

Storytelling: Sowing Seeds for Love and Justice for Korean Women

UnChu Kim

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Abstract

This paper will present data from faith story interviews of two women whose lives show special commitment to the common good and envision discipleship in a particular way. While reflecting on what empowers them to do so, that is, the love from home that gave them the stories, I will interpret the data for the direction of religious education. Storytelling has a role of formation and transformation not only in one's faith journey but also in a larger society. For example, non-Christian stories told by families to children can help them to make connection to Christian teachings. They can become people who carry hope and vision out of that learning. Storytelling may sound so simple that people can easily overlook its power; however, a story can become powerful and influential.

Introduction

There were two motivations to stimulate and encourage improving women's status before Protestantism was introduced to Korea. Those are understandings of women of *Dong-hak*¹ and Catholicism. Being influenced by early Catholicism, women's roles in the Catholic Church were significant. They emphasized women as creatures of God, the Creator. With this spirit, women formed a community of virgins and singles. This kind of lifestyle originated in opposition to Confucianism in *Chosun* dynasty: They challenged the perception that women and men must marry in the Confucian society and then live in the patriarchal family life which demanded the absolute obedience of women and children.² The doctrines that treat women as equal beings showed new aspects of life to women who had lived in a traditional and patriarchal life. These doctrines became opportunities for them, who were bound to a Confucian code (custom), to question their lives controlled by tradition

The fundamental doctrine of *Dong-hak* is that the heart of heaven is a human's heart and therefore heaven and human are connected to each other. This was a thought of human equality that denies inhumane exploitation and persecution toward the slaves and lower class people whose social status were fixed from birth. This thought of equality, however, included equality between women and men. Catholicism as well as *Dong-hak* were the two possibilities which had shown women that there were other ways of life.³ In this way, even before the Protestant missionaries came to Korea, the seeds of the Gospel were already scattered around. Of course, the coming of the missionary was the important motivation to sow more seeds and raise them.

In fact, the proclamation of the Gospel that humans are created in God's image, and thus

¹ This term was used to indicate the opposition to the Western study, which was Christianity that came from the West. Je-Woo Chae, who found *dong-hak* (Eastern study), mentioned "we were born and live in the East. How in the world can people call the West as the East and the East as the West?" For more details, see the page 17, *Traces of one hundred-year history of Korean Christian Women* (Seoul: Min-Jung Sa, 1985).

² Ibid., 16.

³ Ibid., 18.

women have spirit and men and women are equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28), was a revolutionary vision which announced new life and freedom for Korean women when Protestantism was introduced to Korea at the late period of Yi dynasty. I believe that this revolutionary vision was possibly working because of women's constructing power of their own reality. Women at that time were able to integrate their life experience with the essence of the Gospel. Although the Gospel was presented, if women did not connect it to their experiences, I believe that it did not work as a new vision for life and freedom. However, this explosive energy of liberation has become distorted and suppressed as it interacts with patriarchal culture throughout later history.⁴

The church environment in Korea tends to be patriarchal and hierarchical. Discrimination against women occurs; therefore it is difficult for women to develop spirituality in open, encouraging, and holistic ways. My basic understanding of women's issues departs from spirituality. I define spirituality as a power to focus on God who fosters life, and live out this fostering spirit of life emphasizing human dignity, equality, and justice. Thus, spirituality is a process of being close to God through Jesus Christ, and thus it is ultimately following Jesus.

Spiritual growth emerges from people's inter-relationship with one another. It means that spiritual growth is an inter-dependent faith journey rather than dependence on particular clergy. Being dependent, people have difficulty to listen to and validate their experiences, which causes serious harm to women. From an educational perspective, one way of the flowing of interpretation and communication is not productive at all, because it does not provide open spaces where people can learn "the faith tradition...and seek to live together in ways that are faithful to God."⁵ Moreover, it hinders people from interaction, which is the essence in learning and teaching. This hindrance, in turn, does not foster a positive Christian identity and faith formation as well as transformation.

Identity is dependent upon many factors: love, trust, respect or recognition, and ultimately, freedom. It is both personal and communal. To deny someone the respect or validity of their communal identity is to undermine also their personal identity. This general understanding of the human condition shapes our way of life, our way of relating to self, others, and the world.⁶ A sense of self is not formed in the process of separation from others, but within the mutual interplay of relationships with others. Furthermore, as women move into authentic connections with people in their lives, women find more common ground with them, leading them toward an enlarged sense of community and of possibilities for social change.

To address how women indeed grow spiritually, I explored the life stories of women who have and are making a difference. In particular, this paper will introduce life narratives from two Korean Presbyterian women to observe how storytelling empowered them and became a seed for their commitment to justice and love. Thinking through this framework, I will propose how the practice of Christian religious education can assist women to live out their lives more responsibly and justly. I will also include some possibilities that the church can explore the ways in which to be consistent in reinforcing teachings of the home.

Research Method

⁴ Hyun Hye Yang, "Women and The Church in the History of Korean Church" in *The Church and Feminist Theology* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1997), 136.

⁵ Jack L. Seymour, ed., *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 118.

⁶ Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1998), 71.

Different epistemological and ontological assumptions present different understanding of the complexity of social life and the nature of power relations. Although I acknowledge that women's varied experiences of cultural differences, social divisions and power relations exist, and that other factors influence women's lives in different ways, I believe that patriarchal power is a key mechanism in the oppression of women. Women's issues are not a product of thought, but instead, socially constructed.⁷ Therefore, I tried to combine experience, ideas, and reality in this research project. Based on this frame of thought, my research of Korean Presbyterian women's narratives relies on qualitative, narrative, and grounded theory.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative and interactive methods are the most appropriate way to produce data on the realities of women's lives. It encourages researchers to give voice to personal, experiential and emotional aspects of existence.⁸ My research project draws on women's experiences as a theoretical resource and has a feminist epistemology behind the work, reflected in both what I seek to know and how I think knowing occurs. I believe that knowing occurs in relation and story. Carol Hess is helpful at this point. The fullness of knowing occurs in a conversational context where there is fullness of participation in those seeking to know.⁹ Because of this reason - the qualitative method is an appropriate way to generate data on women's lives as well as to give my voice to the project - I chose a qualitative method for my research project.

Narrative Approach to Human Lives

Narrative involves approaches and traditions that emphasize personal experience as expressed or communicated in language.¹⁰ Based on this definition, narrative inquiry has the assumption of the storied nature of human experience. Storytelling is a vital way of expressing oneself and one's world to others by bringing different aspects of the self together into a unifying whole.¹¹ Stories help people organize their thoughts, providing a narrative for human intentions and interpersonal events. Therefore, it is important to have a narrative approach in order to understand one person's unifying whole and the world.

Narrative is cultural in its understanding of human lives. Each life story is situated in an ideological context, and self-understanding is shaped by culture. Lives are lived in culture – in language, social relations, communities, in the web of beliefs, discourses, and so on. Thus, in studying lives we are studying culture as well.¹² In careful listening to how the stories evolved, I argue, we can see a telling is constricted by the social, ideological, and cultural setting. This means that turning to narrative can help us understand the life in question and see the cultural as well as the historical surround. In narrative, we can see the identity of the individual self who exerts agency in life on the one hand and the influence of society and social context on the other. Thus, narrative can serve as a bridge between people and environment across the chasm of time and space.

⁷ Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland, *Feminist Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, SAGE publications, 2002), 9.

⁸ Ramazanoglu and Holland, *Feminist Methodology*, 155.

⁹ Carol Hess, *Caretakers of Our Common House* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 55.

¹⁰ Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich, eds. *Identity and Story*, 4.

¹¹ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993), 27.

¹² Mark Freeman, "Why Narrative?" In *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7(1-4) (1997), 172.

Procedures

The method employed in my study was qualitative research that relies on in-depth interviews which emphasize narrative methodology. In particular, I used the snowball approach and interviewed fourteen women. The snowball method is to identify an interviewee on the basis of the criteria. At the end of each interview, I asked the person being interviewed to identify others whom I might interview. Interviews continued in snowball until I was hearing the same themes over and over. Interviews were conducted from June to August 2005, in Korea. For an interview, I used three structured questions as well as open-ended questions and subsequent questions for probing.

I attempted to ensure that interviewees generally reflect church women at large in terms of social class, professionals, education, and so like. But mostly, they were middle-aged Presbyterian women (between middle 40's and 60's), who have been immersed in Korean culture more deeply than the younger generation. Specifically, other criteria were the following:

- Woman with a certain kind of commitment to the social action and perspectives on disciples that work in equality and mutuality.
- Woman who values being women as God's precious creature.
- Woman who is aware of structural wrongness in the church but is able to get out of limits (what is there), is empowered, and resists as well as demands change.
- Woman who had demonstrated commitment for at least three years.
- Woman who has some consistency between what she professes and how she lives – at church, home, and in the practice of their commitment outside the church. I expected that this ethical congruence was assured through the interviewee who introduces the next interviewee.

After I gathered my materials, I used a grounded theory from a constructivist perspective to analyze the data. I think that the grounded theory approach allows the researcher to form and shape meaning from the on-going process of the collection and analysis of data. This method also allows the researcher to establish the links among data and to forge these links into themes. I chose a grounded theory because “it accounts for variation; it is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered.”¹³ Moreover, the purpose of grounded theory methods is “to generate theory, not to verify it,”¹⁴ which fits the purpose of my project.

Autobiographical Data of Two Women

In this paper, I will introduce two women with pseudonyms. One is Mrs. A. She is fifty years old and became a Christian when she was nineteen years old. As a teen, she worked at the factory with lower wages with many working hours, not to mention its poor working conditions. When the interview was conducted, she was a volunteer chairperson of the board of directors of the medical cooperative association, which was founded to provide the modest health care for the poor people. The other is Mrs. B. She is sixty-two years old and began going to church when she was a middle school student. Mrs. B, with a long time involvement in the

¹³ Kathy Charmaz, “Grounded Theory” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Noaman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., (CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2000), 510.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 513.

YWCA, is very outspoken in a calm manner. She used to speak directly when she faced some unjust situations in the church. She had lots of wounds from doing so because there was not much support. Some people blamed her as a person who destroyed the church. She is a member of lay people's church and is involved in the new way movement. Both Mrs. A and Mrs. B were raised in a non-Christian family.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Home

To be at home has different meanings to different people. But a positive sense of being at home arises from experiences that connect people in trustworthy ways. A firmly developed stage of early trust is essential in order to develop autonomy. However, this trust may not develop if the environment is not intimate enough. Because of this reason, "quality of the maternal [and paternal] relationship is important in the task of forming the ego."¹⁵ In addition, an adequate holding environment is important for the child to develop his or her own innate potential.¹⁶ If the culture or environment is not supportive, identity would not be developed. Therefore, a supportive culture and environment is necessary for forming a sense of ego identity and the development of innate potential.

Home is important for all people. Self, other, and the relationship are mutually interconnected, and the home is the first place the self experiences and mutually forms a relationship. Following Erikson, intimacy means the "capacity to commit [herself] to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises."¹⁷ Why does intimacy matter? Because when women carry out their particular discipleship, they may face situations which may cause their sacrifice or their compromises. Then they need courage to keep up their commitment, and intimacy can foster that ability. Intimacy influences one's relationship to others. In order to have intimacy, the person needs to have identity and in order to have identity, the person needs to have intimacy.

Both identity and intimacy develop together, especially in Eastern culture where people often struggle to have a close relationship even before they build their identity. It is intimacy that has more importance in the development of trust and autonomy from the perspective of Korean way of thinking, because the culture in the East seeks harmony among people rather than the individual freedom. Easterners are attuned to the feelings of others and strive for interpersonal harmony.¹⁸ Carol Gilligan observes that identity precedes intimacy for men, but these tasks are fused together for women. Intimacy goes along with identity, as a woman comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others.¹⁹ Home is the first place where a dialogical relationship between identity and intimacy is practiced.

I have learned that for these particular women, home was important in particular ways.

¹⁵ Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: Norton, 1980), 90.

¹⁶ D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturational Process and the Facilitating Environment* (Madison: International University Press, 1965), 43.

¹⁷ Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950), 263.

¹⁸ Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 76.

¹⁹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 12.

Those ways are receiving love with equal treatment from parents, learning through a mother's action which shared things with neighbors, and story telling. These home patterns seem to have assisted these women in particular ways to be committed leaders and to maintain that commitment. I suggest that their passionate stories about home tell us a lot, not only in terms of an educational perspective, but also from the perspective of culture and its interaction with Christianity. In addition, their stories give us insights for identity formation as well as issues of love and nurture, which would influence the development of the method for Christian education.

Mrs. A, whose family was poor, confessed that she received enough love from her parents as well as her brothers:

I have five older brothers and two younger sisters. I was poor but received love so much: from my brothers, father, and parents... So I did not have any discrimination based on sex. When I worked at the factory, received an education of consciousness reform, and involved in movement for improving women laborers' right, I talked to the supervisor or managers directly. Other women laborers did not speak up. As you know, women who were raised in the family where girls had a sense of the men's superiority did not speak up. We were educated together, but they did not speak. When the managers yelled at them, they did not fight against them. I, however, did so. I did speak what I wanted to say, and I confronted them openly. As I reflect on those days, I was not afraid of men and did not have fear of men in my heart because I did not have any sexual discrimination at home.

Mrs. A's story tells us that if one does not have nurturing connections to other people at home, one may not know how to nurture other people. But because of love and care from her father, Mrs. A was able to love other people. It also manifests that love and care offered an opportunity for Mrs. A to form strong self-esteem. Because Mrs. A had a strong self-identity, she was able to speak up openly against the male managers, who had power and were authoritative. Not to have fear means that she feels equal in power dynamics. Because there was no fear, she was able to speak freely.

Storytelling can promote Justice

Stories are tied to love and care in the family because love from home gives them the stories. These stories are the very "language of the child – the one great and beautiful way in which [one] comes to find [oneself] and [one's] ideals."²⁰ Through stories, people find and make meaning. Storytelling is "a most important form of interpretation,"²¹ but it is often neglected in practice. Dan McAdams acknowledges that storytelling is a "fundamental way of expressing ourselves and our world to others."²² Thus, in this section, I want to present how story telling exerts power over these women and their faith journey.

The first example is Mrs. B. She praised her mother and recollected her as the most

²⁰ Margaret W. Eggleson, *The Use of the Story in Religious Education* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), 21.

²¹ Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 135.

²² McAdams, *The Stories We Live By*, 27.

influential person for her:

My mother was a special person. She did not study much, but she taught us about what it means to become a human and a right person. My mother read so many books. What I remember from my early childhood is that every night, my mother called us to sit around and told three stories. Through story telling, she did so many things to us which any other educators could not do. As I reflected on those stories, they were like, in general, promoting the good and punishing the wicked. Through stories, I learned truth that the good people win at the end. I also learned how to overcome wisely when one faces the great trouble, and how to live by caring about each other and by giving love. I learned all of these from my mother through story telling. Looking back upon the past, I think my mother a great educator. I learned so many things through my mother, especially an education for human nature, compared to other families. After college and having a career life, I feel more keenly about it. Mother's story telling became a good education and made me to live as who I am now.

Mrs. B's story illustrates that story telling can promote justice and peace because, first, her mother's telling about what it means to become a human and a right person, can create a sense of humanity and human dignity. Second, in hearing about the activities of others, Mrs. B might be able to widen the range of her own experience by entering into that story. Third, through stories of the good and the wicked, Mrs. B could unconsciously establish higher ethical standards. True stories help us envision for the future or enable us to create a world that is more caring and humane. True stories carry and nurture us by "helping us to see things as they are as well as what they can become"²³ Story has an impact on our lives.

Storytelling and Imagination

Mrs. B continued her story:

I can still remember that my mother made us play "gold ax and silver ax" [famous story among Korean children]. We wrote down lines of the play, I played a role of woodcutter, and we made a well by putting the quilt around the room (**laugh**), then went out to cut logs with taking an ax on the shoulder, even those things, she made a space like this. My mother was a special person. In fact, she graduated only from elementary school. But she read a lot of books for us. She was full of creative ideas, so I guess she offered us creative way of life. I think my mother's influence was huge.

There is a sense of creativity in this comment. Mrs. B's mother incorporated all the multiple intelligence of her daughters: story telling, singing, dancing, laughter, play, inter-relationship. Mrs. B's memoir of her mother shows us the power of story in "learning creative ways of living," forming values, and understanding Christianity, even when the stories do not have anything to do with Christianity.

Drawing on Kieran Egan and Dan Nadaner's argument, "stimulating the imagination is a

²³ William R. White, *Stories for Telling* (Minneapolis:Augsburg Pub., 1986), 11.

prerequisite to making any activity educational,”²⁴ Mrs. B might be involved in the story with her imagination. Since the imagination is an inner experience, it is difficult to observe. However, stories stimulated a projection of Mrs. B’s unconsciousness. Through the practice of imagination, she was able to find and formulate meaning, and her emotions could have been intertwined with thoughts. This process of imagination and projection is indeed drawing out of a person something potential or latent, which is the meaning of education. For Mrs. B, the imagination became the source of thought. In addition, Mrs. B’s mother told stories every night. Telling stories every night is not an easy practice. Certainly, it was tied to love and care of her mother.

Non-Christian stories/teachings can influence Christian Spirituality

When asked how her childhood experiences affect her practice of faith, Mrs. B spoke:

I was not a Christian when my mother told us those stories. However, I do not conclude that only Christianity can educate well for human nature in light of my experience. When I began to know Christianity based on my mother’s teaching and education, I could easily connect (relate) Christian belief to those of my mother’s teaching, and thus was able to enlarge them. When concepts of love, sacrifice, perseverance, and compassion in Christianity are integrated with my mother’s teaching, I was able to understand and accept Christian stories and teaching in much richer way, and more easily and fast. I was also able to judge Christianity as really good truth. Without my mother’s stories, I would have thought only with stories in the church. Because I had a preparatory stage, those experiences made Christianity to approach me in an abundant way.

This comment suggests that non-Christian stories can influence a Christian’s spirituality and discipleship in terms of expanding or connecting Christian belief to stories. Because Mrs. B already had notions of the good and the bad, human nature, truth, and so like, it was easy for her to understand Christian teachings by relating them to earlier teachings. Being influenced by her mother who emphasized education on humanism, about a human being with integrity, she was able to understand and connect the Christian teachings to her life. This interaction between her mother and herself became time for preparation even before she became a Christian. Because of this preparation, she approached Christianity with a rich and flourishing manner. Thus, more stories from different cultures can become powerful sources of richness as well as deepen Christian belief.

For example, Buddhism, which favors the importance of *saeng-myong* [similar to living with breath] of all creation, can be helpful for people to learn interconnectedness since it emphasizes the circulation of life. Our life is ongoing and never stops. After life, an animal can be born again as a human, and a human can be born again as an animal after life. Moreover, Buddhism emphasizes the self-emptiness which is similar to the concept of kenosis in Christian terms. However, self-emptiness reflects on the self as a part of the whole from the perspective of interconnectedness: Everything is connected, so humans should not be excessively attached to things. This particular teaching parallels Christian spirituality which aims at fostering life-

²⁴ Egan Kieran and Dan Naderer, eds. *Imagination and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), ix.

giving spirit and relationship to all God's creatures.

In Buddhist teaching, a mind of love judges things from the perspective of others, which is similar to empathy: To understand suffering and joy of people is to care and think from that person's perspective. Furthermore, Buddhism talks about loving all creatures.²⁵ *Ja-bi* is the most important teaching in Buddhism. *Ja* is a mind to give joy to *jung-saeng* [means all living creatures], and *bi* means a mind to remove the suffering of *joong-saeng*. *Ja-bi* emphasizes service. This *ja-bi* is similar to Christian love and Confucian *jen*.²⁶ In order to be faithful to the spirit of *ja-bi*, we must love all living creatures. This means that we need to treat all living creatures as an end not as a means. Nowadays, many religions teach the importance of love but fight against each other. So, to love is natural, but how to love is the question.

The Buddhist concept *Sa*[means four]-*moo-ryang-shim* suggests four practical ways to love. First, we must have a loving mind and be willing to serve others. Second, we should not be jealous of another (those who are more outstanding/excellent than ourselves). Third, we must keep a generous mind which can celebrate others' joy. Fourth, we need to become less attached to things. This means to treat all living creatures equally without a biased mind and be moderate (middle path).²⁷

In addition, *Pal*[means eight]-*jong-do*, which has an image of a straightened street, gives us insight for practice for this teaching. The contents of *paljongdo* can be divided into three in large categories: to think rightly, to move one's body rightly, and to reflect rightly. To think rightly is to see justly and think based on that seeing. Without right thinking, right action cannot come out. The power to act steady is from right thinking. To move one's body rightly means that the words become the seeds of the future. Repetition of words plays a decisive role in one's actions. Through right reflection, a new world can be unfolded.²⁸ Buddhism is teaching that emphasizes practice. Thus, to study theory is to practice. Emphasis on practice can also be related to Christian praxis.

Christianity is religion of love, and Buddhism is religion of *ja-bi*. The core of *Samooryangshim* is to have a mind of love based on wisdom. Love and *ja-bi* are similar ideas, but they are different in terms of real practice. Christian love is based on absolute love for God (faith), and *ja-bi* in Buddhist teaching is based on wisdom which emphasizes giving up excessive fondness for people and things. However, both Christianity and Buddhism have a commonality. Christianity emphasizes belief in God, and Buddhism teaches people to live according to the ways Buddha taught, which take root in belief, too. Therefore, having belief is the commonality between these two religious teachings.

Confucian Teachings and Christian Love

Mrs. A shared her influence from her father, who was a man of Confucianism, through storytelling:

My father used to say, "Live in goodness. I have seen so many cases. The end result of being and doing good exist until the next generation. The end of being

²⁵ Byong-Wook Yi, *Essay of Buddhist Philosophy* (Seoul: Un-ju Sa, 2004), 95.

²⁶ Ibid., 92.

²⁷ Ibid., 93.

²⁸ Ibid., 108-110.

and doing bad will be gone even before the next generation.” Then, he cited some real examples: “Did you see who [someone’s name] and who? Their parents persecuted the poor and the needy. So, how did the end come about? Look, they turned out that way.” Then, he told of some people who had difficult lives, for instance, a person who lived as a slave. She is my friend’s mother. “Look at her. Although she lived hard life, she shared things with neighbors among poverty and difficulty. Look at her later life, which became improved and good. Sharing life with neighbor goes to the next generation.” My father used to tell us a story like that.

To have enough love and support from parents is very important not only in a sense of building a sense of equality between men and women, but also in helping to form a sense of cherishing other people as who they are. Loving does not refer only to the momentary overflowing of good feelings toward someone else. It accompanies an emotional attachment to another human being, one “predicated not only on one’s dependency needs, but also on one’s valuing and cherishing the other as the real person he or she is.”²⁹ Because Mrs. A’s father had Confucian values, his storytelling originated from Confucian values and culture.

Confucianism is more like moral teaching and has an ethical dimension. Confucian teaching in terms of extending love toward neighbor was actively constructed and practiced in their home. This particular ethical code strengthened their understanding on Jesus’ teaching about love. From this point of view, Confucianism was a positive factor among these women.

The concept of *jen* in the Confucian philosophy is the determining characteristic of a good human. *Jen* is also the continuum of goodness or virtue, which includes all human beings as equal. The principle of *jen* implies the duty on the part of a human to perfect and benefit others; in so doing, one will perfect and benefit oneself. A human, thus, can be seen in regard to his or her relationships with other humans.³⁰ *Jen* is intended to represent the ultimate balance and perfection that gives the value both to an individual and to the whole humanity.³¹

From a Confucian perspective, heaven contains a series of elements and principles used in creating the world. Everything is born from Heaven. The human is the closest to Heaven. When Heaven creates a person, it does so by endowing the newborn with characteristics representing her or his basic nature of personality. Human personality is divided into two types. One is physiological, which is related to the body and the five senses. The other is a higher level of personality, which is virtue. In the heart of compassion there is a seed of human virtue. In Confucian belief, fulfillment of one’s physiological needs depends on heaven, whereas the realization of the virtues depends upon the individual’s own efforts. Because of this reason, the central focus of Confucianism is development of the virtues rather than physical development.

The aim of Confucian development is to cultivate one’s heaven-endowed nature and thus become truly human (*jen*). The goal of development is to actualize this potential in thought and action. The foundation of *jen* is love, meaning love for one’s parents, for one’s neighbors, and ultimately for all people.

Jen is understood as the underlying principle, the primary motive of all action and behavior, and the essence of human nature and Heaven. There are three ways of practicing *jen*.

²⁹ Althea Horne, *Being and Loving* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990), xiii.

³⁰ Chung-ying Cheng, *Inquiry Into Goodness* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1971), 4-5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

The first is to have sincerity in dealing with others. The second is not to do to others what you yourself do not like. The third is to cultivate one's virtues, so that *jen* can be embodied in one's behavior and attitudes. The first two are used to describe the procedures of *jen* as *love*, while the third is taken as the basis of practice of *jen*.³²

Love is the underlying basis for Christian doctrine: God is love, Jesus is love, and faith in them is also love. Both *jen* and *agape* are closely related to human goodness. The Confucian ideal is the perfect human. To be a human is to possess *jen*.³³ Self-cultivation is not to seek the ideal beyond human existence, nor is it contemplation. It is like digging a well. The deeper one digs, the nearer one is to one's true self. It is also a practice of developing humanity in social contexts, like doing one's duties as a member of family, community and humankind.

Because of the unity between *jen* and humanity, for a Confucian, whatever one does contributes to one's final enlightenment. Without humanity and human unity with the universe, there would be no *jen* at all. For Christians, however, there can be no enlightenment nor is there an ideal to be realized because of human sinfulness. Although the Holy Spirit can be present in human nature so that humanity may seek the ideal out of one's own nature.³⁴ Christian love comes from the divine source rather than from origins in human nature like Confucianism.

The potential goodness in human nature is realized in cultivating *jen*, both in the heart and in community life. In Confucianism, humanity and virtue are promoted and refined as a fundamental principle of universal love. Love is at the center of the meanings of Confucian *jen*, which embraces all beings and things, and is recognized as the integrating force of the Confucian world. In Christianity, love is revealed by God's grace, and God's love is the model and source of all other forms of love.³⁵ Christian love parallels the Confucian teaching that *jen* underlies morality and virtue.

Mrs. A's sense of love is so clear. She describes the spirit of the Gospel as "to put Jesus' love into action." Realizing this mission, she understands that God has called her to help people experience and taste God's love:

When I was working at the factory in the 70's, I worked almost for hundred hours a month sleeping about five hours a day on the floor of the factory, and got up next morning and continued to work. I was suffering due to several diseases such as stomach problems and whole body aches, and my parents were not able to help me because of poverty. No one understood me, but the association for industrial mission recognized me. That is the faith that came to me (**a tearful voice**). When I was really in a desperately difficult situation, God gave me a hope. Thus when it comes to Jesus' love, I remember that experience.

Mrs. A's image of Jesus is love in action. She sees that Christianity as just talking or listening has limitation; thus, the church without any actual practice of love makes it hard for her to accept and attend. The feeling of practicing Jesus' love is important to her.

Mrs. A's comment resonates with Mrs. B's mother who told a story about the good and the bad. Mrs. A's story is more detailed because it has actual examples. The difference

³² Xinzhong Yao, *Confucianism and Christianity* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996), 71-72.

³³ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

between Mrs. A and Mrs. B is Mrs. A emphasized practicing love that she received from her father while Mrs. B emphasized justice. Although both of them were from the poor family, their emphasis in faith journey is different. Two of these women stated that concern about other people came from education at home. Stories they heard at home were very informative in their understanding of Jesus' love later. Since these women heard of the importance of sharing with other people before they became Christian, they were easily able to connect this idea to Christian teaching of love and Jesus' action.

Love and care from the parents influenced these women. Love needs culture and a social context in order to last and develop. It was family that helped love to be developed for these women. The analysis of the life stories at home revealed evidence of teaching and formation of the identity as well as concern for neighbor.

Experience of being loved fully by their parents has been accumulated in their consciousness implicitly and explicitly, and generated a sense of trust. This trust advanced their confidence in doing things in their own. When the relationship with parents was intimate enough, they were able to form a firmly developed trust which was essential for the development of autonomy. Autonomy was one factor that helped these women to name what went wrong in the church.

Repetition of the practices of certain values at home was important in their life. Data suggests that childhood and experiences we have as we grow up are important, and they lie dormant in our consciousness. Therefore, data challenges the way we educate and practice at home.

Implications for Christian Religious Education

Support the Home as the Ground of Commitment

Love, trust, and nurture from parents helped these women develop a sense of who they were but also ultimately became a power to act in their later life. Home provides the child a primary space for interaction, emotional bonding, and self-esteem. A loving environment provides nourishment and respect, and Christian religious educators should support and encourage the home in partnership so that the home becomes a place to practice and connect life and faith.

Parents are educators. They are far more than important. One way their influence is shown is through storytelling. These women learned ethical values and need to care about neighbors from their parents, mostly from their mothers. Stories from their mothers were laid at the bottom of their heart and in their consciousness, then became a part of who they are. Storytelling was like sowing seeds for love and justice for these women. Stories can orient the heart and "soul of a people to the cosmos."³⁶ Adults may assume that children will not understand heavy topics such as justice. However, as women's sharing in this research project implies, they were able to understand high ethical codes at an early age. Stories can become good ways to foster encounters with otherness and interdependence. Therefore, story telling as a vehicle for Christian learning should be taken seriously into account.

Storytelling can model and invite Faithful Living

Stories have power. Through stories, people learn creative ways of living, find meaning,

³⁶ Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 228.

and form meaning. By being involved in the story, their imagination was stimulated. Through the practice of imagination, they were able to find and formulate meaning, and the imagination became the source of thought. In addition, non-Christian stories can influence a Christian's spirituality and discipleship in terms of expanding or connecting Christian belief to stories. Richness of stories - dealing with the notions of the good and the bad, human nature and life - from other cultures such as Confucianism and Buddhism, can deepen Christian belief and could be used for positive connection. Therefore, I propose that non-Christian stories should be explored actively for positive connection.

In addition, faith is a structure of meaning. Jack Seymour and other authors claimed the structure through which "people order their world on the basis of convictions about trust, expectation, and value."³⁷ From this perspective, faith is related to value and trust, and faith is meaning-perspective. Forming value from storytelling is also meaning-making. According to the authors, faith grows from basic experiences of trust and fidelity in childhood. Therefore, life at home also influences the growth of one's faith later. Christian religious education should find metaphors of an interdependent wholeness that can help children to move faithfully into the future.

The mother's influence through storytelling and involvement in caring for the needy neighbor was revealed more tremendously than we could imagine. Some people might say that mothers have jobs and do not have time to have such influence on children. However, most of the mothers of these women were single mothers in economically poor conditions. Thus, the willingness to have concern about children as well as to share time and energy with their children is more important than having good living conditions with enough material goods. The role of mother or significant adults on the children in Christian education should be taken into account.

Storytelling is a process involving relationships. Story time is a powerful opportunity for parents and children to share common lessons. Their minds, linked by their imaginations, journey together.³⁸ In this journey, children should be taken seriously and thus, there should be a dialogical relationship between the parents and children in this process so that children's imagination can be fostered. Imagination is a powerful but neglected in learning, and we need to rethink our teaching practices and curricula with a more balanced appreciation of children's intellectual and creative capacities.

Each and every culture has particular narratives and stories that are passed down from generation to generation, and they provide "narrative structures that both enable and constrain the thoughts, feelings, and actions of everyday experience."³⁹ I propose that cross-cultural interdependence should be actively sought for new educational paradigm whose aims are love and justice. There is diversity in commonality as well as commonality in diversity among many things in human life. Through sharing the particular stories, we can reach universality. 'Love your neighbor as yourself' reminds us of the importance of respecting other people and their lives, which includes their religion and culture. We have to teach and learn this kind of recognition. As I have described in the cases of Mrs. A and Mrs. B, stories are a natural means to this end because stories simultaneously remind people of what is universal while celebrating what is unique to their culture.

³⁷ Jack Seymour, Margaret Ann Crain, and Joseph Crockett, *Educating Christians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 49.

³⁸ Charles A. Smith, *From Wonder To Wisdom* (New York: New American Library, 1989), 6-7.

³⁹ Mark B. Tappan, and Martin J. Packer, eds. *Narrative and Storytelling* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1991), 10.

The biblical injunction to ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ speaks to an important principle – unless we love ourselves, we are unable to love our neighbor. This brings us to the issue of identity. For Mrs. A and Mrs. B, their own sense of self was important not only for themselves, but also for their commitment to social action. In a similar vein, children need to understand their own cultural identity, which can enable them to deal responsibly and sensitively with differences in other cultures.

Stories can help this process of self-discovery as well as reaching out for a connectedness to people and the universe by being creatively and intimately shared.

Therefore, intercultural sharing should be adopted in Christian religious education in order to become inter-connected with the larger world.

Foster a Close Relationship between Church and Home

The church is a place of identity, where children and adults come to know who they are as Christians. Just as home is the first place where parents educate children through the process of socialization, the church as a home for believers should educate its members through values, attitudes, care, and love in a way of influencing and sustaining their identities. Through the socialization of the home, people obtain a sense of the self. In a similar way, the church can become a faith community where everyone gets love, trust, and support. In order to do so, the church should become a hospitable, welcoming, and loving community. From the result of data analysis, I find the church can and should find ways in which people can connect its teaching at home. The following can give us some insights for the church as a loving and caring community.

First, the church can do similar things for its members just as parents did for their children at home. How the communities of Christian believers speak about God represents what the community affirms as its highest good and most authentic truth. The church can create and promote certain values for its members, which will become their identity. A capacity for connection, for creative and provocative response to sufferings and problems lies at the center of faith. Thus, the church should promote values for justice and love which the members of the faith community can use faithfully for response to problems in the world.

Second, a faithful ecology of the church can be and needs to be formed intentionally. In order to do so, the church can create and provide a deep and profound emotional bonding and emotional care. Just as having a healthy and loving family life was necessary for women’s growth as well as conscience development, the church should create a loving and supportive space for its members so that members can grow in faith and develop their conscience. One of the roles of the faith community is nurturing and educating for a life of faith. So the entire congregation is important because the ecology of the congregation is all connected organically. They learn and teach each other in the webs of relationship. C. Ellis Nelson affirmed the role and place of the congregation in nurturing a life of faith: “Faith is communicated by a community of believers, and the meaning of faith is developed by its members out of their history, by their interaction with each other, and in relationship to the events that take place in their lives.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the church should become an emotionally supportive and connected place in which every member is loved and in which they fulfill their need to be wanted and accepted by belonging to a community of faith.

⁴⁰ C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1967), 10.

Reality is socially constructed, and humans' development is influenced by the context. Thus, social context is important in learning. C. Ellis Nelson claims that the agents of faith communication are parents, adults, and small groups in the church.⁴¹ These agents are major figures to have influence on its members. How these agents live out their faith affects the reality of the church, because people depend on significant others for the stories that explain our lives and how our people live.

Third, parents and the church should have a close relationship. For example, parents can do things with their children that would support what the church is offering. If what the church is teaching is tied to and re-affirms the parents' teaching at home, children's imagination, perception, and intuition will be stimulated. In this way, children make connections between what they learn at church and what they do at home. What the child learns in the church will impact the rest of his or her life. Even though it may be difficult for the children and the youth to understand it completely, discipleship should be taught and practiced in the church. Christian religious educators need to explore ways to deliver the basic concept clearly. In this way, children and youth may not have a biased perception, and will have an open attitude from their young age. In some sense, discipleship is one's self-decision. Christian religious education should foster the development of self-control and self-expression so that they become free to ask and think about the direction of discipleship they will have. In light of women's experiences with storytelling in this study project, childhood would not be too early for this kind of teaching.

Fourth, the church should create a space for learning where questions and experiences of faith and life can be shared freely. Carol Hess describes the tension between hard dialogue and deep connections, which takes place in conversational education. She says that "the background for hard dialogue in communities of faith is our deep connection in God."⁴² Through sharing, members of the faith community envision their hope and commitments for living faithfully in the world. However, this task is for both the congregation and individual adult learners who belong to the faith community.

⁴¹ Ibid., 94.

⁴² Hess, 209.

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