioner who never attends church. What is important is that the final narration respects each of these perspectives *at least* in the minimal sense of providing an imaginative framework within which each can be comprehended and conceived in relation to the other as a valid element of a single narrative or family of narratives that identifies the ecclesial community. We should expect a kind of going back and forth between the church and the village in the final narration, a discursive version of the weaving together of divergent (and occasionally mutually reinforcing) intra- and extra-ecclesial experience of the sort in which the congregation itself will ideally consist. Essentially, what is required is a narrative developed *from* the existing, traditional narrative frame that describes the congregation's historical self-perception and range of commitments, but relating these *to* a new range of experience and new understandings of what it means to 'be Church' in this particular situation. This narrative might not have one definite theological flavour, but it will be what the

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[399] The ambiguity of feeling here may be summed up thus: 'Nobody... [really]... notices it, but if it were to go there'd be a huge row'; interviewee quoted in Maxtone-Graham, op.cit., p.124.

[400] Ward, Kevin, 'Believing without Belonging: Church in the Aftermath of the 1960s' in *Reality* 43 (2000).

[401] Any young or middle-aged people who rediscover a deeper faith through attendance at St.Luke's, having no upbringing in the church as an organic, developing institution, are highly likely to be extremely conservative in their perspective upon the church and its place in the village.

liberal theologian Martyn Percy calls 'a critique of the world in a prophetic sense yet also a befriender of it'.[402]

3.4.c. Preliminary Discussion of Tradition:

The concept of Christian tradition, as it has been used throughout this thesis, is an elastic one whose specific referent varies according to the community under discussion and covers both the normative commitments of that community and the allied, inherited imaginative vocabulary in which those might be expressed. Thus, in considering the tradition of St. Luke's we have to establish both the traditional commitments that any new narration must respect and the nature of the imaginative vocabulary that is available to the congregation. The congregation's core commitments can be established by considering, as well as the indispensables of Christian faith, the details of their intra- and extra-ecclesial experience and what this might call forth from the resource of tradition. The imaginative vocabulary available to the congregation is nothing less than the ecumenical tradition in its Anglican development. Though this has content far beyond the particular *intra*-ecclesial experience of the parish church, it also encompasses the local and particular, such as church social events. Awareness of life lived under the eschatological horizon, the mark of narration that is specifically Christian in style, requires here that any new communal biography be opened to the future such as to be of meaning to the community as it seeks to address *ongoing* developments in its experience. This necessitates a creative handling of received tradition which does not compromise the objective of renewal, not mere restatement, of traditional commitments as a series of lived convictions.

We know that St. Luke's is an Anglican church, but to be aware of this is not to understand, therefore, how the faithful parishioners construe their Christian belief. The Thirty-Nine Articles and other fixed statements of the Anglican faith are interesting from the perspective of theology that is intended to be normative, and also from an historical perspective. Debating these synthetic theological 'snapshots' will

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[402] Percy, Martyn, 'The New Liberalism' in Clatworthy, Jonathan (ed.), *Faith for the Third Millennium* (London: M.C.U., 1998), p.12.

not, however, advance us very far in seeking to describe either the actual commitments of a particular ecclesial community or how reflection on those commitments should develop. The ecumenical tradition, particularly in its Anglican development, is the primary resource for the congregation seeking to articulate its experience in faithful terms.[403] However, the ecumenical tradition can only be used to authentically renew self-constitutive discourse for this particular believing community if it is handled selectively.

The congregation of St. Luke's are not seeking to formulate their own creed, or even their own series of confessional narratives.[404] Their problem, as we have described it, is to re-appropriate their changed sense of place within the village community. This involves confessional issues only in so far as they impose a requirement that communal discourse should develop to include *both* the 'traditionalist' and 'innovative' intra-ecclesial perspectives found among the congregation, a requirement that could be satisfied minimally by ensuring that the developed narrative frame is one within which adherents of both could find an imaginative space. Thus, the elements of tradition that are most relevant here will be those that deal with the ecclesial community's place within the wider social context supplied by the village community.

Each of the three principal groups within the community at St.Luke's brings, or invites reflection on, different authorial perspectives on Christian tradition. Through a disposition of committed social engagement (less difficult where as here social relationships already exist), however, each of the groups should be opened to the insights of the others.

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[403] The Church of England has historically been at the forefront of ecumenical dialogue. At a local (diocesan) level Anglicans 'participate in Local Ecumenical Partnerships through common mission projects, chaplaincy partnerships and sharing buildings with other Christian traditions, in some cases, sharing ministry and resources as well'. Thus, it is open to the insights of other churches. Source: official Church of England website at [URL: http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/frame_means.html] (12-10-2001).

[404] The Church of England does not encourage individual parishes to substitute new creeds for the three ancient ones, see Mountney, F.H., *What is the Church of England?* (London: Church Literature Association, 1979), p.14. However, there is a venerable tradition of local communities re-appropriating and expanding upon creedal beliefs through story. Concentrating upon contemporary practice, one need only think of sermons that one has heard and the means by which children are often introduced to the Bible in Sunday school classes and nativity plays.

The vicar, then, in common with all full clergy, should stand in his office as a pointer to the possibility of a life lived more or less completely within the imaginative universe of the tradition.[405] He, perhaps alone, can represent a possibility of certainty or at least confidence in the tradition that will prove helpful or at least reassuring to others at St.Luke's.[406] In his person, however, he brings the fruits of his theological training and of his immersion within the life of the wider Church to communal life. In this connection, we should expect his preaching and other formal discourse to invite reflection upon those texts and traditional understandings that speak to the experience of analogous embattled Christian communities or, more generally, to the perceived need for communal renewal.

Stendhal rightly points out[407] that for congregations struggling *not* against oppression or unbelief[408] but from a profound uncertainty as to the nature of their identity as a believing community, the Pauline epistles which address the like confusion of the apostle's churches are likely to be more useful than, say, the gospels. An objection might be raised here that since Paul's letters are not narrative in form they can hardly serve as models for the integrated, storied self-understanding for which I have argued. Indeed they cannot, if the model of integrative narration as extension of a given narrative frame is in view. However, a competent preacher will be able to bring what these epistles have to say about the problematic nature of being church to bear using the model of *dialogue* with the experiences of his community. It is the vicar's heavy responsibility to set the congregation's priorities in reflection upon the scriptural root of the tradition, and – a more subtle task – to offer his flock ways to lay hold of scripture and the other elements of his preaching. Considering the Pauline epistles once more this could also involve species of mediating narration, relating the church

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[405] Remarkably, this ideal is often approximated to in reality according to Furlong, op.cit., p.261.

[406] For further discussion of this representative function within Anglicanism see ibid., p.262-263. For an insightful Lutheran perspective, see Scaer, David P., 'The Integrity of the Christological Character of the Office of the Ministry' in *Logia* II (1993), pp.15-20, esp.p.16.

[407] Stendhal, Krister, 'The Pauline Epistles' in *Biblical Preaching: An Expositors Treasury* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). Stendhal discusses what the epistles reveal about 'the church, its mission, its problem, opportunities, weakness, and glories', p.325.

[408] There are, of course, texts that have historically been found particularly appropriate to these communal problems too. One thinks immediately of the Markan theme of the 'blind' disciples, of doubting Thomas and of the particular re-appropriations of elements of both Testaments by Liberation, Feminist and other liberative theologians.

at Corinth to St.Luke's as, for example, ideal to be aspired to,[409] warning,[410] edification[411] or real exemplar[412] or some combination of any of these.[413]

As well as mediating the historical, theological tradition and *representing* the possibility of unproblematic faith for his congregation, the vicar will also be a conduit for *new* developments within the Anglican Communion (and wider Church) to flow into their reflection upon ecclesial existence. We have already mentioned developments like the Alpha Course, which he may or may not bring as a contribution to the life of St.Luke's. In addition, we may consider the opportunities for discovering innovative ways of developing ecclesial life afforded the vicar through his participation with other church leaders in diocesan and wider events, which he could also mediate to the congregation. This possibility is amply illustrated by consideration of the simple statement of self-understanding prepared by the Diocese in Europe, just one example of the resources the vicar will have privileged, 'professional' access to:

'Together with our sister Churches, we are... a kind of shop window
for Anglicanism in countries where we are a small minority Church
committed to ecumenism and playing our part in the mission of
the one Church in the new Europe'.[414]

A statement such as that, suitably amended, could supply a much-needed imaginative 'plan' according to which the new self-constitutive discourse of St. Luke's could be formulated. It contains indispensable elements that would need to be present in the new self-description of the community at St.Luke's were that to be adequate in the best possible way to our two criteria. In the first place, there is honest recognition of the church's peripheral position within the community it seeks to serve. Secondly,

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[409] This reading of Paul comes through strongly in Young, Frances and Ford, David F., *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: S.P.C.K., 1987), esp. pp.135-136.

[410] Redpath, Alan, *The Royal Road to Heaven: Studies in First Corinthians* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1960), p.15 and historically Calvin, John, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. Fraser, W.J. (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), p.9.

[411] Glen, Stanley J., *Pastoral Problems in First Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1965), p.10; Ruef, John, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth* (London: S.C.M., 1977), pp.xix-xxvii.

[412] Stanley, op.cit., p.26: '...his words pertained to a wider constituency than the Corinthian congregation or the church universal... to all forms of confidence that absolutize man...'.

[413] Barrett, C.K., *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968), pp. 17-27.

[414] Church of England Diocese in Europe website, available via the Internet at [URL: http://www.europe.anglican.org] (1-2-2002).

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there is a foregrounding of commitment to the Anglican tradition and a positive evaluation of what this might mean where the church is drifting towards the margins. Besides emphasising the historical and sociological circumstances of the church and offering a positive way of thinking about being church at the margins, the Diocese in Europe's statement also opens the issue of ecumenical cooperation and so, indirectly, of the kind of openness to further change and development we have said characterises specifically Christian narration.

His extra-ecclesial experience as a father, a 'breadwinner' and so on notwithstanding, the vicar's authorial contribution to the congregation's project is most easily conceived of as a bringing to bear of the tradition upon communal experience. This is unlikely to be the case when we consider the elderly, regular churchgoers. We have already observed that *some* aspects of the intra-ecclesial experience of these people is likely to predispose them to a conservative attitude toward *some* aspects of the tradition and a desire to bring these to bear within the life of the wider, village community. However, this group of people will have been long-term participants in the village as well as the ecclesial community, not just in their own subjective experience of work and social life but also through (younger, non-churchgoing) friends and relatives. Therefore, this group will be well placed to recognise the church as a part of yet apart from the village and to bring that sense of participation *as* villagers into renewed ecclesial discourse.

How precisely should we conceive of the involvement with tradition of the elderly churchgoers? Based upon what we have said already, we should expect developing communal discourse to respect the adherence of this group to symbols of continuity and reassurance within ecclesial life – well-known hymns and forms of service, for example. A certain limited natural conservatism would not tend necessarily, however, to a view of the ecclesial community going out to embrace the wider community in terms of mission or critique. It might be expressed rather through *wariness* of evangelical schemes. Moreover, if the primary ecclesial experience of this group is bound up with one of being at the centre of village life, we should perhaps expect little resistance to familiar features of church life being augmented or developed so as to foreground that sense of centrality.

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Their natural affection for children and grand-children is likely to make older people accepting of, perhaps even somewhat grateful for, the participation of occasional churchgoers who may include those same family members. This could amount in practical terms to a willingness to move emphasis from Sunday worship, for example, to other extra-ecclesial encounter between ecclesial community and wider community in order to renew the sense of centrality and belonging. These encounters could be almost infinitely various, from participation in school and youth events, local planning and other campaigns such as those associated with Foot and Mouth, brass-rubbing and historical study of the church, and the making available of church buildings for the use of the whole village community. Impoverished rural churches sometimes have to make unpalatable moves to secure a dedicated minister or maintain the fabric of their buildings, such as allowing mobile phone companies use of the steeple or installing a cash point in the porch.[415] Older people could conceive of these not as survival strategies, but as further opportunities for making the village present in the church. In a way that is superficially paradoxical, the elderly regular churchgoers could become the means by which the contemporary life of the village becomes (as in the past) an authentic determinant of ecclesial self-constitutive discourse.

The final group which we must discuss in terms of commitment to the tradition are the occasional churchgoers, in some cases relatives of the regular churchgoers but in other cases likely not, and perhaps people who value the church for other than residual family feelings but do not commit to it in terms of regular attendance. Considerations of the latter sort make it difficult to hypothesise how such a group might handle the tradition beyond what has been said about their collective intra- and extra-ecclesial experience. Let us, then, think through the implications of that experience to establish how they might contribute to the development of tradition within the communal discourse of St.Luke's.

Occasional churchgoers are most likely to have intra-ecclesial experience through their participation in the so-called 'occasional offices' (marriages and funerals) and

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[415] Thompson reports that some of these things are already happening in real rural parishes. 'The village of Moggerhanger in Bedfordshire, without a shop for 13 years, has opened one in the vestry of the parish church. In Westbury Leigh, Wiltshire, worship takes place in the chancel and the village school uses the nave'. Thompson, op.cit.

through baptisms and services of thanksgiving. Since these events mark significant phases and rites of passage, it is likely that occasional churchgoers would resist developments of the tradition that unsettled their memories (perhaps not actively, but simply by ceasing to attend at all),[416] just as we are often upset by changes to the physical landmarks of our childhood. Having little 'stake' in the church *as a developing, organic community*, occasional churchgoers may actually be more conservative on this point than regular churchgoers. When one has little to lose, but values that little, one will guard it tenaciously. However, those among the group of young and middle-aged occasional churchgoers who have much of their extra-ecclesial experience *outside* the village are unlikely to conceive of themselves and of the ecclesial community in terms of a close relationship with the village community.,

It follows that whereas regular churchgoers might endorse a *shift of emphasis* in the congregation's participation in the village community, the occasional churchgoers might seek a development of traditional commitments through *new* forms of ecclesial existence in the village, while yet strongly valuing remembered symbols of participation. In practice, this could mean, for example, making new choices about such things as which charities and community groups to support. Small-scale local charities and community projects might fail to capture the imagination of those late modern people distanced from 'their' community in the same way as nationwide direct media campaigns on cancer and African famine can.[417] The Women's Institute and Mother's Union are far from moribund,[418] but might not appeal to the socially conscious, late modern occasional churchgoer in the same way as a mother and toddler group which provides up-to-date information about social security, medicine and nutrition. St.Luke's might historically have flourished in competition with the local Methodist chapel, but will a strong sense of denominational identity make sense

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[416] This does not entail resistance to *all* change, of course. Any innovation that built upon or memorialised senses of self-identity might prove popular.

[417] In 1997/8 the total income of community based organisations was c.£25-&30,000,000, compared with £129,397,000 for Oxfam (worldwide) and £80,431,000 for Imperial Cancer Research (U.K. only). The two latter charities counted voluntary donations as not less than 71% of their income. Compare *Local Development and Community Organisations* (Kings Hill: C.A.F. Research, 2000) with Pharaoh, Cathy and Tanner, Sarah, 'Trends in Charitable Giving' in *Fiscal Studies* 18 (1997), pp.427-443, p.442.

[418] The Women's Institute claims to be the largest national organisation for women, with c.250,000 members in England and Wales; the Mother's Union claims to have 1,000,000 members worldwide in 62 countries.

to occasional churchgoers in rural Britain?[419] Cases like these latter raise the possibility that, across a great spectrum of issues, the renewal of self-constitutive discourse might involve perceived loss as well as gain. On our dialogical model such as ours, however, we should expect resistance to change to be met with compassion and accommodation wherever possible.

3.4.d. Integrative Narration for Adequate Self-Constitutive Discourse:

It is by no means certain that the congregation of our hypothetical church St. Luke's would ever set down their renewed narration formally. For, as we have seen, in this case the project of narration is likely to consist in a web of dialogical, participative encounters. These would certainly contribute to a meaningful, shared sense of being church in the particular circumstances of village life, but as narratological authority will be more or less diffused through the community that shared sense might be difficult to reduce to any *one* authoritative narrative.

It is not, however, entirely improbable that the congregation might wish to set about this further stage of narration; for it would provide them and others who do not participate in the ecclesial community with a useful hermeneutic key to the church's identity. Here we can imagine that the congregation of St. Luke's has sought to emulate the practice of some real parishes by displaying a notice of welcome, giving details of the church's history and ongoing life. I hope that what follows will be useful in demonstrating the observations made above about the renewal of the self-constitutive discourse of the ecclesial community of St.Luke's. The story told here is relatively abbreviated, as indeed a real narrative of this sort intended to engage those 'passing through' as well as regular visitors might well be, but I trust that it is such as would encourage imaginative involvement on the part of all visitors to the church. The narrative voice is intended to be manifestly that of 'we', the community speaking together. Note that the narrative does not imply a narrowly specified audience, but seeks to be inclusive of the encounter with the church of fellow Christians and, for example, trippers alike. This is, I submit, consistent with what we have said about the

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[419] For evidence that denominational identity may be *growing* in importance in America see Ammerman, N., 'New Life for Denominationalism' in *The Christian Century* 117 (2000), pp.302-307.

direction in which the congregation's narration of its communal existence should move.

'Welcome to St. Luke's parish church. The building in which you are standing was erected in 1857, replacing an Elizabethan structure which in turn replaced the original Norman chapel. There has been a church on this site for almost one thousand years, and the congregation of St. Luke's invite you to share in our centuries-old tradition of worship, if you have time, or simply to take a few restful moments to admire the beauty of the building'.

'The founders of our church dedicated it to St. Luke the Evangelist, whom Christian tradition identifies as St. Paul's friend, 'the beloved physician'.[420] If this tradition is correct, St. Luke was probably an early Christian who never met Christ himself, but who learned his faith from the eyewitnesses and 'servants of the word' he mentions in his gospel, before passing it on faithfully to generations of Christians to come through his writings. In the same way, we seek to bear witness faithfully to what we believe, not just by gathering together to worship God here in this building but by living lives marked by the service and self-sacrifice that Christ taught his very first disciples. Scenes from the life of many of these earliest Christians are depicted in some of the Victorian stained glass windows and statuary that you will notice around the church'.

'Notice especially the windows which remember Mary the Mother of Jesus and St. Luke and the plaque which recalls the nineteenth century re-founders of the Church. Each of them is a record of Christian witness and service. Mary served God so faithfully that she freely gave her body to receive his Son. Luke, who could not serve Christ in person, instead offered the gifts of his mind and labours by writing his gospel and travelling far and wide to do missionary work. The re-founders, likewise eager to serve Christ, did so by building a new church for his people and setting up a school for the poor of the parish. You will notice that their plaque is under St. Luke's

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[420] Should Christian narration for the renewal of self-identity include contentious elements such as this? I see no reason why this should not be so, for as this example demonstrates they can be highly evocative 'ways in' to reflection on what is not contentious, indeed is essential to Christianity. They should be used honestly, however, and not depended upon as if they are established fact.

window, as it were underlining his example. So from age to age, the Christians who worship here have tried each in their own way to follow that example of faithful service'.

'As well as the Victorian monuments, you will notice some well preserved Elizabethan, Caroline and Georgian architectural details. Take time to find the fine brasses, the tombs of the Mowbray family and the memorial plaques on the south wall. We like to think of the stones of the church as reflecting our life here. There is much that is old and inherited, such as the Prayer Book we use for most of our services. Yet, also much that reflects the experience of today's believers, such as the modern hymns we sing and our fine new altar-cloth, designed and sewn by the local Women's Institute. Nevertheless, the village church does not exist just within these walls; it exists wherever the people of the parish are serving God and one another together'.

'Nowadays, although we also come together in formal offices, prayer and song, we try to express our essential, ongoing tradition of service through many of the ordinary aspects of village life. Part of the life of service is a readiness to go to the people in need, rather than expecting them to come to the church! A number of our small regular congregation are senior citizens, which is why St.Luke's is so congenial to those who prefer calm, quiet worship. But our older people are individually very active as volunteers in the local primary school, the church baby-sitting scheme and as members of the village musical society. Younger people who may attend Sunday service only occasionally nevertheless contribute greatly to our life as a church, for example as volunteers at the church play scheme which gives new mothers a chance for a rest and in the 'meals on wheels' service for very elderly and infirm people'.

'In this exciting but challenging age, all at St.Luke's are trying to find new ways to respond to the challenge of being a village church community together and to reach out beyond these walls to share with others. We recognise that although our lives have led us to serve God in the Anglican way, there are many others here and elsewhere who have not shared our experiences. We welcome all as brothers and sisters in Christ and thank God for giving our generation the gift of seeing the coming together of

Christians. Any Christian is welcome to share in our worship and receive Holy Communion with us. Regular visitors to the church might be interested to know that every third Sunday we join our friends from Wesley Methodist Chapel; details of these services are available on the notice board in the porch. If you are not a churchgoer, but would like to help us, you can donate to one of the local, national and international charities we support in the boxes near the main door. At the moment, we are running a special appeal for local farmers who have lost their livelihoods in the foot and mouth crisis. If you or someone you know is in need of support we would like to remember you in our prayers. Please fill out one of the cards in the side chapel to the right of the font'.

3.4.e. Concluding Remarks:

In this section, the possibility of renewing a communal biography through the project of narration has been firmly established. We have seen how narration could enable a diverse congregation to integrate commitments to the (Anglican) tradition, expressed through and informed by intra-ecclesial experience, with extra-ecclesial experiences of the church shifting from the centre to the margins of wider communal life in a way that is adequate to each under the motif of 'service'. We have seen, once more, that the best self-constitutive narration will not be one that refers to self-constitutive experience as if it were something fixed and transparently comprehensible. Indeed, our discussion of the hypothetical community at St.Luke's reinforces the point that even a quite comprehensive self-description could be inadequate unless done in full awareness of the complexity of both tradition and experience and their shared, perennial characteristic of ongoing development. Our narrative here is informed by six types of perspectives, proper to three significant groups, which by turns call forth different sorts of changes in the communal self-understanding of the ecclesial community. In actual cases, other perspectives will pertain depending upon the community under discussion, but in all cases our criteria for good narration – particularly when coupled with a participative model of communal self-identification - demand that these be fully comprehended in a way that is neither reductive nor totalising.

Chapter Four.
Renewing Christian Life.

4.1. Introductory Remarks

In the previous chapter, we saw how a disciplined practice of narration can make a difference in a range of problematic situations confronting contemporary Christian subjects and communities. Our project of narration has been shown to offer Christians a secure route to the positive renewal of self-constitutive discourse and so equip them for self-transformation in the terms of their faith. This accomplished, a wider set of questions opens up. Assuming, as I submit we may now do, that the practical, pastoral worth of the project of narration has been established, what impact might its adoption have on wider theological questions, even including the first order questions of systematic theology? To this point, I have been scrupulously careful to stress the modesty as well as the originality of my proposals. The project of narration has not been envisaged as a model for the reworking of all Christian discourse, still less as some kind of test against which existing formulations can be measured, except in so far as these are to form parts of self-constitutive discourse. However, it is entirely reasonable to suppose that if the proposals set out here were adopted generally, that might have some wider impact upon thought and practice. We have already seen, for example, that our concern with adequacy to the fullness of contemporary experience leads us to privilege a participatory model of the Church over against what we termed the 'corporate subject' model. It is worth considering whether there might be any further, similar ramifications to the project.

While this chapter is an exercise in exploring possibilities, I also want to use it to make a positive case. This is, in fine, that setting the discipline of narration at the heart of self-constitutive discourse equips us with a series of normative principles for discourse that are of still wider value in that they enable us to reconceptualize certain theological problems in a way that will be consistent with our self-constitutive discourse. Thorough critical evaluation of these fresh perspectives is a task for formal

systematic theology and will not, therefore, be attempted here, but divining hopeful signs is very much a part of the enterprise of this thesis.

4.2. Life Together: Understanding Being Church

4.2.a. Introductory Remarks:

We left off the previous chapter after a discussion of how a particular ecclesial community might renew its communal self-constitutive discourse. The reader will recall that part of this discussion was occupied with establishing which of two principal ecclesial models the community might adopt as a basis for its practice of narration. This phase of the discussion was, I trust, self-evidently rooted in the practical preoccupations of the thesis; specifically: which of these two models – each construed as valid by Christians at different times and places – might be most useful in grounding a communal narration of the type projected. However, our decision in favour of the participatory model was not reached on purely pragmatic grounds. We also argued that this model accords best with our criterion of adequacy to the fullness of contemporary experience.

In this section, I will discuss what further consequences adherence to the discipline of narration might be thought to have for ecclesiology. There is some merit, I think, in looking in a little more detail at what it means to conceive of the local ecclesial community as an authorial community, as there are facets to this concept that remain to be explored. We have had much to say about the practical use of the project of narration as a facilitator of the lived, integrated expression of given experiences and traditional commitments. We have not yet looked at the converse of this issue, the way in which adopting the discipline of narration might in itself add new elements to communal existence. This discussed, I will proceed to range boldly into territory occupied by one of the great questions in twentieth century ecclesiology: *what is, who are* the Church? This is not a question of self-identity in the same sense as those local and particular issues that have concerned us here, but it is clearly an issue of self-definition for all Christians. The discipline of narration is not intended to meet such

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questions, but it will be informative to enquire whether its essential concerns tend toward one sort of answer or another. It will also be necessary, of course, to establish what worth, if any, the insights offered here have. The answer to this latter question will provide us with some insight into how far deployment of the discipline of narration must itself be disciplined; that is, limited exclusively to the sphere of local and particular questions of self-understanding.

4.2.b. The Discipline of Narration and the Local Ecclesial Community:

For members of a local ecclesial community to construe themselves in terms of authorship of their self-constitutive discourse implies two sorts of alteration in their self-perception. First, they will understand themselves as an authorial community – a group whose collective responsibility it is to work together to articulate their experiences and traditional commitments in an imaginative fashion that opens the way to a transformed existence in the eschatological future. Secondly, they *may* also come to understand themselves as a community of authors, though this is a further step requiring other decisions. It is a quite different proposition from the first, in that it calls forth a different set of relationships between the members of the community. To put the point succinctly: collaboration in a common enterprise is very different from participating in a contemporary's subjective authorial enterprise and accepting their participation in one's own. The reasons why can be framed by consideration of the different types of author / audience relationship. As a participant in a shared authorial enterprise, one is engaged in a project removed from one's own immediate concern. As an author in a community of fellow authors, one is bound as author to offer the whole of oneself to the audience they constitute and to attend as audience to their self-constitutive discourse.

The question now arises of whether, in framing these issues in the terms of discourse analysis we have actually added anything to the life of the ecclesial community. The answer, assuredly, is yes. Considered just as such discourse analysis is merely a further conceptual framework alongside those drawn from the tradition and from the wider culture with which to characterise communal life. However, it begins to affect the content of communal life when it is wedded to a positive discursive practice. It

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would indeed be possible to describe the collaborative, co-operative element of communal existence through discourse analysis without adding anything to reflection about the community beyond, perhaps, some conceptual clarity. This is the aim pursued by many theorists of knowledge and sociologists seeking to provide an exposition of aspects of particular cases of communal existence.[421] However, the discipline of narration is directed to a series of positive goals; therefore, for us to characterise the relationship between two members of the community as one of author to audience, for example, is much more than description. It establishes, a point touched on above, new series of relationships and ways of being together. These do not, of course, substitute for existing patterns of relationship. However, the types of relationship called into being by adherence to the discipline of narration have an existence beyond these other patterns of relationship.

Whether we tell self-constitutive stories or no will not have an obvious bearing upon existing formal relationships within the ecclesial community. The vicar or minister, for example, will retain his status within the community whatever the mode of its self-constitutive discourse. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, it may be that making a commitment to self-articulation through narration will introduce new, informal sources of authority and so of status. Thus, in terms of the local ecclesial community, the vicar may have less to contribute than a member of the congregation more fully immersed in local life and lore or in the traditions of this particular local community. Less too even, perhaps, than the otherwise peripheral member of the community who has the gift of creative vision and who should be attended to, though seldom is, when the community comes to re-envision its self-constitutive discourse. Consider in this context the vision with which the aspirant scholar Jude evokes 'Christminster' on first arriving there:

> 'A start of aversion appeared in his fancy to move them at sight of those
> other sons of the place... statesman, rake, reasoner and sceptic; the
> smoothly shaven historian so ironically civil to Christianity; with others
> of the same incredulous temper, who knew each quad as well as the faithful,

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[421] Compare Foster, David, *A Primer for Writing Teachers: Theories, Theorists, Issues, Problems.* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1993) and Kephart, William M., *Extraordinary Groups: An Examination of Unconventional Lifestyles* (London: Martin Robertson, 1977).

and took equal freedom in haunting its cloisters'.[422]

The sorts of relationship described here as being called into being by a commitment to the discipline of narration are, of course, somewhat nebulous and certainly negotiable. Evolving naturally from the ad hoc needs of the community, they will evolve with changing circumstances. They are also likely to, by turns, cut across and be limited by other kinds of relationships rooted in more formal sources of authority. This is something that the discussion in previous chapters has anticipated. We have argued that the authority of the mainstream believing community functions as a necessary corrective to the possibility of licence opened up by the imaginative freedom that is an integral part of the project of narration. Thus, in the case of the particular ecclesial community, the vicar or minister might seek – properly – to guide communal narration in a particular direction or to foreclose certain possibilities that seemed to him to represent an unacceptable deviation not just from the traditional imaginative vocabulary, but also from the inner intention of the tradition. Even here, however, the discipline of narration – if taken seriously – has the potential to unsettle, to qualify, existing structures.

A self-constitutive narration that does not speak *to* its author's experience and traditional commitments *from* that author's imaginative vision of a transformed existence in the future is, of course, self-defeating because it either cannot be appropriated or, once appropriated, has no value in equipping the author for ongoing existence. This being so, it is an axiom of the project of narration that each authorial subject and community attend to the deliverances of their own reflection as closely as to received, normative readings of the tradition and the culture. Given what we have said about communal discourse being a participative, consensual enterprise – and given a certain natural human conservatism – this privileging of the particular is unlikely to issue in a radical rejection of formal authority in narration. However, it does suggest that an ecclesial community committed to the discipline of narration would view formal ecclesial authority more critically than a community not disposed in the same way.

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[422] Hardy, Thomas, *Jude the Obscure* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p.87.

The discipline of narration would unsettle internal patterns of relationship and authority within the local ecclesial community, not by destroying them but by adding an additional, powerful series of bases for relationship and authority. In terms of the relations of the ecclesial community with the wider social world, however, commitment to the discipline of narration clearly has the potential to fortify the community.

A case for committed social engagement by Christians not (just) in terms of social ministry to *others* but as a practice directed to the renewal of *self*-understanding was made in Chapter Two, but set alongside an insistence on the importance of the ecclesial community a as space qualitatively different from the ordinary social world. In their being 'apart from' as well as 'a part of' the world, ecclesial communities provide an arena in which members appropriate their tradition and can devise strategies for bringing it into relationship with their other experience. As we have seen, the ordinary social world, while not inherently vicious, tends not to participate in the norms proper to a Christian existential telos. As such, existence within the ordinary social world – with all its manifold benefits – will tend inevitably to undermine not only this or that construal of the tradition, but the very notion of keeping faith with the tradition itself. The discipline of narration therefore requires a high degree of active participation in the ecclesial community as a means to countering this sapping of the traditional content of self-constitutive discourse.

Thus, commitment to the discipline of narration issues in an idea of the ecclesial community as a space in which the tradition becomes a series of lived realities, over against a world in which tradition is always contested or questioned. Above all, the ecclesial community that is committed to the discipline of narration will be one that confidently sets its own self-constitutive discourse over against the prevailing narratives and understandings of the wider culture. In so doing it becomes an 'alternative society' (though *not* a replacement for society, for the ordinary social world must remain a focus of activity and intellection) which functions to guard the tradition but also to question the deliverances of the ordinary social world. The ecclesial community that takes the discipline of narration seriously will be strengthened by the focus on tradition and intra-ecclesial experience this ushers in. It

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will strengthen its members by becoming a space where their reception of the tradition can mature and where they can prepare for engagement with the ordinary social world. I do not deny that something similar is true of many actual ecclesial communities where attention to narrative is not an important feature of communal reflection. For, as some feminists have pointed out, the very fact of separateness has at least the *potential* to be a source of power.[423] I merely affirm that commitment to the discipline of narration reinforces the valuable quality of separateness in the ecclesial community.

4.2.c. The Discipline of Narration and Definitions of the Church:

Constraints of space deny us the opportunity to think through in detail the consequences that adoption of the discipline of narration might have for every aspect of ecclesiology. The Church in all its theological, historical and demographic complexity is a subject well beyond the scope of a thesis in which the principal interest lies elsewhere. However, it will be informative to enquire how adoption of the disciplined practice of narration set out here might affect ideas of the Church. We accept that the Church is not, ultimately, an organization on earth consisting of people and buildings, but is really a transcendent entity comprised of those who are saved by what was accomplished in Christ. As such, the Church has dimensions, and indeed members, that cannot be known to us here and now in our local and particular situations or even in the present phase of life, before the eschatological fulfilment of our faith. Nevertheless, it remains possible and proper for us to enquire about how we should conceive of the Church here and now, for this has the potential to affect our disposition as members of local, particular ecclesial communities.

Enquiries of this sort can proceed in two sorts of way. Firstly, we may ask what – positively – the Church *is* or, rather, in our case, what positive ideas of the Church adoption of the discipline of narration might be thought to support or tend toward. In

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[423] Compare Townsend Gilkes, Cheryl, 'Together in the Harness: Women's Traditions in the Sanctified Church' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 10; 4 (1985), pp.678-699, p.689 and Fraser, Nancy, 'Struggle over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late-Capitalist Political Culture' in Gordon, Linda (ed.) *Women, the State, and Welfare: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives* (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin, 1990), pp.205-231.

our narratological terms, we might ask: which is the best narrative we can tell about the Church? This is a question I will address by way of Avery Dulles' familiar models of the Church.[424] However, in defining the Church positively thus we also imply a portion of the ordinary social world that is 'not Church'. For those who regard the ordinary social world with indifference, disdain or consistent suspicion this need not raise any further issues of definition, though naturally missiological questions are unavoidable whatever view of extra-ecclesial society or culture is taken. We, however, have attributed significant value to the experience of life in the world for all engaged in authorial renewal of self-constitutive discourse. As such, we are committed to saying something about how the relationship of the Church in general to those in extra-ecclesial situations should be conceived. This is also a necessary complement to the account offered earlier in this chapter of the relation of the local, ecclesial community to the ordinary social world.

From around the time of the counter-Reformation until the middle of the last century the Roman Catholic church, in a sophisticated and highly elaborated fashion, and to a lesser extent certain other western denominations, tended to conceive of the Church on the model most readily discernible in the ordinary social world; that is, the political society, the state.[425] On this ecclesiological model, the Church is defined essentially as a society that can be identified by visible characteristics in the same way, as, for example, the United Kingdom or the United States are defined by reference to their constitutions, demographics and heads of state.

The idea of the Church as describable adequately as a political society has numerous theological weaknesses, not least its apparent inability to describe the invisible, mysterious qualities of the Church. However, since we are not engaged in an exercise in systematics, we may confine ourselves to the question of how this model sits with the discipline of narration. In some respects, heavy concentration on the visible, institutional characteristics of the Church is valuable since it gives further definition to the idea of the ecclesial community – here the great, universal ecclesial community – as a definite social space in which tradition is preserved, honoured, appropriated and

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[424] Dulles, Avery, *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988).

so on. Yet representing the Church as an autonomous, *existent* social structure will tend to reinforce given patterns of relationship and authority among Christians. These, as we have agreed in the discussion to this point, may well have continued theological validity. Existing patterns of authority certainly seem indispensable adjuncts to the discipline of narration in so far as the teaching authority of the mainstream church is required to make available the tradition and provide normative, if not always final, guidance upon what may be construed as a valid development of the traditional intention. However, the discipline of narration presupposes the possibility of self-transformation in terms of the eschatological future, thus the identification of any actual and demonstrably imperfect structure in the here and now with the eschatological community of faith is necessarily problematic.

Some elements of this model must, of course, be incorporated into any complete description of the Church. There is certainly merit in the idea of the Church as a new society *in process of formation*, which Gager identifies as one of the earliest conception of the Church.[426] However, commitment to the discipline of narration tends away from any model that attempts to introduce the degree of 'finality' into characterisation of the Church implied by the identification of it with *existing* structures.

A radical alternative to the political society model, and one that certainly appears to have greater scriptural sanction (though is arguably not so prominent in subsequent tradition), is what Dulles terms the 'Body of Christ' model.[427] This ancient model[428] was returned to contemporary debates about ecclesiology by members of the

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[425] Jay, Eric G., *The Church: Its Changing Image through Twenty Centuries.* (Atlanta, GA.: John Knox Press, 1977), p.37.
[426] Gager, J. G. *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), pp.12-16.
[427] Dulles, op.cit., p.43.
[428] A useful treatment of the of the Church as the body of Christ as it appears in the Pauline epistles is provided in Best, Ernest, *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul.* (London: SPCK, 1955). Wider studies are offered by Minear, Paul S., *Images of the Church in the New Testament.* (Philadelphia, PA.: Westminster Press, 1960) and Martin, Ralph P. *The Family and the Fellowship: New Testament Images of the Church.* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1979).

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Tübingen School.[429] The Body of Christ model stresses those theological ideas about the Church that are most obviously missing from the political society model, notably the idea of the Church as a mystical communion with the divine. More interesting perhaps, from our perspective, this is a highly participatory, even democratic, model as well. The activity and gifts of the Spirit in all members of the Church and the dependence of all on the contributions of each are well to the fore here.

The problem with this model, from the perspective of commitment to the discipline of narration, is that it gives no clear indication about how its reading of the Church as spiritual communion might relate to the given structures of the Church here and now. The discipline of narration affirms the institution of the Church, particularly as expressed in the local ecclesial community, as well as the eschatological freedom of believers and relates the two in terms of negotiation between authority and imagination. The discipline of narration, therefore, tends to an idea of the Church as existing within but transcending given structures, the tangible and the transcendent being tied closely together. The imagery of the Church as Body of Christ has enormous evocative power and so will be of value for the expression of Christian self-understanding, as an element of the traditional imaginative vocabulary. However, it arguably defers finality in Christian self-constitutive discourse *too far*, providing insufficient positive content to the idea of the Church as a living reality,[430] such that this essential element of Christian thought cannot, except as a name, form part of the existential telos.

A second problem with the Body of Christ model, from our perspective, is that it posits an extremely sharp demarcation between Church and not Church. This is incompatible with the very positive, if by no means uncritical, affirmation of the ordinary social world that we have made central to the discipline of narration. The

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[429] Compare, for example, Wagner, Harald, *Die eine Kirche und die vielen Kirchen: Ekklesiologie und Symbolik beim jungen Möhler* (Munich: Schöningh, 1977) and Bartz, Wilhelm, *Die lehrende Kirche: ein Beitrag zur Ekklesiologie M. J. Scheebens* (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1959).

[430] Part of the problem is that the Body of Christ model can be construed in such widely divergent senses. On one hand, stressing the mystical dimension of the spiritual communion can take an anti-institutional turn. On the other hand, stressing the visible community as the Body of Christ, continuation of the Incarnation, and so forth, can draw one towards a form of panchristism, a crassly literal application of a model that is essentially a metaphor.

discipline of narration treats encounter with the other beyond the Church as an essential aspect of Christian self-constitutive discourse with its own inherent value, in many respects as important as intra-ecclesial experience, not as a step beyond the bounds of the sanctified community.

Another model that is now a familiar theme within contemporary ecclesiology is that of the Church as sacrament.[431] Clearly, the intention behind this model, rather like that underlying the Body of Christ model, is to try to capture something of the all but indescribable, inexpressible spiritual reality of the Church. Thus - in symbolic terms - just as in the sacrament of Baptism the pouring of water expresses spiritual purification, so the Church's actual life in the here and now is held to express something of what salvation essentially consists in. Theologically, however, a sacrament is held to be efficacious as well as symbolic; that is, to achieve 'inwardly' what it symbolises outwardly. Thus, on our analogy, the symbolic washing of baptism also brings about the spiritual purification it expresses. The Church as a sacrament of Christ brings about the continuation of Christ's ministry, as sacrament of salvation it builds a community of salvation in the world.

From our perspective, this model is an improvement on the ones discussed above because it ties the senses of the Church as existent structure and intangible eschatological community that we want to affirm closely together through the organising concept of sacrament. Thus, on this model, the given community is the form here and now of the invisible communion in Christ; the imaginative freedom with which we transform our self-constitutive dialogue is a foreshadowing of and real preparation for life in the eschatological future. With its capacity to stress the proleptic character of the Church, the sacramental model also supports the affirmation of the ordinary social world that is part of the discipline of narration. Now the Church appears not as the ideal society or a marginal, spiritual elite but as a sign of a transformed reality within the world. Understood in this sense, neither the Church nor its members are set over against the world in a negative fashion, since the sign exists *for* the world. Thus, the world can be conceived of as the space in which members of

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[431] See, for example, Kress, Robert, *The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication.* (New York: Paulist, 1985).

the Church must work out their collective task of renewing their communal self-constitutive discourse such that they can be a more efficacious sign. The sacramental model also sits well with the project of narration's refusal to ascribe absolute finality to self-constitutive discourse, since it explicitly acknowledges the impossibility of exhaustive discourse about the Church.

Dulles offers two further models of the Church that are also capable of reflecting some of the preoccupations of the discipline of narration; the 'Pilgrim People' and 'Servant' models. Both feature in contemporary ecclesiology.[432]

With the idea of the 'Pilgrim People of God', the Church is seen in 'salvation history' terms as a special people called to bring all humanity to God. The Church is itself on a pilgrimage through history in common with the rest of humanity. However, the Church is a favoured people; because it places its hope in God, it is enabled to walk by faith, led by the Spirit of God. Thus, the Church is the vanguard of the whole pilgrim human race, not in the sense that it is called to leadership of all humanity, but in the sense that it has been given the special grace to show the rest of humanity the way to their ultimate destiny.

The great virtue of this idea of the Church, from our perspective, is that it places acknowledgement of historicity and particularity at the heart of ecclesiology, reflecting our criteria of adequacy to the fullness of experience. It also accords well with what we have had to say about the possibility of change in or revision of self-constitutive dialogue, about the participatory model of the local ecclesial community and about the conditions of existence in awareness of the eschatological future. A vision of the Church as continually 'on the move' through history, from new challenge to new challenge, affords us a grand narrative through which authorial subjects and communities can understand their renewals of self-constitutive discourse in terms of the global and historical Christian experience. If the Church is seen to be really engaged in history in the same way as the subject or local community then the

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[432] Compare, for example, Shaw, Joseph M., *The Pilgrim People of God: Recovering a Biblical Motif* Minneapolis, (MA.:Augsburg, 1990) and Hanson, Anthony T. *The Church of the Servant* (London: SCM Press, 1962).

possibility of change, while remaining a challenging prospect, is disclosed as a condition of rather than a threat to faithful existence. If this movement through history is the Church's defining experience (apart from its encounter with the divine) then formal sources of authority within the community are relativized by the call to participate in the common enterprise. If the Church is 'on the way', it is surely towards that eschatological fulfilment which the project of narration identifies as the endpoint of all Christian narratives.

The only serious way in which commitment to a discipline of narration would seem to conflict with the Pilgrim People model is in the matter of affirming the ordinary social world. This model is not at all triumphalist, by locating the Church within history it downplays the Church's communion with the divine to an extent that might even be regarded as excessive. However, it does not have an especially positive account to give of the world beyond the Church, the world that shares history with the members of the Church. Commitment to the discipline of narration presupposes a willingness to learn from as well as exist within the world; the positive value of the ordinary social world for the Church, rather than its mere reality, is something upon which the discipline of narration insists.

The final model of the Church we will consider is one that goes quite some way towards addressing this issue; it is the model of the Church as 'Servant'. Beginning with an explicit acceptance that the Church must be a part of as well as apart from the ordinary social world, because that was what Christ became through the Incarnation, this model sees the Church as called to make a positive contribution to all persons whoever they are and whatever their particular needs. As Christ came to serve, the Church must carry on his mission of service to the whole world. However, this model sees 'service' as going beyond missiology and good works to embrace, as Christ embraced, an attitude of total concern for the human, social world. Thus, this model introduces a rather new attitude of listening to and learning from the world; it makes the world a focus for Christian self-constitutive discourse. It is a model that accords extremely well with the discipline of narration, provided that the 'apart from' character of the Church is not lost in the determination to be adequate to extra-ecclesial experience.

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The discipline of narration is not, as we have said, a yardstick against which Christian reflection -except self-constitutive discourse - is to be judged. It is, however, quite clear that adoption of the discipline would conduce more favourably to models of the Church that reflect its essential concerns. The Sacramental, Pilgrim People and Servant models of the church each reflect in greater or lesser degree these essential concerns: adequacy to historical and experiential particularity, to the fullness of the tradition, to the definitively Christian sense of living under an eschatological horizon, to a appropriate balance between the intra- and extra-ecclesial in Christian life and discourse. A plurality of strong models such as this assuredly makes for a richer ecclesiology, but is in itself consistent with the concerns of the discipline of narration.

For a plurality of narratives about the Church, just as any plurality of ideas in a given area, requires respect and tolerance in the community for models that are not universally popular. It requires too that all endeavour to be critical of *their own* favoured narratives when apparent conflicts arise. If they are all valid, various narratives about the Church will complement each other. Thus, to say that commitment to the discipline of narration favours a plurality of models, since each articulates one or more of its essential concerns especially well is to restate a point stressed throughout this thesis: the discipline of narration resists totalization.

What, if anything, does our conclusion here about models of the Church consistent with the discipline of narration imply about the world that is not Church, beyond the basic disposition of respect and concern we have already established must be a feature of Christian encounter with the other? I submit that, minimally, it rules out any exclusivist view in which Christianity is construed as the only true religion, or indeed the only true path when set over against non-religious worldviews. Ideas argued for in earlier chapters including committed engagement with the world and Christian existence understood as life lived into an incompletely grasped eschatological future, which are supported by the models favoured here, conduce to an idea of the world that is not Church as a place in which meaning can be discovered as well as created. The discipline of narration would be consistent with a spectrum of theological options from inclusivism to a tentative religious pluralism, but not with any exclusivist view that totalised given tradition over experience and over the emerging life of the future.

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In the remainder of this chapter we shall have more to say about the relation between faithfully affirming Christian tradition and affirming, without acceding to, apparently incompatible extra-ecclesial discourse.

4.2.d. Concluding Remarks:

The discipline of narration is not dependent on a particular model of the Church, nor does it preclude the adoption by an author of any particular model from within the traditional imaginative vocabulary. However, given its central concerns with adequacy to tradition, experience and renewal commitment to the discipline of narration will tend to undermine confidence in models of the Church that seem to totalise either the intra-ecclesial experience or existent structures. Such rigid models, and that of the Church as a realised political society is particularly in view here, also seem less capable than others of grounding the kind of open-ended, dialogical, creative encounters with the ordinary social world that we have argued good narration will emerge through. In terms of particular models of the Church, then, the discipline of narration seems to favour what is participatory and outward-looking, with a low doctrine of ecclesiastical authority. However, as we have argued, narration will certainly flourish where the ecclesial community makes a variety of overlapping models available within its discourse. We will now proceed from the key concept in practical Christian thought about social institutions to examine the key concept in practical Christian thought about social activity, enquiring what difference commitment to the discipline of narration might make to our ideas about ministry.

4.3. In the World: Understanding Social Ministry

4.3.a. Introductory Remarks:

We have seen that commitment to the discipline of narration involves authors in engagement with the social world as a positive source of value, different from but as necessary to self-constitutive discourse as intra-ecclesial existence. Naturally, though, Christians who seek to be adequate to the fullness of their tradition do not approach others with whom they share social space simply as participants in discourse, but

precisely as a people committed to a particular, ecclesial discourse community and a corresponding existential telos. If their self-constitutive discourse is well-ordered and well-integrated, believers exist in the social world *as* believers – but what does this mean? Here once more I will not attempt to look into systematic questions, but to address the issue of what difference the discipline of narration might make to our view of these questions. Thus, the central concern of this section will not be: what does it mean to exist as a Christian in positive engagement with the extra-ecclesial world? Rather, it will be to ask what possibilities for such existence are suggested – or foreclosed – by a prior commitment to the discipline of narration.

In the final part of this chapter I will look in detail at how the discipline of narration might bear upon Christian encounter with others as participants in other discourse communities with other, even rival, narratives to offer. Here, however, I want to focus on the issue of ministry, the encounter with the other that places them, simply as fellow human persons, at the heart of one's subjective concern. Thus, we will examine first how a commitment to the discipline of narration might bear upon ideas of ministry and then the practical consequences of our conclusions. One issue I will not look into here is the relation between the ministry of all believers and the ordained ministry of the clergy, or other sub-categories of other-directed ministry. I acknowledge this as a question of pressing interest in contemporary debates over theology of ministry, but cannot envisage how commitment to the discipline of narration might bear upon it, beyond issues of authority in narration discussed elsewhere.

4.3.b. The Discipline of Narration and the Idea of Social Ministry:

Ministry is, of course, an indispensable theme in any narrative about the pastoral, practical implications of participation in the discourse community of the Church. To minister to the other is to participate in an aspect of the tradition rooted beyond question in Christ's own practice and that of the apostolic age generally. However, where, as in the contemporary situation, the ordinary social world is largely alienated from Christian discourse, it can be difficult to think about such themes beyond the core traditional concepts we appropriate within the ecclesial community and those

received cultural understandings which appear to have some relevance. The ordinary social world is a difficult space within which to bring the intra- and extra-ecclesial to bear upon one another in a fruitful way. Yet, commitment to the discipline of narration *privileges* integration between the deliverances of experience and traditional commitments. Such commitment *requires* that we rethink enduring themes such as ministry as part of our attempt to creatively appropriate the emerging life of the eschatological future. At the same time, however, our criteria of adequacy to the fullness of tradition and experience also direct us to at least take seriously received concepts, if not necessarily to ultimately embrace them in our final self-constitutive discourse. Let us examine what this dual commitment to taking seriously the contents of tradition and experience, whilst seeking to transcend both in a newly appropriate imaginative synthesis, might mean in the case of the idea of ministry.

One leading theme in the traditional idea of ministry identifies it very closely with the proclamation of the gospel.[433] Christ's own ministering in the ordinary social world was an outpouring of the gospel he proclaimed and of the eschatological life of which he was an incarnate foretaste.[434] Thus, ministry ceases to be connected with the core of the tradition of the Church where it is not unambiguously directed to extending participation in the ecclesial community where the eschatological life is most fully realised.[435] From the perspective of commitment to the discipline of narration, Christian ministry must, minimally, point toward Christ as well as ending or palliating the suffering of those who are ministered to. Historically, however, adherence to this traditional requirement has often resulted in an abandonment of adequacy to the fullness of extra-ecclesial experience, in the form of a systematic refusal to acknowledge value in those ministered to apart from their involvement with the Church. An extreme version of this is found in the pronouncements of those of our contemporaries who identify victims of disease or other terrible afflictions – and, of course, the AIDS virus is in view here – as having been somehow punished by God

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[433] Grenz, Stanley, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 2000), p.207-211, provides an excellent contemporary account of ministry as involving proclamation.

[434] See Lk.4:18-21. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour... Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'.

[435] Mt.28:19-20.

for misdeeds.[436] The discipline of narration forbids this kind of reading of the world. Those outside the Church may be criticised and castigated, but they must first be attended to and, wherever possible, understood on their own terms not only for their own sake but for ours too. This has implications for how we conceive of ministry as proclamation of the gospel.

Ideas of ministry as proclamation that are instrumental – 'we do this for / to / with you so that you will do x' – are clearly at odds with the vision inspired by the discipline of narration. A much more appropriate sort of concept, and one that is more capable of comprehending the fact that ministry takes place within as well as outside the ecclesial community, is the idea of ministry as 'witness'. By this, I understand simply ministry as a making present through activity of the gospel in a given situation. That is, publicly bearing witness to the gospel within one's own lived self-constitutive discourse rather than making ministry dependent upon the one ministered to having assumed the role of receptive audience to one's narration of traditional themes.

It might be objected that this idea of ministry as witness is inadequate to the traditional concept of ministry as proclamation: how can there be proclamation of the gospel (except as affirmation to oneself) unless it is effectively announced as such, unless ministry is such as to situate the other in the role of receptive audience? This objection rests on a misunderstanding, however. While the discipline of narration prevents us from ministering to others in a way that sets out from a denial of their discourse, it certainly does not prevent us from ministering such as to *invite* them to attend to our discourse. Witness has the potential to resonate with those outside the ecclesial community, thereby establishing a relationship in which their future participation in Christian self-constitutive discourse is made possible. For those within the ecclesial community, the invitation is to a deeper or different sense of fellowship in Christ. By choosing to repeat and amplify through ministry only those values, attitudes and worldviews available in the culture that accord with the tradition, and to not repeat or amplify others, the Christian becomes a powerful witness to the gospel, without seeking to deny what is other.

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[436] McDermott, John M., 'Is AIDS God's Punishment?' in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 7:32 (San Francisco, CA.: St.Ignatius, 1991), pp.51-58, pp.51-52.

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If the discipline of narration requires us to take seriously traditional ideas of ministry, but to understand them in particular ways, it functions in the same way with the relevant contents of contemporary experience. Of course, ministry is an intra-ecclesial concept, but there are certainly pertinent themes and ideas available through encounter with the ordinary social world. One such is the concept of service that seems to animate the British social services – the idea that it is a social duty for the institutions of the state to seek to end or at least to palliate suffering. This is a principle underlying the National Health Service, the social security benefits system and the workings of many other governmental agencies. However, this principle should not be characterised as having to do only with remedial activity. It also contains the idea that, with the end of this or that species of suffering or disadvantage, individuals and communities will be equipped to play autonomous, contributory roles in the alleviation of social ills.

Naturally, Christian self-constitutive discourse will not appropriate a concept derived from extra-ecclesial experience until it has been thoroughly evaluated in terms of its coherence with the inner intention of the tradition. However, the discipline of narration compels us to take seriously an idea such as this, which is a prominent feature of contemporary extra-ecclesial discourse in Britain at least. Thus, from the perspective of fidelity to traditional commitments Christians might, for example, criticise the 'social service' ethic for being too dependent on delivery through impersonal agencies. However, taking the ethic seriously as part of reflection on Christian existence, it is evident that it might have something instructive to communicate about ideas of ministry. If this is, as I submit, so prominent a feature of extra-ecclesial discourse (which members of the ecclesial community participate in and are disposed by too, of course) perhaps it ought to influence how Christians do ministry, at least in the ordinary social world. If there is a social expectation that need will be met in a very 'this-worldly' way, Christians can certainly criticise that expectation as evidence of an incomplete perspective on existence *once* the other is engaged, but perhaps such engagement could best be sustained by actually meeting some of the other's expectations.

'Compromise' of this sort might, in conventional theological terms, be thought necessary but undesirable. The discipline of narration suggests, however, that such compromise, because directed toward engagement with the other, is a wholly valid choice. If we are living towards the eschatological life of the future, which we have a responsibility to grasp in creative acts of the imagination, we are freed to 'bracket' those elements of tradition and experience that inhibit the maximal realisation of a Christian existential telos here and now. A species of 'situation ethics', perhaps, but one that anticipates and is directed to an ever more full breaking in of the eschatological life to the present situation.

The points made here allow us to see how substantially commitment to a discipline of narration might affect the idea of ministry. The new synthesis between tradition and experience inspired by the project of narration would, if applied here, lead to a wholly other-centred form of ministry in which the impetus for ministry and its religious significance are derived from the tradition, but its practical content and development are shaped by the needs and expectations of those to whom ministry is devoted. Once again, this does not disbar Christians from seeking to teach, to inform, to bring in new concepts and critique old ones; but all this should be done in terms of a genuinely dialogical encounter in which Christians learns anew in each case from the other how and when to minister. Where ministry is done in intra-ecclesial contexts, this will be challenging; where it is done in the ordinary social world ministry would be nothing less than total self-giving. In our narratological terms, this self-giving may be understood to involve a situating of oneself as responsive audience to the discourse of the other, motivated by the traditional theme of Christ-like service within one's own self-constitutive discourse.

4.3.c. The Discipline of Narration and the Practice of Social Ministry

I would argue that we might characterise the practical outworking of this concept of ministry through the idea of extending the conditions necessary for the renewal of self-constitutive discourse to those who are encountered through ministry. This might appear a strange approach, given that I was keen at an early stage of this thesis to stress the pastoral availability of the project of narration. Indeed, I do not want to

qualify the claim that this project is fully available to those unfamiliar with formal theology or discourse analysis. Academic discussion is appropriate here, but the project could be grasped by anyone prepared to think seriously about self-constitutive discourse. However, it will be recognised that there are factors quite apart from the intellect and degree of involvement with academic theology that prevent the individual or the community from engaging in renewal of self-constitutive discourse. These are very various in nature, taking in the economic, political, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions of human existence. Thus, they range, for example, from situations of actual oppression where commitment to the Christian tradition is an occasion of persecution, to situations of poverty that limit and distort social experience, to subjective experiences that have introduced fear, mistrust, uncertainty or other self-deforming characteristics into self-constitutive discourse.

Ministry is a basic, indispensable theme within Christian self-constitutive discourse that should inform all other-directed actions. However, particular instances of suffering or limitation such as those suggested above do provide the occasions at which ministry can make a decisive difference. Responsive ministry, then, will be concerned with freeing the one ministered to from their particular suffering or limitation – to the extent that this is possible here and now – but doing so with the idea of ultimately freeing them *for* the renewal of self-constitutive discourse.

Commitment to the discipline of narration tends to an idea of practical ministry as extending to the valued other the same possibilities for self-transformation one has appropriated for oneself. This could even include communication of the project of narration itself, but only in the sense that by providing a point of resonance for others the one engaged in ministry draws those others to engage with his or her self-constitutive discourse. Consciously attempting to import ones own ideas about normative self-constitutive discourse into practical ministry would, like the conscious attempt to proselytise, represent a failure to ground ministry in the real situation of the other.

Commitment to the discipline of narration demands recognition of, though not necessarily accession to, the value of discourse not our own. Thus, recognition of the

plurality of religions and other belief systems existing within the world today must be one of the first steps in contemporary ministry. This is so whether ministry is focussed upon the ordinary social world, or on the intra-ecclesial context, where as we saw in our previous chapter members of the believing community are likely to have divergent spiritual and personal 'biographies'. However, since the discipline of narration is not a principle of systematic theology the fact that it directs us to recognise and value the radical plurality of human self-constitutive discourse does not commit us to one particular theological reading of plurality, religious in particular. It would be legitimate, from our perspective, to hold the view that such plurality is part of the divine purpose, as it would to hold the view that such plurality is a fact of contemporary experience that will be overcome in the eschatological future.[437] What the discipline of narration commits us to is a particular way of handling the fact of plurality here and now.

Thus, Christian ministry should be a witness to the core of the tradition that, Christians believe, can lead all people to the transformed eschatological life. It would have, therefore, to be such as to point to the irreducible source of all Christian witness - Jesus Christ. However, such witness could not be one that simply called upon the other to leave their religious culture or their different construal of the Christian tradition and become part of the ecclesial community and reception of the tradition owned by the one engaged in ministry. Rather, the species of witness we envisage would simply point to Christ as the one who introduces the possibility of self-transformation in the terms of a new existence predicated upon his life and death. This certainly leaves the possibility open for a person who had been witnessed to in ministry to engage more deeply with the self-constitutive discourse of the witness and become part of the ecclesial community that understands itself as the living source of witness. On the other hand, a person who has been witnessed to may feel no desire to reshape their self-constitutive discourse whatsoever. Still, if engagement with the other in ministry has brought them any degree of relief or liberation, and so opened up the possibility of new life, it has been successful. Once more, from the perspective of commitment to the discipline of narration ministry is not evangelism, and its fruits are not ultimately to be judged in terms of conversions or other forms of outward

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[437] Grenz, op.cit, op.275.

successes, but by the movement of the heart towards the eschatological fulfilment of Christian hope within the one ministered to.

Having established firmly what commitment to the discipline of narration suggests practical ministry should not be, let us consider what its positive content could be. What practical steps could authorial subjects or communities take to bring about the conditions of transformed self-constitutive discourse? We can better answer this question by focussing closely on this idea of 'transformation'. Churchpeople engaged in liberative projects, particularly those actually speaking from within situations of great suffering and oppression have frequently used the language of revolution to articulate the sorts of changes they would like to see the Church make in the world.[438] This may be a legitimate development of the traditional imaginative vocabulary, in those situations, but to the extent that the discipline of narration commits us to positive engagement with the world, it discourages ideas of social action that involve negation of what is given. 'Transformation' is a better concept, then, because it suggests that wherever possible what is critiqued from a traditional, faithful standpoint will not be discarded but taken up into a new synthesis with the tradition and directed to the eschatological life of the future. Limited though it is, the culturally prevalent theme of 'social service' introduced earlier in this chapter, with its idea that overcoming human need is not an end in itself, but creates occasions for new and positive contributions, is of assistance here.

As far as the institution of the Church is concerned, then, we can conceive of ministry as a prophetic mission to transform the structures of human existence. It would be possible to author a narrative about this based upon the organising theme of 'justice': justice to the whole human person, social justice to the poor and the marginalised and, perhaps, given contemporary environmental concerns, justice to the natural basis of

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[438] Compare, for example, the post-Christian feminism of Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco, CA.: Harper San Francisco, 1987), *passim*; the black cultural nationalism (imperialism?) of Cone, James H., *The Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury, 1969), esp.p.71; Anyike, James C., *Historical Christianity African Centered* (Chicago: Popular Truth, 1994), pp.159-166; Ani, Marimba, *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behaviour* (Trenton, NJ: African World, 1994), p.186; the liberation theology of Boff, Leonardo. *Church, Charism, and Power: Liberation and the Institutional Church.*, trans. John Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1985), *passim*.

production and reproduction of life on earth too. A grand narrative of this sort could supply a direction for ministry in general, allowing imaginative space for the local, particular contributions of authorial subject and communities. Such a narrative could be lived out in numerous ways.

Pluralist secular humanism, in its statist, technocratic development, is one of the prevailing grand narratives of the ordinary social world. It has value, in that it stands as a counterweight to religious or other ideological hegemony and recognises the essential role of the state in regulating complex society and of technology in contemporary existence. However, it also tends, rather like the bureaucratic systems with which it is allied, to reduce human society to mechanical-materialist dimensions; denying, in consequence, the interpersonal, humanity's relation to the natural environment and, of course, the transcendent spiritual dimension of human selfhood. Thus, this grand narrative has proved incapable of grounding self-constitutive discourse that resists commodification of human persons and ecological degradation. In denying any real imaginative space for religion, it has also fuelled the emergence of contemporary forms of religious obscurantism such as religious fundamentalism, aggressive religious communalism and the intellectually unsatisfactory attempt to value nature through so-called 'neo-paganism'

Confronted with this grand narrative, commitment to the discipline of narration urges that a new story be told and lived out through ministry. A new 'holistic' form of humanism that integrates the technological, ecological, spiritual and interpersonal dimensions of human being has to emerge through the encounter between various Christian traditions, other religions, secular ideologies and individual and communal experiences. Witnessing ministry, as the normative form of Christian encounter with the other, provides the frame for this encounter. Thus, ministry can open a path for religion to assimilate secular values of material development, rational freedom and equality, and for secularism to be integrated with the organic and spiritual dimensions of the tradition.

The concept of ministry privileged by commitment to the discipline of narration would support a very wide range of actual activity. We should expect it to be lived out

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through traditional ecclesial activities such as charity and relief work and through individual patterns of self-giving. We should also, however, expect resources derived from the ordinary social world, from the culture to become occasions for and media of ministry. This last point raises perhaps one further area where adherence to the discipline of narration might have an impact on the practical nature of ministry.

The post-war period in particular has seen innumerable efforts to take up resources offered by the culture and redeploy them such has to communicate the contents of the tradition in ways that are more 'relevant' to our contemporaries. In so far as this represents an attempt to discover authentic value in the ordinary social world it is, from our perspective, a laudable aim. However, I would submit that frequently such engagement with the culture has been superficial, treating it as a storehouse to be raided for prizes that might be of interest to the ecclesial community, rather than as an occasion for inclusive ministry. The distinction between this sort of approach and one inspired by the discipline of narration may be characterised by drawing attention to evangelical Christian reception of the contemporary arts. There is a thriving Christian drama and popular music scene; unfortunately, much of the material it has produced is a pallid version of 'secular' music and drama, essentially because it is the latter drained of any 'controversial' content. As such, it is a form of *intra*-ecclesial discourse, largely restricted to younger Christians. It affords these young people only the most limited opportunities to proclaim their faith through a ministry of witness. How much richer is a disposition toward the resources of the culture in which music, fine art, cinema, drama and so on were seen as occasions to *share* enthusiasms with those outside the ecclesial context.

4.3.d. Concluding Remarks:

While we cannot 'read off' a particular idea of Christian ministry from the discipline of narration, the latter will strongly affect how we conceive of and attempt to live out ministry. Perhaps the most radical implication acceptance of the discipline of narration could have here is the foreclosure of the possibility of ministry as, or as closely bound up with, proselytism. It will be recognised that this possibility is set aside not in deference to a prior liberal or pluralist view of inter-faith contact, but

because of a commitment to treat the self-constitutive discourse of the other with maximal seriousness, which derives in turn from a recognition of its authentic value to the Christian engaged in the project of narration. It is this same commitment that leads us to conclude that ministry inspired by the discipline of narration will be such as to respect and, where possible, to meet the 'this-worldly' concerns of the other. Yet, this central commitment is balanced by other concerns that are part of the discipline of narration. We have considered, for example, the requirements that Christian self-constitutive discourse be adequate to the fullness of the tradition and directed to an unambiguously Christian existential telos. In sum, then, the discipline of narration tends to a conception of the one engaged in ministry as socially activist here and now, but motivated by a tradition-derived desire to extend the possibility of the eschatological life to those encountered in ministry. The initial outward expression of such ministry will be the encounter with, sharing in and attempt to overcome the needs of the other in partnership with them. However, this concrete action will be authentic witness to Christ, inspired by the ancient idea of ministry as proclamation, understood as a lived invitation to share, or share more deeply, in new life.

4.4. The Horizon: Understanding Inter-Faith Encounter

4.4.a. Introductory Remarks:

One of the leading themes of this thesis has been the authentic value of the other and the discourse of the other. However, of course, the other is met not as some subjective atom ready to be disposed as audience to our narratives, but as a subject and potential author existing within and disposed by his or her own complex web of communal attachments and commitments. Thus, encounter with the other will inevitably mean encounter with these too. In those cases where the other has a faith other than Christianity (and this includes anyone who is committed to a grand explanatory narrative), then this species of encounter will amount in some of its phases to inter-faith dialogue. This will be most self-evidently the case, of course, where inter-communal encounter is in view, but we should be aware that individuals who meet as colleagues, friends, sisters, fellow parents, fellow students and so on may also and at the same time meet as living and particular embodiments of their received traditions.

At the head of this section I use the term 'the horizon' to refer to inter-faith contact. This reflects the author's conviction that when we come to the issue of encounter between subjects and communities of differing faiths (including non-religious faiths) *as such* we have reached one of the few areas where the certainty, the finality, that Christians believe will be grasped in the eschatological future is available here and now. Of course, I understand this in a very minimal sense - to be Christian is to have faith in Christ according to the construal of Christian tradition, which is simply incompatible with the faith of the Muslim, Jew or Hindu. This commitment to a certain path is exclusive of all other such commitments, but it does not entail any positive certainty about the validity of those other commitments.

Thus, from the perspective of the discipline of narration, inter-faith encounter cannot be conceived of as an enterprise directed to the goal of stepping out of the Christian tradition into a different religious awareness so completely that authentic connection with the tradition is broken. That caveat stipulated, vast areas of productive encounter between subjects and communities of different faiths remain entirely legitimate, indeed highly desirable. It remains the task of this section to explore which ideas of inter-faith encounter, if any, adherence to the discipline of narration directs us toward.

4.4.b. The Discipline of Narration and the Idea of Inter-Faith Encounter:

We have already concluded that, from the perspective of the discipline of narration, inter-faith encounter cannot be, on one hand, straightforward proselytism or, on the other, an attempt to formulate an essentially syncretistic view of religious truth. However, we have seen in previous sections that while our project sits ill with proselytism, it supports an active proclamation of the gospel through social ministry, through the resonance created in others by our lived witness. In the same sort of way, while abandonment of the inner intention of the tradition is forbidden by our criterion of adequacy to the fullness of the tradition, including its exclusive claims upon oneself, this does not prevent learning from other faiths in a great variety of ways. Examples of what Christians might have to learn could be multiplied here, but I do not think that necessary to make this point. Consider, merely by way of example, Islam and Judaism's radical insistence on monotheism, a belief shared by Christians

but undermined by much of our liturgy and hymnody. It hardly needs to be said that these and other faiths also have much to learn from Christianity. Any such mutually beneficial encounter will come about in the course of a process of dialogical inter-faith discourse; discourse, understood here as throughout this thesis, not simply as a series of acts of spoken or written communication but as a total way of life.

Simply stated, inter-faith discourse involves meeting people themselves - not their sacred texts or other 'representatives' - and getting to know their lived religious traditions. More formally, it consists of discussions for mutual understanding held among differing religious communities. Knitter describes his experience with inter-faith discourse as 'the interaction of mutual presence...speaking and listening...witnessing the commitments, the values, the rituals of others'.[439] The most common form of inter-faith discourse, of course, is when two individuals discuss their religious beliefs in a casual setting. These discussions can be very valuable in promoting better understanding of the different religions that make up the pluralistic ordinary social world. While valuable, however, such discussions do not constitute formal inter-faith discourse of the sort that is usually in view when the expression 'inter-faith' is employed.

An excellent definition of formal inter-faith discourse is supplied by John Taylor, who spent time working as an Anglican missionary, as well as being a noted churchman and author. Taylor defines 'inter-religious dialogue' as a 'sustained conversation between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect contradictions and mutual exclusions between their various ways of thinking'.[440] In other words, formal inter-faith discourse is a process in which members of at least two religious communities come together for an extended and serious discussion of the beliefs and practices that separate the communities, with the authority to do so implied in the fact that they self-identify themselves as members of the community.

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[439] Knitter, Paul F., *Jesus and the Other Names* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), p.14.
[440] Taylor, John V., 'The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue' in Anderson, Gerald and Stransky, Thomas (eds.), *Faith meets Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 94.

Lochhead argues that rather than defining dialogue as a search for *agreement*, it would be more helpful to define dialogue as a search for *understanding*.[441] On this idea, to understand another tradition it is not necessary to agree with its precepts nor to create *religious* 'common ground' by, for example, reaching preliminary agreements on shared ethical concerns. It is enough merely to engage with the discourse of the other with maximal seriousness, in the way encouraged by the discipline of narration. The primary function of inter-faith discourse should thus, from the perspective of commitment to the discipline of narration, be to promote greater understanding between Christians and people of other faiths, and to sustain the discourse that is the medium of this. A sustained, discussion between representatives of different religious communities will clarify the areas of agreement and disagreement in belief and practice, issuing in numerous benefits. For the Christian committed to the discipline of narration these will include opportunities to explore one's own beliefs by testing them against others, to enrich one's religious thought through exposure to an unfamiliar imaginative vocabulary, to invite the other to participate in the ecclesial community and, of course, to work toward a world characterised by love that approximates more nearly to that of the eschatological future.

Focus upon, and acceptance of, honest disagreement is essential to fruitful inter-faith discourse. Christians committed to the discipline of narration will not compromise the inner intention of their tradition; it should be expected that members of other religions will be equally devoted to their beliefs. It is for this reason that Newbigin states, 'the integrity and fruitfulness of the inter-faith dialogue depends in the first place upon the extent to which the different participants take seriously the full reality of their faiths as sources for the understanding of the totality of experience'.[442] A subject or community not fully committed to the distinctiveness of the inner core of the tradition he or she is presenting will not adequately present that religion as it is held and practiced by the majority of sincere believers. The dialogue would thus be compromised and unproductive. Effective dialogue enables participants to correctly identify areas of genuine religious disagreement, as well as identify misconceptions regarding the beliefs and practices of different religions. From our perspective, then,

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[441] Lochhead, David, *The Dialogical Imperative* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), pp.60-64.
[442] Newbigin, Leslie, 'The Basis, Purpose and Manner of Inter-Faith Dialogue' in Rousseau, Jr., Richard W. (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: Facing the Frontier* (n.p.: Ridge Row, 1981), p.16.

this involves trying to determine when it is appropriate to say 'no' to the other, as well as 'yes', and what sort of 'no' this might be.

4.4.c. The Discipline of Narration and the Limits of Inter-Faith Discourse:

> 'the more I am able to affirm others, to say 'yes' to them in myself, by discovering them in myself and myself in them, the more real I am. I am fully real if my heart says yes to everyone. I will be a better Catholic, not if I can refute every shade of Protestantism, but if I can affirm the truth in it and still go further. So, too, with the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists etc. This *does not mean* syncretism... [or] ... the vapid and careless friendliness that accepts everything by thinking of nothing. There is much that one cannot 'affirm' and 'accept' but first one must say 'yes' where one really can'.[443]

The positive view of inter-faith dialogue Merton sets out here is one entirely consistent with commitment to the discipline of narration.[444] On one hand, he explicitly sets aside that crude pluralism which understands religious insights as simply relative to one another or at least easily reconciled. That position is rightly rejected because it ignores the nature of the Christian faith commitment, expressed in our criterion of adequacy to the fullness of the tradition. On the other hand, Merton rejects exclusivism on the part of Christians. That position must be rejected because, as Brown has shown in 'Tradition and Imagination',[445] it is intellectually and practically unsustainable.[446] Merton's words here sketch for us a middle way that is inclusive without being syncretistic. However, I want to take what he says as a cue to

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[443] Merton, Thomas. *Conjectures Of A Guilty Bystander* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1995), p.144.

[444] It is not, however, one that Merton maintained with consistency throughout his own career. In some of his writings, for example, enthusiasm for shared insights passes over into the claim that there is a common, 'ultimate' spirituality beneath the divergent doctrines of the great religions. See, for example, Merton, Thomas, *Mystics And Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1967), p.204: 'ecumenism seeks the inner and ultimate spiritual 'ground' which underlies all articulated differences'

[445] Brown, Tradition and Imagination', p.107 and elsewhere.

[446] Exclusivism as the rejection of dialogue is intellectually unsustainable because it ignores the vast (and potentially ongoing) impact of Judaism and Philosophy and the lesser but still important impact of Islam upon Christian thought. It is practically unsustainable not only because such a position frustrates global Christian goals – witness Hans Küng's statement that there can be no world peace without peace between the world religions – but also because it imperils the very survival of a Christian witness in some parts of the world. Note in this context the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem Rt. Revd. Riah Abu-El-Assal's call for 'religious tolerance and understanding' in Israel so that Christians there could celebrate Easter (ACNS 2443 – 11/4/2001).

think *pessimistically* about inter-faith dialogue, to use that as a way in to this issue of saying 'no' in inter-faith discourse.

There may very well be *particular* contexts where to say 'no' or 'not yet' to the other engaged in inter-faith discourse can never be an appropriate response. We might think here of certain instances of inter-faith dialogue worked out through a common commitment to some form of social action. If, for example, a local ecclesial community and a group of Muslims in the same British city were concerned about the impact of prostitution or drug peddling or some other social ill on the neighbourhood they shared, there might be almost limitless possibilities for co-operation if not for agreement in detail. The Christians involved would be bound by the gospel ethic of love and service to others[447], so supremely consistent with the project of narration, to remain engaged in the situation, struggling for a resolution that would be best for all concerned. Here turning away from members of other faiths would involve abandoning both the criteria of adequacy - adequacy to the inner intention of the tradition and to the fullness of contemporary experience.

Admitting the possibility that *particular* contexts, particularly those where inter-faith discourse is ad hoc and with a pragmatic focus, might preclude the possibility of saying no to those of other faiths, it remains clear that more generally groups of Christians have historically said no for reasons that the whole Church is prepared to take seriously. There are three ways in which Christians who are prepared to engage in inter-faith dialogue can with a clear conscience begin to think about saying 'no' to their partners in debate. The most obvious way, and one which can be compatible with every shade of theological opinion, is predicated upon a refusal to compromise the inner intention of the tradition. We have already affirmed that Christians who maintain their basic faith commitment throughout the experience of dialogue will not be able to give up certain 'essentials'. However, this need not be taken to preclude re-envisioning orthodox certainties. Moreover, inter-faith discourse also calls on Christians to re-think their conceptions of the faith if their witness to people for whom the old, familiar formulae are new and strange is going to be effective. This point is

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[447] In these specific cases, 'the other' would of course include the victims and perpetrators of criminality as well as the Muslim community.

well brought out by the lay Catholic theologian Jose M. de Mesa, who talks of the need to 're-root' the faith rather than simply translating existing formulae into the vernacular while leaving structures and systems unexamined.[448]

The second way in which Christians might say no to those of other faiths is particularly characteristic of conservative Christianity. Conservatives will engage in dialogue but regard its legitimate scope as strictly limited.[449] There seems to be a notion at work that only by restricting what one is prepared to debate or to question can one be sure of preserving the integrity of one's faith. That is not, however, self-evident. Whether one believes *decisively* that Christ is the Son of God and is one's personal saviour is ultimately a matter of individual faith, but in general it should not damage mature Christian faith[450] to debate how the man Jesus has been understood by Jews, Muslims and others. That said, the now truly global nature of some Christian denominations means that inter-faith dialogue can occur in a quite bewildering diversity of circumstances. It may be that the general principle of complete openness encouraged by the discipline of narration cannot be applied uniformly to all of these. The conservative refusal will, I submit, have a limited value as a local strategy where the ecclesial community concerned is in a state of internal confusion. Here we should not think only - or even perhaps chiefly - of Christian communities whose actual survival is threatened by war or some other social disorder. It could well be argued that, for example, Anglicans and Episcopalians should as a matter of pastoral concern make the conservative refusal to open up central areas of belief to the searching nature

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[448] De Mesa, Jose M., 'Re-thinking the Faith with Indigenous Categories' in *Inter-Religio* 13 (1988), pp.18-29. De Mesa also argues that in the process of 're-thinking' the critical element within Gospel-culture dialogue should be secondary to the kind of 'probing listening' that will map continuities and discontinuities between the faith and that which it encounters: op.cit.p.28.

[449] George Knight argues that 'The Church therefore has an abiding and imperative commission to proclaim Christ to that portion of the Covenant People of God who have not yet understood that it is Christ who interprets to them their existence as Israel and who fulfils in himself the meaning of their existence and calling...' which seems to rule dialogue out. However, he goes on to say: 'Yet, since the Church has still so much to learn from these its brethren who dwell with it within the bonds of the one Covenant about the meaning of the redemption of the social order and communal life of man, both Church and Synagogue must humbly listen to what the other has to say to its 'Siamese Twin'. Not only has each much to teach the other, each has much to learn from the other'. See Knight, *George, Law and Grace: Must a Christian Keep the Law of Moses?* (London: S.C.M., 1962).

[450] This point about maturity in faith is one that must not be neglected. At the level of co-operation on issues of common social concern, all members of all faiths should certainly be encouraged to make their contribution. However, in more abstract areas of dialogue the contributions of those who have engaged with their tradition in a deep, sophisticated way are – assuming their readiness to debate – more to be welcomed as these are the individuals who are likely to offer the richest insights.

of committed inter-faith dialogue until the apparent disparity between the beliefs of theologians, clergy and laity which provokes so many headlines is better worked out.[451]

Just as there is a way of saying no to members of other faiths in the course of inter-faith dialogue that is characteristically conservative, so too there is a way that typifies liberal churchmanship. This claim might surprise initially, but its truth is amply demonstrated by the comments of Bishop Michael Ingham of the Anglican Church of Canada[452] after the 1998 Lambeth Conference's rejection of homosexual practice and the ordination of people in same-sex unions.[453] Insisting that 'inter-faith accommodation does not permit us to deny the gospel', Bishop Ingham developed this conservative-sounding premise into an indictment of the bishops who 'abandoned gay and lesbian Christians' 'in an effort to appease militant forms of Islam, particularly in Africa'. He even went as far as to describe the decision of the conference as 'a modern form of human sacrifice'. Thus Bishop Ingham would be prepared, as a liberal Christian,[454] to say no to partners in inter-faith discourse where cooperating with them would apparently imperil the affirmation of human dignity and human worth - characteristically liberal concerns.

Bishop Ingham's views did not at the time represent the mainstream of the Anglican episcopate's considered opinion; the conference voted 526 to 70 in favour of the resolution (with 45 abstentions).[455] However, the principle that Bishop Ingham

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[451] Note that this disparity usually seems to be predicated upon the critical debate between Christian faith and modernity rather than upon inter-faith dialogue. I am also aware that many Anglican churchgoers who may be critical of 'liberal' bishops themselves hold 'unorthodox' views. However, the point remains that the alienation of laity from clergy compromises the Church's ability to engage vigorously in inter-faith dialogue.

[452] Ingham, Michael, 'No Shame in Evangelism as Witnessing to Christ' in *Anglican Journal* 1999.

[453] Resolution 1.10 'Human Sexuality', subsections (d) and (e) are referred to.

[454] It might be objected that Bishop Ingham's 'liberal refusal' is rooted in commitment to the western, left-liberal tradition rather than in commitment to the Christian faith. However, the Church does teach that God 'respects' the particularity of human being and the Anglican Church in particular has traditionally focussed much of its reflection and devotion upon the human Incarnation of Christ. Bishop Ingham could well represent his position as in continuity with these Christian themes.

[455] We might question whether Bishop Ingham was correct in representing the conference's resolution straightforwardly as a capitulation to hard-line Islam in Africa. I would draw attention to the Church's long-standing (though by no means unambiguous throughout all phases of its history) refusal to admit homosexual practice as a divinely ordered expression of human sexuality. *Indigenous* - non-Christian and non-Islamic - African traditions may also be important here.

upholds of a liberal refusal to go further in inter-faith dialogue where the direction of such dialogue is perceived to be inhumane or otherwise ethically suspect is entirely consistent with the discipline of narration. The hypothetical case of local co-operation between Christians and Muslims concerned about the problems of prostitution or drug abuse in their shared neighbourhood which was constructed above reflects real situations in which such co-operation has broken down over ethical questions about the strategy to be pursued.

We have seen that from time to time it may be necessary for Christians engaged in inter-faith dialogue to refuse to go further with their partners in debate in a given direction either to preserve the integrity of the faith, for reasons of pastoral concern or because to do otherwise would involve compromising cherished traditional principles. In real situations these three ways of saying no will each be most characteristic of the particular types of response associated with particular types of churchmanship. Presumably, however, a carefully nuanced approach to inter-faith discourse would employ all three from time to time.

I would argue not that there is anything wrong with saying no to partners in inter-faith discourse in these ways, from the perspective of commitment to the discipline of narration, but that we need to be extremely careful in the way we think about what we are doing when we say no. The same recent Lambeth conference referred to above conceived of inter-faith dialogue along these lines:

> 'a desire both to listen to people of all faiths and to express our own
> deepest Christian beliefs, leaving the final outcome of our life and
> witness in the hands of God'.[456]

Acknowledgement of the eschatological horizon is crucial here. Without it, inter-faith discourse is cut adrift from the inner core of the tradition. Without it, the Church's participation in such dialogue becomes effectively a matter of one sociological grouping negotiating with others, which is a grotesquely impoverished version of inter-faith encounter. Christians *do* engage in inter-faith discourse in part to secure concrete, this-worldly goals, but that certainly does not exhaust the Church's interest

in people of other faiths. Individual Christians and particular Christian communities who approach members of other faiths in a spirit of good will might do so initially because they seek respite from strife, which is a universal human urge. Yet, the Christian claim to offer distinctive insights and critiques and to ask important questions once dialogue is under way rests upon a prior conviction that the Church has been and continues to be in receipt of a unique divine revelation that should be regulative for its life within the world. The Anglican Church is right to draw attention to the eschatological horizon as a factor informing Christian participation in inter-faith dialogue. This is no mere pious afterthought on the part of those already engaged in such dialogue, but a statement of the normative nature of faith for this activity of the ecclesial community, against which the Christian contribution may be evaluated.

The problem here is that the stated Anglican position lacks sufficient *precision* to be the sort of practical guide to 'good' inter-faith discourse that its authors presumably intended it to be. The Anglican formula cited above is laudable in its general features but that is all we have: an outline, a series of generalities. Criticism here should not be too strident - the Lambeth conference resolutions have to take account of hundreds of different kinds of Christian experience and the Anglican communion has historically been very tolerant of a spectrum of particular theological positions.[457] Given these considerations, it is perhaps unsurprising that the final form of words chosen should stop short of the kind of precision urged upon us by the discipline of narration's clear vision of life lived towards the eschatological future.

The basic weakness of any similarly vague acknowledgement of the eschatological horizon in inter-faith discourse is brought sharply into focus if we look at how these formulae colour the issue of saying no to the other. Whilst, again, this might be quite proper in a range of situations, that does not mean that the occasions when we feel bound to say no are not genuinely disappointing and hurtful all round. Saying no in the ways discussed earlier is only proper, from the perspective of adherence to the

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[456] Resolution VI.1, subsection (a), provision (v).

[457] At the 1998 Conference this was most amply demonstrated by the adoption of Resolution III.2, subsection (c): 'in particular [Conference] calls upon the provinces of the Communion to affirm that those who dissent from, as well as those who assent to, the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans...'.

discipline of narration, where it is a painful expression of traditional commitments Christians can legitimately regard as higher than that of adequacy to the fullness of experience. Thus, a truly Christian conception of doing inter-faith discourse *before* God must include the idea that dialogue is done *for* God, in accordance with his will. And if we confess that God calls us to inter-faith discourse we need, surely, to reflect seriously on the nature of that call – in particular on how our risky freedom to say no as well as yes to the other is to be conceived of.

In the context of inter-faith dialogue it is inadequate to state that 'leaving the final outcome of our life and witness in the hands of God' simply means doing our best by the lights of our consciences and the teaching of our church, reassured that God will make all right in 'the end'. That sort of idea may invite, and certainly excuses, something less than the total commitment envisaged by Thomas Merton when he talks of the heart that says 'yes to everyone'. The deepest determination to give the initial yes comes where confession of the ultimacy of God in inter-faith discourse consists in recognizing such dialogue as part of the working-out of his activity in the world and not as some purely human activity which he may choose to grace.[458] Without some such recognition on the part of the ecclesial community Christian participants in inter-faith discourse will stand under suspicion of half-heartedness. Refusals to continue debating or co-operating any further in a given direction on grounds of concern for the integrity of belief, pastoral concern for the church community or concern for ethical propriety may then be represented as evidence of lack of commitment, placing an opportunity to bring peace and understanding in jeopardy. Worse, these refusals *may very well be* evidence of just such a culpable failure. For if God is represented as being involved in inter-faith discourse merely in some vague and general way, parties to it can step back from engagement with a regretful shrug every time the search for understanding grows difficult.

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[458] Even where the Anglican resolution comes closest to affirming a total commitment to inter-faith dialogue the eschatological or transcendent referents which would add urgency and lay obligation are omitted: 'sharing and witnessing to all we know of the good news of Christ as our debt of love to all people whatever their religious affiliation'. Resolution VI.1, subsection (a), provision (vi).

Essentially, then, I argue that inter-faith discourse needs to be set squarely in the context of the duty to seek to bring into being the life of the eschatological future here and now if occasional retreat from it in deference to adequacy to the content of the tradition is to be justified. The only point at which we can make this choice is the point of crisis where it seems that agreement, reconciliation or even understanding is hopeless without faith in a God of 'apocalyptic coherence', a God, that is, who knows the end of our narratives even though we cannot see them beyond the eschatological horizon.

The notion of apocalyptic coherence is not intended to solve apparently insoluble conundrums; it merely represents the faithful hope of the 'right end' to our narratives. The real importance of the framework of ideas I have set out here for inter-faith dialogue lies in the way that, as a particular construal of the gospel obligation to love the other, they constrain Christian participants to absolute commitment *here and now*. *Here and now* the kind of resolutions we ultimately hope for from God do seem as though they must be of a paradoxical or even incomprehensible nature, but as Christians we live hopefully into the eschatological future.

4.4.d. Concluding Remarks:

It is not, of course, the particular narrative constructed or the specific practice of narration that *ultimately* distinguishes authentically Christian story and story-telling, but the nature of the telos of Christian narration. Narration, and the particular narratives that emerge from it are to be judged against this transcendent and as yet incompletely grasped vision. However, I trust that with the discipline of narration detailed here, Christians are better equipped to lay hold of their self-identities in ways that enable them to live toward the life of the eschatological future. The contribution of this thesis is to have described a means - in part derived from traditional practices, in part wholly original - of appropriating that life such that it can break into self-understanding here and now.

The project of narration has been thoroughly described and even realised, albeit in a tentative and necessarily limited experimental fashion. In these chapters we have seen

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how, at levels of Christian reflection including those quite beyond that of immediate self-constitutive discourse, it can be deployed to secure storied accounts of Christian being that demonstrate the imaginative possibility of being faithful at once to intra-ecclesial tradition and experience, while preparing for the transformed, completed life of the future. We have seen that the realisation of this project could be unending, for it becomes newly relevant with each new existential situation, but the business of laying its groundwork concludes here, at least for the present.

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Notes on the Bibliography:

Since this thesis is not predicated upon the work of a single author, there can be no meaningful division between primary and secondary works consulted. Accordingly, the bibliography is divided simply between printed works – books, journals, magazines and newspapers - and electronic resources. Magazines and newspaper references are dated as per their publication, whether that is a precise date or a month. Internet references include the date on which they were last consulted. Where there is no identifiable author, as in editorial statements in some journals, or some websites, the reference is given before the alphabetical list of other references.

Abbreviations used in this Bibliography:

AJ	-	*Anglican Journal*
ASB	-	*Archives of Sexual Behaviour*
BK	-	*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*
CT	-	*Christianity Today*
C.U.P.	-	*Cambridge University Press*
HGLR	-	*Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review*
IJP	-	*International Journal of Psychoanalysis*
JAAR	-	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAD		*Journal of Affective Disorders*
JCS	-	*Journal of Consciousness Studies*
JCTR	-	*Journal for Christian Theological Research*
JPSP	-	*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*
MT	-	*Modern Theology*
NB	-	*New Blackfriars*
NLR	-	*New Left Review*
NT	-	*Novum Testamentum*
NTS	-	*New Testament Studies*
O.U.P.	-	*Oxford University Press*

PSQ - *Political Science Quarterly*

PPL - *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*

RS - *Religious Studies*

ST - *Studia Theologia*

TBS - *The Biblical Seminar*

TT - *Theology Today*

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