



## **Theological Fantasy: An Experiment in Narrative Hermeneutics and Ontology**

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What will it do to Christian theology if we substitute story as a category in place of all the philosophical metaphors and scientific models that have given intellectual shape to the Gospel? What will the doctrines of creation and redemption look like if we cast them in the form of story rather than any of the analogues previously used in the history of theology? Story is not the same as a philosophical root metaphor, nor is it the same as a scientific model, but could it do the work in the scheme of theology that these analogues have formerly tried to do, and do it better? Plato's ideal form, Aristotle's substance, Leibniz's monad, Descartes' matter and mind, Hume's impression and idea, Whitehead's experient occasion—these are all analogues which are intended to be elemental, irreducible, and universally applicable. The root metaphors of the grand philosophies in the past have proved inadequate because they have not recognized that reality includes radical changes in being, irreversible movements in time, trivial and magnificent absurdities, comical and tragic incongruities, and mysteries beyond resolution. These are elements in reality which can be embraced by story. It is true that story is not a simple or elemental analogue. It has component parts, and in this respect it resembles scientific models. But models are used by scientists for operations in limited spheres of observation without claim to be universal. The model of atomic structure applies to all observed matter, but it says nothing to us about the shape of families, or nations, or historical sequences. Story, on the other hand, is a category that informs us about the behavior of gases as well as the conflict between Christ and Satan. Nature, history, heaven, and hell can all be conceived in terms of the struggle for reconciliation. There is climax in the fulfillment of a DNA molecule just as there is climax in the history of a culture.

Precisely what is the category of story? It is simple. There is nothing abstruse about story. We all know what stories are. They have beginnings and endings. They are sequential occurrences in places and times. They have persons in the drama who act and are acted upon. There are props or settings which

support, shape, and limit the action and passion of the story. There are plots with anticipation, conflict, climax, and resolution. Everybody and everything has its story. I propose a new category. We live in a story-shaped world. Story is the nature of reality. Reality is story. There is in reality a plot which carries persons and props to a meaningful conclusion, but the meaning is full of surprises and there is not a sufficient reason for everything. Indeed the deepest meaning is a mystery that is celebrated because its satisfaction is precisely in its awesome power to delight

us in repetitions which are never the same. Hence reality is a story that keeps going on.

What will happen to the doctrinal formulation of the Christian faith if story is used as the category of reality? What will happen if we stop talking about creation in terms of the philosophical category of causality, if we abandon Aristotle's efficient cause, material cause, formal cause, and final cause? Modern science has already abandoned the last three. I suggest we abandon the first one as well. I am not suggesting we quit asking etiological questions. I am proposing we enlarge our quest about origins to include mysteries that cannot be found in any rational or empirical chain of being. What will happen if we describe the trinity not in terms of a hypostatic union but rather from the perspective of dramatic action in a plot? What will happen if the two natures of Christ become two characters in a play about a single person, as with the Duke and the friar in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*?

These are questions which, I think, deserve to be asked in an experimental way for all the doctrines of the church, but before we can do this we must establish a hermeneutic.

## I. NARRATIVE HERMENEUTICS

Attention to story as a category for the explication of Christian theology is indicated by recent developments in biblical hermeneutics. During the twentieth century two approaches to scriptural interpretation prevailed until about 1960: historical analysis and dialectical theology. Historical analysis used scientific critical tools to locate the text in its original setting. Original texts were sought among extant manuscripts through methods of textual criticism. Dates, places, and authors were identified by criticism of forms and by tracing the redaction of editors, with the help of archeological evidence. But historical analysis left us with an embarrassment of riches, a sterile erudition which lost the forest for the trees. Who can preach about J, E, D, and P, or Q, the L source, and M?

The other approach to scriptural interpretation came from Karl Barth and his dialectic between the Word of God and the text. The concern is for God's message speaking from the Bible across the ages. Systematic theologians from Emil Brunner to Gerhard Ebeling have echoed this affirmation of the priority of God's Word in the text over the context in which it is given. Biblical theologians like Eichrodt found that message in the Old Testament to be the concept of God's covenant with Israel.<sup>1</sup> Von Rad found it to be in the history of God's

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<sup>1</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1941).

mighty act of deliverance.<sup>2</sup> Bultmann, a New Testament scholar, said it is the message of self-understanding (*Selbstverständnis*).<sup>3</sup>

But with the sixties came the cry from Walter Wink that biblical criticism is bankrupt and from Brevard Childs that biblical theology is dead.<sup>4</sup> Since then we have seen a variety of alternatives proposed with none as yet reaching ascendancy. The problem is that on the one side history is too relative to provide authenticity, and on the other side dialectical theology is too dogmatic to account for the reality of the human situation. The result is that some have sought religious satisfaction by turning inward. If the Word no longer speaks either as history or as theology, then there is appeal to the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> This accounts for the quest for personal experience in the rise of many new cults.<sup>6</sup> Others have pushed the appeal to history to the extreme. This is what Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann are doing with their assertion that history itself

reveals God.<sup>7</sup> The historical process is known through Jesus, and although we do not know the end, hope is possible because God's future is invading the present. Political hermeneutics is closely associated with this view in the liberation theology of people like Gustavo Gutierrez and Dorothee Soelle.<sup>8</sup> Another tack has been taken with the construction of a new metaphysics in the naturalism of process thinking from Alfred North Whitehead. This is an appeal to nature and creation. It is a turn outward, and it involves both the sophistication of process thinking and the simplistic talk of God as nature, in either case resulting in an optimistic affirmation of the world.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Paul Tillich tried to revive an old metaphysic, Platonism, by providing, in a method of correlation, essentialistic answers to existential questions.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, however, from Germany and France two separate schools have arisen which seek a new hermeneutic in the analysis of language. Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling in Germany have examined the power of the word to create.<sup>11</sup> Language has the creative power to make things new. They call this *Sprachereignis*, which means language event which is objectively given through communication, and must therefore be distinguished from *Spracherlebnis*, which is a subjective experience. In France a similar reaction against the subjectivism of

<sup>2</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962-65).

<sup>3</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (London: SCM, 1969).

<sup>4</sup>Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970); and *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

<sup>5</sup>Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966).

<sup>6</sup>James and Marcia Rudin, *Prison or Paradise? The New Religious Cults* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1980).

<sup>7</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

<sup>8</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis, 1973); Dorothee Soelle, *Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

<sup>9</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965).

<sup>10</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951-57).

<sup>11</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963); *The Word of God and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968); Ernst Fuchs, *Zum Hermeneutische Problem in der Theologie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965).

existentialism has arisen with the help of language analysis. Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Paul Ricoeur have sought meaning in symbols and metaphors which are the stuff of language and the building blocks of stories.<sup>12</sup>

The significance of these new directions is suggested by the following example. Robert W. Funk shows how a structural analysis of the parables of Jesus can provide not only more than one reading of the text but also a clue to the best reading by means of a proper understanding of metaphor. If the structure of the parable of the good Samaritan is shaped by a *determiner* and *respondents*, then the parable may be read either as a story about the Samaritan or about the victim, depending upon who is considered to be the *determiner* of the action in the story. *Determiner* here refers to semantic action, not necessarily to dramatic action. And if the parable is read as an illustration of the virtue of being and doing good to one's neighbor, then the Samaritan is the determiner, and the victim is the respondent. The point of the story is the moral

of neighbor-love as contrasted with the callous behavior of the priest and the Levite. On the other hand, if the victim is the determiner of the meaning of the parable, then it becomes a story about the scandal of a Jew who has become a helpless victim. In his inability to resist he receives mercy from his mortal enemy, a Samaritan. Now the parable is not about virtue, a timeless abstraction, but it tells a story about what it means to receive unmerited mercy. Now it is a story that belongs with all the other parables of Jesus which tell of the grace of the coming Kingdom. And best of all, the story “does not suggest that one behave as a good neighbor like the Samaritan, but that one become the victim in the ditch who is helped by an enemy.”<sup>13</sup> Thus the parable tells us that in the Kingdom mercy is always a surprise.

This means a story may indeed be used to illustrate eternal verities or in a rhetorical and ornamental way, but when they are read with a hermeneutics of metaphor they become vehicles which carry us beyond the literal to the story of reality itself. They do not sew us into a cocoon of fixed truth, but rather invite us to become participants in the opening drama that is being disclosed. To be sure, not all stories do this well. Not all stories are good. Some stories are inadequate, misleading, or deceiving. By their fruits you shall know them. Stories may tend to crystallize an intolerant situation and make it accepted when it could do otherwise. This is why Karl Marx called religion the opiate of the masses. The Chinese myth of the Will of Heaven for centuries supported a Confucian stratification of society and people therefore became locked into an oppressive feudalism. The new myth of Marxist historical determinism and scientific progress has shattered the old myth, and the mythicized history of the “Long March” under the leadership of Mao Zedong has become the cultic replacement for incense at the altar of Buddha. But the “Long March” will not fulfill the needs of a yearning people

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<sup>12</sup>Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye (London: P. Owen, 1964); Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper, 1964); Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (Boston: Beacon, 1970); Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1967) and *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: Toronto University, 1977).

<sup>13</sup>Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 34.

because ultimately we do not live by bread alone. A more adequate and uplifting story will prevail, just as the Judeo-Christian story of the creation of Eve, as the equal of Adam and his partner, is more edifying for us all than the story of Pandora who was given by Zeus to harass men for their pride. The stories that are fully satisfying and edifying will prevail over the stories that are discriminatory and destructive.

## II. NARRATIVE ONTOLOGY

A hermeneutics of metaphor does not suffice, however, to secure story as a universal category of reality. People want to know if stories are in reality true as well as meaningful and good. We may find fictive characters in imaginative stories interesting, intriguing, even valuable. Their value may be a necessity for the proper and full understanding and use of the ordinary world. We may need them to turn our attention and open meanings. But if these stories involve only meanings and values we can put them aside. Are there stories that compel us to acceptance, belief, decision, action? Are there stories that have a truth claim upon us which must be acknowledged whether or not we perceive it or desire it or accept it? Hence we must move

beyond a narrative hermeneutics and establish an ontology.

A great many people have been talking and writing in recent years about the power of metaphor to reach reality. Almost all of these people are biblical scholars or literary critics, not systematians. If they are philosophers they are interested in the analysis of language and not in ontology. They do, however, point in the direction where systematic thinking must go, and they give us tools and vehicles to help us on our way. The scholars I refer to are advocating a radical reversal of the relation of metaphor and logical discourse to reality.

The old point of view may be represented by scholars like David Friedrich Strauss, Adolf Jülicher, Joachim Jeremias, and Rudolf Bultmann. Strauss said that myth is the narrative embodiment of an idea.<sup>14</sup> Myth is the story about the “other side” told in terms of “this side,” but in relating a myth one is really talking about the historic reality of being human in this world. Thus the “other side” does not refer to another world but to a side of this world which helps us get a more clear idea of reality. Rudolf Bultmann had the same notion.<sup>15</sup> The nature of reality is not that of a story but an idea. Bultmann wanted to demythologize the Gospel by stripping away all myths and legends peculiar to the first century which are not essential to the kerygma. The story is reduced to a message and the message becomes a changeless idea. Jülicher had the same idea when he said that parables are stories that point to timeless truths as metahistorical models. And Jeremias says that parables are located in Jesus’ own historical experience as visual aids to defend a proclamation delivered before them and without them.<sup>16</sup> All these notions are considered wrong by the new group of scholars.

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<sup>14</sup>David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

<sup>15</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM, 1952).

<sup>16</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner’s, 1955).

Mircea Eliade may introduce the new group with his contention that myth narrates a sacred history and re-enacts by recitation and ritual so that origins can be experienced and present mysteries resolved.<sup>17</sup> The celebration of Passover or the Eucharist brings to life a story that has not only origins but a present reality that thrusts us into the future. Time in such a view is real, and reality is not a timeless idea but a living story. Paul Ricoeur’s concern is with primary symbols, and for him myth functions as a symbol representing a primary aspect of experienced reality. Poetic diction is primary and ideational language with structured concepts is secondary. We speak primarily of metaphors and stories and secondarily of ideas and concepts about them; we do not speak of metaphors and stories which illustrate or lead us to more basic ideas and concepts. The ideas are about stories rather than the stories being about ideas.

For more than thirty-five years Amos Niven Wilder has been quietly making this point, but never more clearly and forcefully than in his most recent publication, *Jesus’ Parables and the War of Myths*. Metaphor, he says, does not point to something completely other than itself, such as a theme or a concept or a moral or an idea or an institution. Metaphor points to something that is both itself and is not itself. And it has the power to transform.

Now we know that a true metaphor or symbol is more than a sign, it is a bearer of the reality to which it refers. The hearer not only learns about reality, he participates in it. He is invaded by it. Here lies the power and fatefulness of art.

Jesus' speech had the character not of instruction and of ideas but of compelling imagination, of spell, of mythical shock and transformation.<sup>18</sup>

Wilder thinks that in the New Testament there is an unconscious assumption by Jesus and his hearers that all life has the character of a story and a plot, and therefore more justice should be done to the mythopoetic structure of the Gospel with its claim to provide a dramatization of existence.

Story ontology requires us to say that place and time are real and multiple. There are many places and times. There is no reality in the mysticism of Nothingness. There is no reality in the Nirvana of no place, no time. There is in story always both geography and history, places and times. Hence we can speak in story language of Eden and Earth, two different places. We can speak of Heaven and Hell, and a new Heaven and a new Earth. There are many places...“in my Father's house are many rooms.” And we can speak of many times—the time of the beginning, the time before the fall, the time after the fall, the time of the flood, the time of history, the kairotic time of Christ's coming. We distinguish different kinds of time—simple succession or *chronos* and climactic moment or *kairos*. We speak of this age and the coming age, and we speak of the simultaneity of the two kingdoms. We speak of the endtime, the *eschaton*, not the end of time. Never can we speak of timelessness. And because we have real time we have both real tragedy and real comedy. The *kairos* time of Christ makes comedy out of tragedy, laughter out of tears.

<sup>17</sup>Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1965).

<sup>18</sup>Amos Wilder, *Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

I will give you an example of this, not from the Western tradition, but from China, to show that God has always been at work in every history with his redeeming humor, as Choan-Seng Song says with his “transposition theology.”<sup>19</sup> The old Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu loved to poke fun at Confucius. He told of three men who were kindred spirits. They would drink wine together and read their poems to each other. One died. Confucius sent a disciple to help the other two sing their obsequies. They sang:

Hey, Sung Hu!  
Where'd you go?  
Hey, Sung Hu!  
Where'd you go?  
You have gone  
Where you really were.  
And we are here—  
Damn it! We are here!

The disciple of Confucius in a rage said, “Where did you find this in the rubrics for funerals? Such frivolous caroling!” The two friends poked each other, and said, “Poor fellow, he doesn't know the new liturgy.”<sup>20</sup>

So space and time are real. And therefore we can have redemption. Story theology also

requires us to rethink causality. In stories there is freedom of choice and action, and also a fateful destiny—a profound paradox. Such is the nature of reality. Reality does not admit absolute fate-determinism. Nor does it admit absolute freedom-independence. Always we have both freedom and constraint. Causality is therefore not a description of reality, as if everything has its cause which determines what it is, or which determines how it will act. God is not such a cause, nor is nature.

Ancient and medieval people followed the philosophical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, and they found abiding reality in abstractions like idea for Plato or substance for Aristotle. Thus all the many forms and shapes in the world derive from the one idea or the one substance. There was conceived one cause for everything, either as a ground of being pushing from below or a pinnacle of perfection pulling from above, either a first cause or a final cause. Christian theologians used this tradition to construct Christian doctrines. God the Creator was translated into first cause or final cause. One can see how the Calvinists could develop a doctrine of predestination in terms of philosophical determinism from such a notion of God and causality, or how the Pietists could develop a doctrine and a practice of prayer piety which uses God as the power and energy that causes miracles and brings answer to prayer. One needs only to plug into the chain of causation to get salvation and favors from God.

The philosophical category of causality is logical necessity. With logical necessity a closed system of sufficient reason allows for no freedom, no absurdity, no mystery, no conflict, no laughter, no tears, no regret, no hope, no joy. All these are realities of story that cannot be set aside if we are to reckon at all seriously with human experience. The old Greek way of thinking is tempting

<sup>19</sup>Choan-seng Song, *The Compassionate God* (London: SCM, 1982).

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965) 55.

because it conceives of God as abiding substance in the face of a disintegrating world, but C. S. Lewis tells of a woman who said she thinks of God as substance, but the trouble is he comes out as a non-descript blob, something like tapioca pudding, and unfortunately she does not like tapioca pudding.

Modern people have abandoned the causality of logical necessity for the efficient cause of empirical description. In so doing we have also abandoned God. There is no place for God in a scientific equation. We do not say  $E = mc^2 + \text{God}$ . Nor do we say  $E = mc^2 - \text{God}$ . God just does not enter in. The empirical moderns see causality as simple *a posteriori* antecedence and contiguity, the timing and placing of the thing after and next to another. There is no logical necessity in natural behavior, only a practical one. But there is no God, either at the center or on the boundary of existence, either as first cause or as final cause.

My contention is that both the philosophical category of logical necessity and the modern scientific category of efficient causality are inadequate to provide the abiding reality that humankind seeks. Theologians who try to translate God into scientific categories substitute the efficient cause of evolution for the story of creation. This is just as much a violation of God and his creature, of freedom and responsibility, as was the ancient use of first and final cause.

Now what will this mean for the doctrines of creation and redemption?

### III. THE STORY OF CREATION AND REDEMPTION

The creation story is neither empirical science nor recorded history. It is a tale of religious consciousness that reaches beyond sensory experience and logic. It deals with deep truth and reality. We have collective experiences which go beyond the empirical and the rational into deep disclosures and feelings of awe in the presence of the transcendent. We have what we call revelation through the Word of God in nature, history, Scripture, and the Church. This must be distinguished from psychotic hallucination and esoteric intuition and wishful subjective piety. Two marks of distinction are the collective sharing in the community of believers, and the objectivity of the content of the experience. No prophetic word is merely private. It must be acknowledged by the worshipping community as the authentic Word from God. It is never the subjectivity of my faith that defines the spiritual experience. It is always the objectivity of the Word, whether this comes to us through the given historicity of the cross, the account of Scripture, the proclamation of the Gospel, or the grace of the sacraments. True spirituality is always shaped by the object of worship, not by the subjective experience of it. And only the language of story with its metaphoric and metonymic structure can express such reality.

Science, on the other hand, deals with facts of sensory experience that are brought into meaningful relationships through the use of logic. It deals with actuality but not with the deep reality described by story. When the Bible speaks of creation it does not isolate causes and consequences as the scientist does with the view to manipulate and control nature. The story of creation does not tell us that God is the first in a series of causes, as we might identify the finger that triggers a gun and sends a bullet to its target. Theologically speaking, God did not *cause* the world. He created the world out of nothing by what he *said*: "Let there

be light!" This is not a literal account reported to bystanders as in a scientific description or as a journalist might report news with action camera. This is the deepest poetry of the human spirit as God speaks in us and to us about the wonder of creation.

The story of creation and the theory of evolution do not contradict each other. Both are useful for separate purposes. The scientific account tells how things happened according to its working models of molecules and light years, and according to its ethic of survival. These are not unchangeable absolutes. They are only tools that we discard when better ones are made. Science describes and then abstracts in order to put to use what we experience according to what we value. Science does not deal with deep reality. Science is our invention, and today's science is tomorrow's superstition. Evolution is the best theory we have for the present about the development of life but not the last.

The biblical account of creation tells a story with dramatic action and passion. It must never be taken as scientific record. The language of poetry is not literal but analogical. It is closer to truth than the literalness of science because it relates not what happened but who made it happen. It says something about the mystery of why it happened and about the cost of its happening. God made it happen so that we might have someone like himself to love, and so that we might freely enter into his glory.

This story thesis is a radical reversal which puts humankind back on the center of the stage. The created universe is the theatre where God's dramatic action with his children takes place. God spoke. He does not cause any thing. Again Chuang Tzu has a similar idea. He said:

“That which acts on all things and meddles in none is Heaven....”<sup>21</sup> God in his absolute love cares for all things, great and small, but in his infinite freedom he never does anything for us that we can do for ourselves. God sang the worlds into being. Sterile loneliness was lifted into tragic communion. God suffered himself to be heard. Ancient ages ache for answer because the creature’s babble has stilled God’s Word. The celebration of creation is without constraint, but throughout there is subtle, profound recognition of the devastation done by the demonic, the shameful awareness of the pain that comes from defiance. But into this condition of rebellion and victimization comes renewal. The God who suffered to create suffers more deeply to redeem. In the midst of ambivalence and ambiguity there is the mystifying certainty and the holy arrogance of grace. This is the tale that is told.

Finally, let us turn to the doctrine of redemption. What will story theology mean for the doctrine we construct for the Incarnation?

We have been saying that for centuries Christian theology has tried to translate the Gospel into the intellectual categories of Greek philosophy, and this means we have used the logic of Aristotle, which is a logic of non-contradiction. It says we must think with consistency, never contradicting or speaking against ourselves. When we say A is A we cannot also say A is not A. If God is God he cannot be confused with his creature. God is not nature, not the maternal womb of Mother Earth, not the process that germinates and sustains

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 72.

all things. God is Creator, and there is an infinite qualitative distinction between God and his creatures..

One solution to this contradiction is the prolix Lutheran doctrine of *perichoresis* or the *communicatio idiomata* (transfer of the attributes). In the labored logic of Martin Chemnitz it was said that somehow there is an exchange of properties among the two natures of Christ from divine to human and human to divine. The Lutherans retained Aristotle’s logic so they could not contradict their first premise: God is God and so he remains God, yet in Jesus God communicates to the humanity of Jesus his divine attributes. Actually this does break the logic because it asserts the reality of time. *When* Jesus came, *then* God became human. The Lutherans wanted to remain true to Scripture, and so they broke their logic.

It was not until the 18th century, however, that anyone had the courage to challenge Aristotle’s logic and develop a new logic, a logic of contradiction, or a logic of identity-difference. This was done by Hegel, a Lutheran philosopher, who said everything has its opposite, and reality moves through the contradiction of opposites to a higher synthesis. This dialectical triad is fundamental to Marxist thought, and it has similarities in the Chinese dialectic of Yin-Yang. Mao Zedung has an essay in which he draws out this similarity in dialectical thinking of East and West.<sup>22</sup> Every thesis has its antithesis and out of the conflict comes a synthesis or higher resolution. So in the logic of Hegel it is possible to think of a thing becoming its opposite. We can at once live and die and become new creatures. We can entertain the notion of A becoming not-A.

We should at once recognize and acknowledge, however, that Hegel’s logic is no more the rationale for reality than is Aristotle’s. Neither the logic of Aristotle nor the logic of Hegel are bound to the structure of reality. Both are useful as tools in perceiving and organizing reality.

Reality is often perceived as ordered, and we can helpfully say that a thing is itself and not its opposite nor anything in between. God is God and not his creature nor any chimeric *tertium quid*. But reality is also often perceived as contradictory, and we can helpfully say that a thing is both itself and its opposite or any number of things other than itself. Christ is God and Christ is man. Christ is wholly God in the hidden reality of the Trinity; Christ is wholly man in the revealed reality of Jesus of Nazareth. And the logic of contradiction not only embraces opposites, but it also advances to include development in time, a development which at the same time moves and changes temporally and retains within itself that which has been changed. Thus we can say God became man and yet at the same time, while affirming this radical change, we do not say he is no longer God. In Jesus the holy one becomes a sinner without losing his original sinlessness. Also the Christian is a person who has become justified but yet remains in sin, thus doing both sacred and sinful things. Syllogistic logic cannot contain this contradiction, but it is a narrative description of reality.

If it is true that the two logics, the logic of non-contradiction and the logic of contradiction, are tools and not structures of reality, then we may use either of them when we find them useful. Reality is not bound to the simple identities of

<sup>22</sup>Mao Zedung, "On Practice," in *Classics in Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1972) 663-730.

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Aristotle's system, nor is it bound to the contradictory triads of Hegel's. In theology we can use Aristotle to affirm the distinction between God and his creatures, between holiness and sin, between circles and squares. And we can use Hegel's triad to describe how God can become man without ceasing to be God, how a seed will die to itself to become what it is in its flower, how a sinful child will die with Christ to be born into newness of life.

Stories can use both logics or neither. In stories, without a tortuous twist of logic, it is entirely possible to have one person of the drama play two different characters. Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* provides a good example. It is the story of the Duke of Vienna who finds his realm in moral decay. He decides to leave his role as kingly ruler and go among his people in the guise of a friar, thus to perform a lowly servant role. He is no less the Duke when he becomes the friar, but he has emptied himself of his ducal power. It is the Duke in him that prompts him to do what he does as friar, but as friar he is seen by his people not as Duke but servant. All that he is as friar he certainly is as Duke, since he is not another person but the same person. What the Duke necessarily is as Duke and possibly is as friar he actually becomes in the course of the play. The dialectic dramatically fulfills itself.

And what is it that the Duke tries to do as friar? He had ruled with law, but now he tries to do with repentance and forgiveness what the law in its strict observance failed to do. The law is fulfilled by love; justice is tempered with mercy. The principle he puts into action is "forgive and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you...For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38). So in his place when he goes incognito the Duke installs Angelo, a harsh legalist and hypocrite, who brings down the law with a vengeance, closing all the brothels and imprisoning the whores and their pimps and their tricks, and especially Claudio who has gotten his girlfriend Juliet pregnant. Now the Duke as friar wants to set all things right and satisfy the needs of everyone. But in godly and artful detachment he finds that existence is full of

surprises. If he is the God-Christ figure he cannot simply coerce human events. Freedom brings strange twists of both perversion and goodness. The Deputy Angelo is aroused to ungovernable lust by Isabella, the sister of Claudio. Angelo offers to free Claudio if Isabella will yield her body to him. When Claudio hears of this he pleads with Isabella to yield, since it is his neck against her honor. The friar must clean up this mess with indirection, and he succeeds in the end with all parties repenting and forgiving, and himself hinting strongly a proposal of marriage to Isabella, an intimation of the relationship between the Lord and the Bride of Christ.

I do not know if Shakespeare intended this allegory. Some critics have suggested it. My purpose in relating it is simply to show how one person on stage can play the role of two characters without contradiction. In the story of reality God can become human, always remaining God in the human he becomes, yet also really being the human whose role he plays. When God comes to us in the form of a human he is seen to be the human he is but not the God he is. This God is really in the condition of human mortality. Thus a story theology can speak of a God who suffers and dies and who then rises to glory. And a story theology can construct doctrines not by sight alone, nor by intellect alone, but by faith seeking sight and intellect.