

Stories and Storytellers

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If I had been born two hundred years ago as one of my ancestors in Ireland, I think I would have been a *Shanahee* (pronounced *Sha'na hee* or *Sha'na kee*, depending on the dialect of Gaelic used). The *Shanahee* is an Irish storyteller. His love of stories and his knowledge of the storycraft made him one of the most valued and beloved figures of the Celtic culture of Ireland. Stories are one of the most common means of communicating beliefs, ideas, and values as well as history. The *Shanahee* kept the Celtic people informed and the Celtic tradition alive through stories. They were the historians of their world and the gatekeepers of Celtic culture. This tradition is not unique to Ireland; it has through the centuries been the primary means of communicating culture from one generation to another.

The Culture of Stories

Ours is a story filled culture. Stories are everywhere. We all hear stories, we all tell stories. Our world is filled with books and printed materials, all of which present stories in various forms. We are entertained daily by stories, whether at the theater, in films, by television, listening to the news, in our music, through reading, or just talking to one another. It would seem that our culture is obsessed with stories. In fact, it would be fairly accurate to say that every culture of human history has a passion for stories. From the time we are born we are told stories. In most every hour of the day we are somehow involved with stories, we even dream stories, the very life we live on this earth is itself a story - our story.

History and Stories

If one wants to know what any culture of any time was like, he

goes back and looks at the stories that have been passed down by that culture and about that culture. Whether ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, the Far East, Europe, or America, one looks at the stories about the people to learn something of their culture.

That part of Scripture we know as the Old Testament (called *Tanakh* by Jews) is one of the best examples of this. Our knowledge of the history and culture of the Middle East is greatly informed by this collection of stories. Another example of this is found in the writings of the Greek and Romans, from which the modern historian draws his most essential information about who these people were. These writings consist of philosophical treaties, collections of mythological literature, and historical writings. The most essential data informing us about these people, however, is found in the stories within this collection of writings. Even the philosophical treaties of Socrates are contained in dialogues, written in story format, by his student Plato.

Education and Stories

The greatest and most influential teachers of the whole of civilized history have been good storytellers. In fact, education is, and always has been, a storytelling craft. Whether teachers of history, literature, philosophy, religion, the arts, or science, storytelling is one of the most essential parts of the presentation of their discipline. The very heart of every educational center, whether school, college, institute, or university, is the facility housing the books containing the stories of the people of that culture, the library. Filled with books full of stories, it holds the place and prestige of a virtual "temple" of the tradition of the culture that it preserves.

Religion and Stories

Without exception, all of the major religions of the world are belief-disbelief systems centered in stories. We are taught these stories in order to come to belief, we act these stories out in our worship, and we pass them along to all part of the community, especially the generations to follow. This we do to the end that when

we are no longer a part of this life our beliefs will live on through the stories we have passed along to our heirs, who will, themselves, pass the stories from which they have drawn their beliefs along to the next generation.

Moral Values and Stories

Almost every culture on earth has drawn its concepts of right and wrong, its moral values, from its stories. They pass what they have learned from these stories and their own experiences on to the next generation through the stories they tell and the stories told about them. The most valued books, from the oldest to the most contemporary communities of man, are those books that reflect the most valued moral standards of that community. The hero figures most venerated by men are those who have exemplified the highest level of human behavior, and we preserve their memory and venerate their names by telling their stories.

Biblical Stories And Storytellers

Stories usually begin as oral traditions, then, when they are written down, become the corporate literature of a people, i.e., their history, or the interpretation of who or what they were as a people. The oral tradition of the Hebrews became the Hebrew Scriptures, which are a collection of their stories and an interpretation of these stories by various writers. The oral traditions of the Greeks were called *muthos* (i.e., stories of gods and goddesses), which in English we call, "myth." Myths, to the Greeks, however, were not considered to be untrue because they were called myths; they were myths because they were stories about the interaction of deities with mankind. Whether they were true or untrue depended on the particulars of the stories themselves not by fact that they were called myths.

A Good Story

In addition to *muthoi* (myths), the Greeks had another word for story. It was the word *angelia*, meaning, "a message, news, report,

narrative, tale, or story." We are most familiar with this word as it appears with the prefix "eu" (good) in the word, *eu-angelion*, meaning, "a good or happy message, good news, a good report, narrative, tale, or story." This word is translated in the New Testament as, "gospel." The gospel is the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth; i.e., the story of God coming into the world to deliver mankind from the power to which he had enslaved himself.

The Gospel as God's Story

The New Testament uses this word *euangelion* (transliterated in English as *evange'ion*) in 74 occurrences for the good message or story of the Christ event, and translates it as "gospel" in every occurrence. The verb *euangelizo*, "to tell or proclaim a message or story," is found 53 times in the New Testament.

The significance of this word, and its meaning for the reader of the New Testament, should not be missed. It was initially translated in the earliest English translations from Greek into English by the Anglo-Saxon term "*godspel*," meaning, "good/God's spell or story." Because of this translation, the meaning of the word "gospel" has become "the good story" or "God's story." One should not lose sight of the fact that the idea of "story" is intrinsic within the original Greek word for "gospel," (*euangelion*).

The gospel, then, is the story of God's coming into the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to bring about a deliverance of humankind from the dark powers of this world. The Apostle Paul called this story the very power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16).

Conclusion

What is the point of all this discussion of stories? Just this, stories, without question, have a very dominant and appealing presence in our culture. Everyone uses stories to communicate. We, as disciples of Jesus, have the most appealing and powerful story the world has ever known. It is an escapable fact that the disciples of Satan are spreading their stories everywhere throughout our culture.

The greatest storyteller ever to walk upon this earth was the main player in the greatest story ever to be told upon this earth. This story was that God was here in that storyteller's presence and because of that we are not alone, we are not helpless, and our situation is not hopeless. That story, when heard and believed, can change a person more than any story ever told. Ours is a story-filled culture, and we have possession of the story of stories, the most powerful story our culture will ever hear, *and we are its storytellers!*

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