

## CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AS AN EMBODIED STORY: A PERSPECTIVE OF NARRATIVIST THEOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper follows on from the premise that humans are narrative beings, i.e. their identity is founded on stories. From a theological perspective, more importantly, Christian identity is founded on a particular story – the story of Jesus Christ. As a consequence, theology is the critical reflection of this story. Narrative theology is a school which emphasizes this point of departure. However, narrative theology also has its potential weaknesses. In the pursuit of their at least partial overcoming this paper suggests speaking about narrativist theology instead, drawing on from the difference between story and narrative. Subsequently, it argues for the need for the Christian church and theology to be involved in a generous and open dialog with various narratives of the Christian story and with various narratives of other stories. Finally, it suggests understanding (the Christian) story as something which must not be merely narrated, but also ritually enacted and embodied.

**Keywords:** narrative, story, Christian identity, ritual, intratextuality, narrativist theology.

### Story and human identity

In a famous 1971 article philosopher and Methodist minister Stephen Crites wrote the following words: “[People] awaken to a sacred story, and their most significant mundane stories are told in the effort, never fully successful, to articulate it. [...] every sacred story is creation story. [...] the story itself creates a world of consciousness and the self is oriented to it.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 71.

Crites' research represents the quest for one of the plausible answers to the question "Why story?"; the question which has come to be very prominent not only in philosophy, but since the 1970s also in Christian theology.<sup>3</sup> Crites' thesis is that story represents an inherent part of human existence; the narrative structure of human consciousness belongs to the realm of "nature", thus in fact preceding "culture".<sup>4</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre speaks about the narrative form of human identity when he sees the self as a narrative unity linking the whole life of a human individual from birth to death.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Pavel Hošek finds evident and fundamental affinity, even correlation between story and human life, especially with regard to their temporality. He does not

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<sup>3</sup> However, one of the first theological reflections on the notion of story goes back to the early 1940s and to the work of H. Richard Niebuhr. See, especially, H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Story of Our Life," in *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1941), 43-81. A real break-through in this respect was the publication of Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974). The blossoming of theologians' interest in story and the narrative nature of the core of the Christian message began in the 1980s with the emergence of so-called postliberal theology and its "manifesto" – the petite, but intellectually stimulating and dense volume by George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984). Even though some researchers would like to speak of the decline of theologians' interest in story (see, for instance, Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* [Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006]), the ever growing body of scholarly literature on this theme of theological study proves them wrong. See, for example, Adonis Vidu, *Postliberal Theological Method: A Critical Study* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005); C. C. Pecknold, *Transforming Postliberal Theology: George Lindbeck, Pragmatism and Scripture* (London and New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2005); Alexander Lucie-Smith, *Narrative Theology and Moral Theology: The Infinite Horizon* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Aldershot, 2007); Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007); or Robert Andrew Cathey, *God in Postliberal Perspective: Between Realism and Non-Realism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009). After all, the persisting interest is indicated, *inter alia*, by the new 25th anniversary edition of George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2009). In the Czech theological milieu narrative theology has been studied to some extent, for example, by Petr Macek, Jaroslav Vokoun and Pavel Hošek. See Petr Macek, *Novější angloamerická teologie: Přehled základních směrů s ukázkami* (Praha: Kalich, 2008), 114-125; Jaroslav Vokoun, *K rekonstrukci teologie po konci novověku: Postkritický přístup* (České Budějovice: Jihočeská univerzita, 2008), 64-107 and 123-185; Jaroslav Vokoun, *Postkritický proud v současné angloamerické teologii* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2009), 95-192; and Pavel Hošek, *Kouzlo vyprávění: Proměňující moc příběhu a „křesť fantazie“ v pojetí C. S. Lewise* (Praha: Návrat domů, 2013), 32-42.

<sup>4</sup> Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," 70-71. For a critical discussion on this topic see also Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 64.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985), 205.

even hesitate to refer to story as an “immediate offprint of life”.<sup>6</sup> According to Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones story is a crucial conceptual category for depicting personal identity.<sup>7</sup> Ronald Michener perceives people as narrative beings. In particular, he portrays Christians as storying people who as a community embrace biblical narratives and their logic and argumentation.<sup>8</sup>

However, these observations lead us to saying that not all thinkers who otherwise see story as a fundamental category for theology are willing to go as far as to generally say that “to be human is above all to have a story”.<sup>9</sup> Hans Frei and others insistently argue that theology cannot start from universal human experience formulated as a story. It needs to begin with a particular story as told by the Bible. It is this particular story which sustains the existence of any theology. They maintain that the starting point for theology is not the narratively constructed human identity with the story of Jesus Christ as one of the examples, but rather the gospel story that in turn shapes the lives of individuals and communities.<sup>10</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer in this respect says that Hans Frei is not a narrativist as the latter does not aim to construct an epistemology or ontology of human being based on a certain narrative structure. Instead, he interprets Frei as an Anselmian theologian since this prematurely deceased Yale professor first and foremost sought to understand Christian faith on its own terms through its central story.<sup>11</sup>

This paper does not primarily seek to confirm one and to refute the other of the two positions. Here it is more important to emphasize that the concept of story plays an irreplaceable role in Christian theology. It will be, therefore, argued that Christian identity is founded on a particular story – the story of Jesus Christ. The paper will briefly introduce narrative theology as a school which emphasizes this point of departure. However, it needs to be added that narrative theology also has its potential weaknesses, most notably, in the perspective of this paper, its concept of intratextuality. In the pursuit of

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<sup>6</sup> Hošek, *Kouzlo vyprávění*, 17. On this issue see also the work of Paul Ricoeur, especially Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, “Introduction: Why Narrative?,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 4-5. In addition to this significance the two authors maintain that story also plays an essential role in understanding issues of epistemology and methods of argument and displaying the content of Christian convictions.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald T. Michener, *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 122-123.

<sup>9</sup> Hans W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 208.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 210; and Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story*, 66-67.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 178.

at least a partial overcoming of these weaknesses this paper suggests construing narrativist theology instead, following on from the difference between story and narrative. Subsequently, it argues for the need for the Christian church and theology to be involved in a generous and open dialog with various narratives of the Christian story and with various narratives of other stories. Finally, the paper suggests understanding (the Christian) story as something which must not be merely narrated, but also ritually enacted and embodied.

### God's story and human identity

Following from the aforementioned it is possible to formulate the thesis that Christian identity is rooted in the story of Jesus Christ. In this perspective Christian life is the praxis of the following of a story – the story of life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Theology is then, first and foremost, reflection of this story; the story is primary, while theologizing follows. The emphasis on the narrative nature of the core of the Christian message, which can be to a significant degree seen as a response to the decades-long supremacy of Enlightenment universalistic rationality in theology and to the efforts seeking to “translate” the biblical message to a set of universally valid principles and axioms,<sup>12</sup> has given rise to so-called narrative theology – the theology of story.<sup>13</sup> It is also referred to as postliberal theology and its adherents interpret it as an ecumenically open and constructive corrective to modernism, theological liberalism, and conservative fundamentalism.<sup>14</sup>

In the perspective of this theology, conversion, the accepting of faith, that is, the very “heart” of Christian identity, is seen as the entering into the story of Jesus Christ. One finds oneself and the meaning of one's existence in God's story in and with the world; one becomes a chapter in the salvation story.<sup>15</sup> It can be argued that Christianity is autobiographical as it absorbs the life stories of both individuals and communities into the grand story witnessed to by the Scripture.<sup>16</sup> In regard to the “absorbing power of texts”<sup>17</sup> George Lindbeck says that they shape the “imagination and perceptions of the attentive reader so

<sup>12</sup> See Hošek, *Kouzlo vyprávění*, 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Macek, *Novější angloamerická teologie*, 114.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Michener, *Postliberal Theology*, 14. On this topic see also Macek, *Novější angloamerická teologie*, 114-115.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hošek, *Kouzlo vyprávění*, 37; and Niebuhr, “The Story of Our Life,” *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 41.

<sup>16</sup> See Hošek, *Kouzlo vyprávění*, 37. See also Nicholas Lash, “Ideology, Metaphor, and Analogy,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 120.

<sup>17</sup> His observations include fiction but *a fortiori* refer to sacred scriptures.

that he or she forever views the world to some extent” through their lenses. Moreover, “[f]or those who are steeped in them [i.e. sacred scriptures], no world is more real than the ones they create. *A scriptural world is thus able to absorb the universe.*”<sup>18</sup> Such understanding of the Bible was crucial for the birth of narrative theology. A Christian does not perceive the world anymore the way he or she previously used to; he or she looks at it now from the perspective of a character in the biblical story.<sup>19</sup> Gerard Loughlin, however, goes even further when he argues that one becomes part of the story in such a way that the story becomes part of one’s very self. He refers to the biblical image from Rev 10:9-10 where the angel commands John to eat a book. Loughlin claims that one absorbs the text, rather than being absorbed by it; to live in the community of Christians means to consume God’s word.<sup>20</sup> One can become part of God’s story because it is a fundamentally open story. The story of Jesus Christ continues with the story of the church. Or, more precisely, the church is by its very nature a continuation of the story of Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Gerard Loughlin argues that every theology which bears in mind this story is at least partially narrative – it is a story theology.<sup>22</sup> Although one can undoubtedly agree with this statement, it is more helpful for the purposes of this paper to construe narrative theology in a narrower sense as that stream of contemporary theology which establishes itself as a *tertium quid* between theological liberalism and conservatism in the quest for a new understanding of the story of the Christian church in the context of what is often labeled as postmodernity.<sup>23</sup>

### **Narrativist theology**

The critical discussion which has emerged throughout recent decades in this respect shows that narrative theology (“story theology”) requires some corrections despite its unquestionable assets. For the aims of this paper,

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<sup>18</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 117, emphasis added. See also Bruce D. Marshall, “Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths,” in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 69-102; and Mark I. Wallace, *The Second Naiveté: Barth, Ricoeur and the New Yale Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990), 104.

<sup>19</sup> Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story*, 37.

<sup>20</sup> See Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story*, especially 217 and 245.

<sup>21</sup> Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 43. Cf. also Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story*, x. Loughlin goes in his claims even further when he posits that even though not every theology must necessarily have the same emphases as narrative theology, every theology should presuppose narrative theology’s main accent, i.e. the priority of the story of Jesus Christ (*ibid.*, ix-x).

<sup>23</sup> Further on this topic see Michener, *Postliberal Theology*, 2-3 and 14. Cf. also Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 7.

however, it is most important to reiterate the critique elaborated with regard to one of the essential concepts of narrative theology, namely intratextuality.<sup>24</sup> The concept of intratextuality is closely related to the idea of non-foundationality. Christian faith does not need to look for self-justification anywhere beyond the biblical story. It does not need to refer to either experience or reason. It finds inspiration for the “primary way of its expression” in its own “text”, i.e. in God’s story with the world as told by the Scripture. This axiom is basically correct; however, it becomes problematic when formulated in the way that Stanley Hauerwas tersely expressed the task of the theologian: “[This task is not to make] the gospel credible to the modern world, but to make the world credible to the gospel”.<sup>25</sup> It is here that one can see problematic aspects of intratextuality: rigid fixation into two diametrically opposed spheres (Scripture vs. world) and an unrealistically construed one-way flow of influence according to which the world is to be absorbed by the text.<sup>26</sup> A similar critique is voiced by Kathryn Tanner in her argument against the idea of the autonomous identity of Christianity freed from any external influences. Tanner charges postliberals with depicting the emergence of Christian identity as an “internal discourse” matter to which external perspectives play only a negative and optional role.<sup>27</sup> However, Paul DeHart’s critique goes even further when he points out the difficulties related to the ability to assess adequately whether the world is in a particular case interpreted through the lenses of the text, or vice versa. If we consider the diversity of the New Testament writings as well

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<sup>24</sup> Among the proponents of narrative theology the concept of intratextuality was most thoroughly elaborated by George Lindbeck. In addition to his *The Nature of Doctrine* see also George A. Lindbeck, “Atonement and the Hermeneutics of Intratextual Social Embodiment,” in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 226-227; and George A. Lindbeck, “Barth and Textuality,” *Theology Today* 43, 3 (1986): 374-375.

<sup>25</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989), 24.

<sup>26</sup> See DeHart, *Trial of the Witnesses*, 177-184. Cf. also Rowan Williams, “Postmodern Theology and the Judgment of the World,” in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 29-43; Miroslav Volf, “Theology, Meaning, and Power,” in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg and Thomas Kucharz (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 98-113; and Terrence W. Tilley, “Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism,” *Modern Theology* 5, 2 (1989): 87-111. Medi Ann Volpe brightly points out that DeHart in his critique of Lindbeck modifies Williams’ argumentation in a way which suits his own purposes. Cf. Medi Ann Volpe, review of *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology*, by Paul J. DeHart, *Modern Theology* 24, 3 (2008): 526. Nevertheless, even she agrees with the core of DeHart’s (and Williams’) thesis that the notion of intratextuality is untenable since the Scripture-inspired imagination does not simply level the whole world out into the text. Volpe reminds us that for a Christian no less important than the interaction with the Scripture is also the interaction with the world. And this finds expression in the notion of tradition (cf. Volpe, review, 527).

<sup>27</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 106. Cf. also DeHart, *Trial of the Witnesses*, 145-146.

as an immense number of cultural contexts in which the church is engaged, it seems utterly impossible to determine not only a unified cultural framework but also the real point of departure and directionality of influence.<sup>28</sup>

The rest of this paper strives to revise the concept of narrative theology by introducing what will be labeled as narrativist theology. The latter will be based on the difference between *story* and *narrative* as introduced into theological discussion by Gerard Loughlin.<sup>29</sup> Loughlin draws from the linguist Gérard Genette who distinguishes between *story time* and *narrative time*, while in the case of a written story narrative time represents the time of reading.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Loughlin goes further when he distinguishes not only between story time and narrative time but also between *story* and *narrative* (or narratives) as such. His argument is as follows:

The story is not given apart from its telling in narrative, but the narrative is not the same as the story. The order of the narrative can be different from that of the story; the narrative's duration is nearly always different from the story's duration; the narrative can tell many times what happened only once, and tell once what happened many times; and the distance between narrative and story can differ greatly, as also the instant of telling.<sup>31</sup>

Given the differences between story and narrative it is possible, according to Loughlin, to maintain the thesis that the Bible tells one story – in many different ways. It does not tell all parts of the story, while other parts are told repeatedly and from various perspectives.<sup>32</sup>

The distinction between story and narrative is important for what I wish to call narrativist theology. If, theologically speaking, we perceive faith as the entering into the Christian story, if conversion is a witness to how a particular

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<sup>28</sup> DeHart, *Trial of the Witnesses*, 183.

<sup>29</sup> I am of course well aware that the term “narrative” refers to “telling” rather than “story”. In spite of that it seems to me that the concept of narrative theology does not adequately enough consider the dynamic aspect of narration. I believe that the suggested “narrativist theology” might help in this respect. This term is not new; it is used, for instance, by Gerard Loughlin in his book *Telling God's Story*. However, Loughlin never defines the difference between “narrative theology” and “narrativist theology”; he seems to be employing the two terms arbitrarily as synonyms (see, for example, Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, x).

<sup>30</sup> See Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 52-53. Cf. also Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 34ff.

<sup>31</sup> Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 62.

<sup>32</sup> Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 62-63. It is important to point out that for Loughlin story is more important than narrative from a theological perspective. In this emphasis, so Loughlin believes, lies the difference between “narrativists” (he includes George Lindbeck and John Milbank here) and “textualists” (such as Don Cupitt and Mark C. Taylor). In Loughlin's interpretation the former represent orthodox theologians, while the latter are ultimately theological nihilists. Cf. Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 18-19.

human being has become a chapter in the story of “mighty deeds of the Lord”,<sup>33</sup> then that human being is in fact one of the tellers of this great God’s story. The story of his or her life and the telling of this story provide both a perspective and content to the open and continuing story of God. Through the telling of his or her story – which is, in turn, a telling of God’s story – that person co-creates both of these stories. As Loughlin puts it, each new narrative is at the same time a new story, a second story which differs from the first, thus changing it. Each new telling of the story represents in this sense an original story itself.<sup>34</sup>

This paper suggests that the dynamic field of relations between story and narrative can be described by the concept of narrativity. As such, this concept pays attention not only to story (i.e. what is told) and not only to narrative (i.e. how it is told), but also considers the dynamic interaction between various aspects at work in the framework created by these two categories. Narrativist theology thus regards the complexity of the process through which a particular individual (or community) becomes and lives as part of the “great story of God”. However, the process in question is not interpreted in intratextual terms; it is not about a unilateral influence of the great story on the life story of an individual. To the contrary, it is more helpful to speak of *multivectorial intertextuality* here since there is a constant “flow” between God’s story, embodied (not exclusively but primarily) in the story of the church, the story of a particular individual, as well as many other stories.<sup>35</sup> Steven Shakespeare in this regard says that if “Christianity really is an open narrative, then it cannot prejudice the permanence of its own boundaries, cannot deny its own partiality and its need to be mutually constituted by *other* narratives.”<sup>36</sup> A change in thinking occurs under the impact of an encounter with other stories and narratives.<sup>37</sup>

### Embodied story

However, narrativity is something which is not desirable to construe on a verbal level only. It is a concept which goes beyond the boundaries of the verbal telling of a story. In other words, it enables exploring not only words

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Hošek, *Kouzlo vyprávění*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story*, 191.

<sup>35</sup> The whole phenomenon becomes even more complex if one also takes into consideration various tellings (narratives) of all these stories.

<sup>36</sup> Steven Shakespeare, review of *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology*, by Gerard Loughlin, *Modern Believing* 38, 1 (1997): 62, italics in the original. Kathryn Tanner points out that all cultures are dynamic, hybrid and interactive. In case of living cultures the process of their formation is never completed. Their formation is influenced by the context of everyday life. Tanner’s observations with regard to culture can also be applied to what has been said about narrativist theology. Cf. Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 67, 69, and 70.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Hošek, *Kouzlo vyprávění*, 13-14 and 42.



but also deeds or symbolic gestures. It is immensely important for a theology which wants to remain faithful to the incarnational nature of Christian faith.

Cultural anthropologist Ronald Grimes has convincingly shown that ritual enactment can effectively play the role of narrative in some, especially non-western societies.<sup>38</sup> This was the core of his critique of narrative theologians whom he had charged with ethnocentrism because of their unspoken axiom that narrative must be construed in exclusively verbal categories.<sup>39</sup> Grimes reproached narrative theology for not allowing sufficient space for ritual-dramatic enactment without which human stories remain mere intellectual ideals, or – which is even worse – sources of heteronomously imposed images. His thesis is that one learns moral behavior through ritual.<sup>40</sup>

Grimes reminds us that it is not enough to narrate stories verbally. Non-verbal rendering is equally important; stories must also be ritually enacted, dramatically performed, embodied in one's own life. In this perspective Christian identity represents an embodied story. The story of the Christian community is a continuation of the Incarnation – the life story of Jesus Christ with all of its aspects. Loughlin says that one enters the biblical story by entering the church's performance of that story. One is baptized into the biblical and ecclesial drama. From this perspective it is not so much about "being written into a book as taking part in a play, a play that has to be improvised on the spot."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Rowan Williams argues that it is not enough that tellers or readers of the scriptural story remain at the level of tellers or readers but that they are invited to become full-fledged characters in the story which has come to be theirs.<sup>42</sup> For his part, David Ford elaborates on what he sees as the necessary components of such dramatic performance from the perspective of Christian theology. To his mind, there are three main dynamics here: 1.) praise and prayer; 2.) community life; and 3.) prophetic word and action.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Ford examines the issue of embodied story alternatively, from a Ricoeurian perspective, when he understands the self in a dynamic way as defined in its relations, conversations, service or resistance to others within a narrative of characters emerging in time. Humans are therefore social beings rooted in the larger

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<sup>38</sup> Ronald Grimes, "Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer," *Journal of Religion* 66, 1 (1986): 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> Grimes, "Of Words the Speaker," 4.

<sup>40</sup> Grimes, "Of Words the Speaker," 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Rowan Williams, "The Literal Sense of Scripture," *Modern Theology* 7, 2 (1991): 125. Cf. also Nicholas Lash, "Performing Scriptures," in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 37-46.

<sup>43</sup> David F. Ford, "System, Story, Performance: A Proposal about the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 191.

stories of various communities of which they are part.<sup>44</sup> In his interpretation of Ford, Luther Ziegler notes that the former pays an extraordinary deal of attention to liturgy in his theology.<sup>45</sup> This fact can be explained as an emphasis on the incarnational and holistic nature of Christian faith since liturgy appeals to all dimensions of human existence. This brings us to a statement which is also our thesis, namely, that Christian identity is – and should be – an embodied story.

## Conclusion

This paper has shown that there is a close affinity between story and human identity. However, its aim was not to prove the existence of a narrative substructure of human identity. It has rather sought to argue that the concept of story has a central place in Christian theology as Christian identity is embedded in the story of Jesus Christ. Being a reflection on this story which is open and continues in the story of the church, each theology is in fact narrative – it is a story theology. Because of certain weakness of narrative theology, most notably its concept of intratextuality, the paper suggests speaking of narrativist theology instead. The concept of narrativity regards the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between the categories of story and narrative. At the same time, it also considers the influence of other stories and narratives on the formation of Christian identity.

I believe that the concept of narrativity can be a valuable contribution to theological reflection. First, it enables appreciating voices coming “from elsewhere” and assessing their role for the formation of Christian identity positively. And second, it is sufficiently inclusive to provide space to construe Christian identity as an embodied story. In this perspective, a Christian not only tells God’s story but also is an active actor and co-scriptwriter in it.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 82-87.

<sup>45</sup> Luther Zeigler, “The Many Faces of the Worshipping Self: David Ford’s Anglican Vision of Christian Transformation,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89, 2 (2007): 280-285.

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