

**Resolving Not to *Revolve*:
Forming Storied Biblical Literacy in Christian Youth through the *Ordo***

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Introduction

As a Christian religious educator with special interests in youth I share a common concern with my colleagues: few Christian youth in the present day are biblically literate. I work on this problem from my context as faculty director of Duke Divinity School's Youth Academy for Christian Formation. We are a Lilly Endowment sponsored program, part of their wider theological initiative with high school youth. The distinctive emphasis at the Duke Youth Academy (DYA) is providing youth Christian formation through the *ordo*, the church's liturgical ecology grounded in interrelated practices of bath, book, table, and time.¹ This somewhat unusual approach to youth ministry offers an interesting perspective from which to consider the Christian scriptures and the problem of youth's ignorance of them.

In this essay I consider two related causes of youth's biblical illiteracy. One is principally a mass culture problem and the other is a church culture problem. Neither problem was created by the kids. In the first instance, I am convinced that the cultural idolatries of consumerism, individualism and therapy continue to infect and distort the resources and pedagogies employed to teach youth the Bible. A contemporary case in point is *Revolve* (2003), a New Testament marketed to teenaged girls. *Revolve* is perhaps the most highly publicized Christian youth resource of this decade, garnering national press exposure and strong sales. It represents a strategic effort to make the Gospel available to teenagers through a culturally accessible medium—the look, language and practices of women's fashion. I explore *Revolve* in some detail in order to show why it is part of the problem of biblical illiteracy rather than the solution.² As to the church problem, I contend that the loss of the *ordo* in congregations has had the effect of severing the Christian Bible from its primary liturgical context. Instead of book, bath, table and time practiced in liturgical concert and converging to enact communities into

¹ A detailed description of academy life may be found in Edie (2002, 85-107). When I speak of bath, book, table and time I am, of course, making reference to the Christian Bible, Christian practices of baptism and Eucharist, and to the temporal rhythms of the church's liturgical life. I understand these "things" to constitute an ecological relationship from which the church's life, mission, and witness spring. In this regard I am influenced by Lathrop (1993). Further explanation of this construal of "*ordo*" appears in *Remember the Church: A Liturgical, Ecclesial Youth Ministry* (forthcoming). This essay is excerpted from a chapter in that volume.

² Helpful alternatives do exist. One example is the curriculum *Bible Quest*, a cooperative venture of nine Christian denominations. Yet even theologically and educationally responsible curricula do not solve the "church problem" I describe next.

the central stories of Christian existence, the Bible has slipped into unnatural isolation from other holy things and, in the process, has been reduced to personal rule book or self-help guide as in the case of *Revolve*. I argue, therefore, that recovering communal, performative, *ordo*-grounded engagement with the scriptures may again assist in forming communities of story-framed biblical literacy. I also seek to show why the *ordo* requires and reinforces a storied approach to teaching the scriptures. Finally, by way of my work with DYA, I offer pedagogical suggestions for fostering storied biblical literacy in youth. Readers should bear in mind, however, that the sort of literacy I seek is less a function of teaching tips than it is the recovery of the ecology of liturgical holy things in their interdependent and mutually interpretive fullness. In other words, I am urging a fundamental (re-)orientation of congregational life rather than a program to teach the Bible better.

Revolve: Good Intentions Paving That Road

The *Vogue*-like cover grabs you. Three gorgeous females, sophisticated teens with perfect white teeth, done up eyes, and flowing hair smile in close-up beckoning your attention. Their look is tan and fit, the strapped tops and bare shoulders of two of them signal summer sexy. The masthead reads: *Revolve: The Complete New Testament*. But the breathless blurbs below—“Are You Dating a Godly Guy?” “Beauty Secrets” and “Guy’s Speak Out” —tell a different story. So what is it girls? A Bible? A Fashion Mag?

Both! A quick glance inside reveals the entire New Century Version of the New Testament. But it won’t take two seconds more to figure out that this isn’t your Aunt Ada’s illustrated King James. Young women smile glowingly (and knowingly) from nearly every page—except when some beefy guy speaks for his gender about his preferences in women. Of the hundreds of beautiful faces almost none are blemished by braces...or *blemishes* for that matter. Permanent physical disfigurements or handicapping conditions? Dude, no way! You won’t even see glasses unless they’re of the sun shielding variety.

I devote attention to *Revolve*’s glossy layout for several reasons. First, to the publisher’s credit, this is no amateurish knock-off. *Revolve* is professional in voice and polished in look. The editors obviously read through piles of *Seventeen*, *In Style*, *Cosmo*, and *Vogue* to mimic content ideas and prose style. The publisher also invested heavily in *Revolve*’s graphically-pleasing look. That they went to such expense testifies to the first of many ironies involving *Revolve*: while adolescent girls may be biblically illiterate they are fluent in fashion. They recognize without thinking its idioms, its gestures, its looks. They are experts because they have been formed from birth in a culture that values fashion and celebrity more than most anything else. Thus, as the producers of *Revolve* no doubt understood, anything less than a first rate effort at the fashion genre would have been doomed (by definition after all) to failure. What could be more unfashionable than an out of fashion fashion Bible?

I also devote attention to *Revolve*’s layout as a preliminary means to raise critical questions about its premises. For example, do the editors presume the life of fashion to be

commensurate with life in Christ? Or do they imagine the fashion magazine genre to be morally neutral, simply an attractive gimmick to introduce girls to the scriptures? Does this make *Revolve* into a subtle bait and switch scheme? If so, why would the editors presume that Christ's abundant life requires bait? Or perhaps they imagine themselves to be redeeming the culture of fashion by juxtaposing it to the New Testament?

Closer scrutiny of the content of *Revolve*'s features provides some answers to these questions but also raises further questions. Clearly, *Revolve*'s editorial content is way tamer than a typical fashion magazine. For example, it comes out strongly against all forms of what it judges to be sexual promiscuity. In contrast to a *Cosmo*-esque "Top Ten Positions Guaranteed to Drive Your Man Wild" readers find "Top Ten Random Ways to Have Fun with Your Friends" (5). The magazine also speaks directly from its Christian perspective to teen girl crises like anorexia, abuse, and rape. It counsels girls to reach out for help or to offer help but says little about the cultural forces including the culture of fashion that objectify girls and their bodies.

Consuming *Revolve*

The editors of *Revolve* claim to know how tough it is for Christian girls in contemporary North American culture. They jump into the breach by counseling prayer—and shopping. One of the "Top Ten Random Ways to Have Fun with your Friends" recommends the following: "Go shopping and see who can get the coolest item for less than \$10.00" (5). Thank goodness *Revolve* girls know that cool doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg. Elsewhere the editors recommend that readers "[t]ake your sister to the mall and buy her a gift, just 'cause'" (325). This suggestion is reinforced by the full color graphic of a credit card imprinted with the words "charge it." Are we to conclude that savvy Christian girls know that giving gifts to sisters satisfies best when it costs nothing?

Consumption is more than a special treat, however, it is an essential daily practice for *Revolve* girls. The first "Beauty Secret" features a smiling model with creamy white skin, who urges the reader, "[a]s you apply your sunscreen, use that time to talk to God. Tell him how grateful you are for how he made you. Soon, you'll be so used to talking to him, it might become as regular and familiar as shrinking your pores" (5). On the surface only a cynic could grumble against offering gratitude to God while preventing premature wrinkling and erasing oily build up. Among the many intriguing implications of this earnestly intended piece of advice, however, is the editors' assumption that Christian girls practice a daily beauty regimen requiring the consumption of beauty products.

Apparently *Revolve* girls possess both the leisure to spend time in the sun (or they hold down farm jobs) and the resources to buy products that screen their faces and shrink their pores. In other words, being Christian apparently coincides with being a middle class consumer. The irony only grows through the suggestion that prayer may one day become as natural and normal as buying products to beautify one's face. In addition, here and throughout the editorial content of *Revolve*, God is designated with masculine pronouns. Are girls to conclude that God is a silent male admirer, a mystery date for whom girls must scrub their faces to sparkling? Fortunately, if God is a guy, at least he's enlightened

about teen girl life. Like their favorite hairstylist or the clerk at the make up counter, *Revolve* girls can thank God for helping them look good and for understanding how hard they have to work at it. God's in touch with his feminine side.

Therapeutic *Revolve*

Posted to the office door of New Testament scholar Richard Hayes is a cartoon depicting this scene: A book shop customer asks the clerk where to find a Bible. "That would be under 'self-help,' the clerk responds. It's supposed to be a joke, but therapy is very much at the heart of *Revolve*. In a therapeutic culture individuals seek to maximize the fulfillment of their perceived needs. Persons are no longer oriented to ends beyond themselves. Living the Good Life means simply that I am happy.³

Above all else, *Revolve*'s editors want girls to be happy. In the recurring advice column "Blabs," girls ask and editors answer questions like the following: "I'm nearly fourteen and I have never even had a boyfriend. Am I the only one?" (6); or, "How can I quit doing bad stuff?" (13); Or, "I know you're not supposed to have 'it' before you're married, but is it okay to think about 'it'?" (7). Admittedly, "Blabs" responses are not sugarcoated. Repeatedly, they condemn premarital sex and lustful fantasy as sinful. This line in the sand hardly seems to be settling for the moral relativism, the anything goes, "don't worry be happy" attitude often attributed to therapeutic culture. But form trumps content in this case. An advice column operates from the premise that girls have unmet needs that must be satisfied. Situating it in the pages of scripture proposes to readers that scripture itself is a book of therapy. And you thought the Bible was about God! Come on girls, the Bible's about helping you solve your problems!

Revolve reinforces therapeutic culture in additional interesting ways. One quiz deals with the all important teen girl dilemma: "Are you an introvert or an extrovert?" (10). Again, the focus of this quiz is the reader and not God, and in this case the language is explicitly therapeutic. Even more revealing is the quiz: "Are You Crushing Too Hard?" (222). This quiz checks up on whether girls' levels of boy craziness fall within acceptable limits. After answering five multiple choice questions girls are instructed to tally their scores and refer to a key. According to the key, "if you scored between 0 and 9, you are level headed! Right on. You're not carried away about guys. Sounds like you've got your priorities in order." Of course, you could also be a lesbian. Scores between 10 and 16 mean you are "a little boy crazy, but not abnormal. Still you might want to get in the Scripture and refocus on God. Remember, all your fulfillment is in him." "Yes," a slightly boy crazy but not abnormal girl might reply, "but when I try to get into the Scriptures, at least in *Revolve*, I keep running into all these gorgeous hunks of man flesh when I turn the pages." Finally, scores between 17 and 24 mean that "you are totally crushed out. Chill out, girl. God's gonna provide you a man when the time is right. No need to become a stalker. Check your priorities." At risk of completely spoiling the fun,

³ My critique of *Revolve* is informed by Rieff (1987). More generally, I am indebted to the discerning critical eye and methods of Warren (1997).

here is my reading: “Be patient and God will fulfill all your desires. And in your case, girls, that fulfillment comes through a man.”

Admittedly, I am mixing together my critique of therapeutized Christianity as proclaimed in *Revolve* with specific criticisms of *Revolve*'s theology. To be fair, I agree with some of its theological assertions and disagree with others. For example, the feature “Radical Faith” consistently exhorts girls to extend themselves beyond their personal comfort zones for the sake of the Gospel—though it says little about how to do this. The more fundamental critique remains, however. *Revolve*'s earnest desire to be a help to young female Christians by way of the Bible is completely overwhelmed and undone by its unquestioned therapeutic premises as evidenced by its uncritical appropriation of the fashion magazine genre and fashion culture more generally. As with “Are You Crushing Too Hard?” *Revolve* assumes that girls' experiences including their hopes for romantic love provide the normative story into which scripture must fit rather than the other way around. *Revolve* expects that all teenage girls will grow up to have crushes on boys, purchase beauty products to care for their bodies, then hang in there for God to bring them the man of their dreams. In other words, *Revolve* implicitly urges upon girls a certain kind of culturally scripted North American middle class life trajectory leading to personal happiness. Only secondarily and in light of this already determined therapeutic vision of a self-fulfilled life—and applied to that life trajectory like so much spiritual mascara—do the scriptures appear to pretty up the picture.

Revolve-ing Around Whom?

Clearly, teenage girls are the main characters of *Revolve*. It is a book for and about them. Remarkably, this targeting is accomplished between the words of scripture which, ostensibly, is a book about God. Achieving such a stunning reversal is possible only through the prism of unquestioned and unselfconscious individualism. Note this “Blabs” exchange:

Q—Why is religion—the set of rules, traditions, rituals—necessary if you have individual faith in God that you feel content with?

A—Religion is not necessary. That's like saying, Why are the rules, traditions, and rituals necessary to play basketball? They're not. But they help the game move smoother and faster and give you a guide. That is like the whole religion thing. It helps give you some direction on how to create a deep relationship with God the Father without getting majorly [sic] side-tracked. (304)

Leaving aside the issue of the near total logical incoherence of this response—how *do* you play the game of basketball without following the rules?—let us explore the therapeutic individualism undergirding it. The questioner assumes—and “Blabs” does not challenge this assumption—that “individual faith in God” is, in fact, possible, normative even. But from whence does such faith derive? For its part, “Blabs” has no problem imagining the “religion thing” as a non-essential and only potentially helpful means to cement girls' personal relationships with God. Showing no more insight than their adolescent questioner, *Revolve*'s editors fail to acknowledge how personal identity is

inescapably communally constructed—like, through the “fashion thing.” Apparently, neither can they see that there would be no personal faith without the church and its odd collection of “rules, traditions, rituals”—aka, the *ordo*. The result is an endorsement for individualistic, anti-communal, and spiritualized faith.

Resolving Not to *Revolve*

Revolve and resources like it are not the answer to fostering teen biblical literacy or deepening their Christian lives. These resources suffer from a failure to understand how utilizing some forms of contemporary culture may actually be destructive to efforts to promote biblical literacy. What makes *Revolve* so interesting is that it promotes biblical distortion on the pages of the Bible. But the church is also partly to blame for creating the vacuum that *Revolve* is presently filling. It has not sufficiently contested consumerist, therapeutic and individualistic engagements with the Bible in part because congregations have forgotten how to practice compelling alternatives performances of the scriptures.

The Bible as Enacted Story: One Key to Literacy

Fortunately, the book itself—especially as it is employed through the *ordo*—offers some clues not only to how it should be read but also how persons can be better formed to know and act upon its contents. The interpretive key that the *ordo* provides is appreciation for the storied nature of the Bible.

Once upon a time, describing scripture as story could only mean relegating it to the world of child’s play. Wanting to be grown up like the scientists, theologians and biblical scholars spent most of the 20th century searching for the truth *behind* the Bible’s stories. Mostly they succeeded in explaining what the Bible was not—not a history book, not a science book, not distinctive from other ancient literature. Presently, however, we have become aware again of the importance of stories. We have rediscovered how stories play an essential role in shaping communal vision and identity. To be more precise, stories like those contained in the Bible do not answer questions by getting at the facts—a way of knowing pursued by science—they create for tellers and hearers an interpretive field that disposes them to make sense of and live their lives in light of those stories. But stories that shape cultures are not always consciously interpreted or even understood. As is often observed by scholars, persons do not so much tell stories as they find themselves told by them. Stories become embedded in cultural practices including often in unconscious, habitual human dispositions to think, feel and act in story-determined ways. Following this line of thought we can say that consumerist therapeutic individualism is itself a dominant cultural “story” in North America at present. This situation makes even more crucial the recovery of the Bible itself as a compelling story, one that offers a consciously authentic alternative to our current unreflective narcissism. By recovering the Bible as story we may also hope to form the practices of Christian youth with dispositions to think, feel, and act in ways consistent with the stories of Jesus Christ.

Holy Things Aid in Reclaiming the Scriptures as Story

To that end, the *ordo* has always presented, or better, *performed* the scriptures narratively. Historically, liturgical practices of the patterning of time along with practices related to bath and table converged with and enacted stories from the book. For example, the church's decision to worship on the first day in light of Israel's seven day week is indicative of its distinctive patterning of time consistent with its faith in the newly unfolding chapters of God's Story of salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ *on the first day*. Subsequent creation of Christian festival days and seasons juxtaposed to their Jewish predecessors represented the further transformation of time into a witness to the stories of Jesus' birth, ministry, and death. This "yearly round" highlighted annually by Holy Week and Easter told and retold both church and world the church's distinctive story. Indeed, this ritualized patterning of time was key to the church's proclamation of its story long before the widespread availability of Bibles in pews.

Lectionaries, collections of daily and weekly readings of scripture, evolved to support this storied temporal patterning. Keyed primarily to the Gospels, the lectionaries assist the church in telling the stories of Jesus in concert with its new constructions of time. During Advent, for example, at once the beginning and ending of the Christian year, the lectionary includes Israel's accounts of hope for a savior as well the church's own longing for the return of Christ as cosmic king. At Epiphany, which means "manifestation," it chronicles Gospel accounts pointing to the mystery of God at work in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. We hear of Jesus "setting his face to Jerusalem" at the beginning of Lent and of the climactic consequence of his journey to the cross through the one of the Gospels' "Passion Narratives" read and enacted during Holy Week. Through the Great Fifty days of Easter and on to Pentecost the lectionary shares the stories of Jesus' resurrection and of resurrection life in the Spirit-born church. Thus the stories constituting the Bible's Gospel Story are placed in synchrony with the church's patterning of time and both are amplified through this convergence. Book and Calendar work together in the *ordo* to invite a community to participate in the narratives that frame its life.

In addition to the patterning of time, the *ordo's* other holy things, bath and table, also richly enact the stories of the book. The church once understood its ritual meal as the multivalent enactment of multiple biblical stories including, centrally, Jesus' sacrificial self-giving and resurrection presence. Similarly, the church also once understood its baptismal rites as the incorporation of persons into the story of God's covenantal promise to Israel and into the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Such ritual enactment of these stories is accomplished, in part, through the expansive and associative qualities of the symbols of bread, wine, and water.

Typology as the Interpretive Key to Scripture as Story and to the *Ordo* as Enacted Story

Critical to reading the Bible narratively is grasping typological or figural interpretations of the scriptures. As Brian Daley (2003) notes, typology is a method of interpretation as old as the Bible itself. It proceeds by way of imaginative "reception and reinterpretation; of seeing new meaning in old texts..." (75). Distinct from the Old Testament writers and editors, the New Testament writers worked from the assumption

that Jesus as Messiah was the central “type” pointed to by all other scripture which was considered “anti-type.” To put this claim in slightly different language, persons in the early church thought that the stories of what Christians now call the Old Testament “pre-figured” the stories of their central “figure,” who is Jesus. Richard Hayes (2003) frames the interpretive predisposition of Christian typology slightly differently but with a similar intent by calling it a “hermeneutics of resurrection” (230). Hayes means by this phrase that, for the church, Jesus as the risen Lord is the very heart of the Bible’s witness. He argues, therefore, that the New Testament writers were justified in interpreting the Old Testament as anticipating God’s revelation in Jesus. The propriety of this sort of interpretation in the present day is a point of some controversy in current biblical scholarship. But the fact that the early church including the writers of the New Testament engaged in typological interpretation is indisputable. The apostle Paul, for example, portrays Jesus as the “true Adam” succeeding through sinless obedience where sinful Adam had failed. In the language of typology, Paul’s makes Adam to play “anti-type” to Jesus’ “type.” Similarly, Matthew creates a gospel portrait of Jesus in which Moses’ story functions as its pre-figuration. Like Moses Jesus comes to deliver Israel from slavery, this time to sin and death. Succeeding where Moses ultimately failed, however, Jesus, through his resurrection, crosses over Jordan to the Promised Land of life beyond death. In each case the New Testament writers search Israel’s scriptures to discover in Jesus both the recapitulation of God’s past saving activity as well as present fulfillment of it in this chosen One. In the process, these typological interpreters succeed in weaving individual biblical stories into one grand Story of God’s unfolding redemption.

To reiterate, typology supports narrative readings of the Bible and narrative readings of the Bible encourage typological interpretation. Typological interpretations, particularly of the Old Testament by writers of the New, assist in connecting the dots between what may otherwise appear to be a chaotic jumble of unrelated biblical episodes. Typology enables biblical stories to become “chapters” in a grand unfolding biblical Story. Even those sections of the Bible that are patently non-narrative—the Psalms, the Levitical Codes, the Wisdom writings, the Epistles—are best understood as responses to the biblical Story or attempts to form communities that embody that Story. Thus, the Bible itself testifies to the validity and importance of reading the Bible as narrative. Practically speaking, any approach to scripture or purported scripture resource that diminishes its intelligibility as story—ignoring or editing out entirely the Old Testament as in the case of *Resolve* or reducing the Bible to a rule book or advice column or turning the Bible to preacher-chosen proof texts—is unbiblical.

Second, typology asserts that we come to know and understand adequately the story of Jesus as we know and understand the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs, of Noah, of Moses, of Miriam, of Ruth, and of David. We make sense of Jesus as the embodiment of new creation or new covenant only to the extent that we grasp their pre-figurations. The New Testament writers understood this intuitively and already have done for us much of this work of tying type and anti-type together.

Third, in contrast to overly rigid and reductive approaches to engaging scripture including moralizing, snippet-clipping, rule-booking, and proof-texting ones, typology

offers a rich and expansive interpretive method. As the biblical writers and scholars of antiquity demonstrate, ever wider and deeper typological readings of the Old Testament made for ever richer theological sense of Jesus. Their profound knowledge of Israel's scriptures made possible their rich figurations of Jesus as Paschal Lamb, Living Water, Bread of Life, and Good Shepherd along with the aforementioned "New Adam" and "New Moses." Each of these metaphors evokes a different dimension of God's Salvation Story, and each contributes more nuanced awareness of the significance of the saving activity of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, associative and expansive readings of the book that typology affords are equally critical to tapping into the richness of bath, table, and time. As noted, participation in these holy things enact persons into dimensions of the stories of Jesus. Moreover, to the extent that Jesus is regarded as the type for all of God's previous saving work recorded in Israel's scriptures, holy things also recapitulate the stories of Israel and enact persons into them as well. This was the understanding of the writer of the book of I Peter. He asserts that God's deliverance of Noah through the flood and establishment of covenant with him prefigures Christian baptism into Jesus Christ (4:18-22). Simply put, from a typological perspective the waters of the flood anticipate the waters of the font. In this way baptized persons are immersed in the stories of Noah as they are being incorporated into the stories of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Viewed from the other direction, baptism into Christ recapitulates and fulfills God's covenantal promise to Noah and his heirs.

With respect to the table, Paul's framing of Jesus as Paschal Lamb (I Corinthians 5: 7-8) is likewise indebted to typological sensibilities. Paul's choice of this image and the story it represents signals Paul's theological conviction that Christ has now offered his own body and poured out his own blood for the sake of the world. As with deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, through his self-giving Christ now offers deliverance from all forms of slavery to sin along with his companionship on the journey to the new Promised Land of God's everlasting Reign.

Every occurrence of these symbols and the stories they are attached to in Israel's scriptures provided the opportunity for typological interpretation in light of the church's bath, table and time. Encouraged by the multivalent resonances of symbols, early church interpreters readily utilized typological interpretation to show how, for example, the waters of creation in Genesis prefigured new creation available through the baptismal waters, how the manna in the wilderness of Exodus prefigured the Eucharistic bread that sustains Christians on their own wilderness journeys, and how Israel's Pentecost celebration of harvest and gift of Torah prefigured the church's own Pentecost holiday of Holy Spirit sustenance. And this is just a sampling!

Requirements for Instilling Biblical Literacy in Youth

From a pedagogical standpoint, reclaiming a narrative appreciation for scripture means teaching youth to read the Bible in storied chunks rather than as a collection of single verse snippets designed to answer their therapeutically determined questions.

Youth ministers seeking to teach this form of biblical literacy will regularly engage the book in community by way of dramatic reenactments and skits, or, simpler still, through communal readers' theater where different students read aloud the lines of different characters in a story with a narrator filling in the conversational gaps. Leaders will also ask: "What is this story about?" "How do its characters advance the plot?" "What is God doing?" "Where do you see our community life reflected in this Story?" "What other biblical stories does this one evoke?" These pedagogies not only assist students in learning and telling the biblical stories, they reinforce their awareness that the Bible *is* primarily story. Repetition is also key. Stories themselves cry out for it. The stories we love most are the ones we know best. But the many stories constituting the biblical Story are also so numerous and varied that they will require years of repetition in order to become familiar. Perhaps that is one reason why the Christian Lectionary journeys through the life of Jesus each year.

Even as the knowledge of individual stories comes slowly, youth are easily capable of grasping the storied Bible's basic plotline. DYA's list of theological alliterative C's (creation, crisis, covenant, Christ, church, calling, coming Reign of God) offers an excellent shorthand outline for linking the different stories that together constitute the grand Biblical Story. This list also lays out a basic chronology that can supply students important points of historical context. It is vitally important, for example, to understand that God's series of ever more beneficent covenants with Israel precede in the narrative the covenant offered through Jesus Christ. Church curricula sometimes recommend the creation of an actual time-line (on a classroom wall or by way of a length of string with pictures or event names attached) where, in this case, stories related to creation, then crisis, then covenant and so on may be named and grouped in such a way as to demonstrate visually the Bible's narrative trajectory. These suggestions may seem too basic or too remedial for teens--or at least the teens in *your* congregation. If so I apologize, but keep in mind that the research suggests that the large majority of teens do not know the biblical Story—or even that the Bible tells stories.

At the Youth Academy, we are blessed by the good work of a professional biblical story-teller who also frequently participates as a lector in our communal worship. Students quickly recognize that while the words she speaks are drawn verbatim from the scriptures, her tone of voice and inflection plus her bodily gestures transform those paper words into living drama. In worship and at the Arts Village they learn further from her how to hear scripture as story and how to tell it that way as well. Admittedly, she is unusually gifted as an artist and not every congregation may boast of someone like her, but she does not hold a monopoly on teaching youth to engage the scriptures as if they were participating in living story.

Perhaps the most important aid in fostering this sort of literacy in youth will be the restoration of the Bible to its liturgical context. For it is in this venue that the Bible seems most logically public, aural, communal, performative, and participative as well as self-evidently related to other holy things. Each of these characteristics is consistent with and supportive of the practice of performing the Scripture as storied. The lectionary also remains the best way to tell the *whole* Story in its fullness. This amount of exposure to

scripture far surpasses practices in some congregations where the only scripture proclaimed in worship is the single verse a minister decides to preach on. Such silencing of the book is an unpardonable clerical sin.

The Youth Academy employs its own lectionary. With only fourteen occasions to worship, however, it is a leaner one than those available to the churches. Nevertheless it represents our best effort to tell the whole Story of Salvation from Creation to Christ to Coming Reign with the other alliterative C's in between. We also make frequent use of Psalms that actually reprise this unfolding story. Psalm 136, with its hopeful refrain: "God's steadfast love endures forever!" is a good example of an effective means to rehearse and remember the Story. Typological organization of the scriptures is evident with Old Testament prefigurations linked thematically or episodically to the Gospel texts in our lectionary. Robust ritual practice around table and font supports the performance of this Story, just as the telling deepens worshipers' practices of these holy things. Our preaching always gestures toward the table, while in the meal we feast on the Word.

Encountering this much scripture in worship is a novel experience for many DYA participants, but more surprising still is finding themselves on the proclaiming instead of exclusively on the receiving end of the equation. Youth regularly serve as lectors in communal worship. Tentatively at first but with increasing confidence and skill, students proclaim the biblical texts aloud then quickly branch out to dramatic enactment, choral readings, and even storytelling after the style of our artist staff member. As a participant observer this is what I notice: Youth become better tellers *and hearers* of the biblical story in worship when they assume responsibility for the telling. Though it is only a theory, my sense is that the students initially are startled into attention by the shift in the dynamics of power. At home the scriptures belong to the clergy, in public anyway, and seldom do they hear the Bible proclaimed in their own voices. Further, responsibility for proclaiming seems to generate in students a desire for a deeper level of understanding in order to proclaim adequately. Could it be that vesting youth with responsibility for leadership in public worship deepens their participation in public worship...and their biblical literacy as well?

So far I have suggested several ingredients that I deem essential to youth's encounters with scriptures. These encounters should be framed through the lens of narrative: students must learn that the Bible is storied and that it contains a salvation Story. The best ways to accomplish this learning include the recovering of typological interpretations of scripture and the restoration of the Bible to its public liturgical context where it may find concert with other holy things. Even better, I recommend vesting youth with some responsibility for proclaiming the scriptures in these public liturgical settings. All of this falls under the general heading of revitalizing the *ordo's* ecology and fostering youthful participation in it.

A second broad strategy essential to teaching storied biblical literacy is through faithful performance of the Bible in community. Performance includes the proclamation of scripture in worship in relationship to its enactment through bath, table and time. Richard Hayes says, "We do not gain a grasp of scripture's significance solely through

lectures on the text; we come to understand the death and resurrection of Jesus as we participate in the shared life of the community, enacted in meals shared at table” (231) Stanley Hauerwas (1993) adds, “...scripture can be rightly interpreted only within the practices of a body of people constituted by the unity found in the Eucharist.” (23) Each of these scholars reiterates my own claim for the mutually interpreting power of the *ordo*'s holy things; especially in this case, between word and table.

But each is also insisting that performance of the Word extends beyond the sanctuary. As Hayes and Ellen Davis note, “[s]cripture is like a musical score that must be played or sung in order to be understood; therefore, the church interprets scripture by forming communities of prayer, service, and faithful witness” (3).

I can best illustrate their claim through a story. In a past youth ministry I was privileged to know a young woman I'll call Kate. She was unusual in appearance, dressing as a hippy when being a hippy was not even remotely hip, but she was also exceptionally thoughtful. Kate attended youth group by parental mandate and regularly pointed out to me the illogic of Christian faith, including the many inconsistencies of the Bible. She knew all too well the Bible's “failings” as a science book or a history book. Through the blessings of providence, however, she also regularly signed up for church mission trips even while professing disbelief. On these trips she served with people who were often very sick or very poor yet also very faithful. Like others on the trip she lived simply and worked hard. Kate also participated in worship where she encountered the scriptures daily including the cries of Israel's prophets for justice as in Jesus' own reflection on this prophetic word:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4: 18-19)

A funny thing happened to Kate through her participation in mission. Instead of merely considering the stories of the Bible in the abstract as was often the case back home, in mission she encountered the Bible in a context where she and her peers also *performed* the Bible's Story as summarized by Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom's arrival. Kate gave daily care to the poor and sick. She witnessed oppression and worked to assist persons in overcoming it. In return she was blessed with a recovering of her own sight. Kate received the gift of getting involved with God's establishment of a new Reign which in turn made possible her reception of the Bible's storied truth, illogical as it may have seemed in settings where faithful performances were absent. No doubt, my frequent Sunday night youth group moralizing to Kate and others “not to pass by persons in need” failed to persuade her. Instead, her participation in a community that was actually performing the Word opened her eyes to the truth of the Story.

Having learned from Kate and her peers, the Youth Academy intentionally juxtaposes the study of the scriptures with frequent opportunities for getting involved as a community with what God is doing through ministries with sick children,

developmentally disabled persons, poor persons, old people, and through practices of reconciliation with the natural world. Bolstered by these performances of the biblical Story, students encounter Jesus' declarations of God's Reign in the Bible with a resounding "Yes!" rather than a guilt-ridden "Oh no, not this again." When the Gospel's truth is self-evidently embodied in a community's life it becomes good news for a change and generates its own compelling logic.

One specific practice of a communal life devoted to properly performing the Story is hospitality to strangers. The Bible itself repeatedly witnesses to this practice. Abraham welcomes strangers to eat and stay the night, and, according to the story, in doing so actually welcomes God. In the Eucharist's interesting inversion, the invited guest becomes the Host that opens the table to all who hunger and thirst. Clearly, offering hospitality is an important dimension of performing the biblical Story. Welcoming outsiders, serving them, and listening to their stories may also serve an important critical function, however, by assisting Christians toward more faithful reading, interpreting, and living out of their scriptures. Strangers, by definition, confront us with difference. Their differences from us may challenge our unquestioned assumptions about ourselves, including our assumptions that we have a monopoly on understanding and performing God's Word or that we alone are God's chosen. In other words, persons different from us—those who speak a different language, inhabit a different culture, or who do not share our social location—these are persons we need to listen to so that our own readings of the biblical Story do not become too comfortable or self-serving. Different faith communities will define "the stranger" differently. For some it may be poor immigrants or gays or pacifists. For others it may be fundamentalists, rich corporate types, or warriors. By welcoming strangers into our midst I do not mean to suggest that we will automatically amend our readings or performances of the book or our convictions about what the Bible means. I am, suggesting, however that if the Bible testifies to strangers bearing God, then we need to seek friendships with them for the good of our own souls as well as for theirs.

Conclusion

Biblical literacy for youth cannot be achieved by applying a little rouge to the Bible's cover or making it the must-have fashion item of the current cultural season. Instead, I propose creating the conditions and employing the pedagogies for the Bible to be properly encountered as narrative, one that tells the Story of God's redemption of the world. That way youth may hope to discover who God is and who God intends them to be and not merely justification for our culture's consumerist, individualist, and therapeutic agendas. Doing so requires the restoration of the Bible to its proper liturgical context in interdependent relationship with the other holy things of the *ordo*. It will also require fostering in youth a lively typological imagination so that they may discern how the many stories may find coherence as a single narrative. Moreover, youth will require repeated opportunities to perform, ritualize, enact, and otherwise embody this Story. As a community, they may offer hospitality to strangers, share bread with hungry persons, provide comfort to the sick or the old, reconcile with and forgive their enemies and each other—always in explicit and intentional relationship with the biblical stories these practices enact. This intentionally structured pedagogical reciprocity between telling

stories, living stories, and reflecting on stories creates the conditions for forming in youth a biblical story-formed imagination and identity. Moreover, though the limitations of space have prevented me from addressing the issue of critical discernment, story-framed biblical literacy also provides youth one essential means to resist domesticated interpretations of scripture such as those found in *Revolve*. Lest the congregational transformation required for fostering storied biblical literacy in youth seem too daunting for mere adults, I hold out the hope of discovering surprising allies. One DYA alumnus reported that upon return to his home congregation he noticed the absence of Old Testament readings in his community's worship. Innocently as a lamb, no doubt, he observed to his pastor, "It seems like we're missing half of our Story." Soon weekly Old Testament readings appeared in that community's liturgy. Good things happen when the narrative logic of the Bible becomes clear.

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