

and compensation for this endurance of suffering, rather than a vision of an alternative world.

In a similar way Eusebius of Caesarea, in the fourth century, Christianized the relationship of emperor and subjects. The emperor becomes the political representative of the Word of God, the vicar of Christ on earth. The Christian should obey the emperor as a visible embodiment of the reign of Christ over the world. In this Christianization of the patriarchal family and the Roman emperor, the Christian church ceases to stand against the dominant social order as a representative of an alternative human community where "God's will shall be done on earth." The radical egalitarianism of early Christianity is spiritualised, as a reward to be enjoyed after death, and marginalized into a separate, elite, monastic community set apart from the historical order of family and state.

Thus the hierarchical patterns of power of the family, state and social class fail, to be transformed by Christianity, but rather are resacralized as expressions of obedience to Christ. By making the Christian egalitarian counter-culture a monastic elite outside of and unrelated to the family, the Christian church backs away from the possibility that this radical vision itself could lay claims upon and transform the power relationships of society and family.

The Sense of an Ending

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Life stories have a beginning, a middle and an ending. Our sense of the ending depends on our basic faith concerning the ultimate meaning and value of our life story. The entire life story of Jesus Christ and its particular ending in the resurrection equips Christian faith with its sense of the ending of both our individual life stories and of the universal story that is history. The resurrection expresses the belief that the Storyteller's *Creator Spiritus* of life-giving love, which enabled Jesus Christ to find his true story, also

enables us to find our true stories with the same love that survives death in the resurrection of the just.

The story of the Last Judgment, which also expresses faith's sense of an ending, implies that the love which survives death is a responsible love. We are responsible for the incipient life stories that we have gratuitously received; and we are responsible for finding our true stories in virtue of the life-giving love that we have received. Our freedom is such that we are not necessarily predetermined by the gift of the life-giving love to the finding of our true story. What has been freely received may be freely rejected.

There is a kind of love that we have for ourselves which does not survive death, which does not enable us to find our true story: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn. 12:25; cf. Mk. 8:35).

The Storyteller creates every life story with the gift of his life-giving love that enables us to be responsible for our life stories and those of others. Matthew's story of the Last Judgment (25:31-46) implies that we find our true story on the basis of our responsible love for others, and that the Son of Man is normative in distinguishing true from false life stories. The story of Jesus Christ defines faith's understanding of that responsible love for one's own life story and the life stories of others which survives death; it defines faith's sense of the culmination of truly good life stories in the kingdom of the Storyteller and his *Creator Spiritus*. Our stories have been truly told when they have been truthfully lived according to the intention of the Storyteller and his *Creator Spiritus* of life-giving and responsible love.

The irresponsible attempt to be our own little gods, creating our life stories independently of the Storyteller's grace and demand for truly good life stories, is based on the illusion that a truly good life story can be found apart from the Storyteller and his intention for telling such a story. Satan symbolizes the denial of the truth of things which leads to deviousness, self-deception and missing the way to our true story.¹ Such denial is linked to the desire for mastery of reality by trying to destroy the truth which one finds repugnant. Satan is faith's symbol for what can go wrong with a life story. His expulsion from heaven and his being "put on his own" represents the risk of our own personal alienation from the grace and demand of the Storyteller for discovering our true story. Our egotism has the nihilistic character of making naught of everything except our own self-will. Satan symbolizes the self-destructive character of a rebellious pride which seeks to tell its

own story independently of the Giver of life stories and his *Creator Spiritus* of responsible love.

Christian faith's sense of the ending of our life stories might be described in terms of the tragic and melodramatic views of human experience². Persons in search of their true stories are seen by Christian faith more from the viewpoint of tragedy than melodrama.

The tragic view of life stories does not treat good and evil as independent wholes. It does not incline toward monopathic attitudes: with its inclusive view of good and evil, it never sees man's excellence divorced from his proneness to love wrongly, nor, on the other hand, does it see the evil that he does divorced from the possibility of his spiritual recovery. Tragedy sees us in our strength and in our weakness; we experience defeat in victory or victory in defeat; our goodness is intermingled with the power and inclination to evil; our will is tempered in the suffering that comes with, or brings about, new knowledge and maturity.

Tragedy is concerned with the whole man and his dividedness. Tragedy reflects on the copresence of counter impulses always striving for dominance, of the fact that throughout the unfolding of his life story he is a dual creature with possibilities of finding or losing his true story. Impulses and options are dual or multifold, we are drawn now this way and now that, and the awareness that is exacted is complex and troubling. While seeking to find our true story, we are caught between different forces or motives or values. Different competing elements endow our search with a dramatic tension.

The melodramatic version of human experience sees the person questing for his true story either in his strength or in his weakness. He is victorious or defeated, good or evil, hero or villain, angel or devil. Human polarities appear in their pure state; good and evil are independent wholes, and monopathic attitudes result: a triumphal spirit, an unqualified optimism, a belief that good is chosen without anguish and integrity maintained without effort. At the other extreme, melodrama succumbs to total despair, whether of the world, of society, of one's ability to endure one's context or inner state; everything is understood to contribute to a sense of ruin that is staggering because there are no apparent options. Melodrama takes the part for the whole; the complicating elements of character are eliminated or ignored.

The melodramatic obsession with one dimension of truth to the exclusion of every other creates the illusion of possessing the

whole truth while actually blinding ourselves to it. Melodrama is blind to conflicting evidence and intolerant of it; hence it seeks to destroy it. Fanatic obsessions, self-righteousness, pseudo-messianism, demonologies, Manichaeism and ideological hatred and violence are evidence of the melodramatic version of life. Melodrama is not engaged in the search for the true life story; it thrives in the illusion of fully possessing it.

The search for our true stories is worked out step by step through a critical awareness and examination of all the detailed complexity of daily life. The following of Jesus Christ's way to our true story implies our fidelity to his injunction: "Let him take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk. 9: 23). Faith's sense of the ending to its life story is experienced even now in the concreteness and complexity of the present. Faith experiences the promise and senses the end of its life story in the divine reality of the Storyteller which is now, and which is somehow manifested to us in both its grace and demand for a truthful story. The promised salvation is somehow sensed and experienced now: "Happy you who are hungry *now*: you shall be satisfied. Happy you who weep *now*: you shall laugh" (Lk. 6:21). The promised end of our life stories is being experienced in the unfolding or working out of our stories in the present: "Now is the acceptable time, this is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

Christian faith's sense of the end promised by the Storyteller's grace and demand is symbolised by the life-giving love of Jesus Christ which survives death in the resurrection. Faith's sense of the end derives from its present experience of the gift of life-giving love originating in the Storyteller and communicated in the daily dying and rising of those whose love encourages us to find our true story. John expresses this sense of the end with an image borrowed from the creative process in nature: "I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Faith even now experiences the creative power of life-giving love in the creation of its true life story. Faith even now experiences something ultimate in value and meaning, the very substance of its life story's ultimate promise, which Paul describes as that love which does not come to an end, which is the greatest of all the divine gifts and without which we are nothing at all (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

The life-giving love of Jesus Christ symbolizes the power of endurance which enables faith to pursue its true story, notwithstanding our concrete limitations and persecution from others:

“Your endurance will win you your lives” (Lk. 21:19)³. The experience of man’s threatened existence and of the anxieties that accompany finitude and the precariousness of human life is the context of faith’s sense of the end. Within this context, faith is aware of the Storyteller’s presence as the power of life-giving love sustaining the quest for truly good life stories; it experiences the gift of its life story in patient endurance: “Love is always patient...it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes” (1 Cor. 4-7). The love which survives death in the resurrection of the just, in the finding of our true stories, is the same love which we even now experience as surviving the absurdities, antagonisms, hatreds, persecutions, sufferings and other tribulations that assail it.

Our present experience of life-giving love, like that which enabled Paul to affirm “Love does not come to an end” (1 Cor. 13:8), grounds our sense of the end which the Storyteller of Jesus Christ’s life story intends for our own life stories. Our sense of the end is not death; rather, it is the sense of a love which does not come to an end. Just as Christian faith believes that the peace which Jesus gives is “not as the world gives” (Jn. 14:24), so too it believes that the end or culmination which the Storyteller intends for our stories is “not as the world gives”: it is not death.

If the search for our true stories involves a struggle, our finding them implies a completeness. Faith is always reaching out for its true story and longing for its completion. Faith matures in the tension between aspiration and achievement. Our aspiration and struggle for our true story are ways in which we experience the Storyteller and his intention for our self-realization.

Our sense of our true stories is marked by a tension between the complacency which acquiesces in what is and must be and the concern or solicitude which does not stop at acquiescence, but contends for what is not yet but should be. We experience faith’s sense of an ending in our experience of both complacency and concern. Our experience is in deep contrast with existentialism’s stress on guilt, anxiety or despair, inasmuch as our gratitude for the good that motivates our faith in what it promises to become. Faith’s complacency is the affective acceptance of the truth about all that is, as it is.

We extrapolate from our present experience of our life stories for our sense of ultimate culmination. The New Testament implies our search for our true stories in its emphasis on present conver-

sion experience and maturation in conformity with the ultimate reality of the Storyteller's truth and love expressed in the life story of Jesus Christ. We experience the Storyteller in his freedom of grace and demand addressing our freedom for the transformation of our possibilities into his possibilities of telling our life story. We experience the utter gratuity of our life story both in its origin and in its present unfinished state; and, extrapolating from that experience, faith senses that the ultimate culmination of our life story is intended to be as gratuitous.

The Gospel of John expresses Jesus' sense of an ending in terms of accomplishing his Father's will, which is the very sustenance of his life story: "My meat is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work" (4:34).⁴ Jesus experiences his life story as one of absolute dependence on his Father's will; hence, his sense of its end or culmination consists in the consummation of this will. His life story is sustained by the will of his Father who tells it from beginning to end. The sustenance which he draws from acting in harmony with his Father enables his life story to sustain others, as is implied by his injunction "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15ff.). Faith's search for its true story draws its sustenance from acting in harmony with the Storyteller of Jesus Christ's life and his will for our self-realization in truly good life stories that have the power to sustain others as Jesus Christ's story does.

Homecoming, as a beloved son's return to his father, is not only Jesus' sense of an ending for his story of the prodigal son (Lk.15: 11-32) but also for his own life story.⁵ John's Gospel also interprets the life story of Jesus as a homecoming: he is the pre-existent Word who is sent by the Father and returns to the Father. Jesus' journey to the Father is an event which is resonant of Israel's path to life as developed in both the Mosaic and exilic Exodus accounts. The journeys between Galilee and Samaria in which Jesus speaks the word of God as described in the "book of signs" are themselves signs of the journey to the Father which spans the entirety of Jesus' life, culminating in his final return as risen Son and Lord. These visible journeys are signs of Jesus' inner movement toward the Father; they also describe the quality of Christian religious experience as a homecoming which is not actualized in a moment, but in a life story.

The homecoming of Jesus Christ's life story is both a process and a term that is not a return to the past; rather, it is a becoming into the future that is the gift of a participation in the Storyteller's own story for mankind. His homecoming is for Christian faith the

dynamic passage into the future of our unfinished life stories seeking fulfilment in the promise which the Storyteller intends for us. His homecoming is progressively more perfect communication of the Storyteller's intention for the consummation of his life story. It is expressed in the continuum of his lived personal experience of his Father whose story is the "Good News" which his life communicates to faith. John's Gospel interprets Jesus Christ's homecoming as the creation of the way to our own:

Trust in God still, and trust in me.
There are many rooms in my Father's house;
if there were not I should have told you.
I am going now to prepare a place for you,
and after I have gone and prepared you a place,
I shall return to take you with me;
so that where I am you may be too.
You know the way to the place where I am going
(14:2-4).

The sense of home, homelessness and homecoming pervades biblical travel stories. Abraham leaves Ur, his original home, to find a new home. The Exodus of Moses and the Hebrew people starts from a place that is not an authentic home. Forty years of wandering are sustained by the hope of a promised homeland. The Exile tells of a people driven from their authentic homeland into an alien land where they suffer a painful homelessness. The Exodus journey of liberation contrasts with the Exile journey into captivity. The Return to Israel is seen as a new Exodus story.

Faith expresses its sense of an ending in its biblical travel stories. Every journey has its beginning, middle and end. Different starting points determine the threefold division; and there are different levels at which the journey may be considered. Christian faith interprets itself as a community with a travel story that begins with Jesus Christ as its Alpha and follows him as its Way to its destiny in him as its Omega. Jesus Christ is the Pre-existent Logos, the Word made Flesh, and the risen Christ. Luke interprets his life story as a journey which begins in Galilee, follows the Way of the Lord through Palestine and concludes in Jerusalem. The Christian community follows Jesus' "way of life" (Acts 2:28). It is obedient to the injunction of taking up his cross daily and following him (Lk. 9:23). There is a threefold temporal division in Jesus' journey: "It is necessary for me to be on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it is impossible that a prophet should die outside Jerusalem" (Lk. 13:33). Jesus is sent by the Father

and returns to the Father as “the eldest of many brothers” (Rm. 8:29). As the New Adam (1 Cor. 15:45-49), he recalls another journey pattern: Paradise Lost (Garden), the Desert Wilderness, and Paradise Regained. Israel experiences homecoming (the Return) after the Babylonian Exile (587-537 B.C.). Egyptian tyranny, a desert wandering and entrance into a Promised Land marked its first homecoming.

Jesus employs the theme of home, homelessness and homecoming in his story of the prodigal son. His storytelling reflects, for Christian faith, the joy of the Storyteller in a life story that ends well.⁶ The story is a travel narrative of three distinct phases in the relationship between a father and his beloved son. The son rejects his father and home; he goes into ‘exile’ and engages in riotous living in an alien land; finally, he remembers and returns to his father and home(land). Jesus tells of homecoming at the deepest level of our existence; he implies that it consists in the recognition and acceptance of the truth about ourselves and our ultimate environment and ground of existence (home, homeland, fatherland) which, in the context of the entire gospel message, is the Father of Jesus himself. Homecoming is mutual recognition and acceptance, a state where finally everything is alright, as it was meant to be from the start. Jesus’ own homecoming as term in the resurrection tells us that we are most ourselves and most fully enjoying our true selves (self-realization) at the deepest level of our being when, with him in the daily process of our homecoming, we live in a relationship of reciprocal recognition and acceptance with his Father.

The author of Luke-Acts underscores the universal significance of Jesus Christ’s homecoming in order to meet the critical demands of the Christian community’s horizon-shift with regard to the conversion of the Gentiles. His two parallel volumes depict the life story of Jesus and that of his Church as a journey, a dynamic process with distinctive phases, following the way of the Lord. In parallel travel stories, the Spirit which led Jesus from Galilee to his homecoming and our salvation in Jerusalem leads his apostles from Jerusalem to proclaim it to the entire world in Rome. The Age of the Church enjoys a continuity with the Age of Jesus and tells the same story of a loving Father who promises the power of a new righteousness and life-giving love to those who will hear and abide by The Word spoken in the life story or homecoming of Jesus. The outer journeys of Luke-Acts symbolize an inner journey or homecoming in which the Christian community

surmounts the exclusivist insistence that only and solely in the Jewish nation may men find the meaning of their lives before a loving God and Father.

The homecoming of Jesus Christ in Luke-Acts relates the Christian community to the world by conjoining its givenness, accessible to it through memory, with its possibility. But not only with its own private possibility. The storytelling of Luke-Acts affirms that the homecoming of Jesus Christ's life story merges with a universal story and that it is revelatory of the world's and others' possibilities as well; it implies that all our private histories are chronicles of the quest for this same true story or homecoming.

After his homecoming in the resurrection, Jesus calls his disciples brothers (Jn. 20:17; Mt. 28:10). His homecoming has transformed their consciousness; their mutual recognition and acceptance now takes place at a much deeper level. Faith in Christ and the fulfilment of his Father's will are the foundation for achieving the prophetic dream of a universal brotherhood (cf. Mt. 12:46). The author of Hebrews affirms the impact of Jesus Christ's homecoming in terms of our sanctification and brotherhood: "For the one who sanctifies, and the ones who are sanctified, are of the same stock; that is why he openly calls them brothers" (2:11). The unity of brotherhood accrues from doing the Father's will, and the life story of Jesus Christ is Christian faith's understanding of what it means to do that will. In the New Testament Christians are called brothers about 160 times, and Jesus himself affirms that one who does the will of his Father is his own brother (Mt. 12:50; Mk. 3:35; Lk. 8:21). Brotherhood is the intention of the Father's will and evidence of its accomplishment. In the context of Jesus' death and resurrection, we may see brotherhood as a kind of twofold communication: from the Father whose will is to be done and from Jesus Christ who does it. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost symbolizes the power of the twofold communication of life-giving love (the Father's will in Jesus Christ) for creating brotherhood (Acts 2:7-11, 33).⁷

The New Testament presupposes our openness to the mystery of God and holds us responsible for an authentic homecoming in terms of our vision of ourselves, others, the world, and God.⁸ It indicts those who failed to see God in the life story of Jesus Christ, implying that what we see discloses what we are and what we fail to see discloses what we are not. If New Testament faith

affirms the ultimate gift and achievement of homecoming in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it implies that the quality of our own lived experience will precondition our ability to make this affirmation. If only the “pure of heart” see God, then they alone can grasp the significance of Jesus Christ’s life story. Our recognition and acceptance of Jesus Christ’s homecoming evidences our own.

For Jesus Christ, Ultimate Reality or Existence is personal. His life story is a homecoming which, for faith, reveals the Ultimate Reality calling it forth as his Father. He is always at home with his Father, addressing him as “Abba” (Mk. 14:36); and he instructs us to address him as our Father, to invoke him for deliverance from temptation and evil. Homecoming expresses the fulfilment of our Father’s will in an enterprise of filial dependence and fraternal interdependence. Our Father’s gift of the self and demand for responsible lives is the underlying ground of unity which interrelates all life stories. At source, ground and destination, he is their power for fulfilment in a common enterprise through which individuals supplement one another in their efforts to achieve their fundamental aspirations. Our self-knowledge and self-affection are correlative with our mutual-knowledge and mutual affection. And we have been capacitated and intended for such knowledge and affection by the Giver of life stories. Hugo Meynell writes: “All creatures are known and loved by God; it is the special privilege of Christians that the knowledge and love is mutual, that they consciously share in the life of God and hope for a consummation of that sharing in the future.”⁹

Homecoming, as a reaching out for our ultimate possibility, presumes a vision—even through a glass darkly—of what that ultimate possibility is. No authentic homecoming is possible without vision, without a particular way of understanding, imagining, and feeling about the world and ourselves. Rooted in faith, authentic Christian vision is factual, doctrinal, intuitive, and mystical; it is revealed in the whole of the Christian story and summons us to our true story through Jesus Christ’s sonship relationship to God and brotherhood relationship to others.

The factual, doctrinal, intuitive and mystical components of the Christian vision of the world are indispensable for an authentically Christian homecoming. The story of Israel’s promise culminating in Jesus Christ is more than an historical fact; it is an event pregnant with a divine meaning. Christian doctrines are never merely abstract propositional statements; they are always doct-

trines illuminating the meaning of the unique event of Jesus Christ, an event which occurs not merely in the world outside us, but also within ourselves. This event has an objective and a subjective pole, neither of which can be suppressed. The event must be understood and lived; its meaning must be grasped (orthodoxy) and put into practice (orthopraxis). An intuitive and mystical awareness of the presence of God characterizes faith's search for its true story; it embraces an ethic which looks upon right conduct as a response to the present leading of the Holy Spirit.

Although the Christian sense of homecoming is based on an absolute confidence that God will be true to the promises that he has given us in the life story of Jesus Christ, it is prepared for surprises in the particular ways that these promises will be fulfilled in our own lives. But our basic faith interprets and unifies the manifold of our experience on the premise that the ultimate issues of life are interpretable and not absurd; it addresses itself to questions about the ultimate nature and structure of reality and grounds belief in how we ought to behave.¹⁰ Christian faith envisions a homecoming that occurs in the particulars of our spatio-temporal experience, embracing what has been and is experienced, and open and orientated to what can and will be experienced in the concreteness of our life stories. It has been interpreted as a belief in an overarching or universal story, a narratable sequence with a beginning and an end, that is the ultimate context within which each life story has its particular meaning. Hugh Jones writes that "God, as it were, has his own life story."¹¹ He is someone to be greeted within our personal and communal life stories, the Giver of stories; he is their ultimate frame or context. Faith interprets Jesus Christ's life story as the key to God's own story, the decisive story which overarches, interprets, judges, sustains, calls forth and saves our stories.

The general judgment implies that mankind, as a collective unity, has a story which comes under God's judgment; it implies that the one total definitive state of man, as individual and as collective unity before God, will emerge in accordance with its ultimate meaning and value. What is now ambiguous in an ambiguous world of ambiguous life stories will resolve itself and what is truly good will prevail. The general or "last" judgment expresses Christian faith's conviction that our individual and collective stories are called forth to a true meaning and fulfillment in a world that is not absurd.

Final judgments are possible only when all the evidence is in.

The ultimate meaning of our life stories, both as individuals and as a collective unity, is fully knowable in its final effects. Like historical events and movements, they are known in their term. Each new generation provides a new framework for assessing the impact of former generations whose meaning continues to emerge. As the meaning of life stories, events and movements continues to emerge, we become aware of how partial and incomplete our understanding of them was. We are always making new assessments ('new histories') of historical data in the light of current developments. The meaning of the Resurrection, of the Christian movement, continues to unfold in the historical evidence of life stories bearing witness to it; there is more historical evidence confirming its credibility today than there was at the time of the apostles.

Hegel and Pannenberg, in different ways, have recognised that the complete understanding of a life story, event, or movement presupposes a grasp of their relationships to everyone and everything else in the continuum of history. Because every existent in this continuum is related to every other existent, its meaning is only partially ascertainable until its full context of relationships emerges at the end of history. Hence, Pannenberg affirms that God's historical revelation of himself will reach completion only at the term of the historical process through which it is taking place. The fullness of human history depends on the Storyteller calling forth our life stories to that consummation of our individual and collective stories in what Christian faith believes to be the resurrection of the just as adumbrated in Jesus Christ and the impact of his life story.

The story of the Christian community is that of a people helping one another to find their true stories as they are "waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearance of the glory of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus" (Ti. 2:13), when all the truly good life stories have been told. Faith's sense of an ending derives from the life story of Jesus Christ which "has made salvation possible for the whole human race and taught us that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God, and all worldly ambitions" (Ti. 2:11f.). "Ambitions" for a life story apart from the one which the Storyteller would have our lives tell are based on the illusion that such a story would be a truly good story. Our individual stories belong within the larger and longer stories of our families, societies, cultures, the human race, the divine order and intention of the Storyteller's story; and they are

not always good as stories, especially if they are lacking in the integrity of form and coherence with the universal story that the Storyteller is intent on telling.

If “the sum total of necessary conditions for the coming into being of an individual, a species, a phylum or of life itself, are not logically or historically identical with the individual, or species, or phylum, or life itself,”^{1 2} we are neither the absolute creators of our life stories nor are we in full possession of them. We originate as gift, an incipient life story received from others; and we are rarely able to account for more than the immediate others in the long web of ancestors that have been the indispensable conditions for our story.

We are unable to remember, in telling our life story, all the biologically “memorable” individuals who have been the indispensable conditions for the biological reality of our story. We have been called into existence through an ancestral web of life stories, into a particular world which, although presented to us for our free acceptance or rejection, we have not chosen for ourselves. Our life story is not exclusively a matter of self-determination. It involves both our freely receiving what we have been freely given, and our freely giving what we have freely received. Our self-acceptance implies our willingness to accept the definite historical background from which our life story has been called forth; it implies acceptance of a world which can never be “worked over” to such an extent that we are eventually dealing only with material we have chosen and created for the telling of our life stories; ultimately, it also implies an acceptance of the Giver of all life stories in and through all his stories. An authentic self-acceptance implies both an acceptance, therefore, of the universal story encompassing all our stories and a fully personal “yes” to the Storyteller and his sense of an ending.

Every generation leaves something for each successive generation, suggesting that all stories should begin with the word ‘And,’ to remind us that no experience begins without something that preceded it. What really begins, for us, is our awareness of something going on. Perhaps all stories should end with the word ‘and’ too. This would remind us that no story really ends; something more will happen after. There will always be more to start with in our life stories than we can take into account. There is always more to say than we can possibly say. There is always more to end with than we can imagine.

Our individual life story is immersed in a great ocean of life

stories. Christian faith believes that the dynamic interrelationship and order of life stories is not an accidental happening. It believes that our life stories, despite their finitude, are invested with the significance of being related to every other life story within a universal story that is being created by the Storyteller calling it forth. Every life story has the importance of deriving from the Giver of life stories and of belonging to his universal story. Although he has fixed the times and the cycles that govern our life stories, He has endowed us with Freedom and responsibility for the quality of our stories within His allotted times.

Our stories of God reflect our belief in what the Storyteller intends our life stories to become in the telling of his universal story. They concern our discovering “the will of God,” our finding our true story, our true possibilities within the concrete particularities of our historical context for leading lives which faithfully express the intention of the Storyteller for their appropriate realization within the Mystery that ultimately defines them. Our stories of God express our sense of an ending for all the life stories that have been given us for telling.

- 1 See David Bakan, *The Duality of Human Existence* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1966). Also John Navone, “Satan Returns,” *Sign* 54 (Sept. 1974) pp. 11-17.
- 2 Robert B. Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968) provides the basis for this distinction. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) is implicitly relevant for an approach to eschatology.
- 3 See Schyler Brown, *Apostasy and Perseverance in the Theology of Luke* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1969).
- 4 John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth* (London: Sheldon Press, 1972), pp. 89f.
- 5 John Navone, *Towards a Theology of Story* (Slough, U.K.: St. Paul Publications, 1977) treats of “Home, homelessness and homecoming,” pp. 58-61, 66f., 73f.
- 6 Peace is one expression of a God-given homecoming: “Peace I leave to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you” (Jn. 14:27). The peace of a good conscience, of being “right” with ourselves and the Ultimate Truth of things, implies that God himself—the Ultimate Truth of things—is the basis of our peace or homecoming.
- 7 According to Matthew’s Gospel, the whole past of Israel is relived in the relationship of Jesus and his disciples as he communicates to them an understanding of the kingdom of heaven, and this recapitulated past is prologue to the future struggles of the Church among all nations. See Charles H. Giblin, “Theological Perspective and Matthew 10:23b,” *Theological Studies* 29 1968 pp. 637-661. Also his “What is the Gospel?” *Thought XLV* (Summer 1970), p. 233.

- 8 John Navone, "Christian Vision," *Cross and Crown* 29 (Dec. 1977), pp. 346-56.
- 9 Hugo Meynell, "The Holy Trinity and the Corrupted Consciousness," *Theology* LXX (May, 1976), p. 148. This is not inconsistent, according to Meynell, with God's giving the gift of his love in and through other religious traditions. He notes Bernard Lonergan in *A Second Collection*, pp174f, to affirm: "But if the Spirit who is God's love is the Spirit of the Son, and the Son is made man, those who receive the Spirit explicitly through the Son do have a special privilege," p. 148.
- 10 See Andrew Greeley, *What a Modern Catholic Believes about God* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1971), pp. 18-21.
- 11 Hugh Jones, "The Concept of Story and Theological Discourse," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1976) 6, p. 427.
- 12 Daniel W. Hardy, "Man the Creature," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1977), 2, p. 123.

Judaism and the Universe of Faiths

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Recently there has been considerable discussion in Christian circles about the relationship between Christianity and the world religions. Traditionally Christians have insisted that anyone outside the Church cannot be saved. To quote a classic instance of this view, the Council of Florence in 1483-45 declared that: 'no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not just pagans but also Jews or heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life: but they will go to everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. Unless before the end of life they are joined to the Church'.¹

Increasingly, however, for many this view has seemed highly improbable in the light of contact with other faiths. An important document issued by the Catholic Church in 1965 (*Nostra Aetate*) for example declared that the truth which enlightens every man is reflected also in non-Christian religions.² Nevertheless while recognising the value of other religions, this declaration maintains that the Christian is at the same time under the obligation to preach that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.³