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Storytelling and Conversion in Children

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling and Conversion in Children

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This thesis explores storytelling and its use in conversion in children. Bernard Lonergan identifies a three-fold conversion: intellectual, religious and moral. Intellectual conversion allows us to distinguish between the world of immediacy and the world mediated by meaning. Religious conversion points us towards God, and moral conversion acknowledges a distinction between satisfactions and values, and it is committed to values even when they oppose satisfactions.

It begins with an overview of storytelling, storytellers, and stories and how they are used in communities to facilitate intellectual awakening to our world constituted by meaning. It then moves to the stories of Jesus, where children discover God and begin to develop a relationship with him.

It is helpful for parents and other caregivers to have some understanding of how children grow and develop. Developmentalists will help in the understanding of psycho-social, cognitive, moral and faith development in children. Finally, anthropologist Robert Coles reflects on the mystery involved in the development of moral persons.

The development of a religious sense in children begins at birth. Stories, and in particular, the Jesus stories, are used to help children develop a relationship with God, and to ultimately make choices based on values rather than rules. Our desire is to help children choose actions that are true and good; to choose long-term value over short-term satisfaction.

Storytelling can be used as an introduction to God, and is important in the development of religious imagination, for stories can evoke a more powerful faith than doctrine.

For Dad and Donnie

Two of the best storytellers

The Storytellers Creed

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge,
That myth is more potent than history
That dreams are more powerful than facts,
That hope always triumphs over experience,
That laughter is the only cure for grief,
And I believe that love is stronger than death.

- Robert Fulghum[1]

[1] Robert Fulghum, *All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, New York: Ivy Books, 1988, p. viii-ix

TABLE OF CONTENTS

You cannot tell people what to do,
You can only tell them parables.....
W.H. Auden

INTRODUCTION

Our faith begins with storytelling. Faith is the knowledge born of religious love.[1] In religious matters, love precedes knowledge; for God's gift of his love floods our hearts. The very beginning of faith is due to God's grace[2], and as children we become aware of that love for us through storytelling. The original stories in the Christian tradition are often overshadowed by creeds, Christologies and dogmas and, consequently, there is a need for adults and particularly children to rediscover the content of the gospel values which has become obscure and uncertain, especially due to recent cultural changes. There is a great need for children to fit their personal story into the larger community story. The 'Jesus' stories unmask common everyday truths, yet how can these truths and values be successfully transported into the 21st century? How can it be shown that God's love permeates all these stories?

Children have a natural capacity to wonder and enter into a story but has there been some loss of this 'wonder and awe'? Have our children, who are fed a steady diet of TV and video games lost the ability to use their imaginations – to

[1] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, University of Toronto Press:Toronto, 1971, p.115.
[2] Lonergan, *Method*, p.123.

be able to relate to 'heart' stories rather than only 'head' stories. These right brain[3] 'heart' stories are more redemptive and it is at this level that children explore religion. Stories can engage the child wholly. Fairy tales and folk tales, as a form of storytelling, have the capacity to open minds so children and adults can hear a demand for conversion.

Moral formation and ongoing conversion do not happen overnight. It is an continuing part of the longer journey of a child. What one hopes for in the child (and in the adult) is the innermost change of heart under the influence of God's word.

Ultimately, how does one guide the religious response in children to provide them with moral foundations to live truly good and productive lives? How does one help children move from their immediate surroundings towards a larger sense of responsibility and of community? In trying to lead children to a moral life of faith – to conversion – Christian parents are optimistic that they will empower the child to recognize, name and examine the things that tempt them away from Christ in our society.

How did Jesus teach us? He taught by example and he also told stories. This was a common practice in his culture. In his teachings Jesus does not hand down foreign truths but he uncovers essential truths; the 'Jesus' stories unveil the

[3] The right half of the cerebrum, controlling the left side of the body, in humans often associated with spatial perception and intuition. (Canadian Oxford Dictionary)

mystery of God's love and how God cares for humanity and the world. Jesus spoke in parables, telling stories, to get across his teaching and his message.

> "He tried to get listeners to think for themselves by jolting them out of their ordinary way of looking at things. He did not have to explain or interpret His parables. He left it to his listeners to draw their own conclusions and make their own responses."[4]

John Shea says, "we are born into a community of stories and storytellers. In interpreting our traditional stories of God we find out who we are and what we must do."[5]

The purpose of this paper is to help understand how a child's faith forms and how adults on the spiritual journey with children, through the use of storytelling, can significantly enhance the child's spiritual development. Spirituality involves the whole person relating to God; storytelling helps complete that relationship. Christian educators, parents, and other caregivers who understand the inner workings of the development of children can more effectively use storytelling to evoke an ongoing conversion in children. Storytelling stimulates a child's imagination and can be used to foster their spiritual life; it helps them learn to choose what is ultimately worthwhile over that which is immediately gratifying. Conversion is understood to be the transformation of the subject and his or her

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[4] Jerry Weiss, "Tell Us a Story", *Catechist*, 14:1 (September 1980), p.14.
[5] John Shea, "*Spiritual Literary Interpretations of the Gospel Stories*", *Audio Tape, June 28, 1995.*

world.[6] Bernard Lonergan identifies conversion at three levels: intellectual, religious and moral.

Intellectual conversion is awakening to the realization that we will only discover what is true when we use our most personal human capacities, when we devote ourselves to experiencing, understanding, judging with all the resources available to us.[7]

Religious conversion affirms what is *ultimately* good and points to God. Religious conversion is the turning around that resets our consciousness in terms of unrestricted love. When we are religiously converted, our hearts, the centre of ourselves, open to embrace whatever is good, noble, true and humanizing.[8]

Moral conversion, that "radically new horizon"[9], or affective conversion, is going beyond the search for meaning to determine what should be done and acting on it. Moral conversion is a difficult matter. This conversion to a new horizon is not effected by logic and must be reached by other means – "a non-logical leap". Stories can touch our hearts, our affective centre, and can challenge our desire for growth to become more authentic persons. Stories of God and God's love for us make possible the reality of living a morally converted life.[10]

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[6] Lonergan, *Method*, p.130.
[7] Vernon Gregson, *Desires of the Human Heart An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, Paulist Press:New York, 1988, p.28.
[8] Ibid., p.62.
[9] Ibid., p.52.
[10] Ibid., p.52.

With Lonergan's understanding of conversion in children, relating to storytelling, I begin with intellectual conversion, discovering what is intelligible and true through the use of story. In order to achieve this, first of all, I propose in chapter 1 to present an overview of storytelling and the storyteller. I will examine who used stories and for what purpose. I will consider different types of stories, their power and their intent. I will consider fairy and folk stories in some of their aspects but the stories I use as illustrations in the paper are a mixture of secular and folk stories, chosen to depict a particular point and because their length suited my needs.

Folk stories and fables are a valuable resource for the Christian teacher. Some stories can be told immediately after telling biblical stories and the listener can explore the differences and similarities of the two stories. Often we are so familiar with the bible story it no longer shocks or surprises us and with the proper use of fable or folk stories, they can actually help us get in touch with the Word. "Some of the deepest truths about life are to be found in stories and they offer the easiest access to the mysteries of life for the child's mind."[11]

The task of the storyteller is important and he or she must know, love and believe stories before any sharing is possible. A storyteller must be able to tell a good story in a persuasive manner but also must be able to reach and touch some

[11] Jerry Weiss, "Tell Us a Story", *Catechist* 14:1 (September 1980), p.14.

spiritual and moral side of the listener or the reader. We experience religion at the level of the imagination. Both story and art will touch us at this level. Stories are meant to totally engage the listener.

Our sense of responsibility only begins to emerge about the age of three as we gradually move into the world mediated by meaning and regulated by values. If we supposedly reach the age of reason by seven, the level of reason we reach is still far from maturity.[12] In chapter 2, on the development of the religious sense, I look at the Christian story and Jesus as *THE* storyteller. James Fowler's theories will then help to explain the developmental stages that characterize the basic growth of faith in children – faith as a person's way of making sense of life. He identifies stages of faith through which a person goes as he or she matures. With this basic understanding of faith development, I will then look at spiritual formation in children and finally at conversion – an ongoing, lifelong process that begins in childhood.

I investigate psychological and social development in drawing on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who builds on Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, to look at the levels of moral and social development in children in chapter 3. Carol Gilligan is utilized briefly to look at the difference in the moral development of boys and girls. Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg and Gilligan can guide us and give insights to the psycho-social, cognitive and moral development of the child but Robert Coles,

[12] Gregson, *Desires*, p.49.

child psychologist and anthropologist, draws our attention to the mystery involved in the development of moral persons. So I conclude the chapter with a brief explanation of Coles work.

As parents and educators our role in nurturing children is to help them develop skills for decision-making that will enable them not only to make good moral decisions but also to act on them. As children broaden their horizons they are able to grasp what was outside their original horizon. We can use stories to appeal to a child's conscious attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibilities as expressed in concepts, propositions, words, images and symbols.[13] Stories can be used to help in looking for true meaning and value, for sifting out what is illusory and false. Analysis of a story is carried forth chiefly in terms of imagery rather than in abstract concepts, for the aim of a story is to appeal not only to reason but also to feelings, emotions and instincts – to all the faculties that can be more directly affected by such imagery with its wide range of cultural connotations.

Discerning is to understand what is truly good; to discover what is rooted in the enlightening and healing word of God. As persons, we are ordered towards personal growth and transformation. From the suffering and tension of everyday life comes the call to go beyond certain learned but inadequate modes of life to more authentic, higher levels of existence. This invites the use of critical

[13] Lonergan, *Method,* p.224.

intelligence enlightened by prayer; it is a call for self-transcendence – for transformation. Stories and storytelling can facilitate this process. Stories help children see the consequences of actions without requiring that the consequences happen to them. Stories open a forum that allows objective discussion of issues. Children learn the value of the goodness and fairness of a particular action, and our hope is that their morally conscious self will develop a drive to go beyond itself and act accordingly.

There is no surer way to the heart and mind of a child than through the use of a good story.

Peter: "You see, I don't know any stories.
None of the lost boys know any stories."
Wendy: "How perfectly awful."
-Peter Pan, by J.M. Barrie

CHAPTER 1

Storytelling and Development

Intellectual Conversion

We are all storytellers and we all live in one story or another. It is part of our nature as human beings to pass on our human story from one generation to the next, to connect with our past, to garner wisdom from it and to will this to future generations. This chapter explores stories and storytellers, imagination, myth, metaphor and Bible stories; for stories shape our lives. We learn our stories in community; we are formed within communities. Our particular community, the Christian community, has its own stories, memories and ethical teachings based on the Judeo-Christian collection of stories and in particular, Jesus and his stories.

John Navone, in quoting Bernard Lonergan from his *Collected Works*, tells us:

> "Without stories there is no knowledge of the world, of ourselves, of others and of God. Our narrative consciousness is our power for comprehending ourselves in our coherence with the world and other selves; it expresses our existential reality as storytelling and story listening animals, acting and reacting within our particular world context, overcoming the incoherence of the unexamined life. One man's story is another man's point of departure. We live on

> stories; we shape our lives through stories; mastering the complexity of our experience through the dynamic of our structured knowing a whole whose parts involve many distinct and irreducible activities: seeing, hearing, smelling touching, tasting, inquiring, imaging, understanding, conceiving, reflecting, weighing the evidence, judging."[1]

Who used stories

Fairy tales, as a form of storytelling, are as old as language itself and have been studied from many perspectives by philologists, linguists, historians, sociologists, psychologists and lovers of stories. The origins of the fairy tale in Western civilization are in the ancient oral traditions of the folk tale of magic found in the lower classes. The term fairy tale indicates the advent of a new literary form that appropriates elements of the folk to present values and behaviours of the aristocratic and bourgeois classes. Fairy tales are products of the literary upper class, as they were written mainly by court ladies as diversions from their discontentment with marital arrangements and patriarchal domination during the period of absolutism in France during the reign of Louis XIV.[2] Fairy tales incarnate our deepest hopes and our most ardent desires; they carry implicit meaning to the listener and can help move the listener to a higher level in

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[1] John Navone, *Towards A Theology of Story*, p 18 quoting Bernard Lonergan in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, Ed by Crowe: Herder & Herder:New York, 1967, p. 222.
"Human knowing is a formally dynamic structure that puts itself together, one part summoning forth the next, till the whole is reached. The process is conscious, intelligent, and rational. Storytelling is a form of the dynamic structure of knowing and its distinct activities. It leads from experience through imagination to insight; it expresses understanding (interpretation of experience) and judgement." (Ibid. p.223.)

[2] Katia Canton, *The Fairy Tale Revisited*, Peter Lang:New York, 1996, p.6.

decision-making related to his or her personal life. The stories can help resolve conflicts and identity crises, help discover and tame the "stranger"[3] within us.

"The magic of Faërie[4] is not an end in itself, its virtue is in its operations: among these are the satisfactions of certain primordial human desires."[5] To ask what is the origin of stories is to ask what is the language of the mind. Folklorists, philologists and anthropologists tend to want to unravel stories and get information from them but in doing so they forget the original intent of the story. J.R.R.Tolkien says that "even with regard to language... the essential quality and aptitudes of a given language in a living monument is both more important to seize and far more difficult to make explicit than its linear history."[6] In his book, *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim, from the Freudian school, tells the reader "If we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives."[7] Development of mind and body is gained through experience from childhood to adulthood - children need the growth experience to find meaning in their lives.

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[3] Julia Kristeva, in *Strangers to Ourselves,* Columbia University Press:New York, 1991, explains that that which we fear most in others (strangers) is ultimately that which we fear within ourselves – the "stranger", p.191-2.

[4] Faërie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic – but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician. There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That the story must be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away. (Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf,* Unwin Books:London, 1964.)

[5] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf.*P.18.

[6] Ibid., p.23.

[7] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales,* Vintage Books:New York, 1977, p.3.

Folktales have a sense of urgency that rings with nearly every story. They seem to say to the listener "What you do is of absolute importance." In folktales what may seem insignificant could conceivably have dire consequences. A girl is given a box and told not to open it; she does and all sorts of evil rushes out. In our Christian story a man and woman are put in a garden and asked not to eat the fruit of a particular tree. They eat it and the world is never the same again.

Folktales show us what happens if we are greedy or break our promise; they manifest for us that we must become who we are meant to be. Some folktales are banal and others are filled with violence but many are like the parables of Jesus – they can change the way a listener looks at the world.

The Grain of Rice

Once there was a good king who ruled wisely and who ruled well. He was loved by all the people in the kingdom. One day the king called his four daughters together and told them that he was leaving on a long journey. "I wish to learn about God. I will spend a long time in prayer. In my absence I will leave the four of you in charge."

"Oh, father," they cried, "don't leave us. We will never be able to rule the kingdom without you."

The king smiled. "You will do well in my absence. Now, before I leave I wish to give each of you a gift. It is my prayer that this gift will help you learn the meaning of rule." The king placed a single grain of rice in each daughter's palm. Then he left.

The oldest daughter immediately went to her room She tied a long golden thread around the grain of rice and placed it in a beautiful crystal box. Every day she picked up the box and she looked at it.

The second daughter also went into her room, where she placed the grain of rice in a wooden box and put it in a secure spot, under her bed. The third daughter, a very pragmatic young woman,

looked at the grain of rice and thought, "This grain of rice is no different from any other grain of rice." She simply threw the grain of rice away.

The youngest daughter took the grain of rice to her room and wondered about the significance of the gift. She wondered for week, then a month.

When nearly a year had passed, she understood the meaning of the gift.

Months turned into years, and the four daughters ruled in the absence of their father. Then, one day, the king returned. His beard was full and his eyes sparkled with illumination gained through years of prayer. The king greeted each of his daughters, and then asked to see the gifts he had left them.

The oldest daughter rushed to her room and brought the crystal box. "Father," she began, "I carefully tied a golden thread around the grain of rice and have kept it near my bed where I have looked at it every day since you have left."

Bowing to his daughter, the king accepted the box and said, "Thank you."

Next, the second daughter presented her father with a grain of rice. "All these years I have kept the rice secure under my bed." She said. "Here it is."

Again the father bowed, accepted the box, and said, "Thank you. "The third daughter rushed to the kitchen, found a grain of rice, ran back and said, "Father, here is a grain of rice."

Smiling, the king accepted the grain of rice, bowed, and said, "Thank you."

Finally the youngest daughter stepped before her father and spoke. "I do not have the grain of rice that you gave me," she said.

"Whatever did you do with it?" the king inquired.

"Father, I thought about that grain of rice for nearly a year before I discovered the meaning of the gift. I realized that the grain of rice was a seed, so I planted it in the ground. Soon it grew, from it I harvested other seeds. I then planted all of those seeds, and again I harvested the crop. Father, I have continued to do this. Come, look at the results."

The king followed his daughter to the window where he looked out at an enormous crop of rice stretching as far as the eye could see. There was enough rice to feed their entire small nation.

Stepping before his daughter, the king took off his golden crown and placed it on her head. "You have learned the meaning of rule,' he said softly.

From that day the youngest daughter ruled the kingdom. She

ruled long, and she ruled wisely, and she ruled well.[8],[9]

Fairy and folktales can be enriching and satisfying to the child. They are mostly tales from another era, before capitalist modern mass society came into being and when there was a strong oral tradition. Children need a chance to understand themselves in our complex world and they can learn from fairy tales the inner problems of human beings and discover the right solutions to the problems. In fairy tales there is a moral education that is subtly given, by implication, on the advantages of good behaviour. Speaking psychoanalytically, fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, preconscious and unconscious mind. The message that fairy tales get across to the child is that:

> "the struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable; it is an intrinsic part of human existence and that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious."[10]

Fairy tales state existential dilemmas briefly and clearly - they often begin with death or impending death from old age. Fairy tales simplify all situations with their characters being typical rather than unique. Evil is as omnipresent as virtue and is given bodily form in some figure and in their actions. The reader meets the Evil giant, the Genie in the bottle, an Evil Stepmother, some trolls, or other scary being. The duality of good and evil that is ubiquitous in life poses a moral

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[8] William White, *Stories for Telling: A Treasury for Christian Storytellers,* Augsberg Publishing House:Minneapolis, 1986, pp.71-72.
[9] I find the mystery of a story unravels more effectively when the story is allowed to speak for itself.
[10] Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment,* p.8.

problem in the story and requires a struggle to solve it. We see this in the character of the hero who, against many adversaries and bad luck, at the end of the story emerges victorious. The reader will also find that the characters in fairy stories are always polarized - the good sister and the evil sister, the ugly child and the beautiful child and the smart and the stupid child. Fairy tales also abound with religious motifs and many of our Bible stories are of the same nature as fairy tales.

Stories, parables, fairy tales, fables, anecdotes, illustrations, all help us to see the "bigger picture" in life. They help us to understand there is more to life than our own limited sphere of experience. They create pictures in our mind and open our imagination to comprehend a greater dimension of life than we would normally experience. Stories are vehicles that take us to far off places, places we've never experienced ourselves. Stories help us broaden our horizons.

Stories, myths, fables, fairy tales seep all into the listeners inner resources and awaken the sleeping giant – the imagination – the incorrigible child forever at play with frivolities when reason is doing serious work. But imagination carries truth.[11] We can never see things as they really are - it all depends how you look at it.

[11] William Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith,* Twenty-third Publications:Connecticut, 1984, p.24.

The Boy and the Wolf

The wolf was *prowling over the fields looking for food. A boy saw the wolf coming and turned to flee. He realized that the wolf would catch up with him in a few seconds, so instead he tried to hide in some long grass.*
The wolf found the boy's hiding place almost at once. He came loping over to the child, his teeth bared.
"Please Mr. Wolf, do not eat me," begged the boy, trembling with fear.
The wolf hesitated. He had intended to kill and eat the boy, but he had to admit that he had already caught plenty of small animals that day, and he was not really very hungry. He decided instead to have some sport with the terrified child.
"Very well," he said, licking his lips. "I will spare your life, if you can tell me three things that are so true that I cannot possibly disagree with them."
The boy thought rapidly, knowing that his life depended on his three answers.
"Well, he said slowly, "it's a pity that you saw me."
"That's true," agreed the wolf. "That's one answer."
"And," went on the boy, gaining confidence, it's a pity I let you see me."
"That's true as well," nodded the wolf. "Very well, you have two out of three. Everything depends upon your third answer."
"Thirdly," said the boy in a rush, "people hate wolves because they attack sheep for no reason at all."
The wolf was silent for a long time. The boy wondered if he had been too bold. But this wolf was fair-minded.
"I suppose that is true from your point of view," he admitted. "Very well, you may go."[12]

Storyteller

Fairy tales or fairy stories weave a spell from the beginning to the end, they open the door on *Other* time and if we pass through only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe. A good storyteller creates a 'sub-world' into which the listener enters and while inside what is related is true.

With disbelief the spell is broken and the listener is in the Primary world again. When a story was learned from the oral tradition it was assimilated through closely living with those who knew it and shared it; the stories would become part of the listener and the teller. Story telling has a dramatic quality for action that is always part of the story. Sadly, the art of storytelling almost vanished with the dissolution of traditional cultures. The consequences of this eventuality could have a grievous affect on children for the storyteller carries the seeds of truth and history that are both actual and mythological. If the storyteller dies without passing on the stories a treasure that is unretrievable can be lost and thus the heart of a culture, its teachings and its memories could disappear forever. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience of his or her own or that reported by others; then he or she in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to the tale. Lonergan tells us that:

> "Besides the memories of each individual, there are the pooled memories of the group; their celebration in song and story, their preservation in written narratives, in coins and monuments and every other trace of the groups' words and deep life to posterity for such is the field of historical investigation."[13]

Richard Adams' novel *Watership Down*[14] begins with the exodus of a small group of rabbits from a large, well-organized warren. Like the children of Israel, these rabbits are slaves who want a home of their own. Early in the story Adams informs us that rabbits are great lovers of stories, and although the stories are

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[12] *Aesop's Fables*, illustrated by Eric Kincaid, Brimax Books:Newmarket, UK, 1993, p.48.
[13] Lonergan, *Method,* p.177.
[14] Richard Adams, *Watership Down,* Rex Collins:London, 1972.

entertaining, storytelling is the method the rabbits use to find their way through life. El-ahrairah, the mischievous prince of rabbits, reminds the travelers that they are a vulnerable species and must live by their wit, speed and their strong sense of community. The stories help remind them of their origins and of who they are and where they are going. They recall the past as their journey gets difficult and they want to return to their warren. They begin to doubt their decision to leave.

In the end, the exodus rabbits establish their warren on Watership Down. The key to their success, their strategy and their eventual victory comes from one of the stories from their prince, El-ahrairah. The stories help them to avoid the traps that the storyless rabbits fall into because the stories help the rabbits remember their past. The rabbits therefore know who they are and where they are going. Like God's chosen people, the little band of rabbits gets help along the way. They are often in the right place at the right time for a "miracle". The time in the story can be now, yesterday or always.

Stories - Imagination – Involvement

The storytelling process has characteristic ingredients. People tell and retell experiences for there is always more to our experience that we can initially articulate. We try to recapture the initial experience. If the experience has religious significance the inner impact will eventually be sorted out and claimed in the retelling of the story.

Storytelling has the power of involvement and through the retelling of stories, people form pervasive attitudes and outlooks on the mystery of life. We remember past significant experiences when something in our current living resonates with them. We tell stories of the past to ground us in the present. Religious storytelling follows a different set of instincts than stories told for historical purposes for what is quintessential is the revelation that goes on inside the person. Convictions and attitudes learned from stories can engender a certain sensitivity and precipitate particular moral struggles. The truth is built on what has been interpreted in the light of inner revelation.

Stories are meant to be told not read; the vitality enriches and enlivens the teller as much as the listener. Written stories are flat; they lack life and colour. One of the reasons for storytelling is to inspire "to put spirit into". Isak Dinesen, in *Last Tales* writes that "Without stories the human race would have perished as it would have perished without water."[15]

The importance of storytelling for self-understanding is found in the act by which storytelling is made possible. Only after we experience storytelling is it possible to valourise an act and only then can we critically pursue the story of our lives[16] for human knowing and feeling are incomplete without expression. The

[15] Isak Dinesen, *Last Tales*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1957.
[16] Navone, *Towards a Theology of Story*, p.35.

development, then, of symbols, of the arts and of a literature are intrinsic to human advance.[17] Storytelling engages the heart and indeed the whole person.

Among the requirements for the storyteller are the childlike qualities of wonder, imagination and creativity. These qualities empower one to perceive a greater reality already within the ordinary daily activities of life. Storytellers must be vigilant that they do not develop cataracts of spirit, or arthritis of the mind. These are symptoms of an acute disease plaguing every man and woman past the age of 17 – "psychosclerosis"- hardening of one's mind, imagination and attitude.

One of the frustrations of the storyteller is the uncertainty at times of whether he or she is getting the message across to the listeners. The Evangelist Mark, in the parable "The Seed Grows of Itself" (Mk4: 26-29), deals with this frustration: "A man scatters seed on the ground. The farmer goes to bed and gets up day after day. Through it all the seed sprouts and grows without his knowing how it happened." Stories contain a dynamic life force capable of sprouting, growing and bearing fruit in the lives of the listeners without the storyteller knowing it is happening. The storyteller must simply keep telling stories, like the farmer faithfully scattering the seeds. By telling the story the storyteller gives them away and this preserves the story. Hannah Arendt recognized the importance of the story and often quoted Isak Dinesen's statement that "All sorrows can be born if you put them into a story or tell a story about them."[18]

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[17] Lonergan, *Method*, p.303.
[18] Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, Harcourt Brace:New York, 1968, p.104.

Must know and love stories

Arendt says that the story "reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings."[19] A story is not alive unless it is given away, retold anew or taken off the static page and reinvigorated by the spoken word. To be effective the storyteller must enter into the story. Martin Buber tells the story of his grandfather who was asked to relate a story about his teacher, the famous and holy Baal Shem Tov:

> *"The paralyzed grandfather replied by telling how the holy man used to jump up and down and dance when he was praying. Being swept up in the fervour of the narrative, the grandfather himself, stood up and began to jump and dance to show how the master had done it. At that moment the grandfather was completely healed of his paralysis."*[20]

The storyteller must be persuasive and engaging in order to have an influence on the life and action of another. The storyteller or artist, who has been astonished by the work or the job at hand simply wishes to share this astonishment with others. With the Bible stories we tell them to share our excitement with the listener and help the listener come to his or her own conclusions and thus share in the excitement.

But what meaning has the story for us? Once a poem or a story goes out into the world, it belongs to the world. What did the author mean? Now if the author has something to say, it must be given adequate opportunity to speak and the role of

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[19] Ibid., p.104.
[20] Bausch, *Storytelling,* p.54.

the public is to listen. Does the story have the ability to "astonish" the listener? Can the storyteller communicate his or her excitement that comes from the story? The storyteller invites the listener to "come and see".

For a child, a good story must hold his or her attention, it must entertain and it must arouse curiosity. To enrich a child's life it must stimulate the imagination, develop the intellect and clarify the emotions. A good story should be tuned into the emotions of the child and give recognition to difficulties but at the same time suggest solutions to the problems that can perturb a child. All of this should ideally be accomplished without belittling the child. "The fairy tale itself is its own best explanation; that is, the meaning is contained in the totality of its motifs connected by the thread of the story."[21]

Fairy tales, with all their themes and variations, endeavour to describe one and the same psychic fact and have it delivered into consciousness.

> "This unknown fact is what (Carl) Jung calls the Self, which is the psychic totality of an individual and also, paradoxically, the regulation centre of the collective unconscious. Every individual and every nation has its own modes of experiencing this psychic reality."[22]

[21] Von Franz, Marie-Louise, *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales,* Spring Publications:Dallas, 1979, p.1.
[22] Ibid. ,p.1.

Power of Stories

A story engages the mind and permits a savouring of words; it can help revisit an old situation in a new way. Telling our story helps us go back, not to change the unchangeable situation, but to reinterpret it creatively. Dreams, myths, symbols, imagination – all are related and all find their best expression in art, especially in the art of storytelling. Dreams carry truth and they make sense, not logical sense but mythological, story sense. Carl Jung indeed saw human beings as having a spiritual nature as well as a biological one (the only one Sigmund Freud saw) and that dreams express our living reality and essence.

Daydreams are disturbances of the peace but we ignore them at our own peril. Without daydreams the psyche shrivels.[23] Psychology has rediscovered what ancient and primitive peoples knew: that dreams are essential for sanity. The utilization of imagination in fantasy can be an economical way to trying on alternate ways of feeling, acting or being. In fantasy, any outlawed or unacceptable wish can find fulfilment. We can be as cruel, crazy, strong, weak, grandiose, timid or whimsical as we please. [24] The way we imagine anything is exactly what leads to the creation of something fresh or the possible solution of a question. When we read stories we tend to put ourselves into them, to identify with one character or another; we learn about ourselves and therefore can

[23] Sam Keene and Anne Valley Fox, *Telling Your Story: A Guide to Who You Are and Who You Can Be*, Doubleday & Company:New York, 1973, p.97.
[24] Ibid., p.98.

choose to grow – to change, to experience conversion. We gain self-knowledge in perceiving or understanding an individual feeling and for each person this can be a voyage of discovery, a life-long process. We can come to know through our imagination, and experience a sudden grasp of reality through the reliving of circumstance in the imagination. Groups live on in their past and their past, so to speak, lives on in them. Their memories and stories of past exploits help give the group an identity and contribute to the common good of order. The present functioning of the good of order is mostly because of past functioning and only slightly because of the minor efforts now needed to keep things going and to improve them where possible.[25]

Types of stories used

There are many genres of stories, including Bible stories, fables, myths, cautionary tales, fairy tales and folk tales. Frequently these stories do more than expose our failures; they also lift our spirits by pointing to our hopes. When fairy stories are told they exaggerate good and evil and create clear targets because in real life the best and the worst are so entwined that we usually can't tell which is which; Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are in fact united. Exaggeration pulls apart what life has joined together and because life is complex, we invent heroes and heroines. We learn from churches, schools, and the media how to tell the white hats from the black hats; they instruct us as assiduously as any primitive mythology ever taught its adherents to locate friends and enemies of God.[26]

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[25] Lonergan, *Method,* p.182.
[26] Keene and Valley Fox, *Telling Your Story,* p.71.

Whether or not we can ever create a society of the unalienated, we can at least lessen the alienation in ourselves. Every person has traces of paradise inside and if we can locate our feelings of harmony we can learn to move in and out of them almost at will.

What are the benefits of telling a child a fairy story or tale? A child listens, spins a fantasy around the story, becomes familiar with a character with whom he or she identifies and this process helps the child deal with perhaps his or her own confusing emotions. The fairy tale guarantees a happy ending; therefore the child need not fear letting his or her unconscious thought come to the fore. Fairy tales allow any harm that has occurred to be undone by good deeds or by good will.

It is unfortunate that, today, children are exposed to sanitized versions of fairy tales as seen in Disney films and on TV; these have become empty-minded entertainment. With the telling of fairy tales children formed concepts of the world and these fairy tales gave social ideals after which the child could pattern his or her life. Fairy tales are therapeutic because one finds one's own solution upon contemplation of the story. Fairy tales are able to illustrate inner conflict and can very subtly show how the conflicts may be solved, leading the listener into the next step towards a higher humanity. Not all stories in fairy tale collections actually fit the parameter of the fairy tale. Many are cautionary tales that warn us not to be carried away by negative emotions and clearly, this is

something unavoidable in children. Myths are story patterns that have the presence of a cultural hero after whom the listener can model his or her life. And finally, fables can demand or threaten, they can be moralistic or they can just entertain. Far from making demands on even the smallest child, the true fairy tale reassures, gives hope for the future and holds out promise for a happy ending. Lewis Carroll calls a fairy tale a "love-gift" – a term hardly applicable to myth.[27]

"Fairy stories are never deliberately symbolic, yet they embody mankind's shrewdest and most realistic insights into human nature:"[28] Fairy tales can open our minds to the human and make us able to hear more sharply the demand for the transformation of the human into its own completeness in Christ. Frederick Buechner bids us come to that other place:

> *"Once upon a time*, which is to say at a time beyond time, or at a different kind of time altogether from the kind the clock measures, or at a different time that is no time at all because it is without beginning and without end. *There was* a wizard, a woodchopper, a king, which is to say that if you are to believe that *there was*, you have to give up other beliefs you believe in including the belief that *there was not* because there could not be such creatures as these. *A far country, a deep forest, a palace*, which is to say that if you care to enter these places for yourself, you must be willing to enter them in some measure as a child because it takes a child to believe in the

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[27] Child of the pure unclouded brow
And dreaming eyes of wonder!
Though time be fleet, and I and thou
Are half a life asunder,
They loving smile will surely hail
The love gift of a fairy tale.
C.L.Dogdson (Lewis Carroll), in *Through the Looking Glass*

[28] Rosemary Haughton, *Tales from Eternity: The World of Faërie and the Spiritual Search*, George Allen and Urwin:London, 1975, p.15.

possibility at least that such places exist instead of dismissing them out-of-hand as impossible.[29]

Stories are effective because they are objective to the listener and they can be heard in a non-threatening manner. A story is formed in the mind of the listener by word-pictures and as the story unfolds the scenes are formed in the mind of the hearer, taking shape as if they were a mental videotape. How the story is told becomes a positive or a negative influence on the quality of the word-pictures that the person hears and assimilates. Stories become 'new' to us when something in our experience makes us ready to hear them. We must take seriously the familiar, the everyday and discover dislocations within the familiar. We must find who we are in our own particular story.

What Stories Can Do

Story listening requires a childlike wisdom that combines innocence and experience, and no one can be both innocent and experienced in the presence of every story. And so not everyone will get every story, at least not right away. Story cannot be commanded or forced; it must float loosely within its vehicle; the better to lodge within each hearer's spirit. The story is directed outward, is a public genre, inviting participation, empathy and identification.

> *"A disciple once complained, "You tell us stories, but you never reveal their meaning to us." Said the master, "How would you like it if someone offered you fruit and chewed it up before giving it to you?" No one can find meaning for you. Not even the master."*[30]

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[29] Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy & Fairy Tale*, Harper Collins:San Francisco, 1977, p.73-4.
[30] White, *Speaking in Stories*, p.20.

Once upon a time people told stories; in the midst of sorrow and in the presence of joy, both mourners and celebrants told stories. But people told stories especially in times of trouble, when a "miracle" was needed and the limits of human ability were reached, people turned to storytelling as a way of exploring the fundamental mysteries: *Who are we? Why are we? How are we to live?*

The most basic questions are spiritual questions and so stories that people told concerned spirituality. They also concerned imperfection – the limits experienced by those subject to failures of not-knowing and the other "unables" and "cannots".

> *"When the great Rabbi Israel Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.*
> *Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer," and again the miracle would be accomplished.*
> *Still later, Rabbi Moshe-leib of Sasav, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say, "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know how to say the prayer, but I do know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.*
> *Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient."*
> *And it was sufficient. God made man because he loves stories.*[31]

[31] Bausch, *Storytelling*, pp. 15-6

Usually we learn best when we are enjoying ourselves most: songs, jokes and stories told just for the fun of it worm their way into our imagination and nibble at the core of our more serious beliefs. As children we were taught that all are equal in the eyes of God and the law but in stereotyped stories and jokes we gather that Pollacks, blacks, gays, Newfies, blondes, fat people, short people, stutterers were not quite right and not equal. We were taught that honesty is the best policy, but we saw that actually tact (lying), cleverness (cheating), and legal loopholes (stealing) were acceptable aids for getting along in the world. Official morals and myths are ideals, not actualities and that no culture wholly believes in its own propaganda. Thus what we are taught comes to us tinged with conflict and ambivalence and that's usually the way we pass it on.

Metaphor and Myth in story

Lonergan states myth is a narrative about entities not to be found within an empiricist, an idealist, a historicist, and an existentialist horizon.[32] Myths work at the unconsciousness level and there is no need for the hearer to understand the inner meaning of its symbols. What the storyteller does is to tell as good a story as possible so that the characters take on individuality and in their own way work through the unconscious of the listener.

Fairy tales and myth use poetic language and can be read, or more desirably, told, with the result of casting a spell over the listeners. If the storyteller is gifted,

[32] Lonergan, *Method*, p. 239.

fairy tales work on the pre-conscious, sub-conscious and conscious levels. The listener finds herself or himself in a dialectical process responding at both the pre-symbolic or pre-linguistic and symbolic levels. The storyteller tries to evoke something deep within the listener and one can be relieved to find oneself identifying with the stranger, that is the "wicked step-mother", "monster", or "witch" within oneself. Coming to terms with this stranger can be a source of joy, for this foreigner or stranger within can evoke fear and strong emotions in one unsure of one's own boundaries. These emotions can come to represent that which is intolerant and for that reason it is important that we ease up on these repressions and come to an acceptance of the stranger within. Julia Kristeva, in *Stangers to Ourselves,* puts it this way: "By recognizing our uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners."[33]

Bible Stories

We are born into a community of stories and storytellers. In interpreting our traditional stories of God we find out who we are and what we must do. If we see the human face of God in one another, we are already halfway home.[34] God not only loves to hear our stories, he loves to tell his own and, quite simply, we are the story God tells.

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[33] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves,* Columbia University Press:New York, 1991, p.192.
[34] Andrew Greeley and Jacob Neusner, *Common Ground: A Priest and a Rabbi Read Scripture Together,* The Pilgrim Press:, Ohio, 1996, p.321.

We do not live on bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and so our appetite for stories derives from the Creator. As story listening and story-telling creatures, we have a created appetite for God's words, for stories he tells in the lives of others.[35] We need a story in order to survive. First we learn of the involvement of God with people through experience, then through reflection on the experience and then by putting it into words and sharing it in a story. Religion is a story before it is anything else and after that it is everything else. Without denying the differences, the differences we nonetheless bracket for a time so we can listen to one another's stories and recognize a face that is much more like our own than it is different from our own.

The biblical stories of God are literary and poetic accounts of the stories which particular lives told. These stories help us deal with the paradox of our faith that confounds both emotion and reason.[36]Stories can imply a faith imagining, experiencing the possibility of the world's ultimate fulfilment.

The story is a contemporary form close to the parable. Amos Wilder insists:

> "When the Christian in any time or place confesses his faith, his confession turns into a narrative. When the Christian observes Christmas or Easter, in either case it is with reference to a story of things that have happened.
>
> It is through the Christian story that God speaks, and all heaven and earth come into it. God is an active and purposeful God and his action with and for men has a beginning; middle and an end like any good story. The life of a Christian is not a dream shot through

[35] Navone, *Theology of Story,* p.21.
[36] Bausch, *Storytelling,* p. 25.

with visions and illuminations, but a pilgrimage, a race, in short, a history."[37]

One of the reasons we create gods and angels is because we want to believe that the world is ruled by benevolent powers. But when those powers do not eliminate suffering, tragedy and death they evoke panoply of devils, witches and monsters to absorb the blame for all. If this were the best of all possible worlds we might love mystery more and explanation less. But since evil shatters our security we tell stories to explain why a world that is so intricate and marvelous misses perfection by the shadow of a tragedy. All people create a myth to explain why evil exists; because Satan rebelled against God or because spirit and matter are incompatible or because cosmic consciousness is not yet fully awakened.[38]

Jesus

Jesus arose out of a tradition. He reshaped his tradition and gave it new vitality. He saw the past in new light. He did not give new answers to old questions – He raised new questions. Jesus' own life was his best narrative, the best story that revealed the depth of his character and his goodness. Tad Guzie says that:

> "the story of Jesus is our own story and as Christians we are invited to graft our own personal histories onto the mystery of Jesus. The mystery of him is no less than the mystery of being human, being incarnate, and being the way we are. The gospel offers us no escape from this mystery, only an invitation to enter it as fully as Jesus did."[39]

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[37] Amos Wilder, *Language of the Gospel:Early Christian Rhetoric*, Harper & Row:New York, 1966, pp.67,64-65.
[38] Keene and Valley Fox, *Telling Your Story*, p.142.
[39] Tad Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics*, Paulist Press:New Jersey, 1981, p.77.

Why does Jesus' storytelling work? Jesus' stories preserve and concentrate their strengths and are capable of releasing this energy 2000 years after the Incarnation. Sometimes we are moved by the drama of a story but not by real life. Jesus' stories are still capable of astonishing – they are the seeds of grain lain away for centuries that still retain their germinating powers to this day.

Believing has a narrative quality for it is about a process. In *Metaphorical Theology*, Sallie TeSelle writes:

> "Where theology becomes overly abstract, conceptual and systematic, it separates thought and life, belief and practice, words and their embodiment, making it more difficult, if not impossible, for us to believe in our hearts what we confess with our lips.[40]

Jesus as a Storyteller

Jesus used stories and material from folklore and life around him and interpreted it for his own purposes. One purpose of his stories, and in particular his parables, was to be a mirror to human nature. Jesus had stories to tell, work to do and a mission to fulfill.[41] People have gotten so busy debating about who Jesus was and is that they seem to have had very little time to listen to his stories or to ponder his message.

We must remember that the Gospel stories were a response to a very bewildered first generation of Christians who were suddenly bereft of the presence of the

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[40] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Roles of God in Religious Language*, Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1982, p..

one who held them together, healed their rifts and moved their spirits. They were desperate for comfort, for some kind of contact with Jesus. So they did what we would do – and do at the death of a parent or a friend: they sat around the table and asked the original witnesses to tell them once more the stories and deeds of Jesus. And in the telling, as in all good stories, they sensed his presence again. The spirit of Jesus was rekindled. And this wasn't hard to do for these witnesses for there was much to tell. Jesus was, in fact, a fascinating person for those who experienced him first-hand. They shared their belief in Jesus by telling their stories about him. So the stories began – and so did the faith. That's how faith in Jesus got started: in storytelling. And that's what was recorded in the Gospels; stories about Jesus and the impact that he made on people.[42]

Faith generates and demands active imagining.

Summary

As we have seen, stories and story telling are a necessary component in the life of a community; they connect people with their past and orient them towards a way of living in the present. For children, stories, particularly our Christian story, help them discover a way of living and discover solutions to problems that demonstrate the advantages of good behaviour. Stories offer children the experience of trying on another way of being or living without the consequences of actually *acting* on that choice.

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[41] Greeley and Neusner, *Common Ground,* p.214.
[42] Bausch, *Storytelling,* p.22.

The writers of both the Hebrew and the Christian texts used stories to teach the readers and listeners about the love of God, the Kingdom of heaven and the right way of living. This was the way to help the people fit their own story into the larger story; to bring the listeners to some understanding of how God was at work in their lives. Now we will explore the development of religious sense.

I wish to know God's thought
The rest is detail.
-Albert Einstein

CHAPTER 2

Development of Religious Sense

Religious Conversion

Jesus uses ordinary objects from everyday Palestinian life in his stories as a means to bring his listeners to an understanding of a loving God. Jesus' parables, his way of telling stories, use metaphor as a manner of talking about something by talking about something else. He makes it evident that we are part of God's story.

At different stages in faith development stories can help children enter into a friendship with Jesus and begin to develop a relationship with God. James Fowler's stages in faith development escort us through the early stages in religious development in children.

Christian conversion is making Christ the way and life of authenticity.[1] Responses to divine-human interaction are usually expressed in imagination

[1] Gregson, *Desires*, p.63.

forms - poetry, story, art, and music and are capable of triggering feeling-responses in others for they have powerful interactive potential.[2]

In this chapter the development of the religious sense in children is examined through the use of story and the core story of Jesus. We learn about Jesus through stories others have told about him and how he lived in relationship with others. Jesus used stories to teach and to help his disciples envision the Kingdom of God. Storytelling is important in the development of religious imagination for story can evoke a more powerful faith than doctrine and concept.

James Fowler's studies on faith suggest that growth in faith goes in distinct stages as a person matures. My objectives are limited to dealing with the first three stages: undifferentiated faith of infancy, intuitive-projective faith of early childhood and the mythic-literal faith of school-age children. From this I will briefly look at spiritual formation and conversion in children and the use of story in this process.

The Christian Story

Listening to stories and telling stories was an integral part of the way our ancestors lived. Our ability to tell, and listen to, the traditional and sacred stories that shaped previous generations has suffered. As life accelerated and the possibility of both communication and annihilation became ever more

[2] John Shea, *An Experience Named Spirit,* Thomas Moore Press:Illinois, 1983, p.65.

instantaneous, people came to have less tolerance for that which comes gradually over time. The mythologist Joseph Campbell observes:

> "One of the problems today is that we are not well acquainted with the literature of the spirit. We are interested in the news of the day and the problems of the hour. Thus distracted we no longer listen to those who speak of the eternal values that have to do with the centering of our lives."[3]

Without a shared master story and a strong commitment to the values that flow from that story, a society lacks the inner desire and strength to protect what people value.

As Christians our shared master story is the Bible: that of another - Jesus of Nazareth, forms our story. Through these stories we come to know God, and form our image of God. We discover God's purpose for creating us, how God wants us to live and what it means to be good. Stories within the master story often stimulate a desire to be like the characters in the story and often give courage to follow their examples. The master story in which we place our trust and loyalty is the lens through which persons and events are given meaning.

Our Christian search for identity is in response to Jesus who was the Incarnation of God's love for all. *Who am I?* The answer is a story not just of self but also of the self in the hands of a living God. God *is* a love story – and one with a Happy Ending.[4] Our children need the stories that capture and communicate to them the distinctiveness of our faith community. They need to hear stories that carry the

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[3] Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, Doubleday:New York, 1988, p.3
[4] Greeley and Neusner, *Common Ground*, p.296.

core beliefs of the community.

The Gospels contain a fairy story, or a story of a larger kind, which embraces the essence of fairy tales. They contain many marvels - particularly artistic,[5] beautiful and moving. J.R.R.Tolkien states:

> "Mythical" in their perfect self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe.[6] But this story has entered history and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the Story of the Incarnation. The story begins and ends in Joy."[7]

The bible is a work of the imagination for both the writers and readers; we must exercise our imagination as we read it to establish resonance between our imagination and the writer's imagination.[8] The actual process of imagination responding to imagination in reading the bible is as old as the bible itself. Imagination is never undisciplined: it is always shaped and focused by the life experiences of the person whose imagination is working.[9] Bible stories of Jesus 2000 years after the Incarnation can still be read and understood as literature. If we do not understand the Bible as essentially a link between two profound imaginative enterprises, then we do not really understand it at all. Without a

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[5] The art here is in the story itself rather than in the telling: for the author of the stories was not the Evangelist.
[6] "…..Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite – I will call it *Eucatastrophe.* The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function." (Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf,* p.60.)
[7] Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf,* p.62.
[8] Greeley and Neusner, *Common Ground,* p.180.
[9] Ibid., p.181.

sense of awe, wonder and mystery, we forget the inevitable distance between our worlds and divine reality.

Jesus is so compelling that only metaphor,[10] poetry and story help do him justice. We must reflect on the master storyteller, Jesus of Nazareth; envision the event he tells and sense his storytelling pointing to a greater reality that lies beyond. There is a possibility though, in losing something with this approach to life, this sense of allowing the extraordinary to break in on the ordinary.

The task of the storyteller is to open the imagination to picture a new way of living, loving and healing. Jesus does not so much hand down irrelevant truths as he uncovers commonplace truths; he does not so much reveal mystery from above as unmask it from below in everyday life. We see that Jesus can be strong in the face of adversity and in the face of injustice as long as he is true to his mission. He is also armed with the power of humility. His stories and parables provide fresh insights into truths that we have heard repeatedly. These truths that have become so familiar that, at times people no longer hear them. The creative use of our imagination, however, allows us to take fresh notice of them.

> *The rabbi was once asked: "Why does the parable possess such great influence?"*
>
> *The maggid replied: "I will explain this by a parable":*
>
> *"Truth was accustomed to walk about as naked as he was born. No one allowed him to enter a home, and everyone*

[10] Metaphor: application of a name or descriptive term or phrase to an object to which it is imaginatively but not literally applicable.

> *who encountered him ran away in fright. Truth felt greatly embittered and could find no resting-place. One day he beheld Parable attired in colourful, expensive garments. Parable inquired: "why are you so dejected, my friend?" Truth replied: "I am in a bad situation. I am old, very old, and no one cares to have anything to do with me." "Nay," replied Parable, "it is not because of your age that you are disliked by people. Look, I am as old as you are, and the older I grow, the more do I seem to be loved. Let me disclose to you the secret of my apparent popularity. People enjoy seeing everything dressed up and somewhat disguised. Let me lend you're my garments, and you will see that people will like you as well."*
>
> *Truth followed his council and dressed himself in the garments of Parable. Ever since then, Truth and Parable walk hand in hand, and men love both of them."*[11]

Jesus was uninterested in questions about "who" he was for Jesus had stories to tell and work to do; he had a mission to fulfill. Jesus came to lie on the Cross, not to explain it. People are often so busy debating their interpretation of Jesus that they seem to have very little time to listen to his stories or to ponder his message. Andrew Greeley in *On Common Ground* written with Rabbi Jacob Neusner remarks:

> "Our modern obsession with "proofs" with which we can batter our adversaries, with the battle most narrowly defined between science and religion with literalism in the most strict sense of the word, and with discursive, prepositional knowledge to the exclusion of all else has blinded us to the obvious truth that poetic knowledge is superior and not inferior to prosaic knowledge."[12]

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[11] Howard W Polsky, & Yaella Wozner, *Everyday Miracles: The Healing Wisdom of Hasidic Stories*, Northvale, NJ:Aronson, 1989, p.47.
[12] Greeley and Neusner, *Common Ground*, p.181.

Metaphor and the Gospel

New Testament writers employed rich imaginations - banal words such as seed, sheep, wine, water, bread, coins, and so on, were used in ways that revealed deeper content and new meaning. These writers used a variety of metaphors to convey the reality and meaning of the life of Jesus.[13] Metaphorical theologians are aware that what is at stake in Christianity is not belief in doctrines correctly stated but "believing", a process which is more like a story than like a doctrine.[14]

The gospels are metaphorical statements about religious matters, those concerns that transcend and affect us at the deepest level of our existence. Thinking or speaking with metaphor is a way of talking about something by referring to another – finding the thread of similarity between two dissimilar objects, one that is better known than the other. Poets use metaphor to speak of the great unknowns, of mortality, love, fear, joy, guilt, hope, and so on. Religious language is metaphorical for the same reason and therefore it can come as no surprise that Jesus' most characteristic form of teaching is the parable.

Possibly, our best effort when we talk about and imagine God is to construct metaphors[15] – God is a father, a vine, a lover, and a king.[16] We cannot learn or

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[13] Sallie TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology,* Fortress Press:Philadelphia, 1975, p.37.
[14] Ibid., p.84.
[15] If we are to take the lessons of poetic metaphor seriously, theological training ought to include as a major component the development of the imagination.(Wilder, *Language of the Gospels,* p105.)
[16] Greeley and Neusner, *Common Ground,* p.294.

understand except through association; connection.[17] Movement in understanding the possibilities of a metaphor is generally circular and cumulative for all God talk is metaphorical. We circle around the metaphor, examining always the possible links between the two realities involved in the comparison. We make our circuits, however, informed not only by our own insights and illumination, but also by those of the community that has been circling the image for centuries and millennia, and of which we are members.[18] Each of us lives in a world mediated by meaning, a world constructed over the years by the sum total of our conscious, intentional activities[19]

Unfortunately, in referring to God in our era, there has been some loss of metaphorical tension and a tendency to liberalization of our way of understanding.[20] We do not naturally think in symbols the way our forefathers did. We do not see things of this world as standing for something else; they simply are what they are. The ancients were aware that truth has many levels and that when an open mind writes a story of an influential person's life, one's perspective will colour that story. They used common language in novel ways to evoke insight with its emphasis on the narrative quality of believing and its foundation in experience[21]

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[17] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, p.83.
[18] Greeley and Neusner, *Common Ground*, p.180.
[19] Lonergan, *Method*, p.221.
[20] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, p.102.
[21] Wilder, *Language of the Gospels* p.92.

The gospel stories tell stories of ordinary people involved in mundane matters; they assume a non-believing or secular attitude on the part of their audience and they stress the discontinuity, incongruity, and tension between the assumptions and expectations of their characters and another set of assumptions identified with the kingdom.

Jesus – *THE* Storyteller

Good metaphors shock; they bring unlikes together, they upset conventions, they involve tension, and they are implicitly revolutionary. The parables of Jesus are typically metaphorical in this regard, for they bring together dissimilars such as lost coins, wayward children, buried treasure, and tardy labourers with the kingdom of God; they disturb; they upset expectations and each era reinterprets their revolutionary potential.[22]

It was not the weighty public issues that Jesus delved into but the great private issues, not the struggles of the world without but inner world turmoil. For Jesus introduced a new strange way of being in the world, a way that could be grasped only through the indirect means of stories of familiar life which "were and were not" the kingdom.[23]

"Why do you speak to them in Parables?" The New Testament makes it clear:

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[22] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, p.17.
[23] Ibid., p.18

> "All this Jesus says to the crowd in parables, indeed he said nothing to them without a parable."(Matt13: 34). "With many such parables he would give them (the crowds) his message, so far as they were able to receive it. He never spoke to them except in parables; but privately to his disciples he explained everything. (Mk 4:33)

Why does Jesus choose an indirect, confusing means of expression rather than directly confronting situations? A story can bind the listener with its attractiveness; and the New Testament tells us of the crowds being "spellbound by his teaching" (Mk 11:18) Jesus uses the soft-sell approach to confront the hard hearts of men. "Behave wisely towards those outside your own number; use the present opportunity to the full. Study how to talk with each person you meet." (Col. 4: 4-5) Such stories and parables teach a natural wisdom of morality, of healing, of compassion, of values and ethics. Jesus transported his disciples and the crowds to a place far away where there is a new way of living, loving and healing; a new world that these people could never have imagined on their own.

Jesus' parables are primarily addressed to "non-believers" rather than to "sinners", and to those who were weak enough to need and really want the message. A direct assault will gain nothing. First, one must capture the attention, open the ears, soften the heart, and compel someone to take notice. A parable communicates a meaning indirectly to capture a person's attention. It then leads to a reality of life seen with perhaps a new light. Parables are pictures

of life as it is, pictures with meaning. Amos Wilder states that parables are for bringing people to commitment.[24]

Richard Neibuhr says "believing belongs to experience."[25] A person can be known only in the story of his or her life. Believing has a narrative quality – for it is about process. Christian believing sees in the story of Jesus the metaphor of all believing: a life developing towards its consummation in death all the while being led to the evidence that the ultimate power is worthy of trust.[26]

When stories of who we are and where we come from are recounted and celebrated, their influence increases. Jesus uses the language of images and metaphor, not just to elucidate the hidden thing but to make it come alive. Jesus suggests rather than spells out. He evokes rather than explains. He catches by surprise.

Religious Development in Children

What seems to, at times, happen in adults? Do we lose that sense of curiosity, our use of imagination, or of daydreaming? Is the poet in us lost? Do we lose the ability to be struck by the ordinary as wonderful and to experience it and see it as extraordinary? And as a result of that, are our children lacking the benefit of metaphorical language and therefore the language? Is the language of the Bible,

[24] Wilder, *Language of the Gospels*, p.157
[25] Ibid., p.84.
[26] Ibid., p.85.

therefore, senseless to them? We must dust off our imaginations and enter the story with the children, to see and feel the drama as the story unfolds. When the stories are presented as exciting, then the children will desire to return where their imaginations bring God to life. They will learn to love their God and look forward to more meetings with him.

The bible does not tell us how children were to be taught in the synagogue school but it is apparent how they are to be instructed and formed in the faith community. For the community of Moses it is clear that teaching was not an option but a direct command from God – learning was to be lived not just held as knowledge in the mind. Moses' teaching was for the whole community. After receiving the Ten Commandments Moses begins his instruction of the community:

> The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your hearts. Recite them to your children.
>
> Deuteronomy 6:4-7

It is likewise obvious that Jesus valued children and took time to hold them in his arms, lay hands on them and bless them (Mark 10:16). They probably didn't understand the words but they could understand the love communicated through the touch and smiling eyes of Jesus.

While journeying with children in faith development we must concentrate on the *experience* of coming to belief not on the "beliefs" themselves. This will come if the journey is successful. What is more important is listening, hearing, understanding and testing the stories – helping the children to hear the word of God. The stories carry experience of coming to belief in God. The Hebrew Scriptures, the stories of Jesus – each of these helps a person come to an understanding of the story of his or her life – of getting a sense of one's identity. We learn who we are through the stories we embrace as our own.[27]

> The gospel story, modeled on the story of Jesus, does this and more – it not only provides an ordered context from the past (as do all sacred stories) but also leads from the past into the future, for the gospel story, strongly eschatological, is a story of hope.[28]

Children are born into families which ideally are part of a community in which the younger generation can effectively be nurtured in their faith. God never intended two parents to bear the load of raising children alone. God wants children to live in families and communities where God's laws are not just recited but lived for children need to see and experience faith in action. (Duet. 6:17-18) Belonging is the central issue in both psychosocial development and in religious catechesis.[29]

Children become spontaneously curious about the world that surrounds them at about the same time that they become less dependent on caregivers who once

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[27] TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables*, p.138.
[28] Ibid., p.140.
[29] *Issues in the Christian Initiation of Children*, Ed. Kathy Brown &. Frank Sokol, Liturgy Training Publications:Archdiocese of Chicago, 1974, p.171.

provided all-embracing security. As a child begins to move out of his immediate surroundings towards a far larger common sense of community, stories can be used to bring the lives and actions of others beyond the community into the lives of children.

When children begin to ask questions (and they will ask as they are ready) they are ready to learn: this is a teachable moment. Meanwhile the adults who have internalized God's laws and who are motivated by love of God, are living out their faith with integrity in the presence of the children. When children ask we can tell them the story of God's actions in our lives. Children benefit from hearing stories of God's love and presence to the Hebrew people and of Jesus' loving actions. However, they also need to hear contemporary stories of how God's love and presence is working and acting today.

The way toward religious truth and toward universalizing faith leads through the particular memories, stories, images, ethical teaching and rituals of determinate religious traditions.[30] Our relationship to God is interpersonal, and in reading and hearing the stories and actions of Jesus, He is always seen in relation to others, always pointing to the Father. TeSelle points out:

> "The stress is on experience and belief only in action, that is, on the experience of 'coming' to belief, the action the individual takes in response to an action on his or her behalf by God. The stress on

[30] James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning,* Harper and Row:San Francisco, 1981, p.292.

> the individual likewise relates story directly to parable, for in each of Jesus' parables, it is the life of an individual that is at stake.[31]

Children see that the dominant model in the Judeo-Christian tradition is of a personal God relating to responsible and responsive beings.[32] They see the call to a way of life that flows from a heart of love for God and others. God's laws can become freely chosen habits of the heart. Internalized beliefs can have an impact on all of life, making possible constant integrity even when one is not thinking about those beliefs. That kind of living teaches powerfully, for a young child's heart is naturally open to God. Jesus names children as persons who believe in Him; they have faith (Matt 18:6) "little ones who believe in me."

James Fowler

Late in the 20th century James Fowler set off a new wave of thinking about faith. Based on the work of renowned developmental psychologists as Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg and Erik Erikson[33], Fowler's *The Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* claimed that faith, like life itself, goes through distinct stages as a person matures.

James Fowler describes faith as a vision of the transcendent that transforms the total person and gives purpose and meaning to all of life.[34] Faith was the focus of Moses' teaching; the stories and commands are the means to that end. The

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[31] Wilder, *Language of the Gospels* p.120.
[32] TeSelle, *Metaphorical Theology*, p.106.
[33] Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.
[34] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.14

commands of God are taught best in the normal flow of life as the following parable illustrates:

A Parable

I took a little child's hand in mine. I was called to walk together with him for awhile, to lead him to the Father. So awesome was the responsibility that I talked to the child only of the Father.
I painted the Father with a stern face lest the child do something to displease him. I spoke of the child's goodness as something that would appease the Father's wrath.
Together the child and I walked under the Father's tall trees. To show him the Father's might, I spoke of the Father's might and how he had the power to send the trees crashing down with a thunderbolt.
We walked in the sunshine. I told the child of the greatness of the Father, who made the hot blazing sun.
One evening at twilight the child and I met the Father on our walk.
But the child did not run eagerly to meet him. Instead he hid behind me, afraid. The child would not even look up at the Father's loving face or take his hand. I was between the child and the Father.
I wondered why. After all, I had been so conscientious and dedicated.

I took a little child's hand in mine. I was to lead him to the Father.
As we walked along, I felt burdened with the multiplicity of the things I had to teach the child. We did not ramble, but hastened from spot to spot.
At one moment the child and I compared the leaves of the different trees. In the next, we were examining a bird's nest. But while the child was questioning me about the nest, I hurried him away to chase a butterfly.
Whenever the child was tired and tried to nap, I kept him awake unless he should miss something I wished him to see.
We spoke of the Father, oh yes, often and rapidly. I poured into the child's ears all the stories he ought to know.
One evening at twilight, the child and I were following a brook, trying to trace it to its source. Suddenly the Father came in sight.
The child hardly noticed the Father, merely glancing at him and then moving on to something else that momentarily interested him.
Finally the child dropped exhausted beside the brook and fell asleep.
I had come between the child and the Father.

I wondered why. After all, I had taught the child so many things.

I took a little child's hand to lead him to the Father. My heart was full of gratitude for the privilege
The child and I walked slowly, with me adjusting my steps to the steps of the child. As we went along, we spoke of the things that the child noticed.
Sometimes we picked the Father's flowers, smelled their perfume, stroked their petals, and loved their bright colours.
Sometimes we stopped to admire one of the Father's birds. We'd watch it build its nest. Then we'd come back again to count the eggs it laid when the nest was finished. Later we marveled at the care the Father's bird gave its young.
Often the child and I told stories of the Father. I told them to the child and the child told them again to me. We told the stories, the child and I, over and over again.
Sometimes the child I and stopped to rest, leaning against the Father's trees, and letting his cool air touch our brows. We had no need to speak; it was enough to sit quietly enjoying the Father's peace.
Then one evening at twilight, we met the Father among the trees. The child's eyes shone. He looked lovingly, trustingly, eagerly up into the Father's face. He put his hand into the Father's hand. I was for the moment forgotten.

And – I was content.

–Author unknown[35]

James Fowler made the study of faith his life work. He examined the process of having faith and identified characteristics of the process that are used by persons of different religions – Christianity, Judaism, Islam or secular humanism. He found trust and loyalty to be the foundations of faith. Fowler sees the elements of faith as having a trust in and loyalty to a centre of value, having images and realities of power and having a shared master story.

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[35] *Catechist Magazine* 25:1 (September 1991), p.9.

Fowler describes faith as a person or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is a way of seeing others or ourselves in relation to a background of shared meaning and purpose. Faith is interactive and social; it requires community, language, ritual and nurture – it is also shaped by grace. God's redemptive grace is mysteriously at work, ever present, ever active in the events of society and history, reversing the effects of sin and advancing the work of responsibility.[36]

Our image of God predisposes us to see certain things when we read the Bible that is our master story. If our God is all powerful doing as he pleases, answering to no one, biblical stories of God's strength will impress us; we would not likely notice God's love and kindness. If someone who has a different image of God tells us stories we will refine our image. Our faith is experienced in a community that shares in and has loyalty to the same master story, and as we explore the stories of our faith together, our trust in God grows stronger.

Faith forms[37] a way of seeing our everyday life in relation to holistic images of what we may call the ultimate environment. Faith, as imagination, grasps the conditions of our existence, unifying them into a comprehensive image in light of which we shape our responses, initiatives and actions. As we have seen, imagination is a powerful force underlying all knowing. In faith, imagination composes comprehensive images of the ultimate conditions of existence.

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[36] Ken Melchin, *Living With Other People*, St. Paul University Novalis:Toronto, 1998, p.96.
[37] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.24.

Faith is imagination as it composes a felt image of an ultimate environment.[38] Faith as an imaginative process is awakened and shaped [39] by these interactions and by the image, symbols, rituals and conceptual representations offered with conviction, in the language and common life of those with whom we learn and grow. All our knowing begins with images and most of what we know is stored as images. Experiences in infancy and early childhood, before the ability to narrate, makes conscious memory possible and gives form to our self-knowing of the world. Part of what we mean when we say humankind lives by meaning is that from the beginning of our lives we are faced with the challenge of finding or composing some kind of order, unity and coherence in the force fields of our lives. We might say faith is our way of discerning and committing ourselves to centres of value and power that exert ordering forces in our lives.

Stories are the vehicle that moves metaphor and image into experience. Like metaphors and images, stories communicate what is generally invisible and partly inexpressible. In seeking to understand these realities through time, stories provide a perspective that touches on the divine, allowing us to see reality in full context as part of its larger whole. Stories invite a kind of vision that gives shape and form even to the invisible, making the images move, clothing the metaphors, throwing colour on the shadows. Of all the devices available to us, stories are among the surest way of touching the human spirit.

[38] Ibid., p.33.
[39] Ibid., p.25.

Stories shape our lives - they help us attend. And "attending" in the setting of storytelling and story-listening helps us enter the membership of a community. For we are formed in communities – our ways of seeing the world are shaped in shared images and constructions of our group or class.[40] Memory is communal.

Fowler maintains that God created human beings with the capacity and the deep need to have faith.[41] Without faith, life is a lonely, meaningless existence. Faith develops in stages throughout a person's life. Fowler identified one pre-stage and six qualitatively different stages or ways of having faith. For the purposes of this paper, we will briefly probe the first three stages of Fowler's faith development – Undifferentiated Faith, Intuitive- Projective faith and Mythic-literal faith. These stages cover the scope of this paper - birth to pre-adolescence.

Fowler's Faith Stages

Undifferentiated Faith	Infancy
1. Intuitive-Projective Faith	Early Childhood
2. Mythic-Literal Faith	School Years
3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith	Adolescence
4. Individuative-Reflective Faith	Young Adulthood
5. Conjunctive Faith	Mid-life and Beyond
6. Universalizing Faith	

Undifferentiated Faith

The first stage of faith that Fowler understands, *Undifferentiated Faith,* grows out of Erikson's description of life's first crises – trust versus mistrust. The child first

[40] Ibid., p.105.
[41] Ibid., p.109.

experiences trust in the environment that the mother or caregiver creates and this, Fowler also believes, most likely has its beginning even before birth. This basic trust is the embryo of faith, which can come to a relationship with God.[42] Distorted views of God as a demanding judge or a father whom it is impossible to please may cause parents to be fearful and insecure in themselves or harsh and demanding with their children.[43]

Undifferentiated faith forms before children have language to describe it, and before they are actually conscious of the worth and trust they feel. The influence of this first basic stage is critical because it lays the foundations on which later faith is built. If that basic trust is not built in infancy or is destroyed in later life, then trust must be built or rebuilt if a person is to come to life-sustaining faith in God.

Intuitive-Projective Faith

At around the age of two children begin to develop what Fowler calls *Intuitive-Projective faith.* It is the time when children are learning to use language to represent their experiences and to communicate. This stage continues until about the age of six or seven. At this stage faith is intuitive rather than formed by logic. At this stage children are egocentric and project their own meaning onto events without questioning whether it is right. Stories, symbols and pictures can

[42] Ibid., p.121.
[43] Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey,* Baker Books:Michigan, 1998, p.50.

stimulate the imagination of children at this stage: imagination being the power to form in our minds the images of reality.

Fowler sees the imagination as a powerful force in all learning and not just in faith development. At this stage children draw on their imaginations to provide answers about things they have not thought of before with their explanations often being magical.[44] When young children use their imagination to form their image of God, they are using a natural tool for learning.[45] As children construct their understandings of God and religion, they are surrounded by symbols for their imaginations to take hold of and to build into their faith images. When they begin to ask questions about the symbols of faith, we know their imaginations have been grasped by the symbols. As they develop there is a need to continue reflecting on their faith images. Children at this age are dramatic and playful. They mimic the world they observe and the people in it through dramatic play. They also love stories and enter and live them through their imaginations. Faith stories that capture the imagination of a child can awaken and shape beliefs, values and loyalties that take deep root in the child's heart.

Fowler believed that children find great comfort in stories where good prevails and, in the end, evil people must pay for their sins. As has been shown by Bettelheim, stories help articulate the inner fears of children and can show them how to deal with those fears and the strong impulses they feel to do what is

[44] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, pp.57,123.
[45] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, p.154.

wrong. When those in the story who stand for good win, children are assured that they, too, will have the strength to triumph over evil.[46] Many Bible stories give children the opportunity to see God as the one who helps people gain such victories. But the exposure of children "to death, poverty, treachery and maliciousness in the context of fairy tales and Bible stories will be constructive only when told to them by trusted adults with whom their feelings can be tested and shared".[47]

Taking the violence out of fairy tales and some bible stories would take away the capacity that these stories have to help children express the often-unspeakable fears that haunt them. But, needless to say, long hours alone watching violence on television does not equip a child for dealing with the darker side of life. Again, these stories are constructive only when shared with trusted adults with whom they can safely reveal and test their feelings. This safe place is a gift adults can give the children in their care. Parents and teachers have the responsibility and the privilege of giving children stories rich in positive images of God, goodness and courage and of introducing them to symbols and rituals that point to God's faithfulness, love and protection.

Mythic-Literal Faith

Children begin to develop a *mythic-literal faith* at around the age of six or seven. This continues throughout elementary school and into the middle high school

[46] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.130.
[47] Ibid., p.133.

years. Fowler, in his research, also found some adolescents and adults using mythic-literal faith.[48] A myth, in Fowler's usage is a traditional story that explains origins, customs, religious practices and the activity of the gods. In naming mythic-literal faith, Fowler highlights the important role of story – myth – and the literal character of the thinking at this stage.

The development of the capacity for concrete logical thought makes possible this new stage or form of faith.[49] Children at this age begin to see relationships and to logically link pieces of knowledge. They are able to sort out the imaginary from the real but still enjoy using their imaginations. At this stage in their development children are now able to choose to look at a situation from another person's viewpoint though they are limited in the range of perspectives they can comprehend – most easily understanding the viewpoint of persons who resemble themselves.[50]

At the mythic-literal stage of faith justice is understood in terms of reciprocity - an equal exchange. That which is fair is the concern of children and for them this means equal treatment. In relation to God they believe in imminent justice; God who is the creator of the nature of things will certainly act justly, with reciprocity. From this belief in reciprocity and concrete literalism comes the child's view of God as a powerful parent or stern ruler who is fair – even a forgiving God must

[48] Ibid., pp146-7,149.
[49] Ibid., p.136.
[50] Ibid., p136.

preserve fairness by punishing those who do wrong. Simply stated, they have a good guy-bad guy view of God – and God is always fair.

Stories are at the heart of faith development for children; at this stage in the faith development stories can capture and communicate theology for them. If adults try to explain God with abstract ideas the teaching carries little meaning for them. But children can come to know God and experience God in stories. For those children who belong to faith communities during the elementary school years, it is then they will begin to take ownership of the stories, beliefs and religious rituals and see the value in them.[51] Their identity with the community will grow as they learn the stories and are able to participate in the rituals.

Children need to hear the stories that communicate the core beliefs of the community because they capture and impart the distinctiveness of the faith community. This ultimately gives them a sense of belonging. The Biblical narratives have a basic set of stories containing the important Christian beliefs and children are given a great gift when adults share Bible stories with clarity and drama.

For spiritual growth, spiritual formation, and spiritual development the focus is not the study of religious instruction, but rather the formation, during childhood, of a maturing faith and a deepening relationship with Jesus Christ. The spiritual life is

[51] Ibid., p.149.

formed through practices that help to open the person to God and break down barriers that hinder perception of God.

Spirituality involves the whole person as relating to God; it has an impact on every part of a person's being and is expressed through the personality in all relationships. From infancy the personality is forming; children are developing the elements with which they will relate to God. What children learn viscerally in experiences carry more weight than objective, conscious lessons. A brief story by Leo Tolstoy illustrates this:

The Old Grandfather and the Grandson

The grandfather had become very old. His legs wouldn't go, his eyes didn't see, his ears didn't hear, he had no teeth. And when he ate, the food dripped from his mouth.
The son and daughter-in-law stopped setting a place for him at the table and gave him supper in the back of the stove. Once they brought dinner down to him in a cup. The old man wanted to move the cup and dropped and broke it. The daughter-in-law began to grumble at the old man for spoiling everything in the house and breaking the cups and said that she would now give him dinner in a dishpan. The old man only sighed and said nothing.
Once the husband and wife were staying at home and watching their small son playing on the floor with some wooden planks: he was building something. The father asked: "What is that you are doing, Misha?" And Misha said: "Dear Father, I am making a dishpan. So that when you and dear Mother become old, you may be fed from this dishpan."
The husband and wife looked at each other and began to weep. They became ashamed of so offending the old man, and from then on seated him at the table and waited on him.[52]

[52] Robert Coles, *The Moral Intelligence of Children*, Random House:New, York 1997, p. 10-11

Healthy personality development prepares the child for openness to God, whereas developmental dysfunction creates barriers to a life of trusting, growing faith. Not to be concerned about spiritual formation in childhood is to ignore the very foundation of the spiritual life. Faith in Jesus Christ can arise only from encounter with believing Christians [53]

In the biblical stories we see ourselves and discover God's response to actions and attitudes similar to our own. Through the study of scripture, light shines on our experiences, revealing need for change and confirming what God values. The commands and precepts of Scripture are to be learned not simply by intellectual exercise, but through experience.[54] As we try to live out those commands, Scripture molds us – living the commands provides a fuller understanding of their meaning and importance.

Only after adults have affirmed their faith in God, entered into a love relationship with God, and internalized God's laws are they really prepared to teach their children. The faith of a child is more likely to grow when they have the opportunity to associate with adults who are growing persons and who know and love God. The child's faith will be inspired when he or she belongs to an inclusive community that seeks out God's love. Developmentalists who have investigated the spiritual potential of children can guide those providing ministries for children.

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[53] Shea, *An Experience Named Spirit,* p.21.
[54] Stonehouse, *Joining children on the Spiritual Journey,* p.20.

Spiritual Formation

Living in a community invites expression and storytelling gives the opportunity to pass on the values and beliefs of the community to the next generation. Telling the stories of the origins and the development of the community, and in particular, the religious beliefs, ultimately leads to the spiritual formation of the child.

What is spiritual formation? The goal of spiritual formation is a maturing faith and a deepening relationship with Jesus Christ, through which we become more like Christ in the living of our everyday lives in the world.

God created human beings with a curiosity, a desire to know and the ability to search for understanding and truth. The spiritual life of a child is forming from very early in life at a deep level.

As we have seen, our first experience of faith and faithfulness begins at birth. Fowler describes faith as a vision of the transcendent that impacts on the total person and gives purpose to all life.[55] Faith is the goal of teaching though certainly there are stories and commands to learn, but they are a means to an end.

[55] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.14.

It is in and through people's love for us that we sense a greater love. We intuit that their love is not merely of their own making, but they are symbols of "something greater." We gain an appreciation of the divine and this, for most of us, is the gift of a loving, transparent person.

But if the Gospels are relatively silent about who mediates God's love to Jesus, they are eloquent about Jesus mediating God's love to other people. This divine love did not work independent or alongside Jesus' human love. This divine love worked in and through the human in Jesus. Jesus loved people with such intensity that he drove the ambiguity out of people's hearts.

Conversion

Conversion is that grace-inspired moment when a person's eyes and ears are opened; when the mind and heart are filled with a truth that radically changes everything. It happened to a woman of dubious reputation in Samaria. It happened to a once-proud fisherman near that Roman town called Caesaria. It happened to a condemned man (Disma) as he hung on the cross beside an innocent man. This is the moment we call *metanoia*.

Conversion begins with God's invitation, which arises from God's deep and abiding love of the person and the person's assent follows. From this foundational moment of initial conversion, the person attempts to live in a new way. Decisions are made with new values and acts are done with new motivation

and spirit. Knowledge deepens, love increases and actions extend outwards – we love God in our hearts and we serve God in our actions.

We cannot surpass Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life but we must exert the effort to pass on the deep understanding and appreciation of what Jesus did 2000 years ago. The operative assumption is not that there is a puzzle to be solved but that God is speaking, leading, revealing divine truth. Our task is simply to listen and respond faithfully. To attempt to do such listening can itself deepen conversion in a child's life. But we must be mindful that conversion is gradual, progressive and on going in nature. Discernment always challenges individuals to further growth, but God's time is not human time and neither the rhythm nor pace of the forward movement can be predetermined. Developmentalists may be able to predict the sequence of human growth stages on a variety of levels, but the mystery of conversion while it operates within the context of these developmental stages always eludes mere identification with them.

Conversion is a relative notion. It is accommodated to the appropriate developmental level of the child at any given age. Our discernment of conversion misses the mark if we forget this. Conversion is interpersonal; it always has a relational dynamic. The cornerstone of the experience of conversion is the issue of whether or not the child has entered into a vital relationship with God through Jesus. Has the child discovered God as one who has initiated a love relationship

with him or her on a very personal level? The child's response to God's call must be a free one.

Our tradition puts the person of Jesus at the centre of the conversion experience. To assist the child in religious development, the Jesus stories must be told. Age appropriate stories told to children show Jesus as a hero, which appeals to children. Jesus can be presented as a revolutionary, or as the Good Shepherd shown leading and guiding, supporting and protecting the flock – all must be determined depending on the situation.

What is fundamental to discerning conversion in the child is whether or not the child has come to understand and appropriate a relationship with Jesus as the heart and centre of the Christian experience. Ideally children can experience this in a community of faith.

What helps children open up to God? What closes down or prevents an awareness of God? Contact with the Jesus story, no matter what form it may take - listening, reading, dramatic, cinematic - is a result of personal mediation and effective communication and within any tradition it is always a matter of one generation holding the next generation to its heart. To tell a story with religious ambitions is risky business. There are no guarantees that the listener will be touched for the storyteller works in the dark. In story listening that is formative of

faith an exploratory conversation must follow. The questions that follow the story are: "What are you thinking? What are you feeling?"

Is the Jesus story functioning religiously? To do so, it must cut deep into the listener, stop the hearer in their tracks and grab their soul. Attention is total, tears well up, hands hold the heavy head. The story finds its way into the "God space" that has been opened up and fills it with insights that are salvific. "Story-time" and "chewing-time" are essential for experiencing the story fully. One must reflect on the story and attempt to discover the meaning of the reaction to the story. There is a need to determine if the response to the story is appropriate both at a cognitive and behavioural level. What is the experience that the story evokes? It is important to note if the response has developed in a completely wrong direction.

The storyteller, when entering a story of Jesus, must ask; what redeeming power have *I* found in this story? Without a personal foundation, the passion and persuasion are lacking in the story. We retell the story not only to express what we have found but also to communicate and enrich the lives of others. In relating the Jesus stories to children it is often more important to relate it in companion language. For example, in *The Proud Tree,*[56] an award winning animated video, the story of the crucifixion from the viewpoint of Rex, the tree that became the cross that carried Jesus to Calvary is told. Rex, who is proud and ungrateful, learns a lesson of love from the humble, gentle Jesus. Sadness and sympathy

for the suffering Jesus mingle with the joy and exultation of the Resurrection. An old, familiar story is told in a new and memorable way. And although this is a story recommended for children from 6-10, it is a story for all ages.

The story begins:

> *He was the straightest and sturdiest tree in the whole forest. Oh, but he was proud--too proud. "I'm the greatest," he would boast. "I'm as straight as a Roman soldier, as brave as a centurion."*
> *All the other trees grew tired of his constant bragging. They named him Rex (which means king) because he always acted and talked as if he were king tree of all the forest.*
> *Every morning at dawn and each evening at sunset, the trees of the forest would raise their branches in praise and give thanks to God, their creator.*
> *But not Rex. Rex was usually too busy admiring his own green, leafy branches glistening in the morning sun or waving in the evening breeze.*

By now the children are squirming and reacting to what they see as a horrible tree that is so vain and rude. Later in the video they begin reacting again when they have figured out the "king" is Jesus.

> *"He looks so weak and beaten," Rex thought. "Yet, there is a regal look on his face – as if he were a King. Oh no! This couldn't be the King the soldiers were talking about. It couldn't be. Who would treat a King like this?"*

Rex has a change of heart. The crowd has gone and two lonely figures are standing at the foot of the cross.

> *Rex shook his trunk ever so gently.*
> *"Jesus," he called. There was no answer.*

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[56] Luane Roche, *The Proud Tree*, Liguori Publications:Liguori, Missouri, 1995.

"Jesus," he called a little louder. There still was no answer, no movement from the man on the cross.
Rex's voice became anxious. "Wake up! Wake up, Jesus!"
Rex was now yelling, "I said I'm sorry!"
Terror gripped at Rex's heart. He screamed, "I'm sorry! Please, Jesus, forgive me too! Don't die!'
The figure on the cross remained absolutely silent. "How can this be?" Rex asked. "You are God! God can't die!"

But Jesus is dead and Rex too, is dying and not feeling like hating anymore.
"If I could have new growth." Rex whispers to himself,
"I would try to live and love others the way Jesus did."
As the last drop of sap runs from Rex he hears music, the promise of new life for trees, and almost forgets he is dying.
He dies and a tiny sapling grows where Rex's sap had mingled with the blood of Christ.
Its tiny branches are reaching for the sun and new life.

At the conclusion of the movie there is silence and more often than not, tears, as the children respond and are given time to reflect on this beautiful, touching story before they share their many perceptive, caring thoughts about this Proud Tree.

Informal times for talking and discussing are important for this is a time when children can bring up issues that are troubling to them. Sam Keene clarifies this in a particular way: "Caring must be made concrete, otherwise there is no incarnation, no fleshing out of love. Incarnation is incorporation."[57] The image of Jesus for his experience of divine reality is not just Abba, but the Abba unfolded in many mini-stories and one major parable. It is not any old father but the father who appears again and again in the conversation of Jesus and to whom his prayer is always directed.

[57] Sam Keene, *To A Dancing God*, Harper & Row:New York, 1970, p.109.

If the content of Christian faith is ultimately the relationship to God which originated in the divine-human event of Jesus Christ, then what better way to pass it on than in the divine-human events that were our encounters with one another.[58] Those who enjoy a relationship with the God of Jesus invite others into a relationship with themselves. The present company of believers hosts new people, both searching adults and growing children, into their life together, and through this life into abundant life, which flows from God. In this way faith is passed on.[59]

The most prized creations of the Christian tradition are its core myth and ritual. The core myth is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is embodied in the four gospels and the core ritual is the Eucharistic eating and drinking together that he initiated.[60] Myth and ritual are not secondary reflections upon the experience; they are the very embodiment of the experience. They are the privileged creations that carry the experience through time and history and make it available to each new generation. This is what saying that the core myth and ritual are symbolic means of expression.[61] It begins with pondering and wandering and ends in encounter.

When the mind answers the experience mediated through the core myth and ritual, we move toward theology. When the imagination answers the experience

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[58] Shea, *An Experience Named Spirit*, p.22.
[59] Ibid., p.23.
[60] Ibid., p.61.
[61] Ibid., pp.61-62.

mediated through the core myth and ritual, we move toward a new and contemporary embodiment of the experience. The art of storytelling attempts to express what was found in the experience and evoke that in all others that come in contact with the imaginative work. Art and theology are complementary; but they have different ambitions.[62]

To be a "good" parent or Sunday school teacher of children, we do not need to be people who have arrived; God simply calls us to be on the way, seeking, finding and rejoicing in what we find. "Seek and ye shall find." If children see us seeking they will seek – the finding part is up to God.

Summary

The essence of Christian faith is a living relationship with God, a relationship which was inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth and which is presently available through his Spirit as it suffuses and transforms the lives of his followers. From this relationship there emerges a message and an ethic. But without the experience of the lived relationship to God, the message becomes gibberish and the ethic becomes folly.

Conversion is a process not an event as popular society would have us believe. The insights of developmentalists are crucial for we must know what a child is capable of at each stage and seek no more than that. We must patiently wait for the seed to mature, confident that in God's time and with God's grace authentic

[62] Ibid., p.66.

conversion will lead to mature faith. Faith involves development and conversion – both are essential. Development prepares the way for conversion as the image of God forms and children learn the stories that has make God known[63]

Conversion is not the end of the faith journey. Faith development and refining must continue throughout the changes of life so that faith is harmonious with development in other areas. Children are created with the potential for faith development.[64]

The development of a religious sense in children begins at birth. Sharing the mystery of God is a challenge. Storytelling can be used as an instrument of faith as well as for communication. Stories, and in particular, Jesus' stories can be used to help children develop a relationship with Jesus and to ultimately learn to make choices, rather than being rule oriented, be value oriented.

Maturing into authentic human beings is a gradual, life-long process. How can we encourage children to behave morally and to choose what is ultimately good? Our world is often a confusing and even disheartening mixture of progress and decline.[65] Our challenge is to help children to be true to themselves and to contribute to the progress rather than the decline of our world. In the next chapter the developmentalists give us insight into social and moral development in children and we will see how stories can be an integral part of that process.

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[63] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, p.167.
[64] Ibid., p.167.
[65] Gregson, *Desires*, p.28.

That the real reason God made human beings
-because he loves stories
-Traditional Hasidic story

CHAPTER 3

Moral Development

Moral Conversion

The achievement of knowledge and knowing the right thing to do are not the endpoint of guiding children in moral development; responsible action is the desired end. The expectation is that they learn to choose the action that is true and good. Lonergan expresses it as the desire to:

> "head to the existential discovery, the discovery of oneself as a moral being, the realization that one not only chooses between courses of action but also thereby makes oneself an authentic human being or an unauthentic one. With that discovery there emerges in consciousness the significance of personal value and the meaning of personal responsibility."[1]

In the previous chapter on the development of the religious sense, James Fowler's theories on faith development were explored. His theories clarified the emergence of faith in a child. An understanding of these stages can help show how storytelling can be used in introducing children to God, in their faith development and their on-going conversion.

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[1] Lonergan, *Method,* p.38.

In this chapter on moral development in children, the theories of the developmentalists Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg help us understand what we can expect from children at their different stages in development. Erikson's theory of child development is that children must resolve an identity crisis at each of the levels he distinguishes for them to eventually reach maturity. He also looks at the psychosocial influences in child development. Piaget studies the cognitive abilities in children and Kohlberg examines moral development. It should be noted that Kohlberg was male, white, elite, Western and middle class and so were his subjects. Carol Gilligan expands his theories to include women and girls.

The developmentalists broaden our perceptions on how children develop morally and cognitively and I explore the benefits of storytelling to further develop these spheres in the growth of children but Robert Coles gives some clues, because ultimately that is all he can do, on what makes a "good person."

Moral Responsibility

Our culture is charged with moral directives and with ethical norms that must be preserved if civilization is to survive. Generation after generation, the wisest of people have argued the age-old question of right and wrong. The literature of the

race is laden with writings on virtue and sin, duty, discipline, punishment, justice, mercy, guilt, expiation, retribution, salvation and transgression.

The growth of the art of good conduct is complex and depends upon development of an ethical or moral sense – a sense that matures by natural progressions. There is nothing more stabilizing than affection and respect between adult and child and the reciprocity that comes with such respect. Reciprocity in turn leads to reason and ultimately to the concepts of equity, which distinguish the mature ethical sense.

Our sense of responsibility only begins to emerge at around the age of three as we gradually move from the world mediated by meaning and to a world regulated by values. If we are supposed to reach the "age of reason" by seven, the reason we reach is still far from maturity.[2] Despite the time and pain involved, we do gradually grow in knowledge and develop our response to value. We become more and more ourselves, straining towards authenticity and it is here within ourselves that lies the possibility for moral conversion.

We begin to discover for ourselves that our deciding and acting affect ourselves no less than the objects of our decisions and actions. It is up to each of us to decide what we are to make of ourselves and we recognize ourselves of originators of value.

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[2] Gregson, *Desires,* p.49.

The Jug of Water

A Nigerian tribal chief sent out his messengers to invite all of the men of the tribe to a great feast. "All of the food will be provided," they announced, "but each man must bring one jug of palm wine."
Ezra wanted to attend the great festival very much, but he had no wine. He paced the floor trying to think of a solution for his dilemma. Finally his wife suggested, "You could buy a jug of wine. It is not too expensive for the occasion."
"How foolish" Ezra cried, "to spend money when there is a way to go free." Once again he paced the floor until he came upon a plan. "Rather than bring wine I will carry water in my jug. Several hundred men will attend the festival. What will it hurt to add one jug of water to the great pot of wine?"
On the day of the feast the tribal drums began to beat early in the morning, reminding the people of the great festival. All the men came dressed in their finest clothes, gathering by midmorning at the home of the chief. As each man entered the tribal grounds, he poured his jug of wine into a large earthen pot. Ezra carefully poured the contents of his container into the pot, greeted the chief, and joined the dancers.
When all the guests arrived, the chief commanded the music to cease and ordered the servants to fill everyone's glass with wine. As the chief spoke the opening words of the festival, all of the guests raised their glasses and drank. Suddenly a cry of disbelief arose from the crowd, and they quickly drank again. What they tasted was not wine, but water. Each guest had decided that his one jug of water would not spoil the great pot of palm wine.[3]

In learning about and discovering the growth of children's minds, bodies and spirits, it is helpful to have a general guideline for parents and caregivers to differentiate the abilities of children at each stage in their lives. Stage theories, such as Erikson's, Piaget's, or Kohlberg's, gain their great power by describing predictable changes in human thought and adaptation in largely formal terms. That is to say, they present to us the characteristic patterns of knowing,

[3] White, *Stories for the Telling,* pp.66-67.

reasoning and adapting in ways that describe general features of human growth, applicable to all of us, despite the vast differences we recognize in our temperaments, of our own unique experiences and the contents and details of our particular life stories[4]

For the convenience of the reader, I have included a comparative chart, compiled by James Fowler, listing the stages of the developmentalists' theories explored in this paper. As previously mentioned, the concern in this writing is with pre-adolescent children so this chart should give the reader, at a glance, a broader picture of the stages of Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg.

A brief, general explanation of the theories will be helpful at this time.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a Swiss psychologist, is best known for his pioneering work of the development of intelligence in children. His theories state four stages in the mental growth of children. In the *sensorimotor* (0-2 years), the child is concerned with gaining motor control and learning about physical objects. In the *pre-operational* (2-7years), the child is preoccupied with verbal skills and can name objects and reason intuitively. During the *concrete operational* (7-12 years) stage, the child begins to deal with abstract concepts such as numbers and relationships. Finally, in the *formal operational* (12-15 years) stage, the child begins to reason logically and systematically.

[4] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.89.

Eric Erikson (1902-1994), an American psychoanalyst, made major contributions to the field of psychology with his work on child development and on "identity crises", an inevitable conflict that accompanies the growth of a sense of identity in late adolescence. His studies also enabled him to correlate personality growth with parental and social values.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1981), an American psychologist, pioneered the study of moral development. He felt moral reasoning involved six stages (three levels – two stages each), through which each person passes in order, without skipping a stage or reversing the order. His theory states that not all people progress through all six stages.

In brief, Kohlberg's theory of moral development presents three levels: the pre-conventional, conventional, and the post-conventional. Each level contains two stages. Stages 1 and 2 in the pre-conventional level involve an "egocentric point of view" and a "concrete individualistic perspective" in which the person makes choices based on fear of punishment and the desire for rewards. In Stages 3 and 4 of the conventional level, persons make choices from a "member of society" perspective, considering the good of others, the maintenance of positive relations and rules of society. Persons in the final stages of post-conventional level, Stages 5 and 6, reason from a "prior-to-society" perspective in which abstract ideals take precedence over particular societal laws.

Stages of Human Development Optimal Parallels

Eras and Ages	Erikson	Piaget	Kohlberg
Infancy (0-1 ½)	Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust (Hope)	Sensorimotor	–
Early Childhood (2-6)	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (Will)	Preoperational or Intuitive	
			Preconventional Level
Childhood (7-12)	Initiative vs. Guilt (Purpose)	Concrete Operational	1. Heteronomous Morality 2. Instrumental Exchange
Adolescence (13-21)	Identity vs. Role Confusion (Fidelity)	Formal Operational	
			Conventional Level
Young Adulthood (21-35)	Intimacy vs. Isolation (Love)	–	3. Mutual Interpersonal Relations 4. Social system and Conscience
Adulthood (35-60)	Generativity vs. Stagnation (Care)	–	Postconventional Principled Level 5 Social Contract, Individual Rights
Maturity (60 --)	Integrity vs. Despair	–	6. Universal Ethical Principles

James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and Quest for Meaning*, Harper and Row:San Francisco, 1981, p52.

ERIK ERIKSON

The work of Erik Erikson gives insight into how children mature. Erikson was a teacher before he was a trained child psychoanalyst under Anna Freud. He used play therapy to help children understand what was going on inside themselves. As a psychoanalyst he used the three parts of the human personality developed by Sigmund Freud: the id, the ego and the super ego. The id is the irrational, impulsive and selfish part of the person, which seeks pleasure and wants that pleasure immediately; the ego is the rational side of the person, which begins to develop as an infant becomes able to use cognitive functions such as perception, learning and problem solving. The ego organizes experiences and tries to make meaning out of them but it also tries to serve the id by finding acceptable ways of dealing with the id's demands. Or, the ego may block the demands of the id and in this way master it. The superego is what we often call the conscience. Children take in as their own the moral standards of their parents; the superego is like the voice of the parent in the child's mind reminding him or her of what is right or wrong, making him or her feel guilty or ashamed after breaking a rule.

Erikson's particular contribution places more emphasis on the social influences in the development of the child whereas Freud had placed his emphasis on sexual urges. Rather than looking only at childhood, Erikson describes the potential for development over the entire life span. He has a holistic view of the person believing that the biological and psychological cannot be separated and that this has to be viewed in the social setting of the person. Relationships with the family

and community affect a child's view of themselves: anxieties in the family and the community show up as anxieties in the individual.

Moral operations and skills involve insights and judgements about schemes of social co-operation. When we speak of actions that are good or right, these always occur in the context of living with other people.[5] Babies who always get their way through incessant fussing fail to learn more positive ways of interacting with others. They are not learning what others like and dislike or how to behave in ways considerate of those around them.

Erikson also theorized that persons are influenced by family history and by their community as well as by the present dynamics. Past experiences reach through time and touch those in the present. The value of the family and community stories is felt in the recounting and the celebrating of their history. Erikson's theory of development takes into account a complete interplay of physical and psychological interaction with the people and their history. He calls this development *psychosocial,* believing that the person and social cannot be dissociated.

He did not view persons as static things that moved from one box to another. He defined eight stages of psychosocial development with the understanding that a stage is a phase of life when a person is dealing with certain challenges,

[5] Melchin, *Living With Other People*, p.124.

developing new capabilities and a new sense of the self in relationship to others. As an adult or child responds to these changes and manages them, development takes place.[6]

The Psychological Stages of Erikson

Stage	Age Range
1. trust versus mistrust	Birth to 1 year
2. autonomy versus shame and doubt	1-3 years
3. initiative versus guilt	3-6 years
4. industry versus inferiority	6-12 years
5.identity versus role confusion	12-20 years
6. intimacy versus isolation	20-40 years
7. generativity versus stagnation	40-65 years
8. integrity versus despair	65 and older

Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1985), 247-73. Specific age designations from Carol K. Sigelman and David R. Shaffer, *Life-Span Human Development*, 2d ed. (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole 1995), 269[7]

Just as physical development is ordered in a baby – one must crawl before one can walk – so it is with psychological development. Erikson describes crises and conflicts that arise at each stage which are a normal set of stresses rather than coming from some great trauma. In our society five-year-old children leave the safety of home to go off to school. In this new environment there are new expectations and stresses that occur because the skills learned from the last stage are inadequate for this new stage.

At each stage a person develops possibilities for the resolution of crises on a continuum from very negative to very positive. Those who care for children want

[6] Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Norton:New York, 1985 p.34-36.
[7] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, p.46.

to provide them with experiences that develop positive qualities. They must also be aware that negative experiences must be confronted and assimilated, because they can be instructive and formative in healthy development.

Each stage in development becomes more complicated and challenging and positive skills gained from previous stages give strength to take on new demands. A person can experience difficulty if they move to a next stage without resolving the work from the previous stage. Satisfactory resolution of the issues of one stage does not mean they are resolved for life. Circumstances change and can threaten a person's capacity for trust, autonomy, initiative, or identity. People deal with crises throughout life and will be called on to help others at different stages in their lives. With these processes in mind we will briefly examine the stages and developmental challenges that face children. The main focus of this paper is on pre-adolescent children, therefore, only the first four stages of Erikson's psychological development will be considered. They *are trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt* and *industry versus inferiority.*

Trust vs. Mistrust

At birth a baby is moved forcefully from the womb, a place of absolute security, into a strange world. There is nothing familiar. The baby's first cries are ones of "Can this place be trusted?" Resolution of these crises is completely dependent on the caregivers. Babies cry out for comfort and they soon learn if those around

them can be counted on for a response - either positive or negative. With consistent, dependable caregiving the foundations for trust will be laid.

As the baby grows there is more awake time with more sensory interaction with those close to them. The repeated feelings of comfort and enjoyment are then associated with the people around them. Mother, father, siblings and others become part of the good feeling the baby experiences. Erikson believed learning to receive from a "friendly other" is important in learning to be giver also.[8]

Faith and a trusting relationship with God give parents a sense of confidence and meaning that communicate sense and meaning to the baby. Distorted views of God as a demanding judge or a father whom it is impossible to please may cause parents to be fearful and insecure themselves and unable to establish a healthy, trusting relationship with their children.

The hours spent in the arms of a loving caregiver, gazing into eyes that reflect love and deep value develop a growing sense of trust. As babies are held, and caressed they take in comfort, security, and love, and are then able to face their greatest fear – separation from mother. The first social achievement of the child is to let mother out of sight without suffering great anxiety. The memories of the consistent care and frequent returns make the baby certain that mother will

[8] Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, p.75-76.

return. Hope, rooted in trust, gives optimism and the energy to seek new ways of coping with difficulty and challenge[9]

This ability to trust is fundamental to health, wholeness, faith and maturity in all of life.[10] Thus foundational trust and faith are also bound together in the search for God. If the significant people in a child's world can be trusted to respond to the child's needs, then the child can begin to believe that an unseen God could also respond to his or her needs. Children who develop a basic trust in others, themselves and God do so by living with adults who trust others, themselves and God.

Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

In the first stage separation from the mother is the child's greatest challenge. During the second year of life the child matures rapidly, begins to walk, to co-ordinate various bodily functions, and begins to speak. During this stage the child will establish his or her autonomy, with the notion that this freedom of being separate is good.

The sphincter muscles mature and toddlers can experiment with holding on and letting go. Erikson saw this physical reality as an analogy of the psychosocial

[9] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey,* p.51.
[10] Ibid., p.51.

activities important during this stage of life.[11] This being able to hold on or let go is an expression of autonomy.

The "terrible twos" are a shock to parents as toddlers discover the words "no" and "mine". The children insist on doing it themselves and this stage calls for a lot of patience on the part of the parent in guiding and giving age appropriate choices to help the child gradually learn behaviours that are socially acceptable. Children who are not allowed to choose will feel powerless and doubt their ability to control themselves. These experiences can lead to shame and doubt.

At this stage toddlers are vulnerable and parents must offer a reassuring environment for physical movement and choice for the child. Children must not be shamed when accidents occur. The unacceptable behaviour and not the child should be the focus. Their choices must be guided and new things must be taught to avoid unnecessary failure that can cause doubt and a feeling of defeat. Limits and guidance offer a child a sense of security and give a space for free and healthy autonomy. It is important for children to experience both firmness and tolerance, because this sets the stage for them to understand law and grace.[12] If adults exert complete control over them, children never develop a sense of self-control and become vulnerable to shame and doubt.

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[11] Ibid., p.52.
[12] Ibid., p.54.

Initiative vs. Guilt

Children seem to master co-ordination at around the age of four and thus their mobility opens them to a much larger world. To their autonomy they now add initiative, which involves planning and attacking a task – this is self-designed and purposeful activity where they begin to explore their outer world.

Children at this age are energetic; they are also able to forget failures quickly and move on to experiment with new tasks. They are able to work co-operatively with others and are willing to learn from adults around them. This is the stage of never-ending questions, curiosity and exploration.

During this stage, the conscience begins to form. A child accepts and internalizes his or her parents' standards as his or her own. It is mainly the voice of the parent speaking in the mind and memory of the child that causes him or her to observe their actions, and guides him or her towards right responses. It is therefore important for the child that both parents' voices be harmonized to avoid guilt, if a child had to choose between one parent and the other. The child builds into his or her conscience the standards he or she sees lived at home.

Guilt can be a healthy safeguard and a corrective that triggers remorse and a desire to make things right.[13] It is the inner voice of the conscience saying, "That is wrong, you should not have done it." At this stage children learn the difference

[13] Ibid., p.56.

between "on purpose" and "accidentally". It is important that the parent communicate that it is the behaviour that is unacceptable and that the child is loved. A healthy conscience guides without crushing and is firm yet flexible enough to handle complexities of our changing lives.[14] Clear, consistent rules and an environment where children are given choices to help develop initiative will support the child in the development of the skills needed to make good moral choices.

At this stage, play is significant as children act out adult roles in playing house or school experimenting with different roles and relationships. They incorporate the behaviours of the significant adults around them. The virtue or strength established through positive resolution of the initiative versus guilt crises is *purpose*.[15] This can be energized by creative imagination and fantasy, but one must know the difference between what is possible only in fairy tales and what could happen in real life. Young people are developing that differentiation. With the development of this sense of purpose, children are now ready to begin basic skills such as reading and writing, which they will need for adulthood.

Industry vs. Inferiority

The *process of education confronts the industry versus inferiority stage*, where adults pass on the wisdom and skills acquired from earlier generations. For children aged from six to twelve, the school is the central influence in their lives.

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[14] Erikson, *Childhood and Society,* p.95.
[15] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey,* p.58.

What happens here profoundly affects their lives. Their active imaginations are harnessed as they begin to learn to read and write, solve problems and work in groups.

During these years teachers and parents can teach the pleasure of perseverance and working co-operatively; through this, the children discover how a society works productively to provide for the good of all.

It is important for children to receive affirmation for a job well done and for the effort they invested into a hard task. If this is not done, learning will become difficult and a sense of inferiority may settle in. It must be remembered that children mature and develop skills at different rates. Affirmation for doing well is a motivator for children. They can come to believe they are valuable and loveable for what they do, but parents and educators must affirm them for who they are so as to enhance their self-esteem and build their experience of self-confidence. Successfully navigating this stage will develop a sense of competence that will allow children to face the challenges of adolescence.

We are all born with a desire to know and childhood is a time when children are learning from all their experiences and relationships. To communicate effectively with children we must learn how they think.

Our life stories are all one piece; the experiences and responses of childhood are the foundation stones of personality and faith. The children are being formed through what they experience in their homes, schools and faith communities. Human development and spiritual formation are not two separate, unconnected processes. Healthy psychosocial development is part of spiritual formation. It sets the stage for a relationship with God. Young children depend on consistent guidelines and the expression of clear behavioural boundaries with which to develop their conscience, along with opportunities to take initiatives and make choices.

As a child's horizons broaden he or she is able to grasp what is outside his or her original horizon. The use of story will appeal to a child's conscious attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility and will eventually be expressed in concepts, propositions, words, images and symbols.[16] Stories can be used to look for true meaning and value and to help sift out what is illusory and false. Analysis using story is carried forth chiefly in terms of imagery rather than abstract concepts. The aim is to appeal not only to reason but also to feelings, emotions and instincts – to all the faculties that can be more directly affected by such imagery with its wide range of cultural connotations.

As human beings we are ordered towards personal growth and transformation. From the suffering and tension we encounter is the call to go beyond certain

[16] Lonergan, *Method,* p.302.

learned but inadequate modes of life, to be more authentic, to live a higher level of existence.

Consistent, loving care by parents is a child's first experiences of unconditional love opening the child to trusting God. Parents who set wise limits for their toddlers but give them room to express their autonomy prepare children to understand God's laws and the freedom of will given to each person. Parents who understand Erikson's insights on healthy development can relate to their children in ways that will lay a good faith foundation.

JEAN PIAGET

Early in the 1920's, while conducting intelligence tests on children, a young Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, became fascinated with their thinking, and thus began his research in cognitive development, which lasted for more than fifty years. He attempted to reveal the processes of children's thinking and to discover what caused those thinking processes to change. Jean Piaget is well known for his study of thought processes in children. He believed that children pass through four periods of mental development.

Sensorimotor Period

During the first stage, *the sensorimotor period,* children obtain a basic knowledge of objects through their senses. This period lasts until about age 2. During this period the infant's mind works with sensations and actions, taking them in and

organizing them. It could be said that their actions are their thoughts: if hungry a baby will cry. They discover pleasure on sucking their fist the first time that it accidentally touches their mouth. Babies are totally egocentric and everything is an extension of themselves. To use Piaget's term, they are unable to decenter from the self. When an object is dropped, for the baby it no longer exists. The game of Peekaboo gives great pleasure to children, as they master the reality that those who disappear do not cease to exist. In this stage children begin to walk and to use words.

Preoperational Period

During the *preoperational period,* from about 2-7, children develop such skills as language and drawing ability. The amount they learn during this stage is staggering – they are constantly asking questions and assimilating new information. At this stage they are unable to differentiate between their viewpoint and that of others – they assume everyone thinks and sees things as they do. They believe those inanimate objects to be alive. They love stories of animals, trees and flowers that talk. God is understood through their actions and experience. They love to re-enact the stories they have been told. They have favourite bible stories and are comforted by hearing that mean, dangerous people, as in David and Goliath or Daniel in the Lion's Den, are punished and they love the fact that God loves everyone.

Children between 2 and 7 enjoy discovering new pieces of information. This is an excellent time to provide them with a rich supply of stories. From stories they can learn about nature, relationships, and God and they can get to know the characters of the bible. Pictures inform and help focus the attention of perception-bound young children. They like to look at pictures as they listen to stories; a picture of Jesus in a child's room can be a visible reminder of his presence with them. Young children concentrate on one thing at a time: they may focus on one part of the story and miss the point the adult thought was important.

Parents and faith communities have values they believe are important to pass on to children. Children are most likely to understand and eventually own those values if they have the opportunity to experience them. Children learn basic skills and values, and development is enhanced when parents and adult friends include them in life events. By watching adults interact, they learn.

Period of Concrete Operations

In the *period of concrete operations,* from about 7-11, children begin to think logically. For example, they begin to organize their knowledge, classify objects and do thought problems. At this stage they discover that people have different viewpoints from their own – they begin to watch others to understand what they think and how they understand things. They are able to co-operate in games and rules become very important to elementary school children.

It is at this stage that children begin to think logically rather than intuitively – they begin to make connections and the mind operates by putting precepts and information together to form larger concepts. They think logically but about concrete things. It is at this stage that they develop skills in interpersonal relationships and respect.

Period of Formal Thought

The period of formal thought operations lasts from about 11-15. At this time, children begin to reason realistically about the future and to deal with *abstractions*. Abstractions are ideas about qualities and characteristics viewed apart from the objects that have them. Formal abstract logic does not just suddenly appear but develops from experience with concrete logic in the previous stage.

Piaget believed that all persons go through the stages in the same order, although the rate can differ from person to person. In order to move from one stage to the next there has to be biological development that prepares the way for cognitive development and certain skills must be learned at one stage in order to move to the next.

Piaget wanted also to understand what caused cognitive development in children. He identified four factors that we will briefly explore. They are the

biological factor of heredity and maturation, direct exposure, social environment and the process of equilibrium. [17]

Heredity and maturation

Heredity and *maturation* provide the potentials for development - not a pre-programming but being born with a brain that engages the world around them. The maturing brain can organize new information and make changes in the child's thinking. The speed of this development may vary but the sequence does not.

Direct exposure

Direct exposure to the physical world is a must for children to develop cognitively. They learn and develop as they experience and handle objects around them. They discover the effects of manipulating objects and can spend hours amusing themselves with common, everyday things.

Social environment

A child's *social environment* can enrich or retard the developmental potential. As they interact with adults and other children they pick up new pieces of information. Some of this new information may be in conflict with old information and thus the child is required to supplant new ideas for old ones. Lonergan would call this the "self-corrective process of learning."[18]

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[17] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey,* pp.82-91.
[18] Lonergan, *Method,* p.159.

Equilibrium

The final factor Piaget identified in causing development is *equilibrium*. Human beings are born with a need to resolve inner conflicts and restore equilibrium; they make the changes in their thinking that are necessary to re-establish harmony and a sense of adequacy. This is the process of equilibrium at work – the motor of development.

Children are always learning and the significant adults in their lives can influence their development and learning. When we are aware of what is normal we will allow for normal limitations and work with the strengths found in children at each stage of development, waiting patiently for the readiness for discoveries in the next stage.

Adults must expose children to an environment in which they will experience different situations and make discoveries about themselves and others. They enjoy having their favourite stories repeated to them, and also having puppets being used to tell the story. They like colourful pictures to look at as the story is read. Stories can give another way of looking at the same experience and children can be seen to use a favourite story when at play. Children will learn stories and their meanings best if they actively experience them. Repetition reinforces the learning.

Young children enjoy the Bible story of Zacchaeus who is a small person similar to themselves. They are acutely aware that like Zacchaeus, sometimes it feels as if they have no friends; they experience what a change in attitude did for Zacchaeus and that it could possibly benefit them. After listening to the story they are very keen to act it out and sing the song.

> Zacchaeus was a wee little man
> And a wee little man was he.
> He climbed up in a sycamore tree
> For the Lord he wanted to see.
> The Lord passed by and said:
> "Zacchaeus! You come down from there
> 'Cuz I'm going to your house today!
> "Cuz I'm going to your house today! [19]

As noted, visuals have a powerful impact on children and it is important that parents know what their children are seeing. The children need the support of parents when something they have seen troubles them. Some pictures and images that children see on the television can be very instructive, but young children can also be disturbed by things they see. Although videos can offer alternate ways of hearing stories, the choices made for viewing should give positive reinforcement of experiences in the children's lives.

Television is primarily a storytelling medium and could, if misused, become an influential teacher for young. It is important to set limits and to also be selective about the programs they view. Children need to develop social skills and hence it is important for them to spend time interacting with other children. Adults must

[19] *Great Songs For God's Kids*, Joyful Heart Music, 1995.

also spend time with their children. Videos or movies watched together can give rise to opportunities for discussion. Environment and balance within that environment are important elements in healthy growth of a child. At every stage in a child's development understanding the way of knowing is critical to an eventual mature knowing.

LAWRENCE KOHLBERG

Lawrence Kohlberg's work built on the study of the moral development in children begun by Jean Piaget. With much research Kohlberg, and his colleagues developed and refined an understanding of children's moral development.

Adults are concerned with teaching children to do what is considered morally right. Researchers have found that children from religious or moral classes were no less likely to cheat or steal than children who had no classes[20]. Piaget and Kohlberg discovered that children possess different moral reasoning structures than adults and that they develop moral reasoning in a pattern of sequential stages. For adults to help children develop morally it is important to look into the factors Kohlberg believed to make a difference in whether children translate moral reasoning into moral action.

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[20] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, p.94 quoting Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Education in the Schools: A Developmental View", in *Curriculum and the Cultural Revolution*, ed. David E. Purpel and Maurice Blanger (Burkley: McCitchen, 1972),p.456.

Level I - Self-interest

By the age of four or five, Level I in Kohlberg's Levels of Moral reasoning, children will begin to make moral judgements using reason. At this level, which lasts approximately until age nine, self-interest is the moral authority. At the beginning of this stage they think they are acting on the rules laid down by their parents but they act based on their own interpretation of the rules. They are oblivious to what they do not understand about the rules. They make up their own rules for a game, rules that they may have heard others say; then they carry on playing however they want, and in the end, everyone wins.

Later in this stage they move from "everyone wins" to "someone will be a winner"; what is good for me becomes the sole moral authority. They do not understand the need for a source outside themselves that gives authority to moral decisions. At this stage there are good and bad actions but they are unaware of good or bad standards or persons. At this stage children judge rightness or wrongness based on the physical or self-gratifying consequences of the act.

Children begin to label right and wrong in their world through experiencing rewards and punishment as a result of their actions. Young children do not generalize and apply these consequences to similar actions. Young children also believe that the greater the physical damage, the greater the wrong. In helping children share their moral reasoning with him, Piaget would use stories. In the

book *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, Catherine Stonehouse relates the story Piaget used about the boy whose mother calls him to dinner. He comes right away but accidentally breaks fifteen cups on a tray behind the door. Another boy, while his mother is out, tries to reach a jar of jam and accidentally breaks a cup. When asked who is the naughtiest, the children reply the boy who broke the most cups. The quantity of wrongness gets the attention of young children.

They watch the lives of older children and adults, gathering facts and building their view of right and wrong. Later in this stage the focus is fairness – all people must be treated equally for things to be right.

At Level I children do what is right because they believe they ought to obey their parents or others in authority and they want to avoid punishment. Later in this Level they do what is right to gain rewards and benefits. Elementary-school age children are thinking in the concrete and this limits their ability to take the perspective of others, especially others outside their own small circle of experience.

Punishments for transgressions must immediately follow the misdeed. This seems to be important in establishing their inner sense of rightness that they have paid for the wrong and can now move on.[21]

[21] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, p.103.

Level II – External Standards

From the self-interest morality of Level I children move to what Kohlberg calls the *conventional morality* of Level II. In this stage people live by conventions or the accepted values of the society. Late elementary school children begin using this Level II moral reasoning, adolescents depend on this level, but some adults, however, never move beyond this level.

It is at this stage that the individual begins looking at outside standards when making moral decisions. They are no longer locked into the fear of punishment and are beginning to explore the moral guidelines that others have found helpful. Children at this stage discover that others are guided by certain values and have expectations for how people should act. In the later part of this level it is the laws that are valued for bringing order to society.

In late elementary school, the desire to be liked motivates children to meet the expectations of those they are trying to please. Facing the emotional consequences of their actions will often have more influence on their behaviour than threats of punishment. They have a desire to please important persons and to perform one's duty to society.

Children at this level are able to make allowances for intentions where in Level I that was not possible. Their lenience is tempered by a sense of duty. They are also beginning to understand the perspective of friends, family and eventually of

society. Although early elementary school children are able to memorize the Golden Rule,[22] they are unable to act on it and use moral reasoning until they reach the beginning of Level II.

They begin to value relationships because of the affection they feel and because of their contribution to society. At this stage they are beginning to be able to make sacrifices and take risks for another and help out family or friends. People are seen now to have worth.

Carol Gilligan

It is important to note that the participants in Kohlberg's study were all men and boys; girls and women were included only later. One of Kohlberg's colleagues, Carol Gilligan, in her book *In A Different Voice,* notes that the concerns of women and girls differ from those of the men and boys. The male approach to morality is that individuals have certain basic rights, and that you have to respect the rights of others. So morality imposes restrictions on what you can do. The female approach to morality is that people have responsibilities towards others. So morality is an imperative to care for others.

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[22] Golden Rule, precept of altruistic behaviour, that is, that people should do to others as they would have others do to them. With the Ten Commandments, it serves as a proverbial guideline of conduct for Christians, Jews, and others. It is derived in its modern form from Jewish and Christian sources. The negative form of the rule was stated in Jewish literature, as in the Book of Tobit (4:15) in the Apocrypha: "And what you hate, do not do to anyone." Confucius and other teachers of ethics also stated it negatively. The Christian rule, which posits a fraternal ethic from the practical basis of personal realism, is taken from two New Testament passages, Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31. Both Gospel texts report the exhortation of Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mount. "Golden Rule". Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2001.

As she began to study the moral reasoning and development in women and girls, she noted a major change in girls as they entered adolescence, a change that did not take place in boys. Girls, who in late childhood had been honest about their feeling and beliefs, became unwilling to express their thoughts and feelings in early adolescence. As they entered Level II in their moral development, girls became aware of the "good girl" image held by family, friends and society and in the effort to conform, that girls would hide their true feelings, eventually losing touch with their real selves. As adolescents they begin to see the disparity between power and care, so give up on power.[23] When boys have a dispute during play, they actively resolve it. When girls have a dispute, they quit playing in order to protect the relationship.[24] For girls, responsibility connotes an act of care rather than restraint of aggression

Once squeezed into this mold, girls become morally vulnerable and the development of their gifts becomes limited. Gilligan found that girls who had a good relationship with an honest and open woman resisted this conformity to the false image of how girls should be and could develop into the person God made them to be. Seeing authentic women who are willing to stand up for what they believe and do, what they believe right, helps girls resist the pressure to acquiesce to standards set by others.

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[23] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice:Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Harvard University Press:Cambridge, 1993, p.98.
[24] Ibid., p.38.

Level III – Internal Principles

As we have noted, Level I morality is governed by self-interest whereas Level II by external models and rules. It is in Level III that Kohlberg found mature, adult forms of moral reasoning. This stage does not begin until, at the earliest, the mid-twenties, and even then it is not automatic with age. In relation to the moral development of children it is important to know that the progress of moral development is facilitated for children when adults who are morally mature accompany them. Children are given a gift when these people help them develop morally.

Understanding how children reason morally can help adults understand their point of view and be more accepting of them as they journey but it is more advantageous if the parents and caregivers can make positive contributions to the children's moral development. Moral deliberation is not a "logical" matter of deducing implications from first principles but a process of getting insights and making judgements about concrete moral experiences, guided by Christian faith[25]

Besides the four necessary phases of cognitive development identified by Piaget that are also found to stimulate moral development, Kohlberg identifies three other factors that provide the experience, social interaction, and process of

[25] Melchin, *Living with Other People*, p.121.

equilibrium necessary for moral development.[26] These factors are role taking (experience), participation in a just community (social interaction), and inner moral conflict or questioning (leading to the process of equilibrium).

A brief sketch will clarify the importance of these three factors. First, *Role taking* is putting oneself in the shoes of another; becoming aware of their thoughts, feelings and attitudes; empathizing with them. A sense of attachment draws the child from his or her self-centered world into noticing what others are doing. The child wants the other person, someone they love and feel attached to, to be pleased with them and so they imitate them; this is role taking. This is most often done in play – smiling, clapping, and playing house. Generally, especially in a group, the element of emotional warmth and communication is a contributing factor to moral development. The children are given responsibilities and consequences appropriate for their age and they gain insight as to how their actions can affect themselves and others. Children who interact extensively with their peers are more advanced in their moral development.[27] They learn mutual respect, which makes it easier to see the other persons' point of view. In fact, we become aware of horizons precisely because such breakthroughs occur. When we attend to these breakthroughs, we begin asking if and when further breakthroughs can be expected to occur, what we can do to prepare for them and what we can do to celebrate their occurrence in ourselves and in others. This

[26] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey,* p.113.
[27] Ibid., p.116.

is the path of growth and development, the road towards maturity in our moral understanding and judgement. [28]

Second: Children must experience *just treatment* and participate in providing justice for others if they are to develop an understanding of justice and develop morally.[29] When the teachers and parents intuit how children understand justice at each stage in their development and meet them where they are, they can help them discover adequate forms of justice. To acquire bad habits requires only that patterns be repeated often enough that they become the typical form of our response to such situations. We already know how easily such habits are formed and how difficult it can be to extricate ourselves from their grasp.[30]

The major challenge for persons teaching moral education to children is that children see moral issues very differently than adults. Instruction can be counterproductive and ineffective unless the moral demands and teaching match the child's level of moral reasoning. Kohlberg found that children, as well as adults, can comprehend moral reasoning that is one stage above the reasoning they currently use.[31] When the reasoning is beyond that, they fail to connect because it makes no sense to them.

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[28] Melchin, *Living With Other People,* p.90.
[29] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey,* p.117.
[30] Melchin, *Living With Other People,* p.92.
[31] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey,* p.118.

Finally, one way to raise questions and stimulate moral reasoning is to engage children in the *discussion of moral dilemmas*. Using stories in which the children are faced with moral conflicts or having the children relate stories about themselves when faced with a moral conflict can help the children identify actions that could be taken and the consequences of those actions. They can be asked not only *what* is the right thing to do, but also *why* it is right. When this is done in a group they have the added benefit of hearing other children and discussing issues of moral reasoning a little more advanced than their own.

Children need to see moral actions that demonstrate the moral concerns of Level III – the unselfish care of others. In moral actions children see and are guided by the more mature moral actions of others. This cause and effect relationship in moral development is not fully understood but a relationship does exist. It is therefore important that the adults who work with children be sure their actions and their words are consistent. As adults we can understand singly our own lives and the lives of others, so too can we understand them in their interconnections and interdependence[32]

What influences children's moral judgement to become moral actions? Kohlberg found it to be *ego strength*. This refers to a set of inner functions that include the ability to understand a situation well enough to predict the consequences of actions, the tendency to choose the long term greater good over the short-term

[32] Lonergan, *Method,* p.211.

immediate rewards, and the ability to focus attention on a task for a significant period of time.[33] Some researchers call this a strong will. Lonergan would say the drive for transcendence is dynamic and all of us, adults and children, are continually in the process of becoming authentic persons.[34]

What of the relationship between religion and morality? For Christians and Jews they are closely intertwined because our God is deeply concerned with love and justice, calling people to act morally. Faith in a just and loving God gives meaningful purpose for accepting one's duty and being moral. As children meet Jesus and hear the stories they are introduced to God at work and they see justice and love in action. As children grow to know and love Jesus they want to be like him and this gives them a reason to act morally. They also have the comfort to ask God for the strength to do what is right even when it is difficult.

In the following chart is an overview of Kohlberg's Levels of moral reasoning. His study presents a theory of moral development based on cognitive reasoning rather than on behaviour. To measure the level at which persons are operating, Kohlberg developed a highly refined interview process in which hypothetical situations are presented that involve a moral dilemma. The person's answers to questions surrounding that dilemma determine the stage at which he or she is reasoning.

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[33] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey,* p.120.
[34] Lonergan, *Method,* p.13.

We should remember that the use of hypothetical situations measures abstract rather than concrete reasoning. When children (and some adults) are presented with situations out of their immediate experience, they turn to rules they have learned from external authorities for answers, rather than to their own internal voice. Therefore, young children base their answers on rules of "right" and "wrong" they have learned from parents and teachers (Stages 1 and 2 according to Kohlberg's theory). If young children are presented with situations familiar to them, on the other hand, they often show care and concern for others, basing their moral choices on the desire to share the good and maintain harmonious relations, placing them in Stage 3 or 4 (which Kohlberg claimed was impossible at their age).

Kohlberg did not give a plan for Christian spiritual formation of children but his work does give insight into how parents and educators can work with children to facilitate this moral and spiritual development.

Kohlberg's Levels of Moral Reasoning

Egocentric - → Perspectivistic

	Level I	Level II	Level III
Source Of Authority	Self-interest	External Standards – Models and Rules	Internal Principles
Definitions	Right is what adults command or what brings reward. Wrong is what I am punished for – what brings pain.	Right is what good people do or what the law says one should do. Wrong is what good people do not do or what the law says one should not do.	Right is living out moral principles and being just. Wrong is violating a moral principle and being unjust.
Stimulus to Right Actions	Fear of punishment and desire for reward.	Desire to please important persons and perform one's duty to society.	To be true to oneself one must act upon the moral principles to which one is committed.
Intentions	Oblivious to intentions	Makes allowances for intentions. Lenience tempered by sense of duty.	Considers intentions but also concerned about justice.
Ability to Take Another's Perspective	Understands the perspective of person's in situations that he or she has experienced.	Understands the perspective of friends, family, and eventually society.	Understands the perspective of a wide range of persons, including minority groups.
Value of Persons	Valued in material terms. Persons are valuable for what they do for me.	Valued because of relationships of affection and for their contribution to society.	Valued because they are persons.
Justice	What adults command. Later, equal treatment	Defined by society	Equal consideration for all.

Table developed by Catherine Stonehouse, Orlean Bullard Professor of Christian Education at Ashbury Theological Seminary
Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith (Baker Books:Michigan,1998), p 96.

ROBERT COLES

Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist and anthropologist, is another student of children and their moral and spiritual lives. For several decades Coles spoke with and listened to children from rich and poor families in several countries as they spoke about their lives.

In the 1960's, in the Southern United States, Coles worked with an African-American child called Ruby Bridges. Each day, morning and afternoon, she walked through a mob of adults who yelled threats at her – the price she paid for going to an all white school. Where did Ruby get the moral courage to face the mob each morning with a smile and then pray for them each night? In Cole's book ,*The Moral Life of Children,* he explores what could give the children he met their moral strength and the factors that could contribute to it. Another child, Mary, is the daughter of migrant workers. She has grown up with nothing but poverty. A drunk driver killed her father and this was added grief in her life. Eduardo, an extremely poor young Brazilian boy works hard to support his family. All around him is criminal activity but he chooses to avoid this means of survival. In the children he interviewed, Coles sees a compassionate regard for others, stubborn persistence, modesty and candour about personal failings, moral pride or self-respect, moral purpose or a reason to act morally.[35]

[35] Robert Coles, *The Moral Life of Children,* Atlantic Monthly Press:Boston, 1986, pp.4,9-11,50.

Coles says about Ruby's moral courage that "If I had to offer an explanation, though, I think I would start with the religious tradition of black people."[36] In church the children learned that the road to heaven was not an easy one and that God had a purpose for them. Those able to grasp this message had a reason to be strong. The words of the preacher gave Ruby strength and direction in her life[37]

Although Eduardo is a child, his life experiences are that of an adult. His morality developed through intense experience. Coles tells the reason, "He has learned after only ten years on earth to stay alive, to master a modern city, to spar with death, even anticipate its arrival, contemplate its many possibilities: a grown mind's moral imagination at work in the continuing life of one of this earth's vulnerable children."[38]

There are many that are destroyed by similar circumstances in which Eduardo has become morally mature. Coles leaves us with the sense that there is mystery involved and that we cannot have all the answers to understand how one becomes morally mature and strong. We can be guided by the insights of Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg on how parents and caregivers can facilitate development in children but it is clear that this development is strengthened when the child is in a vital faith community.

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[36] Ibid., pp.34,133.
[37] Ibid., pp.23-24.
[38] Ibid., p.135.

For years Robert Coles asked children what made a good person. He tells the children a story, a moral fable, written by a college friend of his named Howie Axelrod. He calls it "Starry Time".[39]

Starry Time

Once upon a time there were no stars in the sky.

Only the lonely moon shone at night. And since it was sad and alone, it gave off very little light.

One person had all the stars. That person was neither a powerful king nor an evil witch, but a little girl named Stella. When Stella's mother turned off her lights at night, Stella's ceiling turned into sparkles brighter than any Christmas tree.

Sometimes she felt as though she was looking down from an airplane over a city of lights.

Stella loved falling asleep under her starry ceiling. She always had bright and wonderful dreams. One day at school, she overheard some boys and girls talking. One boy said, "I can't sleep at night. My room is very dark and I get scared."

A girl agreed, "Me too. That sad old moon doesn't do any good. My room is as dark as a closet."

Stella felt bad. She hadn't known that she was the only one with stars in her room.

That night when her mother turned off her lights, her ceiling lit up like the lights of a city. But Stella could not sleep. She thought about all of the boys and girls who were lying awake in the dark, and she felt sad.

She climbed out of bed and opened her window. The moon hung sadly in the sky.

"Moon, why don't you give off more light?" Stella asked.

"Because I am lonely. I have to spend the whole night out here by myself. Sometimes I get scared."

"I'm sorry," Stella said. She was surprised that something as big and beautiful as the moon could get scared just like little boys and girls.

"Plus I get tired," said the moon "It's a big job to light the whole sky."

Stella thought for a while.

"Moon," she said, "Would my stars help to keep you company?"

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[39] Coles, *The Moral Intelligence of Children*, p. 13-15.

"Yes," said the moon.

"And would they make the sky brighter?"

"Yes, and they would make me happy."

"Stella looked back from her window. She looked up at her stars.

"You should go and help the moon," she said. "I will miss you, but every night I will look out my window and see you in the sky." She wiped a tear from her eye. "Now go."

With that, the stars burst from her ceiling and whirled around with a dazzling glow until they gained enough speed to shoot towards the moon. They streamed out her window, and fanned out across the sky. It was the most beautiful sight that Stella had ever seen.

From then on, the nights were brighter. The moon had many friends, and he beamed with happiness.

And with the light of the new night sky, grandmothers and grandfathers sat outside on their porches telling stories about the old days. And young couples strolled hand in hand along the streets.

And, best of all, Stella could sit outside with a friend, and they could watch the stars together.

This is a story that engages children. Stopping to ask what Stella should do gives an opportunity for creative, moral problem solving. Most of the children with whom I shared Robert Coles story think she should give each child in her class at least one star and are amazed that she is capable of letting them all go for the greater good of all. The discussion of Stella's altruism gives the children an opportunity to react and share their feelings about the little girl and her stars.

Can we project ourselves, our feelings, and our values onto the characters in a story? Can we learn to travel with them, to experience a good or bad process of decision-making? Children need hero worship and positive role modeling. Can stories assist in the "becoming a person" process? Can we live vicariously through a make-believe character?

God is known, not in the abstract but in the personal, as is enshrined in Jesus' saying that as long "as you did it to the least of my brothers or sisters you did it to me." This has become the theme of endless stories such as Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* and *The Selfish Giant* or in Van Dyke's classic *The Other Wiseman.*

Kindness and gentleness are ultimately rewarded, often in surprising ways, as this story illustrates.

The Woodcutter and the Doves

Lars was a woodcutter who had spent his entire life in a huge forest near Trondheim. He knew every trail in the forest. Some said that young Lars might even know every tree and bush.

One day when Lars was getting ready to cut down a tree he heard a cooing sound not far away. He followed the sound and discovered two beautiful white doves caught in a wooden trap.

"Poor birds," Lars thought. "If I don't free them, surely they will die." He quickly opened the trap and let the two white birds fly away. Then the woodcutter returned to his job and forgot about the birds.

In the days ahead, Lars married a beautiful young woman, moved to a small city ten miles away, and began to raise a family. Twenty-five years passed quickly. Though he prospered in his new job, Lars often thought of the forest that had been his early home.

One day Lars rose early in the morning kissed his wife and children good-bye, and said, "I am going back to the forest. I will return tomorrow night for supper."

The ten-mile journey seemed like only a few hundred yards to the eager woodcutter. When he arrived at his beloved forest, everything seemed he same. He recognized the old pathways he had walked upon, as well as the rocks, and even a few of the old gnarled trees.

Lars began to walk deeper and deeper into the forest. After a journey of over an hour, he thought, "The forest has grown much larger, I should be on the other side by now." Still he walked on, farther and farther, until he realized that he was lost. This had never

happened to him before. Was it possible that he had also lost his sense of direction? He continued to walk until night came and darkness settled over the forest. Lars was cold, hungry, and for the first time, frightened in the forest.

Just as the former woodcutter began to prepare a bed for himself, he saw a light in the distance. "Strange, I don't remember anyone living here," he thought.

He followed the light and knocked at the door. After a few moments, the door slowly creaked open. As light from the cabin hit the night air, a chill ran down the woodcutter's spine. Standing in the door was the strangest woman he had ever seen. Her skin was whiter than snow, and her eyes shone like hot coals. She had long black hair that hung far below her waist.

"Can I help you?" the woman asked in a raspy voice.

"I'm lost," said Lars haltingly. "And I'm hungry -- and cold. I also need a place to sleep."

"Come right in," the woman said, beckoning with a long finger.

Lars felt most uncomfortable in this strange house, but he was so hungry, and the food the woman placed before him smelled so good, that he quickly ignored his apprehension. He ate everything that the woman placed before him.

When he had finished he stood to thank his hostess. He looked around but couldn't see her. Suddenly there was a hissing sound from the corner of the room, and Lars saw a huge black snake slowly slithering toward him. When the snake reached him it stood straight up on its tail and looked at him. The snake had the face of the old woman.

"Ssssso, you have come at last," hissed the snake. "I have waited 25 years. Do you remember the two white birds that you set free? They were going to be my evening meal. When I saw you release them, I swore that one day I would kill you."

"I did not know that they were yours," said the woodcutter. "If you would have said something, I would never have opened the trap."

"Ssssso," said the snake, "you do admit you set them free. Now I know I have the right person. Tonight, at midnight, I will kill you."

"Is there nothing that can save me?" the woodcutter cried.

"Yesssss," the snake said slowly. "If the bell in the old church tower rings twelve times before midnight, you will be free. But since I will not let you leave this house, it is certain that you will be my midnight snack."

Full of panic, Lars looked about the cabin attempting to find a way to escape. All the windows were bolted, and the snake had moved in front of the only door. There was no way out. He slumped to the floor, realizing that he would soon die.

As he sat on the floor Lars thought of his wife and children. He remembered the joy he had experienced working in the woods. He had been a fortunate man, up to now. Tears ran down his cheeks.

After a long time, the woodcutter looked up at the clock on the wall. It was five minutes before midnight. The snake began to make its way from the doorway towards Lars. It curled itself around the chair in front of him and taunted him with its darting tongue.

Just before the big hand reached the midnight hour there was a weak sound, way off in the distance. It was the sound of a bell. It rang and rang. Lars started counting: nine, ten, eleven, twelve.

With the last peal of the bell, the house vanished, the snake disappeared, and Lars stood alone in the dark forest. Knowing he could go nowhere until morning, he curled up and fell asleep, wondering who had rung the bell and saved his life.

When the first beams of light broke through the leaves, Lars was on his feet. Off in the distance he could make out the outline of an old church. He walked quickly to the building and entered the broken wooden door. He found the stairs to the bell tower and climbed quickly to the top. Peering intently at the old bell, he saw spots of blood. Down below, on the floor of the bell tower, more blood, and the two white doves who had thrown their tiny bodies at the bell 12 times, in order to repay the man who had saved their lives.

Lars gently picked up the birds. Though their bodies were bruised and broken, each had a steady heartbeat. He tore his shirt and wrapped each of the birds tenderly in a piece of the cloth. He stayed with the doves, feeding and caring for them, until they were healthy. Then, one morning, he opened the church door and, for the second time, set the two white doves free. When they flew out of sight, he returned to his home, greeted his wife and children, and lived happily ever after.[40]

Use of stories in moral development

Some of Jesus' parables raise more questions than they answer (Lk 20:1-8) and we do not know which way to go. The chief priests question the authority of Jesus and questions fly back and forth. Jesus gets the last word but the question remains unanswered. A riddle will attempt to untie but in a desire for the truth we

become more deeply entangled. It acts as an emotional and intellectual catalyst that brings secrets about themselves and others to light. It brings forth discussions between ourselves.[41] Riddles force us to look within and the mystery often reveals more about us than the riddle itself: it helps to make manifest the hearts of people. After Jesus pushes over moneychanger's tables in the temple, he says to the people, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." They were furious with him and at his trial charged him with blasphemy because they had not understood the riddle. By "this temple" "Jesus meant himself and the fact that he would raise from the dead after three days. The only way to understand the Jesus is to give up the current misunderstanding. The happiness Christ offers is perplexing – the only way it seems to be understood is – "if you can't lick them, join them."

As well as studying the moral lives of children Coles also explored the spiritual lives of children, interviewing several hundred eight to twelve year children from various countries.[42] As he befriended the children, he found in the relaxed atmosphere they would share thoughts and insights that would rarely show up in formal tests or interviews. The children, Coles discovered, were young seekers asking deep questions about life. They were trying to make sense out of their lives, to understand what was happening and why. In his book *The Spiritual Life*

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[40] White, *Stories for the Telling,* pp. 93-96.
[41] Robert Short, *The Parables of Peanuts,* Fawcett Publications:Greenwich, Conn., 1968, p.34.
[42] Cole's findings come from in dept interviews with five hundred children whom he interviewed at least five times and some of then twenty five times over the period of a year. Others he interviewed over two years.

of Children Coles says the children think "long and hard about who God is, about what God might be like." In quiet times alone their thoughts they turn towards God, and this is true even for children whose families are not religious.[43]

Biblical stories play an important part in the elementary child's search for answers. Coles found that children relate experiences in their own lives to the events in the lives of the biblical characters. When thinking about the stories, children imagine themselves in the story and they see God working and relating with the biblical people. Particular stories grab their attention and inspire their imagination. This draws them to reflect on life, meaning and God.[44]

Talking with the children, Coles discovered that Jesus was very important to them. Children could turn to him; he would understand them because Jesus had been small like them. He had a life that was interesting and it had a purpose. Children are also fascinated with Jesus' miracles and his "visit" to earth.[45] To many children, Jesus was more than a historical figure and was someone they thought a lot about, prayed to and wondered what it would be like to meet him some day. They frequently spoke to Jesus as their friend and did not consider these times of prayer.[46]

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[43] Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, p23, 25, 37, 100, 168-9, 294.
[44] Ibid., p.121.
[45] Ibid., p.92-3.
[46] Ibid., p.118.

We can assist children in getting to know God better by helping them get better acquainted with the biblical characters and encouraging their interest in and relationship with Jesus.

The Two Brothers

There were once two brothers that farmed together. They shared equally in all of the work and split the profits exactly. Each had his own granary. One of the brothers was married and had a large family; the other brother was single.

One day the single brother thought to himself, "It is not fair that we divide the grain evenly. My brother has many mouths to feed, while I have but one. I know what I'll do, I will take a sack of grain from my granary each evening and but it in my brother's granary." So, each night when it was dark, he carefully carried a sack of grain, placing it in his brother's barn.

Now the married brother thought to himself, "It is not fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have many children to care for me in my old age, and my brother has none. I know what I'll do, I will take a sack of grain from my granary each evening and put it in my brother's granary." And he did.

Each morning the two brothers were amazed to discover that though they had removed a sack of grain the night before, they had just as many.

One night the two brothers met each other halfway between their barns, each carrying a sack of grain. Then they understood the mystery. And they embraced and loved each other deeply.

There is a legend that says God looked down from heaven, saw the two brothers embracing, and said, "I declare this to be a holy place, for I have witnessed extraordinary love here." It is also said that it was on that spot that Solomon built his first temple.[47]

Summary

Why is it the message of Christ so often falls on deaf ears? How can stories reach those who are spiritually deaf for they cannot hear even if they want to;

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[47] White, *Stories For Telling*, pp.30-31.

they must first be opened and always from the out side first. Stories can have the ability to draw the listener in and have them participate in the choices and decisions the main character could take and observe the outcomes of these decisions.

If we wish to advance the common good, we must be open to and supportive of God's saving grace in the personal and social lives of citizens.[48] Moral knowledge is one thing; moral action is another. When we act on our knowledge, we verify and correct our knowledge and we form ourselves as moral persons. Each of us must perform the operations to attain the knowledge.

Interactive story telling helps children discern insights and integrate these insights into strategies for moral living. Lonergan would say that encounter is more. It is meeting persons, appreciating the values they represent, assessing their defects and allowing one's life to be challenged to its very roots by their words and by their deeds.[49] The obligation of persons is to transcend the limitations of self-interest and promote the social structures of the dynamically unfolding common good.[50]

God's design is to work through the everyday relationships of parents and children to provide children with experiences that prepare them for growth in their

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[48] Melchin, *Living With Other People*, p.114.
[49] Lonergan, *Method*, p.247.
[50] Melchin, *Living With Other People*, p.114.

faith. Through instructive discipline and discussions of moral dilemmas, adults can assist children to grow in their ability to assess situations and to predict the consequences of their actions.[51]

It is possible to give persons an image of God in childhood that will be adequate for a lifetime. The primary image of God is powerful and lasting, but the relationship with God must continually be transformed for coming to know God is a life-long process.[52] The tools of ethics and morals do not produce finished products on their own. They require skill development and moral skills must be nurtured and cultivated over long periods in supportive environments[53]

Children learn basic skills and values, and their development is enhanced when parents and adult friends include them in life events. By watching adults interact, children learn.

Conversion transforms the concrete individual to make him or her capable of grasping not merely conclusions but principles as well.[54] As children begin to use their resources to the fullest, their experience leads them to understanding and to making judgements. They then move from making judgements to deciding and to choosing what is important and of value in their lives. This drive for transcendence is dynamic in all of us, children and adults as well, as we are

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[51] Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, p. 121.
[52] Ibid., p.134.
[53] Melchin, *Living With Other People*, p.123.
[54] Lonergan, *Method*, p.338.

continually in the process of becoming more complete and authentic human beings.[55]

It is unfortunate that not all parents feel comfortable reading and passing fairy tales on to their children. Could this be because we are all reluctant to discover and befriend the stranger within?[56] Denouncing traditional fairy tales and substituting the monsters met in these stories with user-friendly monsters, the child misses the monster he knows best and is most concerned with, the monster he or she fears himself of herself to be. Fairy tales allow the child to spin fantasies to help get to know the monster within; anxieties can then be given bodily form. The witch that will devour Hansel and Gretel can be eliminated by being tricked and shoved into the oven to be cooked. Psychoanalysis reveals that children feel deep love for their parents but also strong repulsion. By listening to fairy tales children can imagine their parents to be the evil stepmother, witch or the giant. They can work through their inner conflicts about their parents with the guidance of the story. Despite all the anger and anxiety produced in their minds they will know the story always has a happy outcome. This is unquestionably something the child cannot imagine on his own.

With our present insights and understanding, and with the self-correcting process of learning, we strive to become authentic human beings. Objectivity is reached through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject, and the

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[55] Ibid., p.104.
[56] Kristeva, *Strangers To Ourselves*, p.192.

fundamental forms of self-transcendence are intellectual, moral and religious conversion.[57]

[57] Lonergan, *Method,* p.338.

Nihil amatum nisi praecognitum.
-Bernard Lonergan[1]

CONCLUSION

Responsible action, or affective conversion, is the goal of helping children begin to develop the ability to choose based on value rather than on rules. The challenge for caregivers is to stimulate moral reasoning and give children a safe place to explore their choices.

We all live by stories. They are the vehicles through which we make sense of our world and our place in it. One person's story may say, "I'm in this all by myself, and I can rely on no one," while another's story says "If we all band together, we'll be OK." There are some people whose story perennially warns them, "Don't get your hopes up," while others live out their story, "God has good things in store for us."

True stories can lift our vision for the future or enable us to create a world that is more caring and humane. People, for example advertisers, who want something from our children, are constantly telling them stories. These people don't really care if the stories they tell our children are lies or even dangerous. Ideally, we tell our children stories so they will grow in wisdom and courage and they will know who they are. Yet, they see stories on television that are trying to sell them one

[1] Nothing is loved until after it is known. Lonergan, *Method,* p.278.

thing or another. When we think of the stories children see in commercials, music and rock videos, blockbuster movies, and video games, we should ask, "Are these the main stories we want them to know?"

Progress is the cumulative effect of our personal and communal response to the imperatives of our consciousness: "Be attentive; Be intelligent; Be reasonable; Be responsible"[2] It is the cumulative effect of our being true to ourselves.

Moral action is not the mechanical application of logical systems or codes; it is a matter of performing operations and skills of meaning. We begin to learn these skills in the first months and years of practice, and we use them daily in meeting the demands of ordinary experience.[3]

To be part of the creation of an ethical tradition is different than to be the recipient of an ethical tradition. The creators are building the bridges between religious imperatives and concrete situations. The religious experience is alive and well and pushing to be recognized.[4] In passing on a tradition there is an ethical response to newcomers which says: "We have seen this situation before. We are Christians who live out of love. The best loving thing to do in this situation is_____."

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[2] Lonergan, *Method,* p.18.
[3] Melchin, *Living With Other People*, p.124.
[4] Shea, *An Experience Named Spirit*, p.78.

In the past, social and religious bodies promoted the good of order within the society through these behaviours. If the community standard was trespassed, the community's authorities might penalize those that violate it.[5] The community, depending on how it sees its relationship to God, may declare the offender out of favour with God, and predict future divine punishment. Initially, ethical responses flow from the fullness of religious experience. But they soon become tangled within social systems of reward and punishment.[6]

The enduring problem of receiving a religiously grounded ethical tradition is externalism. The behaviours are encouraged by the social and religious sanctions that have grown up around them. When these sanctions are no longer feared, the behaviours no longer appear desirable. Many commentators see contemporary Christianity suffering this fate. Fear of ecclesiastical excommunication and eternal hell are no longer the motivators they once were. There are undoubtedly many contributing factors to the collapse of this particular sacred canopy. Possibly the most undermining force is the infamous "secular spirit of the age." But perhaps the more powerful influence is the contemporary religious sensibility. This sensibility tends to make clear distinction, and at times complete separation, between Church affiliation and true faith: not to belong is not automatic disgrace - it may be the only path personal conscience can travel. Also, for many people the love of God has swallowed any thought of punishment. Afterlife, if and when it is considered, is seen as redress for the indignities of this

[5] Lonergan, *Method*, p.361.
[6] Shea, *An Experience Named Spirit*, pp.79-80.

life, not further indignity. But no matter what the reasons, the question arises: with this external context of ethics collapsing, will the actual behaviours be abandoned?[7]

There has been a massive rational and pragmatic response to this situation. On the one hand, the connection between basic beliefs and various behaviours has been spelled out. The dynamic reads: "If this is who we are and this is what we believe, this is what we must do." This is an attempt to move from external sanctions to internal reasoning. On the other hand, there has been sustained argumentation that ethical living means good living. If we act with each other in certain ways, our own lives and the lives of others will be enriched. Sinful behaviour may appear to be pleasurable and have personal payoffs; but this is an illusion. The ethical behaviour prescribed by the tradition is the path to fulfillment. Ethics is the searching for a new grounding in belief and authentic living.[8]

The Bible is not a children's book. To assume that the sheer beauty and power of the narrative of the scripture will leave a lasting impression on children is in defiance of sound educational practice. At this level, religious education is reduced to conditioning and not education; it becomes habit formation and is a poor foundation for a belief capable of growing to maturity.

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[7] Ibid., p.80.
[8] Ibid., p.80-81.

Indeed, even with years of study, it is difficult for adults to understand the Bible. With their own limited experience, it is likewise a challenge for children. There must be a more realistic alternate approach to conveying the central message of God's love and the Bible message to children. Religious education must be in touch with the real world of children using their experiences and their natural development rather than imposing religious ideas and language on them. The larger and more complex our society becomes, the longer and more exacting becomes the training that is required for the development of a fully responsible person.[9]

At times, all young children need to split the image of their parents and other adults as well, into threatening and benevolent aspects. The loving parent, when disciplining a child, will suddenly change into a "look alike impostor", "stepmother" or the "wicked witch"[10] in the mind of the child. And what about "magic" in the stories? Does this offer unrealistic solutions to a problem? In a child's life there are many moments of acute frustration - a shoelace that will not be tied or a toy that will not behave in the desired fashion - and at this point the child feels like a fool. Then in a moment, as if by magic the object does his

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[9] Lonergan, *Method,* p.359.

[10] It is interesting to note, particularly in the French collection of Charles Perrault (written in the 17th C before the French Revolution) and the German collection of the Grimms Brothers (written in the early 19th C. that there are no evil "step-fathers' or "wicked-witch" men. The tales are a reflection of the social milieu of the times. Perrault's tales have submissive, beautiful, polite, docile women reflecting the ideal *femme civilize.* In Red Riding Hood, curiosity gets the girl in trouble and the arrival of the man saves her. The Grimms fairy tales are also stamped with male dominance – women's characteristics are the same as for Perrault. The character of both genders reflects codes that fit Protestantism and bourgeois enlightenment. (Snow White, Cinderella)

bidding. In fairy tales magic helps the hero's life; the fool outsmarts the preferred sibling; the youngest child is not doomed to be the ugly duckling but will grow to be a beautiful swan. Eventually, by sustained effort, there will be success. Bettelheim states that "while fairy tales invariably point the way to a better future, they concentrate on the process of change, rather than describing the exact details of the bliss eventually to be gained."[11] The stories start where the child is at the time and suggest where he or she has to go - with the emphasis on the process itself.

Teaching children by example is the best way. Children ought to see the striving for the common good happening at home. Parents ought to show children how this can be done. Teachers in the schools need not only to emphasize the acquisition of abstract knowledge or factuality, but also rather, articulate what really matters - how we behave with one another, what we believe in, and what we look up to.

Storytelling can be a most effective form of catechesis for children.

> "When we have learned the importance of storytelling in religious education, perhaps we will be able to echo the sentiments of G.K. Chesterton, "My first and last philosophy, that which I believe in with unbroken certainty, I learnt in the nursery..... The things I believed most in then, the things I believe most now, are the things called fairy tales."[12]

Hopefully children will develop a conscience oriented to value rather than form a

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[11] Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, p.73.
[12] Weiss, "Tell Us a Story", p.20.

rule-oriented consciousness. Our desire for them would be to learn to choose what is ultimately good for themselves and others over what is immediately gratifying. Through stories and storytelling we hope to pass on to children, and help them discover, the knowledge of what is ultimately true and valuable. It is to gradually bring them to *affective* conversion. This is the concrete possibility of overcoming moral impotence, of not only being able to make a decision to commit oneself to a course of action but of being able to execute that decision over the long haul against serious obstacles. The criterion, then, for authentic affective conversion, lies in action.[13] It is in the real possibility of living a morally converted life. For Lonergan, that possibility lies in the reality of love. And, beyond all knowledge of knowledge, to give also knowledge of affectivity in its threefold manifestation of love in the family, loyalty in the community, and faith in God.[14]

> So long as human beings change and make history, so long as children are born and old people die, there will be tales to explain why sorrow darkens the day and stars fill the night. We invent stories about the origin and conclusion of life because we are exiles in the middle of time. The void surrounds us. We live within a parenthesis surrounded by question marks. Our stories and myths don't dispel ignorance but they help us find our way, our place at the heart of the mystery. In the end, as in the beginning, there will be a vast silence, broken by the sound of one person telling a story to another[15]

[13] Gregson, *Desires of the Human Heart.* p.53.
[14] Gregson, *Desires of the Human Heart,* p.10.
[15] Keene, *Telling Our Story*, p.151.

APPENDIX

As a conclusion of this paper, I explore several current, positive modes available to enhance creative learning of Christian values. J.K. Rowlings' controversial books about the young wizard, Harry Potter, are one way to tap into an extremely popular children's text. Those adults who have open minds can use these books creatively. Two video companies produce a series of delightful videos for children that also capture the imaginations of adults. *Veggie Tales* teach Scriptural values and *Storykeepers* tell gospel stories set in early Rome. Children are eager to watch and inclined to discuss these videos at great length. These videos can help children, either explicitly or implicitly, develop their religious sense and encourage moral action and have them acquire moral responsibility.

Veggie Tales

VeggieTales is a kid's series that teaches timeless values like honesty, kindness, and forgiveness in a delightfully wacky way. Hosted by Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber, each video in the series teaches a life lesson – without ever being preachy. At the heart of each *VeggieTale* video is a nugget of truth that is rooted in the Bible. These hilarious stories feature top-quality computer animation, infectious songs and loveable characters.

In a world full of shows that teach children to buy better toys or be better kick boxers, *VeggieTales* are videos that help teach children to be better children. They have a unique blend of "Sunday morning values and Saturday morning fun"[1] The mission of Big Idea, the company that produces *VeggieTales*, is to elevate the moral and spiritual fabric of society through creative media. They believe that the media children consume (TV, film, and video games) has a strong influence on what children believe and how they behave. Many programming choices have had a negative impact on our culture and these producers are committed to making programs having a positive impact.

Veggie Tales are clever and deliciously silly but it is this humour that gives parents and children a gentle reminder that God made them special and loves them very much. This is the heart of the "big idea" of the *VeggieTales*.

Storykeepers

The Storykeepers[2] is a modern video exposition of the Gospels, drawn primarily from Mark. It is an animated video series created for children that tells the story of Ben the Baker, and his wife Helena, who are Christians in Rome at the time of the Neronian persecutions (64 A.D.) Ben and Helena have adopted four children whose parents were lost during the fires set by Emperor Nero. The hope-giving stories and parables of Jesus are told in the course of their exciting adventures, including the passion narrative from Mark.

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[1] Veggie Tales, Big Idea Productions:Chicago, 1993, promo on video cover
[2] *Storykeepers*, Shepherd Films:Dublin, 1996.

The Storykeepers are a band of assorted, ordinary Christians in Rome about 64 AD. They realize the need for each generation to keep the stories of Jesus alive and to pass them on from one generation to the next - a practice as highly relevant today as it was in the past.

The resource kit for the 13-part series contains a guidebook designed to enable adults to learn and tell the stories of Jesus to children. It also shows how to involve the children with the stories and offers a large range of hands-on activities. The kit can be adapted for use with youth or even the young-at-heart. Parents and grandparents, who are often the best storytellers of all, can also use it.

Harry Potter

Mary Margaret Keaton writes about the recent phenomenon of the Harry Potter series by Scottish author J.K. Rowlings. She views these sometimes controversial children's books as "a tool for sowing seeds of the Gospel"[3]. Aside from inducing a love of reading in pre-teens, she feels we may be able to "hear the voice of God instructing us how to teach them (children)." [4]

The Harry Potter books – four to date – show, in the tradition of the fairy tale, that with much hard work, good triumphs over evil; even children, smaller and weaker

[3] Mary Margaret Keaton, "Harry Potter: A Tool for Sowing Seeds of the Gospel" *Catechist*, 34:6 (March 2001), p. 35.

than adults have many strengths. Goodness and light are strong themes in the stories and "the Harry Potter books lay the seeds of the Gospel – love, self-sacrifice, discipline, friendship, freedom."[5]

Harry, an orphaned boy, is taken into the home of materialistic, mean-spirited relatives, the Muggles (non-wizards), who do not want him to know his family story or anything about his special gift. On his eleventh birthday he accepts an invitation to attend Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and thus enters a world of mystery and wonder.

With education and discipline, Harry can become the wizard he was created to be. Harry discovers he can be brave, loyal and willing to lay down his life for his friends.

The lightening shaped scar on his forehead resulted from an encounter with the evil wizard Voldemort who killed his parents. Dumbledore, headmaster of the school, tells Harry at the end of the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, "If there is one thing that Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good."[6]

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[4] Ibid., p.38.
[5] Ibid., p.38.
[6] J.K. Rowlings, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Raincoast Books:Vancouver, 2000, p.216.

At the end of the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,* Harry understands more of the mystery and tells Voldemort, "I know why you couldn't kill me. Because my mother died to save me." And Voldemort replies, "Yes, that's a powerful counter charm." [7]Jesus gained our redemption by love and self-sacrifice.

Harry and Voldemort have somewhat similar childhoods but end up following different paths. Dumbledore says to Harry "It's our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."[8] Voldemort seeks evil and is transformed by it into something unrecognizable and inhuman.

Harry has a detachment from materialism and holds family life in high esteem. In the *Philosopher's Stone* Harry gazes into the Mirror of Erised, which reflects "our deepest and most desperate desire of our hearts,"[9] to see himself with a family who loves him. We all want to be loved and accepted. *This* is the reality that a life with Christ offers.

We look for behavioural evidences that testify to values internalized. When we look at Harry Potter's angst - living unloved but so good - we wonder, as Robert Coles did, in his studies of children, how does this happen to a child? Aware of the developmental stages, in which the child naturally seeks approval through

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[7] J.K. Rowlings, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,* Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1998, p.233.
[8] Ibid., p.245.
[9] Rowlings, *Philosopher's Stone,* p.157.

conformity, we nonetheless recognize those spontaneous movements of goodness that flow from a generous heart.

The Rainbow People

In a beautiful meadow at the bottom of a great mountain lived a people called the "Greens." They wore green clothes, lived in green homes, drove green cars and believed that God was green.

At the top of the great mountain were another people, the "Blues." They wore blue clothes, lived in blue homes, drove blue cars and believed God was blue.

Greens and Blues didn't speak to each other. In fact they hated each other. Green parents would teach their children to say:

"Green is happy
Blue is sad.
Greens are good;
Blues are bad."

Blue parents would teach their children to say, "Blue is happy; Green is sad. Blues are good; Greens are bad."

Blues and greens grew up seeing each other as "sad' and "bad. But they really didn't know each other. Some Blues went a whole lifetime without ever talking to a Green. They didn't know each other because they stayed in their own territories. They didn't go to the same churches or schools.

It happened one day that a Green boy was walking with his father when he saw a Blue boy flying a kite in their meadow. When the blue boy saw them he became frightened. He ran back toward his mountain. But in doing so he sprained his ankle and couldn't walk very well. The Green boy wanted to help him, but his father said, "No."

"Don't you remember what your mother and I taught you? Green is happy; Blue is sad. Greens are good; Blues are bad."

The Green boy still asked his dad if he could help the Blue. "Dad, how do we know this Blue is bad? All I know is that he has a sprained ankle and he needs someone to help him walk home."

When the Green boy said this, his father turned to him saying: "Blue is the colour of the devil. God only loves Green. Our religion teaches us to help our own kind. I want you to do as you are told."

A few weeks later the Green boy was out playing with his pet rabbit. He chased it into the tall grass and into the open fields. He played for so long that without realizing it, he had crossed into Blue Land. He was about to catch the rabbit when the rascal jumped down a small cliff. Green went

after him and in doing so caught his right leg between two big rocks. He pushed and pulled, but could not move. He called for help, hoping a Green would hear him. He worried that sooner or later a Green would come by. This thought frightened him because he had never met a Blue.

As the sunlight faded, someone approached the trapped Green boy. It was a Blue. It was the same boy who had sprained his ankle, the boy who had been flying his kite in Green land. The Green boy closed his eyes waiting to be hurt by his enemy.

The Blue boy stood by the Green boy for a few minutes. Then he went to a tree and broke off a branch. The Green boy said, "Don't hit me with that branch,' thinking that's what Blue was about to do.

Blue answered him. "I'm not going to hit you. This branch is pry loose the rocks that are holding your leg."

Blue pried loose the rocks. He tore his blue shirt into long strips and tied the branch to Green's leg. Then he helped Green walk home.

When Green's father saw his son's leg tied with blue cloth, he cursed his boy. "I don't care if you were injured." He screamed. "You should not have let a Blue touch you."

Though Green knew his father was upset with him, he could not forget the Blue who had helped him. When his leg healed, he went into Blue Land to find his helper.

For a whole day Green walked in the neighbourhoods of Blue Land. It took a lot of courage to do this because everywhere he went people slammed doors on him and called him names. Some young children even threw rocks at him. Finally, he found the boy who had helped him. He did not slam the door on Green. He welcomed him in his home.

Green was happy to see Blue, but he was surprised to see that his helper had clothes that combined the colours of blue and green.

"I thought you learned that green was bad. Why are you wearing green with your blue?" asked Green

"Do you remember when I helped you when you were hurt? I tore up my shirt to make a splint for your leg. I figured that you became part of me, and I became part of you. In helping you and talking with you, I came to see that green is as good as blue."

"Won't the other Blues throw rocks at you when they find out you're a 'Green-lover?" asked Green

I don't care what people think," said Blue. It's right to help people whether they are blue or green."

The two boys became close friends. They often visited each other. They made up a new song that they taught to the children. It had these words:

"Green is good, but so is Blue,
Purple, Yellow and Red too—
All the children should be glad;
There is no colour that is bad."

Little by little more Blues and Greens started visiting each other. Then they went beyond their own lands and visited the Yellows, Reds and Purples. After a while most people didn't call themselves "Greens" or "Blues" but simply "Rainbow People" And to this day their children sing, "There is no colour that is bad."[10]

[10] Bausch *Storytelling*, pp.152-154.

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