**Beauty and Biblical Narrative**

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1. The Story of “Big Fish” by Tim Burton. In the movie, did William Bloom tell his son “the truth” or not?
2. Aristotle on Narrative.
3. Narrative and Mythos.
4. Stories have a beginning, middle, and end.
5. They have a theme, a “meaning.” That is the judgment that we make.
6. Narrative and History.
7. Historical narrative purports to offer a “true record.”
8. But fictional narrative offers a kind of truth as well.
9. The Truth of Fiction.
10. The ancients knew that beauty, truth, and goodness are related. A good story has to “ring true.”
11. Anecdote about Nairobi parish run by the Holy Cross. The nearby Jesuits were presenting “Animal Farm” by George Orwell in Swahili. The minister for education banned the play. The “pigs” were behaving like the ministers of the government.
12. Will Bloom and Albert Einstein did not appreciate the stories of their elders. They were not convinced by the “facts.” The truth was not in the facts or the events, but had to be discovered. People have to make their own judgments, “What is good and acceptable and perfect” (according to St. Paul).
13. Narrative acts as a heuristic device that provokes us, brings about thought, and enables us to make judgments. [But Gadamer would say, “Do we consider ourselves superior to the text?” McDougall obviously does not. But that may be the weakness of the narrative approach. It has a leveling effect. It neglects the historical dimension of faith that prizes some narratives over others. It also neglects the fact that we are beings in history, whose world view has been shaped by the narrative of the Bible more than by “Big Fish” or by “Middlemarch.”]
14. *Middlemarch* by George Eliot. She said that marriage is the beginning of the “home epic” which makes the advancing years a harvest. Some set out into marriage like crusaders, seeking a conquest. But others seek a “solid, mutual happiness.”
15. How can we care for Fred Vincy and Mary Garth? We care about those we discover in narratives. [The word narrative can describe both *Middlemarch* and *Exodus*. But they’re not the same, because they don’t have the same place in history.]
16. Narrative in the New Testament.
17. We prefer the NT narratives to almost every other part of the Bible.
18. The OT books of Kings and Chronicles contain stories, and that is what remains of the life of Jesus – the stories about him.”
19. The “Q” Source and the Gospel of Thomas. Q did not survive. The Gospel of Luke contains the story of Jesus’ visit to Nazareth.
20. Jesus and Nazareth from other sources.
21. Matthew 13 and Mark 6 set the visit to Nazareth later in Jesus’ ministry than does Luke.
22. For Luke, the visit to Nazareth comes before his preaching. He puts the call of the disciples later. Mt. and Mk. presents Jesus as coming after he had fame. All three evangelists mix history with fiction.
23. All three are aware that he preached before he gathered disciples. Luke places the visit to Nazareth first.
24. The Visit to Nazareth in Luke 4.
25. See verses 16-22. Jesus went back to Nazareth . . . and went to the meeting place. He opened Isaiah, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor, to give sight to the blind.” This is what God has chosen. But “Isn’t this Joseph’s Son?”
26. Isaiah is key to Jesus’ mission. “They spoke well of him,” but “isn’t this the Son of Joseph.”
27. Verses 23-30. Jesus replied, “You say, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’” Can he work the miracles he worked in Capernaum? Miracles happened in Elijah’s day. He was sent to a widow of Zeraphath. Elisha cured Namaan the Syrian. When the people heard this, they revolted against Jesus
28. Discussion. Why did the people become so angry against Jesus, after he had at first won them over?
29. Mark’s version: The people of Nazareth don’t react well to Jesus from the beginning, because he presumes to teach them.
30. Luke’s version. The people turn against Jesus when he mentions the Widow of Zeraphath and Naaman the Syrian.
    1. John Michaloski. Jesus is saying that God loves the gentiles and has done for them what Israel thinks should be done only for Israel.
    2. Mary Guido. Luke is writing for gentiles.
31. Jesus’s quoting from Isaiah 61. But is Isaiah 61 the same as Luke 4? Isaiah is speaking of the restoration of Israel.
    1. The ancient ruins will be restored.
    2. Chris Bedding: Foreigners will till the fields and tend the vines.
    3. Ysmena Pentelow: the devastated cities will be rebuilt.
    4. Philip Perreau: The “nations” will be tending their vines and their flocks, while Israel will be ministering as priests and serving God.
    5. John Michaloski. It is a year of jubilee and a day of vengeance. The tables will be turned.
32. Jubilee for Israel and Vengeance against the Nations. The nations will do the work, and Israelites will be priests for God.
33. So Jesus, in Luke 4, is disappointing the people. Isaiah 61 proclaimed favor and vengeance. Jesus does not read that. He talks about the spirit. He left out the part about vengeance. Jesus is rubbing salt in Israel’s wounds, and he is not cherishing the message of vengeance.
34. Jesus dislikes the narrative of Isaiah 61. He ignores the vengeance. Instead he focuses on the gentiles: the widow of Zeraphath and Naaman the Syrian.
35. McDougall. Stories teach by leading us into an experience from which we can see and judge for ourselves. Luke 4 enables us to “see.” The major characters express their hopes for what God will do through Jesus. The Benedictus and the Magnificat proclaim rescue for the hated and the raising up of the lowly. The Canticle of Simeon speaks of the “glory” of Israel. These canticles recall the vengeance narrative. But Jesus understands the mission differently.

Coffee Break

1. Our Own Insight.
2. The gospel narrative opens our eyes to what Jesus sees.
3. The faith of the Roman centurion.
4. The faith of a prostitute who washes his feet.
5. The Samaritan who helps when priest and Levite walk away.
6. Jesus forgives those who are torturing him.
7. Christ’s vision becomes our vision. “They bore witness to him,” to Jesus.
8. At first, the people who heard Jesus listened to him favorably. It was not just a neutral attitude.
9. Then he provoked them by only quoting a part of Isaiah 61.
   1. James. They are not just narratives. They have a place, here in the Holy Land.
   2. Russ: Biblical criticism has focused on “Did it really happen like that?” and the answer is almost always “No.” Raymond Brown once said, “Fundamentalists approach Scripture in such a way that they are convinced. But if you convince them, they lose their faith.”
   3. Bart Ehrman. In Mark 2 Jesus says David plucked grains of wheat when [Abiathar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abiathar) was high priest, while Samuel says the high priest was [Ahimelech](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahimelech), Abiathar's father.
   4. Fischer. Paul Ricoeur on the existence of the classic. But no one would say that Shakespeare is a revelation of the unknown God.
   5. Chris Bedding. It’s a question of authority. Prophets do not have the authority of the Torah, and the Writings do not have the authority of the Prophets.
   6. John Michaloski. Not until the printing press in 1500s did Bible start to have verse numbers. Do we meet God in the Scriptures – are these stories my stories and the stories of my community?
   7. McDougall. I’m speaking of narrative, and not all of Scripture is narrative. Some is poetry. Some is law. Some is propositions. Stories are not just to be mined for proof texts, but are meant to be experienced.
   8. Michael Talty. Jesus has gone into a synagogue. He’s meeting with the town leaders. There he functions as a rabbi. That’s part of the context. He’s challenging us by focusing on one part of Isaiah, and cutting it off before it speaks of vengeance. McDougall: It reminds me of what Jared Goldfarb suggests: Jesus was an itinerant rabbi who was trying to attract disciples by a distinctive interpretation of the OT.
10. Beauty and Biblical Narrative.
    * 1. The philosophy underlying the narrative approach.
11. Immanuel Kant.
12. His three critiques: Pure Reason (truth), Practical Reason (goodness), and of Judgment (beauty).
13. Aesthetic Judgment. In between judgments of fact and value. For him, aesthetic judgments were based on feeling.
14. Bernard Lonergan in *Insight* and in *Method in Theology*.
15. For Lonergan, aesthetic judgment is part of the same process of learning that leads to judgments of fact and value.
16. Lonergan was not an empiricist. The 17th and 18th century empiricists were wrong in rooting everything in sense experience.
17. Lonergan’s foundation was experience.

* Asking questions leads to hypotheses.
* Judgments can be made about fact and value.
* The question is the driving force for the learning process.

1. Once we judge what something “means,” we have to ask whether it is objectively “true.” He thinks that we can start with experience and not end in hopeless relativity. We have to achieve consensus about facts and values. Because we have an inner drive for truth as coherence. When we talk about the meaning of a story, we have to go beyond our subjective response, and engage in a dialogue about others.
2. If something is true and right, it will make a difference in the way I live my life.
   * 1. The Narrative Approach. Questions are “settled” when people don’t ask about them any more. There has to be consensus. That is how doctrine is defined.
3. Narrative is not about truth and goodness directly. It does not give us propositions. But when we enter into the narrative, by asking questions, we come to truth and goodness.
4. How does the Christian community reach a conclusion about doctrine? It thinks as a body. We can be secure, for example, to say that the earth circles the sun. That is “objectivity.” It is the conclusion that we come to about fact and value after a long period of wrestling with questions.
   * 1. Discussion.
5. Michalowski. It’s not just a question of texts. It is also about ritual and music.
6. McDougall. We are not just a tabula rasa. It influences our reading. In the movie, “Into the Wild,” a recent university graduate goes to Alaska and lived in a bus. The movie sees him as a hero. But many Alaskans viewed him as foolish and ignorant. He felt trapped by a river. But a map would have shown him that he could easily have crossed the river. The evangelists have had a particular encounter with the risen Christ, and want to share that with us.
7. James. There are two kinds of narratives. The film is a “story.” The Alaskans are speaking of common sense.
8. John Conroy. Luke views the resurrection as separated from the ascension. John implies that they are the same event. Two different versions
9. Fischer: What about women’s ordination? Rome says that the question is closed. But as long as Christians raise questions about it, it remains an open question.
10. McDougall: There is more than one narrative about how the Church evolved. Rome says, “Anyone not in communion with Rome, broke off from it.” But here is the Holy Land we see that there are many competing traditions: Copts, Chaldeans, Syro-Malabar Christians. They have a quite different view of the Christian tradition. Many Churches do not regard the Chalcedonian formulation as the last word. Now Armenians and Copts and Eastern Orthodox regard the formulations as different but the underlying reality may be the same for each.
    * 1. The Topic of Beauty. What is narrative understood as a manifestation of beauty?
11. Narrative is a work of art. Meaning comes when we reflect on the narrative. The Book of Judges leads us to a series of stories in which people “save” Israel and then “endanger” it. Samson is focused on himself, not saving his people. But we still like him.
12. The Question of Aesthetics.
    1. “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ - that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” - John Keats.
    2. The outward sign, the document, the picture, the sculpture, reveals the inner reality. *Aesthesis* means that outward appearance can reveal the hidden reality, the essential idea.
13. The Ending of the Gospel of John (Mary Guido).
    1. He purports to show us something that will lead us to truth. God is in human flesh.
    2. John the Baptist asks, “What are you looking for?” We are invited to “come and see.”
    3. After the resurrection. Mary Magdalen asks, “Who are you looking for?” Not “what” but “who.” It is the beauty of the one who loves us and wishes us to love him. “Do you love me?” “Feed my lambs.”
    4. There is a value in the uncreated beauty of God.
14. Narratives lead us to an encounter with God. If you want to know Christ, read the Scriptures.