TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF STORY:

AN EXPERIMENT IN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY.

Roy B. Crowder

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Supervisor: Ass. Prof. Charles Villa-Vicencio

Department of Religious Studies

University of Cape Town

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of story in the Christian proclamation. It focusses upon the dynamic of story which unites praxis and language in a single message.

There are four stages of argument. The First Part examines the hermeneutic problem especially as discussed in the work of Gadamer, Palmer, Robinson, Funk and others writers on the so-called New Hermeneutic. Their views are set against the the perspective of liberation and contextual theologies from Cone, Segundo, and Miguez Bonino amongst others.The impact of social praxis and context on communication and interpretation is examined. Its importance as a barrier to the translation of the whole dynamic of the gospel proclamation is stressed.

Part Two examines Jesus parables and acted parables. The data comes from two sources: the dominant form-critical approach to parables as exemplified by Jeremias or Crossan, in which the situation behind the text is examined. Second is the recent sociological approach to the practice of Jesus taken by such scholars as Theissen or Echegaray. The approach to this data comes from an analysis of the "history of the transmission of the tradition", a concept developed by Pannenberg from the work of Rentdorf and Von Rad. It provides a series of categories through which the data is examined. The dynamic of story is shown in the

unity of function and structure in the parabolic stories and actions.

The Third Part surveys the role of story as a category in contemporary theology. First, the approach of narrative theology is cosidered as in the work of Stroup, McClendon, McFague and others. Then the role of story in Third World theological reflection on liberation struggles is decribed. Examples are drawn mainly form Asia (China, Korea and the Philippines). The Latin American debate about such cultural forms is briefly reviewed. Lastly the role of story in some British contextual theology is discussed. The dynamic of story is dicovered in the function and impact of stories in theological reflection on the struggle against oppressive situations

Part Four briefly notes the perspective of critical theorists, like Habermas, on hermeneutics. Finally an attempt is made to tell stories of theological reflection on domination as a practical exercise illustrating the theoretical themes of the study.

The impetus for the study arises from two period of practical experience. One of some ten years duration, was work in British inner city ministry and theological training, in a context where community groups were struggling against many manifestations of urban stress. The second period, of about half a year, was an exposure to the conditions of life in rural (communal lands) and urban (high density residential area) Zimbabwe, as a visitor to the Methodist Church. In both instances stories were a vital means of communcation about the most important things.

1. INTRODUCTION

> The meaning of Christianity cannot be abstracted from its historical significance. Words - whatever the speaker may intend - communicate in relation to a code that is historically defined, and this code has not been created out of ideas but of the total experience of a given time and people - an experience which incorporates the actual historical impact of the Christian faith.[1]

1.1 A STORY AND A THEME

Christian proclamation is an event of language and praxis. The words of proclamation and the actions of the proclaimer are fused together in the message.

The unity of word and action forms a theme which is displayed with striking clarity in a story told to me by a black South African Methodist minister. He used it to communicate his experience as a landless, oppressed Christian.

> When the white people came to Africa they had the bible and we had the land. They taught us to pray, saying, "Hands together, eyes closed." When we opened our eyes, we had the bible and they had the land.[2]

This theme, the fusion of word and action, is embedded in the narrative. The story tells of missionaries and colonists. Missionaries are people who teach others to pray; they are people of words. Colonists are people who take over land which is not theirs; they are people who act. But the story does not

characterise them as two different groups, even though they were quite distinct. In fact, missionaries and colonists were often in conflict with one another, in southern Africa.[3]

When seen from the perspective of the colonised, however, both groups were part of the same process and held the same values. The story only distinguishes between the "we" who lose the land and the "they" who take it. As listeners to the story, we cannot differentiate the words of the prayer from the actions of land plunder; the message that is heard is a combination of them both. The story economically expresses the combined impact of mission and colonialism on the indigenous people of southern Africa in the nineteenth century.[4] With stark clarity, it illustrates the theme of the **indissoluble fusion of word and action** in any proclamation.

1.2 FEATURES OF THE STORY

The story quoted above transmits its theme by means of four features: its **power**, its **function**, its **impact**, and its **dynamic**.

1.2.1 The Power of the Story

The **power of the story** is that, in plain language and in brief compass, it conveys the impact of the colonial and missionary venture which would require long and complex explanation in any other form. It does not need educated listeners to understand it; but the listeners must be willing to enter the story's world. Theoretical questions do not have to be cleared away before the point is made. The story reveals its truth **immediately and simply.**

1.2.2 The Function of the Story

In considering the second feature, the **function of the story**, there are three elements to note.

First, the story functions as an **interpretation** of what has happened. It helps the narrator and listener make sense of a "memory of suffering".[5] It explains an experience of oppression so that they can begin to deal with it.

Second, the story interprets past experience by means of a **metaphorical comparison.** A metaphor expresses one thing in terms of another. This story expresses the whole history of mission and colonialism in terms of a single dramatic incident of prayer and plunder. It does not describe the complex historical process in realistic detail. It tells an imaginary narrative which conveys the essence of missionary penetration and colonial takeover. It also imparts the surprising quality of **metaphor** by unexpectedly yoking together two irreconcilable events, plunder and prayer.

Third, the story acts as a **hermeneutical bridge** across the "chasm" of time. The narrator tells the story because it speaks to contemporary experience through an interpretation of past experience. It links two experiences which are far removed in time, so that narrator and listener can relate the one to the other. In Gadamer's words it fuses two horizons.[6]

The story **functions**, therefore, as an **interpretation** of the memory of the past which is made in the present by **metaphorical comparison**, in order to form a **hermeneutical bridge** between past

suffering and present experience.

These elements of the story's **function** are found within the story itself. But a story owes its existence to communication. It can only exist when a narrator tells it to listeners. Both narrator and listeners are outside the story, but they are affected by it. As a successful story it draws the narrator and listeners into the message (gospel) it proclaims. The narrator and listeners experience the reality of the story, or as Ramsey suggests, they share in religious event - saying "Aha!"[7] This introduces the third feature of story, its **impact** on narrator and listeners.[8]

1.2.3. The Impact of the Story

Let us consider the **impact of the story** first on the narrator and then on two different groups of listeners.

The narrator of this story is an oppressed person, someone who is an object of exploitation. The impact, on the narrator, of telling the story, is that he or she is transformed into a **subject of history.** The story tells a history and the story teller controls the definition of that history. He or she initiates a struggle for liberation by redefining the past so that praxis can arise in the present.

The impact of the story on listeners is that they are **challenged to take sides,** according to whether they identify with the "we" or the "they" of the story. There are two groups of listeners, then.

In one group, there are those who identify with the "we" in the story - the people who lose their land and gain the bible. The story is liberating for these listeners because it expresses a memory from the "underside of history". As Gutierrez observes, "Many an effort has been made to blot out the memory of the oppressed and thereby deprive them of a source of energy, of historical will, of rebellion."[9] But this story preserves that dangerous "memory of suffering accumulated in history"[10] which can provide the oppressed with impetus for the struggle to initiate and promote their own liberation.

The other group of listeners are those who identify with the "they" of the narrative - the missionaries and colonialists. These listeners may find the story "historically" untrue. They consider the missionary and colonial history to have been beneficial and "civilising". So they find the story irritating and distorted and reject the interpretation of history which it contains. But irritation and provocation can be positive if they lead to new understanding. If these listeners allow themselves to enter into the world of the story they can discover a new awareness. As they see the events of the story through the eyes of the narrator and accept the narrator's interpretation, they begin to encounter the world from the perspective of the oppressed. "Aha!" "The light dawns!" Their situation "comes alive", fraught with new meaning.[11] They are claimed by a discernment of reality which challenges their life and invites, not only a change of understanding, but also a change of praxis.

1.2.4 The Dynamic of the Story

The three features of the story I have identified above, its **power** in simplicity; its function of **interpreting** past memory for present discernment through metaphor; and its **impact** on narrator and listeners as liberating word all combine to form a fourth feature. I call this the **dynamic of the story.**

The listeners react to the story by identifying with, or by rejecting, its interpretation of the past. The strength of the story's impact depends on the significance of this interpretation for the present. As Metz remarks, "The 'mediation' of the memory of suffering is always practical".[12] The interpretation of history contained in the story contradicts the history of the established order. It is a rereading of their ruling history. Gutierrez argues that this "rereading of history" can only happen "in the midst of the successes and failures of the struggles for liberation".[13] Those listeners who find the story liberating, do so because its "rereading of history" stimulates them to a "remaking of history from below".[14] A rereading of the past is made in the present and becomes formative for the future.

There is a three stage process at work here: a story is **told**; once heard, it becomes the springboard for action. Narrator and listeners are involved in **the dynamic of story: spoken word** becomes **doing word** by means of **heard word.**[15]

1.3 THEOLOGY OF STORY

The **dynamic of story**, which is the summation of the other features of story that I have identified, is highly significant for theology. Theology is written in theoretical and propositional language; but, as Metz affirms, it is rooted in story.

> Theology is above all concerned with direct experiences expressed in narrative language. This is clear throughout Scripture, from the beginning, the story of creation, to the end, where a vision of the new heaven and the new earth is revealed. All this is disclosed in narrative.[16]

According to Weinrich, story is the method by which Christianity "transmits itself from generation to generation in an endless chain of retellings of stories: 'faith comes by hearing'".[17] But the real significance of this "circle of apostolic storytelling" is that it follows the pattern of **the dynamic of story**, identified in the previous section.

The "endless chain of retellings of stories" effects the transmission of the Christian tradition. But it is not formed simply by the retelling and rehearing of a story. Telling and hearing are not the only elements in the process. The South African story of prayer and plunder, which began this chapter, reminds us of the **fusion of language and praxis** in Christian proclamation. The argument of this thesis is that transmission "from generation to generation" proceeds by the three-fold **dynamic**, of **spoken**, **heard** and **acted word**. The narrator **tells** a story to listeners; they **hear** it. The impact of the story drives them to "choose sides", "change direction", "give up and follow"; they decide to **act** in the light of that story. In their action they become story-makers, and a new narrator **tells** their new story

to others so that it may be **heard** and impel them to **act.** It is this **dialectic between language and praxis** which impels the Christian tradition. It may be recovered by entry into the **dynamic of story.**

Story is the genre of gospel precisely because narrative is the fusion of action in language.

1.3.1 Biblical Roots of the Theology of Story

The roots of this understanding of story are found deep in the biblical tradition. Von Rad describes the faith of Israel, exhibited in the Old Testament, as "based upon historical acts, and as shaped and re-shaped by factors in which it saw the hand of Jahweh at work".[18] The people's faith creates a world made up of "testimonies which Israel raised to Jahweh's action in history".[19] The theology of this faith is encased in the stories and cannot be abstracted from them to stand on its own.

> If we divorced Israel's confessional utterances from the divine acts in history which they so passionately embrace, what a bloodless ghost we would be left with![20]

Retelling stories is the "most legitimate form of theological discourse in the Old Testament" according to Von Rad. He notes that this style is continued in the New Testament. Stephen and Paul rehearse Israel's history in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 7:2ff, 13:17).[21] The gospels and the Acts form the central tradition of story telling in the New Testament. Within them the **dynamic of story** is most clearly presented in the parables and parabolic actions of Jesus. The dialectic of story and praxis in the ministry of Jesus has been widely recognised in modern

biblical criticism. Jeremias calls these actions, such as eating with outcasts, "prophetic signs, more significant than words, silent proclamations that the Messianic Age is here..".[22] Crossan demonstrates the structural parallelism between Jesus' acted and spoken parables.[23] Theissen observes that in the Jesus movement "belief and practice formed an indissoluble whole".[24]

1.3.2 The Biblical Understanding of Truth

Some of these New Testament stories will be considered in greater detail in Part Two of this thesis. What is clear already, is that biblical truth is encountered in action - in Jahweh's mighty acts, in Jesus' parabolic actions, in the acts of the apostles. Biblical truth is not understood as "a conceptual communication but as a creative event, a history-making pronouncement".[25] Miguez Bonino makes this comment in criticising the classical view of "an absolute Christian truth" which must be "applied" to the world from its pristine state in an "abstract 'heaven of truth'". The liberation theologians reject this "epistemological split". Underlying Miguez Bonino's comment is a dynamic understanding of truth in which language and praxis are fused, "...there is no truth outside or beyond the concrete historical events in which men are involved as agents".[26]

The bible proclaims the gospel in stories. They are its prime method. The liberating truth is transmitted in story and re-actualised in praxis. The dynamic of story integrates language and praxis so that they form "an indissoluble whole". The recovery of this dynamic makes proclamation possible in our context.

1.4 THE ARGUMENT

This dissertation examines the role of story, as **dynamic**, in the communication of gospel. The study proceeds through four stages. Part One is a discussion of "Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics" - the theoretical understanding of interaction between past and present. Part Two investigates "Biblical Stories" - the role of stories in the past gospel tradition. Part Three is a review of "The Theology of Story" - the role of stories in present theological reflection. Part Four is "An Experiment in Contextual Theology by means of Stories" - a recapitulation of critical hermeneutics and some stories of the rediscovery of biblical tradition in the present struggle against domination.

Part One examines the methodological problems we face in trying to identify our situation within the situation of the gospels. Chapter 2 introduces the hermeneutical problem, which Gadamer describes as the attempt "to bring the text out of the alienation in which it finds itself, back into the living present of dialogue..".[27] This effort to bring tradition into the "living present" is noted in the life of the early church and in contemporary debates about hermeneutics as language, as story and as action. Translation of meaning from one context to another is not limited to an interpretation of the language of a text. The story in the text arises from a social project. It occurs within a specific social and political milieu. Interpretation requires a sensitivity to the social context of meaning.

The next chapters seek to deepen and extend the discussion of hermeneutics. Chapter 3 examines contemporary difficulties in establishing a link between our world and the world of the bible. It focusses on the barriers to translation which come from the social, economic, political and cultural discontinuities between these worlds. Chapter 4 discusses the concept of the "history of transmission of tradition" which Pannenberg developed from the studies of Rendtorff and Von Rad. An examination of this concept makes available certain key themes in the transmission of the gospel which are used in Part Two to analyse the stories of Jesus.

Part Two examines the gospel stories of Jesus in order to show how the integration of belief and practice was central to his proclamation. Chapter 5 discusses the recent history of parable research in terms of the themes drawn out of the "history of the transmission of tradition". The discussion highlights the vital interaction between spoken and acted parables in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God: an image that depends for its communicative power on the metaphorical link between the inexpressible Rule of God and the mundane world of human language and praxis, in which it must be apprehended. Chapter 6 examines further the acted parables in the ministry of Jesus and in the life of the early church. Recent sociological studies are surveyed. They help us see more clearly the historical expression of liberating gospel in the praxis of Jesus and his followers.

With this understanding of the role of story in the original proclamation behind us, Part Three returns to the contemporary situation to assess the use of the concept of story in recent theology. Chapter 7 reviews the emergence, predominantly in Europe

and North America, of "narrative theology". I note some limitations which this approach places on an understanding of the dynamics of story. Over against this, Chapter 8 considers how some Third World theologians use stories. Theologians from Asia, in particular, tell stories of liberation which arise from the struggles in which they find themselves. Chapter 9, the last in this section, examines the use of the category of story in theological dialogue. Since the emergence of a distinctive theological voice from Latin America, Asia and Africa, several processes of dialogue have been arranged between theologians from the Third World and the First World. (They have also included representatives of Black and Feminist theologies within the First World.) The category of story has featured prominently as a means of communication in these exchanges where theologians have learned new perspectives from poor and dominated people.

The final section, Part Four, points to an appropriate hermeneutic for the dynamics of story and puts into practice the theory of the preceding Parts of this study by telling some stories. Chapter 10 is a recapitulation of hermeneutical theory. A critique of linguistic, philosophical hermeneutics is made from the perspective of a hermeneutics of praxis against oppression and domination. Chapter 11 tells stories of praxis, amongst people suffering under domination. The subjects of these stories testify how they learnt from the poor and dominated a rediscovery of the radical gospel message and a new orientation to their social reality. The **dynamic of story** is illustrated in their stories.

1.5 THE RECOVERY OF STORY

The gospel is an event in history and society. The words of proclamation take on full meaning in praxis: the actions and inactions of those who proclaim; their interactions with others, their commitments, alliances, struggles and their complacencies. All these express the message which is received by their audience. "The meaning of Christianity cannot be abstracted from its historical significance."[28]

Any attempt to transmit the gospel in the contemporary world involves a movement in two directions at once. It involves the recognition of our situation in the situations of the scripture, and the recognition of the events of scripture in the events of our world. It is a movement of discernment for the sake of praxis. It is a hermeneutical circle in language, culture, time and social space. Consequently the themes of this study range widely.

It might seem immodest to move between discussions of biblical, theological, social and even literary hermeneutics. Each one of these fields is sufficient for a full length study in itself. I do not attempt to make an exhaustive study of these separate areas. My task is more modest. It is to provide a basis for the use of story as a means towards doing theology.

The stories in which we discover oppression and liberation are not mere anecdotes for "credulous children and old people".[29] They are stories whose power is evident in the ancient scriptural tradition and in contemporary struggles against oppression. The challenge is to transform the gospel "from a magical word into a shared event"

which transforms world.[30] The **dynamic of story**, which links the **spoken word** to the **doing word** through the **heard word**, answers this challenge. It presents the possibility of a renewal of story and story-telling which will be a response to praxis and a provocation of new praxis. This is what Metz calls for:

> But surely there are, in our post-narrative age, story-tellers who can demonstrate what "stories" might be today - not artificial, private constructions, but narratives with a stimulating effect and aiming at social criticism, "dangerous" stories in other words. Can we perhaps retell the Jesus stories nowadays in this way?[31]

The retelling of stories can have the "stimulating effect" which Metz requires. Anthony Sampson quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu retelling the story of Africans losing their land and receiving the bible with which this chapter began. He concludes the story in this way: "But perhaps it was not such a bad exchange. The Bible was very revolutionary. It was a tremendous idea, to be the partner of God in the dusty streets of the townships."[32]

It is the retelling of the Christian story "with a stimulating effect" that this thesis seeks to assist.

PART ONE

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL

HERMENEUTICS

The Gospel is firmly rooted in a story of that which once happened. The story is familiar...the situation into which Jesus Christ came was genuinely typical (the outcome of much previous history)...The forces with which he came into contact were such as are permanent factors in history:- government, institutional religion, nationalism, social unrest.

C.H.Dodd, "The Kingdom of God and the present situation." May 1940.[1]

Peter's address to the crowd

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed them in a loud voice:
'Men of Judaea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, make no mistake about
15 this, but listen carefully to what I say. •These men are not drunk, as you
16 imagine; why, it is only the third hour of the day.[b] •On the contrary, this is
what the prophet[c] spoke of:

17 In the days to come —it is the Lord who speaks—
I will pour out my spirit on all mankind.
Their sons and daughters shall prophesy,
your young men shall see visions,
your old men shall dream dreams.
18 Even on my slaves, men and women,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.
19 I will display portents in heaven *above*
and *signs* on earth *below*.
20 The sun will be turned into darkness
and the moon into blood
before the great Day of the Lord dawns.
21 All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

22 'Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazarene was a
man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that
23 God worked through him when he was among you, as you all know. •This
man, who was put into your power by the deliberate intention and foreknowledge
of God, you took and had crucified by men outside the Law.[d] You killed him,
24 but God raised him to life, freeing him from the pangs of Hades; for it was
25 impossible for him to be held in its power since, •as David says of him:

I saw the Lord before me always,
for with him at my right hand nothing can shake me.
26 *So my heart was glad*
and my tongue cried out with joy;
my body, too, will rest in the hope
27 *that you will not abandon my soul to Hades*
nor allow your holy one to experience corruption.
28 *You have made known the way of life to me,*
you will fill me with gladness through your presence.[e]

29 'Brothers, no one can deny that the patriarch David himself is dead and
30 buried: his tomb is still with us. •But since he was a prophet, and knew that
God *had sworn him* an oath *to make one of his descendants succeed him on the*
31 *throne*,[f] •what he foresaw and spoke about was the resurrection of the Christ:
he is the one who was *not abandoned to Hades*, and whose body did not *experience*
32 *corruption*. •God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses to that.
33 Now raised to the heights by God's right hand, he has received from the Father
the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring
34 of that Spirit. •For David himself never went up to heaven; and yet these
words are his:

The Lord said to my Lord:
Sit at my right hand
35 *until I make your enemies*
a footstool for you.[g]

36 'For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that God has made
this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.'

The first conversions

37 Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the apostles,
38 'What must we do, brothers?'

2. PAST INTO PRESENT, PRESENT IN THE PAST: THE HERMENEUTICAL DISCUSSION

2.1 THIS IS THAT

Peter's words on the day of Pentecost introduce the first recorded sermon of the early church. They deal with the problem which has faced all proclamation since. Peter cuts through this problem with a terse formula: **this is that.**[2]

"No!" he says to his sceptical listeners. "These men are not drunk: **this is that. This** strange behaviour which confuses you, so that you reject it as drunkeness, **is** actually **that** arrival of the spirit which the prophets told you to expect. **This** Jesus who was crucified **is that** one the prophets pointed to, and **is that** one whom King David sang about. **This** experience you are having **is that** old tradition of yours, happening before your very eyes."

The author of the Acts of the Apostles shows Peter's problem, like ours, to be two-fold. On the one hand he has to make sense of the extraordinary and challenging things that are happening around him, his contemporary context. Yet the only tools he has for understanding are the conceptions he has learnt from past tradition, his pre-understanding. Ramsey notes that he is one with

the other apostles. "Looking for model-language they found it in the Old Testament."[3] For himself therefore, he is engaged in an "effort to span the distance between a text and the present situation", which, as Palmer points out, is the essence of the hermeneutical drive for understanding.[4]

On the other hand he has to try and communicate his radically new experience to scornful listeners who are horrified by what they see. The only way he can make any entry into their understanding is by speaking in a language and form that is meaningful to them. He is in the same position as Gadamer's "hermeneutically trained mind", trying to ensure "that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against [the listener's] fore-meanings".[5] For Peter, it is not a case of interpreting a text, but an event. He is trying to explain an event to his listeners by reference to a number of texts which describe their "horizon of understanding".

For himself, he has to make sense of present events in terms of past traditions - a movement from present to past; while for others, he has to use past traditions in order to commend present events - a movement from past to present. The traditions have sustained him and are believed by the other people. Now they have to be "transmitted" in a new form. The "meaning" of a "past work is defined in terms of the questions put to it from the present".[6]

Peter is struggling with the task of hermeneutics: "to bring the text out of the alienation in which it finds itself [as fixed, written form], back into the living present of dialogue, whose primordial fulfillment is question and answer".[7] In referring to

the scriptures, he does not try to "reconstruct the world" of the texts or the mental processes of their authors, as though he can know better what was intended than the authors themselves. Rather, he seeks to "merge" or "fuse" his present "horizon of understanding", dominated as it is by the immediate experience, with the "horizon of the text". For, "Integration, not restoration, is the true task of hermeneutics."[8]

> As Gadamer's critique of historical consciousness indicates, the horizon of meaning within which a text or historical act stands is questioningly approached from within one's own horizon; and one does not leave his own horizon behind when he interprets, but broadens it so as to fuse it with that of the act or text.[9]

To use Barth's term, the wall between the two, interpreter and interpreted, becomes "transparent".[10] For Peter "the once-for-all event of the resurrection of Christ leads to an eschatological, missionary necessity of the proclamation to all peoples".[11] And so his exegesis becomes proclamation.

2.2 THE DYNAMICS OF UNDERSTANDING

As exegesis becomes proclamation in Peter's sermon, so the author of the Acts reveals the contemporary, dynamic and practical qualities of understanding. First, it is contemporary in that "there is no interpretation without relationship to the present, and this is never permanent and fixed...Meaning is not like a changeless property of an object but is always 'for us'. Meaning is present-related, arising in the hermeneutical situation."[12] Peter is forced by the circumstances to relate his knowledge of the tradition to a very contemporary situation.

Second, understanding is dynamic in so far as it "is not a subjective process so much as a matter of placing oneself in a tradition and then in an "event" that transmits tradition to him".[13] Peter makes an ineradicable commitment to the spirit which arrives at Pentecost and to the tradition by standing up in a public place and defending his companions' bizarre behaviour in terms of that tradition.

Third, understanding is practical because, "Understanding a text is always already applying it".[14] Peter's whole speech is an attempt to apply the texts to the practical situation in front of him so that understanding, acceptance and affiliation can take place. He is anxious "so to interpret the Scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines [the] present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation".[15]

2.3 THE PAST TRADITION IN THE PRESENT

The early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles are a torrent of words and actions. They illustrate the author's editorial concern to demonstrate the clear continuity between the post-pentecost believers and the historical Jesus.[16] Peter and his fellow disciples spin from reorganising their group after betrayal; to proclaiming their message as new followers flood in; to healing the sick; to defending themselves against the authorities; to landing in prison and escaping from prison; to setting up a communal society in the city. The story is a tumult of moving images, of stories, a tempest of experiences and words. Throughout it follows the order of Peter's Pentecost sermon: **this is that.**

The constant pattern of this torrent of words is the identification of the orthodox past tradition - **that** - within the radical disorder of present experience - **this** - so that listeners could make sense of it in terms of their own "horizon of understanding"; so that they could engage in praxis and apply it to a project of "personal and social transformation" - first, of course, by joining a community of economic sharing.

Peter can look back on the historic texts of his tradition and find his present in their future, as Drury reminds us. "The young community's search for its past is resolved by being thoroughly at home in it - a home which, according to Luke, it has never left."[17] We, in turn, can look at the text which emerges from his present (The Acts of the Apostles) and find our present in its future. Moltmann finds this futurity the key to the hermeneutics of scripture.

> The biblical scriptures are not a closed organism with a heart, or a closed circle with a centre. On the contrary, all the biblical scriptures are open towards the future fulfilment of the divine promise whose history they relate. The centre of the New Testament scriptures is the future of the risen Christ, which they announce, point forward to and promise.[18]

For Pannenberg this historical continuity is a "connection between the beginning and the end point which resides in the process of transformation itself, regardless of how radically this process may be conceived".[19] The events or words which once transmitted the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be simplistically repeated from generation to generation unchanged. They will be reappropriated in each new age in new circumstances and with new meaning. It is necessary to examine whether each new contemporanisation of the redemptive facts is in harmony with the tradition.

Pannenberg's approach throws a bridge across the cleavage of the centuries by tracing the development of "the distinctive contemporanisations and actualisations of the redemptive facts".[20] The events of history are not bare events, but include the tradition in which they are interpreted. The course of history is likewise characterised by the changes and transformations that traditions undergo. But this course is continuous, and links the believer today with the original events and traditions in which God revealed himself through the resurrection of Jesus. As Villa-Vicencio points out, this hermeneutical tool is dynamic because, "it enables one to take both the original historical act as well as the contemporary situation seriously".[21] It is a theological approach which expects praxis. The praxis results from a dialogue between biblical stories of past praxis and present engagement in the quest for meaning.

Pannenberg develops these ideas further by considering "the history of the transmission of tradition". In this history, which will be considered more closely in the next chapter, the tradition is transformed as it is re-actualised in each era but the same themes are found to recur in each "contemporanisation". So it is with the themes found in the opening chapters of The Acts.

A list of these themes would include conflict, fear, bravery, solidarity, propaganda, repression, injustice, release, self-giving, treachery, and alternative community. They are such "permanent factors in human history" as Dodd identifies.[22] The more one reads the chapters the more they describe what is happening today, here and elsewhere. In fact, **this is that.**

2.4 THE PRESENT QUESTIONS THE PAST

Christians in South African, for example, find themselves facing the same themes as they seek to make sense of their present experience in terms of their past traditions. They are involved in the same dynamics as was the early church recorded in the Acts. They must root through their storehouse of traditions to create the new response for the present. Paul Lehmann has observed this happening in practical struggle with the theme of church-state relations. "The concrete context of the present has prompted the probing of the past in a unique reciprocity between past and present that underlines the vital meaning and importance of tradition."[23] Hence, in Moltmann's words again, "present perception of the "future of scripture" takes place in that mission which plays its part in history and in the possibilities of changing history".[24]

These New Testament chapters and our own experience present us with the perennial questions: how to make sense of past revelation in the present day and, conversely, how to account for present experience in terms of the tradition. These questions are also at the heart of contemporary attempts to comprehend the basis of human understanding, as is plain in the hermeneutical work of Gadamer, whose starting point is Heidegger's analysis of the intrinsic historicality of human existence. A perspective is offered here which parallels the "tension between past and present" experienced by Peter and described by Lehmann.

> There is no pure seeing and understanding of history without reference to the present. On the contrary, history is seen and understood only and always through a consciousness standing in the present.

> Nevertheless, the concept of historicality, even while affirming this, simultaneously affirms the operativeness of the past in the present: The present is seen and understood only through the intentions, ways of seeing, and preconceptions bequeathed from the past. Gadamer's hermeneutics and his critique of historical consciousness assert that the past is not like a pile of facts which can be made an object of consciousness, but rather is a stream in which we move and participate, in every act of understanding. Tradition, then, is not over against us but something in which we stand and through which we exist; for the most part it is so transparent a medium that it is invisible to us - as invisible as water to a fish.[25]

Making sense of the traditions of revelation in the "now" demands a creative translation between the past and the present; but not the mere translation of words. It is the transposition of a proclamation from one time, place and culture, into another time, place and culture. It is what Robinson claims to be the business of the "New Hermeneutic" as it has been developed by such figures as Bultmann, Ebeling, Fuchs and Gadamer, since Barth's commentary on Romans "called forth the hermeneutic reflection of our time".[26]

> It is distinctive of the new hermeneutic that it does understand its task as translating meaning from one culture to the other, from one situation to the other.[27]

The "operativeness of the past in the present" is a kind of "hermeneutical circle", which has mainly been considered a matter of language. But interpretation is not a process of words and mental activity only. It proceeds by action and reflection.

2.5 HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLES

The "hermeneutical circle" traditionally refers to the interaction between part and whole in the process of interpretation: "...we interpret part of a text on the basis of a grasp of the whole work while our grasp of the whole requires that we have at least some understanding of the parts".[28] In the terms of Schleiermacher's second canon, "The meaning of every word in a given passage has to

be determined in reference to its coexistence with the words surrounding it."[29] This stress on linguisticality has been a recurrent theme in hermeneutics since Schleiermacher.

In this sense "interpretation" means a process which starts and ends with a book or a text. Cultured persons from particular milieux seek to absorb into their minds the written product of another place or age in order to communicate its meaning to their contemporaries. It is paced in long scholarly library hours and the timetables of publishers. But Peter's "hermeneutical circle" is more like a vortex. He is in a movement of great urgency. His expanding group is approaching that moment of critical mass when explosive new energy arrives. It can be a moment of growth or of disintegration and much depends on how he acts; how he interprets on his feet; how he responds to the dynamics of vociferous opponents and apparently reckless supporters. It is the context of the political hustings or contentious public meeting rather than the studied atmosphere of the library. Peter's experience is, in fact, close to the definition of the hermeneutical circle given by Segundo: "it is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal".[30]

2.6 HERMENEUTIC AS LANGUAGE

The dominant trend in the study of hermeneutics, however, is steeped exclusively, in language. Dilthey, for example considered:

> ...that in language alone does what is inside man find its complete, exhaustive and objectively intelligible expression. Hence the art of understanding has its centre in the interpretation of the remains of human existence (Dasein) contained in writing.[31]

This emphasis continues in contemporary biblical commentary and interpretation, as is evidenced in Crossan's writing on the parables which assumes a basis in Heidegger's existentialism. "It was primarily from these poets," he says, acknowledging his intellectual influences, "and from their practice, not just their theory, that I learned and came to accept that reality is language and that we live in language like fish in the sea."[32] Action - or practice - is admitted here, but it is the cerebral "action" of poetic creation that is meant.

McClendon, however, helps us to see that there is something beyond the word or image expressed in language. He examines Austin Farrer's notion of "dominant images" and uses them to explore the biographies of men of "exemplary quality". These images are such classics as the Kingdom of God, or one such as he identifies in the life of Dag Hammarskjold, "brother of the Brother". The convergence of images helps form a person's "characteristic vision or outlook". But the image is nothing without the life actions which give it a real context. Farrer notes how it is the interplay between the great images of Christ, such as Son of Man, and the events of his ministry which constitutes revelation.

> Certainly the events without the images would be no revelation at all, and the images without the events would remain shadows on the clouds. The events by themselves are not revelation, for they do not by themselves reveal the divine work which is accomplished in them: the martyrdom of a virtuous Rabbi and his miraculous return are not of themselves the redemption of the world.[33]

The revelation is, for McClendon, "enacted imagery" which can become the "controlling motif" of someone's life. This also underlies Vincent's call for our obedience to Christ's "historically defined" obedience, where he says:

> Yet between our's and his there must be the "leap of action". By this, I do not mean the "leap of faith" as some existential movement or conviction, but rather the leap into creative action and embodiment which would mirror and be held by Christ's creative actions and embodiments.[34]

In McClendon's book this kind of "leap of action" would be most clearly embodied in the biography of Clarence Jordan at Koinonia Farm, in whose life obedient discipleship was the "pervasive image".[35] His existence was, in Vincent's terms "tied to the Christ-existence, not in the way of 'nature' or 'being', but in the way of history".[36]

2.7 HERMENEUTIC AS ACTION

The hermeneutic which can deal adequately with the tension between past and present, as experienced at Peter's "public meeting" and in obedient discipleship since, cannot allow itself to be exclusively defined in terms of language. It must also be steeped in action, because the "past revelation" is a story of action in a particular situation at a particular moment in history, not just a catalogue of thoughts which transcend the limitations of time and space. Lehmann notes that the South African theologians engaged in a seminar on the history of church-state relations:

> ...were embarked upon no conventional investigation of a problem and of the ways in which the thought and action of any given past can illuminate and guide a random present. On the contrary, they were acutely aware that "the engagement of church and state is no longer simply in the pages of theological statements. It is in the streets of every city, township, and rural district. It is within churches, and it is the substance of political interrogations inside of prisons throughout South Africa".[37]

The hermeneutic task demands not just criticism but an active commitment to change society. Segundo underlines the link between action and reflection: "each new reality obliges us to interpret

the word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then go back and reinterpret the word of God again, and so on".[38]

As Dodd points out, "The gospel is firmly rooted in a story of that which once happened." The nature of the gospel event, that it happened in one time and place, seems to make it inaccessible. The gospel event is bounded by the accidents of a particular age and locality. It is not a set of universal propositions, but a singular story. The more it is studied by biblical scholars, the more distant and peculiar the circumstances become. It becomes more difficult to transpose into other times and places. Indeed, the nineteenth century critics of religion considered the very exercise of historico-biblical criticism to be "an admission of the discernment that the real world in which we ineluctably exist is not the biblical stories' world..".[39] It raises many questions about the function of mission between one age or one culture and another. It poses, all the more sharply, the difficulty of "merging the horizons" of past and present.

The very particularity of the gospel story seems to be a fence which prevents access to the meaning of the revelation of Jesus, but it can also be seen as the key which opens access. For Michalson, "the real genius of the New Testament faith" is "its particularism".[40] As McClendon also sees it, "Christian beliefs are not so many 'propositions'...but are living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities."[41]

Cone emphasises that Jesus is not a proposition, to be encountered intellectually, but a living presence to be encountered in the particular: "in the history of the weak and the helpless". That is

to say "in the social context of black experience".[42]

> The particularity of human existence is important when one begins to speak of Christ's relation to culture. For Christ's relation to culture is not defined in cultural generalities but in terms of the concreteness of human pain and suffering.[43]

Cone begins his theological project in God of the Oppressed with the affirmation of "black experience as a source of theology" by "an examination of black people's stories, tales and sayings".[44]

2.8 HERMENEUTIC AS STORY

Perhaps it is precisely the category of story that can help us break through the barrier of the particularity and uniqueness of events in their contexts. Truth contained in event or happening, that is to say "story", is of the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Equally it can be seen to be of the essence of human existence, in that "human experience has narrative form".[45] Indeed the story has carried Christian proclamation throughout the centuries, in the form of "parables, stories, poems, confessions",[46] in the popular media if not the academic, since "the ordinary believer owes more to the narratives, and likes them better, than the epistles".[47] The gospels themselves are stories and contain stories. Because story is itself the original and persistent vehicle of the gospel message then a study of its method may have significance for the present. The intention of this enquiry, in the light of the recent resurgence of narrative theology,[48] is to explore "story", as the characteristic gospel method of proclaiming the Kingdom of God revealed through Christ.

Ironically though, the element of story, while undeniably present in scripture, has been lost from sight by the methods, or absence

of method, of biblical studies. This is Frei's thesis in his enquiry into the eclipse of biblical narrative.

> A realistic or history-like (though not necessarily historical) element is a feature, as obvious as it is important, of many of the biblical narratives that went into the making of Christian belief...But since the precritical analytical or interpretive procedure for isolating it had irretrievably broken down in the opinion of most commentators, this specifically realistic characteristic, though acknowledged by all hands to be there, finally came to be ignored, or - even more fascinating - its presence or distinctiveness came to be denied for lack of a "method" to isolate it. And this despite the common agreement that the specific feature was there![49]

He goes on to assert the indispensability of the story element to the scripture accounts, not simply as illustration of something we already know nor evocation of some state of feeling beyond description, but in the sense that "what [the accounts] are about and how they make sense are functions of the depiction or narrative rendering of the events constituting them".[50]

2.9 STORY AS REVELATION

There are many ways of receiving revelation through story and they range from the deeply individual and personal to the extensively social and political. Kierkegaard's way was that of "a more profound inwardness", based on his understanding "that the movement of the spirit is inward, that the truth is the subject's transformation in himself".[51]

He complains about those who regard the story of Abraham as glorious without really understanding it. "They express the whole thing in perfectly general terms" saying Abraham "was willing to sacrifice to Him the best".[52] But they fail to "labour" sufficiently to understand that "best". For Kierkegaard this

labour meant the painstaking retelling of the story by a sort of imaginative re-entry into it. He "saddles his horse and rides with" Abraham, discoursing at every point on the thoughts and decisions which must have made up Abraham's journey until we have entered into the "dread" of it, experienced the "fear and trembling" and shunned every easy avoidance of the awesome "dialectic of faith"[53] even by means of "infinite resignation". His full awareness of Abraham's ordeal is what allows him to reconstruct the scenes of the journey; but, with the turn of the hermeneutical circle, only his imaginative entry into those scenes enables him to grasp, in full awareness, Abraham's ordeal. This awareness comes from Kierkegaard's willingness to "labour and be heavy laden" in the struggle for understanding.[54] It is like Herder's method of interpretation: "not a technical or critical analysis of aesthetic products but an empathetic submission to the author, his depictions, and the atmosphere out of which they arise".[55]

The concreteness of this approach to the essence of a story may be compared with Burckhardt's hermeneutical approach in seeking to reconstruct the mental and moral atmosphere of a historical period. The hermeneutical circle is present in that individual events allow the general character of an age to be determined while the individual events are themselves evaluated against the general character of the age. Burckhardt described himself as clinging "by nature to the concrete, to visible nature, and to history. But as a result of drawing ceaseless analogies between facts I have succeeded in abstracting much that is universal".[56] He advises, "Listen to the secret of things. The contemplative mood." It is the moment of saying, "Aha! I see." It is that kind

of discernment which Ramsey describes when situations are at the point "that they "come alive"; that the "light dawns"; that the "ice breaks"; that the "penny drops", and so on".[57]

One such story of discernment is used by Song to begin his "exercise in the theology of transposition" which celebrates the shift of Christianity into the Asian context. He describes Sri Ramakrishna's vision of the flat-nosed Christ and contrasts it with the "nineteen centuries when Christ was almost exclusively a point-nosed saviour to the point-nosed persons of the world".[58] He recalls the struggles of Asian artists to paint pictures of "flat-nosed Christs" which would be at home in the cultural environment they inhabit. For Song this is not merely an interior struggle for personal enlightenment or "a more profound inwardness". It has global dimensions and the story becomes a "model" for his dicussion of the transposition of Christianity out of the Graeco-Roman world into the "third world" where, already, the majority of the world's Christians live.[59]

He carries on this discussion of transposition by telling the stories of three seminal periods in Chinese religio-political history: the Buddhist penetration, Taiping Christianity and the Fifth Modernisation of "Democracy Wall". These stories become the means for discernment of the whole society in each period. They also form a hermeneutical bridge by which the biblical horizon can merge with the horizon of contemporary China. The stories help us take the whole character of the Chinese experience seriously, to look at the gospel through Chinese eyes and to transform the old dogmatic style of mission so that theology can "be ready to transpose itself into unfamiliar situations to be confronted by

the bewildering but gracious ways of God with all creation".[60] Cone also demands the setting of stories side by side in the creation of black theology.

> We must immerse ourselves in the existence of the people, feeling their hurts and pain, and listening to their testimony that Jesus is present with them, taking black suffering upon himself so that the people can survive with dignity the oppression and violence committed against them. Only by listening to their story and viewing it in the light of the biblical story in relation to other stories in human history are we in a position to make a judgement about the "reasonableness" of black religion.[61]

2.10 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF MEANING

Each new testimony by members of a community "that Jesus is present with them" is an assumption of responsibility for the transmission of the tradition. They interpret the tradition according to their framework of thinking and mark the message according to the determining features of their own context. This process is fraught with dangers and can destroy the message by absorbing it into an alien framework. Ellul describes this process happening in the Hellenisation of Christianity. The Christian experience of resurrection occurred within a Hebrew framework of belief which saw in death "no separation of body and soul". Resurrection was an expression of God's grace, creating life out of nothing. But after the shift of the Christian locus into the Greek cultural world this understanding became subverted by absorption into the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul.

> It is total perversion. Everything is not now dependent on the grace of God, and assurance of immortality comes to be evaluated by virtues and works. All Christian thinking is led astray by this initial mutation that comes through Greek philosophy and Near Eastern cults.[62]

But we have no alternative way. "Finite, historical man always sees and understands from his standpoint in time and place; he

cannot...stand above the relativity of history and procure 'objectively valid knowledge'," The only safeguard "lies not in totally leaving one's own experience but in realizing that one is himself an historical being".[63]

This imposes on the concerned individual a process of self examination which merges Kiekegaard's understanding of the truth as "the subject's transformation in himself", what McClendon refers to as "Kierkegaard's onion-layered pseudonymous self-analysis",[64] with Cone's call on white theologians to divorce themselves from thinking that "is entrapped by the social categories of the dominant culture".

> Biblical thinking is <u>liberated</u> thought,...If white theologians are to understand this thought process, they must undergo a conversion wherein they are given, by the Holy Spirit, a new way of thinking and acting in the world, defined and limited by God's will to liberate the oppressed.[65]

If we seek to divorce ourselves from the dominant thinking of our own culture, we encounter a new and very concrete "hermeneutical circle". The dynamic which provokes someone to make such a painful "conversion" is a central issue in this thesis. The stories in Part Four, "An Experiment in Contextual Theology by means of Stories", contain examples of the clash of experience against presupposition which causes a re-evaluation of one's understanding and "a new way of thinking and acting in the world". The stories confirm Segundo's argument that a necessary precondition for this hermeneutical circle "is that the questions rising out of the present be rich enough, general enough, and basic enough to force us to change our customary conceptions of life, and death, knowledge, society, politics, and the world in general".[66]

It is only after a process of reflection on such questions that those "entrapped" individuals can begin to free themselves from the determining perceptions and behaviours of their dominant culture. They cannot free themselves by procuring "objectively valid knowledge"; but they can "realise their historical being" by engaging in a critical reflection on their "social biography". It is a safeguard against absorption in historical relativity.

In order to describe my social biography I must answer the question: what was the message which emerged from my context in capitalist urban-industrial Europe and which formed me as an individual? A journey backwards into social biography can begin to answer this question with a new description of the social history in which personal history has been entwined, as the next section of this chapter illustrates.[67]

2.11 THE CONTEXT OF MISSION

A sketch of the social biography in which I find myself would have to start with the first massive urban growth which took place in nineteenth century Britain. Neighbourhoods of petit-bourgeois and working class housing sprang up in all the industrial cities. They were built within walking distance of the mills and factories which depended on them for labour. In these suburbs of the last quarter of the century, the non-conformist denominations built their numerous chapels. The majority of the population was untouched having slid out of the church's grasp in the long dissolution, hastened by urbanisation, of Medieval rural Christendom.[68] Nevertheless, these churches were places of real strength in the religious life of the country and were the

dominant institutions of their communities.[69]

By weekday the workers in mill and factory produced a massive surplus of goods which could only be disposed of in a continually expanding market. During evenings and at weekends some of these same workers exercised their surplus energies in spreading the evangelical message of Jesus to the furthest reaches of humanity by means of the chapel missionary societies: the most vigorous branches of these vigorous institutions. Both impulses, that of production and that of evangelism, found their "market" in the empire's colonies; not least in the mad scramble for Africa. "By 1900 the Empire had reached nearly 13,000,000 square miles and 370,000,000 people; the colonies were being used as sources of raw materials, markets, and incomes, and outlets for emigration."[70]

> The missions were employed as a means of enlisting the imagination and sympathies, as well as the meager resources, of the poor in such a fashion as not only to overcome an otherwise inevitable absorption with their own wretchedness, but to give them a stake in the spiritual and material welfare of others, overseas, depicted as more wretched still.[71]

The implications of this were broad. Miguez Bonino, following Semmel, emphasises the degree to which the Methodist awakening helped mould the personalities of workers to fit into the emerging capitalist order and, once this was established, channelled the energies of an important sector of the population for missionary expansion. He concludes:

> The Methodist awakening seems to have fulfilled a significant role in the new political and social relationships which emerged in Great Britain with the consolidation of a new mode of production. Historically, Methodism seems to have served to incorporate into the liberal bourgeois ideology significant sectors of the arising British proletariat which guaranteed the consolidation of the capitalist system and reinforced its imperialist expansion.[72]

So a message which grew in the soil of industrial petit-bourgeois and working class communities in Britain was carried out to African peasant communities who had a completely different life experience and world view. The missionaries had a powerful impact. Tiberondwa describes how missionaries in Uganda "paved the way for the initial occupation and the formal colonisation of the country by their home governments".[73] Just such a role, played by John Moffat, is detailed in Samkange's revealing Origins of Rhodesia.[74]

The missionaries paved the way for the destructive power of colonial despoilation; but also, in many instances, tried to defend their "clients" against its worst excesses.

> European missionaries accepted the colonial invasion, were its agents, and assisted it to succeed in its work of subjugation. Within the historical processes in which they were caught up and of which they were a part, they were also trying to mitigate the suffering and deprivation which colonial expansion entailed.[75]

Above all they were an alien presence who could translate the words of the bible into various indigenous tongues but who eventually were subjected to massive criticism for their cultural imperialism. They brought their message so encased in western values that it seemed indistinguishable from that of the gunboat.

That failure to transpose the message of Jesus from one milieu to the other, wherever one lays the responsibility, is the thesis against which the contextual and liberation theologies of the present time have built their antitheses, about a hundred years after the height of the European missionary movement.

Much of this critique has circled back to the original sending locations, only to find that a radical change of circumstance has

occurred in the intervening period. Ravaged by the urban trauma of post war Britain, for example, the once strong congregations of industrial cities' inner rings, or zones of transition, have declined and almost disappeared.[76] Huge areas of dreadful newer housing for the modernised poor of post industrial Britain seem to have less "spiritual life" than had the smallest African village of the 1880s. In a socio-economic survey of a North London district, Rowland describes in terms of alienation "those in the economic ghettoes and the 'deprived' areas, the dispossessed, the alienated, the 'no-chance people'".[77] He concludes: "It is as if the situation between the rich and poor nations of the world has been mirrored and telescoped to micro-level; the same exploitation and domination games are still played with equal ruthlessness."[78]

A kind of "Third World" within the "First World" of the northern hemisphere appears which now, in its weakness, is in a position to actually hear the contextual theologies which have arisen from the rejection of its nineteenth century strength. There has been a full, ironic turn of this particular "hermeneutical circle".

2.12 AN EXPERIMENT IN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

The gospel message was once carried by the wealth of Europe's workshops, to the so called "heathen" lands. Now it is transposed, so that Europe is no longer the centre of the earth. This transposition is, in Song's words, "a journey into movements of nations and peoples...that may give us some clues to the ways of God in that vast portion of the world outside the [western] Judeo-Christian tradition".[79]

The message from the exploited countries of Africa, Asia and the Americas challenges a powerful but polarised West. "The poor can think!" says Cone. "They can do theology. There is no need for them to depend upon their oppressors to tell them what the gospel is."[80]

It is this movement of translation or transposition which is both the context of this study and its subject. Its origins can be found in the experience of British inner city decline and of southern African struggle, in town and country, a struggle for meaningful independence. It demands that the gospel message be transposed into the contemporary scene so that people can appropriate the tradition for themselves, in order to make sense of their present life in terms of it, and to act out its "possibilities for personal and social transformation". Collins expresses this open-ended futurity of the biblical tradition clearly: "I see the Bible, not as a series of facts or propositions to which we must twist experience to fit, but as a guide or primer to participating in the creation of our own biblical history."[81]

The transposing movement, as it has been explored in this chapter, is a **dialectical movement between past and present.** That is reflected in the pattern of my thesis as the argument moves from a focus on the stories of Jesus in Part Two to the contemporary use of stories by theologians in Part Three. Parts One and Four are concerned, explicitly, with the recovery of a viable hermeneutic which can enable the transposing movement between past and present to take place in both theory and practice. This movement cannot happen, as Cone observes, "by focusing our attention exclusively

on either the social context alone or the Bible alone but by seeing them in dialectical relation".[82] That **dialectical movement between bible and social context** is also reflected in this thesis. My examination of the stories of Jesus, in the second part, shows that the "good news" is inextricably bound up with the "setting in life" of the stories. Likewise, story is seen, in contemporary theology, as both the embodiment of people's experience in their socio-political milieu and as the embodiment of the good news about the Kingdom of God. The Korean theologian, Kwang-sun Suh, calls these two elements of story "the socio-biography of the people, and...the theological biography of Jesus".[83]

These two dialectical movements, that between past and present and that between bible and social context, shape the argument of this thesis. I argue that the transposing movement of the gospel, which Song describes, takes place through a third **dialectic between language and praxis.** This dialectic is the **dynamic of story,** which was identified in the introduction. The chapters which follow seek to elucidate this dynamic.

The remaining chapters of Part One, broaden the discussion of transposition and transmission of tradition, begun in this chapter. In Chapter 3, I take stock of some scholars' views of the hermeneutical chasm which presently divides biblical studies and biblical living. I argue that the divide results from social factors which skew all communication between different societies. The "barriers to translation" identified in the chapter are found in the barriers between rich and poor, powerful and powerless: those "permanent factors in history" which Dodd notes.[84]

Chapter 4 prepares the reader for Part Two. My thesis is that the **dynamic of story** offers a solution to the disconnection between bible and word. Part Two is an examination of this dynamic at work in the stories of Jesus. In order to facilitate that examination, the last chapter of Part One considers the dynamic theoretically. The chapter reviews Pannenberg's work on the "history of the transmission of tradition". Certain themes which emerge from this review are used in the next Part to examine the stories of Jesus.

Part Two describes the methods of Jesus in terms of these themes from the transmission of tradition. I do this in two ways: in Chapter 5, by examining the method of parables, the most prominent story form in the revelation of Jesus. In Chapter 6, I explore the "practice" of Jesus, as it has been illuminated by recent sociological studies. These studies focus on his historicity, not as consciousness, but rather as social practice. Echegaray observes that it is possible to speak of Jesus' historicity "provided that we look to the objective expression which Jesus himself gave to it in deeds and words that were perceived by a community and that helped give this community its objective structure".[85] This examination of the spoken and acted parables of Jesus presents the essential paradigm of the **dynamic of story**, in told, **heard**, and **acted** stories.

The argument follows this dynamic to the present-day in Part Three. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 examine the current discussion of "narrative" or "story" theology and the use made of stories in many parts of the world to express contextual theologies. The experience of Christians struggling to articulate the meaning of the Kingdom of God in their societies finds expression in stories

which both reflect and proclaim those stories of Jesus which are the subject of discussion in Part Two. Bible and context are inextricably linked. The stories of Jesus are **told**, **heard** and **acted** in situations of struggle. They become new stories which may be **told** and **heard** in the future in order to provoke new **actions.**

This dynamic between past and present experience and praxis brings my argument back to the opening question of what constitutes an appropriate hermeneutic. Part Four tackles this issue in both a theoretical and a practical way. Chapter 10 contains a recapitulation of the hermeneutical problem, as it is seen by critical hermeneutics. It forms an introduction to Chapter 11 in which stories are told of people who, having been thrown up against a personal experience of social domination, find in it a challenge to reinterpret scripture and to learn from the poor. These narratives demonstrate in practice the thesis which is reviewed in the concluding chapter, that a theology by means of stories exhibits a dynamic which fulfills two vital functions of the original gospel pronouncement: it integrates belief and practice in an indissoluble whole and makes it possible to communicate and reclaim a gospel of liberation in our context.

The whole is a small contribution to the church's mandate, "to enable God's story to continue to happen in the world".[86]

3. THE CRISIS OF BIBLICAL APPROPRIATION

Belief and practice are integrated in story. Story is vital for Christian theology because, through its integrative dynamic, a liberating gospel can be reclaimed for our context and proclaimed within our context. That is the thesis which this study seeks to establish.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the hermeneutical issues which accompany the transposition of a message from one age and place to another. It is now necessary to examine more closely the difficulties which are experienced in this act of transposition. It is important because many commentators on the contemporary church find there is a crisis in the appropriation of the scriptures. People find it difficult to appropriate the biblical message so that it informs biblical living. The crisis is perceived by some to be a problem in the relation between biblical studies and practical theology or ethics. Others think the problem is more deeply rooted. This chapter reviews some of their varied diagnoses of malaise and argues that the real problems are embedded in the "barriers to translation" which are located in the social contexts of biblical writers and contemporary Christians.

3.1 THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE

How does "that which has been revealed at some point in history become a reality in the contemporary experience of individuals and communities?"[1] Many contemporary theologians report severe problems, even a crisis, with that hermeneutical interaction between bible and church by which the tradition is transmitted into the modern age.

Smart captures the ethos of this difficulty in the title of his book, The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church. He describes the situation of the preachers, "bound by their vows and their tradition to a book that is more of a burden to them than an infinite resource".[2] They straddle a chasm between "these ancient records of faith and the complex situations of a modern community",[3] But they can neither jump the chasm between the original meaning of a text and its meaning today nor the one between their biblical criticism, learned in seminary, and the educational level of their local congregation. He places the blame at the door of the seminaries whose "hiatus between the Biblical and the practical departments" leads to hermeneutics being "developed in one compartment while homiletics and Christian education go their way separately".[4]

Here Smart echoes the critique of Funk who, in advocating the "New Hermeneutic" of the 1960's, presented the dilemma of biblical criticism and relevancy.

> Historical criticism exposes the word of God as a fully human word by exposing the human situation into which it is received as radically human. This procedure may be termed "unmasking."...The problem that now arises, however, is that because historical criticism is blind it

> tends to become irrelevant. And if irrelevant, then it suffers reduction to techniques preoccupied with bits of knowledge.[5]

Petersen also identifies this interdisciplinary problem.

> In Krister Stendahl's terms, the problem is one of determining how one moves from what a text meant, which is the subject of historical criticism, to what it means, which is the subject of theological hermeneutics ("object" criticism).[6]

Yoder takes up the challenge in trying to connect the two worlds of New Testament Studies and Social Ethics. He wants to "let the Jesus story so speak that the person concerned with social ethics, accustomed as he is to a set of standard ways to assume Jesus not to be relevant to social issues,...can hear". He feels it necessary to point out that his thesis arises from the work of New Testament studies but that biblical scholars have "not stated it in such a way that the ethicists across the way have had to notice it".[7]

The crisis can be seen as a problem of relationship between two academic disciplines, historical criticism and biblical theology, which as Frei notes were successors to "literal and figural reading of the biblical narratives, once natural allies [which] came apart". In so doing they became "different enterprises and made for decidedly strained company".[8]

In order to solve this lack of communication between the two seminary departments Smart makes two main proposals: the seminaries should provide more exegesis and less historical criticism and the teachers and preachers should be trained to bring a "post critical biblical awareness" to their pupils and congregants.[9] In this way he presents the problem as a mere

question of balance between academic disciplines. He does not, however, show how the possession of a "post critical biblical awareness" enables members of congregations to use the bible as a "resource for living".

Stroup's more penetrating analysis, identifies the crisis as one of "Christian identity". Biblical illiteracy is "only a surface manifestation of a problem that lies much deeper in the church's life". He also notes that "the sense of living out of a theological tradition no longer seems to inform the life of many Christian communities". These two lead to a third symptom, "the absence of theological reflection at all levels of the church's life". Concomitantly, there is a fourth malaise: "the inability of many Christians to make sense out of their personal identity by means of Christian faith".[10] It is at this level, that of communal and personal identity, that he proposes his understanding of a "narrative structure of Christian faith" which might make a living connection between the tradition and people's personal identity. His treatment helps us understand the formation of individual Christian affiliation but focusses on the internal and psychological mechanisms of individuals as members of the Christian community. It does not show an awareness of the demand for prophetic Christian community in a polarised world.

The contemporary crisis of "Christian living" is also illustrated in Yoder's project. However, the crisis here is, ironically, a mirror-image of the one that Stroup sees. Yoder does not start, so much, from a sense of crisis because Christians have lost their connection with the world of Jesus, but rather because many non-Christian young rebels "claim that Jesus was, like themselves, a

social critic and agitator".[11] In proposing obedience to a seemingly objective biblical standard based on the ethic of Jesus he cannot escape the insecurity of critical relativity. He still has to interpret, across the chasm of the centuries, the concrete meaning for particular contemporary situations of Jesus' normative ethic.

Another critique of the divorce between faith and life comes from McFague who starts from the issue of cultural and historical relativism.[12] She recognises that contemporary Christians are unsure of both their experience of faith and their ability to express it. She identifies the divorce of faith and life in the idolatry and irrelevance of traditional religious language.

It is idolatrous because, knowing as we do the relativity of all knowledge, we know the limitations of any language about God, yet we continue to use language about God, such as "Father", as though the associations of this word truly refer to God's nature. Because in the modern world we can no longer credit the multilayered analogical and tropological interpretations of the precritical era,[13] we have lost the imaginative capacity to see many levels of meaning in the text. Concerned too much with historicity, we approach our scriptures in a over-literal way, which results in rigid modes of thought and leaves the words we use as idols in front of the unknowable realities we claim to worship.[14]

This rigidity leads to the second main problem of contemporary religious language, its irrelevance. It is irrelevant because it excludes those who do not have the associations or connections with which it works. In a large part the language is biblical and

therefore excludes twentieth century persons because its social and cultural assumptions are not theirs. But in particular there are images in religious language which exclude quite specific groups of listeners. The image of father, for example, is part of a patchwork of images in the western religious tradition such as king, husband, lord, master. All of these work together within a patriarchal understanding of the value of men's experience over women's experience They harmonise with actual patterns of governance at work in our society at every level, from the family to the political summit. The image of father is one which, by virtue of its patriarchal character excludes women and is objectively irrelevant to their developing both religious understanding and appropriate language with which to express it.[15]

Language without a sense of awe and mystery loses the "sense of distance between our works and words and the divine reality". Language without a "sense of immanence of the divine in our lives"[16] becomes empty and meaningless. There appears to be no language left with which to speak about God. But the possibility exists that, if no special language exists, then all language may exist for this purpose. All ordinary language may have the potential to speak about God as long as it does not become fixed or final. McFague proposes an understanding of metaphor as the basis of Christian statement because it has the capacity to weld together the ordinary world of human experience with the extraordinary world of God's Kingdom; it can bridge that separation of worlds which is of such contemporary concern.[17]

The critique she makes of the rigidity and irrelevance of religious language exposes the special interests which have

controlled it, sanctioning language which confirms a patriarchal society. Her view of the metaphorical movement, which enables people to speak of the indescribable Rule of God in the words of human discourse, has great potential for the development of a theology of story. It is explored in more detail in my discussion of the metaphorical movement of the parables in Chapter 5.

3.2 THE BIBLE'S WORLD AND OUR WORLD

It is possible, however, to discern a longer history to this discontinuity between the world of the bible and the world of the contemporary believer which used to be united in what McFague calls "the sacramental mentality".[18] Frei notes this separation beginning in the transition from medieval to modern methods of interpreting the scriptures. He identifies three features of the "traditional realistic interpretation of the biblical stories" which were subverted by the advent of historical criticism itself. The first assumption, which followed from a literal reading of a biblical story, was that "it referred to and described actual historical occurrences"; the second was that "the several biblical stories narrating sequential segments in time must fit together into one narrative".[19] The third was that the world of biblical narrative must "in principle embrace the experience of any present age and reader" since "it was indeed the one and only real world". The medieval listener to bible stories "was to see his disposition, his actions and passions, the shape of his own life as well as that of his era's events as figures of that storied world".[20] To confirm his view, Frei cites Auerbach's discussion of the "autocratic" demands of the bible's realistic world into which "we are to fit our own life".[21]

Pannenberg sees the historical roots of a corresponding loss of universality in theology in the medieval "compromise" of Aristotelian philosophy with Christian tradition which forced a distinction "between a realm of supernatural knowledge and a contrasting realm of so-called natural knowledge". For him, the crisis of the scripture principle is deeply embedded in Protestant history. It results from theology limiting itself to its "distinctive task" and withdrawing from the task of the exposition of scripture.[22] The result, ironic to us from a position of hindsight, is that "it falls back upon a separate province of divine revelations and becomes one science alongside others".[23] The study of scripture subverts the universality of the world of scripture; the crisis emerges as a problem of which scientific authority to believe.

> If theology and the secular sciences make different and even opposing statements about the world, man and history, then the question as to which of these statements is to be regarded as true becomes imperative. [24]

3.3 THE ERA OF HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD

When the scholars placed the biblical texts under the caustic scientific scrutiny of the historical critical methods, they saw myths and contradictions. The fundamental principles of criticism demanded that the texts be understood "out of themselves" and that the interpreter "should avoid uncritically injecting his own thoughts and those of his time into the text".[25] Auerbach describes how that critical distancing from the text severed the reader's "sense of personal involvement" in the reality of the biblical world.

> But when, through too great a change in environment and through the awakening of a critical consciousness, this [personal involvement] becomes impossible, the Biblical claim to absolute authority is jeopardized; the method of interpretation is scorned and rejected, the Biblical stories become ancient legends, and the doctrine they had contained, now dissevered from them, becomes a disembodied image.[26]

As Drury notes, the age of our "historiographical innocency" is gone. The stories of faith have come "within reach of the knives of criticism". We will no longer "dress Solomon as a renaissance prince or foist upon Jesus the mentality of a Victorian liberal". What we see in the texts we see more clearly now. For him, it is a problem of getting "critical technology" and "integrating belief" to terms with one another.[27] For Stroup, similarly, the question is whether the critical methods give "full understanding" of a text or whether they need to be supplemented by some literary criticism.[28]

But if the world of the biblical stories does not overlay in some way the world of the contemporary believer there is no Christianity. Moreover, if the contemporary world entirely defines the approach to the biblical world we have no more than the nineteenth century liberal cultural Christianity which affirms human beings wherever they are. After Barth's "No!" it is impossible to return to that era. Equally, nobody can go back to the precritical era, but some of the warning voices describe the modern crisis and disassociation of Christian identity in terms which recall the pre-modern "autocracy" of the biblical world.

One such is Wink who, with careful precision, accuses historical biblical criticism of bankruptcy because it is unable "so to interpret the scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines

our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation". The crux of his argument is that the critical method depends upon a "functional atheism" on the part of the critic which is not neutrality in the face of the text but is "already a decision against responding".[29] "He examines the Bible, but he himself is not examined" by it.[30] This "ideology of objectivism" is what drew historical criticism into a "false consciousness" which hides real attachments behind a pose of detachment. "The scholar is attached to an institution with a high stake in the socialisation of students and the preservation of society."[31] From this position "biblical criticism became cut off from any community for whose life its results might be significant..." and seldom brought questions to the text upon which human lives hinged.[32] Webber describes this happening, in practice, in the disillusioning experience of trying to organise a colloquium for local clergy to discuss current issues in ministry with seminary specialists.

> It was a very disturbing process. In many cases the faculty had given little or no thought to the issue, were not particularly interested in the subject, or clearly had not been interested in this area for their own serious study. The distance from the fundamental concerns of the faculty to the agenda with which God was confronting the church in the world was very far and wide.[33]

Wink argues that the critical method developed as a weapon against existing orthodoxies. Now it has become the established status quo and is unable to nourish "a desirable future",[34] all the while creating a false consciousness by "keeping actual power relations inaccessible to analysis and to public consciousness".[35]

Wink follows his polemical essay (he calls it a tract) by describing a shift into a "new paradigm for Biblical study". He

recounts the practice of working with groups of students on amplification and application exercises after they have considered the critical issues of a text.[36] His concern is to develop a practice of bible reading which engages very directly with the text. For example his approach to the text of Jesus' command to be reconciled before offering a gift at the altar (Matthew 5:23), involves readers in acting out the situation after they have examined it with the help of the critical resources. Each person identifies someone who holds a grudge against him or her and then holds an imaginary conversation with the aggrieved person, sitting alternately in two chairs facing each other, after the fashion of the Gestalt therapy.[37] The readers enter into the biblical passage and also internalise its meaning in a very powerful way. It is no longer merely an exercise of the head.

Wink's method is close to the concerns of the American human relations movement which often displays an apolitical naivety. But one of his strengths is an awareness of his own identity as someone "entrapped by the social categories of the dominant culture".[38] Cone's call for conversion from the dominant ideologies was discussed in the last chapter. Wink demonstrates an awareness of this kind of confronting demand. He notes that all knowledge is "relational knowledge, and can only be formulated with reference to the position of the observer".[39] He clearly identifies the limitations of his own vantage point as "a white male in a liberal Protestant seminary".[40]

Wink perceives a crisis in biblical appropriation in the white liberal church of North America. He tries to recover the vitality of the bible by relating it to the living concerns of readers.

Cone is concerned with the same issue but does not find the same crisis in the black church. The living concerns of black people are already vitally intermingled with the bible stories.

> Black people in America had great confidence in the holy Book. This confidence has not been shaken by the rise of historical criticism and its impact on the Bible...This does not mean that black people are fundamentalists in the strict sense of the term. They have not been preoccupied with definitions of inspiration and infallibility. Accordingly, their confidence in the Book has not been so brittle or contentious as that of white conservatives. It is as if blacks have intuitively drawn the all-important distinction between infallibility and reliability...What they have testified to is the Book's reliability: how it is the true and basic source for discovering the truth of Jesus Christ. For this reason there has been no crisis of biblical authority in the black community.[41]

His solution for the problem found in the white seminaries and churches is not just the marriage of more academic disciplines, but a change in the socio-cultural location of the theologian and critic.

> What is needed is more biblical theologians whose consciousness is defined by the oppressed of the land so that the task and goal of biblical hermeneutics might be rescued from the hands of scholars whose consciousness is obviously limited by the ruling class.[42]

The Kairos theologians in South Africa have also made this critique of the ruling ideas of faith and spirituality in the Afrikaans and English-speaking churches. They remark that "this kind of faith and this type of spirituality has no biblical foundation. The bible does not separate the human person from the world in which he or she lives."[43]

3.4 THE CRITIQUES OF THE CRISIS

So far in this chapter I have reviewed several analyses of the modern crisis in the appropriation of the scriptures. The crisis is a problem of how the bible stories can become "a reality in the contemporary experience of individuals and communities".[44] It is a crisis in the hermeneutical task that Palmer described as the effort to bring a tradition out of alienation "into the living present of dialogue".[45] What this chapter has shown, so far, is that the crisis occurs within a particular social milieu. Cone does not find it in his milieu which is the black struggle. McFague writes in the context of the struggle to create feminist theology. Her critique demonstrates how much the language of scripture and theology excludes some social groups and includes others. Historical criticism itself occurs, as Wink argues, in a particular social milieu; it does not exist in a neutral vacuum. Merely reforming its application, as Smart proposes, is no solution. Stroup's analysis is also insufficient because in focussing on personal appropriation of Christian identity he does not consider the personal in terms of social praxis. The value of his understanding of story and identity will be considered more closely in section 7.3.3.

The discussion has shown that the crisis in the appropriation of scripture is not limited to the sphere of language but has to be viewed within a context of social praxis. Nor is it just a problem of relations between academic disciplines. The same is true of the hermeneutical task, which was discussed in Chapter 2. Both of these issues are generated by social praxis. The role of social praxis in forming barriers to "creative translation"[46] is the

subject of the next section of this chapter.

Before proceeding it is helpful to locate the arguments of the chapters, so far, in the overall argument of the thesis. The discussions in Chapters 2 and 3 have covered the function of the hermeneutical task and the contemporary crisis in the appropriation of scripture. They both illustrate the theme of the **fusion of language and praxis** which was considered in the Introduction. Social praxis forms the meanings of the words we use: it also forms barriers to perception and understanding. The overall argument of this thesis is that a hermeneutic which disregards the fusion of word and action is insufficient to its task. The **dynamic of story,** however, links spoken word to acted word. It can form a bridge between biblical and contemporary worlds. But before that bridge can be constructed the barriers must be removed. The next section identifies "barriers to translation" found in social praxis.

3.5 BARRIERS TO TRANSLATION

"Creative translation" into the "contemporary milieu" is a two-way process. It means both finding a mode of telling the gospel stories to contemporary listeners and a mode of discovering the present situation existing in the gospel stories. Yet whether any bridge can be raised to cross the "seemingly unbridgeable chasm" of culture and time[47] which separates us from the New Testament era, is a central question of any attempt to speak about Jesus in any age. How can anyone know whether two stories or two responses are "the same" in different contexts? How can anyone create such stories or events, which will speak across the chasm of years?

These are central questions for theology.

> Theology, perhaps, comes closest to material agreement with the biblical witnesses when it seriously takes up the questions of its own time in order to express in relation to them what the biblical writers attested in the language and conceptual framework of their time. Modern hermeneutic deals with this problem of the "repetition" of the same content in a completely changed situation. The question here is how to span the distance between the texts and the present of the interpreter.[48]

The questions are equally applicable to any attempt to communicate between one culture and another, even in the same age, and are consequently at the heart of any missionary enterprise. Can a bridge be built whereby meaning can be transposed from Europe to Africa or back again? People operate every day as though it can; yet everyday they fail abysmally to achieve communication.

Even within the same geographical confines, the same questions are raised. West Europeans and North Americans are troubled by the way a gospel "told" by bourgeois people is "heard" by working class people.[49] Both groups may live in the same district or city, but they find themselves antagonistically disposed by the basic arrangements of their societies. The question is no less critical in the West than it is among Latin Americans who criticise the "telling" of Christianity which they have listened to during the last century and more, received from antagonistic European conquerors, and manipulative Western "developers" with their "Christendom mentality".[50]

> Communication...is restricted because it can never be completely achieved. This applies to contemporary communication both within a socio-culturally homogeneous language community and across the distance between different classes, civilizations and epochs.[51]

The study is concerned with the "creative translation" of the stories of Jesus into the contemporary milieu. Translation means,

here, the full transposition of meaning from one place and time to another. Three levels of activity can be identified in this process: the translation of words, of situations and of dynamics or practices.

3.5.1 Translation of Words

The first stage in any attempt to transpose a message from one time and place into another is translation of words. It seems a relatively uncomplicated stage given a competent translator. Even so, a translation always loses nuances of metre, rhyme, pun and other figures of rhetoric. Moreover, all language carries the values of its culture with it, demonstrating the "inseperability of language and life".[52] Three kinds of difficulty are obvious.

First, even the simplest problems of language, however, are not merely linguistic; they are also problems of the social or cultural milieu. For example, a word in one language may not have a corresponding word in another language because the referent of that word does not exist in the other culture. Bailey points out this difficulty from his experience of translating the parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8) into Arabic or Syriac. The English word "steward" renders the original Greek word effectively; but no corresponding Arabic or Syriac word exists.

> There is no word in either language with the same range of ambiguity found in the Greek word. The translator must decide whether in his opinion the "steward" is an estate manager or a moneylender. He has to make this exegetical decision in order to translate. The decision is crucial because the entire direction of one's understanding of the parable turns on the answer given to this initial question.[53]

Bailey concludes that "translation is inevitably

interpretation".[54] We may conclude that **differences between the socio-economic contexts of writers and readers can make faithful translation almost impossible.**

Secondly, language problems are sometimes created by the socio-political limitation or insensitivity of the translators. So for example the story of Jesus healing the Gerasene demoniac (Luke 8:30) is one whose terminology has changed in recent "modern versions" of the bible. The traditional Revised Standard Version of the story called the demoniac "Legion". The Today's English Version of the bible, a version primarily concerned with contemporary intelligibility, contains a radical name change, such as to turn the whole import of the story upside down. Instead of calling the demoniac "Battalion" or "Brigade", which might have been appropriate modernisations of "Legion", the demoniac is called "Mob". It is hard to imagine a more inappropriate translation. Instead of driving "The Legion" into the sea, a point no Jew would miss, Jesus drives out the local "Mob" or "Resistance". The man named after the symbol of Roman oppression, is rebaptised as the symbol of resistance against that oppression. So the translators have made the act of resistance demon-possessed and not the act of oppression.

This mistranslation suggests, that the translators, have not any consciously understood experience of being under the domination of an occupation army. They see no difference between an army of imperial oppressors and an angry or violent group of local citizens. It is clear that **differences in life experience and perspective can lead to faulty translation.**

The issue of the "translation of words" is of huge significance for the transference of meaning from one context to another. Those who have been blocked from apprehending the social and political experience of the original participants can go wildly off track because of their misperception. Coleman claims that, "All pretense to speak the universal language stems from either obfuscation or domination".[55] This raises some questions about the validity of a "universal" translation of the bible which can distort the original so profoundly. Perhaps the bible stories can only be satisfactorily transmitted when reclothed in the cultural garments of another particular society.

There are further ramifications. The previous example is at least a culpable fault on the part of the translators, which is subject to correction, though they may be completely oblivious to the problem because of their secure place in Western society. Another example can show how radically comprehension of the words on a page is affected by the relationship between the social, economic, cultural and political milieu of the producers of the original text and that of the readers, even when the translation has been rendered faithfully. This is a third kind of difficulty.

A classic example of this problem is a text which depends on an almost unique experience in the cultural milieu of Palestine: Jesus's exchange about "rendering unto Caesar". (Luke 20:25) The meaning of this interchange depends upon the experience of a people who worked with two parallel currencies. One was their own self-determined currency, reduced now to "religious" circulation; the other was issued by their hated imperial lords. The emotional, political, treasonable dynamics unleashed by the question to Jesus

about these two currencies were very serious to the Jews. Should they collaborate with their oppressors or assert their independence as God's people? This was an issue of painful immediacy - a life and death question.[56]

One might speculate what this could have meant to an early Christian in Thessalonica or Rome who had only ever used a single currency. A lot of explaining would be needed. It is doubtful whether the real, full, emotional feel of the original altercation could be experienced even after the lengthiest or most erudite note of explanation. We can see that **differences between the life experience of writers and readers can make even faithful translation difficult to comprehend.**

There is a corollary to this problem of translating the words of the bible, which Baum points out, in the difficulties of "translating" doctrinal or liturgical formulations from one social group to another who speak the same language.

> The meaning of religious language depends in part on the socio-political situation of the people who utter it. When oppressed people invoke God as the Lord of lords, they mean that God is more powerful than the pharoahs of the world. But when the king's men who lord it over their subjects invoke God as the King of kings, they legitimate their king's rule as the one who governs in the name of God. What follows from this is that when a theme of black theology is taken over into white theology, it changes in meaning.[57]

Getting the correct word is not enough; somehow the situation which gave rise to the word must be conveyed. And so it is necessary to examine a second level or stage of translation, which I will call the translation of situation.

3.5.2 Translation of Situation

Crossan examines the problem of translating the full impact of the text's situation, when he discusses the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The terms of this parable's title now "evoke no immediate visceral reaction or expectation from a modern reader". He argues that the parable is no longer therefore able to "overturn one's structure of expectation and therein and thereby to threaten the security of one's man-made world".[58]

In further commentary on this parable Crossan notes the irony that centuries of exposure to the parables have led most Christians to absorb a very negative view of the Pharisees. We simply cannot recognise them as "the revered moral leaders they were at the time of Jesus". Our reaction is emotionally cold because we do not have the same "structure of expectation" as the original hearers. We do not share their situation in life. He goes on:

> No doubt we can have it all explained to us in terms of its original historical impact within the language possibilities of Jesus's own day and audience. But a parable which has to be explained is, like a joke in similar circumstances, a parable which has been ruined "as parable".[59]

The best translations and the biggest commentaries are insufficient to give us a real sense of the original or to make up for our cultural unfamiliarity. As Crossan moves on to discuss the "Good Samaritan" his aim is to "rephrase the story in contemporary dress and attempt to convey anew its shock and its challenge".[60]

He retells the story in terms of the American war in Vietnam. Now it tells of a wounded female NBC war correspondent who is ignored

by both an American Green Beret (the elite corps) and by an ARVN soldier (the pro-American Southern-regime army). She is rescued by a Viet Cong guerrilla.

Crossan told this version of the parable to American college freshman audiences at the height of the war. In reporting their reactions, he describes how "many could accept the possibility of assistance from the Viet Cong (this was in 1973) but...they said, 'you should have left out the part about the Green Beret.' The students sensed immediately that something more than 'help your neighbour' or even 'help your enemy in distress' was going on in the story."[61]

The weakness of the story's "new clothes" is that they make it into a kind of "whodunit?" for the listeners. Most of us know the dynamics of the "Good Samaritan" story so well that as soon as we hear a new version our minds begin to cast around to guess who will be picked as the villain-turned-saviour. We concentrate on the ingenuity of the story-teller, instead of being affronted by the story. The end result of this artificial bringing of the story closer, is an actual distancing of the story from its listeners. This is because the essential reversal of the listener's internalised structure of expectation has not occurred.

We know the pattern of the parable so well that we expect it to be repeated. The parable's "pattern of expectation" has become our "pattern of expectation". Originally the scandalous parable overturned the expectations of its listeners. The parable cannot simply be "freshened up" by a change of clothes. Wink demonstrates this point forcefully when considering the false identification

modern readers make with the tax collector in the parable of the "Pharisee and the Tax Collector". The parable only functions when people identify with the Pharisee and feel alienated from the tax collector.[62]

Even **the translation of the bible stories into contemporary situations is, then, not sufficient to carry the essential meaning through to the contemporary listener.** Interpretation cannot simply "restate the text's answer; the text must be placed within the horizon of the question that called it into being".[63] Wink's observation echoes Mezger's.

> Translation does not simply mean finding a word for each word, but rather seeking and finding as well the new place where this text, without detriment to its historical individuality, strikes home to us. The short cut of putting myself in the skin of Moses or Paul is popular but no good, for my name is neither Moses nor Paul.[64]

3.6 CONCLUSION

The first four sections of this chapter have reviewed various attempts to describe the modern crisis in the appropriation of scripture. These descriptions pushed us towards a consideration of the importance of the text's social milieu. The barriers to translation which have been discussed in section 3.5 are examples of the social milieu's powerful influence on the transmission and reception of biblical text.

The "silence of scripture", which was noted at the start of the chapter, is also discovered within the scriptures themselves. Sociological studies of the biblical tradition make us aware of the controlling interests of the writers of the texts. Cone's

suspicion of theologians who are trapped in ruling class ideologies needs to be remembered when reading the biblical texts themselves. The biblical authors were also trapped in particular social milieux. Mosala argues this in his discussion of the understanding of violence in the prophetic tradition. He concludes.

> The Bible, including the prophetic traditions, is of course silent about the responses or perspectives of the oppressed and exploited on violence. The reason is simple. The oppressed did not write the Bible. The biblical text as a discursive practice is a ruling class document.[65]

The bible and theology emanate from particular social milieux and their message is shaped by the interests of the writers. This perception must be used to illuminate the reading of the stories of Jesus which is tackled in Part Two. Before that reading is attempted, an approach to the stories is required that takes account of their status as traditions transmitted through history. The next chapter supplies that approach by examining Pannenberg's study of the history of the transmission of tradition.

4. THE TRANSMISSION OF TRADITION

The crisis of biblical appropriation, examined in Chapter 3, is a crisis in the transmission of the Christian tradition. The discussion in that chapter showed that transmission of tradition is not merely an issue of translating words or situation. It must be an attempt to transpose the whole dynamic of the tradition in its social milieu. The next stage in the argument will examine the "whole dynamic" of the stories of Jesus by placing them in their social milieu. That is the task of Part Two.

Meanwhile the function of this chapter is to identify a series of features of the transmission of the tradition which can be used to approach the stories of Jesus. The features are discovered using Pannenberg's research into the "history of the transmission of tradition". They express the fusion of language and praxis and the unity of style and content in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The crisis of life and faith, examined in Chapter 3, is not a cause for gloom; from crisis comes the possibility of reappropriating the tradition.

4.1 FROM CRISIS TO POSSIBILITY

There is a sense of crisis in our ability to make the leap from the revelation of Jesus to the world of today. The crisis is seen in more than one sphere of life: Smart wants better communication between seminary departments; Yoder observes that there is greater fidelity to the style of Jesus outside the churches than in them; Wink calls for a new biblical paradigm. The origin of the crisis is found by some in the contemporary secular world; others find it in the application of the critical methods, despite their productive value; others see its roots in the shift from the medieval world to the modern. One feels a certain vertigo at the end of all this analysis, wondering if there is any fixed point at which the problem can be located

Cone's perception is that this crisis does not exist in the black church because of its experience of life and gospel. His view suggests that the crisis is not a past historical event, before which matters were satisfactory, but a crisis that is ever present and ever possible. Throughout the tradition there has always been the danger of Christians being unable to bridge the seemingly "unbridgeable chasm" of hermeneutics. It depends on where they stand. In this sense our age is like every age.

Our age is, however, different from previous ages in that our consciousness of the varieties of past experience and of their historical relativity gives us no firm ground on which to stand. We know that the reformers could affirm the principle of sola scriptura with a clear mind. Such an assertion, made today, does not remove the difficulty of dealing with tradition, as it did for

the reformers. The scripture only comes to us through a process of historical tradition which reflects the concerns, prejudices and interests of those who have passed it on. There is, after the era of criticism, no pristine scripture to which we can return which has not been interpreted through a tradition.

This seeming dead end can, however, become a new possibility as Moltmann's reflections on criticism and crisis show us.

> The modern consciouness of history is a consciousness of crisis, and all modern philosophy of history is in the last analysis a philosophy of crisis.
>
> Modern man's epochal experience of history is grounded in the experience of infinitely new and overwhelming possibilities which cannot be mastered by the customary methods of his traditions. They are new possibilities for good or for evil, for progress or for irrevocable disaster. Yet these new possibilities of a new future are always experienced in the first instance as the crisis and collapse of the hitherto known and familiar possibilities with their traditional institutions and ways of life and methods of coping with it. History overflows the banks of tradition, as it were. The dams of tradition and order everywhere begin to burst. They are no longer a match for the new experiences of history and can therefore no longer present themselves as self-evident. They become antiquated, or can be conservatively maintained only with great difficulty. They no longer possess for man the old, unquestioned obviousness of institutionalized modes of conduct. Hence they become the object of reflection and criticism, and man is thrust out into a world that is unprotected, frightening and uncertain. He finds himself in a crisis in which his existence is at stake and he is under the pressure of a vital decision. Thus it is in terms of crisis that history becomes perceptible to him, and historical criticism of his traditions is the offspring of this consciousness of crisis.[1]

The "historical criticism" of tradition, "the handing down of possibilities of existence that have been",[2] is one way in which we have gained an increased understanding of the nature of the scriptures and of how the stories of scripture have been passed on and reinterpreted from age to age. This understanding can inform our own search for the meaning in scripture for today. It is

Pannenberg's project of reflection on the "history of transmission of the tradition" which provides us with a creative way of approaching the source documents of our faith: a way that recognises the historical relativity of their transmission without preventing response to their challenge.

Kierkegaard remarks that "it is not worth while to remember that past which cannot become a present".[3] The history of transmission is a bridge over which the past travels to become present - a bridge between the stories of scripture themselves and the attempt by the Christian community to bring "this narrative history to bear on its contemporary world".[4]

4.2 THE HISTORY OF THE TRANSMISSION OF TRADITION

It is necessary to sketch the origins of the concept of "the history of the transmission of tradition". The study of the concept has been motivated by a desire to overcome the separation of "inner" and "outer" history in twentieth century European theology. Kahler described the function of tradition as the method by "which the historic element is set forth in its immediate significance for every present time".[5] Kahler's distinction between Historie and Geschichte, is credited with being the first serious critique of the liberal search for the historical Jesus. He favoured instead the decision of faith in the "real Christ who is the preached Christ".[6] The "thorough-going eschatology"[7] of Schweitzer administered the coup de grâce to the "quest of the historical Jesus", by identifying "the ground of a purely eschatological Messianic conception".[8] It led to the Word of God, Kerygma theologies of Barth and Bultmann in the first half of the

twentieth century. They resolved historical problems by explaining them in terms of "primal history" and the "subjectivity of the believer".

Later European theologians, however, challenged this separation of event and belief, based as it was on the separation of mind and reality and on the sharp distinction between judgements of fact and value in the philosophies of Kant and Ritschl. They charged that it could not sustain the weight of the Christian revelation.

A different view of reality was required in which the opposition between "subjectivity" and "objectification" was transcended, a point of view closer to Hegel's in which history had a new significance as a process having inherent meaning and value.

Pannenberg, noted that "Kahler did not want to abandon the question of the actual facts of Jesus' career as unimportant"[9] but had, in his statement of the problem, introduced the distinction between "the historical fact" and "its revelatory value". This separation of "outer" and "inner" history had laid the seeds for the subsequent loss of history in Kerygma theology.[10]

This theology "has been oriented entirely toward the problems of New Testament research",[11] where the uniqueness of the problem of historical verification posed by the resurrection allowed for the acceptance of unique solutions. But Pannenberg noted that a study of the Old Testament presented so many cases where "revelatory value" could not be disengaged from "historical fact" that it was to the Old Testament scholarship and methodology of Von Rad and Rendtorff that he turned to answer his question: "does not the

meaning of an event belong to the event itself insofar as it is to be understood only within the historical context?"[12] Von Rad "no longer has anything to do with an 'inner' and an 'outer' history existing side by side, because in the structure of the process of the transmission of tradition he has grasped the point of concrete unity which bifurcates into divergent moments only from an abstract way of looking at it".[13]

For Von Rad, "in principle Israel's faith is grounded in a theology of history. It regards itself as based upon historical facts, and as shaped and re-shaped by facts in which it saw the hand of God at work."[14] And so the study of the history of the transmission of tradition becomes the means by which the dualism of previous theological systems is resolved. The dualism between kerygma and historical-critical conceptions is resolved by "going beyond such cleavages"[15] since the history of the transmission of tradition is itself treated as a historical object.

4.3 FEATURES OF THE TRANSMISSION OF TRADITION

The study of the history of the transmission of tradition "resolves the dualism of previous theological systems". As will become clear in this section, it also overcomes the cleavage between form and content in the Christian proclamation. Attempts to express the gospel in propositional form assume that there is an essential concept in the gospel which can be separated from the style of its expression. The biblical understanding of truth as praxis, which was noted in the Introduction, does not allow such a cleavage.

The features of the transmission of tradition, identified in this section, hold in unity the style and content of the revelation of God's Kingdom. These features will be used in Part Two to examine the stories of Jesus.

4.3.1 God's Rule

"We begin" wrote Pannenberg, "with the simple observation that God's being and existence cannot be conceived apart from his rule".[16] For him, the central concern of Jesus's message was the proclamation of the imminent Kingdom of God, an active dynamic which is to found in the world "where men comply with the will of God".[17]

The Christ event is an event in history which anticipates the active future reign of God. In doing so, it is both the transformation of past revelation into the present and also the unification of meaning and event in the history of the transmission of the tradition. Pannenberg's approach, emphasises the central feature of God's Rule in concrete history. It generates a number of other features which illuminate the parables of Jesus (the primary method of transmission of the Kingdom of God tradition) and any contemporary development of a theology of story.

His emphasis upon "action", as the essential catalytic category for scriptural understanding is entirely consistent with the activeness of the concept of God's Rule which biblical scholars have identified.

> The Kingdom of God is the power of God expressed in deeds; it is that which God does wherein it becomes evident that he is king. It is not a place or a community ruled by God; it is not even the abstract idea of reign or kingship of God. It is quite concretely the activity of God as king.[18]

4.3.2 Contextuality

The next important feature is the essential contextuality of Pannenberg's approach. Villa-Vicencio underlines this, "man's concrete existence in the world is the place where he lives under the rule of God in communion with God in Jesus Christ".[19] Pannenberg sees this as one of the key modifications which Jesus makes to the contemporary Jewish eschatology. Jesus historicises the apocalyptic world view so that the end is proleptically made known. This can only be seen from the perspective of the unity of Kerygma and event. But this perspective also forces unity within another basic dualism, that between religion and society. The human being cannot be seen as a subjective individual. "Subjective behaviour is related always to social institutions and, in most instances, is the enactment of the social forms of life."[20] This means both that the Kingdom of God is directly and essentially political, and also that human beings, their actions and ideas, cannot be understood outside the context in which they think and act.

Pannenberg's ideas open the way for contextual theologies, contextual bible study methods and narrative theologies. But his mainly philosophical argument gives very little concrete picture of the revelation in history, not least because of his emphasis on explicating the historicity of the resurrection in abstract terms.

An actual example of a contextual historical-critical review of a theological tradition, such as Pixley's God's Kingdom provides a much more distinctive picture of the Rule of God than abstract description does. Here a historiographical approach acts as the critique of the transmission of a tradition which has been enslaving as well as liberating within Jewish society. The Kingdom of God is not a uniform revelation which can be apprehended as a term, or even as a literary tradition. It is a practice in the history of Israel which must be unmasked to see what effect it had before its transformation into contemporary meaning is attempted.

> We will not find protection [against preaching a gospel that may not be good news] in biblical language or right doctrine. Even within the Bible, God's kingdom was exploited for quite different purposes. It is necessary to look critically at what is being proclaimed in our day as good news for the poor. We should learn to ask, "What are its real consequences in history?" The answer to this question can hardly be given in general terms. It must be formulated by each Christian group in its place, in the light of its historical juncture.[21]

In the same way, an engagement with the dynamics of Jesus's ministry provides a content of "real consequences in history" from which to approach the historicity of the resurrection. It places the challenge of Christ's revelation in a context of experiences of those "permanent factors of history" which all human beings share.[22] This approach to the practice of Jesus is employed in Chapter 6.

4.3.3 God's Rule Challenges

The context of human society provides each person with his or her presuppositions. These patterns of expectation form an underlying interpretive frameworks. Pannenberg sees these as the defence mechanisms or "structures of hostility" which human beings raise

to protect themselves and their projections from the future surprise of God's initiative. They are not explicitly hostile to the future but appear as structures of security. He argues that "the burden of Jesus's parables is directed toward illuminating the hostile and self-defeating character of these structures of security".[23] The human being, challenged by the Christ event which "reveals the character of history itself",[24] is confronted with the need to make a decision in the present historical reality. "The impinging of the future on the present results in the present being constantly under the judgement of the future which prevents all moral and socio-political complacency and it is also the impingement of the future on the present which prevents otherworldliness."[25]

4.3.4 Neither Coercive Nor Authoritarian

The challenge to obedience is, however, non-coercive: "The rule of God requires unity among men...which cannot be coerced; it cannot be enforced by violence."[26] Pannenberg rejects authoritarian conceptions of scripture or preaching because, since the message of God's Kingdom was "itself proclaimed by man", it is "open to critical examination as are all other claims to authority".[27] When examined in its context, the authoritarian tradition of the church can be seen as a mechanism to regulate the transmission of the scriptures. It defended the reliability of the Christian tradition by defending the credibility of tradition and its representatives. All this was necessary when no other means of assessing reliability existed. Since the development of critical method, all such authority is capable of being examined for what it is and, like political absolutism, no longer has legitimacy.

Since the scripture is itself transmitted through the hands of tradition, it is true as Villa-Vicencio remarks that, "The reformed principle of sola scriptura is not a simple and definitive court of appeal for theologians in a moment of confusion and uncertainty." The confusion and uncertainty is also compounded by the nature of the scriptures themselves.

> For the unified "essential content" of Scripture which, for Luther, was the basis of its authority, is for our historical consciousness no longer to be found in the texts but only behind them, in the figure of Jesus who is attested in the very different writings of the New Testament in very different and incongruous ways.[28]

Scripture must be interpreted through the hermeneutical options of the theologian. These options are informed by his or her reading, in the midst of contemporary experience, of the variety of interpretations of Christ available within the scriptures themselves. Pannenberg sees a concentration on the historicity of the resurrection as being the only way to assert "the connection between the figure of Jesus and the primitive Christian proclamation of him".[29] Moltmann sees the key to this in the "future of scripture" because, "The biblical witness is witness to a historic forward-moving mission in the past, and hence in the light of the present mission it can be understood for what it really is."[30] Cone's view of the authority of scripture is consonant with Moltmann's but is more specific and more concrete in its placing of "present mission".

> The authority of the Bible for Christology, therefore, does not lie in its objective status as the literal Word of God. Rather, it is found in its power to point to the One whom the people have met in the historical struggle of freedom.[31]

The authority of scripture is something which must be recognised. It is not an objective reality which can be forced on people. In

fact authoritarianism can be seen to have had quite counter-productive results, especially in the missionary movement, where Pannenberg notes it contributed to the rejection of missionaries who urged conversions "instead of convincing by example and argument".[32]

4.3.5 Metaphorical Movement

The authority of scripture is not an authoritarian concept, for Pannenberg. It is convincing because it rests on the evidence of the resurrection, which is the linchpin of his understanding of the historicity of revelation. Resurrection is such that is can only be spoken about metaphorically.

Metaphor, where we have "two thoughts of different things active together",[33] "provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another".[34] In many respects it is the only verbal form which allows adequate speech about the revelation of transcendence within the dynamics of this world, because its "basic movement [is] by indirection from the known to the unknown".[35] Further, the extended metaphor, as story, provides a method for unifying meaning and event. This unification was obvious in the story of South African colonial and missionary experience which was analysed in the Introduction.

In any metaphor the one object both is, and is not, the other object in whose terms it is described. Metaphor works precisely because the difference between the two objects which are compared adds a surprising tension to the similarities which have been yoked together.

This is quite different from the method of the symbol in which no tension exists because it "loses" the identity of the referred object in the identity of the symbolic image. Metaphor wrenches together two unlikes by means of one aspect of similarity that they share. Consequently metaphor always contains "the whisper, 'It is and it is not.'"[36] There is a tension within the heart of metaphor just as there is tension, in the New Testament accounts, between the future character of the end of the world and the finality of decision in Jesus's eschatological life-style. Jesus is and is not God. The Rule of God is among us and is still to come.

The paradox of Grace, that God is here but never limited to this present moment or place, leads Pannenberg to draw a radical conclusion. He claims that "in a restricted but important sense, God does not yet exist". Since his rule and his being are inseparable, "We should not be surprised or embarrassed that God cannot be 'found' somewhere in present reality."[37] This perception underlines the prophetic and challenging quality of the Rule of God in conflict with structures of injustice. It contradicts that theological trend which claims that God is to be found everywhere in the world. This is a trend which allows the church, in the name of reconciliation, to sanctify all manner of unjust social structures, by a style of chaplaincy ministry. Pannenberg's observation supports a prophetic style of ministry.

The use of metaphor also allows us to do theology in harmony with the high Kerygma theology of the mid-twentieth century and yet to transcend its twin barriers of elitism and authoritarianism. The corrective necessity of this Word of God theology cannot be

denied, coming as it did into a scene of humanist liberalism which would not have had the stature to confront the mass murder perpetrated by the "civilised" Western powers during the Second World War. That high God of the Kerygma, who could not be reached by mere human thought, can, however, only be represented in the words, thought forms and social structures of human societies. It was not surprising that this theological tendency, vital as its essential message was, became transformed in its transmission into a message of authoritarian elitism, which could only be engaged in by those with enough professional theological study behind them to make authoritative statements.

The metaphorical nature of parable, however, gives all people the power to transcend these barriers without reducing the Godhead to a social programme in the style of the Social Gospel movement. The metaphor, which simultaneously is and is not, is a thought form capable of holding in tension for human beings the dynamic of a God who is beyond humanity and yet to be encountered within humanity. "It is just as the One who is different from Jesus that God is in him."[38] This is a God whose identity is to be found in the practice of the Kingdom of God among people and yet whose presence is still to come. "God's Reign is still future in relation to the ministry and message of Jesus and yet, as future, is present in it."[39]

More than this, the metaphorical form undermines the possibilities of elitism and authoritarianism. Every human being uses and makes up metaphors in the very process of learning their mother tongue. Eminent poets may dazzle with the profundity of their metaphors, but they cannot privatise the thought form for their own

professional use; it is held in common. Nor can the metaphor be defined authoritatively. Its essence is an open proliferation and association of meanings which achieves its accuracy not by the paring down of definition to the one single truth, but rather by the multidimensional overlaying of image upon image reverberating in the mind with possibility. Everyone, "even the least of these", can use the metaphoric style of parable.

4.3.6 Open future

God exists and yet does not; the future is ended and yet it is still open.

The result of Pannenberg's project is a theology of the future. The history of the transmission of the tradition shows how the people of Israel actualised the meaning of their tradition in new and appropriate ways as they encountered new situations. This observation encourages us to take our own tradition seriously in our own place. What is more it points to the openness of the future we project ourselves into.

The open future in Pannenberg's "epistemology of history"[40] does not exclude *a priori* any new event and this is of crucial importance for his view of the resurrection, which expresses, for him more than any other event, the openness and closedness of the future.

Similarly, Moltmann speaks of tradition as "mission that moves forwards and outwards",[41] not as "a handing on of something that has to be preserved, but as an event which summons the dead and

the godless to life".[42] He sees its essence in the historical event of resurrection which:

> ...is not the finally perfect triumph of that which has been approved and preserved unbroken from of old, but the "raising of the dead", and the triumph of the resurrection life over death to the glory of the all-embracing lordship of God.[43]

4.3.7 Revelation Through History

The mediation of revelation through events in history is the way that the inherent meaning and direction of history is carried. The Christ-event is proleptically, "the anticipated coming of the end of history in the midst of history" which "forms the basis from which history as a whole becomes understandable".[44] Continuity and transformation are also therefore antitheses which are unified, through Pannenberg's understanding of the history of the transmission of tradition, in relation to the philosophical discussion of "appearance". Two elements in this discussion have constantly broken apart: the "effective presence of what appears in the appearance, and its transcendence of the individual appearance".[45] But both the continuity and the transcendence are combined in the idea of the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. The Christ event is "the norm of God's self revelation to man...All interpretations of history are to be measured against the Christ event - nothing will occur that is contrary to this disclosed end."[46]

4.3.8 Summary

The purpose of drawing out the seven features above is to gain a perspective from Pannenberg's study of the history of the transmission of tradition which can help us form an understanding of the stories from the ministry of Jesus as transmitted tradition. A notable feature in Pannenberg's work is his concentration on the historicity of the resurrection. My argument is based rather on an understanding of Jesus' ministry as normative Christ event. A sociological approach to the historicity of Jesus' ministry, therefore, informs Chapter 6 in Part Two. The next two sections of this chapter act as a transition from Pannenberg's absorption with the historicity of the resurrection to an understanding of Jesus' ministry as normative Christ event. If the ministry of Jesus is considered normative, then a study of the stories of that ministry becomes essential; this is the subject of Part Two. It is also my argument that such an understanding of ministry, expressed in the dynamic of story, allows us to reactualise the gospel message in contemporary events and stories. This stage of the argument is considered later, in Parts 3 and 4.

4.4 THE RESURRECTION AND THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

For Moltmann, as for Pannenberg, the openness to the future of the revelation through history leads to the resurrection of Christ.

> We cannot turn our backs on the open horizons of modern history and return to perpetual orders and everlasting traditions, but we must take these horizons up into the eschatological horizon of the resurrection and thereby disclose to modern history its true historic character.[47]

Pannenberg's intention, above all, is to provide a historical verification for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because he sees the seriousness of history for the transmission of the tradition. Without this verification he feels the whole revelation is taken outside its proper place in history and is consequently undermined. The raising of Jesus from the dead is the chief evidence that "he is the archetype of the proleptic event".[48] Pannenberg considers it a historical fact by virtue of a different view of history, which emphasises the context of Jewish eschatological thought. In this view resurrection must be seen as a proleptic beginning of a general resurrection. He argues the possibility of a unique event lying beyond verification by analogy. He also uses anthropological arguments to make his case, suggesting that the lack of fulfillment in finite earthly life and the phenomenology of hope support the truth of the resurrection.

The problem, as Villa-Vicencio points out, is that by constructing new criteria of historicity he removes the proof from the historicity we all live by. "Pannenberg's argument for an 'element of truth' within the apocalyptic tradition is thus anthropological or theological but not historical - he has not historically verified the resurrection."[49] Villa-Vicencio himself suggests that the facticity of the Cross can more adequately account for the historical event of Jesus.[50]

4.5 THE MINISTRY OF JESUS AS NORMATIVE CHRIST EVENT

Pannenberg's use of anthropological arguments to fix the historicity of Jesus in a theology of the future, amounts to a kind of social pantheism. A theology of the future, as such, is limited precisely because it is not limited to any particular future. It fails to adhere to the process of the transmission of the tradition. As Vincent points out: "The early Christian theology was not centred on anything other than the continuing ministry of the exalted Jesus of Nazareth. Thus resurrection of Jesus, hope in Jesus, are central. This seems to need stressing at times against Pannenberg and Moltmann."[51] No other point of departure, even the cross, is adequate, as Vincent argues in relation to Kahler, who thought the gospels were merely "passion narratives with introductions".

> Moreover, even if one followed Kahler, one would still have to ask, "Why all the story of the death of this man, more than any other? What in him made his passion so important to mankind?" To answer simply, "Because this was the one whom God raised from the dead," is merely to point further the question: "Why this one?"[52]

The distinctive qualities which make the Christ event archetypal were the dynamics of the ministry of Jesus, which were honoured as those of God's son. The public ministry led to crucifixion, which could not be conquered by death. This ministry is the history which is decisive, not for the purposes of verification, but for the purpose of the transmission of the tradition. Certain distinctive qualities made visible by sociological analysis such as Holl's or Echegaray's can be seen as verified facts. Even though Pannenberg identified the unintended consequence of the form critical method, that it placed the event to which the gospels bore witness in the dark as it always pointed to a further

testimony of the Christian community and never made contact with Jesus himself,[53] we can still turn to him for confirmation of this approach.

> In the oldest layers of the New Testament traditions of Jesus are sayings that speak of the presence of the Reign of God in the ministry of Jesus. These stand alongside sayings that differentiate the Reign of God as something future from the present ministry of Jesus. I...seek the uniqueness of the message of Jesus precisely in this juxtaposition of seemingly opposing sayings.[54]

These oldest layers can be found in Jesus's proclamation of the Kingdom of God by means of parables. They must be examined to discover the dynamics of their transmission in relation to the features isolated above. For any attempt to "translate the dynamics" of the parables of God's Rule must be active as well as reflective.

4.6 SUMMARY

This chapter draws Part One to a conclusion. Chapter 2 began with a consideration of the first Christians' experience as they tried to communicate their faith to the "second Christians" - those who did not hear of the kingdom "directly from Jesus himself".[55] I claimed that the creative interaction between past and present in their experience was the dynamic that we require now in order to "merge our horizon" of understanding with that of the text. I argued that this "fusion of horizons" transcends the power of words and is encountered in action, which is spoken about in story. Story bodies forth the concrete historical context of all thought and language. The dynamic of story stimulates praxis.

This social context of meaning is something that traditional western theology has tended to ignore, depending rather on authoritative statements or propositions. The western church's own experience of foreign mission, in the last hundred years, has culminated in a "mission-in-reverse" from the liberation and contextual theologies which now confront it. Their message makes us realise that all Christian communication has taken place within the social, economic, political and cultural milieux of the missionary community. Theologians and missionaries cannot distance themselves from involvement. These were the themes of Chapter 2.

Chapters 3 and 4 have broadened the basis of these claims and related them to issues in contemporary theology. In Chapter 3 I examined various descriptions of the present crisis in the appropriation of Christian tradition. The crisis disturbs the self-confidence of the mainline institutional churches of the affluent West and their agencies of theological and biblical study. The roots of the crisis are to be found in the hermeneutical problem of finding an adequate "translation" of the full meaning of the scripture stories; this is not a problem of words but one of the socio-cultural context in which words are used.

In Chapter 4 these issues have been considered in the light of a particular theological project, "the history of the transmission of tradition". The necessity for this project is pointed out by Ebeling. "Since the truth of 'sola Scriptura' depends on the reliable transmission of the Gospel, the Scripture-principle necessarily involves a doctrine of tradition."[86] The examination of this doctrine of tradition has revealed certain features

against which the scripture stories which transmit the gospel can be considered.

Having considered the implications of the hermeneutical debate in Part One, the conclusions must be set against the record of scripture; this is the task of Part Two. The function of story in contemporary experience occupies Parts Three and Four.

The two chapters of Part Two will consider the dynamics and methods of Jesus' proclamation about the imminent Rule of God. Chapter 5, discusses the parables in the light of contemporary research. Chapter 6 examines the practice of Jesus in the light of sociological studies.

> Precisely in endeavouring to understand the biblical writings it [theology] will be led back to the question of the events they report about, and of the meaning that belongs to them.[57]

The parables of Jesus are a particularly appropriate starting point because they both "reflect with peculiar clarity the character of his good news",[58] and they constitute "a prime genre of Scripture".[59] The discussion of parables seeks to uncover the **dynamic of story**, which links **told word** to **acted word** by means of **heard word**.

PART TWO

BIBLICAL STORIES

What we have to deal with is a conception which is essentially simple but involves far-reaching consequences. It is that the parables of Jesus are not - at any rate primarily - literary productions, nor is it their object to lay down general maxims ("no one would crucify a teacher who told pleasant stories to enforce prudential morality"), but each of them was uttered in an actual situation of the life of Jesus, at a particular and often unforeseen point. Moreover, as we shall see, they were mostly concerned with a situation of conflict - with justification, defence, attack, and even challenge. For the most part, though not exclusively, they are weapons of controversy. Every one of them calls for an answer on the spot.

Joachim Jeremias
The Parables of Jesus[1]

5. THE METHOD OF THE PARABLES

This thesis seeks to explore the dynamic of story in the proclamation of the gospel message. It is a dynamic which links told, heard, and acted word. It is most clearly evident in the parabolic proclamation of Jesus.

The parables are the most prominent examples of the use of story in the New Testament; they are the "prime genre of Scripture and certainly the central form of Jesus's teaching".[2] This chapter and the next deal, respectively with the spoken parables of Jesus and the acted ones - his practice. The examination of parable in both senses uncovers its dynamic function in expressing the unity of language and praxis so that a pattern is discerned in the use of parables in the New Testament which is suggestive for our use of them today.

This chapter first examines the hermeneutical problem which the spoken parables present of trying to cross the "chasm" which divides their expression in first century Palestine from their application in the contemporary world. A brief outline of the recent history of their interpretation deals with this. The rest of the chapter considers the method of parable when it is viewed from the perspective of the transmission of tradition. The

findings of contemporary biblical scholarship are set against the features of transmission which were described in Chapter 4. The investigation leads us to conclude that the message of the parables is inextricably bound up with the message of the parabolic actions of Jesus and his group of disciples. This chapter leads automatically to the sociological consideration of the practice of Jesus in Chapter 6. The development this century of refined tools of biblical criticism, such as form criticism and sociological method, is responsible for our awareness of the full context of meaning in these stories.

5.1 HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

The explosion of parable scholarship in the past hundred years has turned the received notions of parabolic method and meaning inside out.

Julicher removed nearly two millenia of allegorical interpretation from the stories in his book of 1899.[3] He showed that these interpretations were "alien to the parables of Jesus".[4] They had so encrusted the stories that they had strangled the life out of them. The parables had been turned into cautionary, moral tales whose meaning could be read out to a formula. For Julicher, however, each story was a "piece of real life" and held a "single idea of the widest possible" general significance. His approach resulted in vague moral precepts or principles, which Jeremias identified as an error.[5]

C H Dodd's book of 1935, The Parables of the Kingdom, was the first full scale placing of the parables in the setting of the

life of Jesus and it established the modern definition of parable.

> At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.[6]

Jeremias acknowledged Dodd's major imaginative achievement in placing these stories within Jesus's life setting; but he criticised both the way Dodd limited the field of study to the parables of the Kingdom, and also his "contraction of the eschatology" of the Kingdom to its final breaking through in the works of Jesus.[7] He, himself, proposed an "essentially simple" but far reaching conception of the parables as stories which Jesus uttered in specific situations of conflict. They were stories concerned "with justification, defence, attack, and even challenge...weapons of controversy", each one of which must be relocated in its specific original context for its meaning to become apparent.[8]

These positions established the foundation of modern parable study that: the parables of Jesus are not allegories (Julicher), nor general moral precepts (Dodd); they are rather metaphors, similitudes or stories presenting "one single point of comparison";[9] which to be properly understood must be "placed in the setting of the life of Jesus" where they are found to be "addressed to the situation of the moment".[10]

Built on this foundation are two countervailing approaches. One approach, e.g. Jeremias, Linneman and Bailey, is primarily concerned with elucidating the historical origins of individual parables. These writers determine, using form critical analysis,

what the original statement was and isolate the circumstances which gave rise to the saying. The approach is criticised, however, for becoming so involved in the detail of first century Palestine that its conclusions have no relevance to the life of twentieth century Christians.

> Such rigorous historical methodology in turn has its own built-in hazard, namely, that of pre-occupation with parables as concrete and functional instruments for instruction and disputation in first century circumstances to an extent that they might have little to say to the current twentieth century situation.[11]

The countervailing approach in parabolic research, e.g. Crossan and McFague, is more concerned to interpret the parables within some cultural framework of twentieth century thought, e.g. literary criticism, existentialism or structuralism. These writers draw out a meaning which has contemporary validity and application.

This approach, in its turn, is criticised for missing the distinctive, scandalous, historical particularity of the parables and turning them into twentieth century morality tales.

> The danger we see in this sort of orientation is that it yields a picture of Jesus not as a wandering Jewish rabbi who instructs disciples, replies to opponents, and stimulates crowds, but rather as an existentialist theologian, wearing a Bultmannian or Heideggerian face, who by parabolic speech dramatises ontological possibilities for hearers.[12]

Here is the hermeneutical issue of past and present again. Delving into a parable's original meaning hinders modern application; while making current sense of it obscures its original meaning. The weakness of one approach is the strength of the other. The two horizons seem mutually exclusive. We can understand the original parables in the context of Jesus's society or we can draw

principles and general conclusions out of them for our own society; but the distance between our time and that of Jesus is so great that no close connection can be drawn. We seem to have reached Pannenberg's "unbridgeable chasm" again.

The discussion of the hermeneutical problem in Part One has demonstrated that any attempt to communicate meaning must be considered in relation to its milieu of social praxis. If we apply this observation to the work of the New Testament scholars, one obvious anomoly stands out. The milieu in which parables have been examined is far different from the milieu in which they were created. Jesus created parables while actively engaged within the swirling dynamics of an extremely explosive period of questioning, conflict and reformulation within his own society and culture, which was itself under the pressure of extremely powerful foreign imperial control.[13] He was not working within a mode of distanced, calm, secure, scholarly reflection which was socio-politically inactive. That, however, is the main mode in which the study of parables has taken place in subsequent church history.

A return to the style of parabolic action which was characteristic of Jesus may, I would claim, resolve the problems of understanding and communicating the message of the parables today. It is the intention of this thesis to provide some evidence for this claim by examining the dynamic of story which was introduced in Chapter 1. The discussion of transmission of tradition in Chapter 4 showed that the style and content of the proclamation about the Kingdom of God are indivisible. The present chapter contains a reading of the parables based on modern biblical studies. It confirms that the parables also show this unity of style and content.

The praxis and the language of the biblical proclamation are fused. Praxis does not simply follow from an understanding of the concepts in the biblical texts. (Despite the fact that most theological training assumes that it does.[14]) Praxis results from entering into the dynamic of the story. The **hearing** of the story pushes the hearer into **new action**; equally the **acting** of the story provokes in the actor a **new hearing** of the biblical story. The contemporary stories which are told in Part Four illustrate this dialectic between hearing and praxis in the **dynamic of story.** It is a process that cannot be kept at an academic distance, but one which engages and changes the person. In reviewing the work of Jeremias, Linneman and others, Kessler notes that:

> The students of the gospel parables have looked at Jesus'parables from every angle, including many angles Jesus himself would have been thoroughly bemused by! Yet, I find that the parable students keep the parables at arms length and do not let them enter into their lives - and perhaps with good reason![15]

In hermeneutical terms, Kessler is warning us of the interpreter who is "appropriating another possession for his closet of knowledge", rather than "being appropriated himself by the governing claim of the text".[16]

This brief review of the recent history of parable interpretation introduces a more detailed examination of the method of the parables. It is organised in terms of the seven features of transmission of tradition detailed in Chapter 4.

5.1.2 Features of the Parables

The parables were created in a context of social praxis. Thus the feature of **action** and engagement is to be found in the very creation and transmission of the parables. Further features present themselves from the modern studies of the parable material. Dodd and Jeremias made their important breakthrough by interpreting the parables within the life setting of Jesus. Through their work the feature of **contextuality** became the basis for understanding parables. Crossan's examination of the structure of parables presents, graphically, the feature of the **challenge** that God's Rule makes to our "structures of expectation". Linneman's discussion of the "interlocking" of the parable message with the listener's pre-understanding demonstrates the **non-coercive** nature of this challenge. McFague's exploration of the underpinning of metaphorical identifications, which link story and context, presents the feature of the **metaphorical movement** of the parables, whose challenge invites the listener into an **open future.** Finally the interaction between parable and acted parable, which is noted but not stressed by many writers, offers a new way of understanding the feature of **revelation through history.**

The features which occur in the history of the transmission of the tradition are rediscovered in the contemporary readings of the parables. They constitute the method of the parables. The rest of this chapter is an examination of these features in greater detail.

5.2 GOD'S RULE AS ACTION

The parables of Jesus proclaim what the Kingdom of God is like. In the second chapter of his book on parables, Dodd considers the meaning of the term the "Kingdom of God". He isolates various uses of the term in Jesus's tradition and in his usage. There is the sense in which a person or nation "takes on" the Kingdom as a present reality by their obedience to the Torah. There is the sense in which the Kingdom is something to be revealed in the future in deeds of God which are "effective in the world of human experience".[17] Dodd's particular contribution is to isolate the sense in which Jesus's distinctive proclamation of the Kingdom as "a fact of present experience" differs from the Rabbinic concern with Torah obedience.[18]

> It is a matter of being confronted with the power of God at work in the world. In other words, the "eschatological" Kingdom of God is proclaimed as a present fact, which men must recognize, whether by their actions they accept or reject it.[19]

Underlying all these understandings of the nature of the Kingdom of God is its manifestation in the active Rule of God and in the active response of humans in obedience to its appearance. There is no notion of passive mental belief in the meaning of the term, nor is there a sense of place. The ambiguity of the word Kingdom, in English, which includes the sense of geographical boundaries, is not present in the Aramaic malkuth which should rather be rendered "kingly rule". This emphasis is also discussed by Perrin. "The primary and essential reference is to the sovereignty of God conceived of in the most concrete possible manner, i.e. to his activity in ruling."[20]

The central element in Jesus's teaching was the proclamation of the Kingdom. It is an activity of God ruling which demands an active response from human beings. As Perrin points out the majority of parables are "concerned with the experience and/or subsequent activity of men confronted by the reality of God at work".[21] What is more, the subsequent transmission of the idea of the Kingdom of God has been shaped by the practices which the concept has been used to justify. There is no separating the concept of the Kingdom from the active pursuit of "some particular historical project". This is clearly presented in Pixley's discussion of the Kingdom from a Latin American perspective.

> We have learned in Latin America to be suspicious of the kind of idealism that seeks "true" concepts in their purity. Often behind the beauty and desirability of the concept in the abstract lies the intention to legitimate structures that in concrete history produce misery and oppression....We shall confirm in our study of the Bible that there is no "biblical concept" of the kingdom of God. Within the Bible this idea is central. However, the idea has no existence in its purity as an abstraction. It must always find expression in some particular historical project, a project that may well exclude other projects that also claim to embody the kingdom of God. We would, then, give a fundamentally false impression if we did a study of the kingdom of God in the Bible in abstraction from the particular historical embodiments that that idea found.[22]

Any attempt to discover the meaning of the parables' proclamation about the Kingdom of God is, therefore, an exploration of actions in the world. At the same time, it must examine the context of "particular historical embodiments" in which the ideas have been transmitted.

5.3 CONTEXTUALITY

The Kingdom of God can only be understood in relation to its context in praxis. This is true of the parables themselves which are contextual stories in three senses. First, they are "drawn from nature or common life."[23] They arise from the real context of life of the speaker and listeners. Second, in the view of Jeremias, their context is the key to their interpretation. They were historically shaped responses to controversy and challenge and did, in fact, arise out of action.

> For the most part, though not exclusively, they are weapons of controversy. Every one of them calls for an answer on the spot.[24]

Some were responses to the needs of the disciple group in times of disillusion (eg The Sower). Most, however, were weapons in the conflict between Jesus and those groups, particularly Scribes, Pharisees and Doctors of the Law, who were most threatened by Jesus's message and who condemned his actions. They were spontaneous responses to situations; their intent was not to convey general maxims for behaviour, though the situations they spoke to might recur.

Jeremias tried to uncover the "definite historical setting", or context, of each parable in order to find out the meaning Jesus intended and the impact on hearers. He wanted to discover "the original meaning of the parables of Jesus...in his authentic voice".[25]

His attempt to discover the parables' original meaning shows the third sense in which they are contextual stories. Their meaning

changed as the context in which they were heard changed. Jeremias traces the changes in their interpretation in the early church. The stories arose from conflict with opponents but they lost their raison d'etre once they were used within the context of the early church. These people who were not opponents of Jesus but were his followers looked for an application of the story to themselves. Thus for example the parable of the Great Supper is identified by Jeremias as having been originally a crisis parable with the message, "It may be too late". It was directed at Jesus's critics and opponents.[26] It is transformed by the author of Matthew into no less than an allegory of salvation history.[27] Luke's gospel uses it to respond to the missionary needs of the early Christians, for whom the mission to the Gentiles had now achieved supreme importance.[28] It is one of a group of parables originally "intended to arouse a deluded people and their leaders to a realization of the awful gravity of the moment".[29] The early church found explanations, in this group of parables, of why the parousia they so eagerly awaited was delayed. They also discovered teaching about what their mission should be while they waited for the parousia.

Once a story had been removed from one context to another, which had no need for its original message, its meaning was altered. It was absorbed into the meaning system of the hearers and exploited for any relevant teaching. Simply retelling the original story in a new situation was not enough for its meaning to be apprehended. The transformation of a message by the transformation of its situation has already been referred to in the discussion of barriers to translation in Chapter 3. What it underlines here is the dependence of the meaning of the parables on their context.

The importance of contextual study of parables has been confirmed by many authors. Linneman argues that it is essential to understand them as the original listeners heard them before the meaning for contemporary readers can be ascertained.

> For every attempt to master the parables of Jesus directly, without this return to the historical situation, only yields a theological utterance or a moral demand. This is, however, not only very much less than, it is something quite different from, the original meaning of the parables of Jesus.[30]

She describes the method by which the contextuality of the parables functions. Parables make a direct correspondence between the "story" and the listeners' "reality" - this is the word she uses to describe social context. The listeners hear the judgement made in the story and carry it over into the context in which they participate. "The parable gets its power of argument from the fact that what is admitted in one case can hardly be contested in another exactly corresponding case."[31] This is a quite different method from that of allegory which places a "picture" in front of the "reality" of the hearers' context, both referring to it and hiding it.

The way Linneman distinguishes between parable and allegory helps us to see more thoroughly the contextual method of the parable. Where listeners are active participants in the "reality" or "context" in which the story is told the parabolic correspondence is easily drawn without resorting to an allegorical method. But as soon as listeners (eg the early gentile church beyond the Palestinian/Jewish context) need to have the "story" explained in terms of an unknown "reality", then allegorical method creeps in. Hence the most valuable observation that Linneman makes about parable and allegory is that they must be defined contextually.

Allegory speaks to the faithful, the insiders, while parables speak to the unconvinced or opponents. From this she is able to identify an important function of parable. "The parable is used to reconcile opposition, the allegory presupposes an understanding."[32]

Using this analysis, one can easily see how inappropriate much retelling of the parables has been. In order to communicate a parable, according to an allegorical understanding, the ideas contained within it have to be explained to the listeners before or after the telling of the story because by definition they do not know them already. In this way the parable merely becomes an illustration of ideas which can only be expressed in abstract words. The real function of Jesus' parables, however, is to picture a world in which God rules in concrete contextual terms which mesh with the "reality" of the listener. This function is completely subverted when it is turned into an allegory and an alien abstraction colonises the mind. What Linneman's analysis does is to further expose the powerful effect upon stories of the context in which they are placed during their transmission.

The placing of parables within the setting of the life both of Jesus and of his listeners demonstrates their contextual nature. Furthermore, Jeremias' analysis of the transformation of their meaning in the early church demonstrates how the listeners' context so affected them that they reinterpreted the parables to address issues they faced in their own lives, such as the delay of the parousia or the mission to the Gentiles.[33]

The challenge of the parables could only make sense within the life setting or context of the listeners. For them, also, the meaning of this past challenge was "defined in terms of the questions put to it from the present".[34] It is necessary to examine the nature of that challenge.

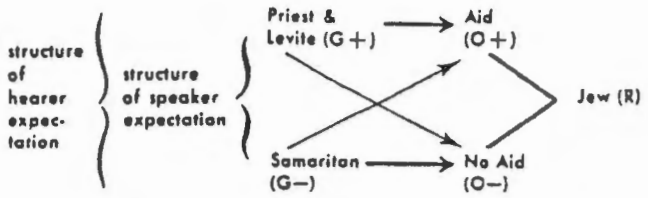
5.4 GOD'S RULE CHALLENGES

Crossan focusses upon the "challenge of the historical Jesus".[35] Having disconnected the parables from their settings in the gospels, in order to avoid the transformations of a later stratum of the tradition, he does little to reconnect them into the situations of Jesus's ministry. He tends to examine the stories on their own. But Crossan's distinctive use of structuralist diagrams to represent the internal dynamics of the parables does help the reader to see the common patterns of expectation at which the parables are aimed and the patterns of response to which they challenge their listeners.

Presuming the Heideggerian view of time, Crossan discusses the parables in terms of three major divisions: Advent, Reversal and Action. This forms, what he calls, a "permanent eschatology", which displays the "presence of God as one who challenges world and shatters its complacency repeatedly".[36]

Crossan expresses this challenge to the "the normalcy of one's accepted world" most distinctively in diagrams of structure, such as the one below which represents the parable of the Good Samaritan. It highlights how the "structure of expression" in the story challenges and contradicts the "structure of viewer

expectation".[37]



(Read: the hearer expects the Priest and Levite to help and the Samaritan to refuse assistance, but the story details exactly the opposite.)

The diagram[38] expresses the clear symmetry of reversal which greets the hearer's expectation, derived from the social norms they have imbibed. The horizontal arrows at top and bottom of the diagram, enclosed in the larger bracket, detail the "structure of hearer expectation" of how a story with such elements of plot should develop. The Priest and Levite (G+) would be expected to give Aid (O+) to the injured Jew (R); whereas the Samaritan (G−) would be expected to give No Aid (O−). What actually happens in the story is the "structure of speaker expectation" - the diagonal arrows enclosed in the smaller bracket. The challenge expressed in the story is the reversal of expectation. The Priest and Levite (G+) give No Aid (O−), while it is the Samaritan (G−) who gives Aid (O+).

The diagram is helpful because it gives a clear symmetrical form to the parable's challenge. It enables the similarity between parables which have an identical form to be observed. Its greater significance in terms of the argument of this thesis will be seen in Chapter 6. There it helps us to see that the parables and acted parables of Jesus have an identical "structure of speaker expectation" which can also be observed in contemporary stories. It is clear evidence for the claim made in the first section of

this chapter that a return to the style of Jesus' parabolic proclamation through the dynamic of story is available to us today. It offers a hermeneutic of praxis rather than a hermeneutic of language.

5.5 NEITHER COERCIVE NOR AUTHORITARIAN

According to Crossan, parables challenge the "complacent normalcy of one's accepted world,"[39] what Pannenberg calls the "hostile and self defeating structures of security" which human beings erect to protect their projections from the future surprise of God's initiative.[40] According to Linnemann, this challenge is of the essence of parable as a genre. It is a form which invites listeners to change their minds and their lives. But the parable does not change the listeners by coercing them, instead it presents a decisive choice which they are free to accept or reject.

> A parable is an urgent endeavour on the part of the speaker towards the listener. The man who tells a parable wants to do more than utter something or make a communication. He wants to affect the other, to win his agreement, to influence his judgement in a particular direction, to force him to a decision, to convince him or prevail upon him. Even when it is only the narrator who speaks, a conversation is really taking place. He has already anticipated the possible objections of the hearers, because it is to overcome such resistance that he has chosen the parables as his form of speech.[41]

She isolates three conditions by which parables operate. First, listeners' minds are to be changed "in a particular historical situation". Second, in their assessment of the disputed situation, narrator and listeners show "the greatest conceivable opposition". Third, the narrator has power through nothing more than the use of language to "offer a new understanding of the situation".[42]

How does a narrator overbalance hostile listeners, whose minds are filled with the dominant presuppositions of their age? It is, Linneman suggests, by a kind of mental judo hold which gives the listeners the confidence to put themselves in the power of the narrator. Then they can be overthrown. She calls this technique "interlocking". First the narrator must make the corresponderce in the parable, between "picture part" and "reality part", clear and undeniable.

> To put it more exactly, the parallels consist in the fact that the relevant feature in the parable evokes the same or at least a similar attitude as the listeners have taken to the reality in question.[43]

For this "claiming one thing as another" (this is that) to happen successfully in the listeners' minds, the narrator must have "allowed room in the parable for the evaluation of his listeners". The way they view the situation must be incorporated into the sinews of the story or they will not give it credence. This can readily be seen in the parable of the Prodigal Son. It is a situation with which many of Jesus's listeners must have been able to identify:[44] a young man with prospects, living in the Diaspora, falls into bad ways. It is shameful, but not unheard of. Any right thinking Jew would have identified with the attitude of the elder brother.

Thus the narrator concedes to the listeners' point of view. They will bother to listen because of this concession to them. The story seems to be shaped to fit their "structure of expectation". By the end, however, the conflicting points of view of narrator and listeners "are interlocked with one another or interwoven in the concise single strand of the narrative".[45] The narrator concludes the story in such a way that it radically challenges the

listeners' "structures of security". They must respond either by following the story to its conclusion or by wrenching themselves out of it to preserve a predetermined position. This is what the parable offers to the hostile listener: an invitation to change sides and support the controversial prodigality of the father's love.

This notion of "interlocking" makes powerful sense of the way an opponent would have listened to Jesus's parables. It also explains the impact of parables on his followers, though Linneman ignores the parables that address them.[46]

There are occasions when Jesus tells parables which are meant to encourage disciples who are not hostile but have lost faith or become disillusioned. He gives them a new understanding of the possibilities inherent in the small disciple group. Such parables would be, for example, the Sower or the Mustard Seed. Other parables, such as the Lost Coin or the Buried Treasure, seem to have been directed at followers, or potential followers, rather than opponents.[47] The same strategy of interlocking is still employed. At first the story interlocks with the preunderstanding of the listeners. By the end they are provoked to draw conclusions from the story which differ from the conclusions they held before. Listeners to the parable of the Sower, for example, find its description of the farmer's problems realistic; they become interlocked with the story.[48] But the conclusion challenges them to stop bemoaning the poor return from large areas of bad soil, and to consider afresh, what they normally take for granted, the amazing return on the single seed which generates.

Disciples, such as those in John 6:66, who have decided to leave Jesus because their expectations are not being fulfilled, are challenged to re-evaluate their expectations by the parable of the Sower. They are invited to realise that something of immense significance is happening in this seemingly insignificant group. They must reconsider whether to leave in disillusion or to commit themselves with renewed determination. As Jeremias concludes of such parables:

> Their meaning is that out of the most insignificant beginnings, invisible to human eye, God creates his mighty Kingdom, which embraces all the peoples of the world.[49]

The parable pulls the listeners' perceptions out of the normal channel of the obvious, into an observation of the equally truly obvious but normally not seen. The capacity to achieve this reorientation is the hallmark and necessary quality of those who wish to lead a movement against the grain of their society and its norms. They need this quality when talking to opponents who operate within the prevailing world view and need to have that hermetically-sealed outlook punctured; they need it to encourage disciples who slip back into the old ways of seeing and thinking when the mission seems to be failing; they need this quality, no less, when talking to interested waverers, who must be strengthened in their feeling that all is not well with the current world view, but who still operate within that view.

Parables confront the listeners with an understanding of life which challenges their own. They must act either in the light of this new understanding or in opposition to it. They cannot be forced into a change of expectations; but they can be confronted with the alternative reality of God's Kingdom. It is necessary to

consider next how this inexpressible reality of God is brought into the realm of human language.

5.6 METAPHORICAL MOVEMENT

The parable produces its effect by interlocking two parties: the teller and the listener. It is a bridge over a personal chasm. The parable is also, in itself, the locking together of two different worlds: the world of common life and the world that results when God's Rule holds sway. In this sense, parable is a bridge over a cosmic chasm. It produces its effect by means of a leap of metaphor, and this is one of the main emphases of McFague's work on parables.

The method of parables is the making of a context out of ordinary people and events into which the extraordinary presence of the transcendent can break. This is the method of metaphor, in which the ordinary is the context for envisaging the strange. McFague's extended review of metaphor underpins her contention that Christian language must always be "ordinary, contemporary and imagistic", as it is in the parables. This is her way of resolving the problem of contemporary religious language which was discussed in section 3.1.

In examining the parable of the Good Samaritan she notes a distinctive quality of the parable's method: its meaning is only found within the story although it is not exhausted by the story. The meaning cannot be abstracted from the story; the revelation comes to the listener by entry into the narrative and by experiencing the shock and surprise of the turns of the story. It

is the radical nature of the imagery and action which carries the meaning; yet the subject of the story, the God who loves like that, is mentioned nowhere in the story. This is a general characteristic of parables.

> The perception of divine love is achieved through stretching the surface of the story with an extreme imagery of hunger and feasting. Rejection and acceptance, lost and found, death and life.[50]

The parable works by the juxtaposition of its two essentials of realism and strangeness. It is a realistic story, set in a world we can accept as really ours - unlike the world of myth. The story is concerned with ordinary events, commonness, secularity. But it creates a strange world also. The listeners are shocked into a recognition that important things happen and are decided within the dimension of the divine at the everyday level.

The parable works in the same way as the metaphor by relating the ordinary and the extraordinary as was described in section 4.3.5. Metaphor works indirectly, bringing new insight by framing the ordinary in an extraordinary context so that the shock is generated by seeing the familiar in a new way. This is how the story quoted in the Introduction functioned.

This indirection suprises someone into participating in an experience. It is a particularly potent quality of metaphor and parable for any attempt at authentic Christian discourse in the contemporary world. McFague argues that theology can only seek a way of believing, in a non-believing time, by asserting no more than the evidence supports, rather than all that the tradition has always proclaimed.[51]

The quality of metaphor, that it always contains "the whisper, 'It is and is not'" was also noted in Chapter 4. In any parable about the Kingdom of God the compared object, for example the growing mustard seed, similarly, both is and is not the Kingdom of God. This quality of tension allows us to escape from temporal boundaries that are taken too literally. Within a metaphorical understanding, there need be no dispute about whether the Kingdom of God is here or whether it is yet to come because metaphor includes both. Any attempt to imagine the presence of the Kingdom of God through metaphor, will necessarily also be suggestive of its absence, because any comparison carries elements which are of the Kingdom and also elements which are not. The Kingdom is the seed growing secretly, but then again it is not.

The images of the parables do not direct us to "God in himself" (or herself or itself - language comes unstuck directly!), they keep our eyes on our own world and that world as transformed by God's rule. We do not cast our eyes on Jesus so that, in the words of the chorus, "the things of this world will pass away", but so that we see them in a new light. It is not a mystical, static or intellectual vision, but a new insight on ourselves: a new insight into how ordinary human life and events can move beyond themselves by being connected to surprising comparisons.

> The familiar and sensuous is used to evoke the unfamiliar and on the other hand, the unfamiliar context or frame in which the familiar is set allows us to see the ordinary in a new way.[52]

The parable does not offer two worlds, but rather two different ways of relating to that one world. Parable is essentially secular and takes its place within the everyday limited world that we know.

The parabolic, metaphoric method does not extricate an abstract concept from, but delves into the details of, the story itself. In this way it is an antidote to the characteristic Western separation of mind and body, and of thought and action. It stresses the unity of body and spirit; that human beings are bodies that think, not bodies and thoughts. It provides a basis for theories of praxis which seek to bring reflection and action into a unified movement.

Crossan highlights the unity of action and reflection within the parables by differentiating between allegory and metaphor in a way which complements Linneman's functional distinction which was discussed in section 5.3. Whereas allegory transforms something into an image which represents a clearly circumscribed abstract concept, metaphor transforms the idea into an image so that the idea is "infinitely active and unreadable, inexpressible except in its own terms".[53] Metaphor is near the heart of language. It does not provide illustrations for those who cannot express their thoughts clearly; it is a way of revealing things which are not reducible to clear language.

> The thesis is that metaphor can also articulate a referent so new or so alien to consciousness that this referent can only be grasped within the metaphor itself...One must risk entrance before one can experience its validity.[54]

Metaphor then is not an ornamental substitute for plain thought, a mere figure of speech, but a distinctive mode of achieving insight. The parables suggest a new context for perceiving ordinary life. The parable teaches us about God indirectly through a "subsidiary awareness".[55] The risk involved in "entering" the parable brings with it the risk of not knowing where the experience will end. The parable poses an open future.

5.7 OPEN FUTURE

Since the parables offer a challenge within the terms of everyday life, the listeners, who must go on making choices about behaviour in that same everday world, cannot avoid reacting in one way or another to the parable's challenge. There is a feedback or reaction, from the listeners to the parables, which arises out of the very nature of the metaphoric process the parables employ. Listeners not only interpret parable for themselves but they are also interpreted by the parables. Their response to the challenge acts as a judgement of themselves. "As you judge so will you be judged" is true of the movement of the parables because the listeners cannot avoid reacting to their challenge and displaying thus the values they hold dear. It is in this way that the rich man of Mark 10:17-22 was judged. He was judged by himself, by his reaction to the call of Jesus to give his wealth to the poor.

A parable is therefore not an end in itself but also a beginning. It must be heard and reacted to. It is open-ended.

One aspect of this open-endedness is that a parabolic or metaphoric comparison is not definitive and final in its judgement. So the image of father as applied to God cannot exclude other images which harmonise with it such as sister, mother, brother or friend. This last is the image McFague goes on to explore in detail as a contemporary image of great significance. The parabolic mode generates new insights and new comparisons. They cannot be foreclosed in one historical moment or result in once and for all right and wrong answers, but must be ever new and plural. This is why the simple updating of parables

which was discussed in Chapter 3 is not a sufficient response to the power of their underlying movement. The real challenge is the imaginative attempt to create new situations and stories which contain the same revelation as Palmer makes clear.

> Every true hermeneutical experience is a new creation, a new disclosure of being: it stands in a firm relationship to the present, and historically could not have happened before. Such is man's "participation" in the ever new and fresh ways that being can come to stand.[56]

5.8 THE DYNAMIC OF PARABLE

The **dynamic of parable**, the movement from speaker to actor, via hearer, is a movement which is essentially narrative. It is the power to claim that **this is that.** It is concerned not with beliefs but with the moment of coming to belief, with believing as something which happens. It is incarnational and secular because believing is centred in people's lifestyle and in their life, lived in stories.

It is contextual because it is a process of interpretation which takes place by means of oversimplification and analogical extension. We suppress the dissimilarities in our comparison in order to see the similarities more clearly. But these similarities in our comparison are ones which appear to us in our perspective, hence it is our contextual understanding which must be compared with others and never absolutised.

It is tensile and contradictory. It both is and is not the image that conveys the truth. It both is and is not the expression of the Rule of God. It is both the Kingdom which is here among people and the Kingdom that is yet to come. No simple-minded literalism

is capable of grasping that dynamic. Thus, it is open ended and generative. It both allows the possibility of and expects the creation of new images, narratives and praxis of the revelation it seeks to express. It is dynamic.

The dynamic of the parables does not merely exercise the listener's mind, it demands an embodiment in human living.

> The uncanny and unnerving aspect of the New Testament parables is that the peculiar insight they are concerned with, believing in a loving God who upsets the logic of the familiar, must be embodied, incarnated in human lives, not in the head alone but in and through the full scope and breadth of a human life.[57]

5.9 REVELATION THROUGH HISTORY

The features of parable which have been discussed in this chapter reveal not only the content but also the style of the revelation of God's Kingdom. The summation of these features is that they must be revealed in the actions of human history. Parable must be "incarnated in human lives".

> This is what Jesus' parables seek to do: to help others into their own experience of the Kingdom and to draw from that experience their own way of life.[58]

Parables are not illustrations of Jesus' teaching. They are the teaching itself. Crossan characterises the method algebraically:

> It talks of A so that one can participate in B, or, more accurately, it talks of x so that one can participate in X and so understand the validity of x itself. Its structural pattern is X-in-x, and the hyphens are not dispensible.[59]

The listeners have to enter the world of the parable to receive its message; it is active and participatory; one cannot be academically distanced. But still for Crossan this is a mental

leap and not something which involves action. McFague, however, sees a necessary link between the participation of the listeners in the parables and the praxis of their lives.

> The parabolic way is necessarily metaphoric, necessarily indirect, because it is concerned not with what we believe, know, or are, but what we are in the process of believing, knowing, and becoming in our lives. Parables are not, then, riddles which give privileged knowledge to those who solve them. They are not primarily concerned with knowing but with doing (understood as deciding on a way of life based on new insight).[60]

According to Jeremias, the dynamic of the parables arose from the manner of their genesis. The original impulse for the stories came from some action in the world which led to the combat of controversy or the need for disciple training.[61]

He quotes with approval Smith's remark that "no one would crucify a teacher who told pleasant stories to enforce prudential morality".[62] Nor, one might add, would anyone crucify a teacher who merely told unpleasant stories to subvert an entrenched morality. These were not just stories. Jesus and his disciples were a controversial, dynamic group at the focus of social movements which could be dangerous to the established powers, both Jewish and Roman as the next chapter reveals.

Jeremias concludes his outline of Jesus's proclamation by identifying these actions as a crucial part of the message.

> Jesus did not confine himself to spoken parables, but also performed parabolic actions. His most significant parabolic action was his extension of hospitality to the outcasts (Luke 19:5f) and their reception into his house (Luke 15:1-2) and even into the circle of his disciples (Mark 2:14 par. Matt. 10:3). These feasts for publicans are prophetic signs, more significant than words, silent proclamation that the Messianic Age is here, the Age of forgiveness...The Messianic Age has arrived. That means that the symbolic actions are kerygmatic actions; they show that Jesus not only proclaimed the message of the

> parables, but that he lived it and embodied it in his own person. "Jesus not only utters the message of the Kingdom of God, he himself is the message."[63]

The parables arose from the ministry of Jesus. Their existence grew out of a context of praxis. The praxis took two main forms: the formation of a group of disciples and the precipitation of conflict by challenging expectations built into the power structure of the society. Jesus' response to these social structures is the subject of the next chapter. But it is necessary to note the point which will be demonstrated there, that Jesus' parabolic stories and his parabolic actions constituted a revelation through history. "Jesus is the moment in our common history in which destiny was completely anticipated in a personal event. He is the archetype of the proleptic event in whom the 'end time' participated in our time".[64] The next chapter turns to a consideration of that practice.

5.10 SUMMARY

This chapter has reviewed the parabolic stories of Jesus. Its data has been the work of modern biblical scholars who have explored the world of the parables that lies behind the texts. The perspective for this review has been the group of seven key features drawn out of a study of the "history of the transmission of tradition": the **Kingdom of God as action** made known in **contextuality**, the **challenge** of God's Rule which is **neither coercive nor authoritarian**, the expression by **metaphorical movement** of the inexpressible Kingdom, and the **revelation through history** of an **open future**. These features illuminate not only the content but also the style of the revelation of God's Kingdom.

They echo and reinforce two themes which have been developed in previous chapters. First the theme of Part One: the attempt to create a **hermeneutical bridge** of understanding across the chasms of history and social conflict. The parables express God's Rule of justice which transforms us and our world. The gulf between the reality of world and the possibility of Kingdom is crossed by a **metaphorical movement.** It offers an **open future** which can be attained in each new situation and yet is never completed. It does not force acquiescence in a **coercive, authoritarian** style but it does **challenge** to commitment.

The second theme which is echoed is the one with which the thesis began: the **unity of language and praxis.** The subject of the parables is the **Kingdom of God as action.** Its nature is **revealed in human history.** The parables express the unity of language and praxis in their **contextuality.** They are fused into the context of social praxis in two ways: as stories based on every day events and as meanings that are appropriated within the controversial situations in which they are spoken - situations of challenge to disciples and opponents.

Most commentators on the parables of Jesus stop their work after a consideration of the spoken parables. But this chapter has shown how the **hermeneutical bridge** is formed in the **unity of language and praxis.** It is necessary to go further and consider Jesus' expression of the Kingdom in acted parables if the full message is to be appropriated. The next chapter is devoted to a review of those other stories of Jesus; not the stories that Jesus himself told but the stories which were told about the **practice of Jesus.**

6. THE PRACTICE OF JESUS

The parables of Jesus arose from his ministry, especially from parabolic actions. That was the argument of the previous chapter. This chapter seeks to substantiate that argument by considering his practice in more detail. In doing so it demonstrates the unity of language and praxis in Jesus' revelation. The praxis seems to have precipitated parables as a "defense of the Good News".[1] Part Two began with a treatment of the spoken parables because they have received the most concentrated scholarly attention. It is only through the recent development of sociological tools for biblical study that the praxis of Jesus has come under systematic scrutiny. The argument of this chapter challenges the scholarly typology that has divided the stories spoken by Jesus from the stories spoken about him and kept them in separate compartments. It is important to realise how these two kinds of stories were integrated into a single revelation. It is important because it places the contemporary search for language with which to express the revelation in the correct relation to praxis. The study of Jesus' parabolic stories and actions in this Part suggests a dynamic for the contemporary proclamation of gospel. This **dynamic of story for contemporary praxis** will be explored in Parts Three and Four.

Here we begin by drawing together the insights about the praxis of Jesus contained in the previous chapter's interpretation of the parables. They point to the need for a sociological approach. This is first attempted by examining the function of Jesus' most striking parabolic action: his table-fellowship with "publicans and sinners". Next I consider the sociological analyses of three authors: Holl, Theissen and Echegaray. These show the unity of belief and practice in the proclamation of Jesus and his first followers. The integration of the spoken and acted parables in the proclamation is demonstrated by comparing the structural dynamics of each. These dynamics are also found in stories of contemporary praxis. The examination of contemporary praxis introduces the theme of Part Three where the significance of story in contemporary theology is considered.

6.1 FROM PARABLES TO PRACTICE

Parables are stories or comparisons drawn from the mundane life experience of Jesus' listeners. They were used to argue with critics who shared the same world view but differed about its interpretation, and to encourage doubting followers. They were combined with controversial actions. They challenged the ideological framework of the status quo.

Jeremias recreated the original situation and meaning of spoken parables. He did no more than mention the parabolic actions which led to them. Those who seek the meaning of the parables need this understanding of them as events in language. They also need to examine the parabolic actions within their social context to find an anchor point within historical particularity for the parables.

Linneman, like Jeremias, identifies Jesus' primary affront to the establishment of his time as his proclamation of the arrival of the Kingdom of God in a way which contradicted his listeners' "firm ideas of what would happen when the change of the ages came in".[2] She describes the proclamation by Jesus, of the arrival of salvation, as a language event for which his opponents could see no evidence, not least because they held fixed ideas about the timing and content of the Day of the Lord. Linneman notes, with reference to some parables, that his opponents' "protest was kindled by Jesus' behaviour".[3] These actions, by which Jesus and his disciples announced the Kingdom, were very clear and constituted an offence to his opponents, especially since they occurred at a time of social stress and unrest when maximum unity was expected against the Roman oppressor.[4] They clearly threatened the status quo. Although Linneman tends elsewhere to characterise this proclamation as a mental conception, she does clearly see the critical position of the parables in the dynamic which Jesus unleashed.

> A man who risks a parable to bridge over such opposition indeed takes a risk. By his words he compels his hearers to a decision, without having the outcome of this decision in his own hands. He will have to bear the consequences! A direct line leads from the parables of Jesus to his crucifixion.[5]

Crossan agrees with Jeremias and Linnemann that Jesus was not crucified because of his parables but because of actions "which resulted from the experience of God presented in the parables".[6] He contradicts Jeremias's view by saying that "the parable is cause and not effect of Jesus' life and action".[7] Parables are not what Jeremias called "weapons of warfare"; they are the cause of the war and the manifesto of its inception.

> In summary: as against Julicher the parables are not timeless moral truths beyond all and above all historical situations; but, as against Jeremias, neither are they to be located in Jesus' own historical experience as visual aids to defend a proclamation before them and without them. Jesus' parables are radically constitutive of his own distinctive historicity and all else is located in them. Parable is the house of God."[8]

This is too simplistic an idea, however, of the relation between action and reflection. Jeremias located the parables in controversies which issued from the parabolic actions. That does not mean that he regarded them as mere illustrations. The New Testament records suggest that reflection is "called forth" by action rather than the other way around.[9] There comes a point, however, where identifying cause and effect in a progression of incidents and reflections has no meaning because each becomes both the cause and the effect of the other. The dynamic of story leads from spoken word to acted word as the hearer responds to the demand of the story. It also leads from acted word to spoken word as the action is retold as a new story. To ascertain the start of this process is not important. This chapter will establish the link, not the priority, between parable and action in Jesus' practice.

6.1.1 The Need for a Sociological Perspective

An understanding of the distinctiveness of the gospel proclamation of Jesus has to bring together the two approaches to parable study which were identified at the beginning of Chapter 5. That means it has to be both consistent with the circumstances of first century Palestine and also available to people in our twentieth century contexts. The search for such an understanding is similar to the struggle going on in the discipline of literary criticism to find

ways of developing an appropriate cultural theory.

> The true crisis in cultural theory, in our time, is between this view of the work of art as object and the alternative view of art as a practice...we have to break from the common procedure of isolating the object and then discovering its components.' On the contrary we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions.[10]

There are parallels in theology. The historical critical method has typically involved "isolating the object and then discovering its components". Latterly, scholars have become much more concerned "to discover the nature of a practice" in the proclamation of Jesus. This move has been based on the kind of assumption expressed by Fuchs that "Jesus' conduct was itself a real framework of his proclamation".[11]

The next section introduces an examination of the nature of Jesus' practice. We focus on a particular parabolic action which was "most meaningful to his followers and most offensive to his critics": his table-fellowship with tax collectors and sinners.[12]

6.2 TABLE-FELLOWSHIP

Table-fellowship was the most prominent, controversial and is the most historically verified, of Jesus' practices. Jeremias argues that this constitutes the "bedrock tradition" and that it was the true "pre-Easter scandal".[13] Perrin also sees it as the real cause of Jesus' crucifixion. He lived at a time when Jewish unity in the hope of the Kingdom of God was their only sustenance against the Roman enemy - it was "the mainspring of Jewish morale".[14] Jesus, like a collaborator or Quisling, was understood to have prostituted that most sacred hope by using it to justify table-

fellowship with the despised.

> It is hard to imagine anything more offensive to Jewish sensibilities. To have become such an outcast himself would have been much less of an outrage than to welcome those people back into the community in the name of the ultimate hope of that community. Intense conviction, indeed, is necessary to explain such an act on the part of Jesus, and such an act on the part of Jesus is necessary, we would claim, to make sense of the fact of the cross.[15]

The hospitality of a shared meal was an expression of great honour in the culture of Jesus' time. Feeding poor and despised people was not scandalous, but eating with them was. Bailey notes that "a nobleman may feed any number of lesser needy person as a sign of his generosity, but he does not eat with them".[16] Table-fellowship was "an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness".[17]

The shared meal is "the central feature of the ministry of Jesus; an anticipatory sitting at table in the Kingdom of God and a very real celebration of present joy and challenge".[18] The meal is not simply offensive on a social level, it also upsets the whole religious suppositions of Jesus' opponents, the defenders of the tradition.

In Jesus' society there was a clear dividing line between sinful and virtuous living. Sin was punished and vice condemned; the perpetrators were proscribed and this restored the order which they had disturbed. Jesus' ready acceptance of publicans and sinners into a table fellowship, which represented the celebration of the Kingdom, disturbed that order far more radically than the sinners' vice. Their vice, ironically, was an essential prerequisite for the self-definition of the virtuous as virtuous; for how could virtue be recognised without vice being available for comparison? Jesus' behaviour undermined that steady symbiosis

of vice and virtue because he "crossed the lines". "He is the man who 'does not co-operate', and so makes the conformity of the others no longer a matter of course."[19]

This acted parable does not teach a "reversal of all values", or an "abstract criticism of accepted standards" or even "a timeless idea of a loving, forgiving Father in Heaven". It shows this love being acted out in a specific situation where Jesus "makes himself accessible to those who need him, ignoring conventional limitations, and thus according such outcasts proper recognition".[20]

Crossan underlines the parabolic nature of these meals:

> The association was deliberately shocking and intentionally parabolic rather than a prelude to or a result of repentance. It was intended to raise questions of who was right and wrong before God and of how securely self-righteously such decisions could be rendered...The parabolic deed, precisely as <u>parabolic</u>, does not exalt the toll-collectors as virtuous. It is not a manifesto for theft. But it reminds everyone that God is even more important than ethics and that God may not always approve our moral judgements.[21]

The social relations of capitalist urban industrial societies have undermined the solidarity in community which informed the ancient Jewish practice of hospitality. It can still be found in the African rural village.[22] The liberal privatised values of the modern urban scene also make it difficult for us to understand the pressures for conformity to the dominant ideas of virtue in Jesus' time. We must make an effort to understand who the outcast sinners were.

6.2.1 Publicans and Sinners

Crossan argues, on the evidence of Donahue,[23] that the phrase "publicans and sinners" does not refer to two separate groups but means "toll-collectors because they are sinners". Tax officials are charged with dishonesty elsewhere in the gospels.[24]

Most commentators, however, consider a much broader collection of social groups under the term "sinner". McFague refers to Jesus' meals with "the ritually unclean, with Gentiles, with those in despised trades".[25] Derrett also suggests the breadth of the concept when he links the term to opponents in the village feuds of hereditary enemies.[26]

As well as the economically high ranking tax-collectors who were despised, as collaborators with Roman administration, there were the poor, the "people of the land".

Jeremias provides the most evidence of this broader social group of "sinners". He lists the wide-ranging prohibitions and loss of civil rights which affected those in the despised trades.[27] The Pharisees did not only oppose the Sadducees but also drew a hardline distinction between themselves, as the "true Israel", and the masses of the people, the <u>amme ha'ares</u>, who did not follow the full rigor of the law, being too poor and subjected to toil to fulfill duties of tithe giving or prayer. "This opposition grew to the dimensions of a caste distinction on the part of the Pharisees."[28] This was the "pattern of expectation" of the society's leaders and "models of piety" which Jesus challenged in his acted parables of eschatological meals which were

"anticipatory celebrations" of the end times.[29] An outline of the dynamics of this decisive parabolic action illustrates the value of a sociological approach to the ministry of Jesus.

6.3 A SOCIOLOGY OF THE JESUS MOVEMENT

Jesus' message was addressed to the people of the context; they were not simply a surrounding backcloth illustrating his message. They were active participants as social groups. If we view the message through the lens of the social interactions of these groups then we can see clearly the distinctive quality of his actualisation of the Rule of God in history. An outline of the dynamics of this decisive parabolic action illustrates the value of a sociological approach to the ministry of Jesus.

The employment of a sociological approach to Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God is no panacea for all the ills of hermeneutical difficulty. It can become as much of a shibboleth as any other "scientific" approach. It can only be a contribution to understanding; it must be transformed into faithful action and faith understanding. What it can do is counter some of the subjectivist assumptions with which we approach the tradition. The practice of Jesus was played out against a set of objective conditions which may be observed with sociological tools. They help us focus on the distinctive contribution of the movement of Jesus and his disciples and they are a necessary object of theological reflection which takes seriously the revelation of God in history. Echegary confirms this approach in his introduction to such a sociological approach.

> Salvation is brought about through concrete events, which continue even today. This is to say that theology must be historical in both content and method.[30]

"Sociological explanations only apply to typical features and not to individual instances",[31] writes Theissen. So this approach makes no pretence to "explain" the ministry of Jesus. Rather it attempts to explain the dynamics of the society and the social movements of the time insofar as they were generated by contradictions and conflicts in that society. In this way the function of Jesus' movement in that society can be observed.

This section will explore three sociological perspectives on the ministry of Jesus and the life of his earliest followers. The work of Holl, Theissen, and Echegaray will be reviewed in order to demonstrate the dynamics which were present in the practice of Jesus.

Holl approaches Jesus as a social outsider. He was someone who kept "bad company". When examined this feature is found to articulate a critique of society. Theissen studies the practices of the earliest followers of Jesus before distinctive Jewish and Greek Christian groups were established. Through an analysis of roles, factors and functions, he outlines the response of the movement to the surrounding society and its impact upon that society. Thirdly, Echegaray studies the practice of Jesus in relation to the political economy and social relations of the Jewish client state within the Roman empire. He draws out a "programme" of alternatives which is implicit in the practice of Jesus.

6.3.1 Jesus as Social Outsider

One way to identify someone is by noting dissimilarities between an individual and his or her surroundings. An approach to constructing a sociology of the Jesus movement is to explore those sociological features which made his movement different to others in his society. This is the approach Holl adopts.

It is very hard for someone from the twentieth century to grasp those things which would have made Jesus distinctive to people in the first century. For one thing the ability to perform miraculous cures is a faculty which a modern (at least urban western) person finds remarkable, if not incredible; but such wonder workers were not uncommon in the days of Jesus.[32] His miraculous faculty did not make him distinctive to his contemporaries, however much the reports of these action are a crux for belief today. On the other hand, an issue in terms of which Jesus was highly distinctive in his own time, the rejection of family, has become much less distinctive in the contemporary (especially affluent "western") world where family ties are greatly attenuated. Also, ironically, this feature of Jesus' praxis has been rendered invisible in the dominant contemporary image of him which portrays him as quite socially conformist.

Holl makes use of three highly distinctive features of Jesus' person and movement which appear when it is compared with other religious groupings.

These features are historical facts, attested to by as much evidence as anything in the tradition. The first is Jesus'

"criminal behaviour". This phrase expresses in blunt terms that which has always been the "boast" of Christianity in other more elevated words. "He was judged and punished as a criminal and the execution took place outside the city, in accordance with custom, thus indicating that the delinquent had placed himself outside the accepted order of things."[33] Holl notes that the only comparable figure in antiquity who suffered a similar fate was Socrates. But even here Jesus' fate arrived much more speedily and sharply, emphasizing the deep division between himself and his society.

Two other features mark Jesus and his movement. One is the insignificance of Jesus' clan in the leadership of the religious movement which followed upon his death. "The Christian Church of the first few centuries was the first in history to know a priestly caste that did not depend for continuity on the hereditary principle."[34] The other feature is the tendency of the Christian movement to spread amongst the lower social classes of the Mediterranean world. "Jesus preferred to look among the less priviledged classes of society - the poor and the socially ostracised - for the conditions in which such attitudes as indifference to money, property, or social status might flourish."[35]

Holl's title Jesus in Bad Company underlines his special concern to interpret him as a social outsider. He analyses his behaviour in terms of role theory using Merton's typology of outsider behaviour. Thus he is able to identify the "urge towards the achievement of renewal" as the pattern that distinguishes Jesus' criminality from that of the gangster.[36] From this critical and historical base Holl is able to examine the features of Jesus'

lifestyle which emerge in the synoptic tradition. One such is his nomadic existence with its indifference to possessions, be they the estates of the landowners, the ritual powers of the priesthood or the intellectual riches of the scribes and pharisees. Jesus' creation of an alternative family of followers parallels his ambivalent refusal to be held in the confines of the fundamental social institution of the family. This leads to Holl's characterisation of Jesus as one who "stands at the most extreme front of human possibilities".[37] Jesus is one who always moves outside any attempts to domesticate him for a particular, especially political, purpose. The many attempts to realise Jesus' initiative which have occurred in history, to which Holl makes continual reference in the text, represent a body of experience which suggests a "knowledge that urges onward the process Jesus started, in other words a knowledge that travels his way".[38] Holl links the three main images of Jesus which he draws to images from Christian history and from the contemporary world. In this way he throws a bridge across the wide gulf which separates the first and twentieth centuries so that something more concrete than broad generalisations can travel across. His analysis does not attempt to show the Jesus movement in the framework of an overall sociological theory. For this we turn to Theissen's work.

6.3.2 The Earliest Christian Movement

Whereas Holl's approach is suggestive, full of contemporary and historical comparisons and references, there is a much greater feeling of spare theoretical rigor in Theissen's sociological analysis of the earliest Christian movement before the transition to Hellenistic and Jewish Christianity. His aim is "to describe

typical social attitudes and behaviour within the Jesus movement and to analyse its interaction with Jewish society".[39] He differentiates between two basic role models in the early Christian community: the wandering charismatics, who are the spiritual authorities of the movement, and the settled communities of sympathisers who support them. He relates their roles to the role of the Son of Man.

The wandering charismatics are characterised by a marginalising ethical radicalism associated with homelessness amd with lack of family, possessions and protection. "They lived as those who expected the end of the world."[40] Here are the outsiders of Holl's "bad company".

The settled groups of sympathisers, who remained at this stage within the framework of Judaism, had to face issues which arose from their relatively stable communal life. These were the need to develop regulations for behaviour, a structure of authority and rules of procedure for accepting and rejecting members. The two groups of followers in early Christianity had a complementary relationship. The wandering leaders could only exist "on the basis of the material support offered to them by the local communities". On the other hand the rigorous lifestyle of these individuals allowed the settled communities "to compromise with the world about them because the wandering charismatics maintained such a clear distinction".[41]

The third role Theissen examines is the Son of Man. Both groups of followers owed their "existence and legitimation" to him.[42] It was expressed in the christologies and commandments of their movement.

The Son of Man was an outsider both positively, as one who transcends the norms of the world, and negatively, as one who suffers by being rejected by the world. The future role of the Son of Man transcended this dichotomy by proclaiming him the one who would be the eschatological judge. Then the powerless ones would be the judges and the rejected ones would be recognised. The parallelism between the lives of the early Christians and the roles of the Son of Man show how the wandering charismatics came to terms with their own authority in the community and their rejection in the wider world. At the same time they live with an expectation of the resolution of that conflict in the time to come. "The figure of the Son of man was central for the Jesus movement. His situation corresponded to their situation. Here belief and practice formed an indissoluble whole."[43] The analysis makes evident the **unity of language and praxis** in the movement.

The roles of the movement were played out in a society in crisis. There are three main sociological responses to such a situation: evasion, aggression or the seeking of support. These were all present in Palestine both in forms which evidenced social disintegration and in renewal movements. Disintegration was evident in emigration, banditry and begging. Particular social movements expressed the three responses as forms of renewal: the Essenes displayed the response of evasion in separated community; the resistance fighters responded to the situation with military aggression; the prophetic movements, which followed charismatic leaders such as Jesus, displayed the response of seeking support.

There are four factors, which Theissen examines, in this context of crisis: the socio-economic, ecological, political, and

cultural. The social rootlessness of the wandering charismatics was a reaction to the disintegrating socio-economic context in which renewal movements were fostered. It was rootless people, highly critical of society and of riches, who joined the Jewish renewal movements. They were driven to join by profound economic changes, such as arose from famine, over-population, and concentration of wealth. Competing tax systems which rivalled one another for the distribution of the peasants' surplus exacerbated the situation and were the "decisive reason for the explosive situation in Palestine".[44] "The trends upwards and downwards shattered traditional values and norms and called forth a longing for renewal. The Jesus movement was one of the renewal movements."[45]

In terms of socio-ecological factors, the Jesus movement was closely associated with the country and ambivalent towards Jerusalem, expressing a deep seated conflict between city and country. Their criticism became more radical the more they contrasted the religious hopes they held for the holy city with the reality of the administration of Jerusalem, almost the whole population of which was dependent on a financial interest in the temple. The country areas, harder to control and comprising border territory, suffered greater economic pressure than the city.

Politically, the tension between two tax authorities and between conflicting roles for the holy city were paralleled by conflict between competing political authorities: the realpolitic of the aristocracy and the ideal form of theocracy expressed in the scripture. The Jesus movement was a radical theocratic movement, proclaiming the imminent rule of God. It implied the end of Roman

rule, but showed its readiness for reconciliation which culminated in the commandment to love one's enemies. The centrality of the Kingdom of God in the Palestine Christian community finds an echo in this deep seated tension about the legitimacy of government. Palestine "was the breeding-ground for radical theocratic movements".[46]

In socio-cultural terms, terms which refer to those values and norms by which a group gains self identity, the socio-political tensions are reflected in a stricter interpretation of the Torah. The Christian community can be seen to have generated an intensification of those norms which express social obligations: relation to aggression, sexuality, communication and possessions. It interpreted religious norms, such as the prohibition of images or the separation from Gentiles or sinners, in a more relaxed fashion. The intensification of norms is so extreme, for example convicting anger with the same severity as murder (Matt 5:21), that "all moral self-righteousness must appear to be hypocrisy". Ethical norms can no longer be used as weapons in moral aggression.[47]

Each renewal group, Pharisee, Zealot, Essene or Christian sought to be the vanguard of the new Israel to such an extent that the defence of the identity of Israel paradoxically led to its loss between the identities of these splinter groups. The renewal movements were therefore caught up in their own contradictions. The greater the crisis of Jewish identity under foreign domination, the greater became the expectation in the renewal movements that they could fulfil this identity in the future.[48] The intensification of norms within these groups, in anticipation

of the future time led in reality to schism among the Jews. Only in the Jesus movement, and finally in the time of Paul, was this traditional ethnocentrism transcended when the church discovered an identity as the new Israel.

The Jesus movement developed in a time of deep social and political crisis, conflict and tension. It was partly conditioned by these tensions and took root amongst the most marginalised groups, those most likely to be sensitive to such situations of pressure and disquieting change. This part of Theissen's analysis demonstrates the deeply embedded contextuality of the movement. All its actions and statements were in response to the concrete conditions of the age.

The response of the Jesus movement to this social situation of generalised conflict is analysed in terms of ways of containing and overcoming aggression: by compensation, transferrance, internalisation, and transformation. The call to forgiveness and reconciliation is the compensation for aggression by turning it into counter-impulses. Demon exorcism is an example of the transference of aggression. The internalisation of aggression is the turning of aggression back to the aggressor as moral reproach and appeal. This occurs in the calls to repentance and the intensification of norms. The intensification of norms, which no one could fulfil, also led to a greater self-acceptance because the grace of God was seen to be the only way of resolving those impossible demands.

> What we have instead is a statement in the indicative that the angry man is no better than the murderer, the lustful man no better than the adulterer. Such an approach to the question of guilt makes self-righteous assessments of transgression of norms impossible. It compels the

> recognition that there is no crime for which we do not have the inner drive.[49]

Lastly, the transference of aggression in the Jesus movement took place by means of accepting into the community the traditional scapegoats of society (foreigners, tax-collectors and sinners), while pointing to another scapegoat in the Son of Man who deliberately accepts the role of the sacrifice for the many. The nature of the challenge presented by the Jesus movement to Jewish society becomes clear in this third level of analysis.

Theissen characterises the Jesus movement as:

> A small group of outsiders [who] experimented with a vision of love and reconciliation in a society which had been put out of joint, suffering from an excess of tensions, pressures and forms of aggression, in order to renew this society from within. [50]

Their movement was a failure as a historical project within Judaism as the tensions became more acute; but it achieved success in the Hellenistic context outside Palestine until "Christianity became more and more the social cement of the totalitarian state of late antiquity".[51] Theissen's analysis focusses on the roles within the movement, the social factors which shaped the movement and the response of the movement to the society. All three parts constitute a profound contextualisation of the Jesus movement in its surrounding and moulding social flux and turmoil.

The analysis of roles shows how the identities of the early Christians were developed in response to the social factors of their age. The second part of the analysis demonstrates how the four main social factors determined the range of responses which were available to the members of the movement as they attempted to

express their vision of the Kingdom of God. The analysis of responses indicates how the challenge of the Kingdom addressed the social conflicts and pressures at the heart of the society. The whole analysis illustrates themes and features which have been pointed out in the preceding chapters: the unity of language and praxis in historical action which reveals the Rule of God as a challenge to the pattern of expectation in the social context.

The understanding of how the social context contributed to the character and to the success and failure of the movement enables Theissen to consider its relevance for today as the contemporary social context more closely reflects the norms of Jesus' Palestinian formation.

> Yet it could be that the pattern of love one's enemy, of renunciation of power and freedom towards possessions, which are thought by many to be the "Sunday norms" of world history, are also significant for everyday life at a time when our social relationships are becoming increasingly fluid. The necessity for inward and outward peace, coupled with the urgency of social change, perhaps requires of us more of a radical change in attitudes than we realise.[52]

It is Echegaray who takes up the challenge of analysing the practice of Jesus in terms which could provide models for a contemporary practice.

6.3.3 A Contradictory Logic

Echegaray, a Roman Catholic theologian from Latin America, delineates the message of Jesus, like Holl and Theissen do, by tracing the silhouette its practice formed against contemporary Jewish society. It is an approach which reconstructs the mission of Jesus in more concrete images than Theissen's sociological

abstractions and allows for a readier transposition into contemporary practice. He defines "practice" as "activity that is done in full freedom and that confronts, redirects, and transforms a given reality".[53] He seeks to understand the activity of Jesus (not to write a life of Jesus) by setting it within a reconstruction of the prevailing economic and political system and by comparing it with other groups and agents contemporary with Jesus. The historical approach to the gospel texts is possible because the theological interpretation which the early church communities integrated with the historic actions "did not eliminate the material facts upon which it is based".[54]

He fleshes out the spare conflictual model of Theissen by identifying the contradiction at the centre of Palestinian life during its forced incorporation into the Roman empire, an assimilation which was smoothed by the collaboration of the traditional Jewish ruling class. The absorption into empire resulted in the destruction of communal lands by transforming them into private estates often held by absentee landowners. The pauperisation of the peasantry, just as they had to bear an ever-increasing tax burden, turned many into slaves and poor day-labourers. Rome's annexation of land was also a religious annexation to the Jews who believed their land was received from Yahweh and was inalienable. Meanwhile the traditional authorities sought a modus vivendi with Rome which increasingly disadvantaged the peasant class. The rudimentary agricultural methods left little surplus to sustain both their overlords and a temple priesthood who merely screened from view the real rulers. This was a contradictory situation.

> On the one hand, the empire drew support for its rule from the pseudo-leaders of the people...On the other hand, the social unrest created by economic exploitation was subverting the credibility and prestige of the Jewish authorities.[55]

The parables of Jesus which are peopled with the day labourers, poor widows and dishonest officials of this scene demonstrate a close association with the social sensibility "of the poor who looked with distrust or contempt on the mighty in Israel".[56] But Jesus does not share the same sensibilities or methods with the other main groups which are historical actors in his time: neither the wealthy Sadduceean priesthood and the ideologically monopolistic Scribes and Pharisees, nor the militant Essenes and Zealots. Jesus proclaims "the imminent coming of God's reign and the radical call of God to conversion and acceptance of the dynamics of the kingdom".[57]

This proclamation takes place in words and in symbolic actions[58] and at the heart of it, according to Echegaray, are three impulses which contradict the dominant forces in the context. He describes these impulses as the "logic" of Jesus' practices. Praxis expresses values which contradict the dominant ideology. Over against the Roman empire's "ideal of absolute domination...Jesus opposes the ideal of diakonia, or readiness to serve".[59] This does not imply a rejection of power as such. Such an interpretation would be an unhistorical and mechanical transposition of meaning out of the political level. It does mean "a different conception of power: power not as domination but as service to the impoverished masses".[60] Secondly, on the economic level Jesus' practice in community offers another contrast in which gift and communion with the poor are set against the imperial practice of

accumulation and wealth for the few with scarcity and debt for the many.

On the third level which Echegaray examines, the ethico-social level or the level of values, a parallel alternative "logic" confronts the dominant "logic". A logic of freedom and love "contrasts with the generalised fear and selfishness that the empire promotes".[61] It demands from the disciples personal decisiveness, tenacity and fruitfulness. These levels of practice arise from the person and uniqueness of Jesus, who exemplified a new understanding of freedom as participation in the action of the Kingdom. This practice is "coherent with the messianic nature of the Kingdom"[62] whose universality must be found "at the level of the ultimate, overall meaning of [Jesus'] activity and his very person" which comes into being in the liberative practice of Jesus' followers as, and insofar as, it becomes a present reality.[63]

Echegaray's analysis, like Holl's, fulfils a hermeneutical function. He focusses on the practices of Jesus as they contradicted the logic of the dominating empire. His formulation in terms of these competing logics is capable of being transposed into the contemporary situation. This is because it represents praxis rather than abstract conceptions.

6.4 BELIEF AND PRACTICE UNITED IN STORY

These approaches demonstrate how two themes, which have been present in the preceding chapters, are to be found in the proclamation of Jesus. First they show how "belief and practice formed an indissoluble whole" in the proclamation. Holl shows how the three distinctive features of Jesus' practice expressed the essence of his mission. Theissen demonstrates how the behaviour of the early Christian community and its charismatic leaders presented a challenge to every feature of the explosive social context. The unity of belief and practice "formed the focal point of the idea of discipleship".[64] Echegaray develops these insights to show how the whole practice of Jesus can be understood as an expression of an alternative logic to that of the Roman empire. The practices enunciated the beliefs. This is the theme I have called the **fusion of language and praxis.**

The second theme which the sociological approaches demonstrate is the **possibility of forming a hermeneutical bridge** between the revelation of Jesus and our time by focussing on the **praxis** of the revelation. Holl continually refers from the practice of Jesus to the attempts made throughout history to duplicate the dynamic of that practice. Theissen concludes his analysis by suggesting the contemporary relevance of the "pattern" that Jesus and his followers expressed in their behaviour.[65] Echegaray argues that the practice of Jesus "permeates our practice" even while it transcends it.

> ...the practice of Jesus is not only present in today's practice but also transcends this, provides it with norms of judgement, and constantly points it toward the open and beckoning horizon of eschatological completion.[66]

These two themes are two aspects of a single dynamic. The proclamation of belief through praxis is the hermeneutical bridge by which the gospel is announced in the contemporary world. The prominance of discipleship as a key category for the modern understanding of the gospel, after Bonhoeffer, reflects this dynamic.

Yoder focusses on the dynamic of discipleship in his attempt to reclaim the teaching and lifestyle of Jesus as a directly relevant model for social and political ethics. He seeks to demolish the traditional methods which have been used to avoid "the normativeness of Jesus",[67] such as the focus upon his teaching as an interim ethic. He sees this relegation of Jesus having been accomplished by the forced choices that have been presented to believers in a series of antimonies: the choice between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of dogma; between the way of the prophet and the way of the institution; between the "catastrophic" Kingdom and the inner Kingdom; between the political and the sectarian; between the individual and the social. But these he concludes are "traditional antinomies of which we must repent if we are to understand".[68] They represent ways of perceiving Jesus which could not have been shared by his Semitic contemporaries and could only have arisen in a modern rationalist context where this unity of belief and practice had been fractured. Yoder's method answers Robinsons's call to "transcend this Cartesian mentality".[69]

From a different starting point, Vincent arrives at the same conclusion in his study of discipleship in Mark's gospel. "Discipleship and Christology go hand in hand. Jesus' own work becomes the clue to the discipleship demands."[70] The picture of

the disciples, and thereby of discipleship itself, is presented by the gospel writers in their novel literary form as "the picture of men involved in the narrative-action".[71] The dynamic of story, which Vincent calls "narrative-action", becomes the way in which belief and action are integrated for the purpose of transmission.

6.5 COMMON DYNAMICS IN PARABLE AND ACTION

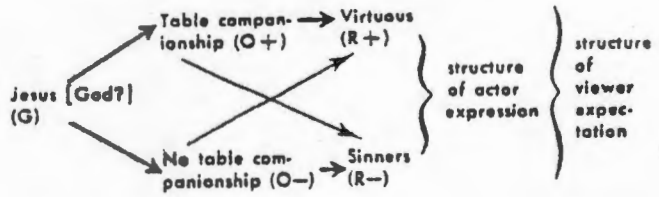
This chapter has focussed on the practice of Jesus and his followers, what Vincent calls the "narrative-action". The previous chapter focussed on the spoken parables. The purpose of Part Two, as a whole, was to demonstrate that Jesus parabolic stories together with his parabolic actions constituted a revelation through history which is available as a dynamic for contemporary followers.

In order to complete the argument of this Part, it is necessary to show explicitly the links between spoken parable, acted parable and contemporary action. This section acts as a bridge to the examination of story in contemporary theology which is the subject of Part Three. Crossan's method of analysing the structure of the parables is the tool which helps us realise the integration of story and action in revelation.

The discussion, in Chapter 5, of the challenge of the parables introduced us to Crossan's structural diagrams. He analyses the parables in terms of the contrast between "hearer expectation" and "speaker expression". That which the listener expects to hear from the situation described in the story is quite contradicted by the way the narrator actually tells the story. The twist in the plot

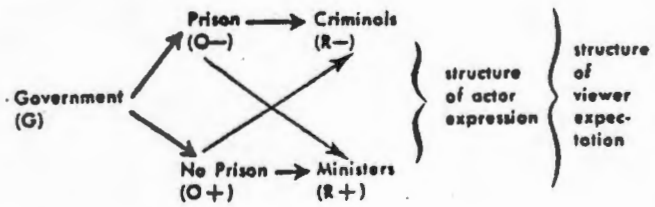
challenges the listeners out of their conventional assumptions about life. The whole plot reflects a controversial situation in the listener's context and offers a new way of evaluating what is going on. This was most clearly presented in the diagram of the Good Samaritan story in Chapter 5.

He shows that the same pattern of parabolic challenge is expressed in Jesus' table-fellowship with publicans and sinners which was discussed in this chapter.[72]



(Read: one expects Jesus as a prophet of God to consort with the virtuous and not with sinners. If he does the opposite, does this mean that the virtuous are sinners and sinners virtuous, or what?)

Crossan goes on to show that the same challenge is found in the pattern of contemporary actions. He uses for his example the anti-Vietnam war protests of priests, like Daniel Berrigan, who burned draft-cards and thereby became criminals.[73]



(Read: one expects the government to give prison to criminals but no prison to ministers. But if ministers go to prison, are criminals free? And what then of the government. . .)

By isolating the deep structure of the parables and actions he draws the outline of a bridge which can simply convey the parabolic dynamics of Jesus into the contemporary milieu.

Crossan's own use of the diagrams is disappointing because he refuses to follow the path he has formed to any contemporary praxis for two reasons. First, he draws conclusions which in the end constitute a disconnected generalisation about the parables. Second, in his anxiety to revoke the allegorical moralizing of the parables in the early church, he disengages the parables from the world of ethics.

6.5.1 The Decontextualisation of Parables

Crossan's structuralist analysis confirms the unity of story and praxis in the ministry of Jesus. It is also positive in two other ways. First, it confirms the imaginative exploration of the world behind the text which is challenged by Drury. Drury criticises the decontextualisation of parables which has been accomplished in the traditional biblical critical consensus by emptying the stories "out of the books and their narratives in order to deal with them as a genre on their own". Biblical scholars attempt to recreate the situation behind the "window of the text".[74] He argues that the original situation cannot be discovered and so the form critic is "like a restorer trying to clean an allegedly over-painted canvas by Rubens without having access to a single indisputably authentic Rubens painting or even sketch".[75]

Crossan's analysis shows up the falsity of this comparison. The patterns of structural expectation and expression in the parables directly reflect the patterns of parabolic action in Jesus' ministry. The parabolic actions are an "indisputably authentic" expression of Jesus against which the parables can be compared. This illustrates the great significance of these actions and

forces us to consider that ministry anew.

The second additional value of the structuralist analysis is that it demonstrates the importance of the relation between narrator and audience in the dynamic of Jesus' ministry. The narrator's structure of expression functions by challenging the listeners' structure of expectation. In demonstrating the importance of the audience this method of analysis challenges another way in which the scholars have decontextualised the parables. They have removed the stories from the social setting of their narration. Their impact on crowds of listeners in controversial public meetings has been removed from our view.

> Form critics view the editorial sections about the people surrounding Jesus as only the framework for the words of Jesus or for the kerygma that Jesus is the Christ. Therefore the people have been excluded and, as a result, a very important aspect has been lost... Redaction critics also seem to have missed the point that the authors of the Gospels put so much emphasis on "the people" because they considered the relationship between Jesus and the people to be crucial for understanding the identity and mission of Jesus.[76]

Crossan's analysis provides evidence for the understanding of the unity of language and praxis which is argued in this thesis. First he shows the parallelism of structure in spoken parables and acted parables. Second, in demonstrating this parallelism, he answers critics like Drury who claim that the dynamic which lay behind Jesus' use of parables cannot be reclaimed. Third, he confirms the importance of the audience as participants in the proclamation of the gospel.

These insights are suggestive for the contemporary actualisation of the gospel story. But there is an ironic contradiction in Crossan's conclusions about the parables which needs to be treated

in a short aside before moving on to consider the use of story in contemporary theology.

6.5.2 Specific Practices Not General Ideas

Crossan condemned Julicher for generating "timeless moral truths" out of the parables. Where Julicher created generalisations of content, however, Crossan creates generalisations of form. He extracts the parables from their gospel setting and then, unlike Jeremias who reset them in the life situation of Jesus as he imagined it, Crossan goes on to extract from all the parables a common meaning in their "reversal of expectation". Like a latter-day Julicher he draws an idea of the "widest possible generality" not only from each parable but from the whole parabolic corpus.

> The parables of Jesus are not historical allegories telling us how God acts with mankind; neither are they moral example-stories telling us how to act before God and towards one another. They are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the relativity of story itself. They remove our defences and make us vulnerable to God.[77]

This meaning of the parable is applied to all situations. It "overthrows ethics", shatters moral systems and makes "us face the problem of the grounding of ethics" when "we want only to discuss the logic of ethics".[78] "Jesus' parables challenge one to life and action within the Kingdom but they leave that life and that action as absolute in its call as it is unspecified in its detail."[79] All situations are to be subverted by parable.

It is, in its conclusion, an unsatisfactory view and represents the false consciousness, false because not historically grounded, which Wink warns against. Not only does the shattering of all

"deep structures" amount to the same thing as the shattering of no "deep structures" - because if everything is to be reversed then nothing is reversed. Cobb makes this his criticism of Crossan's position in saying, "We cannot live by subversion alone!"[80]

The genius of the Christian faith is the revelation of Jesus in a particular time and place, in history, defending some people and offending others. Funk's criticism of universally applicable structural analyses of the human situation could be applied to Crossan's view at this point.

> An interpretation that is universally applicable cannot, without further consideration, be brought into relation to the specific existence of a given period or individual. That is to say, the human situation must be interpreted in terms of the concrete existence of a particular community or person.[81]

The limits of materialist and structuralist interpretations are also underlined by Schillebeeckx when he warns that they "cannot say anything about the special qualities and the originality of an individual text; they simply distil anonymous, universalist typologies". What he does stress is their value and necessity in that they limit "the naturally subjective element" in interpretation.[82]

6.6 SUMMARY

The function of this chapter has been to place the parables of Jesus which were discussed in the preceding chapter into the context of his practice. The most prominent parabolic action of his ministry was clearly exhibited in table-fellowship with the outcasts of Jewish society. The shared meals were signs that the Rule of God held sway in the gathering in of the despised and

rejected. The practice undermined the main image of social cohesion which the Jewish faith offered at a time when the society was disintegrating under foreign and local domination. According to Perrin, this action alone so incensed the Jewish leaders that they plotted to do away with Jesus.

The sociological studies of Jesus' practice which have been examined in this chapter show that the challenge of the parabolic actions extended beyond table-fellowship. The whole practice of Jesus and his followers presented a critique of, and an alternative to, the whole practice of the empire and its client Jewish functionaries. God's Rule, presented in the parabolic actions, threatened the whole established order.

The studies in this chapter demonstrate that the parabolic actions and the spoken parables were a single proclamation. The structure of their manner of expression is the same. The features of the transmission of the tradition which were discovered in the spoken parables in Chapter 5 are also found in the practice of Jesus. The parabolic **actions** constituted a **revelation in history of the Rule of God.** An action such as table fellowship with outcast people intimately probed the **context** of Jewish society in its socio-economic, political, ecological and cultural forms. It was a gathering in of those who were socio-economically and culturally rejected. It offered a **challenge** to the dominant political practices of the urban elite. In demonstrating these features the theme of the **unity of language and praxis** is illustrated again.

The parabolic actions functioned as a **hermeneutical bridge** between the traditional conceptions of the Jewish faith and the particular

demands of the contemporary situation. Table-fellowship was a **metaphor** for the Kingdom of God. Jesus' practice presented active images of an alternative to the situation of a disintegrating society. Listeners were not **coerced** into this alternative; they were invited to follow a way leading into an **open future.**

Part Two has shown the **dynamic of story** at work in the first century situation. The **telling** of story is linked to the **doing** of story by the **hearing** of story. It is idle to speculate whether the parabolic actions of Jesus preceded the stories or not. They must have been mingled together in the hectic, short span of his ministry - action sparking story and vice versa. What is clear is that the full flavour of his proclamation comes to us crystallised in short vivid narratives which still disturb and challenge the hearer who gives them room.

Part Three of this thesis follows the **dynamic of story** into the contemporary debates of theologians and into stories of the struggle to proclaim the Kingdom of God in the face of contemporary dominations.

PART THREE

THE THEOLOGY OF STORY

Has the canon of Old and New Testaments not caused a "ban" to be imposed on narrative, preventing a retelling or futher telling of stories in accordance with the contemporary situation? And should the meaning of the distinction between canonical and apocryphal stories not be examined?

Johann B. Metz
A Short Apology of Narrative[1]

7. THEOLOGY AND NARRATIVE

Hollenweger describes the hermeneutical task as "the translation of a biblical text from the shore of the first centuries of our era in a hellenistic milieu to the shore of our own time".[2] The social context of hermeneutics was the starting point, in Part One of this thesis, for a consideration of the **dynamic of story.** Part Two uncovered that dynamic at work on "the shore of the first centuries of our era" in the stories of Jesus. Part Three brings us to the "shore of our own time". The next three chapters view the dynamic in the contemporary context. Chapter 7 reviews the emergence of narrative theology in recent writing. Chapter 8 introduces the use of stories in some Third World contextual theologies and focusses on examples from Asia. Chapter 9 discusses some First World responses to Third World contextual theology and describes several British developments of theology in story. The stories which are discussed illustrate the dynamic of story which was sketched in the Introduction.

The recent development of narrative theology can be seen as an attempt by some Systematic theologians, working mainly in Europe and North America, to bring their theology into contact with lived experience. This chapter introduces some of their thinking in order to compare and contrast it, in the following chapters, with

the work of contextual theologians who tell stories from situations of domination and poverty. The chapter begins by reflecting on the central importance to Jesus' message of the fusion of speech and action in story, which was discovered in Part Two. Then the new concern with literary criticism of biblical narrative is noted. Having established the centrality of narrative in the bible, the next section examines its importance to the reflective capacity of human consciousness. This introduces a summary and critique of the main strands of narrative theology. Several characteristics of this approach are contrasted with the use of story in contextual theologies which is described in the following chapters.

7.1 THE REINTEGRATION OF SPEECH AND ACTION

The study of the synoptic tradition has focussed on separate story genres. Even before Dibelius and Bultmann established the form critical method, the parables and the parabolic actions were firmly separated. The told stories, or parables, were locked into a complex process of allegorising from which they were only rescued after many centuries. The action stories, be they miracles or demonstrations, were seen by an increasingly positivistic enlightenment world as so much, either good or bad, history; their historicity became the arguable and interesting thing. The scholars mounted what Alter calls "a sustained assault on the supposedly unitary character of the Bible, an attempt to break it up into as many pieces as possible".[3] The organic link between stories describing Jesus' actions and stories he told to defend these actions was lost. Bultmann in his classic study, places the "Tradition of the Sayings of Jesus" firmly in one half of the book

and the "Tradition of the Narrative Material" in the other.[4] This is paralleled in the Old Testament field by von Rad's distinction, in the prophetic writings, between "narratives which tell of what they did" and the "collections of oracles which they themselves delivered".[5]

Biblical scholars have not treated the stories of Jesus about the Kingdom of God, both parables and parabolic actions, as a single category of proclamation within the context of Palestinian society. The study which occupied Part Two demonstrated the fusion of language and praxis, which I have called the dynamic of story, at the heart of Jesus' message. An ironic instance of the scholars' failure is found in the work of Jeremias who, at least conceptually, treated the different kinds of stories as a single formation. But only one page of text, in a volume of nearly 250 pages, is devoted to these "prophetic signs, more significant than words, silent proclamations that the Messianic Age is here, the Age of forgiveness".[6]

The often ignored integration of the parable stories and the parabolic actions of Jesus represents a distinctive style for the communication of the good news of God through Jesus. These two modes of story - told and acted - are inseparable in the gospels. They are dependent upon each other; are each only to be understood in the terms of the other; and are together necessary to any attempt at evangelism or proclamation of good news in any time or place. "Here belief and practice form an indissoluble whole".[7] This welding together of belief and action is the way in which the new dimension of life which exists in God's Kingdom is made manifest in the world. It gives the biblical narrative that

characteristic style which Auerbach notes. "The sublime influence of God here reaches so deeply into the everyday that the two realms of the sublime and the everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically inseparable."[9]

7.2 BIBLICAL TEXT AS NARRATIVE

The task of scripture, to communicate the inseparability of the "two realms of the sublime and the everyday, is achieved through its narrative structure. Narrative presents those worlds as one and makes an interpretation of them. One sign of a renewed interest in the biblical text as narrative is to be found in the resurgence of literary criticism as biblical criticism and a greater intercommunication between biblical scholars and literary critics.[7] Petersen describes how the classic mode of biblical criticism, which found its climax in form criticism, led to texts being considered, in Krieger's terms, as "windows opening on the preliterary history of their parts rather than as mirrors on whose surfaces we find self-contained worlds".[10] The former approach contributed to the splintering of the text into its many underlaying strata and ignored the impact of text as an artistically unified construct which had an impact on the reader. The image of the text as mirror as Culpepper notes, "assumes that the meaning of the text lies on this side of it, between mirror and observer, text and reader".

> As one reads the gospel, the voice of the narrator introduces the narrative world of the text its characters, values, norms, conflicts, and the events which constitute the plot of the story...The narrator's claims and the norms of the story woo, beckon, and challenge the reader to believe that the story, its narrative world, and its central character reveal something profoundly true about the "real" world in which the reader lives.[11]

Culpepper's purpose in his study of John's Gospel is to "contribute to understanding the gospel as a narrative text"[12] by analysing it according to the communicational models of Chatman and Jakobson. His perspective is based on the broad understanding of narrative provided by Scholes and Kellogg who "put the novel in its place" as one example of narrative amongst others, rather than seeing it as the culmination of narrative. They opened the door for secular literary criticism to meet biblical texts which shared the distinguishing characteristics of all narrative: "the presence of a story and a story-teller".[13]

7.2.1 Critique of Literary Studies

The new contributions to an understanding of gospel as a narrative text which are provided by Petersen, Culpepper, Bailey, Alter and others are certainly illuminating and sensitise the reader to dimensions in the text which have long been ignored. But the dynamic perspective of the gospel stories developed in this study, while not questioning the validity of literary critical judgements, does suggest there are limitations to their value and perceptual scope. First, it is obvious that behind these approaches there is always found a notion of text, (be it oral or written) whereas the examination of the biblical revelation, in Part Two, suggests that behind the gospel stories lie events or happenings. Secondly, these approaches have mainly been developed to enable examination of fictions that people expect to bring aesthetic pleasure rather than disturbing realities which might change the hearer's life. Culpepper suggests that the gospels affect the reader's perceptions. "The implicit purpose of the gospel narrative is to alter irrevocably the reader's <u>perception</u>

of the real world."[14] I would argue that this only accords to them a passive function. This thesis has demonstrated the dynamic function of story. Story provokes praxis and praxis provokes story. We are called, not to "appreciate" biblical stories, but to act in relation to them and to create new "stories of Jesus" in our time. Collins stresses active, participatory reading of the bible. It is not a finished document which says it all, once and for all.

> The mistake (or perhaps the deliberate tactic) of the official Christian church was to make us believe that biblical history stopped at the end of the First Century A.D...To the extent that those of us who call ourselves Christian still find important the cluster of meanings surrounding the Exodus, the entry into the Promised Land, the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, we participate in shaping the continuation of that story, just as surely as did Moses and Miriam, Peter, Priscilla and Paul.[15]

Narrative is the biblical style, but Deeks notes that the biblical story cannot be easily contained in conventional literary pigeon holes.

> Straight forward pieces of historical description or objective reporting cannot easily become gospel: they do not have within them the quality of strangeness and mystery without which the Holy One cannot be sensed. Yet the Bible rarely draws upon myth and fairy story. It is as if there must be some link with life and events as we normally experience them.[16]

The literary critical positions of Culpepper or Petersen certainly illuminate the text by means of the analytical tools of "secular" literary criticism. They focus on "how the narrative components of the gospel interact with each other and involve and affect the reader",[17] but they do not seem to escape from a classic view of the impact of literary narrative: that it affects no more than the state of mind of the reader. This widespread assumption can be seen in remarks like that made by a critic of Steinbeck's Grapes

of Wrath (a book in which a central character, the ex-preacher Casy, assumes the stature of a type of Christ) that the primary impact of the book "is not to make us act, but to make us understand and share a human experience of suffering and resistance".[18] He conceives the purpose of reading narrative as being to obtain a mental apprehension of the literary text, not to be affected in behaviour or action by one's response to the text. This position is entirely consonant with the New Criticism's concern to deal with the text only as a text in itself and to be concerned with "appreciation, enjoyment, and understanding".[19] On the other hand Chambers argues that the effect of a narrative depends upon the "contract" between writer and reader as to the purposes served by the narrative. He discusses the "impingement of storytelling on history" and concludes that the "meaningfulness [of narrative] is not exhausted (and indeed it may be completely missed) by analysis of narratives in terms of their supposed internal relationships alone". Narrative is a "transactional phenomenon" which "mediates exchanges that produce historical change".[20]

This kind of understanding is much closer to the view adopted here of biblical revelation as story and action. My purpose is not to consider the scripture as narrative from the narrowly "intrinsic" perspective, but rather to consider what it is that narrative does; what it achieves; how it is employed in action; what results from it. It is necessary to identify the key qualities of narrative, from the discussion so far, which make it a useful category to apply to the gospel for our participation "in shaping the continuation of that story".

7.2.2 Narrative as Embodiment not Abstraction

The narrative quality of the bible is one of its most distinctive and compelling qualities. It is of the essence of revelation in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Ellul remarks on its living rather than its doctrinal or legalistic character.

> To do his work God does not send a book of metaphysics or a sacred book of Gnostic revelations or a complete epistemological system or a perfected wisdom. He sends a man. In relation to him stories are told again that constitute a history.[21]

As Wilder says, Christians confess their faith "just by telling a story or a series of stories".[22] Stories convey the embodiment of a message in a way that more propositional forms do not. They have the capacity to prevent an idea's "abstraction from the particular historical embodiments that that idea found".[23] For the same reason people who listen to stories are confronted by a much fuller experience than when faced with an abstract idea. McFague describes how parables "keep 'in solution' the language, belief, and life we are called to, and hence they address people totally".[24] Story is the mode of discourse which can do justice to what Frei notes as the "unique coherence in Jesus of two elements: unsubstitutable individuality and universal saving scope".[25]

We encounter the body of Jesus, which includes the flesh, the feeling, the experience, as the way to God. This encounter is with the concrete, not with the abstract; it is with the particular life, not with the generalisation about that life. "The way that believing is 'held in solution' in stories is also distinctive in that it encapsulates a particular human story rather than a generalisation."[26] Consequently the dominant genres of scripture

are experiential and existential, expressed in the terms of lived experience: the passion story, hymns, letters, sermons, and poetry. Thought and life, knowing and being, are one. Therefore, in her attempt to chart a route for religious language into the contemporary world, McFague focusses firstly, on the poem, the prime locus of imagistic metaphorical language; secondly, on the story, the process of coming to belief; and thirdly, on religious autobiography, the story of belief as practice.

7.2.3 Secularity - Revelation - Incarnation

Story as praxis is the way the secularity of the contemporary world can be taken seriously; story as embodiment harmonises with the revelation of the life of Jesus which is characterised as incarnation. The only legitimate way of speaking about the incursion of divine being into history, as Pannenberg said, is through metaphor. The movement of metaphor parallels the movement of incarnation. The incarnation and the ancient genres of theological reflection which lie within the tradition emphasise the importance for theology of story as metaphorical method. It is not easily recognised in the dominant strand of Western theology which employs propositional, logical, abstracting discourse.

Story telling is an essential element of the Christian imagination which has too often been subordinated to the propositional and abstract theological modes. The element of story has been increasingly appreciated in recent studies of narrative theology across a range of theological and ecclesiastical perspectives. McFague notes how "worldly stories about human beings in their full personal, historical, bodily reality" are the "way" of the

Christian tradition and not just a present fashion. She mentions Augustine, Dante, Donne, Bunyan, Milton, Woolman, Herbert, Kierkegaard, Eliot and de Chardin, in her review of the longstanding method of speaking of God by implication in stories of human life, a continuance of the tradition of the scriptures themselves. What these authors present are not so much beliefs themselves as the "process of coming to belief".[27] The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England presents its most recent report in terms of story[28] and makes the same point: "Typically the Bible does not say 'This is what you must believe' but 'this is what happened.'"[29]

7.3 STORY REFLECTS MIND

Story telling is an essential mode of Christian discourse. It is also an essential human category. The next section examines how the dynamic of story, as metaphorical narrative, touches chords deep in the human consciousness. The importance of story for theology does not depend only on the fact that it is the original mode of Christian revelation and that it meets the needs of Christian language today. It also reflects the fundamental shape of mind as consciousness of the human condition. World as we know it is mirrored in story. Three ways in which this happens will be discussed below, as they are developed in the work of McFague, Crites and Stroup: first, metaphor as the exercise of thought; second, narrative form as the pattern of human experience; third, our story as our sense of identity. Narrative imitates and speaks to a deep level of common experience and is capable of translating people's most serious concerns into a familiar form.

7.3.1 Mind's Metaphorical Movement

The metaphorical movement is a fundamental method of aquisition of knowledge for the human mind. The fossilised strata of our language suggest this; we refer to the legs of a table, the hands of a watch, the bed of a river, without realising that the impulse to first use these words was metaphoric, using the familiar word for the new reality. McFague also demonstrates, particularly in her discussion of the role of modelling in scientific discovery, that the imagistic mode of metaphor is the means by which new knowledge is developed out of old. It is a mode deeply embedded in the structure of the human mind. It is a necessity. We use analogical processes to investigate any new area of knowledge; without prior concepts it is blank or confusing, so we cast about for parallels.[30]

Our mental movement to understanding of whatever sort is always metaphorical, with ourselves as one term of the metaphor. It is our way of investigating the universe, moving from what we know to what we do not know. Hence there can be no truly objective investigation of anything, least of all of parables. The observer, investigator or interpreter is an inseparable part of the thing which is being investigated. This proves to be another hermeneutical circle but it warns us that any investigation of the parables which leaves the self of the investigator out of the investigation misses the parables' essence. As Robinson says "the text in turn interprets us".[31] Stories which hold glimpses of the extraordinary way of God's Rule in the development of their mundane features of plot, character and event follow an essentially metaphorical movement.

Story as metaphor reflects the way in which the human mind knows the world. This is the first sense in which narrative reflects the fundamentals of the human condition. The second sense in which story reflects life is made clear in the argument of Crites who calls it "the narrative quality of experience".

7.3.2 Narrative as Experience

Scholes and Kellogg call narrative "the dynamic sequential element".[32] It reflects the most basic common experience of human beings; "something has happened in time".[33]

Crites claims "that the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative".[34] He identifies three dimensions of story in human experience. First are those, not directly told, "sacred stories" which shape consciousness itself rather than being shaped by it.

> For these are stories that orient the life of people through time, their life-time, their individual and corporate experience and their sense of style, to the great powers that establish the reality of their world.[35]

These are the "stories" behind myth and scripture which are "their secondary, written expressions". The secondary stories are set within a world: "that phenomenological mundus, which defines the objective horizon of a particular form of consciousness". He calls this second category "mundane stories", whether they are composed as works of religion, of art or are simply "modest narrative communications that pass between people in explaining where they have been, why things are as they are, and so on". [36]

Between these two levels of story there is a third. It is the mediating form "of the experiencing consciousness itself".[37] The memory, which gives experience its coherence within the modalities of past, present and future has its own basic order, the "simple order of succession...in which the images of actual experience through time have been impressed upon the memory".[38] The most obvious and direct way of recollecting is to tell a story. The story is told in the present but that present somehow coexists in tension with the realities of past and future. This tensed unity has itself an "incipient narrative form"[39] in its expression and internal coherence. Not only does story reflect the temporality of existence, in its effect it forms human identity.

> The stories people hear and tell, the dramas they see performed, not to speak of the sacred stories that are absorbed without being directly heard or seen, shape in the most profound way the inner story of experience. We imbibe a sense of the meaning of our own baffling dramas from these stories, and this sense of its meaning in turn affects the form of a man's experience and the style of his action. Such cultural forms, both sacred and mundane, are of course socially shared in varying degrees, and so help to link men's inner lives as well as orienting them to a common public world.[40]

Narrative, in its welding together of time and experience, contradicts the dualism of mind and body. This dualism is, Crites argues, projected by two "time-defying" strategies which are characteristically modern: abstraction "in which images and qualities are detached from experience to become data for the formation of generalised principles and techniques", and contraction by which "narrative temporality is again fragmented...by the constriction of attention to dissociated immediacies". Both the habitation in the "inhumanly dry and abstract" and the immersion in "the warm stream of immediacy" are "strategies for breaking the sense of narrative time".[41]

7.3.3 Story as Self-identity

Crites' understanding of story as the narrative quality of experience leads to a third sense in which story is a reflection of human existence. Story helps us understand our life in the world. Our story gives us our identity; it emerges from the "tensed unity" of past, present and future, which gives narrative "its internal coherence".[42]

> A man's sense of his own identity seems largely determined by the kind of story which he understands himself to have been enacting through the events of his career, the story of his life.[43]

Stroup develops this observation in his discussion of the roots of personal identity which he makes the focus for his understanding of narrative theology. He is not interested in narrative as genre but as "hermeneutical process...which makes possible the appropriation of Christian faith and the reconstruction of personal identity".[44] Because of the formal narrative quality of experience which Crites asserts, Stroup argues that "personal identity as an interpretation of human experience takes the narrative form of autobiography". He claims that "people are who they are because of the stories they tell about themselves". This personal identity is always checked against the community with its collective memory and story. The "collision that takes place between the narrative identity of individuals and the stories of a community"[45] guards against self-deception and can provoke the transformation, conversion or redemption of "personal stories".

> We love stories, then, because our lives are stories and we recognize in the attempts of others to move, temporally and painfully, our own story. We recognize in the stories of other's experiences of coming to belief our own agonizing journey and we rejoice in the companionship of those on the way.[46]

This section has shown narrative to be a mirror of three kinds of human knowledge: of new interpretations of facts, of temporal experience, and of self-identity. They add an extra dimension of depth to the understanding of story as an ancient genre of the Christian tradition, which was discussed in the previous section. narrative theology has developed in response to this newly perceived centrality of story. It must be considered next.

7.4 NARRATIVE THEOLOGY

The coincidence of story as a characteristic mode of human consciousness and of Christian revelation has led to considerable recent interest in narrative theology, which has been discussed by Stroup and Fackre. Stroup places its emergence in the twentieth century debate about revelation. He sees three themes in Niebuhr's understanding of revelation as having especially stimulated this development: revelation as historical event, communicated by narrative account and appropriated within a communal context. Fackre identifies three main forms of narrative theology, which he calls: the **community story**, i.e. a people's overarching religious perspective; the **canonical story**, i.e. biblical narratives; and the **life story**, i.e. biographies of Christian lives.[47] Stroup identifies the same broad groupings. They show the category of narrative to be a suggestive and potentially useful device for addressing perennial theological problems".[48]

Fackre understands **community story** as "Christian teaching in terms of its linear development from creation to consummation..."[49] It is a theological narrative "in which a people identify an overarching plot reaching from Alpha to Omega, gathering up within

its sweep all the particulars of canonical tale, and finding a place as well for the experiences of life story".[50]

Stroup also discusses this grouping and reviews several studies which use the category of narrative "as an introduction to the study of religion". He cites Fackre's own study, The Christian Story; and also Keen, To a Dancing God; and Cox, The Seduction of the Spirit amongst others. He notes that, although narrative is the announced theme, it is often only of peripheral interest to the authors in reality. This is certainly true of Fackre's book which is an exposition of basic Christian doctrine in traditional categories such as "Creation", "Salvation", and "Church: nature and mission", which have no distinctive narrative quality to them.

In discussing **canonical story** Fackre critically examines the impact of literary studies of biblical stories, an approach which was discussed in the second section of this chapter. Stroup ignores these and concentrates on the studies of biblical narrative in which biblical theologians question "how these narratives function in the life of the communities that understand them to be authoritative for interpreting reality".[51] He discusses Auerbach, von Rad and Frei's examination of the way the reader can "enter into the world of the text";[52] Most remarkably, he discounts any significance in the parables for a study of narrative theology because they "are susceptible to whatever strong winds of interpretation happen to be blowing at the moment" and "have no necessary relation to historical events".[53] The consideration which I have given, in Part Two, to the role of spoken and acted parables, reveals the inadequacy of this view. It is based on a fragmentary selection from the scriptural record

since it ignores the fusion of spoken and acted parables which I have established. It is a simplistic understanding of the dynamics of communicating radically new possibilities and challenges in a historical situation. It also assumes that other narratives are not susceptible to changing interpretations.

Life story, the third group of theological narratives that Stroup and Fackre discuss, refers to the recounting of human experience, whether biographical or autobiographical. Life stories express "the experiential roots of narrative". Fackre briefly lists the various styles: from therapeutic autobiography or personal testimony, through introspective self-examination of a personal odyssey, to the encounter with another person's biography through confessions or "letters and lives".

7.4.1 Life Stories

The **life story** form of narrative theology is closest to the concerns of this thesis. The study of biblical revelation in story, in Part Two, and the study of hermeneutics, in Part One, have focussed on the theme of the **fusion of language and praxis.** The life story represents this fusion and will be considered in some detail. The discussion considers the positions of Stroup and Fackre which lead into the work of McClendon, M.Fague and Dunne.

Fackre's treatment of life story in an overview which attempts to categorise every manifestation of the type. The closest he approaches the dynamic of story in praxis is when he discusses "the moral power of story". He argues that this is stressed by those "who believe ethnic communities can preserve themselves

through its mode of discourse".[54] This bland statement projects a patronising picture of people "preserving", in some small corner, a way of life which results from oppression. It carries no implication that their witness may demand that the oppressors' way of life be not preserved! Fackre's view illustrates the weak generalisation which emerges when a practice is removed from its context. It is a far cry from Cone's understanding of story as that which, for victims, "both expresses and participates in the miracle of moving from nothing to something, from nonbeing to being".[55] It not only gives people "the strength to struggle but also an openness to fight together with all victims regardless of their genetic origin".[56]

Stroup's discussion of the life-story starts with Crites' understanding of the narrative form of human consciousness. Then he considers the work of McClendon and Dunne, both of whom can be seen to subscribe to McFague's view that story holds "in solution" language, belief, and life. They have in common the selection of what McClendon calls "compelling biographies" and a concern for ethical questions. McClendon selects Dag Hammarskjold, Martin Luther King and Clarence Jordan.[57] In his discussion of "narrative ethics", he tells among others of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothy Day.[58] Dunne chooses "individuals from Augustine to Sartre and Camus"[59] including Paul and Kierkegaard. McFague also examines biographies, adding to her consideration of Paul and Augustine sections on John Woolman, Sam Keen and de Chardin.[60]

Finding no formal statements of dogma as useful entry points into the biographies of his subjects, McClendon offers a way of identifying the theological issues operative in someone's life by

focussing on the "dominant images" or "controlling motifs" which exist in the pattern of their lives.[61] Dunne is concerned with the interaction between stories and their effect on the readers. He notes that "a man often times encounters a considerable discrepancy between his image of himself and the image his friends have of him".[62] He concludes that there is no absolute standpoint from which human nature can be viewed. It is possible, he thinks, to "pass over" from one point of view to another in order to arrive at self knowledge even if not an absolute self knowledge. He has the same concern with interaction between reader and story as McClendon and proposes the idea of "passing over" as a method to achieve sympathetic understanding with the story of Jesus.

> To reach this intermediate stage, where Jesus is fully and unequivocally human for us, we must pass over from the standpoint in which we are subjective and Jesus is objective (as culture hero) to the standpoint in which he is subjective.[63]

McFague, whose exposition of the metaphorical movement of parabolic story has already been reviewed, finds this method a helpful way of accounting for the impact of stories on lives.

> As John Dunne says, we "pass over" to the story of Jesus and to the stories of others and then pass back to ourselves in the quest for self-knowledge. In reading an autobiography, the finger finally points back to the reader - and what about you?[64]

Stroup criticises them for avoiding the hermeneutical issues that arise such as the criteria for the selection that they make and the lack of appreciation of the historicity of human experience.[65] He himself, concerned with the issue of personal identity, takes the stories of Malcolm X and Augustine to illustrate the process by which the "collision" of personal and communal narratives force an encounter with revelation and a conversion commitment.

There is in each of these workings with biography a vivid cross-fertilisation between multifaceted lived experience and the more usually abstract terms of theological categories; there is always the pressure to ethical decision.

> ...who a Christian is is never only a private discovery, for that discovery takes place not only through encounter with the story of Jesus but also through encounter with the stories of many others. Language and belief are hammered out in action; they arise from and must return to the social and political worlds in which we find ourselves.[66]

7.4.2 Critique of the Theology of Life Story

The most powerful element in the rather inchoate enterprise of narrative theology has been the raising up of biographies of remarkable characters whose Christian story is significant for those who follow after. There is some discussion about whether this kind of approach can really be called theology or whether these stories are no more than the "raw material" of theology, as McClendon and McFague propose.[67] Stroup takes issue with them arguing that "the major doctrines of Christian faith should reflect the normative importance of narrative in the expression of human experience in general and Christian faith in particular".[68] Rather than using biographical stories to illustrate previously conceived doctrines or being concerned with the genre as such, Stroup wishes to focus on the "hermeneutical process which is the foundation for Christian narrative...for the appropriation of Christian faith and the reconstruction of personal identity".[69]

Despite some differences these approaches have a number of features in common. First, it is the individual life story which predominates, following the sequence of a single, usually male, life. The existence of groups or communities is not easy to grasp in any "life-time" sense and is ignored except for its effect on the individual. When community is referred to it is as the individual milieu; even so the sense of contextuality is weak. Second, the lives are past rather than present. Some of the lives are of those near contemporaries such as Dorothy Day or Martin Luther King, but the biographical approach does encourage the practitioners to grapple with finished lives rather than lives "in progress". Third, since the lives are chosen out of a consensus that these persons lived significant Christian lives, an informal "almost beatification" takes place which means that it is the lives of extraordinary persons which become subjects for this approach. They are stars in the Christian firmament; especially those who have left behind a significant corpus of literature. They are not the ordinary or unlearned. Fourth, the commentaries focus more on their subjects' interior life and on their actions as illustrative of their faith orientation, rather than on their actions as revelatory messages to their surrounding society. This means that, fifthly, the characteristic theological reflection is the teasing out of motifs which can be found woven throughout the long perspective of a life viewed in hindsight rather than the creation of acted parables. Lastly, the sense of struggle that predominates is the struggle of individuals for self identity as individual Christians, rather than struggle for human and social transformation in the contemporary milieu.

These points constitute a tendency: male individuality rather than communal Christian presence; past rather than contemporary lives; great (literary) heroes rather than (active) common people; interior life rather than social engagement; theological motifs "recollected in tranquillity" rather than incidents of revelatory power; and personal rather than social struggle.

None of the items of these pairings can be ignored in any Christian story. One of the central themes of this thesis is that story is a means of integrating such dualities as mind and body or action and reflection. They do not harmonise with the biblical understanding of life that was observed in the Introduction. The understanding of story and action in this thesis suggests there must be a "dialectical interplay" between each of the pairings which have become apparent in the use of life story described above. Miguez Bonino's discussion of the dialectical interplay between theory and praxis illuminates this point. He describes them as occupying "two poles that challenge each other, making change and movement possible. Action overflows and challenges the theory that has informed it; and thought, projecting the shape and future of reality, pushes action to new ventures".[70] If his two terms "theory and action" are replaced by the terms of the pairings above, the same dialectical interplay can be seen at work between those elements which represent social praxis and those representing the individual personality.

A common feature of the biographies mentioned by McFague and McClendon is the core of controversial actions which make the lives of such characters as Clarence Jordon or John Woolman into "compelling biographies".[71] None of them are examples of mere

"self absorbed confession".[72] But narrative theology's tendency is to foster individual reflection rather than social praxis. It seems to reflect the individualistic orientation dominant in affluent capitalist societies.

The insights of narrative theology stimulate us to consider the element of story in the biblical records and in Christian history. But they do not identify the dynamic of story in its full dimension of social praxis as the studies of hermeneutics and biblical stories have done in Parts One and Two. Narrative theology contrasts with an approach to story theology which is emerging from Third World liberation and contextual theologies.

The lives of communities in struggle and the pens of theologians committed to those struggles come together in the creation of contextual theologies. liberation, black, feminist, and other contextual theologies arise from the majority world of poor and oppressed communities. They provide a rich vein of narrative for the doing of theology. Their method emerges from their lives of struggle. It contrasts with the imposition of narrative as an interpretative category on already formed material which is a characteristic of the life stories we have considered in this chapter. In the next chapters we turn to an exploration of this alternative kind of story theology which is to be found in several Third World contexts. We also consider its impact on communities of Christians in the First World.

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8. STORIES IN THE STRUGGLE

Chapter 7 has surveyed the resurgence of a narrative perspective on the bible and theology. It has become clear to theologians that narrative is at the centre of biblical revelation and at the centre of human consciousness. Narrative theology has been formulated as a result of this awareness. It has been formulated in a First World context and responds mainly to issues of personal alienation which are particularly powerful in the affluent technocratic societies.

The discussions of hermeneutics and biblical stories in Parts One and Two of this thesis have revealed the determining impact of social praxis on the proclamation and transmission of the Christian tradition. Theological reflection is equally shaped by the location of the theologian as Villa-Vicencio points out:

> ...what a theologian discovers in a text is largely determined by the position which he or she occupies in society. What has revolutionised theology in recent times is the fact that the theological reflection of oppressed people has penetrated the theological market-place, and that this kind of theology is very different from that expressed by theologians who have emerged from the dominant class.[1]

When his observation is applied to the subject of Part Three, the role of story in contemporary theology, it forces us to consider story in the theological reflections of oppressed people. We find

that the dynamic of story is powerfully at work as a medium of reflection in the day to day struggles of people's lives. There is no need for intellectual justification; the stories come naturally.

This chapter describes examples of theological reflection by means of stories in three Asian contexts of struggle; there the story approach has been most extensively developed. The first section considers the work of Choan-Seng Song; the second, the Korean minjung theology - theology of the people; and the third, the verbatim theological reflections of peasants from the Philippines. The last section draws some general conclusions about the role of stories in these contexts and traces the debate about their role in Latin American liberation theology. The concluding chapter in Part Three examines some initiatives in doing theology by means of stories in the First World context of Britian. These emerge as responses to the challenge of Third World theology and to situations of oppression within British society.

A common pattern is found in these uses of story in the struggle for change against the oppression and poverty; whether it is a struggle against military oligarchies in the Third World or against technocratic oppression in the First World urban jungle. The stories express the **dynamic** which has been observed throughout this thesis of imaging and promoting praxis for historical change. They do this in several ways: first, through their **power** in simplicity. Second, story **functions** as an interpretation of the people's experience and of the way of Jesus by the rehearsal and re-enactment of his stories. Third, the stories have an **impact** on narrator and listeners. They are a means by which people build a

common self-definition over against oppressive reality and they are a form through which transforming encounters with "others" can be made. The **dynamic of story** transforms the told word into the acted word through the heard word. It is examined in detail at the end of Chapter 9.

8.1 STRUGGLES AGAINST THE "CHRIST" OF IMPERIALISM

When Dunne was writing, in 1967, it might have seemed unexceptionable to say: "It is a remarkable fact that Christ has been able to remain the archetypal man of Western civilisation in its transition from medieval to modern form".[2] It reads as an extremely contentious sentence today. Its corollary is that the archetypal man of Western society is the type of Christ. This was the image which missionaries brought with them in everything from their religious pictures to their role models for converts. Christ was pictured as the archetypal western bourgeois male.

Dunne's statement is one which unconsciously carries in itelf all the cultural domination of Western missionary imperialism. It shows what Third World theologians have struggled against. The Consultation of Third World theologians noted how "the missionaries could think of the spread of Christianity in terms of transplanting the institutions of their Euro-American churches within, of course, the framework of imperial domination". One important transplanting was the image of Christ as the "archetypal man of Western civilisation". In this way Christ became collaborator in "the brutal colonising process".[3]

Rescuing this image from its cultural and imperial imprisonment has become an urgent issue for all theologies concerned with human liberation. We recall from Chapter 2 that Song begins his theological project by raising this issue. He aims to transform the image of Christ from being "a point-nosed saviour to the point-nosed persons of the world"[4] to being at home in the reality of Asian experience. He generates the process by using stories. In this aspect of theology in stories we find a different set of features from those identified in the discussion of life stories in narrative theology.

8.1.1 Story Theology from an Asian Perspective

Song's story of the flat-nosed Christ, a Christ figure who is recognisably Asian in features, unlike the point-nosed Christ, is an illustration of the attempt by Asian Christians to counter "the centrism with which traditional theology is accustomed to view the history of Israel and the history of Christianity".[5] Since the majority of Christians lives in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, Song argues for a theology of transposition which will effect a shift of ideas, beliefs and understanding of life into each context of this majority. It is a shift which can be compared to the first century shift of Christianity, out of Jewry, into the Graeco-Roman world. It is intended to rescue people from "disowning [their] own cultural heritage as having no useful meaning in the design of God's salvation".[6]

In terms of this intention he composes three movements of sweeping historical stories. He retells the "disruption and dispersion" story of the people of Israel which is located in the Old

Testament. It is a story of their national pride and self-assurance being wrenched out of its centrism into a relation with other nations. Secondly, he retells the "great disruption" story of cross and resurrection as a story of Jesus fighting to liberate his own people from "ethno-religious centrism".[7] The third movement is the movement of "transposition": a journey into movements of nations and peoples in Asia "that may give us some clues to the ways of God in that vast portion of the world outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition".[8] He tells this story by means of a selection of episodes in the history of China which present a sensitively drawn cultural insight into that dynamic society. It reasserts the value of that Chinese culture which was so disdained by the missionaries. He encourages us to encounter with respect and discernment the "horizon" of Chinese history and culture so that a subtle blend may emerge from the fusion with the "horizon" of Christian revelation, which does not violate either. This parallels the approach of the Korean theologians, discussed below, who write that "our reflection on the minjung [people] involves not only objective socio-economic analysis, but also an empathy for their expressive language and culture".[9]

8.1.2 Encountering the Other

The issue of respectful and transforming encounter with "the other" is also an important theme in another of Song's essays in story theology, Tell us our names. In this volume the stories he uses to launch the reflections of each chapter are fairy tales or folk stories from a variety of sources: the T'ang dynasty, the Angolan countryside, the children's books of Lewis Carroll. He chooses these folk stories because they are "culturally and

spiritually deep...parables of human lives...popular theology at its most unsophisticated and yet at its most profound".[10]

> These are stories of despair and hope, tales of doubt and faith, and accounts of the search for the moral power that will enable persons to live in the world. It is a world in which meaning and purpose are terribly twisted to serve the whims of the powerful, the cunning, and the unscrupulous.[11]

Each of these stories provokes an extended reflection on contemporary issues of world mission and cultural understanding. One of the stories is from Alice in Wonderland. It has her swimming in a pool of tears. Also swimming with her is a mouse and all the time, supremely oblivious, Alice is talking to him, in the languages she has learnt from her brother's school books, about cats and dogs. In agitation he swims away from her but finally agrees to talk to the uncomprehending girl with the words. "Let us get to the shore, and then I'll tell you my history, and you'll understand why it is I hate cats and dogs."[12] Alice has dominated the conversation with her powerful language and cannot comprehend the hopes and fears of the mouse because she has not begun to look at the world through his eyes. For Song this humorous story is a powerful metaphor of the role of the churches in their contact with the secular world, always dominating the conversation with their own terms.

> In contacts with the so-called secular world, the church has tended to monopolize the conversation. It tells its story in a variety of ways, often using abstractions typical of Western metaphysics or science, sometimes expressing an unshakable conviction that the pagans are for ever lost unless they believe in what the church preaches and practices, or now and again showing loving compassion and charity to those struggling to survive. But in most cases, the church writes the scenario, directs it, and plays it out.[13]

Instead, Song argues, the church is called to be in a "creatively incarnational relationship with the world".[14] This relationship

demands that cultural outsiders listen respectfully in order to encounter a culture's full dimensions. The same approach is also incumbent on those Christians who have been taught by the mission churches to despise their own history. One of the examples Song uses is the understanding of the Korean word han: "a feeling of unresolved resentment against unjustifiable suffering".

> As Christians get to know their own "native" names and the names of their own peoples, they begin to hear stories and sounds, see symbols and images, grasp feelings and longings, that have been theirs since they were born and have never ceased being theirs even after they became Christians. In Korea, for example, some Christians are hearing a strangely familiar sound from the depth of the history of the Korean people - the sound of han.[15]

8.2 PEOPLE AS THE SUBJECTS OF HISTORY

Han is a word which appears at the centre of recent attempts to develop a distinctive Korean people's theology which has emerged under another key word minjung - "the people, the unlearned, the oppressed and despised and alienated".[16] The concern of minjung theology is with "people as the subjects of history" not as its objects. There is a reluctance even to define the word because "a scientific definition would be an objectification of the minjung on the epistemological level, thus making the people an object for study and reflection". There is also a reluctance to allow the minjung to be known conceptually by the Marxist title proletariat. This is partly because that title has a local totalitarian meaning for the South Koreans who are struggling against their own capitalist militarist oppression.[17] It is also because "the minjung as historical subject transcends the socio-economic determination of history, and unfolds its stories beyond mere historical possibilities to historical novelty - a new drama

beyond the present history to a new and transformed history".[18] It is clear that the minjung must be differentiated from the minjok which means national people. The minjung is defined instead, historically, in terms of the stories that people tell. "Stories are the embodiment of people's experience. And their stories are the socio-political biography of the people."[19]

Kwang-sun Suh describes the genesis of this new mode of theological reflection in the industrial mission movement of the late 1960's, in the Seoul metropolitan area. The members of this movement became involved in organising power at the grassroots level "to enable the urban poor to recover their rights and protect their interests".[20] Members of the Students Development Service Corps also became involved and were exposed to the living and working conditions of the poor. Their experience created a desire to work for justice and social transformation which permeated the student movement as a whole, both Christian and secular. As the Park regime, pursuing economic growth at all costs, became more repressive and social problems began to intensify, a widespread network of Christian 'koinonias' or mission groups emerged which were committed to protect human rights and struggle for justice. At this point, in the early 1970s, conscious reflection on minjung theology started as theolgians working with these groups "began to learn and reflect upon the experience of mission work at the grassroots level".[21]

The concern with the minjung and the experience of living with the minjung, led to a reflection on their stories. Experiences of exploitation and rumours of detention and torture were shared in secret in the repressive climate. Kwang-sun Suh describes the

method and perspective which emerged.

> As we heard the stories of minjung told by the minjung themselves, we thought and reflected and spoke from the side of the minjung, which is to tell the stories of the minjung theologically and spread the rumours of the people as facts and truth. And we tried to see the world from the perspective of the oppressed and the poor.[22]

8.2.1 Listening to the Depths of their Tradition

A powerful source for such reflection was found in the traditional Korean mask dances as well as the folk stories which are rooted in struggle against oppressors. The mask dances date from the village festivals which have taken place since before the eighteenth century. The dances have evolved over time but have a common quality of dynamic bold movement and satirical, vulgar expression. The dances are performed to rhythmic music and songs; they contain dialogue between dancers, musicians and audience. The scenes ridicule the rulers and portray their hypocrisy; also presented is the hard life of the "minjung who suffer hunger, separation, exploitation, beatings, etc".[23] The people experience trouble and seem to have no exit, but they participate in the story-telling with jokes and laughter. Hyun regards this critical laughter at their own lot as the way in which the people achieve transcendence. This transcendence lies in their ability not only to "see correctly the reality of the world, which neither the rulers nor leaders can see because of their obsession with or separation from the world, but also [to] envision another reality over against and beyond this one which neither the rulers nor leaders can see either".[24] This transcendence can have the positive effect of creating among the people the power to survive under oppression and the courage to fight for change.

What the dance does, in Korean terms, is to present the experience of han: the collective feeling of helplessness of the oppressed, a repressed murmuring and submission to fate, but also the "tenacity to life of the oppressed spirit".[25] In the dance, the suppressed feeling explodes into a reality which is resolved by this "critical transcendence". Kwang-sun Suh compares this experience of critical transcendence with Tillich's concept of "God above God". But he immediately qualifies the comparison.

> It is not an existentialist sense of transcendence, "deep down there," but is a social, political, and historical transcendence, "over the horizon of history." In other words, it comes from the sociopolitical biography of the oppressed minjung, and not from the existential biography of an alienated individual.[26]

The qualification of Tillich's theological idea is a contextualisation of the idea in praxis. It is that kind of qualification by contextualisation in praxis which the narrative theologians' use of life stories needs. It needs to be replaced in the communal, struggling sociopolitical biography of the minjung.

8.2.2 A Hermeneutic of Experience

The Korean minjung theologians find a biblical hermeneutical quality in their experience. Their encounter with the minjung is an encounter with the reality of Korean society, through an empathic engagement with people's living reality and their stories. It also helps them to an empathic understanding of the story of Jesus. Out of their discovery of their own political and cultural identity the minjung theologians discover the presence of Jesus among the minjung. The Gospel of Mark, for example, describes the crowds surrounding Jesus, the ochlos. The Korean theologians find that biblical scholarship has paid little

attention to the social character of his audience. "Consequently, the words and deeds of Jesus have been desocialized."[27] The effect of form and redaction criticism in decontextualising the parables was noted in section 6.5.1. Byung-mu Ahn draws out the characteristics of the ochlos in the Gospel of Mark, reviews Jesus' attitude of compassion towards the members of the crowd, and examines the crowd's composition as a single social class of sinners and tax collectors.

In this investigation minjung becomes a means for the rediscovery of Jesus in his place in the gospel, a place that the scholars have failed to perceive because they have lacked the concrete social relations to give them that vision. This was noted in the discussion of the Gerasene demoniac's name in section 3.5.1; social context is a powerful barrier to perception. Minjung theologians have encountered those "permanent factors in history" to which Dodd referred.[28] Minjung, as ochlos, becomes a concrete hermeneutical category with which to approach the biblical text; it is a hermeneutic bridge formed by a dynamic participation in historical reality. Stories of the minjung are found in the stories of Jesus; and "the minjung theologians in Korea found the stories of Jesus in the stories of our minjung".[29] Minjung theology takes the authority of scripture and of contemporary experience to be equally binding. It is what Cone called the "dialectical relation" between bible and social context, discussed in section 2.12. Schillebeeckx argues that any demand to choose one way rather than the other is the presentation of a false alternative.

> ...we can in fact "begin" from a critical analysis of present-day experiences and then discuss them in the light of the gospel (though we shall also have to learn what the

> gospel is!). We can also begin from an exegetical analysis of scripture and tradition, keeping within their own socio-cultural context of experience in order to relate the message which emerges from them to our present experiences (though the way in which this message is formulated remains alien to us unless it is expressed in terms of contemporary experiences, critically interpreted). Thus the contrast between the two starting-points proves to be a false dilemma: the one does not work without the other. Revelation is brought about through experiences.[30]

For the minjung theologians this is not a distanced hermeneutical reflection but the kind of real sociopolitical category that carries meaning in both directions. It is not an "eight-lane highway" across Pannenberg's "unbridgeable chasm"; it is more like a precarious and nerve-wracking "rope-bridge" across which we riskily struggle. It is not constructed by an elite theological engineering corps but by the low key efforts and basic skills of the common people. Kwang-sun Suh uses the terms of McFague's metaphorical theology to describe this theological approach as "the metaphorical identification of the Son of Man with the minjung", in which Jesus both is and is not the minjung.[31] The "metaphorical identification of scripture in Korean history is not new. The book of Exodus exerted a powerful influence after its translation into the vernacular in 1909, and became a method for speaking about the theme of national liberation from Japanese domination when politics could not be openly debated. Eventually, the Japanese authorities banned the story from use in public worship.[32]

Minjung theology is not, then, an imported version of an alien liberation theology; it is not even a Korean theology in the sense of being acceptable to the majority of Korean church-goers. It is a theology for the future which arises out of a profoundly Korean

reflection on the present Korean reality in the light of the gospel. It is a "political hermeneutics of the Gospel in terms of the Korean reality".[33] Through this framework Koreans see that they have been doing political theology throughout the history of the church. Kwang-sun Suh concludes:

> Minjung theology is a story theology in the sense that it takes seriously the stories of Jesus and Jesus as the story of the minjung...The plot of the stories told by the Korean minjung and the parables of Jesus would turn almost everything upside down. They have an entirely different epistemology about reality. Therefore, the minjung carry an epistemological privilege which the rich and the powerful do not possess. Our theology may perhaps be saved by such a theology by the people who have the epistemological privilege of seeing the reality correctly.[34]

8.3 PEASANT THEOLOGY

One of the most vivid publication of Asian story theology is Peasant Theology.[35] It presents an example of exactly this interpretation of the stories of scripture and of everday experience from the point of view of the people, who were described in the previous section as "epistemologically privileged". Charles Avila, a staff member of the Federation of Free Farmers, edited the volume of reflections after ten years of living and working among the Filipino peasantry. He styles himself as no more than a reporter of the peasants "who are doing their own 'theologizing'...which grows naturally out of the day-to-day struggles and experiences of the people".[36]

A characteristic story entitled "The Blind Man" contains reflections on the story of Jesus' healing of blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). The moment in the drama of the story onto which

the peasant interlocutors latch is the question that Jesus asks, "What do you want?" The peasants discuss the improbability of Christ, "God, the all knowing", needing to ask what it was that a blind man wanted. They conclude, "It would seem that Christ asked the blind man because He respects the dignity of all people, including the poorest of the poor. Prior to giving relief, He wants to recognize dignity. He gives only in response to your asking."[37] The reflection on the gospel is also a reflection on the reality of lived experience.

> In fact, Mang Peping adds, the main problem with good people who want to help us is that they don't ask us anything. They think they know the precise nature of our problems. And this is so mainly because they do not ask. They would be wiser than Christ who asked even the blind man before he did anything for him.[38]

Their whole experience of dealing with social and community workers and government officials is concretised in this story of the gospel. They have taught the same lesson about Jesus to Avila that the minjung had taught in their encounter with the Korean theologians who "learned that at least Jesus did not objectify the minjung as the object of salvation. Jesus was on the side of the minjung, and identified himself with the minjung."[39]

Other stories in the Peasant Theology collection focus on biblical passages such as the separation of the sheep and goats, on "theological ideas" such as the notion that God owns the land, or on such contemporary experiences as the effects of landlordism or the challenges involved in organising their movement. The simple style of the language and the method of story telling belie the sophistication of thinking which the stories contain. The method also allows complex ideas to be handled in such a way that they

can be viewed from the peasants' own perspective - the power of story which was noted in the Introduction.

The discussion of the low image of the peasants as "Lazy and Resistant to Change" is a good example of this. The chapter concerns a visit to a model government farm. Superficially the farm and its methods look impressive. But the farmers ask probing questions about the costs of all the inputs which are necessary to make the new methods work. These inputs are quite beyond the reach of the peasants' purses. Their questions anger the landlords who berate them for not adopting new methods and call them lazy and resistant to change. The peasants are able to see through this to the real causes and turn the statement on its head.

> From that time on, says Mang Pedring, I have been thinking and thinking about this "resistance-to-change" accusation. And I say it now clearly: it is the landlords and the government who are resistant to change! They only want us to undertake surface changes. But they refuse to accept the most fundamental change of all which we and our ancestors have demanded for years and years now. I mean have they not done everthing to fight our demand for a change in the ownership of the land?[40]

8.4 THE VALUE OF A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY IN STORIES

This kind of story theology from Asia is highly provocative for theological reflection in other contexts. It is deeply embedded in its context but that does not prevent dialogue with other liberation and contextual theologies. These stories show clearly the key features of the **dynamic of story** which separate this kind of "storied" theological reflection from the life story type of narrative theology, discussed in Chapter 7.

The stories are ways of imaging historical change, whether it be a small scale change in the attitude of "well-meaning" officials to peasant farmers or large scale visions of national liberation. Their power is the simplicity with which they express the subtle judgements of the peasants who are considered "simple" by the officials and landlords. Their impact lies in the way they encapsulate transforming encounters with others; for the Korean theologians and students, the encounter with minjung promotes a deep personal and social reorientation which affects all aspects of their lives and gives them a new perspective on every issue. The impact also enables people who are suffering under the yoke of oppression to build up a new and positive self-image: be it the laughter of peasants who agree it is not they who are lazy, "in the silence some are grinning and many heads nod in agreement";[41] or be it the artists who struggle to paint a flat-nosed Jesus who can affirm their culture and existence in the world so they are no longer aliens in their own place. Lastly, the stories function as new stories and new interpretations of Jesus. They are ways in which Jesus is embodied for people who read, listen to or participate in the stories. Actions result from or precipitate the reflections. The actions are parables of the way of Jesus. They exhibit the dynamic of story passing from spoken word to acted word through heard word.

These same characteristics of story theology can be found in less profusion in other debates about liberation and contextual theologies. Cone describes his own encounter with minjung theology in the preface to the collection of Korean essays. It is an experience of surprising cultural exchange across divides he had never expected to cross and also a frightening exposure to

repressive conditions as, for instance, he lectures to a meeting full of Korean CIA agents. He notes that the unique Korean quality of minjung theology differentiates it from Latin American liberation theology.

> Its strong affirmation of culture separates minjung theology from Latin American liberation theology with its almost exclusive attention to Marxist class analysis...although Latin American theology has said much about the liberation of the poor, the form and content of their theology do not reflect much of the history and culture of the poor, especially among the Indians and blacks on that continent.[42]

The next section turns to the Latin American debate about the issue Cone raises.

8.5 THE SHIFT IN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Latin American liberation theology is not without this critique within its own ranks. Scannone, for one, identifies a critical shift in the locus of the theological project since the Medellin conference. It is a shift which draws him into considering the relationship between theology and popular culture. Of the two broad strands of post-Medellin liberation theology, one more or less consciously applies Marxist methodology and categories for analysing and transforming reality, while the ther focusses upon the popular culture and religiosity of the various peoples of the continent. The issue can almost be reduced to the question of whether one is dealing with the "historical praxis of the Latin American peoples or with that of avant-garde groups whose political consciousness has been raised".[43]

Segundo describes the genesis of liberation theology by recounting the history of these avant-garde groups. The student movements of the 1960's, which ruled the universities in their period of political autonomy, used their freedom to unmask the ideologies which their rulers employed to justify the inhuman situation of the majority of the population. The student movement's critique necessarily included Chritianity as an ideology. In these circumstances a new approach to Christian faith was developed, one which "involved a kind of Christian conversion as far as the social consequences of our faith were concerned".[44] The ideological suspicion which underlay this movement became the basis of the new vision of what theology should be.

The intention of this first strand of liberation was to remake the whole of theology by means of this suspicion of ideology. Middle class students perceived themselves to be on the side of the poor and wished to remake their Christian understanding in order to remove those elements which blocked their commitment to become a liberative force. Their ideological suspicion also made them critical of many behaviour patterns and cultural practices of the popular masses. For example, they made a critique of the link between the fatalism of popular religious statements and the oppressive distortion of Christianity by the rulers. Yet the popular movements had the loyalty of the masses. Furthermore the kind of critique the student theologians made was not welcomed in the popular movements even if it was regarded as dangerous by the status quo. They faced an uncomfortable choice between those practices in the life of the poor which they believed to be oppressive and an alienation from the very people they sought to serve in a liberative way. Segundo explains that the intellectuals

needed to experience a conversion in order to move beyond this impasse.

> I guess that this conversion of intellectuals and, hence, of theologians...had its roots in a painful experience intellectuals often have. In Latin America and everywhere else they try to think and to create ideas for the sake of the common good. They sometimes speak against their own interests in the name of a voiceless people supposedly incapable of recognizing where their actual interest is. And finally they discover not only that they are not understood by the people for the sake of whom they have tried to think and to speak, but also that the main stream of history leaves them apart from popular victories.
>
> Conversion means, then, for many intellectuals a kind of self-negation. Instead of teaching, they should learn. And in order to learn from common people, they should incorporate themselves, even mentally, with these common people, and give up the chronic suspicion among intellectuals that common people are always wrong.[45]

It reminds us of the discussion of Cone's call for the conversion of white theologians quoted in section 3.3. Scannone also talks about the need to "renounce elitism in the area of knowledge" so that the hermeneutic locale may be "the people as they are concretely embodied in their popular culture (in all its manifestations) and as they are interpreted by those in whom they really see themselves interpreted (whatever sort of interpretation it may be)".[46]

One of the results of this shift in Latin American theology has been the great expenditure of energy in working with people from ancient cultures, which have resisted the encroachments of the modernising influences unleashed upon the whole continent. The work has attempted to "modify rites, places and instruments of worship, the idea of the religious, and so on, all in the name of rescuing the most valuable and liberative Christian elements..".[47] But the practical results have been small because of the vast number and depth of these various cultures and the monolithic

character each has needed in order to survive. The category of story has not been developed to the extent that even the Korean theologians have done. But the reality is that at the level of understanding and communicating what is happening in the base communities of the Latin American church of the poor, the telling of stories about their alternative ecclesial life has been of great importance.[48]

Gutierrez finds the notion of narrative, as proposed by Metz, an important way of making this "power of the poor in history" available to the church of the poor in the contemporary situation. "The language of narrative must be a language that leads us to the memory of persons in their suffering, a memory of the suffering of the poor of this world."[49] He criticises the theologians who have "kept themselves aloof" from this pain and also calls them to a conversion so that they permit themselves to learn from the poor. One of the resources for this learning is the "history of the other", a history "reread from the side of the poor" which counters the history of humanity written "with a white hand" from the side of the dominators.[50] An urgent task is to remake history from below and chart the milestones of previous centuries: the earliest Christian community, the Franciscan movement, the peasant wars and Thomas Munzer, and the peasant struggles of modern times. It is part of the recovery of the alternative tradition which always been present in Christian history. Miguez Bonino describes it as "a call to radical transformation inspired by the prophetic-messianic focus on the justice and peace of the kingdom of God".[51] This tradition has been subservient to the tradition of "order" since the fifth century. It has been vindicted as the central tradition by modern biblical studies as we have observed in the

analyses of the stories of Jesus in Part Two.

Villa-Vicencio argues that, "The reclaiming of a theological heritage involves identifying the contraditory dimension of a particular theology, and developing the liberating resources within that tradition."[52]

Sobrino also underlines this shift of perspective which is both a personal conversion and a rereading of tradition. It is implicit in his distinction between a church <u>for</u> the poor and a church <u>of</u> the poor.

> ...the Church of the poor is not a Church for the poor but a Church that must be formed on the basis of the poor and that must find in them the principle of its structure, organization, and mission. For the same reason I maintain that this Church does not conceive of the poor as "part" of itself, even a privileged part, but thinks of them rather as the "center" of the whole.[53]

Gutierrez sums up the perspective by quoting Bonhoeffer's famous passage in <u>Letters and Papers from Prison</u>.

> We have learned to see the great events of the history of the world from beneath - from the viewpoint of the useless, the suspect, the abused, the powerless, the oppressed, the despised. In a word, from the view-point of the suffering.[54]

This is the challenge that returns from the voices of the Third World theologians to those in the First World. They must consider how they can learn from the poor and oppressed and from their stories. They are involved in the **dynamic of story.** The story of the minjung and the peasants has been **told;** the story from the Latin American barrios, the African townships and the American ghettos has been **told.** It challenges the theologies of the First World to **hear** and **act.**

9. STORY THEOLOGY IN A FIRST WORLD CONTEXT

Chapter 8 ended with Bonhoeffer's call to "see history...from the view-point of the suffering". It is a call which has been implicit in the argument of this thesis. The story with which the Introduction began invited us to look at the history of colonialism and mission from the viewpoint of he suffering, to change sides and align with the victims. Cone was quoted in Chapter 2 demanding of white theologians that they release themselves from entrapment in the dominant ideology. The parables of Jesus invited listeners to view the world from the perspective of the outcast who found a home in the Kingdom of God. In Chapter 8 the call was heard in places as far apart as Latin America and Korea. Segundo described the difficulties liberation theologians faced in divesting themselves of <u>their</u> understanding of liberation in order to learn from the common people. He advised them to "incorporate themselves, even mentally, with these common people, and give up the chronic suspicion among intellectuals that common people are always wrong".[1] The Korean theologians described how they had come to view the world from the perspective of the minjung. They "began to learn and reflect upon the experience of mission work at the grassroots level".[2]

9.1 ENCOUNTERING THE VIEWPOINT OF THE SUFFERING

The **dynamic of story** promotes a transfer of sympathy or alliance: what Song calls "transposition" and Dunne calls "passing over". It preserves the "dangerous memory of suffering", to which Metz alludes. It allows us to recover the alternative tradition of "prophetic-messianic focus on the justice and peace of the kingdom of God" which Miguez Bonino describes.[3] It calls us into that alternative. The call comes from the Third World theologians.

This chapter considers how that call is **heard** in the First World. The call to join the alternative "prohetic-messianic" tradition is not simply a call for justice between Third and First Worlds. The First World is not monolithic; injustice abounds within its societies. Racism is as powerful a form of oppression inside metropolitan societies as it is in their relations with ex-colonial countries. Rowland's description of the inner city, quoted in Chapter 2, identified areas of London where the "situation between the rich and poor nations of the world has been mirrored and telescoped to micro-level; the same exploitation and domination games are still played with equal ruthlessness".[4] The oppression of women knows no geographical boundaries. It has been challenged by the women's liberation movement in the heart of the First World. Domination occurs within the First World as well as between the First and the Third.

If the **dynamic of story** is the method whereby we can begin to see the world from the viewpoint of the suffering then there are two dimensions to its operation in the context of the First World. These are the concerns of section 2 in this chapter. First, some

processes of dialogue, are reported, which were arranged so that First World theologians could hear the challenge of Third World theologians about the oppression which is exported from their societies. Second, some situations are examined, the community movement, urban mission, and bible study methods, in which story has been used for contextual theological reflection about oppression within the First World. In section 3 an attempt is made to draw together some of the features of the **dynamic of story** which have been evident in this study.

9.2 THE BRITISH CONTEXT

Several recent attempts to develop a political theology for Britain have used the category of story. They have tried to respond to the demands of liberation theologies and the demands of the local context. In Britain a project called "A Theology for Britain in the Eighties" documented a dialogue process which was arranged in 1981.[5] It followed the experience of a large American project whose major publication, Theology in the Americas, recorded a large dialogue conference in Chicago in 1975.[6]

Brown described the American project's function in terms which echo Bonheoffer's letter from prison. "All of this must lead toward a position in which we develop an increasing ability to see the world through eyes other than our own".[7] Other dialogues have been less well recorded. In South Africa, the Institute for Contextual Theology provided some documentation of the 1983 World Council of Churches' dialogue in Switzerland to which the South African theologian Bonganjalo Goba contributed.[8] The category of story was important as a method of dialogue in these processes.

The attempt to develop a political theology for Britain has sprung out of these dialogues. It has also grown in home contexts. One method of beginning to articulate political theology has been to tell stories about people's praxis. Ambler and Haslam's method was "to take particular pieces of contemporary Christian action, which have political implications, and to tell them as illustrative stories or "praxes" which describe possible forms of Christian engagement in society".[9] Jenner's group, living in the heart of the Yorkshire coal field want to share their process of reflection on the struggles of the people around them, and their own commitment to that struggle, during the climactic 1984-5 coal strike against pit closures, chronic unemployment and community devastation. They call it "a book of Christian story-telling and reflection" through which they have "re-discovered something of the significance of Christian discipleship in Britain today".[10]

> The story of the coal strike needs to be told in such a way that those who lived through it and suffered through it may come to see that their sufferings, too, have a part to play in the world's redemption. If the church does not tell the story that way, is there anyone else who will?[11]

The proceedings of the British dialogue conference mentioned at the beginning of this section are less consistent in the use of stories. But some speakers from Third World contexts invited the home participants to enter into the dynamic of story as a way of imaging the struggle for liberation. De la Torre suggested to the English, (to whom he at first thought the bible had nothing to say!) that they should read the story of Exodus, looking at it "from the shoes of the Egyptian people". He tells them, "In this context you could ask yourself what your position would be and what would your liberation be?"[12]

As Ambler points out, there is a double movement demanded. "When we have seen ourselves through other people's eyes, especially of those we have helped make poor, we have surely to look at ourselves with our own eyes - think for ourselves, act for ourselves, just as they have done in their situations."[13] It cannot be a case of importing a perspective from elsewhere into British society as a way of protecting people from having to think for themselves in every new situation. In fact the most vital indigenous liberation theology was that of the feminist movement.[14] To them the category of story was central. The publication of the Feminist Theology Project's was a file of papers entitled Our Story which recorded a two year "journey" in which they developed a feminist theology. It was partly stimulated by the American Grailville meeting of 1972. The title expresses the thematic unity of the publication as a collection of narratives of changing and developing awareness of women's oppression "inherent in every structure of society".[15]

In this case theology emerges in the interaction between the experiences and actions of struggling against the oppressive roles thrust upon women in an "advanced" industrial male-dominated society and the telling of stories about them.

> When I read the stories of Jesus where he talks to people where they are, helping them to sort out their problems in their own situation I am aware that this is what Women's Aid tries to do. When Jesus talks to Mary when her sister thinks she ought to be doing the housework I realise that Women's ceative writing groups are doing the same for women today. In my reflection I become aware of new insights in my theological understanding and when I think about the questions these insights raise then my theological understanding grows and develops along new paths. This prompts fresh action, further reflections and I am setting out on a journey which will h ve no end.[16]

9.2.1 Community Movement

Another important and prolific First World example of theological reflection happening in the process of telling stories arises from the movement of intentional communities, which was strengthened with new growth in the 1970s. Many of these are counter-cultural groups who have established communities in one house or several houses in run-down inner city areas or have departed from the suburbs into the countryside where there is space to set different patterns of living.[17] They become what Taylor calls "cells of dissent" who discover "radically new styles of living" as a response to the environmental, socio-political or therapeutic crises of the modern post-industrial urban setting.[18] Clark in his major survey describes them as "groups in which Christians are seen to be active in working to establish a new dimension to community life" whose basis of involvement "is that their Christian faith deepens and enriches their appreciation of what community is all about".[19] Vincent identifies the members as people who often "begin by feeling a radical alienation from the total pattern of the monochrome and humanly bruising technocratic society". But their membership in the alternative church or community enables them to "find some of the lost levels of their own consciousness...and end up <u>less</u> alienated from the world and everyone else".[20] He calls this a "feeling of <u>disalienation</u>".

The movement of communities is able to respond to issues which the institutional churches are too inflexibe to handle. One example Clark cites is Christian education where the church has spurned the liberatory approach and contented itself with instructing, training and even sometimes indoctrinating. It has allowed itself

to become trapped in a notion of education as the "banking" of religious knowledge in "empty minds".

> It has contracted out of telling its story, and of communicating it in a way that its Founder demonstrated again and again...[Whereas the new communities of learning] are grappling with the mysteries and complexities of the world in which man lives and the ultimate questions about it. They are enabling us to tell each other stories and to listen attentively: they are realizing that there are no answers or endings other than those which the listener discovers for himself. There is the speaking of the yes, the truth as they know it, but not the speaking of the truth as it must be received by others.[21]

Rodes' method of conveying his "speaking of the yes" to the alternative communities, is by telling the stories of a number of intentional communes and radical churches, followed by impressionistic reflections upon the signs of the times incarnated in these lived parables. A more organised or analytic method of presentation would kill the distinctive variety of the groups he chooses to describe which "are all both special and typical".[22]

> We're going to have to hold in check our neurotic need for a neat picture...So we will simply look and listen at a small variety of the places where those who run, rest, reflect, and rebuild - some communes, some experimental churches, and some of the persons on pligrimage from static to dynamic life.[23]

9.2.2 Urban Mission

Vincent also uses story as the organising pattern of his theological reflections on the para-church and urban mission.[24] The mission groupings of his context are traditional and alternative churches, located in the most difficult and yet most vigorous setting for Christian mission in contemporary Britain - the devastated inner city. These churches in their life, activity, organisation and community are a challenge to the dominant and

monocultural suburban status quo in society and church. Their distinctive elements, again, can only be conveyed in the image or story which transmits the feel of their life. The fundamental theological method is to set the disciples' contemporary existence beside the existence of their Lord. "We set our story beside the story of Jesus."

> All through this book, therefore, I shall be telling city stories in Jesus language and Jesus stories in city language. I shall sometimes tell an apparently completely secular story about something in the city but then show a Jesus element in it. Sometimes, I shall tell an apparently purely religious or churchy story about something in our Christian community, but then show a city-wide element in it.[25]

This method suggests that the narrative theologians' three-fold typology of story[24] is not a helpful classification. It separates canonical story from life story and community story theology, as was noted in section 7.4. The community movements discussed in this section have opted for an integrated or dynamic understanding which is able to relate "life stories" and "canonical stories" in the midst of active struggles. The groups which Vincent describes do also show allegiance to overarching "community stories". But their dynamic engagement in struggle leads to a "post-sectarian attitude" and a "provisional ethos, an acceptance of pluralism within the group"[27] rather than a "high visibility" dogmatically orientated formulation.[28]

9.2.3 Story as Hermeneutical Tool

Story becomes a double-edged hermeneutical tool. It is the secular story which can interpret the bible narratives and it is the "canonical narrative" by which people interpret their experience in society. Fraser reviews some of these narrative approaches to

biblical exegesis as part of his main concern with "reinventing theology as the people's work". He writes from the context of training for urban mission. Without downgrading the contribution which biblical scholarship makes to exegesis he argues that the biblical text cannot become alive today without "knowledge gained from life-perceptions" complementing the work of the critical tools.[29] He uses Hollenweger's approach to illustrate his argument. Hollenweger attempts an imaginative reconstruction of "the theological and economic class-struggles and conflicts" within the church at Corinth.[30]

The first stage is a study of the religious struggle of the Corinthian church in relation to the conflicts and social class tensions within the church community. The next stage is an imaginatively constructed narrative of the conflict at a worship service among the Christians in Corinth. The conflict is sparked in this case by a riot in Corinth in which a Christian slave has been arrested. One of the women in the congregation challenges the prestigious members to do something to defend the slave in the name of Christian brotherhood. Then there is an argument about her ability to speak in the congregation as a woman. The issues illustrate how the internal conflicts reflect the wider social and economic conflicts in Corinth itself. The third stage is the "testing" within the contemporary group of believers who have listened to the narrative. They reflect on the story's "resonances with contemporary questions faced" in their own lives.[31]

Fraser also reviews Davies and Vincent's biblical study method which has many resonances with Hollenweger's. It has been developed within a practical ministry situation in areas of urban

conflict. It is aimed at the same goal, to "reflect on our experience, link it with the stories of Jesus, and derive mandates for new action in the contemporary world".[32] They argue that contemporary Christians are in the same position as the early church; they are "second Christians" who, unlike the "first Christians" of Jesus' own lifetime, cannot ask Jesus for an answer to a particular problem in their situation. But they can ask themselves, "Is there anything in our memory of Jesus which can help us to find our own answer?"[33] The story form of the scripture arose from such usage in the past. That is why narrative and contextual approaches to scripture reading are important today. They describe the process through which the early church came to value stories.

> And so they were led to a new obedience in unprecedented situations. When that happened, they found that the older stories of Jesus were, after all, worth remembering and re-telling; they discovered the connections between what God had been doing in Jesus and what God was seeking to do through them in their new situations. So they treasured and recorded these stories: they needed the stories of the past in order to interpret and to respond to the demands of the present.[34]

9.3 THE DYNAMIC OF STORY

Chapters 8 and 9 have, so far, sketched a picture of the use of story for theological reflection in varied situations of oppression and poverty. This section will examine the common features which have emerged in this survey.

If, as Brown argues, the crying need in theology at present is, "the 'doing' of theology as a process" in terms of "human struggle, anguish, pain, and exploitation". Then the traditional

orientation "to books, ideas, concepts and modes of argument"is inappropriate.[35] The method of story is the prime vehicle for this theological approach.

This survey of the story method has been impressionistic. The various experiments with doing theology in story are not a systematic enterprise. They happen at the edges of the institutions and have no publishing programme to project them. The methods are emerging at the places where there is great difficulty in the communication of gospel: in situations of poverty and oppression. It is not being developed in the places with the greatest leisure to document the process and think it through. Much of its style and documentation is ephemeral or considered unworthy of "serious" scrutiny; for example, one of the most imaginative contemporary British "ways into" the parables is by retelling them in cartoon strips form. They are the self-published productions of a trade union shop steward trying to communicate with semi-literate hospital workers.[36]

Despite difficulties, the method of theological reflection by means of stories continues because it is really needed. In the situations described in these chapters people are living through struggles which demand a living gospel. Wink criticised the practice of biblical criticism, in Chapter 3, for asking questions of the texts that "were seldom one on which human lives hinged". But the questions brought to the text by the Korean minjung theologians are ones on which human lives do hang.[37] Segundo criticised the aridity of the "death of God" theology by making a similar observation. "In the concrete struggle for liberation, the danger is not the death of God but the death of the theologian,

his interpreter.[36] The intensity of struggle varies from situation to situation in the examples considered here, but the questions which are brought to the scripture are all ones on which human lives hinge.

In these situations the dynamic of story is the bridge between language and praxis. Its pattern was outlined in the Introduction and at the beginning of Chapter 8. The dynamic of story images and promotes praxis for historical change. It achieves this first, through the power of story in simplicity. Second, story functions as an interpretation of people's lives and of the way of Jesus by the rehearsal and re-enactment of his stories in contemporary situations. Third, the dynamic of story operates through its impact on narrator and listeners. It offers them the possibility of building a common self-definition over against an oppressive reality and it offers transforming encounters with "others". These stages will now be discussed in more detail.

9.3.1 The Dynamic - Imaging Historical Change

From the time when the early Christians "told the story of Jesus in such a way as to set Him over against the imperial, emperor worshipping cult of Rome",[37] the method of story has been the vehicle for the imaging and promoting of radical political change - that is to say, change in the interaction of powerless and powerful in its broadest perspective. The parables are the classic examples. "God communicates himself to men and women in the unexpected and shocking dislocation of normal values and securities."[40]

The examination of the stories of Jesus in Par Two demonstrated the dynamic contextual basis of the scripture stories. Davies argues that the foundation documents show us theologies "pulled into existence by the experience of a story taking place".[41]

> The one great result of a century of critical scholarship is not that we can evaluate the historicity of documents or put them in order of compilation; it is that we have been made to recognize how every element in the gospels (and in much of the rest of scripture) owes its existence to the needs and pressures within the life-situation of a particular community needing authority for its propaganda, resources for its apologetic, motivation for its resistance to oppression, and an interpretation of history in a situation of conflict, betrayal, failure, and death. People with this kind of situation are not motivated and upheld by arguments or speculations; they need the emotional and identificational sustenance of specimens, models, paradigms and stories. It is one of the supreme treasures of the Christian inheritance that its fundamental expression is in the form of story and not theorem.[42]

The dynamic of story results, first of all, from its power.

9.3.2 The Power of Story - In Simplicity

It is one of the great values of story that everyone can join in. It is not the preserve of the intelligent. Collins remarks on its value for feminist theology because, "Testifying is a cherished tradition and telling our stories to one another is what women have always done."[43] It is an accessible mode of communication, a common denominator of the human family. A theology by story allows all people to "do theology" instead of making it the preserve of those with a "knowledge content orientation".[44] The Filipino peasants are despised by the landlords and do not have the power of education, but, through the power of story, they can make a critique of the landlords which "turns the tables".

The Christian way cannot be succesfully controlled by an educated elite because the power of its story belongs to all. As Ellul argues, God's gift of revelation did not come as a "a book of metaphysics" or "a perfected wisdom" which could be expropriated by the philosphers. It came in the form of a man about whom stories are told and the stories can be appropriated by all.[43]

9.3.3 The Function of Story - Rehearsal of Jesus' Story

The story functions as an **interpretation** of people's lives. The minjung theologians, who were described in section 8.2, experienced the stories told by Korean workers to urban-industrial mission groups, as an interpretation of their life in struggle. The **hermeneutical** link between their contemporary stories and their history of oppression was found in the stories of the traditional mask dances. These presented a **metaphorical** image of their suffering or han. The task of the theologian was to retell and reflect on "the stories and the social biography of the minjung and the hopes and aspirations of the minjung in the world and history".[44]

At the same time the stories of struggle for justice in urban-industrial mission act as an **interpretation** of the biblical revelation. They establish a **hermeneutical** bridge in social praxis between the first century revelation and contemporary experience. They present to the world an acted **metaphor** of the Kingdom of God. Hargleroad sums this up in his introduction to a world-wide collection of mission stories.

> The Judaeo-Christian heritage which holds us in unity is a series of stories; in many ways the Christian theology is a story-telling theology. Urban-Industrial Mission is

> clearly a story-telling sign of the presence of God in this world, its cities and its industries, its rural lands and people's movements.[47]

The "dialectical interplay" between bible and society which Cone was anxious to maintain is present in these stories. They rehearse the stories of Jesus in a form which is "for us" because it is grounded in contemporary experience. The revelation of Jesus Christ is rehearsed and actualised in concrete signs. Webber describes this as engagement in "a living dialogue between contemporary issues in faith and obedience and the witness of Scripture and tradition, seeking not to find a traditional answer but to be open to the new truth which God is offering his faithful people".[48]

On the one hand, contemporary stories and experience illuminate and interpret the scriptures. Members of a Filipino consultation on urban industrial mission discuss how "the bible [is] experienced" when they work in a community organisation.

> Contact with such real situations seems to concretize and enrich one's understanding of the Bible. For instance, the Exodus appears as not just an abstract symbol but also as one's experienced reality, of agitation, organization, cunning tactics, demonstration, confrontation, and even violence.[49]

On the other hand, biblical stories are actualised in contemporary praxis and in the stories told about it. The editor of a collection of "stories of urban rural mission" from ten countries makes the following rationale for their significance.

> Christians engage with the poor as they begin to move as subjects of their own history, in the conviction that God is present and active in those struggles. These Christians believe they are called to join their Lord in his redemptive action. They are called to be witnesses to the signs of the Kingdom of God which can be recognized in these very struggles for justice.[50]

The stories have an impact on their narrator and hearer which is transforming. This is the third feature of the dynamic of story.

9.3.4 The Impact of Story - To Empower and Transform

The life of faith "is to be lived within the context of a community that embodies and remembers the Story".[51] This creates a sense of shared common identity. It is not the highly individual sense of identity which is the focus of so much concern in the alienating societies of Western affluence.[52] Common identity arises, as Cone testifies, out of story as "the history of individuals coming together in the struggle to shape life according to commonly held values".[53] Vincent notes that the movement to form alternative Christian communities in Britain enables people to discover a new personal orientation. He calls it a way of "disalienation" which enables alienated individuals to "live more relatedly".[54] It is a way by which oppressed and exploited people gain control of their lives. "In the process of telling our stories as a conscious political act, we begin to define ourselves and our reality".[55] The dynamic of story functions as means to empower people who are powerless.

The dynamic of story also functions as a transforming encounter by which people see themselves through others, eyes. They begin to see the world from the "viewpoint of the suffering" and are forced to take sides. This is graphically illustrated in the story of an alternative community from an economically depressed inner city area of Birmingham. The community members are forced to reconsider their identity as they listen to the stories of their poor immigrant neighbours. They find an identity as oppressors thrust

upon them for which they must make amends.

> People of faiths other than Christianity living in Britain are mostly poor, black or Asian, and oppressed by this society. The history of their countries of origin are ones of colonisation by Britain and the theft of resources...Some of our neighbours, through this history link experiences with Christian missionaries with bad experiences of colonial rule. We have to understand the dubious role which many missionaries had and we have an awesome responsibility to make amends, to befriend people whose nations and people have been mistreated by Britain and to befriend people who have suffered from actions carried out in the name of Christianity. Our task is to befriend, to restore trust and to take joint action for justice with our neighbours.[56]

The story that their neighbours have to tell provides them with a transforming encounter. Like someone hearing a parable, they have to respond to the story. Their acts of befriending lead them into radical action in their neighbourhood: they set up an innovative "farm", in unused back gardens, to grow Asian vegetables which are unavailable locally; they form an employment scheme to mobilise the dormant skills of an area of high unemployment which is ignored by the authorities; they engage in dialogue at the local mosque in order to respectfully discern their neighbours' concerns; they visit Pakistan and the Carribean to cement the ties of kin and locality.[57] In a variety of imaginative ways they act in response to the stories they have heard. Then their own actions become stories which are signs of the Kingdom of justice to which they are discipled. Their stories of urban mission are a rehearsal in their own time and place of the story of Jesus: this is that.

The told word is heard and becomes the acted word. The dynamic of story becomes evident in its power, its function, and its impact.

This chapter concludes the survey of the use of story in contemporary theology which has been the focus of Part Three. The stories of struggle in Chapters 8 and 9 have displayed the dynamic of story which has just been reviewed. The same dynamic can be seen in the parabolic stories and actions of Jesus from Part Two. The survey of narrative theology in Chapter 7 showed the value which modern academic theology ascribes to the narrative element in the biblical revelation and in the depths of human consciousness. Narrative theology, however, failed to thoroughly embed its understanding of narrative in the world of social praxis which is evident in the stories of the two subsequent chapters.

Part of the reason for this failure can be found in the limitation of hermeneutical understanding to the world of language. Crossan says that "reality is language" and we live in language like fish live in the sea.[88] But reality is not language for the Korean minjung, the Filipino peasant or even the Pakistani immigrant to Britain, though it may be for the American professor. Reality is domination, labour, and social praxis in their contexts: it is interpreted in language but it does not exist as language. Part Four of this thesis turns again to hermeneutics in order to examine this problem. Chapter 10 considers the perspective of critical hermeneutics on philosophical hermeneutics. The discussion introduces an experiment in contextual theology in Chapter 11; some stories are told of transforming encounters in social praxis.

PART FOUR

AN EXPERIMENT IN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY BY MEANS OF STORIES

> There has always been a hermeneutical problem in Christianity because Christianity proceeds from a proclamation. It begins with a fundamental preaching that maintains that in Jesus Christ the kingdom has approached us in decisive fashion. But this fundamental preaching, this word, comes to us through writings, through the Scriptures, and these must constantly be restored as the living word if the primitive word that witnessed to the fundamental and founding event is to remain contemporary...This relation between writing and the word and between the word and the event and its meaning is the crux of the hermeneutical problem.
>
> Paul Ricoeur
> Conflict of Interpretations[1]

10. HERMENEUTICS AS PRAXIS AGAINST DOMINATION

10.1 CONTRASTING HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

In this thesis I have discussed the dynamic of story as an active component in the transmission of gospel as liberatory praxis in the contemporary context. I started by surveying the main hermeneutical presuppositions upon which the study of scripture depends today and noticed a crisis in the transmission of the tradition. It is a crisis in the contemporary apprehension of the biblical texts as models which Christians can appropriate for the practice of their lives in community. The crisis is perceived by some commentators, like Smart, as an "unbridgeable corridor" between the seminary departments of biblical criticism and practical theology. Others see it, in the terms of Pannenberg's hermeneutical theory, as an "unbridgeable chasm".

Yet the crisis is not observable, as a crisis, in those contexts where Christians face the most critical situations: the black American experience, Latin American struggle, Korean and Filippino oppression, the subjection of women, British inner city decline. Here the crisis is in the reality that people face in their daily lives. Here the story of lived experience and the story of biblical tradition are in a dialectical relationship. Instead of

trying to bridge the "unbridgeable chasm" at its intellecual height, here Christian leaders and community leaders descend into the "chasm" of real struggle in the hope that there might be a way across down there at the bottom of society. The crisis is really a possibility, as Moltmann argued.[2]

The contrast between hermeneutics as menta reflection and hermeneutics as reflection on praxis is present throughout the argument of this thesis. There are the contrasting understandings of the parables which were discussed in Part Three. Some interpret them as existential challenges to consciousness; others as challenges to the practice of domination. We have also observed the contrast between a narrative theology which reflects the individualizing tendency of the affluent western nations, reviewed in Chapter 7, and the theology by story of those engaged in the struggle for liberation, which was sketched in Chapters 8 and 9. The contrast is also present in the hermeneutical presuppositions which underpin interpretation.

At this stage in the argument it is necessary to go back and ask if the existential hermeneutic with which we started is sufficient to carry us through to the understanding of hermeneutics as praxis. The next section will consider the recent history of development of the principles of hermeneutics in the light of the experience of domination and the struggle for liberation.

10.2 LANGUAGE AS HUMAN BEING IN THE WORLD

Robinson describes a hermeneutical principle as "that with which the text is confronted to call forth from it what it has to say".[3] The principles which are now widely accepted have themselves arisen from a tradition of hermeneutical development. They are especially influenced by Heidegger's existential categories, which have centred on language as "human being in the world".[4] Instead of seeking, with the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, to become "contemporary with the author - reliving his experience",[5] the "New Hermeneutic" knows that no authentic interpretation can leave its own time behind. Gadamer, rejects any claim to objectivity.

Proponents of the "New Hermeneutic" are phenomenologists of the "event of understanding". As Palmer notes, they "stress the historical character of this 'event', and consequently the limitations of all claims to 'objective knowledge' and 'objective validity'".[6]

They regard the relationship between interpreter and text as a "language event", which is approached through the preunderstanding or tradition of the interpreter. The hermeneutic philosophers recognise that the interpreter is not only a questioner, but is questioned by the text, in the dialogue of question and answer. He or she must "grasp and be grasped by the text".[7] The event of understanding cannot take place without being applied to the present situation of the interpreter. Practically relevant knowledge emerges as something "which had not been there before".[8] Bleicher sums up the result, in saying that, "the subject himself

is changed by being made aware of new possibilities of existence and his responsibility for his own future".[9] The phenomenological approach avoids the sterility of the subject-object dichotomy and claims for itself universality as a description of what is.

10.3 CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS

However, proponents of critical theory, such as Apel and Habermas, challenge the phenomenological approach because of its focus on language as the "central issue of hermeneutic philosophy".[10] They criticise both its naive acceptance of the intentions on the surface of language, and its passivity. They criticise Gadamer's "uncritical acceptance of the role of tradition as authoritative for present concerns, together with his "ontologisation of language", which fails to recognise its use as a medium of domination.[11]

Apel criticises the "idealist presuppositions" of this hermeneutical approach which neglects "...the material conditions under which history proceeds..". It wrongly assumes that:

> ...the step from pre-history to history proper has already been taken and that men are the conscious and self-determining creators of their own future, as philosophy has always promised.[12]

Gadamer is criticised for ignoring conditions of scarcity which constitute the "realm of necessity", or "second nature", "in which social processes appear as natural events outside the scope of conscious intervention".[13] Apel argues that:

> History, viz. the progress towards self-realization, is still hobbling along on crutches, deformed by outmoded forms of domination even in conditions where material want should already be an anachronism, and supported only by conceptions of human dignity which still have to be

> asserted defiantly in the face of an inhumane reality rather than being taken for granted.[14]

Critical hermeneutics suggests that an attitude of suspicion, of seeing through, like Nietzsche's "art of mistrust",[15] is required which will unmask reality by the "counterposing of concrete reality to its mystifications".[16]

For Habermas, a more adequate framework for the interpretation of meaning would "refer to the systems of labour and domination which, in conjunction with language, constitute the 'objective context from within which social actions have to be understood'".[17] Such a framework would avoid the "making light of economic and political factors which may drastically limit the 'horizon' of some or all of the participants" in any process of interpretation.[18]

> Tradition, as a context that includes the systems of work and domination, enables as well as restricts the parameters within which we define our needs and interact in order to satisfy them. That socio-historical processes should occur over the heads and even behind the backs of those carrying them, who may systematically be unable to give an accurate account of their individual actions and the motivations underlying them, points to an approach to social phenomena which transcends the scope of merely meaning-interpretative investigations.[19]

Gadamer's hermeneutic "attempts the mediation of tradition and is thereby directed at the past in the endeavour to determine its significance for the present". Habermas' critical hermeneutics, however, is "directed at the future and at changing reality rather than merely interpreting it".[20] The critical approach, by making transparent the mechanisms of domination in language and tradition, enables "human actors to regain mastery over their destiny".[21]

10.4 ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

Because "the enlightenment which follows from radical understanding is always political"[22] the interpreter suffers painful choices. Not only must the "contemplative self-sufficiency" of the interpreter's role have to be given up for engagement with the "emancipatory interest", but also this engagement in practice will interpret the interpreter, in just the same way that the hermeneutical theorists like Fuchs and Gadamer have noticed the text moving into a "criticism of our own self-understanding" which "interprets us".[23]

In biblical critical terms, the limitations of the language-as-world existential approach to interpretation can be seen in Crossan's understanding of the parables. I have already pointed out, in section 6.5.2, the way in which he absolutises one aspect of the meaning of the parables by abstracting the "challenge" to patterns of human expectation from its location in specific circumstances and turning it into a principle of the widest generality. Crossan's focus on language as creator of world ignores the way in which language "expresses and transforms a world that already exists".[24] His view of parable as the story that subverts world, leads to a "withdrawal from involvement in any effort to change the world by action".[25] The transformation of world involves not only subversion of its established patterns but also the establishment of new patterns which "take account of the disruptive truth as well as of such truth as was present in the old world".[26]

It is the dynamic of story which can provide a practical hermeneutical principle to lead the interpreter towards this involvement in transformation of world. The transformation of world is also a transformation of self, because "every hermeneutics is..., explicitly or implicitly, self understanding by means of understanding others".[27] We can define the role of the dynamic of story as a hermeneutical principle by contrasting it with the role Robinson assigns to a hermeneutical principle.

> A hermeneutical principle is that with which the text is confronted to call forth from it what it has to say. Put otherwise, a hermeneutical principle is the "place" where the text is to be put if it is to begin to speak. Put a cat before a mouse and the cat gets into action and shows what a cat is.[28]

What we have learnt from following the dynamic of story, in this thesis, is that the terms of this principle must be reversed. It is [illegible] perspective on hermeneutics. Rather than being concerned with finding the "place" where the text is to be put so that it can speak to us, we must look for the "location" of the interpreter, in order to understand the significance of the interpretation he or she makes.

Cone adresses this issue when comparing Tillich's culturally affirming understanding of God's Word with Barth's culturally challenging understanding. The meaning of a text differs according to the "objective context" from within which someone listens.

> Though Tillich was not speaking of the black situation, his words are applicable to it. To be sure, as Barth pointed out, God's Word is alien to man and thus comes to him as a "bolt from the blue," but one must be careful about which man one is speaking of. For the oppressors, the dehumanizers, the analysis is correct. However, when we speak of God's revelation to the oppressed, the analysis is incorrect. His revelation comes to us in and through the cultural situation of the oppressed. His Word

is our word; his existence, our existence.[29]

The perspective of critical hermeneutics confirms the practical experience of the dynamic of story which has been reported in Chapters 8 and 9. The theologies which emerge from solidarity with the struggle of the poor and oppressed, prove that the concrete location of the interpreter is the hermeneutical turning point. From participation in praxis the scriptures take on new meaning and vigour. We see this in the testimony of Filippino community activists who find themselves living with the story of the Exodus.[30] New understandings of scripture lead to a re-evaluation of the tradition. We see this in the Korean search for "historical references for a theology of minjung".[31] And new aspects of the tradition become significant. We see this in the Latin American chronicle of the poor "remaking history from beneath" and in the summons "to follow in the footsteps of the poor in this history".[32]

10.5 AN ALTERATION OF HORIZON, BY AN ALTERATION OF STANDPOINT

The transformation which is required by a critical hermeneutics of the bible is paralleled, as was noticed when considering the practice of Jesus, in that other discipline of textual interpretation, literary studies. There is a similar contemporary concern to find a form of literary studies and appreciation which does not bracket out of existence the world of domination and labour with which all literary production is undergirded. It is not a new phenomenon. George Orwell, writing a 1930's essay, "Down the Mine", observes how his own writing is only possible because of the world of labour and domination in the mines, which provides

the energy he needs for his writing.

> Practically everything we do, from eating an ice to crossing the Atlantic, and from baking a loaf to writing a novel, involves the use of coal, directly or indirectly.[33]

Raymond Williams, in discussing this change of perspective which brings back into vision that which is normally bracketed out, calls it "an alteration of landscape, by an alteration of seeing".[34] It is precisely the same kind of "alteration" that is required in the moment of biblical interpretation and which is illustrated in the stories above. It could be called in this context "an alteration of seeing, by an altera ion of landscape". This movement out of the normal "landscape" of the subject into a new position alongside the poor and oppressed provokes a new interpretation of reality

We can observe the steps of this process in the hermeneutical argument of Segundo who describes a fourfold process of interpretational change. First, he argues, comes an experience of dissatisfaction within the socio-economic milieu, which leads to an act of will to break with these patterns. This leads to a realisation of the falsity of a previous reading of the biblical text and forces a new global interpretation. These are the stages Segundo identifies in the hermeneutical circle that "continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal".[35]

The experience of a new situation or encounter which does not cohere with our existing structure of expectations brings about a state of dissatisfaction with the mystifying impact of the

existing ideology, and a will to make a break with it. This leads to a dissatisfaction with the structure of ideas which are read from the bible and provokes a new reading or interpretation of the bible texts.

Segundo argues that the hermeneutical circle:

> ...stems from the fact that each new reality obliges us to interpret the word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then to go back and reinterpret the word of God again, and so on.[36]

His approach contains the implicit commitment to changing reality in the light of the revelation of God. It builds on the existential hermeneutic of Bultmann, in emphasizing the newness of an interpretation which is "for us", but goes beyond it in terms of his reflexive commitment to the transformation of reality which will lead to a new turn of the circle.

Segundo's fourfold circle illuminates the narrative pattern of the **dynamic of story** and will be reflected in the four stories of the next chapter. **Rehearing** the story in a new context, with the poor, brings sudden illumination. It challenges the self-understanding of the interpreter. The next chapter explores the **dynamic of story** as it challenges the interpreter by offering a new location, in praxis, for the hermeneutical task. The chapter begins with a review of the dynamic of story which has emerged in this thesis. Four stories of hermeneutical transformation are then told which illustrate in practice the theoretical discussions of the thesis.

11. THE DYNAMIC OF STORY: FOUR STORIES

11.1 THE DYNAMIC OF STORY

Part One of this thesis introduced the dimension of the hermeneutical task which demanded in Cone's words a dialectical relation between bible and contemporary situation. The thesis has developed within that dialectic. Part Two examined the biblical stories; Part Three examined contemporary stories. The first chapter of Part Four has earthed the hermeneutic task firmly in the critique of oppression and domination, giving it an emancipatory interest.

The purpose of this chapter is to put the theory of the thesis into practice by telling four stories. They all present the dynamic of story in the dialectical relation between bible and contemporary situation.

When describing the dynamic of story I have used the formula: told word becomes heard word which becomes acted word. The formula expresses the shape of the dynamic but does not define its beginning or end. The argument between Jeremias and Crossan about whether the acted parables provoked the spoken parables or vice versa was noted in section 6.1. The dynamic of story cannot be

trapped in such an arid debate. The point about the parabolic stories and actions (argued in detail in 5.1 and 6.5) is that they constituted a single proclamation in which language and action were fused. Thus, the hearing of a story leads to new action; and the action leads to a new story being told. It is in the hearing of the story that the possibility of transformation resides.

The evidence of Part Three, which considered contemporary stories, suggested that transformation can begin from the hearing of contemporary stories which are in a "dialectical relationship" with biblical stories. Those who are trapped in dominant ideologies can begin to experience transformation by hearing the stories of those engaged in the struggle against oppression and domination. This hearing, true to the dynamic of story, must then proceed to action. Then new stories can be told which new people may hear.

It is in this way, I would submit, that Cone's call to white theologians (which was discussed in Chapter 3) can be fulfilled. He complains about "scholars whose consciousness is obviously limited by the ruling class", and asserts that:

> What is needed is more biblical theologians whose consciousness is defined by the oppressed of the land so that the task and goal of biblical hermeneutics might be rescued from the hands of scholars whose consciousness is obviously limited by the ruling class.[1]

This process can be seen happening in the four stories told below. They illustrate the feature of the dynamic that I have called its impact. In particular, they are examples of the impact which I identified as providing the possibility of transforming encounter: someone is provoked to take sides in terms of the gospel and their

contemporary situation. In each case the subject of the story has heard someone's story; he has then acted in response to that hearing. In the first, it is the story of an innocent man imprisoned; in the second, the story of Chinese peasants suffering military occupation; in the third, it is the story of alienated youth; and in the fourth, that of the homeless poor. In each case the person experiences, to some extent, the situation of people under domination. His experience is transforming in three ways.

First, it provides the basis for a transformation of consciousness as he begins to experience the world of oppression and the perspective of the poor which he did not know. Second, it provokes a transformed understanding of the bible story as it becomes a living word in the contemporary situation - in Ricoeur's phrase, a primitive word which remains contemporary.[2] Third, the experience is transformed itself. It becomes the subject matter in the telling of a new story which others may hear.

In each story the location allows the hermeneutical task to take place. It provokes dissatisfaction with the ruling ideology and sets in motion the four phase hermeneutical circle which Segundo charts and which was discussed in the previous chapter. It starts in ideological suspicion about one issue, generalizes to the whole superstructure of ideology, leads to exegetical suspicion, and results in "our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal".[3] Each of the following stories provides a "snap-shot" of that process.

Apart from these introductory remarks the stories will be left to stand on their own without further interpretation.

11.2 THE DOMINATION OF IMPRISONMENT AS HERMENEUTICAL SITUATION

A story of ministry to right an injustice.

"What would the Methodist Church have said if I had ended up in prison?" asked the minister.

"You had it coming to you!" blurted out a woman who sat in the pew, then she cringed in embarassment realising what she had said.

The minister was preaching to a small congregation in the Old Ford Chapel in London's East End. He had asked a rhetorical question but, inside the church building, reality had overstepped the bounds of convention, just as it had done in his life.

He had been describing his part in a campaign which had galvanised the capital and splashed headlines across the pages of the daily press. The "Release George Davis Campaign" was definitely not respectable. Davis was a London taxi-driver and small time crook who had received a 21 year sentence for his part in an armed robbery. But he had not been anywhere near the bank when it was robbed. His less than respectable life militated against respectable support in the attempt to have his sentence quashed. Two people, his wife and a boyhood friend, decided to campaign for his release. His friend had been with him when the robbery was committed by others. After the official channels had dried up, the campaign started using the unofficial ones. It was a completely home-grown working class East London campaign which attracted no support from the middle class political and civil rights organisations which might have helped; people were thrown back on the resources of their own imaginations.

Peter Chappell, the friend, was a huge determined ex-guardsman. He was involved with the adventure playground at the minister's church. He told the minister Davis' story until the minister too became convinced that a miscarriage of justice had been done. He became a kind of unofficial "chaplain" to the small group of family and friends which made the campaign. It was a role which ranged from offering moral support, to illegal fly-posting at night, and even smuggling money into prison on clerical visits. Within the context of British oppression, mild by comparison with military dictatorships, but heavy enough when mobilised, it became a risky involvement. It was all the more so, because his ministerial colleagues did not sympathise with him and believed he was doing the wrong thing, Their naive faith in "British Justice" was so ingrained. After all, this was no historic liberation movement with widespread support. It was a lunatic-seeming group of nobodies who always went too far.

By now, you could not travel from central London to the East End, without passing huge graffiti on all the most prominent bridges and walls proclaiming, "GEORGE DAVIS IS INNOCENT OK?" There was something distinctive about the aggressive cockney question, "OK?", which characterised the campaign. The marches and slogans were still ignored by the establishment. So they began small scale, publicity seeking, acts of sabotage. These demonstrations ranged from a window smashing attack on the British Embassy in Paris, to an axe attack on the famous Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square, both of which attracted hardly any attention. It was not until they dug up the pitch at Headingley Cricket Ground, on the eve of a critical Test Match, that the campaign hit the headlines. For this, Davis's friend, Chappell, was sentenced to 18 months in prison, where he continued his vendetta against the authorities, losing remission for good behaviour and, although not to the ultimate, laying down his life for his friend.

During his imprisonment, and while strenuously denying any mal-administration, the Home Office did reopen the case. Quite soon and quite quietly, Davis was pardoned, exonerated and freed. Suddenly the campaign was given the respectablity it had been denied before. The tone of high moral rectitude with which the campaign had been vilified over the months turned into hesitating admiration. But the campaigners, and perhaps especially, had all experienced being shoved beyond the pale and being on the wrong side of prison walls.

The minister found, as he reflected upon it with fellow christians, that it had been a hermeneutical experience. His experience of prisons and prisoners gave him new eyes to see. He experienced being on the wrong side of the law with no recourse, because the weight of social approbation was against them. He experienced rejection from his own colleagues who claimed the same commitment to justice he had, but could not accept the praxis it forced him into. He experienced derision, as someone gone slightly mad, from many who knew his involvement. He also experienced the support and encouragement to strive on, which was generated among the members of the campaign. These people, living in one of the poorest and most deprived parts of the country, had no other resources than their imagination and commitment. But this was sufficient to move even the mountain of the British Home Office.

He experienced, as he said in his sermon, what it was to be in something like the position of St Paul. This gave him the new eyes with which to read the letters of Paul. For the first time, he claimed, despite many years of Biblical study, he actually realised just how much time Paul spent in prison. He felt the dynamics within which the apostle lived his life and his mission. And, not for the first time, he marvelled at the distance that the institutional church, as interpreter of the Scriptures, had moved away from this life experience of being under domination. He wondered what the church's reaction would have been if he had been caught and imprisoned. Would they have listened with as much expectation to his words as they did to the sanctified words of Paul's texts? Undoubtedly, some of his closer associates, knowing and trusting him, would have done so. But the majority would have thought him an embarrassing fool.

He now knew what Paul meant, when he said:

For it seems to me that God has given the very last place to us apostles, like men condemned to die in public as a spectacle to the whole world of angels and of mankind. For Christ's sake we are fools...We are no more than this world's refuse; we are the scum of the earth to this very moment! (I Cor.1:9,10a,13b)

The experience also opened his eyes again to his own context. This is how he reflected upon his involvement as a hermeneutical experience - he calls it the issue of "seeing clearly".

> East London is the kind of place where it is almost impossible not to be impressed by something of magnitude every day - good things, corrupt things, beauty, pollution, cultural diversity, injustice, spontaneity, racism, alcoholism, earthy vitality, homelessness, bustling street market, bureaucracy. Seeing clearly what is really happening is very difficult. Seeing issues clearly inevitably means making enemies or at least creating misunderstandings.
>
> Three years ago a Minister of the Mission became involved in the "Free George Davis" Campaign. Because of that involvement he was on the receiving end of considerable criticism and abuse. Few people seemed to understand his reasons for involvement in such a controversial issue. Alongside the personal question of a man's wrongful imprisonment was an issue of equal importance. When a group of people have exhausted every acceptable legal, constitutional and lobbying tactic in order to get their voice heard on such a burning issue as 20 years' wrongful imprisonment, what does the Church do when nobody in a position of influence appears to listen? When those who have power, law and media control at their disposal simply ignore the voices that are raised, must not the Church stand with those who cry for justice? Taking sides in the George Davis Campaign inevitably meant being associated with digging up Test wickets and the outrage that followed. Many people argued the rights and wrongs of the Test wicket issue. Many argued the question of innocence or guilt. Few detractors were prepared to consider how, in our society, the voice of an unpopular, dispossessed group could be heard. Fewer still dared consider the question of controlling the media from the bottom by "making front page news". Seeing the real issues is always hard. Much of the time we fail to do so. When we do it is always disturbing and uncomfortable. If the Church is serious in its quest to carry Christ's cross it must expect such discomfort.[4]

11.3 MILITARY OCCUPATION AS HERMENEUTICAL SITUATION

A story of encounter with a situation which transforms the understanding of scripture.

Alan Dale began to translate Bible passages into his typical fresh, down to earth, vivid English for his student teachers. They had asked him for readings which their "average" pupils could understand, instead of the King James Version. C.F.D. Moule said the translation "startled" the reader and yet retained the "essentials" of the Scripture.[5] Dale explained that his insight arose from becoming aware that Jesus was a poet, living in a pre-scientific era, in an occupied country.

> Two things opened my eyes and made the story of Jesus "come home" to me...I find it difficult to exaggerate the change it made in my thinking about him. The first was the discovery - and it was indeed a discovery to me - that he lived in an occupied country with its resistance movement. I had lived in Asia in such a country and knew what that was like. Suddenly, whatever I made of Jesus, I could never again think of him as a mere figure in the past or (as some of my friends seemed to think) as a teacher of pious platitudes.[6]

He told the story of his hermeneutical experience.

> In 1929 I went out to China and in 1933 the Japanese invasion of Manchurea, North China, took place. They came as far south as Tientsin, occupying Callhope, although they publicly denied their military presence there. This was in the "Demilitarized Zone" south of the Manchurian border. They occupied T'angshan, the railway and mining town which was the centre of our Christian work in the north (in Hepei), with Fred Heslop in charge. I was in Shantung, and had to go north to T'angshan to see Fred, who was ill. So I had several times to move in and out of the area occupied by Japanese troops.
>
> So for the first time I lived in an "occupied country", and saw the effect this had on the life and attitudes and conversation of ordinary Chinese people. Suddenly, I found myself realizing that this was the situation in which Jesus grew up, and in which he carried out his ministry. The conversation with every meal in which he shared must have been very like the conversations I listened to. There, whatever the subject, the Japanese presence forced itself into the talk.
>
> I began to read Mark's story of Jesus in quite a different way. What Jesus had to say - his stories and remarks and sayings - took on a new liveliness and "bite". This impression and awareness deepened when I re-read Flavius Josephus' Jewish War, and years later, read the Israeli account of the freedom fighters, the Zealots, given in such books as Yigael Yadin's Masada.

> The desert meal with a group of 5,000 men looks to me like a mob looking for a way to become an effective resistance movement. The tragedy of the great Resistance movement up to the capitulation at Masada was that it had no leader. There was a whole succession of Messianic and Zealot leaders - but no one of them could gain total support. So, here, five thousand look to Jesus as the Leader in a revolt against the Romans.[7]

This insight reverberates through the stories of Jesus, giving new and distinctive nuances to old stories. In the story of the Gerasene demoniac, his name is "Legion". "What Jew," Dale would ask, "could hear that story of the Legion being driven into the sea as pigs, without hearing in it a story of national liberation?"

11.4 THE DOMINATION OF REJECTION AS HERMENEUTICAL SITUATION

A story of encounter with scripture which transforms the understanding of a situation.

When the Vicar of Reading was thrown bodily out of one of the town's main hotels it was a case of mistaken identity - or rather it was not.

He was someone who had been brought up in an impeccable middle class background and had the accent as evidence. Before becoming a vicar in the southern English town of Reading he had been a missionary in the Carribean and had been an embarrassment to his white congregation by refusing to follow their racist behaviour patterns in his own life. But he was not such a controversial figure to warrant summary ejection from a bar.

It was something that happened after reading Joachim Jeremias' book on The Parables of Jesus. He was excited by the challenge of this new way of seeing these old stories in the context of the life of Jesus and the early church. But it was not until the stories merged with his own context that they really came alive. The time was approaching for the annual Reading Rock Festival. The people of his parish looked forward with loathing and incomprehension to this annual invasion of hippies. They thought these young people were unwashed and immoral and only wanted them to go away. During the Festival, the respectable vicar became fascinated as he observed the animosities and hatreds of his parishioners reflecting the animosities and hatreds he had just been reading about in the parables. He decided to visit the Festival, wander among the tents, listen to the music, talk to the people and look for himself.

What he discovered changed his life. He felt that the unconventional visitors had more spontaneous interest in the deepest concerns of the gospel, more love, more joy, more acceptance, more fellowship and more striving for peace than had his parishioners. By the end he felt that his congregation

resembled far too closely the Pharisees and religious authorities of Jesus' day; while the hippies seemed more like the publicans and sinners. It was as though the Gospel was happening in his time and place.

As the next year's Festival approached he knew he had to do something about his discovery. Some local clergy invited him to join their "Tent Ministry" to the Festival-goers which would offer advice and counselling. But that was not the style that seemed right.

Eventually, he realised what he must do. Equipping himself with a bucket of water, soap, a towel and some talc, he wandered down to the tents dressed in flowing casual clothes, with beads and a crucifix round his neck and asked people if they would like to have their feet washed.

Never before had these young people been confronted by a minister of religion who was so direct and yet so unpatronising. Here was only an intimate, gentle offer of cooling comfort in the hot dusty atmosphere. It was an invitation which they could respond to as they wished. Many of them only felt scorn for the activities of the church, but this they could relate to immediately. Often people said, "But this is what Jesus used to do, isn't it?" People began to wash each other's feet and conversation about the most important things in their lives easily emerged from this simple act of demonstrable care. It was too simple to be sneered at, too gentle to be laughed off, too refreshing to be denied; and there was great joy.

But the local people still would not change their attitude nor begin to comprehend their vicar. So it was that one day, looking for all the world like an aged hippy, he entered one of the local hotels from which the visitors were barred, and was thrown out.

It was as though the scandal of the parables of Jesus had come alive in a conventional twentieth century English town. The rejects had been accepted and the respectable people had turned their backs on openness and possibility. For the vicar the text had happened in his own experience as his "horizon" of praxis had merged with that of the parable event of Jesus.

11.5 THE DOMINATION OF HOMELESSNESS AS HERMENEUTICAL SITUATION

A story of encounter which challenges dominant ideology.

I first encountered the hermeneutical problem on a cold winter's day in 1972, while walking down a derelict street in downtown Liverpool. A one-legged ragged old man grasping wooden crutches was leaning against the railings on the opposite side of the road, shouting. Its hard to describe that shout. He was not speaking to someone; there was no one near him; he was not directing his shouting at me, over the road. He was declaiming, maniacally. He was shouting out, "Jesus Christ!", over and over again. But he was not swearing. It sounded as though he was proclaiming his

identity. He was crazy.

It was a bizarre sight, even in that neighbourhood and I have never forgotten it. This was Everton Brow, the dividing line between Liverpool's Catholics and Protestants, the Cogs and the Proggers, where the graffitti about the Pope and King Billy, the IRA and the Orangemen, were violent and abusive The unemployment here was 25%, when in Britain as a whole it was 2.5%. Every shop in the mean nineteenth century streets and in the shabby new high rise neighbourhoods was protected by iron grills; something I had never seen before. As we nailed more planks onto the windows of our shop, as burglar guards, so the local youths resorted to kicking the whole windowframe out of the wall, until we had no possessions left to bother with.

I was living in a large broken down Georgian terraced house on the Brow, a member of a 25 strong household called the Simon Community. Most of the members were down and out homeless people who had been pushed and shoved in life until they had reached the bottom of the pile. About 15 of us lived there semi-permanently. The other 10 were the "casuals", selected each night from the crowd of 20 to 50 who lined up at the door for the chance of a bowl of soup and a bed. Some of us were the "workers" who kept the place going; some of us were the "residents" who were there because they had problems. But it was never so easy to draw that distinction in practice. Visitors often could not distinguish between us. We all lived at the same material level, ate the same food, wore clothes from the same second-hand shop, shared the same rooms, and received the same pocket money. We experienced living among those members of British society who were the most despised and rejected: the human cast-offs of prisons, psychiatric wards and other "corrective" institutions. Those of us who were workers gained more from the experience than we could ever contribute to it.

It was the sort of poverty that has existed throughout the ages. But for someone who had been brought up in the booming Britain of the fifties and sixties and had just passed through one of the most affluent and established universities in the world, it was an amazing experience which overturned every value my high-status education had presented. How to make sense of it and interpret its meaning was a constant pressure; how to make sense of and interpret an ancient university which understood itself to be committed to the highest values and yet lived without qualm in the same society as these poor people was just the other side of the coin.

As someone who had been brought up to respect the police, I learned to regard them as the enemy who were always out to move us on. As someone who had been brought up to visit hospitals if I needed healing, I learned to regard them as the oppressors who spurned us. As someone who had always assumed social work was a good thing, I learned it was just another way the authorities tried to control us for their benefit. And I learned these things in my bones, not in my head. I took some years to sort these things out in my head. But the learning in the bones only took minutes: like on the day an old man died in one of our beds because the emergency ward would not accept a loused up old man like that; he had to go through the "disinfestation" treatment

first, which was on the other side of town and would only be open in the morning - the hospital had to be kept clean of course.

But I also learned of the incredible dignity and generosity of the really poor. One rainy winter night among the crowd at the door were two friends, men in their forties. As the names of the ten "bed-winners" were called out they realized one of them was number ten and the other number eleven. They tried to get us to bend the rules to allow them both in, but there was not any good enough reason for that. The man who had been chosen then turned with dignity to the next man in the queue and gave him his bed. He walked off into the cold wet night with his friend rather than desert him. To give up a night's dry lodging and food in those circumstances was something we could hardly imagine.

We never had to sleep that rough. Even though it wasn't always easy, with commotion and disturbed nights, we still had a roof over us and blankets. We often had to visit the derelict houses or air vents where the homeless people stayed, so we knew something of what it was like, more than most people of our class.

It was here that, for the first time, I really heard those words of Jesus, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Lk. 9:58) When I had heard them before they had been spoken by well heeled, comfortably besuited preachers who each knew where they would lay their head that night. Some of them may have lived through a time of crisis, such as warfare, where they might literally have not known where they would sleep each night; but it was far from their experience when they stood in the pulpit. The radical nature of that dispossession which is the state of being homeless in a society based on home possession was never explored in the interpretation of that text. But for me, resident in a community where each had so little that sharing was the norm, a community which, despite the tensions and disturbances, it was a joy and a laugh to live in; for me, it was a text which suddenly came alive in experience, tutored as I was by the poorest of the poor.

When I walked along Everton Brow and heard a mad old dosser shouting out his name as though he was Jesus Christ, I had become prepared to believe him. Here was an hermeneutical circle I could engage in. This was an encounter which could carry the message of the gospel in a concrete, literal and radically challenging way. It disturbed the normal patterns and values of social life. It caused division and provoked commitment. It conveyed a message without religious words or religious sanctions; but it rehearsed the real presence of Christ, in the people without a place to lay their heads. It was a moment when the horizon of my life was drawn open so that it could now merge with the horizon of the text; it was a way into the hermeneutical circle. "It is not a question," says Bleicher, "of avoiding this circle but of getting into it properly since it contains the possibility of original insight."■

12. CONCLUSION

> If theology is to be meaningful for us, it must not start with abstractions, but with our stories - just as the early Hebrews and Christians of the Bible began with theirs. Somehow, our churches got the order reversed. How many of us were taught as children to memorize Bible stories and verses before we ever understood or had a chance to articulate our own story? We cannot appreciate the meaning of another's experience - especially if that experience occurred two and three thousand years ago - until we have asked the right questions of our own.[1]

The purpose of the study has been to begin to provide a rationale for the place of story in the doing of theology.

Its starting point was a recognition of the hermeneutical problem which is implicit in the Christian proclamation. The proclamation is, as Ricouer maintains, that "in Jesus Christ the kingdom has approached us in decisive fashion". The problem is that the scriptures which record this revelation "must constantly be restored as the living word if the primitive word that witnessed to the fundamental and founding event is to remain contemporary".[2]

My thesis is that the **dynamic of story** offers a way of restoring the "primitive word" as "living word", because it is the form in which the biblical revelation was couched and because it is, as Collins argues above, the way we order our experience. The argument of the dissertation seeks to substantiate that position.

The discussion of the hermeneutical problem in Part One showed that our attempts to appropriate the Christian revelation take place within three dialectical movements - what Song calls "the transposing movement"[3] of the gospel. There is the dialectic between **past and present;** the dialectic between **bible and social context;** and the dialectic between **language** and **praxis.** As people living in a particular social milieu, we are caught between these poles. The proclamation of Christ itself occurred within these same dialectics. The stories of Jesus and of the earliest Christian movement are a "transposing movement". The scripture shows Peter, at Pentecost, caught in the movement of transposition between past and present, between tradition and context, and between his words and the praxis into which he is impelled.

Part Two explored these themes and found them in the revelation of Jesus. His proclamation was a **dialectic between past and present:** he made his disclosure of the Kingdom of God in dialectical tension with his audience's past understanding of that Kingdom. It was a **dialectic between revelation and social context:** his "founding event" erupted in the midst of a profoundly tense social milieu and offered a response to the societies' crisis at every level. It was a **dialectic between language and praxis:** he demonstrated the "nature of the practice"[4] of the Rule of God and defended it in stories.

Jesus bridged these dialectical tensions by using the **dynamic of story.** His proclamation was made in the interaction between **told word, heard word,** and **acted word.** His followers passed the message on. His parables and the stories of his actions, became **told word,** which motivated his followers as **heard word.** Their response became

acted word which was retold. This dynamic reaches to our time.

Part Three of this argument, therefore, considered the dynamic of story in the contemporary context. It is particularly plain today that, "The meaning of religious language depends in part on the socio-political situation of the people who utter it."[5] Therefore it was not surprising to find that the category of story has been appropriated in different ways by different theologies. But the dynamic of story which has been identified in the past tradition can still be observed at work. It is present in those contextual theologies which Song describes, struggling to "deal with concrete issues that affect life in its totality...to wrestle with the earth, not with heaven".[6] It is present where the "dangerous memory of suffering", which Metz identifies,[7] is incarnated in the stories people tell of struggling to become subjects of history.

The dynamic of story is present in the struggle of the poor to emerge from, what Gutierrez calls, "the underside of history"[8] It is found in the repossession of the "other tradition", suppressed in the history of Christendom, which Miguez Bonino characterises as "the order of justice".[9] It is present in the experience of people who are challenged to free their consciousness from the shackles of the dominant ideology, which Cone describes.[10]

Part Four of this thesis located the theme of transposition in the critical theory which identifies labour and domination as profound limitations to the hermeneutical task. As an experiment in contextual theology four stories were told. They exhibit the dynamic of story which is found in its power of simplicity, its function as an interpretation of reality, and its transforming

impact on narrator and listeners.

The whole argument traverses a broad spectrum of theoretical areas and practical endeavours. I do not attempt exhaustive studies of those areas of biblical, theological, social, and even literary hermeneutics, which have been covered. But when the areas which I have mentioned are compared to the available range of theory and practice upon which this thesis impinges, its deficiencies loom large. I can only offer it as an attempt to clear a limited area of ground which could help the regrowth of the vigorous tradition of story-telling which has transmitted the gospel from the first.

This thesis is made in the hope that it contributes a small part to the description, which Metz makes, of Christianity as a "story-telling community". In this spirit, the last word is a story - a **told word**, made available to **hearers**, so that they may **act**.

After the war of liberation in Zimbabwe, a group of theologians created a centre for contextual theology, calling it Buriro-Esizeni, the threshing floor. One of their tasks was to collect the people's stories. I quote one of these stories below which tells how a young girl finds that the gospel comes alive during the harsh physical struggle for liberation. A miracle occurs in the most mundane experience of feeding. **This** miracle of feeding in the bush **is that** miracle of feeding in the gospel. The story forcefully illustrates the dialectics between past **and present**, **bible and context**, and **story and praxis** which have been discussed. The "primitive word" of the revelation becomes the "living word" of the contemporary situation. It acts as a metaphor by which she can interpret experience.

It is all the more fitting as a conclusion to this thesis because the story celebrates the life of the bible in the recovery of the people's land. It complements the story, of gaining the bible and losing the land, with which we began. It vindicates Archbishop Tutu's remark that "...perhaps it was not such a bad exchange".[11]

The Miracle of the Four Bananas[12]

Students at Sunnyside Secondary School north of Chimanimani have a Bible study group where the events of their daily lives take on a new and Biblical meaning. After reading the story in Luke 9 about Jesus' miraculous feeding of the crowds with five loaves of bread and three fish, a 14 year old member of the group named Rumbudzai contributed the following modern-day version:

"I have seen that same miracle take place," she said. "It happened one day during the war when the regime's soldiers came to our village to harass us for supporting the guerilla fighters. Seeing me standing there the commander of the group ordered me to call together all the women and young girls of the village. We were to be punished for cooking food for the guerillas. I ran off and found some of the women hiding behind a hut with four small children. Together we fled from the village and ran towards the hills. Before she left, one of the mothers who had a small child slung across her back grabbed a tiny bunch of bananas. We reached the hills and hid, knowing that if we were found the soldiers would surely kill us.

Night fell and soon the little children grew restless and hungry. The only food among us was the small bunch of four bananas which the woman had brought for her own child. But she did not hesitate to share them with all the other children.

We stayed in the hills for several days, and during that time we could hear the soldiers hunting for us. Those four miraculous bananas kept the children quiet all those days, until finally the soldiers left and we were free to go home."

The group asked Rumbidzai why she thought the miracle had taken place.

"I think the miracle happened because of the mother's unselfishness," she said. "She was willing to give up the only food her child had to eat, and through her generosity and faith that something good would come of it, God was able to create a miracle."

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