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Building a Story Together: The Challenge of Conversion in a Plural Age; A Narrative Interpretation

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Abstract
If Christian conversion is understood as conversion-in-history, then how does our present culture of fear, distrust and indifference to the 'other' animate discipleship as an ongoing process of conversion? This essay develops a narrative hermeneutic as a viable conceptual and theological framework for engaging this question. Describing the conversion process as an unfolding story of our lived "yes" to God's self-gift, it argues that saying "yes" to God today means, among other things, welcoming the (often demanding) story of the other. The "yes" of conversion entails nurturing a narrative hospitality. The essay offers two ways to practice a spatially and temporally responsible narrative hospitality that are urgent for Christian discipleship today.

Keywords: Conversion; narrative; pluralism; narrative hermeneutics; hospitality; identity; empathy.

The Story of Now[1]: Fear, Indifference and Violence in the Encounter with the 'Other'

One year after the tragic events at the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon, I continue to be struck by a particular rhetoric, embraced by various media and public officials, claiming that the events of last April 15th have not and will not change who we are. Now, this statement may be interpreted in a number of ways. On the one hand, the tragedy revealed the best of who we are as a nation. The people of Boston triumphed as a community of resilience and compassion. Addressing an interfaith service of healing at Trinity Chapel, Copley Square in the aftermath of the tragedy, the Reverend Liz Walker (of

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[1] Marshall Ganz, "Why Stories Matter: The Art and Craft of Social Change," *Sojourners Magazine* 38, no. 3 (2009).

Roxbury Presbyterian Church) captured well the texture of a heroic and compassionate community:

> This is what I know: God is here, in the midst of this sacred gathering, in this sanctuary and beyond. Different faiths, different races, strangers bound first by loss and pain, but now clinging together in growing strength, in a city that has always faced the darkness head on. We are members of one another; a community of resilience; hard pressed but not defeated; confounded, but not consumed. We are gathered in community, and through the blur of each other's tears, and the beats of so many broken hearts, we will rise in community and face whatever the future holds, resolutely as one. This is what is demanded of us, and this is who we are.[2]

Surely, we should remain steady in our compassion and resilience. However, it is quite another matter to say that the events of April 2013 should not *change* us – should not cause a critical reevaluation of the stories that we live by in this world, and how our national narratives may or may not fuel such instances of unadulterated rage and hate. Surely our continued development as a nation and global citizen demands such introspection at institutional and personal levels, leaving open a vision of change to ever-greater responsibility and to an authentic, inclusive humanism.

Changing who we are is the substance of a conversion narrative. It is an existential need that people of faith are called to discern in every age, as we further God's reign. The specific claim made by *this moment in history* on the Christian vocation to conversion is where I wish to focus this essay. Conversion is always *conversion-in-history*, so it bears asking: what specific claim does our moment in history impose on us?

I accentuate one particular claim in this essay. The events in Boston were, I suggest, emblematic of a more ubiquitous and persisting phenomenon: our fear, distrust and indifference to the presence of the 'other,' represented under the different

[2] "Interfaith Service for Bombing Victims in Boston." C-Span Video Library. Accessed May 22, 2013. http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/BombingVi.

guises of the 'religious other', the 'racial other', the 'ethnic other', the 'poor and oppressed' other, and also the 'forgotten' other, meaning those who are othered by temporal distance and by memory.[3] The problem may be summarized by an aporia adapted from German Lutheran scholar Eberhard Jüngel: "There *you* are – here *I* am! How does that concern me?"[4] In other words, does the other make a claim on me, and is this claim legitimate? Does the present "clash of civilizations," heralded by scholars and social commentators, demand that we retreat into the bunkers of our familiar cultural values and norms – as Samuel Huntington would have us to do?[5] Are we to engage the other, in our midst and in our memory, through exclusion or through the openness of embrace and hospitality?[6]

Thick Questions about Conversion

This trajectory in the story of now suggests a few thick questions about what constitutes a historically relevant conversion. How does this trajectory of otherness contextualize and make concrete the demands of discipleship as ongoing conversion in faith? Alternatively stated, how can we grow closer to God, as persons and as communities, as we engage the 'other' in our societies, in the knowledge that this 'other' may be

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[3]As a society we are all too often indifferent to the global poor; we commonly distrust the Arab-featured passenger on our airline flight; we are all too quick to reduce the problem of violence in our inner cities to the dimensions of a 'Black' or Latino problem. Pluralism and difference permeates our social and cultural landscape and challenges our deepest sense of identity and morality.

[4]Eberhard Jüngel, "The Effectiveness of Christ Withdrawn: On the Process of Historical Understanding as an Introduction to Christology," in *Theological Essays I*, ed. J. B. Webster (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1989).

[5]Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 21. See also Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2004).

[6]Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 75. Volf describes exclusion as manifesting by way of elimination, assimilation, domination or abandonment. See also Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: Norton, 2007) for similar critique of the clash of civilizations.

someone in need of our charity and justice, or may be a terrorist who may maim or kill? "There *you* are – here *I* am! How does that concern me?" Such questions are never easy, and this essay can hardly presume to offer definitive answers. But the challenge of making faith relevant in any age is to respond with wisdom, critical insight, and deep regard to its demands.

I offer a narrative hermeneutic as fecund for constructing an approach to these questions. Specifically, this essay makes three main points:

1. That a narrative hermeneutic is a viable conceptual framework, which characterizes the encounter with the other as a *narrative encounter*, and that the challenge therein regards a *re-storying* of identity.
2. That a narrative hermeneutic is also *theologically* viable for addressing this problem. I offer that a theological ethic of affirmation (or "yes," to God's self-gift) may be embodied in a practice of *narrative hospitality* – welcoming the storied lives of others, and sharing our lived stories.
3. That conversion, as the unfolding of our lived 'Yes' to God's self-gift, may be occasioned by the encounter with the other.

Hopefully, these proposals will constitute a response to the obvious question of: why a narrative approach to conversion?

The Conceptual Adequacy of a Narrative Hermeneutic

Regarding the conceptual adequacy of a narrative hermeneutic: "There *you* are – here *I* am! How does that concern me?" How can this question be viewed as 1) a *narrative encounter* that 2) invites a *re-storying of identity*? I suggest three main lines of questioning:

1. What is narrative?
2. How do narratives function?
3. What are the components of narrative identity? How does this clarify the term 're-storying'?

What is Narrative**?**

Narrative is quite a ubiquitous and pluriform phenomena, at least in popular usage. We are used to the standard definition of narrative as pertaining to the combination of events in literary plot. Yet, theorists in narrative psychology have long attested that human identity is ultimately an ongoing story (or at least a confluence of many stories), and that narrative is a form of cognitive competence that gives structure and meaning to day-to-day experience.[7] Even beyond personal narratives, there are also national narratives that constitute the ethos in which we exist as social beings. We are – as philosopher Paul Ricoeur was wont to say – beings "*entangled in stories*."[8]

Such conceptual extensions of narrativity beyond discursive media have, however, failed to gain much traction in philosophical exploration. Under the sway of the linguistic turn in continental philosophy, narrative theorists (including Paul Ricoeur) have tended to concentrate on the functioning of literary text as the archetypal form of narrativity, perpetuating what Calvin Schrag has called an "excessive and self-limiting preoccupation with discourse and discursive practices" within contemporary philosophy.[9] On the evidence of current scholarship, therefore, it seems that there is much room for

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[7]Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1986); Jerome S. Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of "Reality"," in *Psychoanalysis and Development: Representations and Development*, ed. Massimo Ammaniti and Daniel N. Stern, Psychoanalytic Crosscurrents (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Stephen Crites, "Storytime: Recollecting the Past and Projecting the Future," in *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore R. Sarbin (New York: Praeger, 1986); Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989); Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences.*, ed. Lenore Langsdorf, Suny Series in Philosophy of the Social Sciences (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Theodore R. Sarbin, ed. *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

[8]Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 30.

[9]Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 11.

establishing a more cohesive understanding of narrativity, if at all possible.

Narrative as a Human Competency to Establish a Storied World

But, this is a big 'if.' Theorizing on narrativity is made complex by the pluriformity and ubiquity of the phenomena. I propose, therefore, as a working definition, that narrative be understood as *a distinct human competency for forming meaningful connections among events, situations, causes, goals and other phenomena in life*. This narrative competency may congeal in many forms, including literary text. But, more significant to the purposes of this essay, it also extends to the actions and practices of daily life (non-discursive forms of expression) that are *lived narratives*, which express, constitute and embody our sense of identity and life story. The amalgam of such discursive and non-discursive forms of communication constitutes the storied world in which life unfolds as meaningful and livable. In essence, *narrative is a human competency to establish a storied, meaningful world*.

Narrative Encounters and the Mediation of Human Meaning

How do narratives function? A particularly evocative thesis of Paul Ricoeur is that narratives serve, among other things, to *mediate* the creation and transformation of meaning. Literary narratives (the textual archetype) enable a re-visioning of ordinary life by shepherding readers into the imagistic world of the text.[10] This narrative encounter with a text affords the critical distance necessary for 1) recognizing the ways in which we are socialized (often unconsciously) into our storied/symbolic cultural landscape, and 2) imaginatively reconfiguring of our agency in that world.[11]

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[10]To be sure, Ricoeur was arguably under no illusion that literary text exhausted the potential for narrativity; rather, he focused on literature in its capacity as a *textual archetype*. It most perfectly possesses the compositional and textual qualities that make for good mediation. Ricoeur would further argue that storytelling gives authors ultimate flexibility to craft virtually an infinite number of plot variations (and thus worlds) that may engage the human imagination.

[11]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans., Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988).

I propose, however, that Ricoeur's thoughts must be extended to account for the ubiquity of narrative forms and narrative encounters observed earlier.[12] In particular, I offer that our lived narratives may also mediate human meaning. We are moved by life stories, not just biographies, but by our flesh and blood encounters, our personal relationships with charismatic individuals, saints and exemplars. Ricoeur has argued that human action is text and, as such, can mediate meaning.[13] I suggest that he does not preclude that action can do this in its capacity as lived narrative.

Dan McAdams and the Storied Nature of Personal (and National) Identity

It is now possible to clarify the term re-storying. Narrative psychologist Dan McAdams has done much to advance understanding on the storied nature of human identity. His distinctive contribution, in my opinion, is to theorize and research into the components of life stories. In his book *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story*,[14] he advances two main points in this regard:

1) Life stories are animated by a perennial tension between the need for power, autonomy and personal agency on one hand, and for intimacy, community, and relationship on the other.[15] These are fundamental motives in life.

2) Life stories are typically constructed around:

- *Nuclear episodes*, or the landmark events in life. These are the "high points, low points, and turning points in life stories."[16]

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[12]This was an implicit point in David Carr's challenge to Ricoeur that the latter make clear his position on the narrative quality of realities other than literary text. See David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, ed. James M. Edie, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[13]Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (1971).

[14]Dan P. McAdams, *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1985).

[15]Ibid., 26.

[16]Ibid., 27.

- *Imagoes*, or "personified and idealized images of self"[17] that function as characters in our autobiographical narratives, and embody our aspirations to power and intimacy. Examples include images of oneself as a hero or victim, as a friend, as an adventurer, as a helper, or as a good citizen.
- *Ideological setting* is the "backdrop of personal beliefs and values which provides a context for … action."[18] In other words, it is what we hold as true, good and beautiful in life.
- A *generativity script*, defined as "a future plan or outline concerning what one hopes to put into life and what one hopes to get out of it to fulfill the developmental mandate of *generating* a legacy."[19] It is the component of our life story that orients us to the future and, hence, brings meaning and agency to our present.[20]

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[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid (emphasis in original).

[20]McAdams further developed this thesis in *The Stories We Live By*, in which he maps the various components of identity to the stages of human development. Motivational themes of power and intimacy "may be traced back to the elementary-school years; the ideological setting is laid down in adolescence; imagoes begin to form in early adulthood; the generativity script becomes more salient as we move into mid-life." See Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 271.

His later work *The Redemptive Self* marks a shift away the conceptualization of story as relating uniquely to personal identity, to a consideration of national narratives and how they inform or constitute a nation's sense of common identity. Based on years of research, he finds common patterns in the stories that highly generative American adults tend to tell about their lives – stories that emphasize the power of human redemption and a steadfast belief that one will ultimately triumph over obstacles to find fulfillment in life. Stories of the redemptive self has an American heritage, having been embodied and articulated in foundational myths like the story of the first pilgrims, in the stories of American heroes, in literary classics, as well as in popular cultural icons like the cowboy or the space adventurer.

The attendant problem, he says, is that the redemptive self often goes hand in hand with values of individualism and exceptionalism. "The interlocking ideas of chosen people, promised land, manifest destiny, and redeemer nation form a unique constellation with an especially powerful pedigree in American cultural history – going all the way back

What are the Components of a Re-storied Narrative Identity?

How do these components of life story relate to re-storying of identity? To say that a life may be re-storied is to suggest a transformation in our sense of identity that proceeds through the psychological channels of nuclear episodes, imagoes, ideologies, and generativity scripts.

An example from my experience in faith formation ministry at Boston College (that focused on the transformative effect of immersion trips) may serve to elucidate. These trips do not always spur a re-visioning of life. But, when they are effective, they establish a new nuclear episode in students' lives – a major point of transition and one of the high points of their college experience. Moreover, these trips also occasion a rethinking of life values, coalescing around such virtues as simplicity, charity, justice and gratitude. There are newly found ideals in life that come together into new images (imagoes) of self, such as being a new person, and being blessed in life compared with so many. There may be a new sense of conviction of personal culpability in perpetuating sinful structures; all of which may give birth to an active discernment and adoption of a new generativity script – new ways of living more justly and responsibly in the world.

In conjunction with Ricoeur's thesis on the narrative mediation of identity and meaning, it is thus possible to say that encounters with the life stories of others are able to reconstitute human meaning and identity by engaging the human imagination with meaningful events, powerful and persuasive characters (imagoes), compelling ideologies, and fruitful and identifiable generativity scripts. Stories of Jesus work in this way, but so too does encountering the lived narratives of any

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to the Puritan Myth." Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (Oxford University Press, 2006),108.

While, McAdams doesn't break down national myths into these components, I think such connections can be plausibly asserted. For instance, American national or communal myth of the redemptive self arguably revolves around nuclear episodes (such as the stories of the first Pilgrims), imagoes (the hero), ideological setting (the influence of a Christian worldview), and generativity scripts (being a world power and bastion of freedom and democracy). Moreover, U.S. foreign relations constantly discerns between the exercise of power and of intimacy (community) on the world stage.

holy person. If someone is moved by such an encounter, it is probably because that saintly figure powerfully embodied some foundational virtues like love and hope, or portrayed a life praxis that was persuasively generative, or was associated with significant events or way of life or, maybe, simply motivated a change in the way that person viewed themselves.

The problem of "There *you* are – here *I* am! How does that concern me?" is thus a problem of narrative encounter. As Ricoeur showed us, this problem masks an opportunity: new life meaning is to be gained in this encounter. But as we say "Yes!" to the narrative of the other, so can we, and often must, say "No!" As I indicated earlier, the other could come in violence and terror. What bearing, therefore, does our life in faith have on our decision of "Yes" or "No"?

Christian Conversion as Ongoing Affirmation of Discipleship to God's Self Gift

I suggest that a narrative hermeneutic is also theologically appropriate for addressing the question of otherness in our societies; it provides a way of conceptualizing how a faith that affirms (says "yes!" to) God's self-gift may be actualized in an ethic of narrative hospitality – the mutual welcoming of our storied lives.

I have thus far refrained from a definition of conversion. This can longer stand. I understand conversion as the ongoing affirmation of discipleship – our lived "yes" – to God's self-gift.[21] This "yes" is never complete, and hardly ever consistent; rather, it is *storied* by the ebbs and flows of our faith lives – by our occasions of turning away from God, by our times of indifference, and by such times when we were graced enough to respond with our whole heart, mind and soul. Our conversion story is the story of our "yes," which traces the plot of a divine-human love affair, replete with scenes of faithfulness and of our

[21]I should also state how I am not using the term conversion. I don't mean changing one's religious affiliation – of 'converting' to a particular creed or faith. Nor am I considering it as purely personal phenomenon; the need for communal or national conversion is probably as urgent today as it ever was.

infidelity, of reconciliation, and of God who walks in the garden of our lives calling us into deeper relationship.

I employ a Rahnerian theological ethic by claiming that we are created for this "yes," – this sacramental existential – wherein, enabled by grace, we abandon self into the Holy Mystery of God.[22] Moreover, this encounter with Holy Mystery is potentially mediated, in faith, by our encounter with the other. Paul Ricoeur, ever the theological dabbler, understood that narratives (again meaning literary text for Ricoeur) could mediate ultimate meanings and the divine presence. The parables did just that for their hearers. When Jesus wanted to communicate inexhaustible mystery – the mystery of God, or of God's reign – he told and lived (think of his table fellowship) stories. So do we! The medium of story is structurally adequate for this because it is a language form that opens up the imagination into ever expanding possibilities of meaning. Myth, Ricoeur informs, "is the bearer of other *possible* worlds."[23] Moreover, the life witness of saintly exemplars is a further example of narratives that point towards God. Thus, to the question of whether narrative can mediate a more profound understanding of God, the answer is, "yes"!

However, not all narratives are salubrious of human life; some are downright destructive and degrading. Thus, a significant qualification needs be added to the previous "yes." Even the biblical narrative, we have long recognized, warrants critical reading with a healthy hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval.[24] In addition, the human capacity to perpetuate evil and injustice through life story and practices must also be acknowledged. Moreover, even when narratives are efficacious

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[22]Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans., William V. Dych (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978). See also Shannon Craigo-Snell, *Silence, Love, and Death: Saying "Yes" to God in the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008).

[23]Paul Ricoeur, "Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J Valdés (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 483. Emphasis Ricoeur's.

[24]The 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence was a reminder of the role that the Bible played in validating the power of the slave holder, as well as its power to incite liberation.

in leading human beings closer to God, they are ultimately and inevitably insufficient to that task. No narrative, no matter how provocative, is sufficient for the task of mediating the awesome majesty and mystery of God. To think otherwise is idolatry.

Saying "yes" to God in the context of our age means greater openness and hospitality to the other, as well as greater risk and uncertainty. We are called to leave the certainties of our own finite existence and risk that the presence of the other may occasion a transformative encounter with grace. This is the existential wager demanded by faith in a God who comes shrouded in mystery and otherness.

Narrative and Conversion: Re-storying our Faith Lives in Response to God

To say that conversion is a re-storying of our lives in faith is to say that it is a refiguring of our sense of who we are before God. It is growing in knowledge of our finitude, our sinfulness, but also our giftedness and created dignity. Moreover, we may come to this knowledge as we discern God's presence in the ordinary experiences of life, and as we open to the life events, imagoes, values and generative themes of the human other.

At the start of this essay, I laid out some thick questions imposed by that story on our thinking on conversion, namely: How do the claims embodied in difference or otherness contextualize and make concrete the demands of discipleship as ongoing conversion in faith? My best answer, from a narrative perspective, is that the claim made by the other regards our "yes." *To say yes is to welcome the story of the other. It is to practice narrative hospitality.* What does this mean? In a general sense, it means that we must attend, with a critical mind and with responsibility, to how others are implicated and affected by the narratives that we live, and to how we are implicated in others' stories by choice or by chance. We ought to attend to how our lives impact others for good or for ill, and to how the stories that our neighbors live impose upon us. This means rejecting the injurious narratives that we inherit or in which we are implicated, personally and through the discourse and actions of community, institution and nation.

Let me make two specific suggestions regarding the practice of narrative hospitality that may be of relevance to our discipleship and educating in faith. First, as persons and as a nation we need to do better at practicing *temporal hospitality*. This means that, as persons and as a nation, we recognize our place in historical community. We ordinarily do this through our establishment of museums and erection of monuments and statues. However, temporal hospitality is more encompassing and more challenging. It means recognizing *the burden of the past*: that the possibilities of life that we enjoy today rest on the legacy of the silent majority who came before us. Temporal hospitality especially means keeping the storied memory of the oppressed of history alive, as a barometer for our own moral decision-making. It means living the gospel story in the present with agency, responsibility and fidelity and, as such, rendering our own stories as compelling witnesses to the truth of God's love and forgiveness. Finally, to practice temporal hospitality is to be a good steward of the future. It demands striving for a just, sustainable world where our progeny too may flourish and have the opportunity to be their best God-given selves.

Second, as a nation, we also need to do better in the practice of *spatial hospitality*. We need to create what Letty Russell called safe spaces where hospitality can be practiced.[25] What do I mean by that? We need spaces where we can encounter the stories of others, our neighbors, in all their richness, complexities, tragedies and victories. There are too many non-spaces that proliferate our landscape. Malls and supermarkets define us solely as consumers, separating us only by our spending ability and preferences. On the highways and airports of life, we are travelers, differentiated by our ability to pay for five inches of additional leg-room, or for a five-minute earlier boarding time. The proliferation of such spaces may make our societies more efficient, but only at the cost of defining us, beyond our ability-to-pay, as an amorphous crowd. We are continually dehumanized inasmuch as the din of market efficiency muffles our uniqueness and particularity.

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[25]Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, ed. J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott (Loiusville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 85.

To practice spatial hospitality is to humanize by being attentive to what most embodies human selfhood – our story! How wonderful would it be to reimagine common spaces where we can practice narrative empathy[26] – telling and living our stories, and listening and welcoming the storied lives of others? In pursuit of this, we ought to take a searching look at how well traditional settings like our church communities offer hospitality and neighbor-love. Yet, we ought also to extend, imaginatively, this practice to non-traditional settings. Take, for example, our supermarkets. In day-to-day life we are, more often than not, unaware of the source of our food, and of the stories of the agricultural workers who wrestle with multinational corporations for a living wage. To practice spatial hospitality is to get to know the transcontinental stories behind the products that we consume, and to promote global justice through practices like fair trade. Conversion that is responsive to the global-present rests in the active affirmation that we all share a common human story, and that this should concern us all.

The story we build together may be unknown, unfinished, swaddled in uncertainty and mystery. Yet, ultimately, it is God's story in which we share, and to which we are responsible. It is the unfolding story of God's reign in history and society. The wager of cultivating narrative hospitality to the other (spatial and temporal) is that grace will be ever present. The promise of such conversion is a more profound knowledge of the mystery of God and of human being. This isn't the only invitation and challenge of contemporary discipleship. But surely it is a worthy one.

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[26]Suzanne Keen, "A Theory of Narrative Empathy," *Narrative* 14, no. 3 (2006).

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