

## VI I BIBLICAL STORYTELLING IN EDUCATION

A primary revolution of educational method in the modern world has been what Nathan Morris has called "the dethronement of memory."<sup>1</sup> Prior to the 20th century, memorization was a central and regular pedagogical method. But that is no longer true. Birger Gerhardsson has described the situation well:

"In the tradition of western culture it is only in our own day that the memory has been effectively unloaded into books. Not until our own day have we learned to accept a form of education which to a great extent consists of being able to find the material which is required in the right books, without needing to carry it all in the memory."<sup>2</sup>

The centrality of the process of memorization to religious practice is reflected in the names that have been given to the sacred traditions of Judaism and Islam. Mishnah and Koran are both noun forms of the verb, "to recite, repeat," in Hebrew and Arabic respectively. And this was true in Christianity as well.

The memorization of the Psalms, the liturgies, the creeds, and Biblical narratives has been a consistent educational practice throughout Christian history until this century.

This dethronement of memory has been a gradual process. In the periods of oral communication, memorization and recitation were virtually equated with education.<sup>3</sup> The extent of one's knowledge was more or less equal to the amount one had memorized and could recite. But, as the sketch of Biblical storytelling has made clear, the development of writing changed the role of memorization. In the manuscript period, memorization was still required for reading some manuscripts. With the development of print and silent reading, however, Biblical narratives have increasingly been equated with the marks on the printed page. In this century, memorization of Biblical stories has virtually ceased.

But memorization and recital of Biblical stories had value beyond mere retention and reproduction. Memorization creates a different kind of knowledge. Stories that are memorized are more likely to be internalized and to become a part of the person. Also the heart becomes involved as well as the mind. The internalization of the tradition tends to create a higher degree of felt relationship with the tradition. There is a different quality of learning in knowing stories by heart than in simply knowing where to find them in a book.

Furthermore, the mastery of sacred tradition by a group of people tends to create a higher degree of community. The learning of the faith stories from parents or teachers provides a foundation for community formation.

And, finally, the educational system was not dependent on highly educated persons. A Biblical storytelling educational system can be run by persons who have not mastered reading and writing. In light of the central importance of Biblical storytelling in the life and mission of the Church through the ages, one can see why this pedagogical system could produce persons who were highly committed and effective ministers of the Gospel.

## An Assessment of Our Present Church Education System

This history clarifies some of the problems of our present educational system. In the Sunday School of the 19th century, a number of the characteristic marks of the Biblical storytelling tradition can be identified. The stories were regularly read aloud and experienced as sounds in a community of persons. The basic curriculum pattern was for the students to read the Scriptures aloud. The teacher would then lead the group in studying the text and in sharing personal experiences related to it. There was a high degree of memorization of the tradition. Recitations of various kinds were a regular occasion in the Sunday School.

In this century, a primary media change has taken place. The dominant and organizing medium of communication in Christian education has shifted from the spoken word to the written word. At the beginning of this century, the curriculum was overwhelmingly oral. The first step in the change was the Uniform Lesson Series. This series introduced a one-page sheet of written material. However, with the Uniform Lessons, the Bible itself remained the primary text and was always read aloud. Biblical materials were read aloud, memorized, and recited.

With the development and multiplication of printed curriculum, the role of oral processes has been reduced. Memorization of the Bible has been largely eliminated. And the required skill for a Sunday School teacher has become the ability to interpret printed curricula to the children. Thus, Christian education has shifted from a predominantly oral curriculum with a minimum of written material to a predominantly written curriculum with a minimum of oral process.

This shift in media worlds has created persistent problems. The shift to a written curriculum has often exceeded the media mastery of the teachers in the system. Regardless of the degree to which the curriculum is written for laypersons, there is no way to design written curriculum for persons who are intimidated by reading and writing. Furthermore, this task is to be done in one hour a week. A media analysis would suggest that the discontinuity between the media mastery of the teachers in the system and the curriculum is an underlying source of the persistent problem of low teacher morale in the church's educational system.

A related problem is the quality of the students' learning. Students in the system tend to become familiar with a broad range of materials in the Christian tradition but learn little or nothing in depth. The learning has shifted from a relatively intensive learning of a small range of material to a superficial familiarization with a broad range of material. Our present system tends to produce persons who have little felt identity with the Christian religion.

When seen in the context of the history of Biblical narration, the elimination of memorization of the Bible from the process of the Sunday School is the most radical change in the process of learning in the history of the religion. When compared with the educational systems of the other major religious groups in America, the liberal Protestant churches have eliminated memorization more assiduously than any other

group. In Judaism, the process of the bar mitzvah has preserved the primary process of catechetical training from the ancient tradition. The child learns to read Hebrew and the trope marks. The preparation for the recital of the Torah from an unpointed text at the bar mitzvah requires the memorization of the text as well as the sounds of the language and the chant. In Roman Catholicism, catechumens are required to memorize the basic elements of the Eucharistic liturgy (in Latin until the mid-'60's), the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary," and often one or more of the creeds. In fundamentalist Protestant education, students are often required to memorize a large number of verses from the Bible as well as the Lord's Prayer. In liberal Protestant churches, memorization, if required at all, is generally limited to the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and perhaps the Apostle's Creed. And, while correlations are difficult, there has been a more substantial decline in the educational systems of liberal Protestantism than in any of the other groups.

Finally, a persistent problem in Christian education has been the involvement of parents. In his book, Protestant Strategies in Education, Robert Lynn has provided a cogent account of the effort the "Faith and Life" curriculum to establish an alliance between the family and the church school. This curriculum was organized around the emphases of the Biblical theology movement and sought to involve parents directly in teaching those concepts. It failed. Lynn observes that the Presbyterian failure was not atypical:

In other sectors of American Protestantism the story was much the same. None of the main-line denominations had any substantial success in working along the family-church school axis. By 1960 one could glimpse modest gains here and there, probably more of a concern with the churches' ministry to families, but no breakthrough to a new first commitment in educational strategy.<sup>4</sup>

The analysis here would suggest that the curriculum was organized in a media world that was alien to parents and was, therefore, doomed to failure from the start.

There is a close connection between this problem and the history of Biblical narration. The Biblical theology movement was highly interested in the recital of the acts of God. But, as Mary Boys has made clear, the effect of the movement was to substitute theological concepts for the Biblical narratives themselves:

Ironically, the Biblical theology movement, with its rhetoric of the "mighty acts of God"...actually obscured narrative; history overshadowed story. As a consequence, Christian education tended to become excessively didactic. The biblical theology from which it drew so heavily was insensitive to the literary character of the Scriptures; moreover, its educational theory was virtually swallowed by theology. Perhaps some of the fascination today in Christian education with "telling the story" is in part a way of remediating the power of narrative obscured in the enthusiasm for the Biblical theology movement.<sup>5</sup>

This was a natural and probably inevitable development. Storytelling in the media world of silent print was closely connected with the retelling of the stories as history and theology. But it also meant that the primary persons who could tell the stories were highly educated persons rather than parents.

Thus, a new framework for Christian education is needed within which the primary role of Biblical storytelling can be reintegrated into the educational process. A central aspect of the reappropriation of Biblical storytelling is addressing the relationship between the family and the congregation in a new way.

### Biblical Storytelling in the Family

As is reflected in the story of God's search for a people with which this chapter began, there is great power in parents and other adults telling the stories of God's actions to their children. The local church has become the primary organizing center in which the stories of God's actions have been told among the generations. Yet, even there, telling or reading Biblical stories has ceased to have a primary role in the educational program. Enabling parents and teachers to tell Biblical stories is one place to begin. A local congregation has access to children one or two hours a week while parents are with them every day for at least a few hours. Just as in the time of Moses, the family remains the part of the community with the greatest storytelling potential.

The traditions about Moses' instructions to the people are refreshing in their directness. He does not plead with the parents of Israel to tell the stories or seek to enable them to do it. He commands them to learn and to tell the stories as one of their primary responsibilities: "And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children..." (Deut. 6:6-7) And then as now, parents asked, "When?" Moses anticipates the question: "and (you) shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." In other words, the stories are to be told and talked about at all times: major celebrations, mealtime, bedtime, morning, going and coming, and working.

But will it work now? Will children listen? The experience of virtually every parent to whom I have spoken has been consistent. While there may be some initial resistance and confusion about this new activity, the problem is never getting the children to listen. They love the stories and want to make it a regular activity. The appropriate parental fear is not boredom. It is that the kids, like baby robins in a nest, will bug you to death crying, "More!"

The problem is learning enough stories to keep the storytelling going when the kids demand more stories. In order to solve this problem, some parents have read the stories to the children from a Biblical storybook first and then told the story later. And virtually everyone has found that they cannot tell the stories word for word.

Thus, a combination of story reading and storytelling has proven to be both practical and faithful.

As in ages past, parents have found that the best time for storytelling is either bedtime or mealtime. Keith Russell, now president at New York Theological Seminary, has made a regular ritual of storytelling at suppertime. In my own family, each of these times has been an occasion for storytelling during various periods. The values of storytelling are often exceedingly practical. For example, I have found that a good Biblical story is extremely effective in getting restless boys to go to sleep.

I remember one night when an eight year old was unable to settle down because of a recurring nightmare about a ghost. It was near Halloween and ghosts were in the air. In response to his cries, "Dad, I can't go to sleep! I'm scared," I first tried to lighten the atmosphere: "Come on. You know that ghosts don't exist. They are only imaginary. Just say "Hi" or imagine that it is like Casper." When that approach didn't work, I tried threats, "If you don't settle down in three minutes..." That didn't work either.

And so I went upstairs and told him the story of Jesus walking on the water in the middle of the night and disciples crying out, "It's a ghost." And Jesus spoke to them: "Be not afraid; I am." And he got into the boat and there was a great calm. And Jesus said, "O men of little faith, why were you afraid? Have you no faith?" Apparently he could hear those words when they came from Jesus. After I finished the story, he sighed a big sigh, and said, "Thanks, Dad." And after a hug, he rolled over and went to sleep.

After the experiences we have had with Biblical storytelling, the values are clear. But the development of Biblical storytelling in families today will only happen with the support and encouragement of a local congregation. The vows that parents take at infant baptism would, appropriately include some such instruction. A series of Biblical storytelling workshops for young or prospective parents would also be helpful. There is no time when parents are more interested in being good parents than just before the first child is born. In the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition, this training is far more important than classes in natural childbirth. Since I valued those classes highly, I wish that we could have had the support of a community in learning how to build our family as well as in learning how to give birth to it.

In addition to telling the stories to children, it is also important to enable them to learn to tell the stories themselves. This will in part be the natural result of frequent tellings. One of my earliest and most delightful memories is learning to recite "Twas the Night before Christmas" when I was four years old. I required my Mother to read it to me over and over again. And, through sheer repetition, I was soon able to astound my Aunt Mary by saying the whole thing. There is no doubt that this early experience has been a source of my interest in storytelling. I know that there is great value in enabling children to memorize and recite "sacred" traditions as that poem clearly was for me.

Enabling children to memorize and recite literature is relatively simple. Repetition, frequent occasions for the children to tell the stories, and the rewards of some form of performance are all elements. But the secret is the sheer delight of making the events of the past and the present alive again within the life of the family. Children will naturally want to contribute to these occasions and will learn the stories by osmosis. And when the children begin to tell the stories to persons outside the family circle, both the family is strengthened and the motivation for the children to learn more stories is increased.

## BIBLICAL STORYTELLING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

From the perspective of the Biblical storytelling tradition, the local church is a tribe. The congregation as a tribe is linked by ties of a common spiritual heritage rather than biological ancestry. The members are born of a common stock of spirit rather than a common blood. The vitality of the tribe depends on its members' knowledge of the tradition in which they stand. The educational program of the local church is, therefore, a means by which the families of the congregation are formed into a new tribal identity.

In all tribes, the elders of the tribe teach the traditions of the tribe to the young. This means that occasions need to be provided in which the elders can refresh their memories and continue to grow in their ability to interpret the stories. The youth who have demonstrated their ability to tell the stories need to have occasions in which to practice and develop their skills in the recital of the traditions. And the young need to be told the stories and to learn the basic skills that will enable them to tell the stories.

### Biblical Storytelling with Children

The first element in a basic model for Biblical storytelling in a local congregation is that the children be told the stories in as many contexts as possible during their early years: at home, in worship, and in the church school class. This multifaceted repetition is the best form of exposure to the tradition. At the same time, however, the children need to begin working toward the first primary goal of the educational process: the occasion when they tell a story to the congregation.

The bar mitzvah is a model for the demonstration of storytelling ability by the congregation's children. At the age of twelve or thirteen, Jewish boys and now girls became adult members of the congregation by chanting a story from the unpointed Hebrew text of the Torah. After this demonstration, they are accepted as adult members of the congregation. Preparation for this event requires years of work. The children learn to read Hebrew, master the trope marks which indicate the chant, and memorize a particular text in detail. The mastery of this ability is appropriate grounds for respect and for acceptance as an adult.

In the context of Christian education where mastery of the ability to read a sacred language is not required, an appropriately demanding educational goal would be for children to memorize and recite a Biblical story before the congregation

without the aid of a text. The natural setting for such a recital is at the confirmation or baptism of the congregation's young people. In the case of a large group, the young people could recite their stories as part of the worship services during the weeks prior to confirmation or baptism.

This should be a culmination of a process that has begun much earlier. At this stage, a young person should have a mastery of a wide range of Biblical stories. The confirmation or baptism is, in the context of the educational program, a Kind of graduation for which the recital of one story is only the tip of the educational iceberg.

How then are young children to learn to tell the Biblical stories? The basic steps of a story workshop - memorization, study of the story in its original historical context, internalization/appropriation of the story in relation to present experience, telling the story - are natural steps in the mastery of a Biblical story at all stages of the educational process. But there are a wide variety of ways in which each of these elements of the process can be accomplished in a classroom. Jean Boomershine, my life partner, is a teacher of young children. In her research, she has developed a series of extensions of Biblical storytelling that have proven to be highly effective. The goal of these extensions of a storytelling methodology which she has developed is to give children as many ways as possible in which they can tell the story. Through this process of training, children gain confidence in their ability to tell the stories. Rather than sharing particular stories of the use of these extensions, I will be outline them in a summary fashion.

### Extensions of Biblical Storytelling

#### I. The Uses of Music

**Movement** - The goal of using movement is to get a total feeling of the emotions and dynamics of the story. The teacher chooses a selection of classical music that either evokes the mood of the story or expresses the mood of a character in the story. After explaining briefly why this music captures the feeling of the story or the character, the childrens move to the music as expressively as possible using their total bodies. After they have the feeling of the "mood," either the teacher or one of the children can tell the story with the music in the background while the children move to the music.

**Rhythm and Dynamics** - Every story has some rhythmic quality or tempo to it as well as dynamics of volume and tension/relaxation. The children can clap as the story is told, softer or louder, faster or slower. This can also be done with rhythm instruments.

**Songs** - There are already many Biblical story songs such as "The Wedding Banquet" and "Zacchaeus" from the album, Joy Is Like the Rain. These can be sung either before or after the telling of the story.

Classical/Popular Music - Children can select the music that they want to accompany their telling of the story. Their choices are often popular records. These can either be played as a background for the story or in between the episodes of the story.

Chant - The teacher can chant the story line by line and the children can sing it in response. This can be accompanied by gestures which the children can also repeat.

## II. The Uses of Art Materials

Art materials enable us to approach the story from another part of ourselves. It is the process and not the product that is important. The artwork enables children to put themselves into the story. The value of any "product" that may result is to enable the storyteller to have props or other "tools" with which to tell the story.

Art materials can be used to depict a personal experience that is related to the Biblical story. Or they can be used to create an image of the Biblical story showing either the events of the story or our responses to the story. Both abstract and representational art is appropriate.

A. Fingerpaint - Using the same music that was selected for the mood of the story, have children fingerpaint as the story is told. "Representational" art is to be discouraged here since the purpose is to explore the feelings that are generated by the story. It can be suggested that the selection of color may be important in capturing the feeling tone of the story.

B. Clay - The same process is also helpful with clay. Often clay requires a longer period of time and more concentration on a final product. It is best when the clay is used to express the feeling of the story as a whole or of one of the characters in the story.

C. A Mural - The group can work together to create a mural that tells the story, episode by episode. Each member of the group chooses an episode to draw. The drawings can either be on separate pieces of paper or on the mural itself. The episodes are arranged in sequence, either with or without words. If words are used, only key words that aid memory are permitted. The group can then present the mural to the class. Either one person can tell the whole story or each person can tell their episode as they show the mural.

D. A "Comic Strip" - The squares of a comic strip need not be limited to the episodic structure and all of the story's dialogue can be included. In this way, the whole story can be told in the "comic strip."

E. An "accordion book" - This is similar to a comic strip but instead of drawing the story, children may use magazine pictures, Christmas cards, old educational



materials, or anything else that either represents or symbolizes the episodes of the story.

F. A Felt Board or Figures - This activity is particularly useful with young children. The teacher makes the figures for the children and uses them as she tells the story. Then the children can use them to tell the story either with words or by simply moving the figures. It is of great value for young children to be able to use the figures spontaneously during periods of free play. They can either use a felt board or simply move them on the floor. If a number of stories are learned, the figures for each story can be kept in a separate box that is available to the children.

G. A Diorama - The children make a miniature scene from which the story can be told. A variety of materials can be used: a cardboard box for the setting, pipe cleaners or clay for the figures, fabric, paint, etc. for the background. Before starting, the children can decide what elements are necessary for the scene by doing research in the Bible itself or by remembering the story. As the children are making the scene, the teacher can either retell the story or introduce relevant historical data. When the diorama is complete, the story can be told by the children using the scene and moving the figures. One advantage of a diorama are that the props provide memory associations. But, most important, the scene takes attention away from the storyteller which is extremely helpful for many children. It also provides a means by which children who are reluctant or unable to tell the story verbally can tell it in another way.

H. Pictures of Individual Experiences - There are a variety of ways in which art materials can be used to explore the connections between our experience and the Biblical stories. Children can draw pictures of something that has happened to them that is similar to an event or feeling in a Biblical story. This will most likely be a representational picture that will show the experience. Or they can draw a "picture" of a feeling that they have had. In a class in which the story was Jesus walking on the water, for example, a group of children who were asked to draw a picture of being afraid all drew pictures of cemeteries and ghosts. Often, however, these will be more abstract drawings in which the color will be important. After the drawing is finished, the children can tell about their picture and the way in which it relates to the Biblical story.

All of these exercises in various ways enable children to relate their own experience and feelings to the Biblical stories. Some children may not want to share their personal stories or their drawings. In those instances, the exercises can be private experiences. But the goal is for them to be able to retell the Biblical story with a higher degree of empathy and expressiveness as a result of having discovered their own personal connection with it.

### III. "Role Doing"

The purpose of this exercise is to help the children to understand how each character felt in relation to the other characters of the story. The goal is not a

dramatic production. Instead of asking a child to "act out" one part, children are asked to do the roles of all the characters in the story. Having gotten a sense of the characters' responses, they will be able to tell the story more effectively.

A. Everyone pantomimes all the parts while one person narrates the story. Or each person tells the story without using any words at all.

B. The story can be acted out while someone tells the story either as a participant in the mode of story theater or as an observer. It is important then for each person to change roles and do the story again.

C. Highlight Key episodes and dialogues. In the story of the paralytic, for example, the dialogues of Jesus and the crowd can be taken by three people. Each person can take the dialogue of one of the three characters and Keep changing parts until each person has done all three. Or the three people can tell the whole episode in which that character predominates; e.g., the crowd takes episodes 1 and 5 (the beginning and the end) , Jesus takes the episodes 2 and 4 (the paralytic coming to him and the speech to the scribes), and the scribes take episode 3 (the scribes' response).

All of these activities are effective preparation for telling the stories in some way. A primary activity for children is to make audio or videotapes of their tellings of the stories. These tapes can then be played, first of all, for themselves. There is nothing that children love more than to hear themselves on a tape recorder or to see themselves on TV. But, if their tapes are good enough, they can also be shown to others. Tim Enders-Coppock, the producer of United's television program, conducted a series of storytelling workshops with a group of children at First United Methodist Church in Dayton at the end of which they produced a television program of songs and stories on the local cable system. As the children's skills at story- telling increase, not only parents but also members of the congregation who are hospitalized or confined at home find such tapes a welcome gift. But the goal of telling the stories to other children and adults in the congregation is only a means to enable children to learn as many Biblical stories as possible while their abilities to memorize are at their peak.

If a training process in storytelling is begun at an early age and continued steadily, every child will be able to succeed in telling a Biblical story to the congregation in some way at their confirmation or baptism. I have witnessed some of these occasions in a variety of roles: teacher, congregational member, pastor, and parent. These storytelling occasions are times of high celebration. The child is given dignity and stature before the congregation in telling the community's sacred story. It is an appropriate and meaningful way to become an adult member of the community of faith. And the congregation is strengthened in its faith through successfully passing on the stories of God's deeds to another generation. Thus, the goal for a Biblical storytelling education program in a local church is to enable the children to tell the stories to the congregation.

## Biblical Storytelling with Youth

Once a child has mastered the basic skills of the storytelling tradition, the next challenge is to develop those abilities and to broaden the range of stories that can be told. The youth fellowship programs of local churches are the ideal context for the development of these abilities. But the focus of energy needs to be outside the youth group itself. It is important for young people to have the opportunity to tell the stories for others.

The least threatening context is telling stories to small groups of younger children in the local congregation. Homes for the elderly are also a warmly appreciative place for Biblical storytelling by the youth of the congregation. Making audio and TV tapes in which there is an integration of Biblical storytelling with rock and roll songs is another means by which the stories can be told to others in the church. And, of course, the youth can recite or read stories for congregational worship.

With teenagers and young adults, however, the goal which has provided the highest degree of motivation for learning has been to tell the stories outside the congregation. The report which follows was written by The Reverend Pamela Moffat, presently Minister of Education at First Congregational Church in Norwalk, Connecticut. A 1978 graduate of Lancaster Theological Seminary, Pam had been deeply influenced by a series of Biblical story-telling experiences both in workshops and in courses with Gil Bartholomew and was determined to explore the use of Biblical storytelling in youth ministry. Steve Rose, a primary contributor to Pam's project, is the former editor of *Renewal* magazine in Chicago and is presently the director of the Albert Schweitzer Foundation. A radical Christian who was deeply involved in the civil rights movement and the resistance to the Vietnam War, Steve began writing and singing folk music in the '70's and has produced a wide range of Christian folk music. This is Pam's report:

"The past five years of my ministry have been based on teaching, telling, and sharing with others the story of our faith in Mark's Gospel. In the early days of my ministry, I recognized the power the word had when it was shared as story. However, I also found that people had a very low tolerance level for memorizing the story as a story. It reeked of school and reminded people of all their failings at "learning" facts and figures. There had to be a medium which would empower the people with the Biblical story in order to allow it to shape and form their own life story.

Working with the youth of the First Church of Christ, Congregational, in Groton, Connecticut, I noticed that music was the major medium both for learning and for the formation of value judgments. The kids only had to hear a song two or three times before they were capable of singing along with the record. By the time they had heard it another two or three times, they were humming or singing the words with the music at a very subconscious level. I

decided that if I were able to capitalize on this learning pattern, I could give them a life-shaping story which would be with them for the rest of their lives.

Steve Rose offered his God given gift of being able to transcribe printed words into song—songs which were easily learned and tunes which were easily remembered. He set major parts of the Gospel of Mark to music. The process of building a strong Biblical base in the lives of many young people had begun!

Due to an absolute ignorance of musical theory or practice, and without being able to read one note of music, I embarked on a blind journey of faith with thirty young people, aged 12-18. We listened to very rough tapes which Steve sent, singing along with him over and over and over again. (In fact, the tapes were so rough that he would stop mid-verse to change a word or the tune, and the kids in the re-singing would stop and make the same changes with him--even after we left the tapes behind and began singing them on our own!) After the first week of listening to the tapes, both as a group and at home, we knew, in a way that could never be taken away from us, at least the equivalent of four chapters of Mark's Gospel. It became clear to us and to those who knew what we were doing that the Spirit was alive and active in our lives. Further, it gave us a common base for our questions both about life and about God. Counseling and contacts with the kids and their families became a joy because we knew where each other was grounded -- in the Biblical story of salvation of which we were a part.

For the next three months we worked on learning the parts of the story which the songs did not cover and on refining the words and the music. We then had to decide how we were going to share the story with others. We decided we would "perform" the Gospel of Mark from Chapter 1 verse 1 through the Transfiguration, ending at Chapter 9, verse 8.

At the end of the summer, we went to camp for a week. We worked on the stories while we were swimming, eating, and canoeing from dawn until late at night. One night we had a campfire at which we sang and told everything that we had learned from the Gospel of Mark. The lake where we were camping was a large lake with a number of campsites around it. We had seen a number of people at various points but had not interacted with any of them other than civilities. As we were singing and telling the stories, we couldn't see a thing because of our campfire. But, when we stopped singing at one point, we suddenly heard applause echoing across the lake. The kids were so excited that they started yelling for the people to come and join us. They came from all over the lake, some walking and some in cars. Those in cars surrounded the campfire. And we sang the rest of the Gospel for them.

The people stayed until late that night. And they were so appreciative that the kids couldn't believe it. From then on, there was no stopping them.

The end "product" which we wanted to share with the "outside" world was neither professional nor original. Rather it was our gift to those who came to listen and to watch. The power of the story was conveyed through the expressions in the eyes of the kids and the sincerity of their presentation rather than through the quality of the voices or the acting ability of the youth. Everyone knew that the kids believed what they shared. We traveled through Connecticut and Pennsylvania sharing the power of God's gift to us in the story of Jesus' life and ministry as it was recorded for us in Mark's Gospel and as it shone through us in our telling.

I am convinced that it was through the medium of music that the story became alive and met the youth where they were. The music and the story together created a context in which God was able to enter into the lives of both the tellers and the listeners.

Since that first experience my entire ministry has been grounded in the telling and teaching of the Biblical story. I have conducted two weeklong summer conferences for the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ for junior high students in which over 120 youth have learned the entire Gospel of Mark from the RSV. The response has been overwhelming from the home churches as well as from the youth who have been involved. I have also conducted workshops on the Gospel of Mark in music for the United Methodist Church. They were received as welcome beginning points for the reappropriation of the Biblical tradition in the education ministry of the local church. At the present time, I am involved in leading workshops which are designed to enable youth leaders to use the materials on the Gospel of Mark on their own."

Pam has moved from Groton to Norwalk and, in the past three years, has established an even larger youth program there around the telling of the Gospel of Mark. The importance of this experience is its demonstration of the potential of Biblical storytelling to provide a center for the education of youth. Undoubtedly, the development of the music has been a crucial element in making this program possible. And it is doubtful that the storytelling process would have this degree of meaning without the music.

However, in her Christian education program with children, Pam has developed a storytelling curriculum in which the teachers have learned to tell the stories without the assistance of folk music. Thus, while the music has been central to the development of the youth program, the educational program has also developed through the telling of the stories. But, in relation to the youth, the motivation to learn the stories has been the prospect of telling them to people outside the local congregation. Both the challenge and the promise of that mission has given them a reason to learn.

Out of this experience with the Gospel, the youth have become involved in a variety of social action projects: a soup Kitchen, visiting youth in prison and on drugs,

collecting and distributing clothing for needy families, and the support of a mission project in Haiti. Thus, through learning to tell the stories of the Gospel of Mark, these young people have internalized the stories and are now living them out in action. In this project, the marks of the original medium of Biblical narrative are present: the experience of the Gospel in sound, the memorization and internalization of the stories, the formation of community, and the initiation and development of a storytelling network which reaches out beyond the community to others in need.

The foundation for Biblical storytelling in the educational program of a local church is adult education. And all of the processes described earlier in the chapters on becoming a Biblical storyteller and on Biblical storytelling workshops are directly applicable to adult education. The involvement of adults in Biblical storytelling is particularly important because Bible stories have come to be associated almost exclusively with the Christian education of young children. The value of Biblical storytelling in the educational program of the local church is to provide a common heritage and language which can be shared by all generations. Biblical storytelling is a truly intergenerational language. From young children to the elderly, all age groups in the educational program can find meaning in the recital of Biblical narratives. Whether told by persons in their same age group or by persons from another age group, telling Biblical stories is a primary way of remembering and celebrating "our story." But the foundation stone for this development is the involvement of adults - parents, Sunday School teachers, and lay leaders of worship - in the storytelling process. With this foundation in place, the telling of Biblical stories can become the basis for the development of a vital oral tradition network within the life of a local church. The reappropriation of Biblical storytelling may, in turn, help to remedy some of the problems that have developed within recent Christian education.

## NOTES

1 Nathan Morris, The Jewish School (New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, 1942), p. 114.

2 Birger Gerhardsson, Memory and Manuscript (Uppsala: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1961), p. 123.

3 See, for example, the monumental study of H.M. and N.K. Chadwick, The Growth of Literature I-III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932-1940).

4 Robert W. Lynn, Protestant Strategies in Education (New York: Association Press, 1964), p. 48.

5 Mary C. Boys, S.N.J.M., "Narrative and Religious Education: A Story Full of Promise," in Chicago Studies, 21 (1982), p. 91.