A Narrative Epistemology of Sacred Frame Constructedness and Deconstruction:

Exploratory Analyses of Ways of Knowing Sacred Interpretation and Understanding Through Context, Symbol/Concept, and Role

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In Memory of Consultant 11

Consultant 11: So, ah, I went down and uh, and uh, we started off. Went out, to greet the people and Fri, Father Frisbee had this huge red cope on. I me-iwasa beautiful, beautiful piece, I mean, heavy, it was awful heavy to me, it was really beautiful wool. And, uh, he started into the, the introductions and we got maybe... three or four minutes into the ceremony when he, he kinda backed up and got near a candle and, an this cope caught on fire.

Interviewer: Oh no! [laughs]

C11: An, it literally, I didn’t realize, because I was standing right next to im, and so my vision wouldn’t see back there but the people let out a gasp, you know. And I thought what’s that and I looked and, here there were flames!

I: [laughing]

C11: And he didn’t realize it at all. So I’m hitting him on the back, putting out these flames, you know. And I said, I said to him afterwards I said, “I, I think, uh, Friz, that, uh, you’ll have to admit that it took a Roman Catholic to come to save you, as an Anglican.”

I: That’s great. [laughs]
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Introduction

This inaugural chapter serves as the Introduction to my Anthropology Senior Honors Thesis. Here begins a journey into the constructedness of the sacred within society. Before departure, however, processes need explication, and implements of understanding necessitate definition. To engage in this thesis is to under-take an expedition into interpretive ways of knowing through narrative. As your guide, I must provide you with the structure and the tools applicable to this process of discovery before we head out into the sacred to narratively explore. This chapter, then, is our toolbox, and consists of five sections:

1. **Purpose**: Stating the purpose of this thesis, including premise and goals.
2. **Structure**: Describing the structural presentation of this thesis, including sections, chapters, appendix, acknowledgements, and references cited.
3. **Methods–Data**: Explaining types of data employed, and the data collection process.
4. **Methods–Analyses**: Describing the analytical process and organization of the data.
5. **Terms**: Setting forward definitions and discussions of key terms and concepts.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this Anthropology Honors Thesis is to understand sacred construction through narrative epistemology. That is, with the help of an analytical model of framework, frame, and strip, I analyze narratives regarding incidents of disruption and incongruity within the sacred framework as a way of knowing the sacred as a social realm, constructed as dialectically different from the domain of “conventional” social cognition. Specifically, I will examine how the stories embody ideas about how the sacred framework constructs fragile interpretive frames susceptible to incidents which challenge its structural rigidity and inflexibility. These stories expose the *constructedness* of the sacred.
Structure

This thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Acknowledging My Own Bias and Subjectivity
This Chapter briefly addresses the factors inherent in my own interpretation of the narratives, and argues for the validity of these analyses as socio-culturally relevant.

Chapter 2: Reality, Frame-Analysis, and the Sacred
This Chapter presents the theoretical background for the analytical concept of “frame-analysis”, and how this concept is applicable to an examination of sacred construction (and deconstruction!) in society.

Chapters 3 - 5: Narrative Analyses
These Chapters present the actual analyses of the narratives:
Chapter 3 considers worship ceremony narratives.
Chapter 4 probes “special” ceremony narratives.
Chapter 5 examines children’s-theme narratives.
Each Chapter begins with one to three longer narrative analyses, and concludes with five shorter analyses.

Chapter 6: A Narrative Epistemology of the Sacred
This Chapter introduces the concept of epistemology as relevant to sacred understanding, and presents encapsulated “seeds of contradiction” for each narrative analyzed.

Conclusions: Patterns of Differences
This section concludes the thesis by pointing out general patterns perceived within the “seeds of contradiction”, and briefly postulates how these patterns reveal sacred ways of knowing.

Appendix: Transcriptions and Consultant Demographics
This section contains the transcripts of the interviews in their entirety, and gives basic demographic information for each consultant.

Acknowledgements

References Cited
Methods–Data

The data employed for analysis in this thesis are narratives. A small portion of the data were previously used in a term project for the course “Forms of Folklore” at Oberlin College, Spring semester, 1995. The narratives were collected with the intention of using them solely for the purpose of that project and thus my collection method reflects that purpose to some degree. However, this thesis does not manipulate the original data in any way. Rather, the data essentially governed this thesis. This thesis is a detailed study of the narratives as an epistemology of the constructedness of the sacred in society.

Originally the data set consisted of 11 religious-leaders from various faith practices. For purposes of uniformity of structure and approach, this thesis utilizes the six religious-leaders who are Christian—either Catholic, Episcopalian, or Protestant. Each narrative session–interview—was conducted by myself and involved a private or semi-private discussion with no formulated questions or structure, other than comments to elicit stories about humorous, poignant, and personal experiences. I generally began each interview with an exemplary story or suggestion for direction, (most notably Narrative 8.1 was used as an example of a humorous and memorable incident), and if the discussion seemed to stagnate I tried to suggest other narrative directions to spark dialogue.

Each of the consultants I either knew personally, (such as Consultant 8—my father), or was connected with through the help of my parents, who, due to the nature of their jobs, have numerous affiliations with religious-leaders throughout the Binghamton, New York area, where all the interviews took place. None of the consultants were paid for their time, and they all agreed to conditions of anonymity with the knowledge that the narratives would be publicly archived.

These conditions have been upheld within this thesis, evidenced by numeral narrative reference. This reference system is simple: take, for example, Narrative 8.1. The first digit, before the decimal point, refers to the arbitrary number in the sequence of the original eleven 11 religious-leaders.

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1 This folklore collection, entitled Clergy Lore, contains archive-formatted analyses for selected stories from the same narrative set. The collection can be found in the Oberlin College Archives, Mudd Library, Oberlin, Ohio.

2 My father is pastor at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Binghamton, New York. My mother is Associate Director at the Broome County Council of Churches, Binghamton, New York.
interviews. The last digit, after the decimal point, refers to the number in the sequence of story
delineations (as delineated by me for purposes of analysis) within the interview. Therefore,
Narrative 8.1 refers to Consultant 8, story 1.

The transcripts of the relevant interviews are provided in full in the Appendix. The
interviews were recorded onto high-bias audio tape via a hand-held tape recorder, and the
transcripts reflect the entire contents of the audio tape. These transcriptions were prepared by
Charles Matthew Newburn, an anthropology major at Oberlin College, within the month of March,
1999. I then corrected and notated the story delineations for each interview.

Methods—Analyses

Analytical Process: The narrative analyses will be structured as follows:

1. Synopsis of the story related within the narrative. Quotes from the narrative
   transcription are placed in parentheses ( ) to show the exact wording of the consultant.

2. Delineation of the sacred-frame, including the strips of activity to be framed for
   analysis.

3. Discussion of the conceptual and symbolic elements involved in the story,
   shared cultural understandings about them within the sacred framework, and the particular
   use of the concepts within the sacred-frame.

4. Examination of how the sacred-frame is weakened and perhaps broken when
   conceptual and/or symbolic elements are twisted into frame-distant meanings and
   understandings.

5. Analysis of the constructedness of the particular sacred-frame and its fragility.
   I analyze how the narratives implicitly show the sacred framework’s inability to allow for
   frame-distant conceptual and/or symbolic interpretive meaning and understanding.

The narrative analyses are structured within this uniform method as I examine and explore sacred
constructedness and fragility. Although not all of the narratives fit perfectly into this method, the
format has been maintained throughout so each discussion can be compared easily with others. I
trust that, with the use of this method, the analytical process will become apparent.

My analytical approach is based largely on Erving Goffman’s concept of “frame” and
technique of “frame-analysis”. His process of “framing” certain social “strips of activity” to get at a plausible answer to the question, “What is it that’s going on here” (1974:8)? has served my purposes well. I utilize his analytical approach to examine aspects of sacred “frame” constructedness and deconstruction. In addition to Goffman, Gregory Bateson is a strong theoretical force within this thesis. His concepts of the epistemology of epistemology—“the study of how epistemology is done” (1991:231)— and epistemology through “news of difference” (1991:233) are central to our understanding of sacred ways of knowing.

In essence, I am building an analytical structure: the base is the narrative itself, from which we delineate strips of framed activity constituting the storied incident. With a defined frame it then becomes possible to understand the central concepts that become problematic in the fragile constructedness of the sacred framework. Each analysis explains that particular frame’s weakness and/or collapse.

**Data Organization:** For purposes of organization and clarity, the narratives will be divided into three broad categories based on the story’s prescribed setting:

1. Stories about events within the large frame of “regular” worship ceremony (i.e.: weekly Sunday service or mass). These stories are about those rituals and situations which are normally a part of the worship ceremony (i.e., communion, sermon, prayer, offering, etc.).

2. Stories about events taking place within the large frame of what I call “special” ceremonies—those sacred events and rituals which do not occur on a regular basis, and/or do not occur as part of the “normal” worship ceremony (i.e., weddings, funerals, baptisms, holidays, etc.).

3. Stories involving children and/or childhood as the main theme (i.e., a consultant’s childhood experience, children’s sermon, children’s pageant, etc.).

This organizational structure of dividing the narratives into three broad types lends itself especially well to the identification of epistemological patterns. We will see later on that the three different sacred situations—worship ceremony, special ceremony, and children’s themes—may share certain unique fragilities and weaknesses.
Terms

The following terms are central to the understanding of this thesis, and are therefore defined and discussed:

Sacred: A constructed “reality” imbued with “special” meaning where symbols and concepts may take on a sacred ontology or “life” (the consecrated communion bread and wine, for example). Essentially, the sacred combines symbol and “reality”—sacred symbols unite both the “stands for” and “the is” (after Bateson 1991, 1987). Specifically, for our purposes, the sacred is that sense of the holy and divine within a framework of understanding and knowing.

Secular: The term “secular” is employed here to mean the notion of “every-day”, “normal” social life and social comportment. The secular can be thought of as an overall framework which arguably encompasses all aspects of society and culture. In this way, I use the secular to refer to that dialectically³ other than the sacred, into which the sacred-frame can collapse and/or implode.

Interpretation: The act of interpreting events is a cognitive process combining perception and understanding. The combination itself is synthesized by an individual, but both perception and understanding are socio-culturally based. Interpretation is a unique formulation of socio-culturally-based impressions.

Expressed in first-person terms, I am thrust into a world which is always ‘already’ in process, that is, there is no point for the actor on the social scene, the participant in daily life, at which one might say the slate is clean, experience is untouched by the past, or everything is just starting. At any moment of reflection, I can look back and locate the ground or source of the present; in fact, reflection by its very nature presupposes a something prior, a something already there to which attention is to be given. A pattern of intention and attitude, merged with memorial notes and sly expectations, underlies even the most casual elements of experience. Nothing is presented to me which is pristinely stripped of association and implication, nor is anything received by me which enters my perceptual doors without ringing a bell that reverberates throughout my being. I am speaking of the social, not the physical” (Natanson 1974:103).

³ The term “dialectic” was furthered by Hegel as, defined by Gergen, “The very comprehension of being requires a simultaneous grasp of nonbeing or absence. To understand that something is the case requires the realization that it might be otherwise” (1994:9).
Meaning: Meaning is realized through interpretation. The way we create significance is by understanding events and objects as not only relevant, but also as important to our life. What is important—and therefore meaningful—requires an individual interpretive act. However, it is important to realize that society and culture shape individual interpretation. Consider Berger:

"[T]o live in the social world is to live an ordered and meaningful life. Society is the guardian of order and meaning not only objectively, in its institutional structures, but subjectively as well, in its structuring of individual consciousness" (1967:21-22).

In essence, the way we interpret experience is a product of societal guidelines. Meaning, then, can be produced through individual interpretive acts, but our interpretation is grounded within common social structure.

Symbol: Our entire society is based on understanding arbitrary symbols. Language, money, government, and even religion, are all based on a set of symbols which we agree to understand as representative of some higher idea. Schutz defines symbolization as follows:

"A symbol can be defined in first approximation as an appresentational reference to a higher order in which the appresenting member of the pair is an object, fact, or event within the reality of our daily life, whereas the other appresented member of the pair refers to an idea which transcends our experience of everyday life" (1962:331).

A symbol cannot, therefore, be interpreted except by other symbols. The understanding of a symbolic element does not consist of grasping its significance in a rational way. Rather, in experiencing it existentially as a unique reference to something transcendent that vanishes at the limiting point (after Jaspers 1932:16). In this way, symbolization is a relationship between concepts, elements and entities which are not revealed in description, but in conception of the relationship between symbols (after Bateson 1991:302-303).

Context: The context of an experience is imperative to understanding its significance. Bateson states,

"Without identification of context, nothing can be understood. The observed action is utterly meaningless until it is classified as 'play', 'manipulation', or what not" (1991:76).

Interpretation is also heavily reliant upon context: a large part of what we take something to mean is
based on the context in which it occurs.4

**Concept:** For our purposes, a concept is a conventional understanding of an entity. Different than a symbolic element, a conceptual element is not representational, but refers to a shared understanding of an entity. For example, the “sermon” is not a representation of a transcendent entity, but it is an entity realized through the pastor’s role as “interpreter of God’s word”.

**Framework:** By the term “sacred framework” I refer to practices of religion (very specifically, in this case, the practice of Christianity), which may encompass any aspect of life (especially the life of the Christian religious-leader) consciously or subconsciously related to the observance of God as supreme deity5. I use the term “sacred framework” for events taken in a broad religious perspective—a general structure of belief and understanding that is the basic premise for a sacred activity, event, or experience.

**Frame:** The term “frame” (with the prefix of “sacred-situational”, “sacred-ceremony”, or “sacred-ritual”) refers to the structure of the specific activity, event, or experience from which a strip of

4 Bauman applies this contextualization to narrative speech-acts, and is worthy of note:

> "Insofar as acts of speaking are of focal interest retain kinds of narrative, an understanding of the ways that these speech acts are contextualized within the narrative can enhance our understanding both of how speaking operates and is understood to operate in social life and of how narratives are constructed" (1986:54).

5 While I generally assume and further the notion throughout this Thesis that the sacred framework exists apart from the secular—a construction of frames above the “every-day” realm—this is not the only interpretation of the sacred framework and its importance within life. Consultant 8 believes, (in contrast to my assumption that sensory deduction and logic create a purely and physically rational “default” framework), that everything about life is sacred:

> "...a deeper lesson—there is no REAL distinction between the sacred and secular after all. ...My contention is that the sacred and the secular are more than two sides of the same coin—they are one. So, is everything secular or sacred? Obviously I believe it's all sacred. Of course we muck it up a bit, but that's just a glimpse into our human nature trying to swim in the sacred."

While both approaches and interpretations are valid, I have simply chosen a set of assumptions which better serve the purpose of this thesis, as a theoretically-based socio-anthropological epistemology of the sacred.
activity is taken and “frame-analyzed”. I use the terms “sacred-situational/-ceremonial/-ritual (frame)” to focus in on the nature of the frame being discussed. Frames refer to defined activities, events, or experiences which are built on the foundation of, and encompassed by the sacred framework, and which often constitute and delineate the boundaries of the particular frame. In essence, I seek to interpret a “sacred-frame” within the context of the “sacred framework”.

Sacred Activity: Within the context of this narrative collection, the term “sacred activity” refers to an event, action, behavior, and/or experience that occurs within a sacred-frame. For example, the anecdotal narrative 10.8 includes the “sacred activity” of pouring what is supposed to be holy water over the priest’s hands, within the “sacred-ritual frame” of pre-communion cleansing (to prepare the sacraments for consecration). I believe the narratives reveal how framed sacred activity gone-awry can be indicative of structural flaws within the sacred framework.

6 By “defined” I mean in a liturgical sense; the dictation of a particular activity, ritual, etc., by the doctrinal structure of the worship ceremony, sacred ritual, etc. For example, the sacred activity of breaking bread is “defined” by the structure of the communion ritual: when it is to occur within the ritual, the words with which to invoke the ritual activity, etc. The communion ritual-frame itself is defined within the liturgical structure of the worship ceremony, i.e., after the sermon and before the last hymn.

7 In other words, frame boundaries are often delineated by that strip of activity which they enclose. For instance, in Narrative 8.1, the strip of activity defines the frame for analysis: the little girl’s vomiting occurs very specifically within the liminal frame between “beginning signal” and “sermon proper”. This liminal frame is manifest through the incident; had the girl not vomited at the specific moment which she did, the sequence of frames would have moved from the “beginning signal” straight to the “sermon proper”.

8 For Narrative 10.8, consult the Appendix.

9 For further discussion of the ritual of communion, (or Eucharist in the Catholic faith practice), related symbols and concepts, and frame-analysis, consult Narratives 8.2 and 7.2 in Chapter.
Chapter 1

Acknowledging My Own Bias and Subjectivity

This Chapter briefly acknowledges my positional interpretation of the narratives, and argues for the validity of these analyses as socio-culturally relevant. My personal background is discussed, and how this has bearing on the narrative analyses. Following this, interpretation and narrative are discussed briefly in light of my subjective background.

It is important to note that I am the son of a United Church of Christ pastor (Consultant 8).\(^{10}\) This fact is relevant in two ways. The first may be seen as problematic: The fact that I was raised as the son of a pastor, very much connected to sacred life through church-attendance, activities, and home life, inevitably leads to a perspective of these narratives that is inescapably biased. I am something of a “native” in this sense. My perceptions and interpretations are based on a lifetime of sacred understanding through participation, and therefore I carry assumptions that underlie my discussions here. In essence, I am not able to attain an outsider observer status.

However, because of these same facts regarding my upbringing, I believe I also hold a native perspective which is essential to my analyses. Because the analyses are directly based on the narratives themselves, I am obliged to use my own understandings as a participant in Christian practice to place each story in a context of “church culture”, so to speak. I am able, then, combine this “expertise” with anthropological and social theory. I believe this combination leads to a useful presentation of the narratives, their interpretations, and their understandings. I am a “native anthropologist” of sorts, able to present an understanding of the sacred “from the inside”, established in the theories and analyzed with the tools of social science.

\(^{10}\) More specifically, I am a white male, age 22, of European heritage, economically positioned in the middle class, from Binghamton, New York, and a senior Oberlin College student majoring in Anthropology and ‘Cello Performance. My native language is English, and I was born and raised in the United States.
More On Interpretation: We all share common societal truths and understandings, and each one of us uses these shared concepts as a foundation for interpretation of experience. While “society” does not itself dictate experience, it acts as a foundation of not only shared concepts, but also of cultural conventions and role expectations. States Ichheiser:

“The psychologically naive, unreflective person lives and acts under the silent assumption that he perceives other people in a factual, objective way. He is not aware of certain interpretive mechanisms at work within himself which distort and falsify his perception, observation and interpretation of other people” (1970:34).

These elements of role and cultural convention do not necessarily mold experience, but guide our individual interpretations and understandings of events.

I contend, therefore, that my analyses of the narratives, essentially my own interpretation relevant to my own purpose, is inherently and inescapably subjective. However, as an individual within the collective that is society at-large, my interpretation is not unfounded. Rather, my method of interpretation is implicitly based in a common core understanding of society and culture as the shared expansive framework in which we all act out our lives collectively.

The discussion up to this point has a purpose, which is to convince you that I have the authority to present an admittedly biased, limited, partial, and altogether subjective analysis of the narratives I have collected, their meanings, and their ability to begin to illuminate the constructedness of the sacred framework in society. The positivistic attitude which still pervades the social sciences, for better or worse, maintains that everything, every aspect of society and culture is explainable and can be accounted for in objective terms. I would maintain, however, that, at least in the case of the sacred framework, some elements, entities and concepts are unexplainable in any objective sense. We can, nonetheless, together reach an understanding of ways of knowing—the epistemological basis for interpretation. Therefore, my analysis of the narratives is meant as a performance of ways of knowing: by exampling my own interpretation of significance through analyses, I hope to illuminate how sacred epistemology is “done” by the narratives.
More On Narrative: The wonderful thing about a narrative tale is that we gain a unique personal perspective (that of the storyteller) of an event. Yet we can still apply our own individual interpretations as to the underlying significance—what the story means to us in relation to our individual lives. White defines narrative as “...a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (1981:2). He is taking a broader view of narrative acting as a bridge between cultures, and in this way inviting “...reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself” (1981:1). I intend to take a narrower view, but with the same concepts: Narrative analysis is a reflection on the nature of meaning construction and epistemology—a window into the way one interprets personal significance.

If social life is indeed communicatively constituted (Bauman 1989, Hymes 1975), and continually “...produced and reproduced by communicative practice” (Bauman 1989:177), then I would contend that narrative analysis is the perfect way to gain insight into the entity broadly defined as social life. Narrative provides a context of communication that promotes ways of knowing. Further, how better to examine a facet of that entity—in this case the sacred framework within the social—than to examine that facet through the contextual lens of narrative?
Chapter 2

Reality, Frame-Analysis, and the Sacred

This Chapter presents the theoretical background for the analytical approach of “frame-analysis”, and argues how this concept is applicable to an examination of sacred construction (and deconstruction!) in society. First, I will provide an introduction and overview of the theory of frame, drawing from the sociological and anthropological literature (primarily Goffman’s Frame Analysis) on this concept. Second, I will explain how this theory relates, and is applicable, to the construction of the sacred, based on examples from the narrative collection.

The concept of “frame” is a useful implement in the differentiation of social experiential occurrence, event, and incident. Much like a picture frame, a social frame encloses a portrait of social activity; it sections off a certain representation of what’s going on at a given moment. The contextual background within which the activity occurs can be described as the “framework”—the structural basis for the frame. Obviously, a person’s social life does not consist of hopping from one framed pose to another, but rather a continuum of events which require the individual to continually adjust and adapt in order to function “normally” as a participant in the larger context—overall framework—of society and culture. The concept of “frame” is merely a helpful tool, allowing for an examination of how members of society might understand a specific piece of the continuum of social life as if it were enclosed within a specific period in time.

Before proceeding further, it is also imperative to discuss the notion of “reality”, its assumptions and limitations. Although this thesis is not concerned with the notion of “reality”, it is important to understand why this is so. Reality is an elusive concept, and impeded by the fact that it is often used rather loosely by some in every-day lay speech; to describe vague “everyday activity” or “ordinary conduct”, or simply as a contrast term against which experiences can be ambiguously explained as “unreal” or “special” (Goffman 1974:560). Goffman states that within the argument that every-day activity “...provides an original against which copies of various kinds

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11 The term “normal(ly)” is in quotes due to its nature as a subjective, individualistically determined notion. This will be explained in further detail and with greater lucidity below.
can be struck, the assumption [is] that the model [of every-day activity] was something that could be actual and, when it was, would be more closely enmeshed in the ongoing world than anything modeled after it” (1974:562). In essence, the every-day social assumption of reality is that it is an actual entity—a defined set of activities which can be thought of as an exemplary notion to be behaviorally copied by members of society and understood as part of the “ongoing world” of social life.

But life is not lived as a behavioral xerox of some exemplary set of defined activities. Rather, life is lived as a playing out of socio-culturally constructed roles built upon expectations of “normal” comportment. Essentially, social behavior strives to imitate notions of normality, a paradigmatic collection of culturally-based intimations for conduct. Like “reality”, “normality” is an holographic construction of socially established assumptions and expectations. Goffman, once again:

“Life may not be an imitation of art, but ordinary conduct, in a sense, is an imitation of the properties, a gesture at the exemplary forms, and the primary realization of these ideals belongs more to make-believe than reality” (1974:562).

Each individual in society essentially organizes their own experience within the guidelines of culture, using shared expectations to build understanding of their life through continuous and self-fulfilling confirmation of interpreted experience. As all circles, making sense of one’s experience has no beginning and no end, rather an infinite loop of confirmed understanding through self-fulfilling interpretation.

“What people understand to be the organization of their experience, they buttress, and perforce, self-fulfillingly. They develop ... scenarios which elegantly confirm a frame-relevant view of the workings of the world” (Goffman 1974:563).

So, what we take as reality is a mirage, an ephemeral image of the “real world” the way things “really are”. We organize and interpret personal experience using shared models, concepts, values, goals and narrative forms.

Why, then, is social science so obsessed with objectifying social experience12 if reality is

12 For a discussion of why the subjective point of view “should be preferred in the practice of the social sciences”, see Schutz, 1964, pp. 3 - 19.
nothing more than a mirage of "exemplary forms"? Shotter wonders,

"[W]hy are we so passionately convinced that there must be a single, well-ordered 'reality' to be discovered underlying appearances, as well as an 'objective' viewpoint, in terms of which it can be characterized" (1983:24)?

While Shotter believes the answer to our positivistic goals lies in "...systems inherited from the Enlightenment" (1983:24), I believe the answer lies in the fact that even social scientists fall prey to the notion of developing "... scenarios which elegantly confirm a frame-relevant view of the workings of the world" (Goffman 1974:563). No one has the ability to objectify reality, because objective reality does not exist. Rather, each individual defines his/her own reality through culturally-predicated "cognitive style"; a unique interpretation of experience that creates a belief of reality, what we believe to be "real". In this way, we each generate a world, a habitable universe that is defined by our experiences and our interpretations of them (Goffman 1974:5), and shaped by culturally shared understanding. The question is, then, not "What is reality?", but "Under what circumstances do we think things are real?" The answer lies not in collective society directly, (although we may utilize collectively learned models, concepts, constructs, and conventions) but in the individual's view of society, shaped by cultural understanding.

"The important thing about reality ... is our sense of its realness in contrast to our feeling that some things lack this quality. One can ask under what conditions such a feeling is generated, and this question speaks to a small manageable problem having to do with the camera and not what it is the camera takes pictures of" (Goffman 1974:2).

Thus it stands to reason that Shotter's complaint that reality is more of a "...disorderly, fragmented, and heterogeneous affair than we had previously thought" (1983:18), is perhaps because, as a social collective of individuals, we are a rather disorderly, fragmented and heterogeneous bunch. The trick to understanding a bit about social "reality" lies in the analysis of how an individual organizes his/her activity and experience using social terms, means, and learned habits; not by a hunt for abstract patterns in the broad swath of "social life" as an unwieldy

13 Shotter postulates that, beginning with the ancient Greeks, the assumption that "reality is to be found behind experiences" (1983:24) led to the societal acceptance of a special group of individuals whose legitimate task it was (and still is!) to "attempt to articulate the nature of this deeper order" (ibid.).
whole. This is where the concepts of "frame" and "frame analysis" become useful in looking at individual narratives as they organize personal life using cultural constructs.

Bateson premiered the term "frame" as a concept to help explain how individuals (within society, using socially-learned tools), interpret their experience. In the paper "A Theory of Play and Fantasy", Bateson uses the concept of frame as an analytical tool to show that a serious activity, such as fighting, can be turned unserious, such as in "play fighting", when a person engages in a different interpretive frame of experience. Sometimes the experience is such that we may not know which interpretive frame we're in—"play" or the "real thing" (Bateson 1972:177-193). But it was Goffman who molded the term into a applicable and limiting tool for organizing social experience:

"I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition of frame" (Goffman 1974:10-11).

This set of concepts defies the notion of reality as an entity; a situation is not only constructed with principles of organization—such as the concept of frame itself—but also by the individual’s involvement in the situation, which is a subjective activity.

This concept of frame is such that "reality" is inconsequential and even irrelevant to such an analysis. The social scientist’s goal is to understand the framing of experience, not to explicate some objective "reality". The purpose, then, is to explicate a limiting frame, enclosing a "strip" of activity so we can see how people answer the question, "What is going on here?" The strip need

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14 Looking for patterns in collective "social life" is a worthwhile cause if one desires to study societal constructs in a general approach towards understanding a particular society. The collective is not, however, where one will find experiential "reality" due to its nature as individualistically determined.

15 An "interpretive frame" is how we interpretively take something—as serious, play, lie, threat, etc.
not be labeled as “reality” or anything else. The danger in labeling a strip is it can make forms of knowledge or understanding seem all absolute or completely essential; all our knowledge is shaped by formal learned terms, and we must know these terms can’t “label” absolute realities or differences. Rather, the strip is merely a “capture” of a particular short sequence—a moment in a stream—in an individual’s involvement in a particular experience or event. States Goffman,

“The term ‘strip’ will be used to refer to any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity, including here sequences of happenings, real or fictive, as seen from the perspective of those subjectively involved in sustaining an interest in them. A strip is not meant to reflect a natural division made by the subjects of inquiry or an analytical division made by students who inquire; it will be used only to refer to any raw batch of occurrences (of whatever status in reality) that one wants to draw attention to as a starting point for analysis” (1974:10).

It is in this way, by “framing” a “strip” of “ongoing activity”, that a social perspective on experience is attainable and reasonable. These concepts allow for a manageable shared understanding of an “event” as a person sees it; through examining a manageable strip of experience, we organize it into a manageable frame for analysis. Using the notion of the “strip”, we can feasibly postulate an answer to the actively experiencing person’s question “What is it that is going on here?”, and frame-analysis of a strip of activity greatly facilitates the explanation of that answer. It is imperative to realize, however, that we are speaking of concepts for a template for organizing a member of society’s experience, and not an organization of society itself.

In addition, my intentions are not to illuminate frameworks organizing all types of experiences in any strip of activity, but to hold a focused light to the framework of the sacred realm

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16 Goffman argues persuasively that the question “What is it that’s going on here?” is “considerably suspect”. The validity of “focus”, in relation to the description of an event, “perspective”, in relation to differentiating participant roles, and “situation”, in relation to the many different things going on at once in any strip of activity, are questioned. However, Goffman presents only a cautionary gesture, daintily sidestepping the pit of vipers: “I only want to claim that although these questions are very important, they are not the only ones, and that their treatment is not necessarily required before one can proceed. So here ... I will let sleeping sentences lie” (1974:10).
of experience,\textsuperscript{17} derived from a few strips of religious activity as narrated by six Christian consultants.\textsuperscript{18} But, in principle, Goffman's intentions are much the same as my own:

"My perspective is situational, meaning here a concern for what one individual can be alive to at a particular moment, this often involving a few other particular individuals and not necessarily restricted to the mutually monitored arena of a face-to-face gathering. I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: 'What is it that's going on here?' Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion or doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand" (1974:8).

Where Goffman and I differ is merely in our focus. Whereas Goffman aims to "...try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events and to analyze the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject" (1974:10), I aim to take a more modest approach, focusing exclusively on how individuals who share a body of beliefs, practices, and conventions "know" the sacred framework by telling stories of their experiences of sacred-frame disruption, collapse, and/or implosion.

How does my use of the sacred concept fit into this approach? Is the sacred not unlike "reality", an "exemplary form" which can only be gestured at as an idyllic representation of a make-believe entity? Or perhaps the sacred is the imitation of "religious/spiritual activity" (whatever that is!), occupying a transcendent plane of understanding and knowing above the "secular"? Perhaps the enactment of "the sacred" in experience is an attempt to live out or embody a transcendent "reality"? Let us take as an exemplary model the sacred situation of Christian worship ceremonies. In Christian practice, the worship ceremony is the nucleus of the sacred experience in social life. Itself a large frame encompassing many smaller frames of prescribed ritual activity, the worship ceremony is the situational context in which ritual scenarios are played

\textsuperscript{17} When I speak of the sacred I am speaking of the that which is constructed by shared religious practices. I realize that the concept of "sacred" means different things to different individuals. However, for the purpose of my focus, the sacred refers to those experiences produced by a religious ceremony, ritual, experience, symbol, etc.

For a discussion of the sacred as a social concept, beyond the religious, see Gregory Bateson's collection of essays and lectures in \textit{A Sacred Unity: Further Steps to an Ecology of Mind}, specifically "Ecology of Mind: The Sacred", pp. 265 - 270; and "Seek the Sacred: Darington Seminar", pp. 299 - 305.

\textsuperscript{18} For consultant demographic information, consult the Appendix.
out, specific roles are realized, and symbolic interpretations presented all as frame-relevant, legitimizing and confirming sacred understandings and ways of knowing. In essence, the sacred is the epitome of an “exemplary form”: it can never be truly attainable as an entity, only gestured at with grand symbols and elaborate liturgical sequences.

The sacred framework is an organization of experience just like any other social situation. What is different is that the sacred situation in an organized, doctrinal religious setting is a strictly controlled organization of experience, in which perception of activity and understanding of events are dictated by official traditional scripts—liturgy—and by what one is supposed to “believe”—a way of knowing based, to a large extent, on scriptural dictate and liturgical doctrine. Goffman addresses the stricture inherent in ceremony and ritual as a kind of representativeness:

“On the face of it, [a ceremony or ritual], no decision making function is operative, the whole having been scripted by tradition, lore, and protocol. [T]he figures involved are bodies, but although some practice may be required in performance of the ritual, proper execution can easily become routine and unproblematic. [U]tilitarian procedures are not involved; the controlling, open intent is a kind of symbolization, a special kind of rounded, well-formulated representation” (1974:568).

Although Goffman never specifically addresses “ceremony” and “ritual” within a sacred-religious context, his statement regarding these concepts is quite relevant to the notion of “sacred framework”. However, my intent in analyzing the narrative collection is not to bolster and further prove the legitimacy of the representative power of “ritual” and “ceremony”—Goffman does that

19 Instead, Goffman asks us to consider a high school debate as explication:

“Two teams are involved, each with two or more players. What is put at play is verbally presented arguments, these judged on standards of content and delivery. The delivery is certainly a problematic and important feature, and certainly control of voice, monitoring of speech, and other physical acts are involved. But the body as a whole has dropped out. The individual is expected to debate on his feet, but if he needs a wheelchair he can still participate fully” (1974:569).

Although this metaphorical explication serves to illustrate Goffman’s theory of the elements involved in ceremony and ritual, I would contend that the sacred-religious is the quintessential explication of ceremony and ritual. Whereas a high school debate is illustrative of these elements, the sacred-religious framework utilizes, as its basis for creating significance, the elements of ceremony and ritual themselves. Worship, as the core of the sacred, employs the elements of ceremony and ritual explicitly, as defined symbols of “well-formulated representation.”
quite well\textsuperscript{20}—or even to show how these concepts are legitimate and applicable in the sacred framework (which I trust the reader will understand implicitly from the above discussion). Rather, the narratives themselves will reveal how the sacred frame, in most cases containing a strip of activity found in a particular ceremony and/or ritual, is rendered fragile through inherent flaws in the frame’s construction.

Since my data are of a limited type (stories from six individual Christian religious-leaders, all from Binghamton, New York), I seek simply to analyze the narrativically related experiences—my “data”—which I have, and only within the contextual confines provided within the stories themselves. Therefore, my analysis will deal with the constructedness of the sacred framework as explored in the narratives I have collected, with the focus directed towards isolating some of the basic ways that stories “narrativize” understanding the sacred framework and its construction of frames. Specifically, I see the stories as examinations of the inherent vulnerabilities within these sacred frames—mainly due to the rigidity and inflexibility of the sacred framework. My perspective will be situational, because this is what my narrative data reflect: a view, from the individual perspective, of how the participants’ might answer their question “what is it that’s going on here?”, primarily during experiences causing them or others confusion and doubt within the sacred frame. In essence, I am critically examining the sacred framework as a construct within our society through a series of vivid narratives. Doing frame-analysis of this narrative set provides a glimpse into how people think about and understand the nature of the sacred framework through their narrative exploration of its rigidity and inflexibility, manifest in the weaknesses and fragilities of the frames it underlies.

Not as a cop out, but as a means of presenting a manageable analysis, I must claim, as did Goffman,\textsuperscript{21} that I have an analytically inherent bias, and be allowed to proceed. Any event can be analyzed with a wide or narrow, distant or close focus, and each angle of depiction is legitimate and correct, depending upon one’s analytical goals. The span and level I choose, because of what I intend to accomplish, is that of narrativically depicted activities within the framework of the


\textsuperscript{21} See Goffman’s legitimation in Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience, pp. 8 – 9.
sacred. In other words, my focus will simply be how the sacred-framed events depicted in the stories implicitly provide a narrative understanding of the sacred framework.

22 I fully realize that my method of analysis is subjective, rendering my analysis partial as well. However, this partiality is unavoidable—my focus is chosen with regard to the data, but also with regard to my own personal affinity for this particular focus for analysis. Anyone could take the same data set and choose to explore a completely different focus range, thereby undergoing a completely different analytical process. For additional discussion regarding my authority in presenting such an admittedly biased approach, please consult Chapter 1.
Chapter 3
Worship Ceremony Narrative Analyses

This chapter will focus on examining some sacred-ritual frames within the worship ceremony setting. Specifically, this section examines how the collection of narratives illuminates the sacred framework’s rigid construction through its creation of fragile frames. Conceptual and symbolic elements and their contextual interpretation will be the primary focus of my analysis of the narratives. These elements reveal the fragility of the sacred-ritual frame when disruptive experience leads them to in some way deviate from the underlying sacred framework. Essentially, I will show how the narrative collection contributes to an understanding of how the worship ceremony is susceptible to collapse, fall-out, or implosion due to a frame-distant incident.

Narrative 8.1

1. Synopsis: This story-incident occurred at the time of the consultant’s first sermon presentation as a post-graduate of seminary (“...[A]nd I was just out of seminary and was called as the ah, associate pastor. Aaand it was my first Sunday preaching.”). As the consultant finished saying the ritual prayer to mark the beginning of the sermon presentation, a young girl, seated in the first pew, stood up and “projectile vomited”, the vomitus nearly reaching the front of the pulpit in which the consultant stood (“A, the service went along and it was, ah, time to ah, for me to get up to preach, and I, uh walked up into the pulpit, which was maybe five or six feet in front of them [the little girl and her mother] and um. As I remember, I think I offered the prayer.... I said ‘Amen’ and I sort of straightened up to say my first word, just as I took my breath to speak, the little girl, Jill, stood up in the front row, and kind of just, vomited, pro-jec-tile vomited all over the, almost reached the pulpit!”).

2. Frame: The incident described in this story occurred just before the beginning of the actual sermon presentation, which can be considered a frame in and of itself. The sermon is usually considered the main part of the Protestant worship ceremony, in which the pastor “lectures” or
“preaches” to the congregation on a thematic aspect of Christianity. In the case of this particular pastor/consultant, the event of the sermon is quite explicitly framed: the congregation is made aware of the beginning of the sermon, signaled by a prayer invoking God to accept the words about to be spoken by the pastor, and accept the congregation’s “meditations” on those words.23 The end of the sermon is also signaled definitively: the pastor utters a closing remark followed by the word “Amen”.

However, the strip of activity in this story does not include any part of the “sermon proper”, and the beginning prayer signal is completed. Therefore, the strip of activity occurs within the contextual threshold of prepared expectation, so to speak, and before the sermon proper. This liminal-sacred frame encloses the following strip of activity: The consultant’s physical preparation for the beginning signal (“...and it was, ah, time to ah, for me to get up to preach, and I uh, walked up into the pulpit...”), the beginning signal itself (“...I think I offered the prayer, ‘May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God our rock and our redeemer, A-men.’”), the occurrence of “Jill” projectile vomiting (“...and I sorta straightened up to say my first word and just as I took my breath to speak, the little girl, Jill, stood up in the front row, and kind of just vomited, pro-jec-tile vomited all over the, front almost reached the pulpit. Just, all over the floor and then, just gagged and made this terrible sound...”), and the aftermath of the occurrence (“And her mother was so embarrassed and stood up an, and of course, we all rushed down an, helped the little girl and somebody came in and threw some rags on the floor, an. Then the little girl left...”). In short, the frame is defined not so much what it includes as when and where it occurs—its liminal nature highlighted by the fact that, because of its contents, the frame becomes a wedge between two sacred-ritual frames: sermon preparatory prayer, and sermon proper.

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: The most apparent conceptual element in this story has already been alluded to; the sermon is, as has been mentioned, the focal point of the mainstream Protestant worship ceremony. Although it is not a physical entity, the sermon is an important conceptual entity: it is a sacred message for the congregation. But on a deeper level, it holds

23 The consultant’s prayer is as follows: “Dear God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable to you/in your sight, o God our rock, and our redeemer. Amen.”
significance and is anticipated because it is the pastor's individual, creative contribution to the worship ceremony. The sermon is the time when the pastor's role—as "interpreter of God's word"—becomes ultimately manifested. Further, within the worship ceremony, the sermon is the structural pinnacle; all events are arguably in preparation for, or a reaction to, this central presentation of the theme for the particular worship ceremony.

Because of the sermon's central role in the worship ceremony, and its thematic significance to the entire structure of the worship ceremony, I believe that it can be argued that the sermon ritual holds high conceptual importance to those participating in the worship ceremony. For this particular narrative, I would suggest that the un-narrated sermon plays a large role despite the fact that it is not actually a part of the story; the point is that the beginning-prayer ritual, or strip, was immediately preparing for the sermon and the assumption was that the sermon was about to begin. The significance of the sermon in this story lies in the fact that it was an event that had been built up and prepared for since the beginning of the entire worship ceremony. Yet, the sermon becomes significant here not because it occurs as the congregation (and the pastor!) expects, but because it is upstaged at the most pivotal moment by an unexpected profane event. The timing of the young girl’s vomiting, exactly after the beginning signal and directly before the start of the sermon itself, supplants the expectations of both the pastor and the congregation.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: In this particular story, as noted above, the concept of the sermon becomes prominent, but not as expected. The story is about a first-time experience, and what makes the experience significant beyond that fact are the special circumstances involved therein: the context of preparing a presentation of a sacred entity, during which a young girl stands up and vomits, thereby causing a disruption in the the sacred-ritual of the sermon. But, the actual sermon wasn’t destroyed; after the incident the consultant still delivered it. Yet, its significance was arguably nullified by the over-shadowing disruption.

In essence, the timing of the incident had a direct impact on the weakness of the sacred-ritual frame at this critical moment. Had the event occurred at another time within the sequence of

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24 In general, all of the hymns, prayers, invocations, responses, creeds, etc. are based upon a central theme which the sermon addresses directly (i.e., a scriptural passage, a holiday season, an example of goodness, love, giving, faithfulness, etc.). The pastor presumably tries to find appropriate hymns, invocations, creeds, etc. that compliment the central theme of the sermon.
the service, the impact would not have been the same, and I would contend, not as detrimental to the frame. For example, had the young girl vomited during another part of the worship ceremony—other than at the point directly after the preparatory ritual for the pinnacle of the ceremony, or directly before the presentation of the ultimate expectation—it would have been easier to maintain the integrity of the frame which was under construction since the beginning of the worship ceremony.

Due to the timing of the incident at the most crucial point in the ceremony—the liminal moment of expectation—and the contextual preparation of frame up until the incident, the sacred-ritual frame of the sermon was weakened by the occurrence of a profane incident. The entity of the sermon itself remained intact, its understanding and meaning still viable, but its significance was weakened by an ironically poignant disruption in the limen between contextual preparation and sermon presentation.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: The fragility of this sacred-ritual frame should, I trust, already be apparent. The frame in which the sermon is presented as the ultimate expectation is constructed and prepared through a process of liturgical order. That is the first clue to its instability. If a frame is prepared by stacking many other frames one on top of the other until finally it is time to place it—the ultimate ritual frame—at the pinnacle, if any underlying frame is weak, it can render the whole structure unstable. Further, if each progressive frame is built without allowing for flexibility—with no system of accommodation to deal with problematic weaknesses—the pinnacle frame is vulnerable to collapse due to the brittle rigidity of its underlying support structure. Thus it is with the sacred framework. If we think of the worship ceremony as a structural process, a construction of many frames constituting a supportive scaffolding for the frame in which the sermon occurs, it is easy to realize just how fragile the whole process is.

Narrative 8.1 describes an event of frame implosion at a dramatic moment: after the buildup of the underlying frames as context, the unexpectedly profane occurs just as the ultimate

25 The concept of imploding frame refers to that event or occurrence that causes the frame to collapse inward as focus or attention is inevitably redirected onto the incident. In the case of Narrative 8.1, the implosion of the sacred-ritual frame occurs due to the inescapable focus on the event of the young girl vomiting. The sacred frame collapsed, and the attention of the frame participants was sucked into the disruptive occurrence.
framed conceptual entity is about to be presented. The fragility of both the sermon and its supportive frames lies in the fact that the transcendent sacred framework won’t allow for deviant, secular, profane events. So, if an event such as a young girl vomiting occurs at such a poignant moment, within such an expectant context, the shock and disruption causes an implosion of frame into the incident itself. In fact, the disturbance is so irrevocable that what was to be the pinnacle framed event is supplanted by the incident. States the consultant in the narrative:

“...I have no idea what I preached on that day but I think nobody remembered the sermon I’m sure...that they all remember the incident of Jill O. throwing up just as the new pastor was to give his first sermon.”

It would seem, then, that even after a long period of time had passed after the vomiting incident, the pinnacle frame of the ceremony structure was recalled not as the sacred-ritual of the sermon presentation, but the secular occurrence of a profane event disrupting the sacred ritual.

The sacred framework does not build frames alongside the secular. Rather, frames are built above the secular in a teetering tower which can, with an unexpected incident, collapse “down” to the secular level. In order for the tower to be rebuilt, the sacred framework must be rebuilt. Once the secular has invaded the sacred frame structure, there must be a conscious re-entering into the sacred in order for the sacred concepts and symbols to be valid once again. This is another aspect of fragility inherent within the sacred framework; a sacred frame—by definition—can not meaningfully exist within a secular realm of understanding.

If the secular invades a sacred frame, a new frame must be built, reconstructed from the previous sequence of frames. In Narrative 8.1, the sermon-conceptual frame must be reset; the pastor must somehow give a new beginning signal to delineate the return of the sacred-ritual frame. Here, the consultant describes the return as first a beginning physical signal (his returning to the pulpit), and then building a bridge from the incident that had just occurred back to the sacred-ritual frame (in the form of a witty comment: “...and then I remember going back up in the pulpit and saying something to the effect of, that, uh, I thought seminary had prepared me for just about anything. And even though I had preached, uh, quite often out at the churches, this was the first time I had ever received, a reception quite like that to my preaching before I’d even started.”).

Thus there are three elements in this narrative which highlight the fragility of the sacred frame structure: (1) The narrative shows the construction of the pinnacle (sermon) ritual frame
through a dependent structure of supporting frames. (2) The narrative shows the sacred structure won’t allow for deviant incidents, and the bodily secular easily becomes a deviant entity itself. (3) The narrative shows that if a collapse does occur, the frame implodes down, flooding into the secular level. Then, to re-enter the sacred framework, a reconstitution of the sacred-ritual frame must occur.

Narrative 8.2

1. Synopsis: This story also involves a first-time experience for the consultant as a post-graduate from seminary. In this instance, the focus of the narrative is the consultant’s first time officiating in a communion ritual. The consultant was co-officiating with a Lutheran pastor in a joint worship ceremony at the consultant’s Presbyterian church (“And I remember the first communion, that I did.... The regular minister was on vacation, and during the summer, the Presbyterian church and the Lutheran church up the street had joint services. ...And, the two churches for many years had these joint communion services so Presbyterians and Lutherans, even though it wasn’t quite, the norm in most other communities, would gather.”). Before the ritual of communion and during his sermon, the visiting Lutheran pastor stated that it was proclaimed over a hundred years ago “...that Lutherans and Presbyterians would never share the Lord’s Supper together.” At the beginning of the communion ritual, the consultant, however, noted to the congregation: “Now isn’t it wonderful that so many years later, that we can share communion together!”, earning him a dour look from the Lutheran. In addition, during the middle of the communion ritual, as the consultant was “preparing the elements”, the Lutheran pastor extracted his datebook and began leafing through it, “...in front of the whole congregation! And started writing messages in it”, incensing the consultant. Later, after the worship ceremony, the consultant discovered that the Lutheran pastor was trying to fluster him, being a “rookie”, so to speak: “...he must of, must of really wanted to see how far he could push me....”

2. Frame: This story does not center on a single point in time as the previous narrative did. Rather, there are three strips of activity which can be combined into a frame for analysis: references to the sacred-ritual frame of communion, and occurrences related to it. The first strip of activity occurs as a perceived preparatory remark for the communion ritual: the Lutheran pastor’s divisive
statement of the decree "...that Lutherans and Presbyterians would never share the Lord’s Supper together." The second strip occurs at the outset of the communion ritual: the consultant’s repairing diplomatic note to the congregation that "...isn’t it wonderful that so many years later, that we can share communion together!" And the last strip occurs nearly at the peak conceptual and symbolic moment of the communion ritual, with the preparation of the elements: the Lutheran pastor infuriates the consultant by blatantly leafing through his datebook "...in front of the whole congregation!" I see these three strips of activity as combined into one sacred-ritual frame: the communion ritual.

Although the communion ritual in this story isn’t as specifically defined as the sermon was in the previous narrative, we can still infer it’s definition through important landmarks within the strips we are analyzing. First, the story makes it obvious that the communion ritual occurs after the sermon in the sequence of the worship ceremony. The consultant’s narrative notes: “So the time came for him to do his sermon, which is before the communion” So, if the theory holds that the sermon is the dramatic pinnacle of liturgical events and frames, then the communion ritual, although more holy and sacred, is somewhere on the structural down slope, heading towards the culmination of the ceremony and re-entrance into the secular world outside the church. From my own personal experience, if I may be so allowed, I have observed the fact that the communion ritual occurs very soon after the sermon, if not directly following it. However, the communion ritual is more holy and sacred than the sermon in the sense that it is a potent ritual at the heart of belief and faith. The communion is the ritual frame in which I will place the three strips of activity, although the activities did not occur all together in the nice neat bundle in which I am framing them. However, the frame I employ makes sense of the event as whole, as described in the narrative.

26 The sermon is the “dramatic pinnacle of liturgical events and frames” most notably within Protestant faith-practices. For more discussion regarding the sermon and the concept of pinnacle frame, consult the previous narrative analysis (Narrative 8.1).

27 Here, and in the following discussion, I refer to Protestant practice—I am less personally familiar with the Anglican and Catholic faith practices.

28 In some ways, the sermon might seem a preparation for communion, but the sermon is the pinnacle achievement for the cleric—a performance event which organizes the service.
3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: While the sermon is a ritual of highest importance, built up and supported by the sequence of sacred-ritual frames before it, the communion ritual is a special occurrence within the liturgical sequence. It is more deeply holy—taking place not every worship ceremony like the sermon, but periodically (i.e., once a month) in Protestant practice. It entails partaking of Christ's sacrificed body and blood in an intense reaffirmation of faith and incorporation. The sermon is also significant here. The consultant titles it “Today's Interpretation of God's Word”. Therefore, the sermon is not only a ritual presentation, but also a conceptual element of highest importance in the larger ceremony frame. The divine “message” is manifest through the pastor's interpretation.29

In addition, while the sermon involves two opposing participant roles—active (the pastor) and passive (the congregation)—the communion ritual involves active roles for all participants. Some of them are shared, and others are not. For instance, the pastor (and any attending ushers) and the congregation all partake in the communion elements (the bread and wine symbolizing, in the Protestant practice, the body and blood of Christ30). But, the two roles of pastor and congregation are also played out in different ways. The pastor is the sole active presenter and preparer of the communion elements, and the members of the congregation are passive listeners and observers. These roles are manifest at sequentially different, appropriate, times during the ritual. The sacred-ritual of communion employs variable roles, whereas the sermon sacred-ritual generally does not.

There is one other symbolic element, easily overlooked, but pertinent to this story. The consultant says, “And, so finally the time for communion came, and so, we got up and stood next to the table....” The mention of the “table” is important because it is an entity much like the pulpit, a place where symbols and conceptual elements become manifest into meaning, and presented to the congregation within the sacred-ritual. In Christian practice, the “communion table” is metaphorical and symbolic of the table where Christ supposedly performed the communion ritual.

29 For further discussion regarding the element of the “sermon”, consult Narrative 8.1. For discussion of a Catholic sermon—“homily”—consult Narrative 6.6, and 11.1 (the latter can be found in the Appendix).

30 For further discussion regarding the communion ritual and its corresponding conceptual and symbolic elements, see Narrative 7.2.
for the first time, an event referred to as the “Last Supper”. In essence, the “table” is symbolic of a gathering place where the holy becomes realized metaphorically in the flesh. In addition, the fact that this symbolic entity is combined with the communion elements is what makes the Lutheran pastor’s action of leafing through his datebook while at the table so enormously frame-distant. The sacred elements are being presented by the appropriate presenter, standing at the appropriate symbol on which the elements are displayed and are to become manifested, and the appropriate liturgical context is at hand. What makes the event unable to fit into the sacred-ritual frame is the Lutheran pastor’s decidedly secular action of consulting his datebook.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: Unlike the ritual of the sermon presentation in the previous story, the integrity of the symbolic ritual of communion does not remain intact. In two of the three strips of activity within the communion-ritual frame, the validity of the frame is directly assaulted. The remaining strip within the frame is the attempt by the consultant to preserve the validity of the frame and to reinvest integrity into the ritual.

Even before the time and proper liturgical context are reached in the worship ceremony, the Lutheran pastor sets out to destroy the communion-ritual’s foundation by stating that the ritual’s context—as shared by the two faith practices—is against church law. Essentially, the Lutheran pastor undermines the validity of the shared communion-ritual before it even begins, stating that the shared ritual specifically defies the governance of the Lutheran church authorities by breaking a decree made over 100 years ago.

In the next strip of activity, the consultant begins the communion ritual by trying to regain validity for the sacred ritual about to take place. By counteracting the Lutheran’s frame-deconstructing statement with a frame-constructing statement (“Now isn’t it wonderful that so many years later, that we can share communion together!”) the consultant tries to stabilize the foundation of the communion ritual by attempting to re-instill its sabotaged legitimacy. Presumably, this repair job is sufficient to restore a sense of validity, and the ritual proceeds.

31 The “Last Supper” was, historically, the last meal Christ ate before his subsequent crucifixion. The meal was held in an upper room, consisted of bread and wine, and involved Christ and his twelve disciples. Christ blessed the bread and wine, invoking the disciples to continue to break bread and pour wine together after his death as a symbol of his sacrificing his body for the sins of human-kind. For more in-depth discussion regarding the communion elements, consult Narrative 7.2.
The final strip constituting our framing of the sacred-ritual of communion is most interesting because it includes a complete frame-break by one of the interpreter-presenters of the communion ritual. The Lutheran pastor, at the most auspicious moment possible, reverts to the secular framework by engaging in a completely frame-distant activity—consulting his datebook. The quintessential symbolic elements of Christianity, the holy bread and wine signifying the body and blood of Christ, are being presented to the congregation, yet one of the active presenters is decidedly uninvolved, uninterested, and operating outside the sacred framework entirely. In this way, the Lutheran not only sabotages the integrity of communion ritual frame, but also breaks through the sacred framework itself. With a single planned secular act, at the right time, the Lutheran pastor manages to invalidate symbols, destroy the communion-ritual frame, weaken the encompassing frame of the worship ceremony, and operate outside of the sacred framework, in addition to giving the consultant a very difficult time during his first presentation of the communion-ritual! The timing is all the more ironic because the Lutheran pastor consults his datebook of secular "times" he has appointments for, or other sacred events he will attend, privileging other "times" above the sacred time of the communion ritual at hand.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: While this frame of activities is quite an unusual example of deliberate disruption due to the fact that it was a religious-leader who was the cause of the frame break and symbolic desecration, the communion frame does illuminate some very relevant fragilities of the sacred framework as a whole, beyond the worship ceremony. The fact that the communion-ritual was so strikingly disrupted by the frame break of one of the leaders shows that the religious-leader himself is a sacred conceptual element, his activities expected to remain "symbolic", always maintaining the correct representation of his calling as "interpreter of God's word". Essentially, while officiating, he must always be directed at building, maintaining, enhancing, and guiding the sacred framework and frame. If the religious-leader becomes suddenly "un-symbolic", or "un-sacred", then the frame of the event is easily weakened or broken.

32 There is an underlying concept regarding the Lutheran's datebook that is worthy of mention. Not only is the datebook inappropriate within the ritual (and ceremony) because it is not sacred or conceptually representational of the sacred, it is quite frame-distant. The datebook is an implement of the secular, "outside"-the-sacred-framework realm, organizing time ("dates") within the "framework" of every-day social life.
Fragility is inherent in the expectations placed upon religious-leaders; the sacred framework does not allow the pastor to act as anything less than a representation of holy authority, a superhuman form imperative to the framework's well being in the minds of the congregation. His acts must serve the sacred framework at all times, and in all ways, and while he may be human, he is perceived to be inhumanly free of errors. This fragility also manifests itself in a particular frame when the religious-leader shows all-too "human" errors, such as making a spoken or behavioral error, or succumbing to a physical frailty. In this case, however, the frame-weakening is caused by the Lutheran pastor's conscious choice to engage in frame-distant activities that purposefully imports alien and destructive elements of the secular into the sacred-ritual frame.

The sacred framework is again shown to be exclusionary of the secular, "outside world". The fact that it is not acceptable to be leafing through one's datebook—never mind that it was one of the pastors!—within the sacred framework is significant. The sacred, in essence, sets itself apart from the secular. Sacred understanding is often not compatible with the logicality of the "outside world". For example, in the sacred framework, the idea of a "book" is quite special, and exclusionary. The "Book"—referring to the Bible—is one of the central conceptual elements within Christianity. Essentially, the Bible is an appresentational entity that appresents and is the basis for legitimation of the entire sacred framework; used not only for its contents, the Bible also signifies an entire realm of understanding separate from that of the "outside world".

The concept of "The Book" as an integral part of a symbolic structure appresenting the divine is conceivable within the logical understanding of the secular—the Bible can be read as a source of information, understanding, even enjoyment. But the reading of a book about car mechanics, or cooking, or personal appointments, at "the table" for communion is inconceivable, much less inappropriate, de-legitimizing the sacred framework. This is where the fragility inherent

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33 For further discussion of religious-leader roles, see Narratives 5.3, 7.3, 8.15, and 10.7 (as well as others).

34 For an example of religious-leader error within the sacred framework, see Narrative 10.1. For an example of religious-leader physical frailty weakening the sacred framework, see Narrative 10.21 (see the transcript in the Appendix).

in the sacred framework is evident: the narrative shows the incompatibility of secular concepts and understandings with the appresentational entities and elements of the sacred.

**Narrative 7.2**

1. **Synopsis:** This narrative's central theme is also the sacred-ritual of communion. The consultant, a Methodist pastor, was officiating with two other pastors at a communion ritual in the autumn season. As the weather had just begun to turn chilly, the heat in the church came on for the first time since early spring, causing numerous flies to awaken from their summer slumber ("I knew the fact that this room was heated for the first time, the flies began coming out en masse..."). Unfortunately, one fly managed to fall directly into the communion chalice just as the consultant began to prepare to symbolically offer the "blood of Christ" to the two other pastors and presumably to the congregation ("And I looked down in the chalice and noticed that ... well the one fly found his way right to the center of the chalice. Floating on top of the juice."). Because the consultant was wearing a white robe, and the two other pastors were about to dip their bread into the chalice, the consultant was forced to think fast. He managed to get his piece of communion bread under the fly and lift it out of the chalice, at which time it "found its land-legs and flew away" ("I was wearing my alb, my off-white alb and I had in one hand a piece of bread and the other hand the chalice and I thought 'what do I do?' I cannot possibly serve this cup to the congregation with a fly floating about. Yet, I'm not going to scoop that fly up and wipe it on my alb. ...But not knowing what to do, well, I did get my bread under the fly and got him out of the juice. And then I paused for a moment wondering what comes next. As I watched, the fly found his land-legs and began walking around on the bread and then flew away."). The consultant believes that this entire sequence probably passed by unbeknownst to the congregation, because the two other pastors never noticed what had happened ("I bet, I think that no one else probably knew anything about that until I told them [the two other pastors] after the service.")!

2. **Frame:** The frame for the incident in this story is rather self-explanatory; the strip of activity occurs within the communion ritual, but concerns only the beginning, before the symbolic elements are presented to, and consumed by, the other two pastors and the congregation. Consult the above narrative analysis (Narrative 8.2) for placement of the communion ritual within the
sacred-ceremony frame of the worship ceremony.

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: The symbolic elements here are identical to those in Narrative 8.2. However, this narrative requires a more thorough description and explanation of the communion “elements”, as they are traditionally called in Christian practice. The bread and the wine, which is also referred to as the “cup”, are the central symbols in the communion ritual. As stated in the previous analysis, the bread and wine are symbols of the essence of Christianity—Christ and his sacrifice for humankind’s sins. As the Bible relates, the night of Jesus’ crucifixion at the hands of the Pharisees, Christ shares a meal (a Jewish Seder) with his twelve disciples in an upper room. It is at this time that he purportedly urged the disciples to carry on the ritual of breaking bread and pouring wine, “in remembrance of me.” The bread, Christ stated, was his body, “broken for you”, the wine his blood, “poured out for you”. The anthropomorphized bread and wine are treated as arguably the most ritualistic and sacred aspect of the worship ceremony because of this direct and vivid symbolization of Christ. They are held in the hand by the pastor or priest and consumed by the congregation as a powerful testament to Christ’s sacrifice for humanity manifest in the present as well as the past.

In the Catholic and Anglican practices, the symbolic elements are thought to become the actual, real entity of the body and blood of Christ. With the consecration of bread and wine, the ritual becomes an act of literal consumption of the body and blood of Christ. The Methodist practice, as with all Protestant practices (and this is the essence of Protestantism), decrees that the communion elements are not actually the body and blood of Christ, but merely highly potent symbols thereof. States Bateson regarding the sacred, Christianity, and Protestantism,

“[Historically], the Catholics were saying that the bread is the body and the wine is the blood, and the Protestants wanted to say, the bread stands for the body and wine stands for the blood. This difference seemed to them one for which it was reasonable to burn people and reasonable to be burned” (1991:301).

I would argue that Protestantism is not, therefore, a “softer” practice. This is not faith tempered by the secular understandings of bread and wine merely as food commodities. Perhaps it is, rather, a practice with strong symbolic beliefs, relying on inner faith rather than prescribed faith. The Methodist practice employs the communion elements of the bread and wine as potent symbolic
representations of Christ’s body and blood. In this narrative, it is of particular interest how the symbolic “body” and “blood” come to interact with each other in a rather unorthodox manner!

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: Within this story the issue is not so much how the sacred-ritual frame was actually weakened. Instead we learn about both the potential for its weakness (if the congregation had found out about the fact that a fly had landed in the chalice the communion would have been severely weakened or destroyed), and the way the sacred symbolic element of the bread/body was disregarded. The bread was secretly “sacrificed” to adroitly use it as an emergency implement to rescue the integrity of the wine/blood symbolic element.

First, consider the implications for the sacred-ritual frame of communion had the congregation been aware that a fly had landed in the Chalice and was being diligently fished out by the pastor as he prepared to serve everyone the symbol of the “blood of Christ”. Would they have engaged in theoretical and philosophical debates: did the fly actually receive the “blood of Christ”? did the fly defile the “blood of Christ”? is the fly now to be considered blessed, having literally bathed in Christ’s symbolic blood? Had the congregation discovered or witnessed the true events, there likely would have been an epistemological dilemma in the minds of everyone present; a conflict of secular and sacred—“do I now partake in the wine as the symbolic blood of Christ, or do I refuse to partake in the wine as a possibly infected food product?” If the members of the congregation each asked themselves this question, whether subconsciously or very consciously, the frame would be weakened. Moreover, the frame is no longer whole if its validity is questioned; its weakness lies in any doubt from the congregation.

The communion can not remain within the realm of the sacred framework if the bread and wine become seen as merely sanitary or unsanitary foodstuffs, safe or unsafe for consumption. The symbolic essence of the bread and wine is destroyed by wondering about its edibility. Whether or not the wine is safe to drink should have no bearing on its symbolic meaning; the question equates the wine with any other beverage at home in the refrigerator. Also consider the bread/body: does it have any chance of retaining its symbolic dignity if we see it as a vehicle for removing flies from wine? I would contend, from a personal standpoint, that if I observed my pastor using the symbolic “body of Christ” to extract a house fly from a cup of wine, even “The Cup”, I would personally have difficulty in continuing to think of the bread as one of the most holy
entities within my faith practice! The use of the bread as something so profane as a fly remover severely detracts from its validity within the sacred-ritual frame.

But of course, the members of the congregation (and the other two pastors) are blissfully unaware that they are about to partake in a now perhaps less-than-holy chalice. But this then raises the question, can the communion ritual still remain a sacred occurrence, retaining its meaning, if the members of the congregation don’t know otherwise? This is another theological question I over-step only because it is not of direct relevance to the analysis at hand. Suffice it to say that I would assume the communion ritual proceeded without a hitch after the incident, which is perhaps a comment on the collective assent to sacred meaning and understanding, and the collective participation within the sacred framework. The pastor himself was the only witness to the situation, and it was his duty to keep the sacred-ritual frame intact at all costs. Unlike the Lutheran pastor who publicly undermines the communion ritual, (Narrative 8.2), the Methodist pastor sustains the validity and dignity of the wine as a symbolic element by secretly hiding his necessary undermining of it.

But it could be persuasively argued, I believe, that the integrity of the wine as symbol was saved at a cost: using the bread for a non-sacred, even profane, purpose. By using the symbolic “body of Christ” to fish out the fly from the symbolic “blood of Christ”, the symbolic essence of the bread is severely tainted in two ways: One, in a literal sense, the bread is now, after touching the fly, rather unsavory—I would not want to eat that piece of bread! Two, in a symbolic sense, the bread is shedding its purpose of being a pure and holy entity, to become a useful and frame-saving implement. But now, after being used in a secular, even profane, manner, the bread is arguably impure and unholy, (or at least less so), after having come into contact with what we think of as a disease carrier and a nuisance.

But, then there is also the question, since only a small piece of the bread was used in this way—the whole loaf was not used to purloin the fly!—is the rest of the symbolic element tainted in a figurative sense? In other words, does the symbolic essence of the bread become changed if a detached part is arguably defiled? Does the desecration transfer back to the whole? Again, these are questions for the theologians and clerics to debate. They are questions which impact this story indirectly, because the questions did not have to be posed subconsciously by the congregation, because the frame participants apparently had no idea of the symbolic and epistemological fiasco.
that was taking place. Again, (as in Narrative 8.2), these issues implicitly deal with the nature of symbolic meaning, integrity, and validity.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: What is so intriguing about this narrative is that the sacred-ritual frame has the full potential to utterly collapse into secular revulsion at the thought of consuming wine from a cup into which a fly had fallen. And yet, this fallout does not take place because the consultant was sufficiently adroit and subtle to save the integrity of the communion-ritual frame. The congregation continued to operate within the understanding and under the assumption that the communion elements were pure, holy, and unadulterated symbols, as always. Had the congregation realized what had happened, and the sacred-ritual frame collapsed, the fragility of the communion-ritual frame would be more apparent.

Essentially, the sacred framework does not allow for symbolic alteration of any sort other than for the sacred purpose at hand. When, by chance, the symbols of Christ manifest in the present-day are tainted unavoidably, the meaning of the symbols is suddenly questioned, and they may lose their validity as representative of the sacred/holy/divine. By losing their validity, I mean that the elements cease to be symbols in the minds of the members of the congregation for a moment, as they each question the implications of a fly in the wine they are to consume. The briefest lapse in cognitive symbolic integrity is enough to cause the symbols to break down, because after they are questioned, their original purity can never be truly regained. I know that after an incident such as the one in this story, I would thereafter be reminded of it during subsequently similar rituals of communion—you never know what’s been in that wine!

As for the bread, the fragility of the frame lies in the fact that the symbols in the sacred framework are physically unalterable regarding their purpose in the ritual. For the bread to be used in any way other than as a symbolic piece of the “body of Christ”, and then to be blessed and ceremoniously distributed to each member of the congregation, constitutes fraud in the eyes of the sacred framework. To use it as an hors de' ovre, to feed the pigeons,36 or to fish a fly out of a cup of wine, be it a symbolic element or not, is invalid and would be an inconceivable sacrilege to many. The bread, and the wine as well, have set understandings in the sacred framework. To alter the purpose is to alter the understanding, and therefore the meaning of the essence of the

36 See Narrative 10.20, located in the transcript in the Appendix.
symbolic element. The fragility of the sacred-ritual frame is inherent in the structural rigidity of the sacred framework.

**Narrative 6.6**

1. **Synopsis:** This story-incident takes place during the homily within a mass ceremony at a Roman Catholic church with which the consultant, a nun, was connected at the time of the following incident. As the priest was presenting his homily to the congregation, birds trapped in the sanctuary swooped and dove around the altar area, adding some unexpected excitement to the service ("...a couple a times of birds getting in the church in the middle of mass. And all of a sudden this bird would swoop down you know. ...There was especially with, you know, with the priests giving their homilies or something. All of a sudden this bird is swooping down.").

2. **Frame:** The frame for analysis for the incident related in this story is similar to that for Narrative 8.1. Instead of the pre-sermon ritual of preparing for the sermon with a prayer, however, this story’s incident occurs during the homily, the Roman Catholic equivalent to the Protestant sermon. Although there is no specific “landmark” to orient us in this narrative as to what exactly was going on at the specific moment of the incident—we only know that the priest was actually giving his homily, during which, at some point after the beginning and before the end, trapped birds began to swoop down around in the altar area. It is critical, I believe, to understand that the specific sacred-ritual of the homily was underway, and that this ritual was interrupted.

3. **Conceptual/Symbolic Elements:** Although the homily itself does not stand for anything directly, I would argue that it is a conceptual entity. As in Narrative 8.1, the homily (a.k.a. “sermon”, in the Protestant faith practices) is the interpretive focal point of the mass-ceremony, an

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37 The terms “Homily” and “Mass” are specifically employed by the Catholic faith practices (and some Anglican practices as well). The “homily” refers to what would, in the Protestant practice, be called the “sermon”, and the “mass” refers to what is generally called the “worship ceremony/service”.

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anticipated thematic element within the liturgical sequence. I would contend that this is so because the homily is the time when the priest truly fulfills his role as “interpreter of God’s word”, the time when he contributes his own individual interpretation, a frame which he fills with his own message for the congregation. In this way the homily is an important conceptual element because of its power and poignancy as an individualized message, different from the set liturgy that surrounds it and comprises the rest of the mass-ceremony.

It is important to consider the symbolic potency of the cultural narrative element in this story: the birds trapped in the sanctuary. While birds in general may not have a set symbolism outside a particular framework, within the context of the frame in this story, the birds, as a natural entity, have possible symbolic meaning. Not only can this interruption of the sacred-ceremony stand for the “outside world” within the closed, holy realm of the sanctuary (a secular representation), but also something much more potent and perhaps poignant to the sacred-ceremonial situation. Perhaps the birds can be interpreted as some sort of omen, a sign from God? Essentially, can they be interpreted as a sacred symbolic entity within the sacred framework? Of course, interpretation of this event and an understanding of its symbolic meaning rest in the individuals witnessing the occurrence. However, I do believe it is possible to make some good educated guesses as to the individuals’ cognitive activities.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: Pertaining to what was just discussed above, a great deal of the weakening of this particular sacred-ritual frame is inherent in the individual

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38 However, it is important to note that while the homily is important as an interpretive entity within the mass ceremony, the ritual of communion—the Eucharist—is arguably as or more important as a “sacred act”. In a related personal note, Consultant 8 (a Protestant pastor) stated that,

“Sermon and communion are usually referred to as WORD AND SACRAMENT. Sacrament means a “sacred act”—so communion has a deeper sacredness to it [relative to the sermon/homily]. ...In the Roman Catholic Church, of course, it is the sacrament ... that is more central. The sermon (homily) is usually much shorter than a Protestant service and has less oratory skill.... But people generally go to a Catholic service expecting the central focus to be the Eucharist not the homily.”

39 Perhaps, and in relation to the above footnote, the homily is even more distinctively different (and therefore poignant?) than the surrounding set liturgy—including the Eucharist—because of the fact that it is the single ritual in an otherwise highly-structured ceremony that involves an individualized message from the priest. Perhaps the individual message is not so central in Catholicism.
interpretations. The birds are, of course a physical interruption, startling the congregation and
distracting them from the priest's homily. But, whether or not this destroys the homily-frame is
really up to the individuals comprising the congregation: do they let the incident destroy the frame,
being too distracted and thrown figuratively into the cold of the secular "outside world", or can
they and do they remain within the sacred framework by interpreting the bird flight as a sacred
symbol, some sort of omen or sign, perhaps? It would seem that if the members of the
congregation, although temporarily distracted from the homily-ritual, are able to continue to operate
within the sacred framework, then perhaps the frame of the homily is weakened very little, if at all;
the ritual simply put on hold for a moment by the occurrence of an unexpected, but holy, incident.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: The fragility of this sacred-ritual frame is innate,
I believe, in the fact that there is the possibility for a digressive interpretation of the incident—an
understanding outside the sacred framework. I think it is safe to assume that this would be the
more prevalent interpretation of this incident. After all, most parishioners knew the birds were
merely trapped in the sanctuary. This fact would likely destroy the sacred framework for many
because of their interpretation of the incident as frame-distant. We may jump to deviant, frame-
distant interpretations of incidents even though this wrecks the frame, because the sacred
framework allows this deviant interpretation. Again, the higher the sacred frames are built above
the secular, the farther, and harder, the fall-out. And if the sacred framework is so rigid that
deviance can not be accepted, or at least can not be understood within the sacred-ritual frame, then
the sacred frame, such as this homily, is inherently unstable and, when subject to the unexpected,
has the tendency to collapse.

40 It is tangentially intriguing to note the paradox here: the fact that the sanctuary—a safe-
haven—becomes a trap for the birds—quintessentially free and unhindered, conceptually! Also, on a
deeper level, the fact that the holy place of ceremony—where God as creator and protector of all things is
worshipped—becomes something essentially evil and demonstratively confining, is an ironic paradox.
Narrative 6.7

1. Synopsis: This story also occurs during a mass at a Roman Catholic church with which the consultant was affiliated. During the ritual of “giving the sign of peace”, a young girl in the congregation fainted (“Um, Father Gore had a funny experience two weeks ago. ...One of the girls who was serving, fainted, and he just said, he saw this expression in her face, and she was moving toward the altar, and he reached down to grab her just before she went down. And, he said, I guess it, oh, I know, it was at the sign of peace, we usually, you know, give the sign and shake hands and wish each other peace.”).

2. Frame: The frame within which we will analyze this story is the ritual of the “giving the sign of peace”, within the larger frame of the mass ceremony. Specifically, this ritual is a part of the mass during which the members of the congregation leave their pews, (or at least get up out of their seats), and offer greetings of peace to other members. The consultant does not specify at what exact point during this ritual the girl fainted—during the invitation to participate, the congregation’s greetings, or the end signal—but this is irrelevant. The point is that the incident of the girl’s fainting occurred during this ritual, and within the larger ceremonial context.

3. Contextual/Symbolic Elements: The ritual of “giving the sign of peace” involves the greeting of others in the congregation. However this is accomplished, words, hand shake, kiss, hug, etc., is not of direct importance. All these actions are conceptual elements in that they stand for a religious greeting—the physical action symbolizing the concept of greeting another person. However, this ritual is not just about saying a simple phrase of greeting, such as “hello”, accentuated with a physical action (as in the “every-day” framework). The greeting itself is conceptually symbolic of something larger because it occurs within this particular frame, and under these particular conditions within the sacred. As the “title” of the ritual states, this greeting is about symbolically “giving the sign of peace”, meaning to “give the sign of peace, in the name of God/Christ/the holy”. In essence, the greeting is a symbolic element as a type of blessing—a ritualized action which stands for the sacred act of anointing another with God’s peace and love.

As in the previous narrative (6.6—the interruption of the homily by birds), the actual entity of disturbance, in this case a girl’s fainting, can also be seen in a conceptually symbolic light,
dependent upon its interpretation. As the trapped birds could be thought of as symbolic in the sense that perhaps they could be taken as some sort of sacred sign or omen, so too can the fainting be taken as symbolic or as a sacred sign. We can imagine many different interpretations of how the act of fainting in this particular ritual could be understood as sacred-symbolic, so suffice it to say that any witness in the congregation could have come up with one. Again, what is crucial is in what framework—sacred or secular—were the interpretations being constructed?

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: Continuing the discussion above, the congregation’s interpretation of the incident indicates the weakness of the sacred-ritual frame. How the members of the congregation decide to interpret the incident—as an intrusion of the secular, or as an occurrence with sacred significance—determines the stability of the ritual frame. As in the previous narrative, (6.6), interpretations of the girl’s fainting lead to two main ways of understanding the incident. One allows the frame to continue, perhaps interrupted but still intact. The other one potentially causes the frame’s collapse. The question, then, is, for the situation at hand—within the frame of this special ritual of blessing and greeting—is it easier to interpret the girl’s fainting as frame-distant or frame-plausible?

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: The fragility of the sacred-ritual frame is realized no matter which way the above question is answered. That the question arises in the first place deconstructs the efforts we use in interpreting any entities in the sacred frame. I would argue that it was much easier for the members of the congregation to interpret the incident as frame-distant, simply because the sacred framework has a difficult time trying to compensate for, explain, or accommodate anything that is not within the liturgical structure set. I would contend that one could more easily interpret the girl’s fainting as, at the least, an occurrence with some sacred meaning, if the sacred framework did not build its frames so far above the secular “ground”. The rigidity of the sacred framework creates brittle structures which are easily broken apart by that which does not fit into the expectations inherently built into the frame.

41 Perhaps a frame-relevant interpretation of the girl’s fainting would be that of a divinely-caused state of altered consciousness, a spiritual possession of her body causing her to faint. Obviously this is but one of many possible frame-relevant interpretations of the incident.
Narrative 8.7

1. Synopsis: This story occurs during a worship ceremony close to the Christmas holiday, during the Christian-liturgical season of Advent. During the particular ceremony related within this narrative, the consultant drew the congregation’s attention to the symbolic entity of the Jesse Tree at the front of the sanctuary (“During a, Christmas season we would, we’d get an old branch, and put it in the church and we’d create a Jesse Tree.”). Explaining the barren branch’s symbolism (see section 3: “Conceptual/Symbolic Elements”), the consultant invited the members of the congregation to take a yellow ribbon—signifying American concern for the hostage crisis in Iran at the time—to come up to the Jesse Tree and “tie one on” (“...[T]he people at the time were, um, tying yellow ribbons on the trees and branches outside their homes. To, ah, remember the hostages. So, I put this big branch up in the sanctuary. And we had yellow ribbons for everybody. And at that point at the service I invited people to come forward, to take a yellow ribbon, and to tie one on.”). As the consultant said this phrase, he realized that he had uttered a euphemism for “getting drunk.” The congregation snickered, and the consultant, embarrassed, lamely said “Oh, you know what I mean...!”

2. Frame: The frame for this incident is somewhat equivalent in nature to that of Narrative 8.1; it encompasses the beginning signal of a ritual. Within the larger context of a worship ceremony temporally close to the Christmas holiday (in December), during the liturgical season of Advent, the consultant introduced the symbol of the Jesse Tree, explained its symbolic significance, and explicated the significance behind the symbolic ritual of tying yellow ribbons on the Tree’s branches. This introduction, preparing and giving the congregation the understanding and significance they needed to participate in the ritual with full comprehension, is the frame in which the analysis of a particular strip of activity will take place. This strip is the utterance, by the consultant, inviting the members of the congregation to come forward to the Jesse Tree, and “tie one on”, meaning tie a yellow ribbon on the tree.

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42 Advent is the liturgical season of preparation for the celebration of the coming of the birth of Christ, lasting the approximate four weeks from the Thanksgiving holiday to the Christmas holiday on December 25th.
3. **Conceptual/Symbolic Elements**: The conceptual/symbolic elements pertinent to this story are three: the Jesse Tree, the yellow ribbon, and the phrase “tie one on”. Scripturally, the Jesse Tree signifies new life—the symbolism of Jesus being new life from the old, dead stump of Jesse. An old, dead branch, placed in the sanctuary, was given “new life” through decoration. This symbol was presumably used by the consultant during the Advent season as a symbolic reminder of the coming birth of Christ, who, it is scripturally maintained, brought new hope to a sinful world.

The yellow ribbon was a symbol most prominent during the Iran hostage crisis in the early 1980s. As a symbol of support for American hostages held in Iran, many people around the country tied yellow ribbons on trees or other conspicuous places outside. The consultant thought it would be appropriate and agreeable to the congregation to decorate the Jesse Tree with symbolic yellow ribbons—both to show support for the American hostages, and to symbolically bring new life to the old branch.

The phrase “tie one on” is colloquially metaphorical for becoming inebriated. Although in this context the consultant in no way meant for the phrase to mean “to get drunk”, the phrase obviously retained its secular, profane meaning, even within the sacred-ritual frame, witnessed by the fact that some of the members of the congregation “snickered”. While the consultant meant the three words “tie one on” to mean nothing more than what the sacred situation at hand required—merely to tie a yellow ribbon onto the Jesse Tree—the phrase was taken as a profane reference to a very secular concept!

4. **Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame**: The element most responsible for the sacred-ritual frame’s weakening is obviously the phrase “tie one on”. Because this phrase was secularly interpreted, it caused the frame’s weakness, and arguably, led to its collapse.

Interestingly, the sacred context was very clear—the ribbons were present, the Tree was visible, and the phrase employed by the consultant made perfect sense in the sacred context. Yet, the phrase caused a fall-out of the frame because of its very strong profane connotation. In essence, the folk phrase holds so powerful a meaning, (as perhaps is a characteristic of all fixed-phrase slang expressions, illicit concepts, and “naughty” symbols), that to take it in its profane sense was inescapable, even in the sacred context where it made perfect sense pertaining to the
situation at hand.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: Perhaps, then, the fragility underlying the sacred-ritual frame was not merely the inability of the sacred framework to allow for a secular, profane interpretation of a phrase, but also the fact that the profane phrase carries with it such intense potency that it is undeniable and inescapable within any context and/or framework, even in the sacred. In addition, when the leader of this sacred-ritual frame and upholder of the sacred framework himself makes the secularly interpretable suggestion for the congregation to come to the front of the sanctuary and get drunk, the phrase becomes even more profanely potent, simply because of the absurd, blasphemous notion.

Narrative 8.8

1. Synopsis: This narrative incident occurred during a worship ceremony ritual, in particular the ritual of “sharing the hand of fellowship, or a kiss of peace”. At the culmination of a particular worship ceremony, the consultant decided to invite the congregation to participate in the ritual of greeting one another with a hand shake or a kiss (“...Part of the frustration of many churches is where to put the um, the peace, the passing of the peace. Because people feel it disrupts the service. So, for me, the best place to do it was at the end, right after the benediction, as people were leaving. So the first Sunday I was to do this....”). In invoking this ritual, the consultant inadvertently committed a “spoonerism”,43 inviting the congregation to “share the hand of fellowship, or a piss of kease.” Embarrassed, the consultant said nothing of his mistake, and the ceremony ended (“Aaand...and as soon as I said it my face went bright red I looked up, and I realized that if I did anything I would draw attention to it....”). The consultant notes that this event was one of his “most embarrassing moments [during a worship ceremony].”

43 A “Spoonerism” is the linguistic act of switching the (first two) spoken phonemes of a short phrase (i.e., “kiss of peace” becomes “piss of kease”).
2. **Frame:** The framing of this incident is very similar to that of Narrative 6.7, including a strip of activity in a relatively equivalent ritual.\(^{44}\) In this case the strip is not of a girl fainting during the ritual itself, (as in Narrative 6.7), but, as in the above narrative, (8.7) a faux pas by the consultant in his introduction and preparation for the following ritual—that of “giving the hand of fellowship, or a kiss of peace.” Even more specifically, again as in the above analysis, the consultant is giving the beginning signal—the invocation, in a sense—for the start of the ritual itself.

3. **Conceptual/Symbolic Elements:** As in Narrative 6.7, the ritual act of “giving the hand of fellowship, or a kiss of peace” has conceptually symbolic elements inherent within it. In fact, the consultant acknowledges these symbolic elements in his phrase of invitation: the hand-shake stands for “fellowship”, the kiss for “peace”. This is not a mere greeting, not a simple “hello”, but a blessing bestowed on others that symbolizes peace and fellowship. Also as in Narrative 6.7, the sacred is manifest through these acts of symbolic blessing. The consultant invites the congregation to participate in this ritual within the sacred-ceremonial context of the worship service. In essence, the greeting is a symbolic element in the fact that it is not merely a greeting in any other (non-sacred) context, but a type of blessing.

4. **Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame:** Instead of a disruptive incident occurring during the ritual itself, (as in Narratives 6.6 and 6.7), this particular frame is rendered more unstable and weak because the frame-distant activity occurs during the invitation to, and introduction of, the ritual. Essentially, the construction of the sacred-ritual frame is undermined from the start. I am arguing that when a deviant incident occurs during the ritual, it leaves the foundation of the frame intact. This story relates an occurrence that weakens the entire foundation of the ritual frame because the frame-distant event occurs in the *process* of frame building. The pastor is *preparing* the congregation and inviting them to participate in the ritual.

Further, the incident of the girl fainting in Narrative 6.7 is not a very profane event, and

\(^{44}\) Relatively equivalent in the sense that this event occurred within the Protestant practice, and the incident in narrative 6.7 occurred in the Catholic practice. While both Christian practices, they differ quite drastically in some ways, most notably in the sense of the communion ritual—see narrative 7.2. Nonetheless, it is safe to assume that the ritual discussed in both of these narratives is similar enough to be described as “relatively equivalent”—the same ritual occurs, but within a different ceremonial style and practice.
can even, as I have contended, be incorporated into the frame itself as an occurrence within the sacred, perhaps even with the possibility for sacred meaning and understanding. In this story, however, the incident is profane without a doubt—it narrates the utterance of profanity itself! Furthermore, the profanity is voiced by the pastor himself, the one who is the “architect”\textsuperscript{45} of the sacred-ritual frame.

What is even more intriguing is the fact that, by committing a mere accidental “spoonerism”, the consultant \textit{inadvertently} utters profanity. The entire phrase “piss of kease” of course has no meaning in any framework of understanding, but the first word is instantly recognizable as rather distasteful and profane, definitely inappropriate within the sacred framework, and especially frame-distant if spoken by the pastor! It seems, then, that it was an arbitrary accident of language that the ritual frame was weakened so much. Had the spoonerism produced nonsense words, (like “kease”) or at least no profane word,\textsuperscript{46} I would contend that the sacred-ritual frame would not have been weakened as severely because the profane element would not have been present, and therefore the mis-speak not nearly so frame-distant.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: As in Narrative 8.7, the sacred-ritual frame is weakened by the presence of a word understood-as-profane, even within the sacred framework. As similarly stated above, (in Narrative 8.7), perhaps what caused the fragility of the frame was not just the inability of the sacred framework to allow for a secular, profane word, (even inadvertently spoken and without meaning!), but also the fact that the profane word carries with it such intense potency that its profane meaning is undeniable and inescapable within any context and/or framework. In addition, when the leader of this sacred-ritual frame and upholder of the sacred framework himself utters the profane word for a profane bodily function, it is conceivable that the word “piss” becomes even more strikingly shocking. The pastor himself introduces a discordantly secular meaning within the sacred-ritual frame about to commence.

\textsuperscript{45} By referring to the religious-leader as the “architect” for the sacred-frame, I mean to say that s/he designs the structure of the ceremony, ritual, etc. to some degree. In this particular case, the consultant was the “architect” of the ritual frame of “giving the hand of fellowship, or a kiss of peace”, designing the ritual’s structure through his introduction and placement of it within the larger worship ceremony frame.

\textsuperscript{46} For example, if the consultant had meant to say “...hug of peace”, instead of “...kiss of peace”, the spoonerism would not have led to a profane word or connotation; “...pug of heace” is harmless!
Narrative 10.1

1. Synopsis: This story includes a particular incident during a certain Episcopal worship ceremony. At some point during the mass ceremony, presumably during the offering ritual, the consultant said “remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when he said it is more blessed to receive” (“So, I was an aspirant at the time, I was real new, at saying the priest part, I hadn’t been ordained yet, and I remember turning around and saying....”). The Consultant should have said “...it is more blessed to give” (I got the give and receive confused.”).

2. Frame: If we assume, (which I will do from here and throughout the rest of this analysis), that this incident occurs within the offering ritual during the mass ceremony, the frame is much the same as the above narrative (8.8). Again, the story concerns the invocation and introduction of a ritual. In this instance, the consultant utters a phrase to both signal the beginning of the offering ritual, as well as to invoke and introduce the offering ritual for the congregation. The strip of activity is very short, and involves the consultant merely saying the phrase, “remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when he said it is more blessed to receive”.

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: The conceptual elements in this story are only two: First, the act of offering itself is a conceptually symbolic entity. Behind the act of giving money as a ritual within a sacred ceremony, lies a concept. By participating in the offering ritual, one is, in a sense, also participating in the symbolic concept inherent within the act. What I mean is this: by giving money during the offering ritual within the sacred framework, one does not simply concede money as in the secular act of paying for a product or service, or even as an act of charity or simple gift-giving. Behind the act of giving money within the offering ritual is another layer of meaning—a deeper understanding of the act as symbolic. Very simply, the offering is symbolic because it is proffered by, and understood to be, giving a part of one’s self, in this case one’s “wealth”, to God, (or at least indirectly as a gift to the church to further God’s will). In this way, the offering is more than a beneficent act, but further, an act of self-devotion and piety.

   The other conceptual element employed in this story is the standard phrase, “Remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when he said it is more blessed to give.” This phrase has specific meaning within the offering ritual context. Spoken by the priest to invoke the offering ceremony,
the phrase is representative of more than the act about to take place; it is not meant to be just an instruction to the congregation to contribute money to the church, but also a reminder that giving is sacred, and by offering part of one’s wealth to God, one will, in essence, be fulfilling the words of Christ. Essentially, the phrase is a conceptual representation of Christ’s philosophy of giving as a sacred, blessed, act of stewardship.47

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: If this incident of the consultant’s word-switching was uttered truly within the offering ritual, then he literally switched two symbolic meanings. By mistaking one word within the introductory and invocational phrase of the offering ritual, the entire ritual has the possibility to take on a completely contradictory meaning. By quoting Christ as having said, “it is more blessed to receive”, the consultant inadvertently, (as in Narratives 8.7 and 8.8), weakens the foundation of the entire offering ritual frame by giving an introductory statement that is not only contradictory, but has a rather profane, and definitely unchristian, meaning. By merely switching the word in the ritual phrase, the consultant turned a sacred act of giving in the name of Christ into the profane meaning of preferably receiving wealth as a blessed and holy act. Unlike Narrative 8.7, the congregation does not have an interpretive choice that may or may not lead to the fallout of the frame. The congregation did not have to choose a profane meaning in this case, the pastor inadvertently does so! The consultant is completely responsible for the the undermining of the frame, (also as in Narrative 8.8), having uttered the frame-weakening statement himself.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: The congregation, however, is responsible for the actual collapse of the sacred-ritual frame. If they allow the ritual to proceed, cognitively continuing within the sacred framework and therefore avoiding a frame fallout, then the frame may conceivably remain intact. Even if the congregation is capable of ignoring the consultant’s slip, thereby not letting it ruin the ritual frame, I would think that no one could completely block out the meaning of the consultant’s phrase mistake. This is where the fragility of the frame lies. Each

47 Stewardship is, rather than an act of “giving money to the church”, a responsibility for sharing one’s time and talent, as well as material possessions, systematically and proportionately over time, in the service of God and for the benefit of all humankind. In essence, stewardship is a sacred framework-defined role manifested through one’s sacredly-dedicated actions, rather than just a financial obligation to the church.
individual’s cognitive process inescapably questions the meaning of the ritual subsequent to hearing the consultant’s mistake. But this fragility is not the consultant’s fault, nor any of the frame participants’. Rather, it is inherent in the sacred framework, which forces participants in any sacred frame to operate with restricted set meanings and infallible understandings. A simple mistake can ruin it all.

I would also contend that in the sacred framework the consultant’s phrase “remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when he said it is more blessed to receive” might mean nothing, elicit no understanding, and therefore may be simply ignorable—a non-destructive element in the sacred frame. But obviously, this quarantine of the word is impossible, because the phrase does in fact evoke meaning and elicit clear understanding from outside the sacred framework. The fragility in this sacred-ritual frame is derived from the inadvertent and unavoidable default secular understanding of the mistaken word. The sacred framework is too inflexible to allow for secular interpretation—this is a major fault-line within the sacred framework, because the secular is always the default framework for understanding.48

48 I state that the secular framework is “always the default” with some trepidation, simply because I do not feel qualified to state such a phrase as fact. I am relying on my own intuition and observation to formulate my own underlying theory, which is this: Logicality—and I mean this in the sense of simple deductive cognition—will always prevail over transcendent cognition. This is because logic is supported by our physical senses, (it is very possible to see why 2+2=4), whereas transcendent cognition is dependent on non-physical notions of idealism (it is arguably impossible to see God in the physical sense, without cognitively using appresentational references).
Chapter 4

“Special” Ceremony Narrative Analyses

This chapter will focus on examining some sacred-ritual frames within the “special” ceremony setting. Specifically, this section examines how the collection of narratives illuminates the sacred framework’s rigid construction through its creation of fragile frames. Conceptual and symbolic elements and their contextual interpretation will be the primary focus of my analysis of the narratives. These elements reveal the fragility of the sacred-ritual frame when disruptive experience leads them to in some way deviate from the underlying sacred framework. Essentially, I will show how the narrative collection contributes to an understanding of how the “special” ceremony is susceptible to collapse, fall-out, or implosion due to a frame-distant incident.

Narrative 8.3

1. Synopsis: This narrative involves the consultant’s first officiation at a wedding ceremony, as a post-graduate from seminary. The bride was only remotely related to the consultant’s church, and although they were from Detroit, the wedding party wanted the ceremony to be held at the consultant’s church in New Jersey (“...[T]he young lady was only remotely related to the church through a cousin and they wanted to have it here, and they came out from Detroit.”). Everything proceeded to go wrong: the wedding party had only one meeting with the consultant and no rehearsal (“...I only had one opportunity to meet with the couple the weekend, of the wedding. And, there was no time for rehearsal, and, there were seventeen people in the wedding party.”); half of the groomsmen’s tuxedos got lost on the flight from Detroit (“Aaand, half of the groomsmen didn’t have tuxedos because they got lost in the flight from Detroit.”); it was an extremely hot afternoon in August, making everyone, especially the organist, “sweat bullets” (But, anyway, the wedding was supposed to start and the organist was playing away. ...Aaand, it was the hottest day of the year. It must have been 95 degrees outside.”); the bride was forty-five minutes late, and accompanied by two mothers (“So I guess it was polygamy at its ... finest”), who wanted to be walked up the aisle by the pastor/consultant (“...I think this was two or three
o’clock in the afternoon...but the bride didn’t show up. The groom was there, and the groomsmen and we were waiting. ...[It] was two o’clock and it was quarter after two and then it was two thirty. And the organist kept playing and playing. And, he kept going through his music two or three times. ...It was hot, it was miserable. Forty-five minutes late, the bride shows up, ‘kay. Now she and her family are from, I think it was Ghana. ...And she came with two mothers. And don’t ask me how she had two mothers ... the mothers were insistent that I should walk them up the aisle. I should escort them up the aisle.”); the photographer was extremely obnoxious and insensitive to the ceremony at hand (“...[R]ight in front of them, came the photographer. And this photographer was so obnoxious. At points during the ceremony he actually, moved some of the bridesmaids out of the way to get a better shot. One point he walked right between the bride and the groom. And I was so angry....”); the wedding bands were sewn onto the pillow born by the ring-bearer (“So, the Best Man and I, were holding the pillow and yanking them off ... and pulling them off, sweating like crazy....”). “[I]t was the worst nightmare, of a wedding one could ever expect....”

2. **Frame:** The event which the consultant describes encompasses a large swath of activity with a few specifically defined strips. The analytical frame which will be employed is parallel to the structure of the ritual incidents occurring within the wedding ceremony. That is, the beginning of the ceremony corresponds to the starting boundary of the frame, and the end of the ceremony corresponds to the ending boundary of the frame. This is not so important except to point out and elucidate the concept that the entirety of the event is significant to our employment of frame analysis. In essence, the whole wedding ceremony is of import, and therefore in the frame for analysis, because although some activities and traits are time unspecific, they are contextually important.

For example, the photographer’s actions are an important part of the event, and contribute to the event’s incongruous nature. Yet these actions did not occur at a specific time in the story. Rather, it is understood that they occurred continuously:

“...And this photographer was so obnoxious ... at at one point during the wedding he actually ... moved some of the bride’s maids out of the way, to get a better shot! One point he walked right between the bride and the groom, and I was so angry, that ... I was almost tempted to stop the
wedding and kick him out, but I just wanted to get it over with.”

The photographer, it is implied, was “obnoxious” throughout the wedding ceremony, but his most atrocious actions were his moving of the bridesmaids, and stepping between the bride and groom.

Within the broad sacred-ceremony, there are three highlighted strips of activity which are pivotal to the health of the frame and its continuance within the sacred framework. The first strip contains the activity of the organist playing away, sweating like crazy, while everyone waits for nearly an hour for the bride to show up.

The next strip contains the arrival of the bride with her “two mothers”, and their insistence that the consultant escort them up the aisle, the photographer in close attendance.

The last strip contains the activities surrounding the ritual of ring presentation; the consultant bending down to remove the rings from the pillow, discovering they were sewn onto it, and his and the Best Man’s subsequent actions to remove them.

These strips constitute the frame used in the following analysis.

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: There are many subtle conceptual and symbolic elements employed within this narrative. Before discussing these, however, there are two, more prominent, elements to discuss. First, it is important to discuss the concept of marriage. Although not a material symbol (like the wedding ring), marriage is a very secular concept, not limited to the sacred framework. Marriage is a legally recognized entity: if the proper steps have been taken, then it is understood that marriage constitutes a legal, and perhaps spiritual, connection of a man and a woman in a conceptual bond, committed to each other for life (unless special circumstances arise; i.e., divorce). I trust I need not elaborate on the legalities of marriage further. However, a wedding ceremony, performed in a religious institution by an ordained religious-leader, carries greater conceptual potency than simply initiating this legal bond. If a pastor or priest conducts a wedding ceremony, there is a spiritual aspect to the beginning of marriage. A wedding is thought to transcend legalities, joining a man and a woman together in wedlock within the sacred

49 It is important to define the two terms “marriage” and “wedding” and their differences. For our purposes here, marriage constitutes the institution of being joined together in wedlock—a legal concept that is the opposite of “single”. The wedding, on the other hand, is the specific ceremony in which two people are married as a sacred covenant—a sacred concept that is in congruence with God and the sacred institution of the church.
framework and its inherent understandings. In this sense, there is not merely a legal bond, but a spiritual bond as well—a union of two people into one life that carries with it a spiritual blessing.\(^50\)

The other, and perhaps more apparent, element in this particular story is the symbol of the ring. The ring is both a secular and sacred symbol—the wearing of rings by the spouses signify unity, not necessarily in a sacred sense. Our interest here, though, lies in the sacred application of the symbol of the ring. Within the Christian practice, the sacred-ritual of exchanging rings is, I would contend, the most important liturgical event in the entire wedding ceremony. The rings are presented, usually by a third party (i.e., a ring bearer), and then, in this case, given to the couple by the pastor. The bride and groom in turn place the ring (traditionally) on their new spouse’s left-hand ring finger, thereby representationally cementing the pastor’s invocational words with a physical act. The ring, then, is not merely a symbol of covenant with each other, but also of covenant with God—the rings are exchanged within a sacred frame, as sacred symbols of commitment to each other and to God.

The subtler representational concepts that exist within this story are all contained within the larger symbolic system of the wedding ceremony, and serve to further its significance and “spirituality”.\(^51\) These include organ music, long associated with Christian sacred ceremonies as a gesture of praise and invocation of the holy; ceremonial dress, in this case the wedding-party attire of tuxedos for the men, a representational reminder of ceremonial observance and authority; the action of escorting, in this case the “mothers” of the bride, up the aisle of the sanctuary, denoting their ceremonial significance as the bride’s “parents”; the pastor, as presider and officiator of the ceremony, representative of the holy, and bestower of God’s blessing; the Best Man, intermediary between the ring-bearer and the pastor, presenting the rings as representative of his significance in the ceremony as the groom’s trustee; and lastly, the significance of the bride and groom within the

\(^{50}\) It is interesting to note that even if a marriage ceremony is performed in a highly religious context, there are still legal implications—a marriage will not be recognized legally in society if the religious-leader is not “certified” by the government to perform such ceremonies. A marriage may be performed without any spiritual aspects whatsoever and still be legitimate; a marriage may also be performed in a highly religious context, yet not be socially acceptable and recognized legally. In this way, marriage can contain both the aspects of religious belief and social law.

\(^{51}\) By the term “spirituality” I mean that the wedding ceremony is, through representational and symbolic concepts, connected to the divine and holy. To “further spirituality” is to foster that connection between sacred ceremony and divine entity.
ceremony, whose sacred unity the wedding ceremony itself enacts.

4. **Weakening the Sacred-Ceremony Frame:** The weakening of the sacred-ceremony frame within this narrative is caused primarily by participant roles that (ordinarily) sustain the integrity of the sacred-ceremony frame and, in this ceremony, are deeply strained.

Note first that the participants in the wedding ceremony other than the consultant do not conform neatly to the context at hand; the wedding-party was in no way connected with the church or the consultant, except the bride, who was remotely related to the consultant's church through a cousin. In addition, the party was not from a nearby area, but came from Detroit, hundreds of miles away from the place of the wedding ceremony in New Jersey, (where the consultant’s church was at the time), and the bride hailed from a completely different country, with a rather different culture, no less!

The first indication that these distance factors had a bearing on the integrity of the ceremony was the fact that the groomsmen’s tuxedos got lost on the flight from Detroit, so they were inappropriately attired for the ceremony. Not only is the dress of the groomsmen important in the sense of uniformity of appearance, but also as representative of authority in the wedding ceremony as attendants of the groom.

In a material sense, wedding attire in general can be thought of as a statement of finery belying the splendor of the ritualized celebration. Without the aspects of uniformity, authority, and finery, it may be argued that the wedding ceremony lost a portion of its dignity in the eyes of the audience—visual observation is corollary to mental perception. Was the groom’s integrity compromised by the appearance of his attendees? Perhaps one doesn’t have to have tuxedos, but once a protocol of tuxedo-dress is established, the code is shattered if the groomsmen are not in tuxedos.

Consider next the organist, who began to play in anticipation of the bride’s arrival. The organist’s job is subtly important: in Protestant practice, organ music is usually the first signal of the start of almost any ceremony—worship, wedding, funeral, etc. In essence, he began the entire ceremony.

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52 Perception is obviously linked inextricably with interpretation. Therefore, how we "see" things—quite literally, in this case, with the non-uniformity of the groom's men—greatly effects our interpretations. Here, it is conceivable that the groomsmen, "attendants" to the groom and therefore linked to his overall image, may possibly weaken the groom's integrity due to the perception of them as non-uniform.
ceremony frame, setting the sacred "atmosphere" with his prelude. But as time wore on and the bride and her party did not arrive, he was forced to play through his music two or three times, sweating profusely, and imaginably becoming more and more fatigued, worried, and irate.

Even if the organist’s playing did not reflect his sentiments, it is conceivable that the music, upon repetition, became less mood-evocative and more worrisome each time the assembled realized he was replaying a piece he had already played at least once before. It seems, then, that through the necessity of its over-use, the organ music became less evocative of the holy, celebratory atmosphere, and more representative of the anxious situation at hand. Essentially, the organ music imaginably became detrimental to the sacred-ceremony frame, weakening its structure with each repetition.

When the bride finally did arrive, she brought with her a spectacle: two mothers, both of whom insisted on being escorted up the aisle by the pastor/consultant. On the surface, this seems simply unconventional in a Western Christian church—two mothers, one of which obviously cannot be the bride’s biological mother, and both, assumedly for reasons of recognition and dignity, insist that the officiator of the ceremony walk them up the aisle. But look a little deeper and think about the cultural clash: the idea of having two mothers conceptually contradicts the essence of the western-style Christian wedding ceremony itself. The ideals of monogamy, faithfulness, loyalty, caring, etc., all are opposed by, at least figuratively, having two mothers—"polygamy at its finest"! In addition, note that it is the consecrator of the ideal of a monogamous union himself who conspicuously escorts the participants in polygamy up the aisle, in the very ceremony in which he is to oversee holy vows of monogamous faithfulness, “until death do you part”. In essence, not only is the symbolic nature of the Christian bride undermined by being accompanied by two mothers, but so is the conceptual nature of the officiator of the sacred ceremony as well. By walking the "mothers" up the aisle, the consultant seems to subtly, and subconsciously perhaps, condone what modern Christian practice would view as sinful.

Next consider the Best Man and the pastor struggling mightily with the rings sewn onto the pillow. The fact that the ring exchanging ritual must be temporarily stopped weakens the sacred-ritual frame, and arguably the larger ceremony frame as well. The liturgically defined sequence of ritual events is interrupted due to the impediment of perhaps the most poignant ritual. Also, the Best Man and the pastor are forced to unexpectedly alter their roles so as to allow the ritual of
exchanging rings to actually take place!

Lastly consider the entity of the couple: “bride and groom”, “husband and wife”, “dearly beloved”, etc. The entire marriage ceremony is focused on this concept of unity from two separate entities (i.e., what was before simply a man and a woman now becomes the recognized institution of “husband and wife”). It is ironic, then, that this “oneness” is physically divided by the person hired to capture a most special and sacred moment. The “obnoxious photographer” not only has the audacity to move some of the bridesmaids out of the way, but also to come physically between the bride and groom during the ceremony of their unity. He contributes to the frame-weakening actions by being an actively disrupting and physically dividing entity in the ceremony rather than a passive and invisible recorder of events.

Essentially, then, the large frame of the sacred wedding ceremony is weakened not by a single out-of-frame incident (such as the fly in the chalice, Narrative 7.2), or even two frame-distant activities (such as the Lutheran pastor’s statement and action, Narrative 8.2), but rather through many frame-“bending” occurrences in the form of twisting role manifestations. The proper role of the groomsmen was not depicted in their dress, and their lack of uniformity perhaps undermined their integrity and authority as the groom’s attendees. The sacred atmosphere-creating music perhaps became hackneyed and ominous with the realization by the audience that the pieces were once again being repeated. The very essence of the Christian concept of marriage, with its vows of loyalty and monogamy, was literally and physically contradicted by the bride’s attending “mothers”, both of whom were escorted up the aisle by the pastor in a clash of cultural ideals. The pastor and the Best Man were forced to alter their ceremonial roles, desperately trying to present the symbolic entities of unity and wedlock to the waiting couple. The very entity of the unified “bride and groom” was literally separated, the documenting of the wedding seemingly superseding the sacred integrity of the ceremony itself.

It is in this way, through a twisting of participant roles—some necessary in order to maintain the sacred-ceremony frame and others detrimental to it—that the frame is weakened. The element of ceremonial role, containing sacred significance and up-holding ceremonial validity and integrity was only tenuously maintained.
5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: The essence of this frame’s fragility lies in the fact that, again, as in previous narrative analyses, the strict sacred framework does not allow for deviance from the sacred-ritual frame. In this particular story there are many different deviances which have the effect of arguably weakening the entire wedding ceremony frame, its integrity and significance as a unification of man and woman. In this case, the sacred framework constructs frames intolerant of frame-distant incidents and behaviors both contextually and temporally.

The fact that the sacred framework insists on an uninterrupted sequence of ritual events also lays the foundation for an unsound ceremonial frame. If the wedding-ceremony frame can not and will not allow for deviance from the prescribed sacred sequence of events, if a deviance does occur, (such as the bride being late, the repetition of organ music, and time necessitated to try and detach the rings), then any large interruption becomes drastic, weakening the frame’s integrity. The interruption of a particular sacred ritual contextually and/or temporally is a rude reminder of the fragility of the larger ceremony frame.

Lastly, perhaps the most subtle problem in the wedding-ceremony frame with which we are concerned is that of culture. Although the wedding takes place in our own culture, the entrance of different systems of belief and understanding into our own culture-context may constitute a spectacle—a shock to our own way of social understanding. In our culture and society, the practice of having two wives is unacceptable, and in the Christian religious practices, generally considered a sin. The bride’s two mothers, therefore, completely contradict societal correctness, religious practice, and in this case, the very foundation of our cultural understandings of marriage. But the cultural implications the bride carries with her are only thought of as deviant because they conflict with what we understand and “know” as acceptable to us. The sacred framework does not allow this conflict of understanding. In this case, polygamy undermines what, in the Western-Christian practice, constitutes beliefs and concepts of the institution of marriage. The sacred framework is based on the unwavering continuation of participants’ cultural beliefs and understandings, making the sacred-ceremony frame vulnerable to those aspects that contradict its foundation.
1. Synopsis: The incident within this story occurred during a funeral ceremony at which the consultant was officiating. This story was prefixed by the consultant with the note that the one thing that he has always dreaded was forgetting the name of the deceased during a funeral ceremony ("I guess the, the one thing that I've always dreaded ... and I've always taken great pains t' make sure that this never happened.... And what I've always dreaded was, forgetting the name of the deceased"). During this particular funeral, his worst nightmare became reality. While speaking a prayer for the deceased during the ceremony, the consultant uttered the wrong name of the deceased ("But what happened was that, during the prayer, ahm... I, said the wrong, first name of the person. Aaand, um, instead of it being Lucy I said Linda or something like that."). Fortunately, he realized his mistake right away, and corrected it with an apology ("And as soon as I said it, I knew I was wrong and I sorta stopped... and, said 'I'm sorry' [chuckling], and went back. And, and, did the name over again."). After the ceremony, the consultant again apologized personally to the deceased's daughter, explaining his worst fear had finally come true ("And fortunately the, the woman whose mother it was was very gracious. And afterwards I prf I apologized profusely and said it was the one thing I'd always hoped would never happen and it finally did. And she graciously said something like 'well, that's okay now you've got got it out of your system and it'll never happen again.").

2. Frame: There are two strips of activity framed within this narrative. The first strip is the faux pas itself and its immediate correction—the instance, within the consultant's prayer, of mistakenly uttering the wrong first name of the deceased, and his quick apology and correction by saying the right name for the deceased. The second strip occurred after the termination of the funeral ceremony, at which time the consultant apologized "profusely" to the daughter of the deceased, and subsequently received forgiveness. These two strips of activity are basically the entirety of the narrative, and constitute the sacred-ritual frame to be analyzed here.\(^\text{53}\)

\(^{53}\) For purposes of analysis, I include both strips of activity in one sacred-ritual frame. Although the strip which includes the consultant's apologies to the daughter of the deceased—and her subsequent forgiveness of him—actually occurs outside the ritual of the prayer itself, it is relevant and important that both of these strips be analyzed within the same frame.
3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: This story operates with the assumption and utilization of a three-tiered organization of conceptual elements. On the first, broadest, tier is the concept of the funeral ceremony itself. The funeral in this case denotes a Protestant ceremony signifying death and the deceased’s soul’s transition from the “human realm” (earth) to the “holy realm” (heaven). Although not mentioned outright in this narrative, the funeral ceremony usually includes the presence of the corpse, in a closed or open casket. This fact is relevant in the sense that the deceased was “present” for the instance of the consultant botching her name.

The second, next-broadest, tier is that of the ritual prayer within the funeral ceremony. Again, although not directly stated, it can be assumed that the prayer is a ritual in the fact that the pastor prays for the deceased, invoking God to provide a better “life” for the deceased’s soul in His “kingdom of heaven”. I would contend that this particular prayer is most essential to the liturgical sequence, both as an intimation of the soul’s transition, as well as a consummate reminder of God’s existence and therefore the soul’s existence in another realm—a comforting notion for the bereaved.

The third, and most specific conceptual tier, is that of the deceased’s given name. While this concept may seem rather superfluous to the sacredness of the funeral ceremony, or the concept of ritual and its frame, consider the implications of speaking the wrong name within this tier system: it has power to retrospectively destroy completely the conceptual elements preceding it, and their significance within the sacred-ritual frame. In essence, the name of the deceased becomes a symbolic element within the funeral ceremony, and more specifically within the ritual prayer, representing and standing for what are now memories of a life, a personality, and a living body. Placing the wrong name in the prayer nullifies the prayer for the deceased. The “correction” almost would seem to require a new prayer.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: My purpose for delineating three tiers of conceptual elements within this story is to show how each is dependent upon the others in maintaining the integrity of the sacred-ritual frame. Without the first tier—that of the funeral ceremony—there would be no infrastructure of understanding within which to place the prayer ritual or the deceased’s name within the prayer. The fact that the context is that of a funeral, as opposed to a wedding, baptism, or Sunday-morning worship ceremony, formulates not only the
liturgical sequence, but also, in a social sense, the appropriateness of behavior, comportment, attire, etc. Likewise, the tiers of prayer and personal name influence each other and the funeral ceremony. As stated previously, the pastor's prayer for the deceased's soul is an important conceptual element, and going without this acknowledgement and blessing of the deceased's entrance into another realm of life would be, I believe, inconceivable. And, one can imagine that if the prayer was impersonal, not referring to the deceased, this would thwart the purpose and meaningfulness of the prayer.

Within this story, the pivotal incident occurs within what I have called "the most specific conceptual tier", and radiates to affect both "upper" tiers. In other words, a frame-break occurs and produces a conceptual ripple effect, not only collapsing the frame of the ritual, but also severely weakening the larger ceremonial frame. Consider the following scenario, my best attempt at recreating events from the perspective of a member of the bereaved audience:

You knew the deceased well; she was a special friend, a kind, wonderful person. The memories you have of her and with her are precious, and they come back in a rush now as the pastor invokes God to "watch over and take good care of Linda as she..." Linda? LINDA? Who the heck is Linda? Her name was Lucy, not Linda! Oh, thank heavens, the pastor realized he said the wrong name. As the pastor finishes the prayer, you try to recreate the memory you were recalling when the pastor said "Linda".... But it just isn't the same.

My point being, once the collapse occurs, stemming from an incident as small as uttering the wrong word, the ritual, (in this case the prayer), somehow becomes less meaningful, less poignant, perhaps even invalidating its sacred significance? The integrity of the deceased as memorially alive is central to the funeral ceremony, and when this is inadvertently questioned through a minute yet shocking frame disruption—a shattering of the participants' assumptions of for whom exactly they are there to mourn the passing and celebrate the life of—the entire structure of the ceremony is grievously weakened.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ceremony Frame: As should be readily apparent by now, after many previous narrative analyses with regard to sacred frame disruption, break, and collapse, an inherent flaw within the sacred framework is that it does not have sufficient strength and flexibility to withstand deviant and contradictory occurrences. This story is no exception. In fact, it is a potent example of how, by simply injecting one mistaken word, (and this mistake is virtually a
contradiction since the name is “not-Lucy”), assumptions are destroyed. This is not only because the audience expects to hear a different name than consultant utters, but also because the ceremony itself revolves around a single person. When the referring conceptual element—the name of the deceased—is misrepresented, the funeral ceremony through which the bereaved seek closure, understanding, meaning, and holy purpose itself becomes undermined.

The fragility of the prayer-ritual frame, and subsequently its effects upon the broader tier of the funeral ceremony, is inherent in the audience’s assumptions about what they are going to hear, and their reliance on the pastor for the accurate manifestation of those assumptions. They assume he will say what they expect to hear, and he will unfailingly represent and refer to someone dear to them, even if he never knew the deceased.

Narrative 8.12

1. Synopsis: Although the actual ritual-ceremony never occurred, this story concerns the conceptual element of baptism. The consultant was at work on a particular day when a couple with a newborn baby approached him (“One of the funniest things I had was this couple came into the church one day...with a little baby. And, uh, they introduced themselves and I said ‘hello’ and they sat down....”). They stated that they wanted the consultant to “do” their kid (“...[A]nd they said, ‘We wanchyou to do our kid.’”). The consultant, being perplexed and taken aback by the couple’s statement, asked them to elaborate. He finally was able to understand that the couple wanted to have their son baptized, because they thought it was the “right” thing to do, in essence to save their child’s soul (“‘We wanchyou to Christen our kid. ...We want you to do our kid because every kid’s gotta get done.’”). The consultant then tried to explain to the couple the conceptual symbolism behind the act of baptism, its sacred meaning for both the parents and the congregation as a covenantal relationship of growing together in faith (“And, I tried to explain to them that, that Christening is baptism, and, the significance of baptism. ...[I]t wasn’t the thing about trying to save the child’s soul it was, a covenant relationship between parents and congregation and they needed to be part of the church family.”) The couple, however, became incensed, unable to understand why the consultant wouldn’t simply agree to “do” their child, and decided to go somewhere else to have the ceremony performed.
2. **Frame:** The frame within this narrative is simple, containing the strip of activity of the couple’s meeting with the consultant. Within the frame, however, are two contradictory sets of understandings, both represented within the single strip defining this situation. The conceptual element of baptism is central to both of these two contrasting and contradictory understandings.

3. **Conceptual/Symbolic Elements:** There are actually two conceptual elements within this story, I would argue. The first has already been introduced; the concept of baptism holds two, very different understandings and meanings for the two parties represented in this story. For the parents of the newborn child, the baptism ceremony was, I would contend, thought of as a metaphysically\(^\text{54}\) preventative, utilitarian act. Their presumed rationale for baptizing their child was only that it would save his soul—essentially, baptism, as understood by the couple, was a preventative measure against the child’s going to hell after his death. The couple seemed to see baptism as a necessary, parental act to insure the future health and safety of their child; perhaps akin to having gates at the top of a flight of stairs, or putting plastic covers over the electrical sockets, yet in a transcendentally practical way.

On the other hand, the consultant, as “interpreter of God’s word”, is unwilling to engage in an act of “prevention”, understanding baptism as a much more meaningful, covenantal ritual with an ongoing set of consequences in this world. It is apparent that the consultant felt it inappropriate and perhaps hypocritical\(^\text{55}\) to perform a ritual act without the sacred meaning which he was invested to elucidate. The parents’ unwillingness to enter into a covenantal relationship with the pastor and the congregation—the ideal of nurturing the child together within a sacred community—I believe leads the consultant into refusing their request.

The second conceptual element is the child himself, in close connection with the two understandings and ideals of the concept of baptism, as discussed above. What makes the child a

\(^{54}\) To save the child’s soul is a metaphysical concept and hardly simple. What is restrictive in this concept is that baptism does only that. For the child’s parents, baptism is a kind of spiritual prophylactic measure and is as utilitarian in the presumed afterward as taking out life insurance for the child’s college education is in the present world.

\(^{55}\) Hypocritical in the sense that, had the consultant performed the baptism ritual with the knowledge that the child’s parents were operating under a completely different understanding of the concept of baptism, he would be directly contradicting his duty and calling to help form a covenantal relationship between parents, child, and the church.
conceptual element is the fact that the differing meanings of baptism, as understood by his parents and conversely by the consultant, constitute differing concepts of him as a child. His parents seem to believe that the child is a “fallen creature” who will “go to hell” without “magical” protection. The consultant, I would contend, believes that the child is a “child of God”, an inherently sacred human being with the potential for spiritual growth and understanding, of which baptism is only the first, symbolic step. It is in this way that the child is a conceptual element in this story; the understanding of him as a human being with inherent possibilities for doom in the after-life or for a spiritual life on earth.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Conceptual Frame: It is interesting to note that in this story there is no specific “frame break/collapse/weakening” per se, but rather a conflict of understandings and inherent meanings. To keep with the current method of analysis, then, let us take the sacred concepts of baptism and the child within a single frame for examination. This does not require much imagination or theoretical gymnastics—think of the frame as the sacred understanding behind the baptism ceremony and ritual.

The weakening of the concept of sacred baptism occurs not because of a secular incident causing a fallout into the non-sacred realm, due to a disturbance or deviant incident. Rather, the couple’s use of the verb “do” (as in “do our kid”) captures their utilitarian concept of baptism. The pure utility of the potential baptism, and the work of the pastor as just “doing their child” (not baptism as welcoming the child into a Christian community) reveals sacred fragility. The potential baptism “does” the child like a smallpox inoculation “does” form a shield around the child. Sacred fragility occurs when the child becomes a passive object that is “done” for a future after-life rather than a covenantal relationship between an active person who will do something in this life spiritually, and a spiritual community. In essence, the couple sees baptism as a single act that will insure the child’s eternal after-life somewhere other than hell. They think this alone is sufficient and have no concept of (and/or perhaps no wish for) entry into a spiritual community, or their role as parents in such a community, on earth. They fail to see the spiritual in life, only in death as a punishment to be averted.
5. **Fragility of the Sacred-Conceptual Frame:** The basic fragility of the sacred-conceptual frame lies in its inability to fend off the undermining of its integrity. If the sacred institution of baptism within a larger Christian life is not respected, being conceptualized only as a utilitarian act of metaphysical prevention, the sacred framework itself arguably becomes weaker and more fragile.

Those who understand the sacred, but who perhaps do not believe in its appresentational concepts and symbols are not the threat here. One threat to any institution in society and culture is non- or misunderstanding of that institution’s larger functions. I would contend that the couple who came to the consultant, wanting to have their child “done” did not (want to?) understand the baptism ritual as sacred. They essentially contradicted and undermined the concept of baptism’s embodiment of a divine covenant of sacred meaning. In essence, the fragility of baptism as a concept, in this instance, lies in the couple’s (mis-)understanding of the church—as well as the consultant—as a service-institution; an immunologist of sorts, there for their inoculatory use of the brief but necessary injection of the hell vaccine called baptism.

**Narrative 8.13**

1. **Synopsis:** This story runs relatively parallel to the above narrative, (8.12), except its theme is the elopement of a couple rather than a couple’s incongruous baptism request. The consultant was at work when a young woman called and asked if he would perform her and her fiancee’s wedding ceremony on short notice (...[I]t was like, early in the week it was a Monday or Tuesday. And I got this phone call. And this woman introduced herself and she said that she and her fiancee wanted to get married that Saturday.”). The consultant stated that he would like to have time to meet with the couple before officiating at their wedding, but the woman assured him that they had “already done that”. The consultant then asked why they wanted to get married “at this particular church”, and the woman informed him that she and her husband-to-be had just had a fight with both sets of parents, and had decided to elope. They would allow the families to show up at the church where the wedding was to be in the first place, but she and her fiancee would get married at the consultant’s church and elope (“So she proceeded to say that she and her fiancee had just had a

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56 Was the couple’s lack of understanding and respect for the sacred concept and ritual of baptism a (conscious) choice, perhaps? If so, is the sacredness of baptism further undermined?
fight with both of their parents. And they were supposed to be getting married at the big church in
Ridgewood. ...[T]hey said that they were so angry at their parents that they just decided that
they’d let everybody else show up at that church and they’d get married somewhere else. And then
elope.”). The consultant, incredulous and flabbergasted, offered counseling services for the
couple and their families, but refused to perform the wedding ceremony (“And I said, ‘you gotta be
kidding me!’” ...I said, ‘Listen, wait a second, you’re going to be in big enough trouble as it is ...
listen, I’ll be more than willing to, to meet with you and talk to you about this and try to work this
out.’”). The woman told the consultant that she would find “someone else to do it for us”.

2. Frame: As in the previous story, this frame consists of only one strip of activity, and is thus
relatively simple. The strip is the interchange of the consultant and the bride-to-be on the
telephone. Also as in the previous story, there is a clash in the understanding of the inherent
conceptual element—the wedding. Like the baptism, the actual sacrament—the wedding
ceremony—never occurs as part of this narrative. The potential wedding ceremony is only
discussed in this strip of activity, and is not broken or weakened itself. Rather, this story
illustrates not a real frame break or collapse, but a weakening of the sacred framework itself. The
concept of a wedding and of marriage (involving families, trust, and an officiating cleric and
congregation with a stake in the relationship) is under attack. The couple’s utilitarian notion of the
concept reveals the sacred framework’s potential weakness in society.

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: As mentioned, the one conceptual element within this
story is that of the wedding. But, also as noted, the actual wedding ceremony itself does not
occur. The element I speak of, then, is completely conceptual in nature, and this is where the
differences in the two interpretations lie—in the concept of the wedding. Perhaps not as drastic in
this story as in the previous narrative, the wedding here can, however, still be described as two
differing concepts, one held by the consultant, one by the bride-to-be (and presumably her
fiancée). As with baptism, it is apparent that the consultant holds the wedding to be a ceremony of
sacredness and joy, as well as an entering into a covenantal relationship with God and each other.
The wedding is a time for celebration, for sharing the celebration with other loved ones who watch
and often take part in the union of two separate lives.\textsuperscript{57}

But for the vindictive woman on the phone, the wedding ceremony was none of that. For her it had turned into an act of revenge against the couple’s two sets of parents, a ceremony perhaps of love and symbolic unity, but tainted by what, I would imagine, would be a rather un-celebratory atmosphere. In essence, the wedding became utilitarian, just as the baptism did for another young couple. The place, the surroundings, the specialness of the ceremony itself became lost in the necessity that the event, as an act of deception and revenge, take place at all costs: “We’ll find somebody else to do it for us.”

4. Weakening the Sacred-Conceptual Frame: With an understanding of the previous narrative and corresponding discussion under this heading, it should be apparent that, for this story also, interpretation and understanding are key. It seems that the couple had decided, perhaps subconsciously, that the wedding ceremony was foremost a functional element, an act necessary, yet devoid, perhaps, of its sacred meaning. For the consultant, the wedding ceremony is not an act of necessity, or a functional element; within this concept of sacred matrimony exists not just the joining of husband and wife, but also of two families, united together through a sacred coalition. Why I believe the wedding ceremony lost its meaning for the couple is because the ceremony would not only have been a seemingly arbitrary necessity, and one not only excluding the parents, friends, church, and their community, but also harming all those entities. The wedding would have been an act of revenge rather than love. Those two feelings are incompatible, and perhaps this is belied by the young woman’s determination to find someone, (apparently just about anyone!), to conduct the secret ceremony rather than try to make amends. This concept of the wedding ceremony as a necessity, a specialized, functional act of “getting married”, perverts the sacred meaning of the wedding ceremony, making a sacred celebration into a secular act of spite. In addition, it is important to point out that again, the verb “do” shows a very utilitarian use of the pastor’s work and that of the church as a mere “site”—not an institution with larger functions.

\textsuperscript{57} For more discussion on the conceptual nature of wedding and marriage, consult Narrative 8.3.
5. **Fragility of the Sacred Framework:** Whereas Narrative 8.12 describes a situation where the sacred framework itself was made fragile through its misunderstanding, so too, in this story the sacred framework itself is jeopardized. However, we don’t know if the couple who wanted to elope simply didn’t understand the sacredness of the wedding ceremony and the notion of union with themselves, family, and God, or if their utilitarian concept was a lack of respect for the sacred, brought about by spite and revenge towards their parents. Perhaps both lack of understanding and respect go hand-in-hand here as they do in so many other social contexts of understanding. But, since it is possible that the couple does understand and value the sacred, perhaps obscured under their anger, the issue of sacred respect is of interest here.

Humans legitimize and imbue the sacred with symbols and concepts illuminating and representing a transcendent, divine entity. If one decides to take part and participate within the sacred framework, one is investing in understandings of those representational concepts which set the “sacred” apart from the “secular” in society. Without a respect for the sacred framework, an understanding of one’s, (or in this case the couple’s), role in it, and an investment in its symbolisms and concepts, not only is the dignity of the sacred-conceptual frame ground to dust, but so is the structural integrity of the underlying sacred framework.

**Narrative 8.15**

1. **Synopsis:** The incident within this story occurred during a special ceremony to observe the Christian holy-day of “Good Friday”. The consultant wrote a reader’s theater drama which he and some members of the congregation performed during the Good Friday ceremony. The consultant notes that this drama was “the best thing I’ve ever written”, and believed it made a profound impact on the audience/congregation that day—all of the performers were wearing dark hoods, on a dark stage, and with this somber setting, the performance was “very poignant and heart-wrenching”, leaving people in tears at the conclusion (“And it was uh, we all wore these big black hoods, we had microphones hooked up.... And this, it was this, very poignant, somber, heart-wrenching

58 As an example of the mutuality of respect and understanding in society at-large, consider generation gaps. It seems, sometimes, that a lack of respect can perhaps be linked to a lack of mutual understandings and different societal ideals. Essentially, different generations within society have different bases for interpretation. This has, in my experience, led to different interpretive understandings, and because of this, loss or lack of respect. See Narrative 8.6a (located in the Appendix) for a related discussion of generation gaps and acceptance of change and creativity in the worship service.
dialogue....”). However, at one point during the performance, the consultant realized he was reading the wrong paragraph during his turn, and had to improvise lines to get the next performer in on his cue (“And all of a sudden I realized I was reading...the wrong paragraph. And I was reading, the, an, so what I had to do was improvise, re-read the whole thing, come back to where I was supposed to be, and, so that the other characters would have their right lead-in line.”). After the performance, “backstage”, the consultant began to gripe about his missed lines, and apologized to the rest of the performers for “screwing up”. It was then that he realized his wireless microphone was still on, and the audience could hear his complaining and apologies (“[I]t was, su, such a moving piece that people were in tears and they were so moved and as we got to the rear of the sanctuary I started...gripping and groaning how I had missed the cue and I started apologizing to the others, ... and I started talking about how I had just screwed things up and I was sorry.... And then all of a sudden I looked down and I realized my microphone was still on. And, people hadn’t left the sanctuary, they were just sitting there listening, listening to our conversation in back.”). The consultant was “totally, totally mortified”—he felt as if he had “ruined the entire experience.”

2. **Frame:** This story is somewhat unique: like most of the other narratives it does involve a frame break, and a very destructive one at that! But, unlike most of the other stories, this sacred-performance frame collapse occurs after the frame has already been established—the ending signal was already given. Therefore, while there are two general strips of activity—the performance event itself, (including the consultant’s muffed lines), and the post-performance faux pas, (including the consultant’s self-reproachment, retrospection, and apologies to the other members of the cast), only one strip occurs within the performance frame proper; the other strip is what constitutes its destruction.

3. **Conceptual/Symbolic Elements:** First, the Christian holy-day of “Good Friday” must be briefly explained. Scripturally, Good Friday commemorates the day of Christ’s crucifixion: the Thursday night before,59 he had shared a Last Supper with his disciples (now ritualized through

59 The Thursday (night) before “Good Friday” is called “Maunday Thursday” in Christian religious practices.
the sacrament of communion—see Narratives 8.2 and 7.2), been betrayed by Judas, (one of the twelve disciples), arrested, and tried by Pontious Pilot, who was unwilling but politically forced to send Jesus to his death. Conceptually, and of greater interest here, “Good Friday”—as a term—has come to be sacredly representative of practices of deep introspection and meditation on individual and collective sin, and the understanding that Christ died for those sins.

The consultant’s reader’s theater drama was a catalyst for the audience; an intermediary between historical events and ideals and their present-day applicability. In this sense, the performance itself may be thought of as a conceptual element. Much more than a simple performance for entertainment, the drama became a representation and re-enactment of the holy, both in representing the historical sense of what purportedly happened long ago, as well as in presenting the spiritual sense of a powerful means of interpretation of “God’s word”.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Performance Frame: It is through this deep poignancy and profound power of the portrayal that the sacred-performance frame’s destruction becomes devastatingly complete and terribly traumatic. The audience was reportedly so moved, so affected, that I would contend they had almost fully suspended disbelief. For the audience, the performance created a frame, and instead of merely looking, they were drawn in, immersed to the point where affections became real emotions, and poignancy became heart-wrenching. To create such a frame, engrossing and drawing the audience into it completely, is a special gift which any performer hopes to attain. But with such a frame’s creation there comes an awful danger: the destruction of that enrapturing, and therefore fragile, frame.

The true irony in this story comes not in the simple destruction of a meaningful frame, but in the fact that the person most responsible for the frame’s construction is he who ultimately destroys it. In a sense, the consultant takes away from those to whom he has just given so much. His break of character in front of, so to speak, the audience, is much more than a simple, momentary slip out of role. By broadcasting his complaints about the performance, acknowledging its and his own flaws, and apologizing because of his mistakes—all after the frame has been completed!—lays bare what the consultant believes to be the frame’s ineffectualness, imperfections, and shortcomings. The reason the sacred-performance frame collapsed was because the audience was still operating within the frame—but when the consultant described what
he felt to be the performance’s deficiencies and weaknesses, the audience unavoidably became privy to these imperfections. The consultant deconstructed the frame around the audience with his condemnation of the sacred-performance frame he himself constructed.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Performance Frame: The fragility of this sacred-performance frame is simple: the element of fragility lies in what ironically makes it so special, affectual, and powerful. The build-up of a performance frame that draws in the audience, transports them to where the performer becomes not an actor but a sacred embodiment of his portrayed role, and engages them in real emotion, runs the risk of a more complete fall-out. To take away something “real”\(^60\) from those who have come to truly believe, especially if you have shaped their belief in that “reality”, is the ultimate betrayal. That the portrayal was made even more powerful in its manifestation because of its sacred meaning only contributes to the performance frame’s fragility. The sacred drama is not entertainment; it is a profoundly powerful presentations, even embodiment, of what people believe. Belief is a fragile entity, built with a tenuous support structure of socio-cultural confirmations and legitimations. The consultant, not only a portrayer, but also an upholder and a supplier of peoples’ sacred beliefs, un-confirms and delegitimizes a part of that support structure he has created.

**Narrative 11.7**

1. Synopsis: This story concerns a wedding ceremony at which the consultant, (a Catholic Monsignor), and Consultant 10 (an Episcopal priest), co-officiated together. According to the consultant, (hereafter referred to as Consultant 11 to avoid confusion), Consultant 10 was wearing a beautiful red wool cope, which, at one point during the wedding, caught fire from a candle (“Father Frisbee had this huge red cope on. I meawasa beautiful, beautiful piece, I mean, heavy, it looked awful heavy to me, it was really beautiful wool. ...[W]e got maybe...three or four minutes into the ceremony when he kinda backed up and got near a candle and, an this cope caught on fire. ...And I though what’s that and I looked and, here there were flames.”). Consultant 11,

\(^60\) Or, perhaps if the embodiment wasn’t truly “real”, then the consultant still defrauded the audience of their suspension of reality-based belief. For a discussion on the problems associated with “reality”, consult Chapter 2.
noticing this, quickly smothered the flames ("And he didn’t realize it at all. So I’m hitting him on
the back, putting out these flames, you know."). After the ceremony, Consultant 11 said to
Consultant 10, "It took a Roman Catholic to save you, as an Anglican!".

2. Frame: The frame to be analyzed contains two strips of activity. The first strip occurs during
the wedding ceremony: the catching fire of Consultant 10’s cope and Consultant 11’s
extinguishing the flames. The second strip occurs after the wedding ceremony proper: Consultant
11’s remark to Consultant 10 that "It took a Roman Catholic to save you!". Like the previous
narrative, (8.15), the most poignant and intriguing aspect of this story occurs after the sacred-
ceremony frame has been constructed and, in this case, disrupted as well. A mere off-the-cuff
comment can provide invaluable insight!

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: The basic conceptual element of this story, the
wedding, has already been discussed. However, the situation in this story is unique—there are
two officiators, from two different faith practices, no less! While it is easily explained and readily
understandable from the narrative transcript why the two consultants were co-officiating—one
wedding party represented the Roman Catholic practice, the other the Episcopal practice—what
is perhaps not readily understandable is what this act of co-officiating by a Roman Catholic
Monsignor and an Episcopal priest carries with it conceptually.

Historically disparate, the two faith practices viewed and thought of each other, (and
perhaps still do, to some extent), with animosity and aversion. During the Reformation, Roman
Catholics viewed the Episcopalians as heathen; unclean because of the fact that they were unsanctified
and therefore impure. The Episcopalians, on the other hand, resented the Catholics principally
because the Catholics branded them as virtually unholy and unspiritual, essentially unworthy of

\[61\, \text{See Narratives 8.3 and 8.13 for discussion of the conceptual/symbolic elements within the wedding}
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\[62\, \text{"[T]he boy was a Catholic boy and the girl was an Episcopalian.... So, she, she wanted the wedding at}
\]

\[\text{Christ [Episcopal] Church but, uh, the boy wanted a priest to be there, for it too...."} \]
God’s grace. With changing times has come acceptance, at least for the two consultants concerned in this story. They both acknowledge each other as friends and colleagues. I believe, therefore, that Consultant 11’s comment to Consultant 10 at the culmination of the wedding ceremony was, by no stretch of the imagination, good-natured—a joke about the rift that once existed between the two faith-practices. Consultant 11’s comment, however does make a slight jab at Consultant 10, or at least alludes to the out-dated notion that Catholics are somehow above Episcopalians (i.e., pure and blessed), and that “it took a Roman Catholic” [read: “superior faith representative”] to save him, a “heathen”, from a crisis!

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ceremony Frame: On the surface, the weakening of the sacred-ceremony frame seems the only aspect of this story worth analyzing in detail. But, as we have seen above, there is an underlying factor: the implications of the co-officiators as representors of historically rival faith-practices. Granted, Consultant 10’s spectacular (although accidental) display of pyrotechnics surely dazzled the audience, no doubt imploding the ceremonial frame into the incident because of its startling and rather urgent nature. But it seems to me that the most important fragility in this story, as told, is really about the nature of relationships between religious-leaders from nearly identical beliefs and practices, yet separated by old enmity.

The sacred-ceremony frame may have been broken, but utter disaster was averted through the Monsignor’s quick “Good Samaritan”-esque action. The punchline, however, encapsulated these concepts within Consultant 11’s jab/joke that “It took a Roman Catholic to save [an Episcopalian]!”

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ceremony Frame: In emphasizing the relationship of the Roman Catholic and Episcopal religious-leaders—rather than examining how the sacred framework doesn’t allow for unexpected deviant, never mind inadvertent, incidents within the doctrinal structure and liturgical sequence—let us examine the frame’s fragility from another,
hypothetical, angle. Suppose, however unlikely, that the two consultants were rivals incapable of speaking or interacting civilly because of the dictates of their respective faith practice. Now frame the incident of Consultant 10’s cope catching on fire—what would be the Roman Catholic’s response to the crisis situation? “Let someone else extinguish the Episcopalian, because he is unwashed and impure”? Even if the answer to this hypothetical question is “Of course the Catholic would help, his humanity transcends a ridiculous religious boundary”, the fact that we, (1) must ask this question in the first place, and (2) we have to consider the answer, reveals an existent underlying fragility.

The fact that a faith-practice can be and has been so exclusionary as to dissociate itself from other faith-practices, (even those who have the same beliefs, but simply practice them in slightly different ways), to the point of even burning them alive,65 belies a sacred framework capable of breeding intolerance, segregation, and warfare. History itself is a testament to this ominous fragility: the sacred is a universal concept; the interpretation of it and its framework is not, and this fact alone has cost many millions of lives throughout the centuries. This story, then, is not so much about extinguishing a burning cope, but about extinguishing a conflagrant set of sacred discriminations and prejudices.

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65 See Narratives 10.16 and 11.12 for discussions of both Catholic and Episcopalian exclusion. Perhaps the irony is especially sharp because Roman Catholics at one time did burn Protestants alive (and vice versa). Additionally, see Narrative 7.2, especially the “Conceptual/Symbolic Elements” section.
Chapter 5
Children’s-Theme Narrative Analyses

This chapter will focus on examining some sacred-ceremony, -ritual, and -situational frames within narratives with a children’s theme. Specifically, this section examines how the collection of narratives illuminates the sacred framework’s rigid construction through its creation of fragile frames. Conceptual and symbolic elements and their contextual interpretation will be the primary focus of my analysis of the narratives. These elements reveal the fragility of the sacred-ceremony frame when disruptive experience leads it to deviate from the underlying sacred framework. Essentially, I will show how the narrative collection contributes to an understanding of how ceremonies and rituals with a children’s theme are susceptible to collapse, fall-out, or implosion due to a frame-distant incident.

**Narrative 10.7**

1. **Synopsis:** This narrative was related within a conversation regarding expectations of the consultant as a child. The consultant grew up in a strictly religious household, his father an Episcopal priest (as the consultant is now) (“Um, so it was a formal setting but it made sense because we were formal people our worship...instilled a formality in the house.”). During the worship ceremony, the consultant, a young child, decided to use the prayer books in the pews as “missiles”, throwing them at other children (“Um, I wu once was caught, um, as a little boy throwing prayer books, using them as missiles, and throwing them, you know....”). Observing this, a member of the altar guild grabbed the consultant by the ear and said, “You of all people ought to know! You’re the Rector’s son!”

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66 Note how powerful and commanding the member of the altar guild’s action is—grabbing someone by the ear is a sure-fire attention-getter, as well as a strong, physical rebuke. Also, it is interesting to note that the member of the altar guild feels he has the responsibility—and perhaps the audacity?—to grab the Rector’s son by the ear and reprimand him in a rather harsh way.

67 “Rector” is the title given to the equivalent of a priest in the Episcopal faith practice. Essentially, he is the head officiator and spiritual leader of the church.
2. Frame: The frame for analysis is self-explanatory: it is the activity itself, within the background context of the worship ceremony during the consultant's childhood. This sacred-situational frame includes two strips of activity: the consultant's action of throwing the prayer books, and the member of the altar guild's response and rebuke. Importantly, the frame of analysis in this story is not focused on aspects of the worship ceremony, but rather the focal point is sacred-situational roles, their implicit expectations and their actual manifestations.

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: The conceptual and symbolic elements in this story are only three in number, two of which are personal roles. But first, let us discuss the symbol of the prayer book.

It may seem that the prayer book itself is not a symbol—it does not appear to stand for anything directly, and is merely a "tool" used in specific sacred rituals and ceremonies. But I would contend that it is treated as symbolic. In essence the prayer book is a device that "helps" congregants essentially speak to God during a prayer ritual. The prayer book contains specific prayers which are employed in collective ritual invocation, each prayer having its own place in a certain ceremony—a time when it is most appropriately uttered pertaining to the liturgical dictate of the ritual at hand. The prayer book, then, is a collection of these invocations, an assortment of divine solicitations for a wide spectrum of sacred-ritual use. As an encompassing volume, the prayer book is, I would contend, not just a book, but a collection of pathways to God's ear.

Now on to conceptual roles. The member of the altar guild is known to us only by this title—the narrative does not provide any further information about this person except his title and actions in this very specific situation. However, it is reasonable to assume that, pertaining to his title, the "member of the altar guild" has a rather specifically defined role in the worship ceremony. The title implies authority within the ceremony—as associated with the altar, (the physical focal point of the ceremony, displaying the sacred symbols68), holding membership in a group associated with a most important sacred entity, (the word "guild" denoting elitism and uniformity of purpose). It is safe to assume, then, that the consultant was rebuked by a person holding the role of ceremonial authority and elitism—a higher-up—within the Episcopal practice.

68 Examples of sacred symbols likely to be displayed on the altar are the cross, perhaps with a Christ-effigy, depicting the crucifixion; the Bible, believed to contain the "Word of God"; candles, symbolic of the "light of Christ", as well as others.
The consultant, a child at the occurrence of this incident, also has his own sacred role whether he likes it or not. As the son of the Rector, the consultant is associated with the sacred and holy by default, socially and biologically linked to the “interpreter of God’s word”. Due to these facts it is safe to assume (and, I believe, implicitly confirmed by the consultant’s narrative) that the consultant, as son of the Rector, was naturally viewed as somehow different than any other child in the congregation. I would contend, as the son of a religious-leader myself, that there is an inherent set of expectations for behavior, especially while directly operating within the sacred framework. Although I can not explain exactly what these expectations are, (or were for the consultant, no less), suffice it to say that the way in which the son of a religious-leader is expected to comport himself is manifest in, and related to, his father’s role as “interpreter of God’s word”.

The member of the altar guild neatly states all of these implicit expectations: “You of people ought to know! You’re the Rector’s son!” The conceptual nature of this role—that the son is expected to reflect this set of expectations, (behavioral traits in accordance with the ideal of the sacred and his father’s role as authoritarian of such)—is of significance to the weakness of the sacred-situational frame under examination.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Situational Frame: I contend that the frame we are examining is “situational”. Although the strips of activity do occur within a ceremonial setting—that of worship—I believe the real essence of this frame is not the ceremony within which the strips take place, but the specific situation at hand, defined by the strips. In other words, this story could be analyzed to show how throwing prayer books in a ceremony weakens the sacred-ceremony frame. However, I trust that this type of analysis has already been satisfactorily explored in the previous narrative discussions. It seems more beneficial here to briefly discuss how the prayer book weakens the sacred-ceremony frame, and then examine how participants in the strips create a weak situation within the sacred in a more general sense. Because the worship ceremony is in the background of this story, we can take a closer look at the participants in these strips as having unique and expectationally defined roles within the sacred framework.

Along these lines, I trust that it is now apparent how the prayer book underwent an alteration of its symbolic ceremonial “role” from that of the ritualistic (communicatory device

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69 Perhaps, also, conduct can be symbolic, if representing a religious life-way or sacred order.
containing a direct line, so to speak, with God) to the secularistic (using the material object “as a missile”). If our interest lay in examining the use of the prayer book and its symbolic role metamorphosis, we would, in short, come to the conclusion that the sacred-ceremony frame was weakened because this important sacred-symbolic entity was used in a deviant manner, with profane intent (to hit someone else!). However, I want to look not at the implications for the ceremonial frame by using a sacred entity with profane intent, but rather how this action reflected a breach in the consultant’s expected role within the sacred.

As has been noted, the expectations for the consultant, as the son of the Rector, are high—he is expected to behave in such a way as deemed appropriate within the sacred. During a worship ceremony led by his father, it is readily imaginable that the members of the congregation expected the consultant to comport himself in accord with the sacred situation at hand. Perhaps it was acknowledged subconsciously by those projecting expectations that “yes, he is a child, and therefore allowed some deviation from the ‘quintessential sacred behavior’. But using a sacred symbolic entity as artillery was outside the bounds of acceptable deviation, even for a child.

However, the intolerable action of the consultant throwing prayer books during a sacred situation was heightened by the fact that his role was as “the Rector’s son”. By shattering projected expectations, the consultant’s arguably profane action is more than simple deviance from the sacred framework in general—it was an action that unmistakably contradicted his inescapable role as “the Rector’s son”.

What is intriguing is the fact that another authority-figure in the situation reprimanded the consultant for his unbecoming behavior. The member of the altar guild essentially reminded the consultant of his role as “the Rector’s son” while rebuking him for his deviance from the sacred framework: “You of all people ought to know!” Although unclear in the narrative, it seems the member of the altar guild himself broke out of his own sacred-situational role in order to correct that of the consultant. The reason I say these role-breaks are unclear in the narrative is because the story gives no indication of the situational implications of either of these two strips of activity

70 This, then, begs the question, what is secular comportment? Perhaps, as far as the sacred framework is concerned, secular comportment is every behavior that is not appropriate within the sacred framework.

71 The member of the altar guild left his station (presumably at the altar!) to come and get close enough to grab the consultant’s ear.
largely realized by the congregation's/other participants’ reactions. However, it does seem relevant that the member of an elitist group, holding a ceremonially significant role, would, for whatever reason, decide it necessary to himself violate his own role expectations and, in a rather painful way (grabbing the consultant by the ear!), remind the consultant of his place.

The sacred-situation within this story is weakened through role deviances more than any other type of frame disturbance. This is, then, another facet of fragility within sacred framework; sacred roles are not flexible enough to allow for any behavior other than deemed appropriate to the situation at hand. In a sense, sacred expectations destroy what they have built—a structure constructed from our own projections of role, easily destroyed by those actions which do not fit into our anticipations and assumptions.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Situational Frame: As stated above, strong expectation of strict sacred roles, (as well as activities, symbols, etc.), creates a shaky foundation for a situation or an entire event. The fragility does not lie in the actual roles of sacred participants, but in the expectations of narrow sacred comportment in these roles. In this story, the expectation was that the Rector’s son would be better behaved than to throw prayer books in hopes of hitting someone else. Why these projected expectations are detrimental to the integrity of the sacred-situational frame is due to two reasons, I believe.

First, and most simply, (because this concept has already been discussed in previous narratives), is the fact that the sacred framework does not allow for deviant acts, outside of what is deemed appropriate for the situation. The sacred framework is extreme in its barring of “outside” occurrences because (as also discussed earlier—consult Narrative 8.1, especially) sacred experience is built high above the secular, a tenuous structure of reliant frames. And, because the sacred framework will not allow, or even attempt to understand secular occurrences within its structure, the “tower” of frames is destined to be unstable. An inability to acknowledge and deal with a problem may inevitably lead to frame collapse. So, when “the Rector’s son” throws prayer books, the sacred framework has a very difficult time allowing the notion that the consultant has any other role outside the sacred-situational frame at hand.72 What occurs, then, is an unexpected role manifestation, unacknowledgeable as anything other than a deviation and a threat to the

72 Consult Narrative 7.3 for discussion of the notion of multiple roles, and how these may clash.
situational frame.

Second is the inability for the role projected upon the consultant to be independent from that of his father’s. The consultant is not reprimanded solely because of his inappropriate actions within the sacred-situational frame, but because of how he is expected to know better—he’s the Rector’s son! Because of his father, the consultant is bestowed with projected expectations, and because they are more rigid than other children’s in the congregation, they are that much more brittle. In essence, the consultant’s role is precut from his father’s position within the sacred framework. When role and actions don’t match, the role becomes deviant and the sacred-situational frame made fragile.

**Narrative 5.2**

1. **Synopsis:** This story describes an incident which occurred during a “children’s sermon” ritual, within the larger worship ceremony. In concluding his message for the children present in worship, the consultant has the tradition of closing with a prayer. On a particular Sunday morning, however, the service was running behind schedule, so the consultant stated his intention to skip the closing prayer (“Today there’s an awful lot going on so we’re not going to conclude with our usual prayer.”). Directly after uttering his intentions to the children, as well as the observing congregation at-large, a loud thunderclap occurred (“At which time, out of what at that moment came into church, out of the clear blue sky, there was this huge clap of thunder ... and the church shook, and I mean, really.”). Collecting himself, the consultant said, “On second thought, let’s pray”, and went ahead with the closing prayer as usual.

2. **Frame:** The frame for this incident is simple, and contains only one strip of activity, outlined above. Like Narrative 8.1, the strip involves a ritual within a larger ritual; that of the closing-prayer within the larger ritual of the “children’s sermon”. Instead of a beginning signal, outside of the ritual itself, (as in Narrative 8.1), this ritual is an ending signal—a ritual event that closes the frame of the children’s sermon ritual. What is interesting about this particular frame is the fact that

73 Note here the paradox: it seems that the more the sacred framework strives to be rigid and impervious to deviance, the more brittle it becomes—its inflexibility is an hindrance because deviance is something that is unavoidable, especially in such a strict delineation of “correct” comportment!
the ending signal had already been given, but in a different way, and then given again, in retrospect. In other words, the consultant’s statement, “Today there’s an awful lot going on so we’re not going to conclude with our usual prayer”, was meant as the closing signal—the end of the ritual of the children’s sermon for that day—as well as a justification for omitting the expected final prayer. However, after interpreting the thunderclap as a direct divine judgment on the reformation of the frame ending-signal, the consultant gave the expected final prayer, “on second thought”.

3. **Conceptual/Symbolic Elements**: The conceptual elements we are concerned with in this particular narrative are three: the “children’s sermon” ritual, the ritual closing-signal prayer, and the thunderclap interpreted into a meaningful concept.

   First, the children’s sermon: conceptually very simple, the children’s sermon is a time during the Protestant liturgical sequence during which the children present in the worship ceremony are directly addressed. This usually involves the children coming to the front of the sanctuary and watching or participating in an activity or verbal exchange, geared for their understanding and comprehension. The topic may consider the sacred in scripture, Christ’s teachings, moral and ethical behavior, etc. In essence, the children’s sermon is a message specifically for children, who otherwise are subjected to an adult-oriented service, if they are not sent off to Sunday-school.

   The second element is that of the closing prayer, a ritualistic tradition the consultant uses to terminate the children’s sermon segment of the liturgical sequence. This prayer, I would assume, is in following with the tone of the message to the children: a simple prayer which young children can understand and relate to, perhaps synopsizing the message the pastor was presenting. The closing prayer is important because it performs the close of a liturgical segment.

   Lastly, the thunderclap must be addressed. In and of itself, a thunderclap is not a conceptual element; it does not stand for anything, represent any entity, or transcend its materialistic nature to become a symbol. However, it can be given, by semiotic operations, any of these properties. Within a certain context, an individual, or a group of collective individuals, can imbue the thunderclap with significance. I would argue that this meaningless, extra-frame event is incorporated *within* the frame, producing a sense of divine injunction.
Essentially, the sacred-ritual frame is rectified to avoid castigation. The pastor decided to forego a small ritual this particular week because of time constraints. Just after he announces his intentions, the thunderclap occurs. The coincidental timing of the thunderclap and the pastor's announcement creates a context in which the thunderclap has the potential to mean something, to be more than just a natural occurrence. What cements this interpretation is the pastor's acknowledgement of the thunderclap as significant; he could have chosen to ignore it, and the worship ceremony would have likely carried on without a hitch. But by his statement, “On second thought, let's pray”, the pastor is implicitly acknowledging the thunderclap as indicative of something: most obviously a sign from God, Christ, or both, showing disapproval of the pastor's decision to continue without engaging in the usual prayer ritual. The consultant's comment and decision to go ahead with the final prayer after all not only endorses the thunderclap's unstated possibility for frame relevance, but also changes the conduct of the service as if to answer the divine rebuke. This endorsement and change in conduct make the thunderclap an actual element in the worship ceremony.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: This story does not involve a collapse of frame per se, or perhaps not even a weakening of it. Rather, it narrates an instance of frame inclusion, thereby shaping significance. So what is there to analyze here? There is fragility inherent within this frame—illuminated is the fact that a coincidence within context can create significance, and this may not always be a good thing!

The sacred-ritual frame is vulnerable to timing and context, thus a coincidence can become unavoidably significant. Especially because of the sacred framework's obsession with seeing and creating holy meaning everywhere, the sacred frame becomes prone to coincidental, “outside” events. When coincidences occur, and within what ritual context, determines how they affect the frame. In this case, the coincidental thunderclap was able to be incorporated into the frame as a sacred conceptual element by the adroit consultant. Yet, a little girl throwing up (Narrative 8.1), or fainting (6.7), or a priest catching on fire (11.7) are all similarly coincidental in nature, nevertheless their timing within the sacred context did not further the integrity of the sacred frame. Here the sacred-ritual frame is shown to be subject to human interpretation, and thus potentially weakened when coincidental events are made an integral part of the ritual frame.
5. Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame: The sacred-ritual frame’s fragility is revealed when coincidence has the power to create significance. Why this is so, I would contend, is because the sacred framework is so exclusionary in the first place. By creating a structure of frames so far above the “every-day”, secular realm, the sacred framework can not allow for secular interpretation in its creation of significance. Perhaps, therefore, as a kind of defense mechanism, the occurrence of a coincidental incident, such as a thunderclap, must be acknowledged as inherently sacred. The thunderclap is taken to have sacred meaning so as to maintain the integrity of the sacred framework’s significance structure. If the thunderclap had not been acknowledged as sacred, or simply not acknowledged at all, it arguably would have weakened the sacred-ritual frame of the children’s message, potentially destroying it, because the thunderclap would have become a deviant, frame-distant occurrence.

Narrative 5.3

1. Synopsis: This story-incident, as the narrative above, (5.2), occurred within the context of the ritual of the “children’s sermon”, during a worship ceremony. The consultant and his associate were dressed as clowns, and conducted the children’s sermon in clown attire. The theme for the children’s message was, “Christ... gives us a hand in our daily experiences with living”, so the consultant used a fake hand in place of one of his real hands (“I had one of these fake hands that you hold with a stick and you push up your sleeve over top so that it comes down over it. So you have two gloved hands, one of which is... fake...”). Noting that he “didn’t think it through very carefully”, the consultant let a very young girl shake his fake hand (“And, uh, she took the hand, and was, I mean she wasn’t terribly traumatized but you could see for a second that she’d thought she’s pulled the poor man’s hand off, you know.”). The consultant attributes this poor judgment to the fact that he was young at the time, not having “gone through that [idea] very carefully.”

2. Frame: The frame of this story is simple and compact: the strip of activity with which we are concerned is the hand shake between the consultant with his fake hand, and the young girl who was traumatized as a result of thinking she had pulled off the pastor’s hand. This strip occurs within the larger sacred-ritual frame of the children’s sermon, during a particular worship ceremony.
3. **Conceptual/Symbolic Elements:** As in Narrative 5.2, the children’s sermon is an important conceptual element within the liturgical sequence governing the worship ceremony. Without restating the above discussion, suffice it to point out once again that the children’s message is generally the only time during the worship service that a ritual is specifically targeted toward the children present in worship.

The most significant conceptual element within this story that needs to be discussed is the theme of the message the consultant is trying to get across to his audience of children, and the manner in which he manifests that message in a very real (and shocking!) way. As stated by the consultant, “And the theme that we were trying to get across with the children was that Christ...gives us a hand in our daily experiences with living...”. To physically illustrate this theme, the consultant employed a fake hand, in place of one of his real hands. He apparently thought this would be a good idea, amusing the children as well as illuminating his point in an unforgettable way:

“We were talking about that we thought it’d be kinda cute with the kids, you know, to do something, something, well, we just didn’t think it through very carefully that it could also be very traumatic.”

Why the consultant thought it would be an effective illustration of his point to let a young child think that she had ripped off the hand of a clown, representative of Christ, we may never know. I’m sure the little girl will never forget the incident, but not for the reasons the consultant intended!

4. **Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame:** As mentioned briefly above, the consultant was in clown attire, a child-friendly, goofy character who, to illustrate his point, pretended to be a Christ-like entity. Whereas this might be a warning signal already as to how the frame might end up collapsing, the real issue is the fake hand, and the fact that it was offered assumingly as representational of the hand of Christ, “giv[ing] us a hand in our daily experiences with living...”. Further, that this “hand of Christ” was presented as a well-meaning, but nevertheless shocking and traumatic, gag for the four- or five-year-old girl. The fact that the consultant was dressed as a clown, supposedly harmless and friendly, only added to the trauma, because the little girl was caught completely unaware.

In essence, there occurred a build-up of role: a friendly, personable clown, presented to the
children as representational of Christ, and embodying the messages of sacred helpfulness and love. Then, (as also in Narrative 8.15), the consultant destroys what he has so beautifully wrought. The young girl was operating under her own innocent, trusting set of expectations and assumptions within the frame, in no way deviant or frame-distant. She expected what the consultant led her to believe—a special moment of manifested meaning.

Perhaps the consultant did not realize the power or the potency of the expectations he was constructing, or perhaps he did not realize the poignancy of the moment for the trusting young girl. In this story the frame was broken not by a coincidence, a natural occurrence, or any other relatively unavoidable action, event, or behavior. Curiously, from the beginning of its construction, the creator of the frame himself knew (subconsciously?) that he would destroy it in the end.

5. **Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame:** Similarly to Narrative 8.15, the fragility inherent within this sacred-ritual frame is in the hands of its creator. The consultant constructed a structure of belief and expectation; he presented to the children a message manifest through a material, visual, and finally physical set of portrayals and actions which, it would seem, affected them and drew them into his performance. He created an enriched role with cultural expectations for the child-audience, and ultimately dashed them by adding the role of prankster.

Perhaps, in a broader sense, where the fragility lies is in the sacred framework’s build-up of religious roles and meanings, both for symbolic elements and people, which they do not embody outside the sacred framework. This role build-up can occur in such a convincing, powerful way that when a role break takes place, and the representation goes awry, such highly invested expectations are shockingly, traumatically—even cruelly—decimated. The more a role, (or symbol, or concept, or frame), is imbued with appresentational meaning, the more people are willing to suspend disbelief. Soon, a “reality” built on enactment is the result, and the awareness of the fact that the role portrayed is merely that—not actual embodiment—becomes more and more distant. Sooner or later, though, something will go wrong.

In the (secularly-based) presentation of a play, if the actor misses a line we—the audience—are suddenly brought back to the fact that the actor is merely that, that his role is a portrayal of someone or something else, and while this is not false—the actor is meaning to do
this—we realize our expectations were. Within the sacred frame, if the pastor mis-speaks74 we—the congregation—are pulled out of the sacred framework by the assault on our beliefs. We enter the theater expecting enactment. We enter the church expecting embodiment. The consultant, then, failed to take this into account: he, as a Christ-clown, became an embodiment to the young girl, a manifestation of cultural and sacred beliefs. Finally, having created for the children a “reality”, full of expectations and assumptions, the consultant had the opportunity to endow a pinnacle moment with sincere meaning and significance. Instead, he shattered their belief in his embodiment with a shocking reminder that things are not always as they seem—a harsh lesson for a four-year-old.75

**Narrative 7.3**

1. **Synopsis:** The consultant mentioned that he related this story to a group of high school students in a sexuality seminar. The story involves a devout and committed parishioner who was an upstanding member of the consultant’s church. On a particular day, she came to the door of the parsonage to speak with the pastor/consultant (“I went to the front door of the parsonage one day and the woman who was most active in the church, kind of, Mrs. Methodist, was there, to give me yet some more information about things she was doing.”). As the two were standing in the doorway conversing, the consultant’s young son came down the stairs stark naked. About halfway down the flight of stairs, the consultant’s son began urinating “like a fountain of Rome!” (“...I turned around to see what she was looking at and there right about the fifth step, was my year-and-a-half-old son making like one of the fountains in Rome. ...Totally naked, just peeing this lovely arching stream down to the floor.”). The devout parishioner said nothing of the incident.

2. **Frame:** The frame for analysis of this incident is simply a conversation between the consultant and the parishioner at the door of the parsonage. The strip of activity within this frame includes the consultant’s son descending the flight of stairs stark naked, and stopping to urinate in such

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74 See Narratives 8.4, 8.7, and 8.8 for examples of the pastor/consultant "mis-speaking" in various ways.

75 An especially harsh lesson when the young girl was "implicated" in the "mutilation" of the Christ-clown!
a vividly described manner. Of interest here is the fact that there is no sacred-delineated frame; the sacred framework is employed through the three roles—pastor/father, pastor’s/father’s son, and parishioner—and the location of the incident—within the pastor’s house. Therefore, what is of importance here is not how or why a particular sacred-ritual or -ceremony frame collapsed, but how the sacred roles mentioned above enter into and effect the otherwise secular frame.

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: There is one conceptual element, other than the roles of the participants as mentioned above, that underlies the significance of this narrative. This is the concept of the parsonage: a Protestant entity, usually owned by the church and provided to the pastor and his family to reside in, the parsonage is, I would contend, more than a simple abode. In essence, it is where the “interpreter of God’s word” lives, eats, sleeps, raises his family, etc., supported by the institution of the church.

Having lived in parsonages for the majority of my life I can relate that, as an entity, the parsonage is somehow different from an ordinary home. Without knowing exactly why myself, I believe that while the parsonage is set apart (physically) from the church itself, it is conceptually still attached. Perhaps the reason lies in the notion that even in the parsonage the pastor is to be a “man of God”, leading an exemplary Christian life at all times. In relation to this, I would contend from personal observation that the parsonage holds an air of mystique for the members of the congregation—where the “interpreter” becomes demystified as just another tired, irritable father after a long day of church and personal politics, but they do not normally see him in this role! Essentially, the entity of the parsonage holds some sort of conceptual representation for the congregation.

As for the concepts of the roles, I trust they are relatively self-explanatory from their titles, as well as from the previous explanations of similar or identical roles in other, previous narratives. Suffice it to say, however, that within this frame the consultant embodies two role manifestations: the pastor, relevant to his orthodox visitor, and the “father”, suddenly relevant in

76 Generally within the Roman Catholic practice, (and some Anglican practices), the priests live in a Rectory—a house or dormitory which is maintained by the church or parish. See Consultant 11 throughout for many intriguing insights into his residency in Rectories.

77 See Narratives 5.3, 8.15, and 10.7 for more on the concept and portrayal of “roles”.

87
his responsibility for his picturesquely urinating son. Perhaps, then, this combination of roles relates to, and illuminates the notion of the parsonage—the place where the sacred and the secular are both necessarily instituted.78

4. Weakening the Sacred-Situational Frame: The conversational frame’s collapse seems obvious enough: the consultant was interacting in his formal role of pastor with an important, and perhaps rather stoic, member of his congregation, when their sacred-conversational frame was broken by first a startlingly profane sight, and then a very startling profane act! In essence, the body and its needs intruded on a non-physical, transcendent frame within a context of (at least for the parishioner) clandestine liminality.

But this is only the surface; consider the role manifestations that play out in this brief incident. A rather safe assumption is that the consultant was operating within what I will call his “natural” role—at home, and conversely not at work, or conducting a sacred ceremony, etc. He was obligated to switch roles when the parishioner rang the doorbell and stood in the doorway—a literal, physical threshold between roles, perhaps? He then took on a new role which I will call “pastoral”—not ceremonial, but not “natural”, either. I would contend, in keeping with this theoretical assignment of roles, that the pastoral role is described best as “occupational”; wherever the consultant is, whether in his office, visiting others, or at home, the pastoral role can be put on. However, while easy to put on, it is hard to take off while operating within an occupational frame—perhaps because this means a change of role in front of an audience.

Applying these theories to this story, it is easy to imagine the consultant switching roles, from the “natural” to the “occupational” as he opens the door to the parishioner. Then, while acting within his “occupational” role, comporting himself as appropriate for interaction with “Mrs. Methodist”, he must suddenly switch roles to deal with his naked son who then urinates—in full frontal view, no less!—on the stairway owned by the church. While we don’t know if the

78 An additional concept within this narrative, (which seems worthy of a brief note), is that of the consultant’s description of his son urinating on the parsonage steps. The notion of “like a Fountain of Rome” is a very ironic simile. Although the consultant is Methodist, the two entities of Rome and religion in general bring to mind the Vatican. Further, the fountains there are very picturesque: putti cherubs who constantly relieve themselves of their never-ending supply of water. The consultant’s descriptive simile is, therefore, quite close to the truth: his son, the naked “cherub”, relieving himself of real urine, in a “lovely arching stream”, fit to make a Vatican cherub proud!
consultant successfully re-entered his occupational role to finish his conversation with the parishioner, we do know that the witnessing parishioner wholly observed his role shift. Depending on her ability to accept the consultant’s role switch, this incident may be the cause of a complete frame-break for the parishioner. I would contend, then, that the frame’s health is largely dependent on the parishioner’s understanding of it—does she expect the consultant to operate as if he were in church or at work? Or, will she allow for the fact that he is at his home, where the “natural” and/or “father” roles are most prevalent? She says nothing, leaving her response ambiguous. She makes no critical remarks, but neither does she say anything to defuse the embarrassing situation or help the consultant regain face.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Situational Frame: The fragility of this sacred-situational frame is due to the pastor’s many roles, and the expectations of the parishioner at his door. The pastor, representative of the sacred, is expected to be super-organic, sometimes even super-human, in his role as interpreter of God’s word. During the sacred ceremony or ritual, the pastor is expected to be indefatigably flawless, to the point where if he should make a mistake, as tiny as switching two phonemes (Narrative 8.8), the sacred frame collapses because of the sacred framework’s inability to allow for its representor to present an understanding of anything but itself. It would seem that these super-human expectations carry over, even into situations outside the worship service or special ceremony. To some degree they permeate the pastor’s other roles as well. The fact that the religious-leader is simply another human, a flesh-and-blood person just like anyone else, seems to elude most, especially those who are members of his congregation.

In essence, the pastor is just as capable of making mistakes as anyone else. While this story does not exhibit a mistake or blunder by the consultant, it does reveal aspects of his role that seem more “human” than some, possibly including the parishioner, are wont to admit exist for a “man of the cloth”. The notion that her pastor has to deal not only with spiritual problems, but also with small children whose bladder control and sense of decency have yet to be established, may have been quite an eye-opening experience for the parishioner! Simply, then, the fragility of this frame, as well as the pastor’s role-frames in which he operates every day, is realized in others’ expectations of him as a religious-leader, and whether or not they allow him to be a mistake-capable human.
Narrative 8.19

1. Synopsis: The incident occurring within this story took place during the consultant’s childhood, at a Bible-reading contest at a church-related “youth program”. The object of the contest was to recognize the child who could find a particular set of chapters and verses within different books of the Bible the quickest (“And, so they lined us up on the front of the stage and they gave us Bibles. And, they, they announced the verses. And the one who could find the verses fastest, would win the prize.”). The consultant won the contest, but not because he knew his bible books, chapters, and verses. He merely looked up the prescribed passages in the Bible’s table of contents, and was able to accomplish the task faster than the other children, who were trying to remember what they had been taught in Sunday school79 (“And I must have gotten six or seven out of ten on the first one. ...And I didn’t, I didn’t read the Bible. And I won the prize. ...But the funny part was, but the reason I got it so fast was ‘cause everyone else was leafing through the Bible, I just looked in the table of contents. ...Everyone else was just trying to find the Bible, trying to remember where it was.”)

2. Frame: The frame of this event is, simply, the event itself and its context; the Bible-reading contest event in the context of the consultant’s childhood, as well as the physical context of the church where the contest was presumably held. The strip of activity is also simple: we are concerned with the consultant’s Bible-verse search, and his unorthodox—perhaps even cheating—yet logical methods.

3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: There are two conceptual elements pertaining to this story. First, the Bible: Essentially the guide to Christianity,80 the Bible is interpreted in many ways, thereby explaining the many different faith practices that use it as the central element of truth, symbolism, representation, and doctrine. Divided into the Old and New Testaments—that

79 Sunday school is generally held on Sundays, as the title implies, either before, during, or after the worship ceremony. Usually taught by lay adults—members of the congregation—the “school” is a brief time of listening to, and teaching of, the Bible and its sacred messages and interpretations.

80 The Bible is a sacred book, believed to reveal “God’s Word” with the help of interpretive agents (such as the pastor). Therefore, its contents are never changed—translations are to be absolutely accurate.
is, before and after Christ, respectively—the Bible is thought to have been written by many different historical authors, who wrote the Bible's many books within both the Testaments.

The second conceptual element is that of the Bible-reading contest itself. A common exercise and task in Sunday school is memorizing the books of the Bible and their order. The contest in which the consultant participated was a test of such memory. The premise, we can assume, behind the contest was that the child who knew the books of the Bible best, both in memorizing their names and their order, would win, being able to find the passages the fastest using only memory as the tool.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Situational Frame: Although there is no “falling-out” or disruption of the frame that causes the participants to be shocked or pulled out of the sacred and into the secular, there is still, I would argue, a frame-distant occurrence. The fact that the consultant wins the contest does constitute something of a frame break because he has used unorthodox methods, and therefore his triumph contradicts the values placed on sacred study, memory, and commitment of knowledge to memory. In essence, the consultant by-passed the sacred framework on his way to the desired outcome. He logically and deductively proceeded in his methods for finding the Bible verses, as opposed to the assumed process in which he would use his Sunday school knowledge and memory.

In this story, then, the consultant, to his credit, operated within a deviant cognitive process—outside the sacred framework—and emerged the winner of the contest. On the other hand, however, perhaps the introduction of a speed contest into the value of knowing where the passages lie creates a value system at odds with sacred knowledge through intimate familiarity. The rules of the contest revered speed, not intimate knowledge itself. It seems that the contest was ill-conceived, part of American secular values on competition and speed—not unlike an athletic event.

5. Fragility of the Sacred-Situational Frame: It seems that this incident illuminates the actuality that the fastest, most efficient manner of going about a particular task is essentially contradictory to sacred values of reverential knowledge and intimate understanding. The goal of the contest is to test and reward intimate Bible knowledge, but the emphasis on just a correct
answer given the fastest, lays open the process to other skills (such as using the table of contents!) than close knowledge. What the sacred framework does not take into account is the fact that, temporally, at least, the fastest will always be fastest no matter what framework one operates within. When attempting to attain the “fastest”, no matter if it be the fastest car or the fastest Bible-reader, value is automatically placed on competition.

The sacred is surpassed by one boy, a non-conformist to the sacred framework, (“And I didn’t, I didn’t read the Bible.”), yet attaining the same results in less time to beat out those who have been taught the “correct” way to go about looking up a Bible verse. The sacred framework, at least in this case, seems to insist on a metaphysical approach—committing knowledge to one’s mind, one’s self. The fact that the consultant can employ an external, non-self approach within the sacred framework and still win the contest suggests that there is a fragility underlying the sacred framework that runs deeper than the frame of a Bible-reading contest.

**Narrative 11.13**

1. **Synopsis:** This story involves another children’s sermon incident, with the consultant officiating. The theme of the children’s message was giving gifts, and the consultant was speaking of the gifts the shepherds brought to the newborn Christ-child in Bethlehem (“Sometimes I will just have the kids come up around and talk to just them.... So we talked about the um, ... the gifts of the shepherds.”). The consultant stated that one of the shepherds’ gifts was a ball, at which time a young boy piped up and asked, “Was it a basketball?” The consultant simply answered, “Yes, it was.”

2. **Frame:** Again, the frame for analysis here is very simple: within the frame of the children’s sermon ritual, the strip of activity central to this narrative is the young boy’s question and the consultant’s response. As shall be discussed in greater detail later, the frame remains intact, although it does have the potential to become weakened and collapse with the child’s innocent question.

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81 Perhaps another point of irony is that the consultant became a “man of the cloth” himself many years later, and now teaches a much larger version of “Sunday School”. Needless to say, the consultant would doubtless be able to participate in a Bible-reading contest without having to resort to “cheating”!
3. Conceptual/Symbolic Elements: I trust that the concept of the “children’s sermon” and “message” have been satisfactorily discussed,\(^\text{82}\) so all that need be broached here is the concept of the story the consultant was attempting to elucidate for the children.

The shepherds are traditionally thought of as the first people to have visited the Christ child after his birth in Bethlehem. The scriptural account tells of a “multitude of the heavenly host” who gloriously inform the shepherds of the Christ child’s birth to a virgin, in a stable. Whether or not the shepherds bring gifts or not is left up to interpretation; but obviously relevant to this story, the consultant’s interpretation is that they did. The scriptures also leave it up to interpretation as to what gifts, if any, the shepherds brought. So, perhaps it was the consultant’s individual interpretation of historical events that led him to state that one of the shepherds’ gifts was a ball. Nevertheless, what is important is that he made a factual statement that the shepherds indeed brought gifts to honor the Christ child. In essence, it is this fact that gets interpreted within a startlingly contemporary context through the historically uninformed consciousness of a child.

4. Weakening the Sacred-Ritual Frame: As noted previously, the frame is perhaps not actually weakened, and doesn’t collapse, apparently. The frame of the sacred-ritual of the children’s sermon was no doubt in danger, however. What kept the young boy’s question from weakening and possibly breaking the frame are two facts, I believe.

First, the child’s question was completely relevant to the frame, logical and cogent; the only reason the question nearly collapsed the frame was because the boy was operating under a modern set of assumptions and references rather than the ones needed for an historic event.

Second, the consultant, as maintainer and engineer of the frame, did not let the frame collapse with the young boy’s question. Rather, perhaps out of desperation, or perhaps out of prudence, the consultant confirmed the child’s question as correct, and carried on with the frame at hand. The consultant’s response allowed for not only a continuation of the frame, but a new interpretation of his story as well—the child and his question became a valid part of the frame, as opposed to deviant. In essence, the consultant allowed the sacred-situational frame to widen to include not a natural coincidence, but a “natural” child’s question of relevancy.

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\(^{82}\) For discussion regarding the concept of the “children’s sermon”, and “message”, consult Narratives 5.2 and 5.3, located earlier in this section.
5. **Fragility of the Sacred-Ritual Frame**: Running parallel to the element of fragility in the previous narrative, (8.19), this story illustrates how the sacred framework seems to insist on a dogmatic, narrow-minded approach. Rather than from a pedagogical standpoint, however, this story addresses the issue in a broader sense: the inherent fragility in the doctrinal interpretations of sacredness. What saves this particular frame from peril is the consultant’s acknowledgement of a valid—perhaps not historically, but certainly personally for the child—interpretation of a sacred account and concept.

Many would contend that giving the gift of a basketball is not a sacred act. But who is to say it isn’t? For the young child it was essentially sacred; he was able to very beautifully relate to the sacredness of the shepherd’s gift of a ball to the Christ-child by making the account relevant to his own life. This is something every religious-leader dreams of accomplishing: bringing the scriptures to life so that they become meaningful for those who listen and understand. Perhaps, on the grandest scale, the fragility of any sacred frame lies within, at the core of our interpretation of what is sacred, and what is not. In this case, the fragility of the sacred-situational frame is based on whether or not the adults in the congregation (assuming they are privy to the incident) will respect the frame-widening retelling of the story. The narrative does not indicate whether the congregation seems to accept the optionality of a detail, or if it detracts from the larger understanding and significance of the story. Once the sacred framework begins to dictate what fits into sacred interpretation and what does not—whether a basketball is a sacred gift or not—a child’s innocence is labeled “wrong”, and the sacred becomes distant for him; a time very long ago when there were no basketballs.

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83 What makes this story “sacred”? Is the shepherd’s gift sacred, or the understanding of the event as sacred, and as told traditionally as orthodox?
Chapter 6
A Narrative Epistemology of the Sacred

This Chapter introduces the concept of epistemology as relevant to sacred understanding, and presents encapsulated “seeds of contradiction” for each narrative analyzed previously.

This thesis has, I trust, been a journey of sorts. I have attempted to bring to the fore an understanding of the fragility of the sacred framework, through analyzing religious-leader folklore. My methods and interpretations are admittedly biased and subjective, but also perceptive and effectively provocative, I hope. This analysis and interpretation then begs the question, of what use are these analyses to anyone except the analyst himself? Certainly the narratives are interesting and humorous, but are they more than anecdotes and funny stories which I have self-indulgently interpreted in my own words through my own thoughts? If this is so, than I have been effective in elucidating what I set out to accomplish, which was to produce a set of ideas—epistemological implements, in essence—which can be applied to formulate a better, more coherent understanding of the sacred in society.

As anyone who has studied a foreign language will attest, understanding is not instantaneous, nor is it isolated to vocabulary words; understanding is a contextual process. Thus it is with the sacred. Perhaps, then, to draw a rather loose metaphorical analogy, the sacred is akin to a foreign language one learns in high school: Social scientists study hard the equivalent of the vocabulary words, verb tenses and their usage, in the form of analyzing symbols and symbolic structure, belief systems and hierarchies, ceremonial rituals and their manifestations. But to truly understand how the language works, how it is really spoken by everyday people, on the street, in their homes, the aspiring linguist must journey into the culture, into the society, visit the homes, walk the streets, so that s/he can hear with her/his own ears the language spoken by native, fluent speakers. I believe that the same holds true for the sacred.

In essence, then, I am your guide to the ways the sacred is constituted and deconstructed. But I don’t pretend to know every aspect, every street in the city. Rather, I am a temporary guide, only through these few pages, of a small area—the fragility of the sacred frame, a little of its
construction, and quite a bit of its collapse. I have used the tools of social science—anthropological and sociological concepts and theories—but I will be the first to admit: I am relatively self-taught. My analysis is derived, secondary to the stories themselves, and indebted to nothing but my own interpretation. However, like all guides, I believe I have a rather unique perspective, incorporating both a native standpoint and a theoretically discerning basis for interpretation. Being both the son of a pastor—a “preacher’s kid”—and a student of anthropology is what (retrospectively) led me to this particular manifestation of an honors project. As a “native anthropologist” of sorts, I feel obliged to proffer a caveat on my inherent subjectivism. As a native, I’m eager to show you around.

Ways of interpretation are inherently individual, yet guided by society and culture. The process of making meaning—finding significance in events—is based on one’s own past experiences and interpretation of those experiences as relatively meaningful to life. But one does live within society, and cultural influences are not hard to realize. My purpose, then, is not to impose a set of meanings on these narratives, for that would deny the individual something intrinsically essential to folklore; its personal touch. The analyses herein are not meant as dictated meaning, but as a personal interpretation—my own personal interpretation—that is hypothetical and exemplary, yet no doubt influenced by society and culture. In this sense, then, the validity in my analyses is found in a revelation of shared “ways of knowing”.

Epistemology is not about finding the answers to meaning and knowledge—what we know, what is meaningful. Rather, it is about exploring questions—about how we know, and how we make meaning. States Bateson,

> Epistemology is that science whose subject matter is itself. ...We set out to study the nature of study itself, the process of acquisition of information and its storage. ...The study of art and poetry and of how these things are done and how history is done—all these are epistemology, along with the study of how epistemology is done” (1991:231)

The analysis of these narratives, then, is a study of “how epistemology is done” within the sacred framework. My goal has been to present ideas exploring the nature of the sacred framework and its inherent weakness it builds into the frames it constructs. By examining the sacred’s fragility

84 By “personal touch” I mean the narratives’ power as individually interpreted packages of meaning and significance. These narratives, as folklore in general, make no attempt to explain meaning—their beauty lies in their interpretive possibilities.
through a model of frame-analysis, a “way of knowing” has been set forth. Now we must ask how we know what we know; “how is epistemology done” within this set of narratives? In essence, the question is how do we know, through narrative? How do narratives of embarrassment, shame, discomfort, coincidence, rebuke, etc. expose the limits and flexibility (or lack thereof) of the sacred framework?

While this may at first seem to conflict with my earlier theory of individual meaning creation through one’s life experiences—how can one argue that the narratives make meaning if meaning and significance are individual interpretations?—I would again caution that one’s life experiences are culturally based. Epistemology is not the study of individual meaning interpretations themselves, but of our ways of knowing as based on shared cultural understanding of experience, as an individual within society. Essentially, we are studying the tools which we all use to create—interpret—our own finished product. Bateson speaks of “abstract patterns” which are shared vehicles for knowing:

“Notions like ‘aggression’, ‘crime’, ‘wealth’—and even ‘god’—are highly abstract patterns which continually provide the tramlines upon which our thought travels forward to decisions of all kinds” (Bateson 1991:233).

While Bateson does not apply his notion of “tramlines” to any specific instance, that is the goal here. The analyses are meant as a delineation of the paths which lead to an understanding of the sacred framework; we are using the narratives as ways of knowing. In this way I am your guide; I suggest ways of seeing, perceiving what is there, giving you an infrastructure that, instead of historical, is epistemological. In essence, ways of knowing the sacred, its framework, and its fragility through the narrative set—a collection of anecdotes which contain kernels of socio-cultural understanding.

But the question still remains, what is at the core of the epistemology of the sacred? What is at the basis of a “sacred” way of knowing? We easily understand the narratives are presentational of the sacred way of knowing: they are straight from the mouths of religious-leaders themselves, regarding incidents within the sacred framework. But what still remains is how they are presentational, and why this is.

Bateson describes and defines the “science” of epistemology with help from Warren McCulloch and his physiological explanation:

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“In the living of the frog, the only input that can reach the frog’s mind (its total organization) through the frog’s eye is input about moving objects. It cannot see the stationary. ...By the same token, our human machinery for perceiving—our sense organs—can receive news only of difference. And within the wide category of difference, we can perceive only those differences which are already events in time or which can be converted into events in time. ...So, epistemology insists that the stuff of knowledge is always made of the news of difference. ...Well, the next step from news of single differences is to the building up of patterns or configurations. Quite a step” (Bateson 1991:232-233)

What is of importance to us here is not frogs and moving objects, but another type of difference. And rather than "events in time" in the general sense that Bateson is speaking of, events within the sacred "time" ("frame" is a better word!) are our focus. So, the epistemology of the sacred framework, and the understanding of those ways of knowing—"the stuff of knowledge"—is found in differences. But, a single difference does not a way of knowing make. Rather, it is in "the building up of patterns or configurations" where fundamental differences may be realized. My last duty, now, as your guide through the narrative set, is to point out those differences and their structure of patterns and configurations which lead to an epistemology of the sacred framework.

But first a word about the notion of "difference" within the sacred, and a word of caution regarding the disparity of secular and sacred epistemologies. Without too much head-scratching one may come to the realization that the sacred framework is indeed made up of difference-making. In fact, there are many differences inherent within the context of the sacred that provide the basis for understanding and knowing; taking any occurrence as a sacred symbolic or conceptual element is, in essence, making a "difference". Bread and wine within the context of the communion ritual are very different than bread and wine on the dinner table. A thunderclap at precisely the right moment is suddenly very different from a thunderclap that might have occurred just minutes, perhaps even seconds, earlier or later.

But in a broader sense, the sacred framework itself, as a structured mentality, is created apart—and therefore different—from the secular (everything else that is considered "not sacred"). While this is certainly not an epiphany—anthropology has long been pointing out the "transcendent" nature of the sacred in myths, rituals, symbols, and the like in so many ways and in so many different cultures—perhaps what is surprising is how these narratives actually expose the constructedness of the sacred. The participants and officiators within the sacred framework create
difference themselves. The point is, specialness is invested in difference. If the conceptual difference breaks down—the communion bread becomes merely bread and not the “body of Christ”—the sacred becomes no different from the secular. The “specialness” of the sacred, therefore, lies within the ability of mere mortals to create a transcendent way of knowing, set apart from that considered “not special”.

What is imperative to this argument here, then, is the comprehension that the sacred framework is indeed made up of making and up-holding differences, and that the understanding of these differences—how they are created and supported—is the key to understanding sacred ways of knowing. Therefore, it is imperative to realize how the process of making difference creates a sacred epistemology different from what I have been cautiously calling the “secular”.

I would contend that, by engaging in a certain interpretive frame, a difference is unavoidable. Essentially, by interpreting the communion ritual as a literal, or even symbolic, act of elemental embodiment consumption, this interpretation must differentiate between ritual elements on the communion table, and everyday foodstuffs on the dinner table. In other words, secular ways of knowing are potentially volatile and destructive within the sacred framework because of the sacred framework’s inability to allow for a less than “transcendent” epistemology. This concept is central to the narratives that make up the body of this thesis.

Think of Narrative 8.7—the pastor encouraging the congregation to come up to the front of the sanctuary and “tie one on”—and how the sacred framework’s inability to allow for a secular interpretation of a mere three words, coupled with the fact that the particular phrase had such potent profane meaning, led to a sacred-ritual frame fallout. Or note Narrative 6.6—trapped birds swooping and diving during the priest’s homily—and how a deviance from the ceremony occurs not necessarily because of the incident itself, but due more to the congregation’s interpretation of the event as frame-distant. What occurs, then, inherently in incidents of sacred-frame collapse, is contradiction. The disparities between the epistemology—the mentality—of the sacred and that of the “outside world” become glaringly apparent. What we are interested in here is the nature of the sacred epistemology; the basis for its framework and creation of sacred frames. I believe the concept of “contradiction” is at the core understanding of sacred epistemology. The sacred “way of knowing” is illuminated through the narratives exposing the inherent differences in the moments that cause the sacred frame’s collapse, and/or expose the sacred framework’s fragility.
Whereas the analysis of the narrative set is admittedly my own interpretation of the events related to me in interviews, I believe there is a seed of contradiction in each story that can be revelatory of socio-cultural-wide understanding. Essentially, by getting at the heart of the “difference” that the sacred framework relies upon to remain transcendentally “special”, we can reach a socio-culturally-based comprehension of the sacred way of knowing. These narratives unveil sacred epistemology by showing how “differences”—Bateson’s “stuff of knowing”—invest in deeper, more poignant, and more potently powerful meanings, concepts, and symbols. But these narratives show how those sacred ways of knowing are most readily deconstructed.

Because the sacred framework employs a “transcendent” understanding, and because it is imbued with so much symbolic and conceptual significance, its epistemology requires intense commitment. Paradoxically, though, that intense commitment is easily undermined and frayed. Our method of understanding the sacred framework and its epistemology is to catch a glimpse of frame collapses and falls, and within that to realize the fragility of the sacred way of knowing. The analyses have examined the falls and the collapses, and how they reflect back upon the fragility of the sacred framework. Now our task is to reveal, at the core of each story, a small seed of contradiction. This seed not only blossoms as the sacred frame’s collapse, but also leads to a way of understanding the sacred framework’s fragility. To get at sacred epistemology we must engage actively with the narratives, because they are our way of knowing the sacred through its fragility. We must, then, create a response that allows us to engage in the sprouting—the drawing-out—of meaning from fragility and intrinsic contradiction. The way to engage in the sprouting is to consider contradictions. In essence, I believe that the analysis can be thought of as a branch of a tree, and the contradiction as the single seed from which the tree sprouts. My analyses were branches on the different “trees” which I drew out of these narratives; now let us engage in the consideration of the seeds.
Seeds of Contradiction: What follows are the “seeds of contradiction” for each story analyzed in the previous sections. This set of contradictions is structured as follows: (1) A “catch phrase” is given for each story to serve as an encapsulating reminder as to what the story is about both in the abstract of the incident and conceptually in the analysis. (2) The contradiction itself is stated as an opposition: ____ vs. ____. (3) A brief statement shows how the contradiction fundamentally produces fragility within the sacred frames. Notes are provided in parentheses regarding how the contradiction is manifested within the particular story.

Narrative 8.1
2. Contradiction: Profane Timing vs. Sacred Context
3. Implications for Sacred Fragility: The unexpected occurs when a profane involuntary body-function (vomiting, specifically “projectile” vomiting) disrupts the sacred frame during a contextually poignant moment (directly after the beginning signal for the sermon, and directly before the sermon actually begins) creating an implosion of the sacred-ritual frame into the profane incident. A combination of the timing of the profane incident and its occurrence at a pinnacle moment of sacred contextual build-up, prove disastrous.

Narrative 8.2
1. “The first communion and malicious distractions.”
2. Ceremonial Integrity vs. Secular Action
3. Ceremonial integrity, validity, and sacredness (within the communion ceremony) are difficult to up-hold (by the novice consultant/pastor) when secular actions are intentionally introduced (i.e., flipping through a datebook) by another officiator and supposed up-holder of the sacred (the Lutheran pastor). What are otherwise appropriate actions in the normative setting of every-day life become undermining disruptions of the sacred-ritual frame.
Narrative 7.2
2. Sacred Essence vs. Secular Tool
3. Material entities (the bread and wine) become imbued with symbolic meaning (the “body” and “blood”, respectively) within the sacred. However, the entities’ utilization as secular implements (the necessity that the bread/body be used as a tool to fish out the fly from the wine/blood in order to uphold the sacred-ritual frame of communion) attests to their secular nature and status as nothing more than ordinary. The use of an ordinary entity as a representational sacred element necessitates an abandonment of the secular interpretive frame—the communion bread must be somehow inherently different from the toast you ate for breakfast.85

Narrative 6.6
1. “The birds: sacred or secular?”
2. Contextual Occurrence vs. Contextual Interpretation
3. An incident within a particular sacred context (the frame of the homily ritual within the mass ceremony) may be interpreted in two ways: contextually relevant (the birds were somehow sacred, or representational of the sacred), or contextually irrelevant (merely trapped birds, distracting and disconcerting). The interpretation of the incident determines its sacred significance or secular deviation, and therefore its structural integration or exclusion. The health of the sacred-ritual frame depends on the participants’ frame-inclusive or frame-exclusive interpretation. The stability and flexibility of a sacred context/frame is dependent upon the epistemology which is employed to interpret an incident.86

85 But once the bread is used as a tool for removing the fly, it becomes polluted bread as well as unable to recover as “the body”. Either way, the bread is inedible, either as the “host”, or as “food”.

86 In both cases interpretation is the way of knowing—but the type of interpretation depends on two different epistemologies. Events are signs of God’s presence or the presence of religious discipline and conduct, or they are merely aspects of the life of the human body.
Narrative 6.7
1. “Ritual fainting, or fainting during ritual?”
2. Contextual Occurrence vs. Contextual Interpretation
3. An incident within a particular sacred context (the frame of the “giving the sign of peace” ritual within the mass ceremony) may be interpreted in two ways: contextually relevant (the fainting of the girl is somehow a sacred occurrence, or representational of the sacred), or contextually irrelevant (merely a biological phenomenon, distracting and disconcerting). The interpretation of the incident determines its sacred significance or secular deviation, and therefore its structural integration or exclusion. The health of the sacred-ritual frame based on its participants’ frame-inclusive or frame-exclusive interpretation. The stability and flexibility of a sacred context/frame is dependent upon the epistemology which is employed to interpret an incident.

Narrative 8.7
1. “‘Tying one on’ during church.”
2. Contextual Meaning vs. Profane Interpretation
3. The sacred context is vulnerable to dual understandings: one contextually relevant (the phrase “tie one on” describing an action within the sacred-ritual frame) and the other contextually distant (“tie one on” colloquially describing the profane action of “getting drunk”). The interpretation of an incident decides which understanding is more powerful. The profane meaning has the upper hand because of its proverbial potency within any context (evidenced by the congregation’s snickering). The sacred context undergoes a loss of transcendent epistemology due to the fact that the profane interpretation of an incident over-rides any cross-epistemological ambiguity.87

87 The proverbial understanding over-rides the attempt to make that phrase have a meaning relevant only to the concept of Advent and remembrance.
Narrative 8.8

1. "'Piss of kease': a ritual 'spoonerism'."

2. Sacred Context vs. Profane Coincidence

3. The sacred is vulnerable to coincidence: an incident occurring merely from chance and happenstance (the linguistic error of switching phonemes is not uncommon) is dangerous. That the tiny coincidence occurs while establishing a sacred boundary (at the time of a ritual introduction, no less!) shows a secular invasion can make a breach at the barest hint of a crack in the sacred armor. That crack here is the notion that the pastor is, as a sacred representative, somehow super-humanly free from error, including profane secularism. Epistemologies are fragile when their underlying structure is weak and fragile as well—a way of knowing can quickly be abandoned when threatened.

Narrative 10.1

1. "Secular getting and sacred giving."

2. Ritual Assumptions vs. Secular Value

3. Assumptions (those inherent within the ritual of offering) are essential to the sacred framework’s ability to create and sustain meaning. In this story, the tenets are that selflessness is a Christ-like trait, and therefore "it is more blessed to give than to receive." The shattering of such doctrinal assumptions (by admonishing the congregation that it is better to receive—a rather capitalist ideal!) is, then, a direct assault on the sacred’s integrity of meaning. The transposition of words flips understanding on its head and takes the sacred-ritual frame with it ("if it is more blessed to receive, why are we giving the church money?"). Sacred conduct is founded on sacred assumptions and protocol. When the secular system seems to be recommended instead, a dangerous way of knowing is substituted and an epistemology based on differences no longer holds.

88 "Piss" replaces "kiss" in a terrible irony of the gross body replacing the spiritual use of the body.

89 Like the transposition of parallel phonemes (Narrative 8.8)!
Narrative 8.3

1. “The first wedding and ‘polygamy at its finest!’”
2. Ceremonial Sacredness vs. Ceremonial Faux Pas
3. The delineated sacred ceremony (delineated specifically as a “wedding ceremony”) employs a liturgical sequence of events which create a structure of meaning and sacred specialness (normally, the bride is escorted up the aisle, rings are presented, and pronouncements are made—but a deviation from the sequence creates a deviation in the wedding’s conceptual significance). A sacred entity (the unity of bride and groom into one life together) is being created through doctrinal dictate (wedding protocol), but deviances from the doctrine interrupt the build-up of sacred significance (i.e., the rings tied to the pillow interrupt the symbolic bestowing of pronounced unity). The “sacredness” of an event is a measure of the sacred framework’s ability to maintain a continuity of understanding, upholding the sacred epistemology.

Narrative 8.4

1. “Saying the wrong name: funeral forgetfulness.”
2. Ceremonial Assumptions vs. Elemental Misrepresentation
3. Basic assumptions and expectations form a link between a set ceremony and a particular person (for whom the funeral ceremony is being conducted). The link can be completely shattered merely by inserting a wrong conceptual element (the incorrect name of the deceased) into a small but poignant sacred-ritual (the pastor’s prayer invoking God to take care of the deceased). Sacred meaning is based on a way of knowing intolerant to any such deviance from expectations. Assumptions are strong bulwarks of the sacred-ceremony frame and its specialness as personally meaningful (for the family and friends of the deceased). If these bulwarks collapse, the entire sacred epistemology collapses as well.
Narrative 8.12

1. "The concept of Baptism: 'We want you to do our kid!''"
2. Sacred Conceptuality vs. Utilitarian Necessity
3. The utilitarian logicality of performative acts of ceremonial rituals (the baptism ceremony as a necessity for the child's well-being after life) may overshadow the sacred intent and meaningful understanding of those acts (a symbolic first step in the spiritual life and growth of the child within the sacred). The mindset of ceremony participants ("We've got to get our kid done so he doesn't go to hell!") is the foundation for the sacred-ritual frame's representational validity as meaningfully sacred (the act of baptism as a holy blessing). The sacred epistemology is vulnerable to interpretive frames operating within a different mode of conceptual understanding.

Narrative 8.13

1. "Family feud and elopement."
2. Sacred Dignity vs. Utilitarian Necessity
3. The dignity of the sacred ceremony (the wedding, in this story) is reliant upon the respect which its participants bring into the sacred frame (respect for the holy institution of marriage, and conceptual unity with couple and God). Sacred meaning depends on understanding the sacred frame, which, in turn, is dependent on respect for the sacred framework. When respect for the sacred and its conceptual elements is left behind in favor of a necessary end result (having the ceremony at any church whatsoever, just so the couple could elope), the dignity of the sacred process is ground to dust. Ways of knowing within the sacred framework are often realized within the liturgical process building, presenting, and partaking in sacred concepts and symbols. If the sacred epistemology is foregone, and the goal (of the wedding ceremony) is just the finished product, (marriage), the sacred ceremony ceases to be transcendentally special.
Narrative 8.15
1. “Poignant performance and the critique of portrayal.”
2. Sacred Manifestation vs. Role Reality
3. A performance role (the consultant’s portrayal in his own reader’s-theater production) within the sacred framework is taken beyond that of “acting”, to a certain embodiment which has the power to shape belief (the drama portrayed becomes conceptually “real” through a combination of the audience’s willing suspension of disbelief and the performers’ roles manifested as embodiment). The audience’s affection nurtured to the point of frame immersion carries with it the danger of utter collapse if the ephemeral embodiment is betrayed (the audience witnessed the consultant’s role-break, destroying the poignancy of what they had just become involved in).

Sacred epistemology relies heavily on total immersion into performance and role to create meaning and uphold belief. This creates a powerful, but tenuous, embodiment of understanding and transcendent reality.

Narrative 11.7
1. “Episcopalian aflame; Catholic to the rescue?”
2. Religious Rift vs. Contextual Situation
3. A secular crisis situation, even within a context laden with denominational disparity (the Episcopalian’s robe caching fire within a wedding ceremony with the Catholic), has the power to break down barriers of sacred dictate. These dictates are both liturgical (the frame of the ceremony itself and the ritual frame) and sectarian (the exclusionary practices of the faith-practices). Instead, an imperative necessity of working together (to put out the cope and avert a much larger crisis) would seem to supersede these dictates. However, the religious rift could have been (as in the past) so great as to be unspannable (could the historical discriminatory rift be so great that the Catholic might have refused any contact with the Episcopalian, even in a crisis?). When faith-practice dictates carry inherent discriminations and prejudices they are dangerous indeed, possibly bypassing notions of decency and respect in their rigidity.
Narrative 10.7

1. “The Rector’s son, prayer books, and expectations.”
2. Sacred Expectation vs. Role Enactment
3. The sacred framework—and frames therein—projects roles on its participants (that of “Rector’s son” and all the inherent expectations stemming from the Rector’s role). Participants must, to remain within the sacred framework, comport themselves in ways that manifest sacred expectations—the sacred framework dictates role enactment in complete compliance with a sacred-situational frame. Projected roles are as rigid and inflexible as the sacred-situational frame at hand, and must fit the ceremony or ritual locked into doctrinal order. This leads to the possibility for an enactment of role that does not fit into the projected image (using a sacred conceptual element—the prayer book—in deviation from the sacred frame). Sacred understanding is a product of assumptions, including role expectations. Conversely, ways of knowing are built on an understanding of assumptions; the result is a legitimation of the sacred through the fulfillment of projected expectations.

Narrative 5.2

2. Sacred Context vs. Natural Coincidence
3. The sacred framework’s reliance on conceptual meaning and its support of understanding inherently creates significance out of a mere natural coincidence (the thunderclap became, with its acknowledgement by the pastor, a sacred entity—much more than an act of nature). The exclusion of secular interpretation of events and incidents (the thunderclap as a mere coincidence) within the sacred-ritual frame (the children’s sermon and its closing prayer) leads to the necessity of incorporating coincidence into the sacred framework (acknowledging the thunderclap as a “signal” to have the prayer after all). Otherwise, coincidence has the potential to destroy the sacred-ritual frame as a secular occurrence.90 The integrity of sacred epistemology is such that “transcendent” ways of knowing must be incorporated into occurrences otherwise secularly “normal”.

90 Would the unacknowledged thunderclap really have collapsed the sacred frame? The consultant uses it to “strengthen” sacred frame but admits how arbitrary sacred interpretation is.
**Narrative 5.3**

1. “A fake hand, a young girl, and a poor choice.”
2. Role Manifestation vs. Role Expectation
3. The sacred framework promotes a structure of belief through role manifestation within the sacred-ritual frame (the consultant’s portrayal of the Christ-clown became an embodiment for the young girl). Along with belief in the manifested role as a real embodiment comes inherent expectations of comportment (i.e., no fake hands—clowns and Christ are friendly, not harmful!). When a role betrayal occurs (the consultant in essence breaking role in allowing the little girl to shake his “disembodied” hand), expectations shatter along with the belief in the role as embodiment. Secular epistemology is left behind upon entering into the sacred understanding, and fragile ways of knowing manifest themselves when tenuous roles based on representation rather than presentation intrude.

**Narrative 7.3**

1. “The pastor, the parishioner, and the ‘fountain of Rome’.”
2. Sacred Role vs. Profane Incident
3. The existence of roles other than those that are sacred (like the role of “father”: responsible for his son, necessitating action within the “father” role when his son displays a profane action) is a hard pill to swallow for one (the devout parishioner) who observes and therefore knows her “interpreter of God’s word” as only that. With the understanding of only one conceptual “role entity” of sorts (that of “pastor”) seen always manifest within a sacred frame, and as incapable of secularity, the enactment of other roles outside the sacred framework may come as a surprise. Sacred ways of knowing are enclosed within the sacred framework itself, which promotes a projection of a single role onto one person, (especially the pastor). Denying that he must operate as an individual away from the sacred framework in order to survive within society makes his role fragile and impossible to maintain in anything other than the sacred framework. Perhaps a combination of roles could be epistemologically allowed (i.e., pastor and father)?
Narrative 8.19
2. Metaphysical Memory vs. Logical Deduction
3. Inherent within the sacred framework are traditional values placed on reverential knowledge through intimate familiarity (learning the books of the Bible by memorization) which, when applied to a task (looking up Bible verses as quickly as possible) may prove to be inefficient. Further, recognizing these sacred values through a secular competition based on speed (in a task such as looking up Bible verses) essentially contradicts those values. The sacred framework, with its transcendent understandings, is arguably illogical by nature. One invests belief in sacred frames where meaning and knowing are not based in quantitative logic or deductive reasoning. But an adoption of a seemingly secular competition in order to reflect and recognize sacred scholarship lays bare the inefficiency of those ways of structuring knowledge.

Narrative 11.13
1. “The shepherd’s gift to the Christ-child; dunk it!”
2. Sacred Assumption vs. Child’s Interpretation
3. Sacred understanding can be narrow-minded, therefore leading to highly specific, set interpretations of sacred concepts (the story of Christ’s birth interpretable only as an historically distant story, and within a very different way of life). These narrow notions of validity and invalidity (is the notion that the Christ-child received a basketball from one of the shepherds valid?) can be applied to others’ interpretations of sacredness. Individual interpretations (the child’s reality-based interpretation is valid for him, certainly!) can either be validated within the sacred framework by (the priest’s) acknowledgement, or invalidated by disregard or correction (the priest, in this instance, acknowledges the child’s interpretation). Epistemologies are understood through interpretational acts. The sacred way of knowing, however, is dictated by liturgy, scripture, doctrine, etc. leaving differing interpretations to either become deviant or somehow included. This arbitrariness is underscored in this story, as well as fragility: whether members of the congregation accept the priest’s validation.
Conclusions

Patterns of Differences

The purpose of this Anthropology Honors Thesis has been to understand sacred construction through narrative epistemology. With the help of the analytical model of framework, frame, and strip, the narratives regarding incidents of disruption and incongruity within the sacred framework have been shown to be a way of knowing the sacred as constructed purposefully different and contradictory to "conventional" social cognition. Specifically, the analyses have focused on how the sacred framework constructs fragile interpretive frames susceptible to incidents which challenge its structural rigidity and inflexibility. These stories expose the constructedness of the sacred.

In analyzing how the narratives expose the sacred's constructedness within society, an overall pattern has become apparent. That pattern is simply that the sacred is constructed through interpretation. Narrative analysis and epistemological inquiry show that only by our using interpretive frames, is the sacred known as "different" and understood as "special". In essence, without our actively interpreting what constitutes the sacred—symbols, concepts, roles, etc.—we do not imbue the sacred with a notion of "specialness" that allows its difference from the "everyday" realm to be known as transcendent.

This thesis has examined the sacred's constructedness by examining its structural fragility. By getting at an understanding of how the narratives are ways of knowing the sacred—by illuminating the fragilities inherent in various sacred frames—we have revealed three elements that support interpretive difference. How we interpret sacred Context, Symbol/Concept, and Role are imperative to the sacred framework's structural integrity.

The narratives become ways of knowing the sacred based on how they show context, symbol/concept, and role as fragile constructions:

Narratives 6.6, 6.7, and 8.7 are especially good examples of how the context of interpretation can make or break a particular frame. The way the congregation interprets incidents of natural disturbance, human frailty, or mis-speak, determines the incident's effect on the frame at hand. The interpretive choice to understand incidents as either contextually frame-relevant or
frame-distant is essentially the choice to remain within the sacred framework or break out.

Narratives 7.2, 8.4, and 8.12 reveal the interpretive significance placed on concepts and symbols tenuously attached to particular assumptions. The validity of symbols and concepts as meaningfully sacred may be undermined by secular utilization, poignant misrepresentation, or performative misunderstanding. A symbolic or conceptual element's integrity is dependent on both the effectiveness of its presentation and the preservation of its representation, as well as its ability to perpetuate assumptions of significance.

Narratives 8.15, 5.3, and 7.3 show how role enactment and expectations can destroy built-up beliefs. An audience's willing suspension of disbelief may be shattered by a betrayal of an evocative role, betrayal of role embodiment, or enactment of an unexpected role. The maintenance of sacred roles is imperative to the health and integrity of the sacred framework, and projected expectations are often contextually analogous.

This thesis is a journey—a process of exploration into sacred ways of knowing. Through narrative, we have gained an understanding of sacred constructedness and fragility. The journey began with a statement of my interpretive position as a "native anthropologist" of sorts, combining my unique perceptions and "inside" understandings with a socio-culturally based methodological approach. Those methods were then discussed and explained within the established theoretical background of primarily Goffman's "frame-analysis" approach. The model of frame-analysis was then applied to selected stories from the narrative set. A five-step procedure was implemented with the purpose of methodologically attaining an understanding of weakness and fragility inherent in the sacred framework's construction of the particular frame. This five-step analytical procedure was applied to three narrative categories: stories involving worship ceremonies; stories involving "special" ceremonies; and stories thematically involving children. Epistemology and its applicability to the sacred framework was then broached, and the relevant theories of maintaining difference were discussed. Lastly, seeds of contradiction were elicited from each narrative analysis as the kernel element producing fragility.
But the journey has really only just begun. I have been your guide through a small area of the sacred, and while there is much here, there is much more to explore. Concepts of social reality and the sacred, the role of the sacred in social and cultural evolution and change, performative aspects of narrative, culturally-based sacred rituals and traditions, and other (non-Christian) religious-practice epistemologies have been addressed briefly or not at all. These concepts are but examples of the possibilities for further socio-cultural scholarship. It is my hope that this thesis can act as a jumping-off point for further investigation into the sacred, its frames and framework, and its epistemologies.

For myself, this journey has been immensely gratifying. I have undergone a process of self-conscious investigation: my interpretive processes have been laid bare, and I have come to realize that indeed, the sacred was (and is!) significantly formative to my upbringing. This thesis has been an exploration into my own fascination with sacred meaning, understanding, and knowing. Anthropology has been my formative lens.
Appendix:
Narrative Transcriptions and Consultant Demographics

This section contains the transcripts of the interviews in their entirety, and gives basic demographic information for each consultant.

The transcripts are in standard interview-dialogue. My speech is noted with the prefix “I:“, standing for “interviewer”. The Consultant’s speech is noted with the prefix “C#:“, standing for “Consultant Number (5, 6, 7, 8, 10, or 11)”. Speech-relevant actions, inflections, and laughter (in its various forms) are noted in brackets: “[ ]”, such as “[laughs]”. After the termination of each interview appointment, a brief spoken demographic note, regarding the consultant’s faith practice, place of interview, and date of interview, was recorded and is reflected in the transcription. In addition, each narrative—as defined by its content—is noted as “Narrative #” within the transcript to allow for easy reference.

Preceding each transcript is a brief statement of the consultant’s demographic information. Included is: Personal Title (i.e., pastor, priest); Faith Practice (i.e., Methodist, Roman Catholic); Gender; Approximate Age; Ethnicity (assumed); Native Language (assumed); Interview Location; and Interview Date.
Consultant 5

Personal Title: Executive Director, Council of Churches
Faith Practice: United Methodist
Gender: Male
Approximate Age: 60
Ethnicity: White—European descent
Native Language: English
Interview Location: Consultant’s office, Binghamton, New York
Interview Date: March 24, 1998
Consultant 5

Transcript

Prepared: C. Matt Newburn  440 774 1117

Interviewer (Joshua Aerie):   I
Consultant (#):   C(#)

I: The way this will work will be, is that I will transcribe it off the tape and it’ll be put into a collection an archived collection so that other people will uh in the future can use it for research but it will be all confidential just to let you know

C5: Yeah.

I: Yeah, but um... I wanna leave this real open so that um I don’t wanna ask any of a too much of a pointed question but, um, the story I like to start off telling people to hopefully get some wheels turning is a first time story that my dad likes to tell. And I think it was his first time in the pulpit somewhere in New Jersey after he’d gone to seminary and he got up to do his first sermon and he said, “Let us pray.” And at that moment a little girl just got up and [laughs] threw up. All over the place. And I guess, for him, that broke the ice, you know, so I guess you’d feel a lot better and a lot less nervous. But, I don’t know, I guess what I’m looking for is some experiences or stories, they don’t have to be comical or...

C5: Yeah.

I: Yeah. Anything from...

C5: And you’re thinking more personal stuff as opposed to, I mean personal as related to the church, to the ministry...

I: Yeah.

C5: ... that kinda stuff, as opposed to... anything related to traditions or more formal... whatever.

I: No, either way, really. You know, I...I
Narrative 5.1

C5: I mean, I always think they are stories and stories and um, I think one of the stories that is more personal but it reflects some of the... moral codes or whatever of folks. I was, uh, serving a small church in Tyler, Illinois and eventually three churches, but, among these three churches, and uh. Over the years we’ve adopted five children and um, we had just adopted our first child at that, while we were at that church. I remember the first Sunday after the adoption had occurred we, we had received the child - there’s a lapse of six months, typically up to six months. When they, they’re checking just to be sure that it’s working, that you’re gonna be good parents and so forth and whether you should be adopting. Well, anyway, we uh, had picked the little girl up. She was our first daughter, and she was with us that Sunday and we announced that we were adopting this little girl and uh... afterwards folks, you know, were greeting on the way out, you know, talking about what a great sermon it was, whether it was or...
I: Or if it wasn’t [laughs]
C5: or if it wasn’t [laughs]
I: Sure, right, right.
C5: Well, anyway, on the way out, these two spinster ladies came together and said to me, “Father Reverend Stanton, it’s so wonderful that you’ve adopted this little girl.” And then they said something like, “It’s such a, it’s such a clean and decent way to get a child.” [chuckles]
I: [Chuckles] jeez, that’s...
C5: And I’ve always chuckled about that, you know, that, I mean, there’s the implication that there’s no sex involved.
I: Right. Right, right.
C5: And, uh, it’s sorta like kids not -having a hard time dealing with the fact that they’re parents are sexual beings, you know.
I: Right, right.
C5: I suppose many people have difficulty accepting the fact that their pastors are sexual beings. So that’s, you know, just kind of a little...
I: I’m sure....

Narrative 5.2

C5: ...bit of a personal story. Your story that your dad told makes me think of a story when I
was, um, I, most of us as pastors have done a lot of children’s stories over the years. And some of the funniest things uh... that happened I, in our ministries, or fun things are in the contexts of those children’s stories. And I remember one Sunday when I was at Vestal, which was a big church, well, I guess back then it was the biggest Protestant church in the county, and that was the biggest Methodist church we had. I had a staff, and... we, we always had a lot going on. And a particular Sunday was a very busy Sunday and there was a worshipping service, your dad identify with this, there were just so many things to get done and you want to contain it within your hour. We mainstream Protestants are really locked into this hour service...

I: Yeah, right.
C5: I know some friends and kin that are a little bit looser about it, but, anyway... So, you want to contain it within that so you wanna kind of pick and choose and keep things reasonable timewise. So, I knew it was a busy day and so I had told this brief story, which I don’t even remember now, to the children, and I always ended it with prayer with the children. And I said, “Today there’s an awful lot going on so we’re not going to conclude with our usual prayer.” At which time, out of what at that moment came into church, out of the clear blue sky, there was this huge clap of thunder...

I: Ha, ha. Wow.
C5: and the church shook, and I mean, really. I mean, it was weird, because it wasn’t raining or nothing. This huge clap of thunder. And there was silence. And I recouped and said, “On second thought, let’s pray.”

I: [Laughs]
C5: And so we had a little prayer. And, of course, it brought the house down. But, it was a fun kinda thing.

I: That’s great.

**Narrative 5.3**

C5: Um, I remember one other story, of the children’s stories, which wasn’t as funny, and I think it’s an illustration of how things can go awry. Where, I was playing the part of clown this particular Sunday. And I was doing a children’s story and I was using as the theme...

[beep, beep]

Secretary: Bill.
C5: Yes?

Secretary: Maureen Harvey with Simon-Welles.

C5: Ok.

[phone rings]

C5: [to Interviewer] Hold on, just a second.

I: Certainly. No problem.

C5: So, I was, sorry for the interruption, but I was playing the part of a clown, and actually we did kind of a mime thing. My associate and I were dressed up as clowns, so the children's story, that was for the sermon, but we were doing that, so the children's story we were obviously in, outfit...

I: Yeah, yeah.

C5: And we, uh, ended up, I ended up telling the children's story. And the theme that we were trying to get across with the children is that Christ... gives us a hand in our daily experiences with living...

I: Yeah.

C5: And, I'll tell that story because it's one of the neater stories in a minute, but, I had one of these fake hands that you hold with a stick and you push your sleeve over top so that it comes down over it. So you have two gloved hands, one of which is... fake, and I, uh...

I: Huh.

C5: We were talking about that we thought it'd be kinda cute with the kids, you know, to do something, something, well, we just didn't think it through very carefully that it could also be very traumatic.

I: Yes, ha ha.

C5: And, uh, so, uh, the shaking hand, with a little little girl, she was maybe four or five. And, uh, she took the hand, and she was, I mean she wasn't terribly traumatized but you could see for a second that she had thought she'd pulled the poor man's hand off, you know.

I: [Laughs]

C5: And I thought afterwards, what a poor choice it was,

I: [Laughs]
C5: with a children’s, whatever, illustration, story. And I was young, fairly young, at that point. And I guess I just hadn’t gone through that very carefully. But it’s just an example of how you do things that you think were gonna be you know, good, but...
I: Yeah.

Narrative 5.4

C5: Which leads me to the story about the clowning. Uh... among Methodists in this area... I, for a, for a couple of years after I left the ministry was known, whatever, was as the Parish Clown.
I: Heh.
C5: And the reason for that was that I uh... well... one day was trying to think, you know... you preach on Easter, you preach on Lent, year after year after year. You wanna, wanna come to it fresh and you want to bring something stimulating. And it’s gotta be fresh to you if it’s going to be fresh to the congregation. So I was trying to think... what can I do this Easter that’s fresh, that’s new. And, uh, I think, especially for children, you know, they’re the ones that I wanna really get to. And we used to, in that church, pack them in at... 600 people at uh, 6 to 700 people at uh, the biggest service and 3 to 400 at the other service. So, I’m thinking, something that’s going to stimulate, that’s going to excite, that’s gonna make the people think through and come to grips with their faith. So, I’m thinking, well, as a child, what was it that really spoke to me that turned me on? What did I get excited about? Without any second thought, it was obviously the circus. Love the circus.
I: Hm.
C5: And at the circus I particularly loved the clowns. That’s why I thought, that’s it, we’ll do a clown for the Easter Sunday. Which, most people would think what an absurd thought.
I: Heh haha.
C5: So, I went to my associate, who used to be uh, a, uh, a chaplain at a university here and he’s now a full-time associate dean at Vestal, and I said, “Ken. Easter Sunday, how would you like to be a clown, for the services?” He said, “A what?”
I: [Laughs]
C5: I said, “A clown.” He said, “Welllll, why not? Whaddaya got in mind?” So, I kinda laid it out for him. And so, we decided, we decided we’d do a mime. Try to enact the, the uh, Easter
story...

I: Huh.

C5: in mime. And uh, Ken, my associate, played the Christ in all the white-faced clown, which, I guess if you go back in, uh, and I wasn’t aware of that when we started but we began to learn that if you go back in the Middle Ages that the clown was was part of the worship experience for many years and somehow got lost in the interim years or in the later years. So, he played the white-faced clown of Christ, and I played the bumbling, you know, human...

I: Right.

C5: Humanity.

I: Right.

C5: And, uh, and, you know, we acted out three different scenarios. One of which including the nailing him to the cross, all of this in mime without a cross or anything...

I: Yeah.

C5: ...all of this in pantomime, so, and, uh. So, as we’re getting ready for it, um, I’m thinking, we don’t want it, we want it to be professional, what can we do. So, I’d happened to see in the paper that they did a story about a local woman who used to work with Barnum & Bailey as a clown. So I called the press and said, “I know you can’t give me her phone number but, would you contact this woman and let her know who I am, and tell her I’d like her to call me about our doing a clown service, sermon for our church.” She called, long story short, she said that she would come with costumes for us, all of the paraphernalia...

I: Wow.

C5: and come and make us up, that Easter Sunday. What she didn’t tell me was that she had a husband who was currently a clown, she was retired and, um...

I: Right.

C5: a fairly young woman yet but was no longer doing her husband was still with Barnum & Bailey, they were separated. They had a form of separation, not only separated on the marriage license, it was before that time. She called him and told him about, what we were going to do and... and he ssaid, “Gosh, I’d like to experience that. Is there any chance I could come out and be there with you? Would you mind?” And she said, “If you wanna come, come out.” So he came out. The two of them together made Ken and I up...
I: Wow.

C5: ...prepared us for the services. Were there throughout the service, brought all kinds of uh, professional, ahw, I can’t remember it all, a flower that squirted water an...

I: Yeh.

C5: all kinds of crazy things, you know.

I: Right.

C5: But I mean, everything was done very professionally, and the end story was we had packed churches. And we didn’t announce it. We, when time for the sermon, uh, that we, we had, I had a second associate...

I: Right.

C5: and he led the first part of the service. When it came time for the sermon... he, uh, simply sat down and Ken and I came in the back on the sanctuary

I: Wow!

C5: and proceeded to do this mime thing. Anyway, we found out then that next week that the two, the fellow that was currently a clown with Barnum & Bailey, and the former clown, who was his wife,

I: Right.

C5: had reconciled. In the process of this Easter... experience...

I: [laughs] That’s great.

C5: ...around the clowning. So, it was kind of a neat, neat thing.

I: Sure.

C5: And then I had, uh, years later probably 8, 9 years later a fellow who contacted me who was a professional uh... trumpet player...

I: Um-hm.

C5: bout, and uh, and I don’t remember, I’m trying to think, but I can’t think of it, some jazz vocal group. Who was the guy who had, who was the bass player, that was so well known all over this area...?

I: I dunno.

C5: Well, I bet he’d a know, he was an African American.

I: Huh.
C5: Just great, I mean, known world-wide for jazz. And this fellow played a lot with him, but he was currently, when he wrote me this letter, he was playing... with, uh... Tommy Dorsey band.
I: Woah.
C5: I mean, they’re, I think that still exists, I’m not sure, I mean Tommy Dorsey’s dead, uh.
I: Right.
C5: ...There was still a time or something. But, anyway, he wrote me a letter saying, “Bill, I don’t know if you remember when you played the clown on Easter Sunday.” Of course, how do you forget that?
I: Right, right, right.
C5: [laughs] He said, uh, “I know you got a little heat about that afterwards, but I want you to know that I came there with my wife. And I hadn’t been in church in about twenty years, not wanting to be there. She dragged me along.” And he said, “That experience was a life-transforming experience. I gave my life to Christ. In that... worship service. Never told you about it. Just wanted you to be aware.” And he said that he was then about to be in some kind of Christian... um, I don’t know whether it was some kind of band he was forming, or what, but full time Christian music, uh, recording. So, you know, it was a kind of interesting... experience.
I: Yeah...
C5: Well, those are a couple, I don’t know what other uh...
I: That’s... that’s fine. I don’t know that...
C5: I’ve got a couple more, I’m trying to think of other [ahem]... other kinds of other things you can think of?
I: I’d like to ask people about their childhood or whether or not they actually grew up in the church,
C5: Yeah.
I: since that was so interesting and such a part of my life, if there’s any experiences or stories out of that. I remember, for me the big thing, um, having always gone to church... way back a long time ago when we were still living in Jersey, was to um, to ring the bell on Sunday morning. And that was just, that was always...
C5: Yeh.
I: Stuck in my mind as as an experience. That, that was, like that was the big special thing for me to do every Sunday.

C5: Yeh. Yeh.

Yeah. I grew up in a church, and I think probably one pastor stands out in my mind. Used to do ‘chalk talks’, used to draw chalk drawings as he talked to you...

I: Wow. Neat!

C5: And he’d give them, and I still have one in my attic, uh, and it’s nothing but, it’s just a treasure, of mine. And whatever kid got that drawing that day it was like, wow, yeah! And so, I remember, and he was just a marvelous guy, you know, two of his own churches. But, there’s no question that he inspired me, uh, tremendously in the church. Although I never thought of being a pastor until I was in college...

[beep]

Secretary: Bill.
C5: Yes?
Secretary: Selena Claire.
C5: Uh, see if you can take a message.
Secretary: Okay.

C5: Thanks. Um, so, you know, he um, made a great impression on me. He was only there probably until I was about seven or so.

I: Um-hm.

C5: So, those early years, some big decisions were made. Sometimes you don’t realize it, but, um...

I: Yeah, yeah.

C5: sometimes, kind of early decisions...

I: Yeah. So how did you come to be a pastor, if you don’t mind me asking?

C5: I was going to uh, Lafeyette College

I: Um-hm, sure, sure.

C5: I was going to be an electrical engineer...
I: Wow.

C5: It was somehow, they somehow have a congregation on campus. Their chapel is not just a chapel but it's a full-blown congregation.

I: Um-hm.

C5: And they elect all the people from the classes to be the whatever they are now, the, the uh... trustees or deacons or whatever they're called...

I: Right, right.

C5: And for some reason, I have no idea how I got elected, but I was elected as one of two representatives of the freshman class.

I: Hm.

C5: So, I became very active in the chapel, in the congregation. And I had some experiences with some of my classmates, uh, um, where they were going, well, you remember your first year. There's lots of trauma that goes on...

I: Yeah.

C5: and, and adjusting. A lot of uh, negative stuff as well as some good stuff. And I remember uh, struggling through that with some of my friends, and uh, helping them in the process and one week in a period of four days having three different, uh, peers, fellow students... ask me one way or the other, "Have you ever thought about being a minister?"

I: Dayeah, wha...

C5: After the third one, asked me I said, hmm.

I: [laughs]

C5: Ah, you know, I oughta think about this, you know, anyway.

I: Yeah.

C5: It was, it was kind of that simple. And, uh, I guess I felt the call though the... if you will, the call of the challenge of some of the students, my student peers...

I: Yeah.

C5: that kinda thing. And then uh, later transferred to Harper, which became Madison (?) U.

I: Oh, Ok.

C5: Graduated with from there and then went inta seminary in Westley (?) down in Washington. So,
I: Yeah.
C5: So, it, there’s no question whatsoever your first years are very formative.
I: Yeah.

Narrative 5.5

C5: Our kids, our children. I mean, I can tell you story after story of some of the great times as you can...
I: Sure.
C5: great times that they had in the church as children. They’re young people now... .... makes me think of one of the stories I love to tell about my little daughter... who uh, we used to kneel, take turns kneeling with her and and with each of the kids in prayer by her bed at night, you know, so, we’re kneeling there and she’s saying her prayers. And, we used to use the “Now I lay me down to sleep,” you know, we changed the end so we weren’t using the words, “If I should die before I wake...”
I: Right, right.
C5: So, anyway, she finished the prayer and then we’d always “God bless” and she in particular, she, didn’t want to go to sleep, would bless the dogs and the cats, by name...
I: [laughs]
C5: and um, all of the children n, she’d name the kids in her classroom, she’d go on and on. She was kinda doing that, and then she said, “And God bless Grandma and Grandpa and God bless Grandma and Daddy...” and without even catching breath, “and Daddy, how come I only have one Grandpa?” Well, my father had died before she was born. So I said to her, “Well,” - here you are, you’re a “quote” theologian, you know, you should have all these answers [snaps fingers] right there.
I: Right.
C5: You don’t. And I’m, thinking, how can I say this in a way that will be meaningful to her. And I said, “Well, honey, Grandpa was... your other, you have another Grandpa. You never knew him because he was very sick.” Well, he really died of a heart attack or something, I was trying to explain to her. I said, “He was very sick, and uh, and... he’s now with God... so, he’s okay, but you’ve never met him.” And she said, “...does God know how to drive?” And I said, “Why do you ask, honey?” And then it hit me... I’d said her Grandpa was with God, and, so, in
her mind, little mind, she was probably about 3 or 4 years old, she thought that God must’ve come to get Grandpa, and so he was able to drive then, too.

I: Right, right.

C5: So, sh she said, “Well, um, I mean, God came to get Grandpa, right?” And I said, “Well... [laughs] yeah, you know, sort of.” I said, “Uh, to be honest, we don’t really understand...”

I: Yeah.

C5: this completely. But, uh, Grandpa was sick. And when you’re sick like that, you know, you go to be with God. So, he’s with, he’s with God now.” And, uh, then she I’m trying to think what she asked but, she was very clearly thinking through how, how it was in her mind, you know, anthropomorphizing it...

I: Sure.

C5: In her mind, thinking through, how it is that one gets from this earth to the... heavens, to be with God.

I: Yeah, yeah.

C5: And uh... who knows, ya know?

I: A logical way of thinking...

C5: Her way of thinking, thinking of it is as good as any other.

I: Sure, right. Exactly.

C5: I don’t know. Ion’t know, anything else you think of? I need to, uh, go here in just a minute or so, but, uh.

I: I think that’s fine. You’ve provided me with some great stories...

C5: Well, that’s close... that’s great...

I: Yeah yeah

C5: Well, now, how seriously...

[end of interview]

I: That was informant #5, at the Broom County Council of Churches in Binghamton.

Today’s date is 3.24.98. And he was the director of the Broom County Council of Churches.

Uh, a Methodist, pastor, I believe.
Consultant 6

Personal Title: Administrator, Religious Life Center
Faith Practice: Roman Catholic
Gender: Female
Approximate Age: 60
Ethnicity: White—European descent
Native Language: English
Interview Location: Parish Offices, Binghamton, New York
Interview Date: March 24, 1998
Consultant 6

Transcript

Prepared: C. Matt Newburn 440 774 1117

Interviewer (Joshua Aerie): I
Consultant (#): C(#)

C6: Something in my mind, or...
I: Yeah, sure, I... er. Yeah, uh. I’ll just let you know that this will be, it will all be confidential...
C6: confidential.
I: But, ah, um, it’ll be put into a collection. I’ll transcribe the tape...
C6: Uh-huh.
I: and put it into a collection which will be archived at the College an hopefully, people in the future be able to see it.
C6: Oh!
I: But yeah. I guess what I’m looking for is, being a religious leader, I’m kinda taking this in two perspectives, one is being, having it being an occupation, in a way, you know, making money and making a living. And the other is is the spiritual aspect; how those two combine, uh, an, and, that’s one avenue that we could take. Some people have talked about... childhood experiences, some people have talked about how, first time experiences, being in the pulpit for the first time or in front of a congregation or something like that... So any....
C6: Any direction.
I: Yeah, any direction, really... I wanna come at it open so, ah, one of the stories my father likes to tell is ah, he was in the pulpit the first time, um, in New Jersey after graduating from, seminary. He got up to do his sermon and he said, “Let us pray.” And of course, he was very nervous at this point and he bowed his head, and at that moment a little girl in the front pew stood
up and threw up all over the place...

C6: Oh ho ho, dear, yes! His first time...

I: So he always loves to tell that story because yeah, but that really broke the ice for him, you know, so...

C6: Yeah, oh, hum...

I: So I don't know if that helps you at all. But...

**Narrative 6.1**

C6: I was thinking that probably some of the most memorable experiences that I've had were when I was in Albany, I was in a parish up there for twelve years. It was right on Central Avenue in Albany, which is a very busy area of the city. And, um, and there were just so many different things that seemed to be going on there in that parish. Ah, it was a more elderly parish, there were older people, but that they had a school, too, which was two doors down from the church. So there were young families also, it was in an area where there were some families in need so we used to get a lot of requests for food and other things that, they were in need of. And because it was an elderly parish we also had many funerals and ah, that was, a little... hard part, there, because we had so many. I think the last year I was there we had 110 funerals...

I: Wow!

C6: Just, for years... so, wuh, I was there for 12 years, and I was thinking one day that, within those twelve years I, I must have gone to about 800 funer... I mean, it seems terrible to think of, but you know, when, um, but, we had, an, if we even had 80 a year, which was less than any years that I was there 12 years. If I had only been there 10 years that would have been 800, so I, I figure, you know...

I: that's incredible....

C6: there were just a lot of wah, [sighs].

I: Wow...

**Narrative 6.2**

C6: There was that hard part of the ministry, but it was kind of balanced off by uh, sharing ministry with two priests, uh, the pastor and his associate pastor. Uh, and three of us just really had a very good... ministry experience together because we could laugh a lot, which, which, helped a lot, because we did a lot of difficult things together. But, it always seemed that there was
something funny that would happen that would keep us from getting, you know, a little, discouraged sometimes with, with the many deaths that we had there [ahem]. And I, I guess the other thing that I thought of those years was, uh, the realization that for me, ministry is like a mutual thing, there's like a mutuality

I: Mhm—

C6: in the ministry. It is, I try to minister to others, they're ministering to me, an

I: Oh yeah!

C6: And I think that came out, I was thinking of, and this is the more serious part, we had many people in the hospitals ahm, but there were like four hospitals that we visited, an um, [ahem] we used to go and sometimes there'd be 20 people from the parish an, in the one Catholic Hospital that we visited. So you would spend the one afternoon just visiting these people. But, I often found that as hard as that was, many times my own faith was, um, deepened by just the contact with, with people who, in the midst of their suffering, you know, could find their own reason for that, or, ah, have the courage, and uh, the strength to continue.

I: Oh yeah.

C6: I remember one day, going into a room, and the woman had had both her legs amputated. I, uh, what could you possibly say to someone like that? But I didn't have to worry because, you know, she, uh, eh, as far as acceptance and everything she said, "Well, you know Sister, I since I've been here in the hospital, I look around and I think, it could be worse. I could have something worse." And I thought, yeah, wow. That day I think I had been kind of um, maybe preoccupied by some, I dunno, some minor problem or something, but it always, ahyou know, everitjustkinda made me see things in a whole never perspective. And I though, "Here is this woman who is facing, you know, the rest of her life, both legs amputated." An, you know, she's seen people who maybe are confused, or are unable to communicate, and she's finding, "well, I can still do these things; I can see, I can hear."

I: Yeah, yeah.

C6: "I can appreciate life even though I can't live it the way I used to." That, that, for me was really something. An, it just happened that, you know, it, these two examples were both women who'd had amputations, but another woman... who was in ICU, and she had had to have her leg amputated an. She had lived with her sister, and she was the driver because her sister didn't drive.
An, uh, so I went in to visit her. She said, “Sister, I’ll be back in church.” She said, “I’ll be driving again.” She said, “I, I know I can do it.” So, within probably six months she was back with the prosthesis, the artificial leg, you know, walking down the aisle with her sister, you know, holding her arm. But she was the driver once more, an. I thought, those were hard things visit, you know, some of those, somehow you were just kind of uplifted by some of the, um, ways in which... my own faith I found strengthened by the faith and courage of other people like that.

Narrative  6.3

And, anyway, we had, as I was saying, we used to have some funny experiences, too, an, you just kind of never knew. Um, thisthis one always kinda struck me funny, [ahem] there was a woman who was kind of a hypochondriac, you know, an every time, well, we took turns visiting her, the two priests and myself, to bring her communion and to visit her once a month. And um, [ahem], oh, maybe I could call her ... ... by just a name like Betty an, one day and I went to see her we were always teasing about whose turn it was to visit Betty because you’d be there quite a while, and she would... this was like the office fixture, she would be going on about all her ailments and everything and her illness and that she didn’t have long to live and this might be the last time you’d see her and everything. And, one time it was my turn and I went. An, um, she said, “Aw, Sister.” And she’d usually be kinda lying on the couch like this, you know... the end was, the end was soon to come, she said. “I don’t know if told you that I have AIDS.” [laughing] Well, I just that, she was about like, she was in her late seventies, and I didn’t know respond ‘cause I thought... [gasps] you know, I, she’d had a lot of illnesses that she went through each time, but I just wasn’t prepared for AIDS, you know.

And I said, you know, “Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t realize that.” An she said, “Yeah,” she
said, “They come in two or three times a week to help me.”

I: Oh! [laughs]

C6: [laughs] So I had to go home and tell the story for the other two priests...

I: That’s terrific...

C6: I said oh, I can’t believe, you won’t believe this one. Betty who’s had every condition that you can imagine, I said, “She’s got aides now.” [laughing] They said, “Karen, no ...

I: That’s great.

C6: I said, “Well... [giggles]” so luckily we could recover from that. [ahem] An, um, an it, as I said the funny thing was just meeting all the different kinds of people an, and types of people. We’d get, uh, with the food pantry we used to have people calling a lot for assistance and everything. And, ah, one day I got I got in and I had a message to call Marlon Brando [laughs]. But I, I, I, was so shocked, you know, when I heard

I: yeah.

C6: Marlon Brando! You know, and I thought, and I was thinking of the actor and I, you know, the number was there and the, the secretary said, “Don’t get, you know, don’t get excited. It’s not the same one we’re thinking of [laughs]. It’s someone looking for food.” I said, “Oh, [laughing] okay!”

I: That’s really....

**Narrative 6.4**

C6: and then um, we had another kind of situation. It was kind of sad, n kind of funny, but we had these two sisters that lived together. One was 86 and one was, what, 88, an um, we used to visit them because they weren’t able to get out to church, um, an, they had like a... love-hate relationship you might say. They, they lived together for many many years, but they argued a lot, so ahh you never knew when you got there what you were going to get [chuckles]. Kind of...uh, be the referee or the mediator

I: mediate, eh...

C6: in the midst of their argument. Ah, um finally it got to the point where the younger one decided she couldn’t live with her anymore. So, she moved out and got her own apartment, at86 [laughs], moved out of the 88-year-old was, was, there on her own. So, we ah, continued to visit
her. And over the next year or so the apartment, that uh, she lived in the top floor of a... two family home. And it just continued to decline, you know, the conditions you get when, ah, the health aides that came in to help her an um, fulltimmaids [ahem] it was just getting that, an, and I guess they stopped coming, and ah. The curtains were kind of falling off the windows, an, you know, things were getting very dusty, and kind of, you know, disintegrating, an, uh, the dust was probably like two inches on the floor. And then, I went out to get her a glass of water one day and they, uh, the cockroaches were crawling up the wall and everything. So, we knew... it awh, we tried to, we tried to talk to her about having somebody come in to help her. But she was very independent, she didn’t want anyone coming into her...

I:  Yeh....

C6:  her house. It was her house and she’d take care of it. She walked stooped over, ‘cause she couldn’t really straighten up even. So, um, [ahem] the pastor, kinda, finally was able to prevail upon her that, you know, we would try to get things straightened up for er, and... a cleaning company would come in an she didn’t want a lot of people in there, so we couldn’t get a group of people to come in and clean, so. [ahem] through some funds we get in the church we thought that we could get this at least pay to have someone come in and just give it a good cleaning and everything and I went out and got curtains and new shades and everything for the windows, ‘cause they were ripped

I:  Yeah.

C6:  and, you know, just trying to do the best we could to get it cleaned up for her. Ahm, [ahem] the day before the cleaning company was to come they called to the church, they had just a couple of questions to ask us. You know, an what they, an are there any, a know, insects or roaches or anything like that. And we said... “Well, there had been a problem.” They said, “Well, if they get there and if they’re, they’re around, we can’t stay, we can’t let our workers stay.” ... So, I thought, what am I going to do?well I’ll go over and see what it looks like, you know. So I went over an, uh, there, there were roaches out in the kitchen. So I was going around trying to kill the roaches, trying to get rid of them, to do the preliminary cleaning before the cleaners came [laughs]

I:  Yeah, right, right.

C6:  So, all I could think of was that “La cucaracha” [laughing] dance. This is an old tune that
they used to have
I: Yes!
C6: about the cockroaches, so I'm jumpin' around the kitchen floor trying to kill all the roaches, and then get the broom to sweep them up and get them out
I: Mm-hmm.
C6: and they, so it finally looked like they were, you know, I guess you never really get them all unless its exterminated, but, we, it looked like we had most of them. And then we did, I guess there was a little gap 'cause, I think we did have to call an exterminator to come in. So, I did that and then they came [ahem] but then they were still around, so, uh, it must have been a couple days before they were gonna to come. So we got the exterminators in an they did the job and got rid of them. Then the cleaners came and they did everything, so when they finished I went over and I put up the drapes, the curtains and everything. An, Suzy thought it was wonderful, she thought it was just great
I: Yeah.
C6: She was so excited and everything. The day after we get a call from her and she's saying, "Sister, somebody's got to come over, I had a terrible accident. My oven exploded." I said, "Your oven exploded? Are you alright?" She said, she said, "Yes, everything's ok. It's just that it's all smoky and dirty and everything." So I went over and I practically cried. The whole house had all this soot and everything
I: [chuckling]
C6: all over it. The walls, that had been washed, the curtains, the windows. She had had a... plastic bag with plastic curlers in it, and for some reason had put it in her oven, and then had turned the oven on. And the whole thing exploded in the oven. [laughs]
I: Oh.
C6: Well, that is, this is another one of the funny th-, I mean, the stories, you know, that later on, that we could laugh about [laughs]
I: Right.
C6: But at the time, the... oh, oh...
I: That’s, ah... that was the day after?
C6: Yeah, it was the day after couldn’t believe that.
C6: So we had to kind of start over from scratch. An, I thought, oh, dear...

[slight pause]

Narrative 6.4a

I: If you don’t mind me asking, how did you, did you grow up in a Catholic family?
C6: Yes, uh-huh.
I: Yeah.
C6: Right here in Binghamton, in fact,
I: Oh, really?
C6: yeah.
I: Was your father closely related to the church? Your mother, or...
C6: Weh...

Yes, they were both active in the church, we went to St. Paul’s in down here on the north side of Binghamton, we lived up on the east side, and then at Ft. Dickenson when I was in high school, an, and they were always, we went to St. Paul’s School, they had a school in, so I had contact with the Sisters in school. For 12 years of school. Then I went to college for a year. But then, got thinking about it more and more, I decided, I think I had, I had been kind of resisting the idea of the call, to be with this life. I was thinking, well, I don’t think I really want to do that. But then I got away from home for a year in college. I guess the, it was a thought that was in the back of my mind that... maybe God was calling to this, and I would like to this, too, now. So, finally they came together.
I: Yeah.
C6: So, a gift... hmm. Have been able to live my life this way, you know, it’s the hard thing that’s in everybody’s life. You know, the joys of them, I think, outbalance them, so...
I: Good, sure, yes yeh....
C6: I’m grateful for that, yeah.
I: So, when you were in school, uh, in the Catholic school, growing up in the church, how, I’m just curious, um... I guess you never really suspected that you’d grow up to become a Sister, or...?
C6: Well, I think when we were, uh, the Catholic school tradition, in years past was different,
of course, than now. It was a little stricter environment and everything, uhm. The Sisters used to always... try to encourage young women, young girls, to become Sisters and boys to become priests and everything, but for me, the more anyone ever said anything the more I think, I don’t want to do that, you know.

I: Right.

C6: I kinda resisted most of the time, so, it wasn’t something I always knew I was gonna do, it was something I used to think I didn’t wanna do [laughs].

I: Right. Yeah, yeah. So, looking back, what are some of your perspectives on these, your teachers, the priests in the church, which, like, coming from like, you were once on, one side of the fence, so to speak and now

C6: yeah, yeah

I: you’re back...

C6: Yeah, having become one of the ones I used to try to resist. Well I uh, I think um, I was, I went while I was, I went to a Catholic college and, but I had a different community of sisters. So when I began thinking about it, you know I, the Sisters of St. Joseph, of whom I’m a part now, ahm I had known them all for years when I was in school and I felt very comfortable with them. And there was, I guess there was, I felt there was this bond or kinship with them... they were ahm... always, I always felt, as teachers, they were always concerned about the children they taught, and the had a...a real care and love for them, and they challenged us to uh, they were, I had some excellent teachers. So, I think in in some ways they were like role models

I: Sure.

C6: You know, I didn’t think along those lines at the time,

I: Yeah.

C6: what their influence was, deeper than I realized....

I: That’s real interesting. I know that myself included, a lot of people have very stereotypical views of, you know, parochial schools,

C6: Oh, sure....

I: and whatnot. That’s really interesting for you, to hear you say that. Because I never, I never obviously went to Catholic schools or even had any connection with Catholic schools. Besides, my sports teams. But, yeah, yeah, that’s interesting.
Yes, it’s interesting how things turn about in our lives, that you do you normally don’t expect sometimes. And then, of course, being in a religious community, ss, the more I, certainly, I: I know! a great gift, a grace, to be able to share life with other women who have a common or similar vision, and... you know, and yah we gather strength from one another... encouraging... I think um, you know, we’ve, I’ve, I think we find ourselves challenged by each other and by the community an... you know, I think, in more recent years for me, it’s been more in the line of social justice issues, you know what I’m... concerned about our focus on homelessness for probably about five years now. You know, many of the activities that we had, some of the fund raising done has been for the benefit of the homeless and then, uh, within this area, there’s an organization called JPAC, the Justice and Peace Advisory Council, that’s kinda, it comes out of the Catholic parishes here, but they were in conjunction with the Council of Churches, too, and you know, sometimes planned things together. And, ah, the sister that I live with here in St. Catherine, she’s very involved with that. And so that spurs me on, too, when different events are being planned, there’s {??} I’m kind of inspired by the things I see her doing and being involved in, and um, I think for myself... one of the things that’s very important to me is to try to work against racism, so I’ve been trying to be involved in as many different groups... uh, the NAACP, I’m a member of that, and I had belonged to we had another group called the Coalition Against Hate, it was part of the Council of Churches, it was like an ad hoc group there. Yeah.

And, I was part of that. I think that’s been a wonderful thing, you know, being involved with other churches kind of collaborating. And then your mom, all the work she started with the neighborhood interfaith volunteer caregivers. That little map behind you, Josh...

Oh my gosh...

is the, recently did, showing our volunteers and the clients. Like tha those little red pens are the friendly visitors who were there, and the blue were the people who offered transportation, an, the green are the ones that do yardwork and small home repairs, the yellow are the kind of different categories, like the coordinators. And,
I: Interesting!

C6: the white are the people that we serve, the care receivers,

I: Shure....

C6: and it goes down in...

I: That’s...incredible wow!

C6: but that’s been a wuh, you know, a really wonderful, and ag- again I think a good example of working together among the churches...

I: Yeah!

C6: Your mom got us started off on that, which was great, with the training sessions... an

I: yeah...

C6: and she did a great job getting it off the ground...

I: yeah, yeah.

[slight pause]

C6: So this is, I've kind of been giving you a mish mash [laughs]...

I: Really, that’s great. I was thinking, um, I’d .. done some work for the food pantry at the First Congregational Church... and some really interesting people come, of course, it’s a really interesting experience. And also, with that, I’ve seen come in, looking for my father, as a religious leader, to ask for help

C6: oh, yeah....

I: or ask for money, an, an... the funny thing is that the people off the street, they don’t know what to call him, so I’ve heard him called “Father”, “priest”, very rarely do they call him “pastor” or “minister”, because that’s, people want to, that’s familiar. But I’m just wondering, like, with yourself being a relij, religious leader, I’m sure people uh, don’t usually confuse “Sister” very much, but if you’ve had any... intra, interesting experiences with people off the street or, people who come to ask you for help or anything like that.

C6: I, you know, I had quite a few, here we don’t get as many, you know, and I, um, so many of my experiences were in Albany ‘cause it is, just, a a a- variety of things going on

I: Right

**Narrative 6.5**

C6: you know. I had a real funny one. This happened one time, I woman came to the door
and she, ya know needed help and everything. There we had a society that used to visit the homes, this was kind of a good thing ‘cause sometimes you don’t know the stories, and you wanna try to believe the story that you’re hearing, on the other hand sometimes they’re not always legitimate [laughs]

I:     Right, right.

C6:     an um, so this woman came n, we, this group of men, they were mostly retired men, they were called the St. Vincent DePaul’s Society, and they were devoted to helping the poor. So they would make a home-visit and assess the situation and then they would get whatever, whatever kind of help that, was really needed. And they did some wonderful work, because in addition to giving, we had a food pantry in the parish and we could give groceries, but, if somebody needed medications, you know, they could give them money and, most cases they would pay the drugstore, you know, for the medication, or... they’d help people get appliances or they’d help with security deposits for rent, so it was wonderful to get a group like that. Well, I had called these men, and they wanted to step over and meet this woman. Because it seemed, I think she was living in the area but she had just moved in, but there was some problem about going to her home, so, uh. She was a very large woman, and uh, we started the, the men were in this other room and I was coming out of the living room and I had forgot, an I was going right towards this door and it wasn’t a regular-sized door. It was about 2/3 the width of a regular door. Kind of like that door there, but not quite as... Well, she was so big, she couldn’t get through it [laughs]...

I:     Oh, no! [laughs]

C6:     I tried, I thought, what am I going to sayaherya. So I said, “Well, what if we go around this other way [laugh].” I said, “I think it would be easier if we go around this other way, to, to the room where these men are in.” So, I had to bring her in through this other office, but the main reason was because the size of the door. [chuckles] So, how’m I going to do this. Her name was Tina, to make it all the worse [laughs]. Couldn’t get through the door. Well, I got, I’ll show you something funny, Josh...

I:     Sure...

C6:     When I left that parish I, after your mom called this morning, I got thinking, I was trying to remember some of these experiences. Well, the woman who had been the secretary there, they had this little going-away party. Well, she put together this little, album, or, of all her memories. And
this was one of them. I was telling you about the man whose name was Marlon Brando.

I:  [laughs]

C6:  This was one of the women who used to come a lot for a, help and everything, so, she was a very familiar face, so, I, I was just thinking there were a couple of things I was telling you about. This was the one with the stove.

I:  Oh! Yeah!

C6:  Where she ever found these pictures, she said she had it, she said had, she found a couple children’s books and I said, they were just so perfect, with the stove exploding...

I:  [laughs]

C6:  [laughs] and we have a little book of ah, um reminders or memories, let’s see, here’s another one that’s good, too some of them are just kind of funny other things that don’t have much to do with the ministry. But, ah!, this was what made me think of it. The narrow door.

I:  Ohhh... [laughs]

C6:  The narrow door...[laughs]

I:  That’s terrific...

C6:  Where’d she ever find these?

I:  Yes, I think, that mouse looks so familiar, I’m sure that’s where the children’s book was.

C6:  [laughs]

I:  Yeah, it might have been when you had...

C6:  I don’t think that probably any of the other one are as pertinent, but... hmm... but, when I was talking about the, doorway, it came back to me... I know there was, she had a picture of that! Oh dear...

I:  Oh, those are...

C6:  Yeah, they’re kind of... fun... yeah... ..... .... I guess, here, the ministry is probably much the same except for the, we don’t get the same requests for assistance as we did like one that was right in the heart of a city

I:  Right.

C6:  But still, kind of, working with... uh, elderly and the sick n... right now we have four children who are sick, and iss really hard. Three have leukemia and one has a brain tumor

I:  Oh, no....
C6: that's a really hard thing...
I: sorry about that
C6: You see a lot of, you know, wonderful support among the people, you know, trying to help the parents with prayers,
I: Shure....
C6: and other ways.

Narrative 6.6
I: One of the reasons I decided to do this project... is because I know, ah, worship services um... and what not, and ceremonies, and stuff, which were so, serious... and then, I just knew there were
C6: this...
I: would be other things that go on... behind the scenes, and I know that Catholic is very much more... ceremonial... uh, um, very much more, doctrinal, and straightforward in procedure, procedures and stuff like that, an, have you had any experiences where things have gone awry or anything like that...
C6: oh, I'm sure we have had... let's see
I: anything like that the...
C6: but, they aren't coming back to me right away but ah. You know, things like where you had a... a couple a times of birds getting in the church during mass. And all of a sudden this bird would swoop down you know [laughing]. That added a little bit of
I: [laughing] yeah, right.
C6: there was especially with, you know, with the priests giving their homilies or something. All of a sudden this bird is swooping down. And I don't know what drew them into the church, but we had an awful time getting them out. They were like, one at a time, there wasn't a flock of them, but it definitely a couple of times, we were getting birds in the church. But I remember there was the birds [laughs]
I: I don't think we've ever had that.... Just, the sirens going by all the time, that...
C6: Oh, yeah, that's hard, isn't it?
I: Yeah.
Narrative 6.7
C6: Of course then, you have the children, nn
I: Sure.
C6: Um, but it’s, Father Gore, the pastor here, is very good about that, and I’d rather have them there and here than not have them here, so. We have a “cry room”, but, uh, a lot of the families, use it if the kids really start screaming, they go back, er, they’re just more comfortable in a spot where they can see everything and hear everything but not, you know, kids climbing all around. Um, Father Gore had a funny experience two weeks ago. I wasn’t here I was in Maine, but one of the girls who was serving, fainted, and he just said, he saw this expression in her face, and she was moving toward the altar, and he reached down to grab her just before she went down. And, he said, I guess it, oh, I know, it was at the sign of peace, we usually, you know, give the sign and shake hands and wish each other peace. And so, the people in the pews were doing that with each other an so they didn’t see it and that was what, he was going over toward her and another server to give the sign of peace. And ah she, all of a sudden, just was gonna go right down, he said he didn’t thankfully he’d caught her in time. Then, ah, he kinda led her over to the seat, and then, her father came up, he saw her go down and they brought her out. She juss, You know, she juss, it was kindajust of, she came to right away, but...
I: Right.
C6: She hadn’t had breakfast, and...
I: Oh, ah.... Yeah....
C6: She’d decided she didn’t need to eat breakfast that day. So, I guess that was all that...
I: We’ve had a couple of things like that... the uh, UCC had their big conference here one... ss... summer or two summers ago. I don’t remember but, um... yeah, all of a sudden, and with the sanctuary being packed, all of a sudden you see two or three of the leaders like, run up the aisle after someone...
[pause]
C6: Oh ahh...
Narrative 6.8
C6: [whispered] we had someone die in church one time,
I: Oh no...!
C6: it was so hard. But he was sitting in the back of the church. And of course, a yknow people didn’t really realize that, you know he didn’t just fainted... they called 911 and got them here an everything but they were never able to revive him, that’s a hard one...
I: I don’t think that’s ever happened....
C6: No. Oh, good! [laughs].... In a way, good to die on the day of the at the feet of the Lord, there...
I: Sure. Yeah, right.
C6: Well, you have another appointment, doncha? When?
I: I do. I guess I’d better be going, oh, ah, this is wonderful
C6: Well, I don’t know if this [laughing]
I: No, this is actually, it’s very helpful.
C6: this is what you’re getting.
I: Thank you so much for your time.
C6: You’re welcome oh, sure...

[end of interview]

I: That was informant number 6. Uh, she was a, uh, Catholic Sister, she was a nun, um and today’s date is 3/24/98, and that was at the Religious Life Center Parish Offices on, of, uh I believe, a Catholic Church, in the area of Binghamton.
Consultant 7

Personal Title: Pastor, United Methodist Church

Faith Practice: United Methodist

Gender: Male

Approximate Age: 55

Ethnicity: White—European descent

Native Language: English

Interview Location: Consultant’s office, Binghamton, New York

Interview Date: March 24, 1998
Consultant 7

Transcript

Prepared: C. Matt Newburn 440 774 1117

Interviewer (Joshua Aerie): I
Consultant (#): C(#)

Narrative 7.1

C7: ... the conference editor of the newsletter and newspaper and uh she, was there at the special session of the annual conference, she was very pregnant and and wearing a smock that had this lettering on it said “Baby” with an arrow pointing down
I: [laughs]
C7: signifying what was going on. And my boredom I was sitting there with paper and came up with a little sign that said “Baby fat” and I wore that on my belly.
I: [laughs]
C7: And somehow there’s a, a cartoon in the book that illustrates
I: [laughs] That’s that’s great.
C7: But it’s what you do when sessions become intolerably boring.
I: Yes.
C7: You’ve heard of that.
I: Yes, yes. I’ve been through.

Narrative 7.2

C7: There were some other anecdotes that I’ve shared with, er services, there was one time I was pastor, while I was still serving as campus minister in Oneonta as a part time supplementary job I took this to supplement that job I took on two little country churches about thirty miles from where the campus was. And ah, one of those little churches we were fortunate to have, sometimes
have a half a dozen people at church, and in the winter months it was often two or three of us, or four, and we’d be in the back room of the church, we’d never heat it up because it just wasn’t necessary. But when we got in the spring time, ah, there were about three churches in all, three or four that decided to get together for a Maunday Thursday, Holy Thursday Service.

I: Mmmhm.

C: And, ah, so we said, ah, “we’ll have it at Communion Valley it’ll be nice to uh, heat up our sanctuary and have the service there.”

I: Yeah.

C: So we had a nice group of folks, three pastors, I was about ready to serve Eucharist to the other two pastors who had helped me serving the congregation. And I looked down in the chalice and I noticed the... In view of the fact that this room was heated for the first time, the flies began coming out en masse, and there were lots of eggs that had been deposited on the window sills. So we had a lot of flies in the room.

I: Oh no....

C: well the one fly found his way right to the center of the chalice. Floating on top of the juice.

I: Oahahaha!

C: And I looked down and I was wearing my alb, my off-white alb and I had in one hand a piece of bread and the other hand the chalice and I said “what do I do? I cannot possibly serve this cup to the congregation with a fly floating on the top. Yet, I’m not going to scoop that fly up and wipe it on my alb.”

I: Yeah.

C: But not knowing what to do, well, I did get my bread under the fly and got him out of the juice. And then I paused for a moment wondering what comes next. I don’t think that either of my colleagues had noticed what was going on. As I watched, the fly found his land legs and began walking around on the bread and then flew away.

I: Ha!

C: And, at the end of the service I explained what had happened, and the, uh, the woman who was the pastor of the UCC church out in Coventryville?.. and her name now escapes me, just looked back at me and said, “Gary resurrection?”
I: [laughs] That’s great!
C7: Silly thing, but I really didn’t know how I was gonna deal with that. That situation, but lots of fun things that happened.
I: That’s really funny.
C7: But many people never notice.
I: I know, I know. I...
C7: I bet, I think that know one else probably knew anything about that until I told them after the service.
I: That’s great. Yeah, well that’s, that’s

Narrative 7.3

C7: For pastor’s fumbles when you first called me, one story came to mind which I had told a few times, maybe in sexuality seminars with high school kids, we used to do a series of those, uh whole weekends every year with a number of high school kids and their parents. Toward the end of that weekend would be a time for a fishbowl kind of sharing where you get all the kids sitting all around and the parents standing behind them and in the center of the circle were four chairs and ah four leaders would start off by sharing some experiences that were kind of personal to them, developmental experiences. Where the kids in the group could identify with embarrassment unease all those things that happen when you grow up, trying to find your way. And, it often came to, [sigh] me to tell a story, which was only tangentially related to our sexuality but, but, it was a story about my own son, when he was, my oldest, older son. Uh, he was probably a year and a half two years old, walking, I don’t know exactly his age but, I went to the front door of the parsonage one day and the woman who was most active in the church, kind of, Mrs. Methodist,
I: [chuckles]
C7: was there, to give me yet some more information about things she was doing. Which, always boggled my mind I’d figured as paid staff I would never quite keep up with her and her volunteering capacity. She was always one of those fast workers and a very pleasant, very wonderful woman. Well, she kind of had this puzzled... amused look on her face and she looked over my shoulder right behind me with the staircase where the staircase was. And I turned around to see what she was looking at and there right about the fifth step, was my year and a half old son making like one of the fountains in Rome.

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I: Oh, no. [laughs]
C7: Totally naked, just peeing this lovely arching stream, all the way down to the floor. [laughs]
I: Oh, that’s terrible.
C7: And I didn’t know what to do. I was just totally... [laughs] she was very, ah very cool about it. She took it all in stride. But I have never forgotten, in fact...
I: That’s really
C7: I reminded her about that not too many years ago, and she had no, no recollection of that, she just
I: Wow.
C7: It was just one of those things. But for me
I: Yeah!
C7: I was just mortified and I didn’t know what... I guess I finally pulled myself together and grabbed him up and carried him upstairs.
I: That’s really funny.
C7: Heh.
I: My father has this story about the... about me, I guess I was, um, naked in his arms and the UPS man came to the door and he was carrying me in one arm, trying to sign for the package with the other arm and I guess I just pooped all over the front of him and the package and everything.
C7: Oh, dear. [laughs]
I: And, I don’t, and he said the UPS man said something funny but I don’t remember.. same kind of thing.
C7: Same kind of a deal. [laughs]
I: Yeah.
C7: You never know what your child is going to do at that age.
I: Heh. Nope.
C7: Poor kid doesn’t know what to think of life, either.
I: Yeah, right.
C7: Heh heh. Growing up is not a fishbowl existence.
I: Yeah, yeah.

C7: I don’t remember very much. I was five years at a place called Pennsylvania, it’s outside of Scranton. The suburbs, as it were. But, ah... the only other thing I really remember strongly, is, these are personal things, was the uh, the kind of indignation I guess that the congregation felt when I put up a poster in 1972 in my front window in the front picture window of the parsonage which was right across the street from the church. Wasn’t directly identified with the church building, and my understand was that it was my house... and I thought that I had a right, so I put up a poster of George McGovern. A very beautiful colorful picture of George McGovern that was probably, my wife and I were probably the only people in the community, who had any love for George McGovern at all.

I: Oh....

C7: We were quite ardent supporters and I remember the, the hostility that some had, but, ah. Our being so brassy as to put this poster up in the parsonage window, whichhh offended some people. And I also remember being offended myself as I went to vote for George McGovern just down the street, and uh, it was about a block from the church, at the fire house. And within a certain range of a polling place there are requirements that you’re not supposed to lobby people.

I: Yep.

C7: Five hundred feet, fifty feet, whatever it is.

I: Yeh.

C7: But inside the polling place, I wearing my McGovern button on my lapel, somebody said in a loud, voice, not even a stage whisper, “Anybody who votes for McGovern ought to have his head examined.” I thought it was rather intimidating.

I: [incredulously] Yeah.

C7: I mean they might have even been working the polls, I don’t remember for sure.

I: Wow.

C7: But, it was that sort of environment, ah, that hostile to Democrats.
I: Yeah!
C7: Progressive politics.

**Narrative 7.4a**

I: Yeah... So, now have you always, I I like to ask people this... di how didjyou grow up in the church per se?
C7: I did.
I: Okay.
C7: Yeah, I did pretty much. My mother was quite, I think my mother would have been a pastor if it had seemed to be an option
I: Hm.
C7: for her. But she was born in 1916 and she finished college in 1937. And, at that point there were no, uh, ordained women elders in the United Methodist Church, the, the Episcopal Church. It wasn’t until 1956 gave full ordination opportunity to women.
I: Mm-hmm.
C7: So, I think that even though there were a few women pastors who served as local, pastors you might call them lay pastors... uh, Ruth Underwood lived right in this area her father was the one baptized Anatoly so this would be back in the early forties.
I: Mm-hm.
C7: But it was a rare thing for a woman to be in any kind of pastoral role so she probably didn’t think of it. Now she’s 81. She uh preaches twice every week.
I: Wow.
C7: At two Methodist churches, the retired from teaching public schools at the age of 55. Went to take a course of study just for her edification was asked if she would take on a couple country churches.
I: That’s terrific!
C7: She had to take a hiatus to take care of her mother and husband, and she ended up marrying the guy who’d retired from the church she was only 65 he was 83.
I: Wow.
C7: But he was a wonderful guy, great shape for 83 and they had a very happy life for twelve years but after he died, after her mother died at 103 her sister, uh she no longer had no one to care
for at home, she uh decided she would ah accept the invitation to go back and be a pastor at a couple of churches so she’s doing that now. And I think without my mother’s, uh strong interest I probably would not have, well it’s likely
I: So, you were always, you’ve always kind of known you were going to be a pastor, I mean, like at school.
C7: There were hints along the way.
I: Yeah.
C7: There were hints along the way. In fact I remember one time when I was seven or eight years old I was at one of those vacation bible school programs in the summer and I happened to be up in front of all the other kids and we shared things with their parents. And I, I happened to be sort of hidden behind the, pulpit, the, some pastor of the community cracked, “Well maybe someday you’ll be behind the pulpit, Gary, but for now come out where we can see you.” It’s funny the things you remember,
I: Yeah!
C7: the other people
I: Yeah
C7: probably made at two or three points along the way, suggestions or something like that. I went to college not quite sure, I was interested in music and uh debated whether to become a musician or a pastor. So, ah.
I: Yeah, I noticed, is this, trumpet?
C7: Yeah, I used to play it but
I: Neat.
C7: I can barely play it now. Still play the keyboard, there’s a piano organ in the middle of my
I: Oh, really?
C7: one of my but ah I did play trumpet quite well. I played in Endicott Johnson Worker’s Band when I was in college. And I of course then they got rid of that frills that they provide. They no longer can in a competitive atmosphere.
I: Right.
C7: Used to get paid three bucks a rehearsal and four to five bucks at concerts
I: Wow!

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C7: Back then it wasn’t bad.
I: No.
C7: First time anybody’d paid me for playing.
I: Yeah, sure, I’d take that much.
C7: It was there were some old guys that Endicott Johnson Band good musicians who could read through stuff and the next Sunday play the part.
I: Shure...
C7: But, uh, so, I, I really wasn’t a professional caliber musician. I probably could have gone into church music, traditional thing, it was probably wise in earlier times ah, but I think I’m... satisfied. I, I went into the seminary in the sixties it was a very interesting time I, had not been politically... a student or involved.. at that time. I noticed while I was in college the civil rights movement gaining speed but it was always far away with maybe one minor exception. I went to a core meeting here in Binghamton I went to Harper College.
I: Oh, ok
C7: Which is up in the university. And, ah, the college chaplain invited me to go to this core meeting for racial equality showed a film about freedom riders about folks who were riding buses across the state lines into the southern states. And that was quite, somehow an offensive to tradition, and some buses were stopped to force off the bus, the uh, buses overturned and burned a terrible offense of riding blacks and whites together. That was at, 19, early 1960’s.
I: Yeah. Wow. These were...
C7: Hard to believe that, ah, you know, when you stop to think about that, it was only thirty forty years ago.
I: Yeah. Yeah. I can’t imagine.
C7: We’ve come quite a ways, actually.
I: Yes, yeah, be thankful.
C7: There were still, ah, separate restrooms and drinking fountains and uh, you couldn’t automatically if you were black go into a diner or Woolworth’s and couldn’t get a hotel for the night at most places go to the restaurant, be sure that you’d be served. So, you know, I think my interest was piqued by, by all that I ended up going into the seminary with a bunch of people in ‘65. King invited all the kids so, I was glad, I guess, that I was in a role where I felt that I could
speak up about things.

I: Yeah, yeah... I've been asking people also about some experiences and what it's like to be, ah.. in a sense called by God in a religious sense to do what you do but also have it be it's an occupation. That's how you make money, and how you survive.

C7: That's how {???

I: Yeah, it's not a paradox but an interesting...

C7: There's tension, isn't it?

I: So is there, I've been, any thoughts on that or, or experiences... on your occupation and how

C7: Well, I don't know it's hard to it's hard to... talk about that in terms of anecdotes or other particular things certainly I've always been, I've wished like a lot of other people that it was possible not to have to receive a salary from the church and be able to do that when pastors say, when I was in college I was still wrestling with what I wanted to do... and he was an activist, but I remember but he said, “if I could manage to do this, you know, and I get paid for the privilege I'd be glad to do so.”

I: Interesting.

C7: But it is a privilege and I realize that it's a privilege much more, much more valuable than any person or people could ever think to deserve be invited into people’s lives and I think, I reflect on that all the time. You just kinda do the things, yaknow one more funeral or one more wedding make it seem just like more work, but at the same time, you look back on it, you say, it's been a quite a rare privilege to walk in say, a hospital room and you're welcomed and appreciated. [ahem] Sometimes I've been to jails, prisons, but I get paid for it, so... kinda neat, so it feels a little strange you know at times when other people give sacrificially churches tend ta receive... the life of the widow’s life story of the gospels. The higher percentage of the sources of the people who are poor goes to the wealthy the poor tend to give more because the poor are much more aware of their vulnerability than others.

I: Yeah....

C7: Majority of them somehow are more attuned to sharing {???

I: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.

C7: Ah, so, you know sometimes it's uncomfortable, ah, to receive a salary when I was in
seminary I recall one pastor preaching in a chapel saying ah, "Work for His word is wiser." that’s
certainly one of the aphorisms of I guess that Paul, one of the Apostles he was a tentmaker and he
would speak sometimes about tent-making ministries that refuse to sustain themselves with secular
employment and uh, their work at church as voluntary.
I: Yeah, yeah.
C7: There are worker priests in the Catholic Church in France and other countries, that chose to
work in factories, may they be priests working in house communities, house churches working
outside of the working hours to sustain themselves through manual labor. It seems impossible that
Paul would have done factory work, he pretty much survived on the church’s support, but I think
he was speaking of others who were spending their time building up churches and reminding them
that a laborer is worthy of his hire,
I: Yeah!
C7: giving support to those who are working,
I: Righ, sure...
C7: but, uh, maybe we’ve taken too much for granted in fact some people think we ought to
{???} as a community, as a conference. The UCC is a conference and the Methodists and as a
conference half of the members are urging that we set a basic salary, what the clergy be paid. So
the clergy have, it’s 50%, so it might be more, of a voice of what the minimum salary ought to be.
I: That’s great.
C7: At the same time, most clergy don’t get paid, exorbitantly.
I: Yeah.
C7: Um, most of us can live comfortably at least. There were times when pastors were paid in
tomatoes and corn.
I: Yes!
C7: And loads of wood and things like that.
I: You kind of implied that you’ve met some interesting people, I’m sure that you have, had,
just thinking of my father, an the people who even just walked through the door of the First
Congregational Church and asking for a handout. Or money, or his money stories are about
people who don’t know what to call him. That he’s been called priest and father and things like
that.
Narrative 7.5

C7: I think of one time when I was in the role of being the so-called ah, police chaplains. They had a program and I was just out of the seminary, here in Binghamton. I was in but I was down in Binghamton like Saturday night, Friday night or Saturday night, usually Saturday night because a lot of clergy didn’t want to use that.

I: Right.

C7: And I’d ride an eight our shift in a police car.

I: Wow.

C7: And it would start about six seven o’clock maybe, and go till three in the mornings.

I: Wow!

C7: And just ride around in the patrol car. And, the police thought it was of some value, particularly in family quarrels where more police officers are killed at any other time,

I: Really?

C7: People get livid when somebody else in their family. And the theory at least was the idea that seeing somebody walk in with a collar might sort of calm people down a little bit and also you could talk to somebody on one side of the room while the police officer’s trying to talk to someone else.

I: Yeah!

C7: It’s more likely to quiet things a little bit. So, one time the policeman was just up the street, just checking things out to see if everything was copacetic down on Exchange Street or something. And I was hanging around the car just sorta waiting for him, and an African American guy walked up and was chattin with me and, I had a beard maybe a foot longer at the time. So he didn’t notice the collar, but when he finally did see the tab in the middle of my shirt there, he looks a me and says, “Oh, Father!” [laughs]

I: [laughs]

C7: I said, well, I don’t know what I said but I might have said, uh, I’m gonna be a father in a few months, yeah.

I: [laughing] yeah.

C7: My wife’s pregnant, so.

I: Wow, I never knew that that was common, that that was practice, riding in the patrol car.
C7: That, that, I think that they still have one or two guys that do that, but at the time it was twenty or thirty. Clergy who did that. That was 1969. So, we’re not in the same, place.

I: Yeah.

C7: It’s a very, potent learning experience. I’ve learned a lot of what life in the streets is like, that I had not seen out. So, people at their worst times.

I: I can only imagine, yeah.

C7: Had some accidents that were pretty awful.

I: Yeah. yeah.

C7: I Met some police officers that were, really super at that time, the police ran an ambulance service.

I: Oh, really.

C7: And they had a, they had an ambulance it was often called first in the city. Some of the guys that worked on that were ah, remarkable, they were just [snaps fingers] knew what they were doing, got people in there, and got them in time, I would have trusted my lives to them.

I: Wow.

C7: Uh, there were some others of them that I found that I didn’t particularly respect as much, and I think some of them were racist and we’d say now homophobic I remember still one guy saw a cross dresser or transvestite guy was across the street.

I: Yeh...

C7: And he was quite, quite convincing in his dress. And uh, maybe not quite as good as some of the drag queens Sunday night they had a big thing down at the Lost Dog last Sunday.

I: Oh, really?

C7: Arranged for us to have a table down there so we could have the opportunity to see a drag show it was really quite astounding. Some of the best ones I’ve ever seen. Some of those guys were very attractive.

I: [laughs]

C7: Blew my mind. That’s really funny, really interesting. But, ah, this guy on the street, I remember the police officer’s comment that he would get him killed, you know, if somebody fancies a woman, there’s going to be a lot of violence.
Narrative  7.6

I:  Yeah. Yeah. Well, part of the reason, well, a lot of the reason I took up this, kind of collection, project, at least the clergy part was that I’ve seen so many funny things happen in worship services that, things that have gone awry like you were talking about the fly. Um, trying to think of... baptisms are always a big things. The baby crying...

C7:  I’ve tried to avoid the utter embarrassments of ah, you know, [chuckling] potential catastrophe.

I:  Yeah.

C7:  I try ta, I try very hard not to ah, you know, break the pitcher when I’m pouring water into the font.

I:  [laughs]

C7:  And, ah, that sort of thing. Or drop the baby, God forbid.

I:  Oh, wow. [chuckles]

C7:  [laughs] I know, you have to be very careful with young lives but ah... I’m trying to remember, I’m sure there’s been some times where... I’m, I’m trying to remember babies letting go with, lots of liquid... when

I:  Heh heh.

C7:  they’re, they were being baptized but otherwise, I can’t recall no, any specific times it may have been, almost, gotten wet but, ahm. I think the thing that people really enjoy actually I try to, take the child out into the congregation,

I:  Oh neat!

C7:  sometimes even when they’re wailing, for a few moments at first as I kind of joggle them along, and uh, walk them down the aisle, most of the kids really warm up to that.

I:  Yeah.

C7:  Some of them are almost like, they are almost like waiting for her majesty the queen, going out to see their subjects. But I try to introduce them to the congregation and remind them that they have an obligation to be part of the family, part of the community, as part of the community the covenant The covenant is two-way. Trying to recall other embarrassing moments with, ah, I’m sure we’ve had lots of funny things. With, with kinda tough to pin down now. So... the fly seems to stick out more than most.
I: [laughs] I, I,
C7: I combobble words.
I: Oh, yeah, I was just going to say, I remember my father forgetting the Lord’s Prayer, just, he just stood there, and had no idea....
C7: [laughs] I know, he always, you always say, oh my gosh, I just hope I can remember.
I: [laughs]
C7: Especially when you’re young and uncomfortable with the role. It’s a pretty big role to fill.
I: Shure!
C7: And you’re young and you kinda worry that everyone thinks of you as quite, ah mature enough to be handling this anyway. I think a lot of people, I think, go out of their way to help young pastors. God bless them there’s a lot of...we....

Narrative 7.7
C:7 My first church was, while I was in seminary, I drove out from Washington, D.C. where I was in school, it was on the eastern shore of Maryland which was a very very conservative community. After having me for one year they decided that, to go back to their old pastor I think that was their way of saying they didn’t want someone who wanted to talk about race or the Vietnam War. This was just, early on, this was, when a maybe about ’66, so not a lot of people were talking about that. Vietnam....
I: Yeah. Yeah.
C7: And I was, once in a while brought up ugly stuff like that.
I: Yeah.
C7: But they were very conservative there. I remember we had a dance for kids, well, the church hall was attached to the sanctuary. Well, the sanctuary had to be the most holy of holies, and nobody was going to dance in that church hall attached to the sanctuary! My goodness sakes alive!
I: Right.
C7: So my wife and I said, okay. I had just got married. I’d just preached my first sermon and the next Saturday I got married. Aahh, so ah, we said ah we’re going to roll up the rugs in the parsonage and have the dance there. And one older couple who was very supportive of us, would bring us loaves of bread and a fan to cool things down in the summer they’d go out and buy these
things and show them to the parsonage door, show them these goodies.

I: That’s so neat!

C7: And they said, “Gary, we’ve been here for five years and people still think we’re newcomers. And, we know how hard it is to break in, just stick to your guns. We’ll support you, we’ll come and be present at the dance and help chaperone.”

I: Neat!

C7: And ah, they were, they were some neat people, that ah would stick their necks out.

Narrative 7.8

C7: But, that was the kind of community, right, you’ve been someplace for five years and it’s like like yesterday.

I: I know, yeah, I know the way it was, especially with my grandfather. Um, who was also a pastor, he is a pastor, actually, at a Reform Church. The Dutch Reformed Church, but um...

C7: Was he the one who was here for your father’s ordination?

I: Yes.

C7: Or, not ordination, but rather installation

I: installation yes. But um, he used to move every three to five years, yknow across the country. And I guess I’ve moved, eight times or so. I guess it’s just the way, it seems, and especially when I was living in New England, Massachusetts it took us a long time to really fit in there I see what you’re saying.

C7: Well, how, ah, how many years did your father typically serve in one location? About five or six years?

I: Ah... ih, we well, in the beginning there he had, one or two churches, I believe just for a year or two then he served, he’s Presbyterian, um. He served the church in Allendale, New Jersey for... five or six years? and then came up to Monterey, Massachusetts and served there. I think another five or six years. And, wa in that time he did some interim stuff. Ah, a couple years, in western Massachusetts... yeah, yeah.

C7: That’s not atypical at all. In fact it’s, ah, in our tradition, that would have been at one time long.

I: Yes.

C7: When I looked back in the records, back to old Pennsylvania. I’d served, I was there five
years and I was one of the longest serving pastors. There were one or two there that were there seven or eight.

I: Wow.

C7: But I was probably tied with several others at five years. It was the longest time they had, seven or eight.

I: Why do you think that is, that, just to get new blood into the congregation? or,

C7: Well...

I: was it the pastor’s choice to move on, or.

Narrative 7.9

C7: It was a, it was a kind of a pattern that got established, I guess the idea was we didn’t want build around personalities. If we’re going to keep the mission alive we can serve anywhere and the pastors are sort of interchangeable parts. There’s still people who think that way I mean, it’s all right but, the dynamics of modern life, well, especially since our institutions are not very settled that life is changing all the time that people yearn for something that has some kind of permanence. You begin to notice, some of the psychologists in the seminary ask me how long I’d like to stay in churches and I’d say “Oh, four or five years.” And he says when you get to baptize the children and the people I’d first baptized you really would get to know the families.

I: Huh. Yeah.

C7: Well, I know some people who’ve been maybe too long at churches, you know after about 25 years they get a little stale.

I: Yeah.

C7: I think three or four years is just about enough time to begin trusting, you know.

I: Yeah, I wouldn’t....

C7: They like to get to begin to know you, uh, they believe you’re there for them a lot more people do {???}.

I: Well there’s certainly is a lot of trust that goes into being a pastor, you find that just being a, having the role of being pastor that people generally are, trust you very much or do you find that you have to gain, or?

C7: Well, a little of both. I mean, I think that people are a perhaps more trusting than some polls would indicate.
I: Hm.

C7: But people have been burned too, or have felt, uh, that, that, that pastors were really more interested in something else than, than... so, ah. Yeah. To a

I: Shure...

C7: certain degree. But yet, we don’t fully earn it because I think most people give the benefit of the doubt, I think most people do but there are some that are tougher.

I: Right.

C7: But, I’ve got a bunch of, real, sweethearts in this congregation, people who are really very good to me. I think they were the were looking for somebody that they wanted desperately, they were falling apart, so showing a strong interest. It didn’t take a lot, to get a response.

I: Yeah.

C7: I think an awful lot are eager, hungry for someone to be here.

I: Right. Right.

C7: So, it’s a, it’s always a two way street. I think it’s a kind of covenantal relationship, and, and, most people are willing to give their share.

I: Yeah.

C7: I don’t know if that’s helpful at all or not.

I: Sure, definitely, I mean what we’ve talked about has been great.

C7: Well, I hope this will be, I hope your professor will, will think it’s good too.

I: I think so. I, think so.

C7: I’ve enjoyed it. It’s probably an unusual slant so you may find this a kind of a, interesting project.

I: Yeah, yeah I’ve, I’ve talked to

C7: He or she...?

I: She.

C7: She.

I: Yeah, I’ve talked to her and she’s, she’s pretty excited about it, so, yeah. And it’s great, I have so many connections, too.

C7: [laughs]

I: Through my parents. They’ve just set up each one of these.
C7: You’ve got neat parents. I really, I really admire both of them ya know....

[end of interview]

I: Ahm. That was informant number ss seven, that was at the, uh, Methodist Church, he was a Methodist minister. Today is 3.24.98 aand, uh, this took place in an, his office at the Methodist Church in Binghamton.
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Consultant 8

Transcription

Prepared by C. Matt Newburn 440 774 1117

I: Izz, yeah, I’ve gotten a lot of things from a lot of different people. There’s two main…. veins that we’ve been going on. One is just stories and anecdotes, funny things that have happened during worship or as a pastor like visiting people or, ah, there’s been a lot to do with children’s messages and sermons. Um… things that have happened in the church, funny things that have happened during communion, baptisms, stuff like that. Or other people talk about, um… how being a pastor or a religious leader is both an occupation it’s a way you make money n survive. And there’s also you know, a being called by God kind of thing that, it’s kind of ironic, in a sense, it’s it’s both those at once and needs to be both those at once.

Narrative 8.1

I: So, I don’t know, the way, actually, th way I’ve been starting out trying to get people going is by telling a story I’ve heard you tell think about the first time you were in a, went to the pulpit for your sermon and you stood up, you went to say your prayer,

C8: Heh!

I: you bowed your head and a little girl threw up all over the front. An I tell people that that helped to break the ice for you.

C8: Okay...

I: So, maybe if you can tell that story maybe, put it in a, kind of bigger context it might be helpful to me.

C8: Sure…. [slight pause] well, the story you’re speaking about took place um, in Teaneck, New Jersey and I was just out of the seminary and was called as the ah, associate pastor. Aand it was my first Sunday preaching. I had been at the church for several weeks, but it was my first opportunity to actually preach. And, dah, the sanctuary is kind of long and narrow, and as in most churches, everybody sits back towards the rear. So, basically the first four or five pews are are
pretty much empty. Ah, except, that morning, um, a woman and her daughter. I think her name
was Jill, she was probably about seven or eight years old. They were sitting right in the first pew.
And, the service went along and it was, ah, time to ah, for me to get up to preach, and I, uh
walked up into the pulpit, which was just maybe mayawbe, maybe five or six feet in front of them,
and um. As I remember, I think I offered the prayer, "May the words of my mouth, the
meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, oh God our rock and our redeemer. Amen." I said
Amen and I sort of straightened up to say my first word, just as I took my breath to speak, the little
girl, Jill, stood up in the front row, and kind of just, vomited,

I: [Laughs]

C8: pro-jec-tile vomited all over the, front almost reached the pulpit. Just, all over the floor and
then, just gagged and made this terrible sound. And her mother was so embarrassed and stood up
an, and of course, we all rushed down an, helped the little girl, and somebody came in and threw
some rags on the floor an. The little girl left and then, and, and then I remember going back
up in the pulpit and saying something to the effect of, that, uh, I thought that seminary had
prepared me for just about anything. And even though I had preached, uh, quite often out at the
churches, this is the first time I had received a reception quite like that to my preaching before I’d
even started. So everybody got a good chuckle out of that. And, uh, it uh, I have no idea what I
preached on that day but I think, nobody remembered the sermon

I: Ha ha!

C8: and I’m sure they all remember the incident of Jill Oxley, throwing up just as the new
pastor was just about to give his first sermon.

I: So, that, that wasn’t really your first time preaching for, that wasn’t the first time, in the, in
the church, in that particular church.

C8: Right, that was my first time preaching as an ordained minister. When I was in seminary,
um, I would preach, what’s called on the circuit, you’d go around to all the different churches and
preach, or if I was doing student teaching I would be working at a church, and uh, but this was
after graduation and after I was ordained and that was, that was my first preaching. It’s interesting
because, in, in that church there were a number of firsts that I did, that were all kinda dramatic.

**Narrative 8.2**

C8: And I remember the first communion, that I did at that church. The regular minister was on
vacation, and during the summer, the Presbyterian church and the Lutheran church up the street had joint services.

I: Oh.

C8: And the, um, the minister at the Lutheran church, oh, what was his name, George something. Anyway, he was known to be kind of an old curmudgeon, a as kind of ah, sarcastic older gentleman who really liked to, ah to, lay it on them, the new ministers in town. And, the two churches for many years had these joined communion services so Presbyterians and Lutherans, even though it wasn’t quite, the norm in most other communities, would gather. And, this time, um, he came to preach, and, and I was to, administer the sacrament. So, I called him the week before and I asked him if he’d like to co-officiate. We’d do it together and he said, “Yes.” So, the service started at eleven... at quarter to eleven he still wasn’t there. Ten minutes to eleven he still wasn’t there, we kept calling his church. At five minutes to eleven he walks in the door... and uh, sorta says, “Hello.” And, um, so I was a little frustrated right off the bat, and duh, we, we took a couple minutes to go over the order of the service an, and how we would do communion and how I would dum, offer the bread and he would offer the cup. So the time came for him to do his sermon, which is before the communion. And he stood up in front of the congregation, and I guess it was supposed to be kind of like an icebreaker. He talked about the fact that uh, the history of the churches were different, the Presbyterian church and the Lutheran church. And he asked if anybody knew what happened at the Council of Kansas City back in 1830-something, back in 1840 or 50 I can’t remember now. And of course, nobody knew. And he said, [in deeper voice] “Well back in... cancel council of Kansas City it was... um, proclaimed that Lutherans and Presbyterians would never share the Lord’s Supper together.” So I was sitting there and I was waiting for him to say something like, “Now isn’t it wonderful that.. a hundred and

I: [Laughs]

C8: thirty or forty years or, whatever, we’re now doing this.” But he never said anything. He just went into his sermon. And all through his sermon I kept wondering.. what is he trying to do? Because the two churches had had communion before, now here he was, saying that it was against the church law to have communion together. And, so finally the time for communion came, and so, we got up and stood next to the table and I said something like, “Now isn’t it wonderful that so many years later, that we can share communion together?”
I: [Laughs]

C8: And he just kind of scowled at me. And during the middle of communion while I was reading from the book and preparing the elements, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his date book. And started leafing through his date book in front of the whole congregation. And started writing messages in it.

I: [Laughs]

C8: And I just stood there and I was just burning up so... so angry what is this guy trying to do? And uh, finally, the communion was over and ah, you know, he left, and I remember thinking to myself, ya know he must of, must of really wanted to, see how far he could push me and then I found out later that was exactly what he was doing. The, minister came back, our minister, he heard the story and he found out that George, this other minister, was trying to get me flustered

I: Yeah

C8: And all, uptight... um, but, he said that all that he had heard was that I held my own and did a good job. So,

I: Sheyeah.

Narrative 8.3

C8: And then the other first that I had that was kind of hilarious was the first wedding.. at that church.

I: The first one you—

C8: The first wedding that I’d ever done. Aand, um, again the minister was away, it was August, and, this was a couple, the, the young lady was only remotely related to the church through a cousin and they wanted to have it here, they came out from Detroit. And so I had, I only had one opportunity to meet with the couple the weekend, of the wedding. And, there was no time for a rehearsal, and, there were seventeen people in the wedding party.

I: Ha-ha.

C8: Aand, half of the groomsmen um didn’t have tuxedos because they got lost in the flight from Detroit. But, anyway, the wedding was supposed to start and the organist was playing away. And his name is Doug. Aaand, it was the hottest day of the year. It must have been 95 degrees outside. I think, I think this was two or three o’clock in the afternoon... but the bride
didn’t show up. The groom was there, and the groomsmen and we were waiting. It was two o’clock and it was quarter after two and then it was two thirty. And the organist kept playing and playing and playing. And, he kept going through his music two or three times. He was sweating bullets, just completely drenched, people were sitting in the sanctuary. It was hot, it was miserable. Forty-five minutes late, the bride shows up, kay. Now, she and her family are from, I think it was Ghana. Liberia, or Ghana. And she came with two mothers. And don’t ask me how she had two mothers,

I: [Laughs]
C8: and when she came... the mothers were insistent that I should walk them up the aisle. I should escort them up the aisle.
I: The all three of them?
C8: No, the two mothers. Just the two mothers. And one father. So I guess it was polygamy at it’s finest. Anyway, so the wedding starts, I escort the two mothers up, the groom is in place, the groomsmen are there. Everybody is just saturated with sweat and... they come up the aisle. And, also, right in front of them, came the photographer. And this photographer was so obnoxious. At points during the wedding he actually, moved some of the bridesmaids out of the way to get a better shot. One point he walked right between the bride and the groom. And I was so angry...
I: Ha!
C8: that, I was almost tempted to stop the wedding and kick him out, but I just wanted to get it over with. It came time for the ring. They had a ring bearer, a little boy about seven years old. And he had the rings on a pillow. So I bent down to get the pillow, and they had sewn the rings onto the pillow. Usually there are ribbons and you pull them loose?
I: [Laughs]
C8: They were sewn. So, the best man and I were holding the pillow and yanking them off
I: [Laughs]
C8: and pulling them off, sweating like crazy. This, this photographer all over the place, with all these groomsmen and bridesmaids that didn’t want to be there. They weren’t properly dressed. And, and couldn’t get the rings off and finally did. Got them on their fingers down the aisle, and got them out of there, it was the, the worst nightmare of a wedding one could ever expect. So my
first sermon, little girl threw up. My first communion, the other minister was obnoxious and refused to co-operate, and my first wedding, the bride was almost an hour late, the rings were tied to the pillow, and it was a complete and utter disaster.

[pause]

**Narrative 8.4**

I: What about, uh... funerals? Huh... Little more somber of a subject but ah, the ah, interesting experiences doesn’t necessarily have to be funny or, just kind of things that may not go quite as expected or, or, differently or not according to tradition at funerals at all...

C8: Well I guess funerals are a little different ah... I’ve been told that, the funerals that I lead are very meaningful because they’re not always very traditional and they tend to be a celebration of people’s lives. I guess the, the one thing that I’ve always dreaded.. and I’ve always taken great pains t’, make sure that this never happened, finally happened.

I: Ha!

C8: Just about a year ago. And what I’ve always dreaded was, forgetting the name of the deceased.

I: Oh no! [laughs]

C8: And it was a funeral just about a year ago. Aaand... you know, I can’t even remember, the name, now of the person, but what happened was that during the prayer, ahm... I said the wrong, first name,

I: Ah, no!

C8: of the person. And, um, instead of it being Lucy I said Linda or something like that. And as soon as I said it, I knew I was wrong and I sorta stopped... and, said I’m sorry [chuckling] and went back. And, and, did the name over again. And fortunately the, the woman whose mother it was was very gracious. And afterwards I prf apologized profusely and said it was the one thing that I always hoped would never happen and it finally did. And she graciously said, like, ‘well, that’s okay, now you’ve got it out of your system and it’ll never happen again.’

I: Yeah, righ...

**Narrative 8.4a**

C8: Am, that also happened in a similar way when I was, um, doing a funeral at a atta graveside. And, uh, after the funeral the funeral director took me over to the other grave. And he
said, "Would you mind saying a prayer for this person? He had no family and, and uh, nobody was here for the funeral, so it would be nice if you could just kind of say something." And I looked down at the marker and his name was Frank ah or something like that. And I went into this whole big long thing about Fred. With my eyes closed and I'm praying and I look up at the tombstone, and I said, "Oh, my gosh it's not Fred, it's Frank." And the funeral director kinda chuckled and laughed and said, "I don’t think it really matters at this point." He probably has a new name and his heavenly reward.

I: Yeah, yeah.

**Narrative 8.5**

C8: But, other than that I, I don't have too many... outrageous things have happened. I guess, I'm always under some sense of pressure... at a funeral because you want it to be just right. But I guess the most pressure I felt was last year when I, um, when Mrs. Dickenson of our church died. And, she is the um, benefactress of every arts institution in Binghamton. Her husband was one of the co-founders of IBM. And, every year, her pledge to the church underwrites... aahm, about a fifth of our budget, I mean she gives 70,000 dollars every year. And so, at the, at the funeral, was not only the family, who were the hot-shot lawyer from New York City and the two daughters who were very kind of snobbish New York socialites but also, the director of the Symphony, the director of the Opera, the mayor, and everybody, all the big dignitaries in town. And uh, so I, I was able to, ah, to again be a little self-effacing because what happened was that the first time I met Mrs. Dickenson, I went to visit her at her house, which was a big English Tudor mansion, just a couple blocks from our house. And she’d been, she’d been very sick for a number of years and had around the clock nursing. And I walked in met her for the first time and, and introduced myself and I said, "Hello, Harriet," and she looked at me and she’s almost blind and, almost deaf, and we carried on a conversation ‘n, and she talked about the fact that, um, what should I call you? Do you prefer Reverend Aerie or Pastor Aerie or Mister Aerie. And I said, “Well, I really prefer Cliff.” You know, you can being informal. And she said, “Well, I believe people really need to respect one another’s dignity.

I: Ohhhh!

C8: So I believe that I should call you, Reverend Aerie.” Well, as soon as she said that I realized the faux pas that I had made, because when I came in I had said, “Hello, Harriet.” And I
learned that, after that, that nobody ever called her Harriet. She was always Mrs. Dickenson. And so when I went to visit her I always had to wear a tie and jacket, and I always referred to her as Mrs. Dickenson. Well of course, during the funeral service I shared that story. And I shared it, at the point being, that her, her, not only being proper but her sense of dignity, that she took the young pastor, the new pastor to task, and made sure that not only was she was referred to correctly, but that he had a sense of esteem and, and uh, dignity for his own office. So, everybody at the wedding. Wedding, wedding excuse me, funeral got a big chuckle out of that because they all knew, as soon as I said, “Hello, Harriet”, everybody just burst out laughing.

I: Right

Narrative 8.6

C8: So... other than that I’m sure that there have been some interesting times, at funerals. I know one funeral we did this past year, the gentleman really loved, ahm, Dixieland music. So, that um, at the end of the service, owah, I had the organist come down the piano and I got out my saxophone and we had a singer, and we did “When the Saints Go Marching In”.

I: That’s cool.

C8: That’s, that was kinda cool... But, ah, that’s all that really I can remember at the moment.

I: Kay!

[pause]

Narrative 8.6a

I: How bout, ahm, kinda keeping on the theme of the the ceremonial aspects of being a pastor or a religious leader at this point. What, I know there’ve been, I’ve been witness to some pretty interesting services that you’ve lead or been a part of and I was just wondering if there, if you could share some of those experiences during worship, you know, during regular Sunday morning worship services. Um, where things have gone wrong or interesting things have happened or even creative things that you’ve done.

C8: Well, we could talk about this one for hours because, done so many creative things in worship over the years, because, I believe that worship needs to be creative. Gee, where do I start? We’ve done everything in in church service from, not only classical music but folk music to jazz. Uh, to dance, acting... we’ve done clowns in worship. We’ve done, um, uh, balloons, I remember an Easter service where in Monterey, we were at the church. We, we had all these white
and black huge balloons blown up and during the sermon, I just tossed them out at the congregation and people,
I: Yeah, I remember!
C8: just hit balloons around the sanctuary as part of the celebration. When I did, when I was installed at that church, we had a liturgical dancer. And um, during the installation, we had, um, confetti in the communion cup. And, ah, she ran down the aisle throwing confetti on the people. I also did that on Easter Sunday here in Binghamton, my first Easter, that ah, we had an Easter party and ended up throwing confetti on all the, all the people. I did that once a long time ago, too in...
I: Heh!
C8: I guess it was Allendale, where I did a sermon on Baptism, and went down the aisle with a bucket of water and had my hand in the water and sprinkled people. Ah, imploring them to remember their baptism. Ah, gee.
I: What did people think of that and the confetti? Did, [chuckling] did you find some of the older folks a little...
C8: What I've found is that very often it's the older folks, who are, pretty willing to accept the changes, and the younger folks. It's the middle age people who are in their 40's and 50's who don't accept the change and the innovation quite as much and I think that's, I think that's because, for younger people, they're experiencing a lot of change and older people, are going through a lot of changes in their life when they're losing a lot and their life is changing. But the middle age people are at a point where they're the status quo and they don't want things to change. And dum, so, I've always had quite a few people who, every now and then, um, are rather dubious about what I was doing but, uh, by and large people are rather gracious in their acceptance, um.

Narrative 8.7

C8: I remember one incident in Allendale. During a, Christmas season we would, I would get an old branch, and put it in the church and we'd create a dress, a Jesse Tree.
I: Ah.
C8: We'd decorate it with Christmas, with ornaments. Well, this was back in about, wu when was the Iran, hostage crisis? That was just before Reagan came into office, so that must have been '82.
I: Yeah, real early 80's.
C8: Real early 80's? '81, '82. Anyway, we uh and, the people at that time were, um, were tying yellow ribbons on the trees and branches outside their homes. To, ah, remember the hostages. So, I put this big branch up in front of the sanctuary. And we had yellow ribbons for everybody. And at that point at the service I invited people to come forward, to take the yellow ribbon, and to tie one on. And [laughs] and the phrase, to “tie one on”, means to get drunk!

I: Yeah. That's right! [laughs]

C8: So, as soon as I said that, people just started snickering and laughing, and I realized what I said. And I said, “Well, you know what I mean. Come on up here and tie a yellow ribbon around the branch.” And people did, and....

I: Yeah.

Narrative 8.8

C8: But one of the most embarrassing moments I ever had was in that congregation. And it was early on, I'd only been there for a few months... and, part of the um, part of the, frustration of many churches is where to put the um, the peace, the passing on the peace. Because, a lot of people feel it disrupts the service. So, for me, the best place to do it was at the end, right after the benediction, as people were leaving. And so I did, some, theological study, and I found that in um, the New Testament, Paul exhorts people to “share the hand of fellowship, or to give one another a kiss of peace.” So the first Sunday I was to do this, I stood up, and I said “I invite you to share the hand of fellowship, or give the kiss of peace.”

I: [laughs] Oh, no!

C8: And... and as soon as I said it my face went bright red I looked up, and I realized that if I did anything I would just draw attention to it, just kept on going inviting people to share the blessings of the day. And I just kind of...

I: So you just did a kind of “spoonerism”, I guess.

C8: I did spoonerisms all the time. I mixed up words, and, as my mother would say, get them “bass ackwards”.

I: Yeah.

C8: So, that was a pretty, uh, that was a pretty embarrassing time...

Narrative 8.9

C8: Um, other than that, ahee... doing creative things in worship, always having a lot of
serendipity because you never know what’s going to happen and how people are gonna respond to it. So it’s always, um, I find my, my musicianship, my improvisational abilities very helpful, or to be able to improvise around any situation because I’ll often do that in a prayer in a situation when a baby cries or there’s a motorcycle outside or something happens. Uh, to be able to um, ta kind of dance around that and to, adapt. I know one of the most dramatic things that uh, I ever did was at a worship service, ahm, and, we were, we were acting out the confession, and dum... I did this with, my friend’s first wife. And we were acting it out as two people, as kinda like mimes, walking from the rear of the sanctuary, and ah going across to the front and, greeting one another. And in the course of, course of miming portraying two people meeting and then, um, creating a barrier, an anger. And so, what we would do, was that, I was to portray being angry and, uh, then I would slap her across the face,

I: Heh!
C8: and, turn away, and then she would portray forgiveness, by turning around and reaching out and turning me around and embracing me. So, we were doing that, and we got to the front, and we had practiced it, and Carol had always said, “You’re not hitting me hard enough, it doesn’t look like you really mean it.” But it, it would just be this little tap.

I: [laughing] Oh, no.
C8: So, I went up there, and we did it, and I got into my part, and I hauled off and I really belted her!

I: [Laughs]
C8: It was like smack!

I: [Laughs]
C8: And the whole congregation just went [sharp inhalation]. ... and you couldn’t hear a sound. And I turned around and tears were just going down my cheeks, I felt so bad. And Carol reached over and she turned me around and here she had this big red welt on her face. She reached out and she gave me a big hug and we walked off hand in hand. And as we got to the rear of the sanctuary I kinda looked up at her and I said, “I I’m sorry.” And she looked at me and she said, “That was great!” So...

I: [laughs]
C8: Anyway... that’s that’s enough for now.
Narrative 8.10

I: OK. Well, I’m sure there’s many more worship service stories you can tell but maybe we should move on to something else for a while. Em, like a lot of what we’ve been talking about obviously has to do with interaction with other people. And, ah.. making them understand, different things, religious things, from different viewpoints and stuff like that but, but within a worship service and I guess, um, kind of a something that I’ve been asking a lot of other people a lot of other people have been talking about is, is um, interacting with other people not necessarily in the worship setting. Like, ahm, people just coming off the street looking for a handout or, um Jehovah’s witnesses who come to the door trying to convert, um, you know the general neighborhood, and kind of how, maybe your role as a pastor ah, changes, or changes other people’s viewpoints when they’re interacting with you or, that’s one way we can take oor, you know, interacting with other people in the church environment like, someone would come and ask for a handout or anything like that.

C8: [pause] [disgusted voice] Ah, yeah handouts people off the street. I get a lot of that right now in Binghamton, particularly just, you know, the thing is that, people have the weirdest stories of what they need the money for. Um, you know um, you get the stories about, food and bus tickets, and I try to hand out, instead of giving money, going and getting a bus ticket for a person or, to go an, pick up a prescription.

I: Yeah.

C8: But I’ve had people come and they’ve talked about needing money for, um, for things like, um... things like, well one of the weirdest ones was lately this guy who came in, he didn’t have any money but he wanted to stop smoking so he wanted to be able to go get a patch, on his arm [chuckles]. And felt that the church should do that for him. Uh, so, that was, that was kind of kind of weird.

Narrative 8.10a

C8: And that’s one of the hardest jobs that I have, because it makes me feel like I’m in the, seat of King Solomon to be the judge and the jury, like—

I: Right.

C8: To decide well, who gets money and who doesn’t and how much do they get and how much can I help an, and it’s, it’s always a tough thing.
Narrative 8.11

C8: An, an people come in, for some really strange reasons. Well, ah again, when I was in Allendale we, um, we had this little quaint church, uh, that a lot of people would come to get married because it looked so beautiful. And, um, I remember um, one day, ah, actually you and I were out raking leaves during the fall, aintknowif you remember this but a guy, and I think he was Hispanic, came up to me an, asked for the minister and I said I was the minister and he said, “I’m hungry and my, two little children are hungry and we’ve got nothing to eat and can you give me, you know, $50.” And I said “no, I don’t have $50” thawass you know, 20, 10. I said, “no, but we’ve got a food pantry I give you some food”. And um, aee then he started hemming and hawing and saying, “well, no, I need the money for food because we need some special food”. And, I jus, an, e no right away I said, “listen, we’ve got food here, you said you were hungry, I can give you the food but I can’t give you money.” And, and the guy, just said, “we eh uh maybe I’ll come back later”. And he never came back and I remember as I was raking he, we, you know, as we were talking, he said, he lived at, and he gave the address down on Allendale Avenue. It was like, it was 329. And I remember, that, that night, and it was like a Saturday night, and I I was like, I couldn’t get to sleep because I kept thinking of this guy. And, and I, um, he talked about, there was something, something extraordinary about his children, I forget what it was. They had a real difficult need or whatever. And I started feeling so bad that I got up, must’ve been after midnight. And figured I was going to walk down to this address, and, and just check it out. An I remember walking down, an, an, getting down there and there was no number 329.

I: Yeah.

C8: It was just like a vacant lot. And I got so angry. And I remember the next morning, preaching about that. And then, realizing, in the course of the sermon, who was I to get angry at this person... um, you know, even though he had told a lie. So, wuz it was a very, humbling situation.

Narrative 8.12

C8: One of the funniest things I had was this couple came into the church one day... with a little baby. And, uh, they introduced themselves and I said hello and they sat down and they said, “We wanchyou to do our kid.”

I: [laughs]
C8: And I said, “Uh, excuse me, what do you mean, ‘Do your kid’?” “You know, do our kid. We wanchyou to Christen our kid.” Well, I, a know I explained to them that I don’t ‘do kids’. And, I tried to explain to them that, that Christening is baptism, and, the significance of baptism and they said, “No, we want you to do our kid because every kid’s gotta get done.” And I tried to share with them that that’s not the case because, dh dh it wasn’t the thing about trying to save a child’s soul it was, itwasa a covenant relationship between parents and congregation and we needed to be part of the church family. And I remember them getting so incensed that I just wouldn’t say, yeah, ah that they finally said, they picked up their little kid and said, “Well, if you won’t do our kid, we’ll find somebody who will do him.

I: Ha heh!

C8: Good bye.” And they left and I though, well, okay! [pause]

**Narrative 8.13**

C8: It makes me think of another situation it was, um, it was like, early in the week it was a Monday or Tuesday. And I got this phone call. And this ah woman introduced herself and she said that she and her fiancee wanted to get married that Saturday.

I: Uh huh.

C8: And I said, well, this is rather short notice I usually like to meet with people two or three times, um, oh, we’ve already done that. And I said, “What do you mean?” And she said, “We’ve already gone through our pre-marital counseling. We just want to get married in your church.” And I said, “Well, I’d still have to meatchyou and, we’d have to talk about it and why do you want to get married at this church?” So she proceeded to say that they, she and her fiancee had just had a fight with both of their parents. And they were supposed to be getting married at the big church in Ridgewood. Which, was a Presbyterian church, and I knew the minister there. We were friends. Um, not well, we were associates, not really friends. And... they said that they were so angry at their parents that they just decided that they’d let everybody else show up at that church and they’d get married somewhere else. And then elope. And I said, “You gotta be kidding me!”

I: [laughs]

C8: And they said, “No. I mean, they don’t understand, they can just go to the, church, we’re not going to be there, and then they can go have their own reception. We’re just going to get married by you and elope.” I said, “Listen, wait a second, you’re going be in big enough trouble
as it is just by the argument, you’ll never be able to speak to your parents again. You’re going to be off on the wrong foot.” And, uh, I said listen, “I’ll be more than willing to, to meet with you and talk to you about this and try to work this out.” And she said, “Yeah, well, maybe, we’ll find somebody else to do it for us.” And she hung up. So I never really found out what happened. But ah you get some really strange, phone calls.

I: That’s....

Narrative 8.14

At, at the first church down in Teaneck we get some really weird looking people coming in off the street. An one guy, I still remember his name, this was back in 197... 7. Neil Skwatiri. An he was a dead ringer for Charles Manson. You know Charles Manson is?

I: [laughing] yeah.

C8: The, killer who killed the actre...

I: yeah

C8: Sharon Tate. An, he’d, he would come into the church, he came about two or three times. And, um, you know, the minister, the senior minister would give him a handout or whatever. Well, I left that church, we went to the church in Allendale, and I was out at a meeting one night and I came home and just as I got to the door, Jan, my wife, your mother, came to the door with you in her arms and said, “There’s a gentleman here to see you and he says he knows you.” Hi ah she said, “He’s been here about a half hour and he’s reeeally weird, I don’t like the looks of him” and I walk in and it’s Neil Skwatiri.... now, these churches were twenty miles apart. And evidently he’d been traveling and knew my name and saw my name from the other church and saw my name on the signboard and came and knocked on the door to the parsonage and said, “Oh, I know Cliff, I’m a friend of Cliff’s.”

I: Jeez!

C8: So, I quickly hustled him out of there, got him in a car and gave him five bucks, put him on a bus. But that was so, frightening to your mom because there was this wild, wide-eyed, wild-eyed looking Charles Manson guy with a big beard and long hair, and just really, just really a wild character.

[pause]

I: That’s funny. I hadn’t heard that one before Iah..... Boy. Let’s see, what else can we
talk about.

C8: Hmm.

[end side one of tape]

[begin side two of tape]

I: [pause] Alrighty, side two. ... Um... I guess another kind of... things that I remember especially while, when I was a kid, I guess now too. One of the most fun parts of the service is the children’s message and um.. I’m sure there’s some, good, funny stories there er uh about kids, what they say and how they answer questions and stuff like that so maybe, we could talk about that.

C8: [pause] [clears throat] Boy, I’m trying to think of something, really unusual and I’m not having muchhh luck at the moment. I mean there’s always something that, that happens, some kid will come up with some really weird answer or bright answer or they’re trying to be cute. And of course, everybody laughs. The real trick is trying to not talk down to the kids but talking with them so that, when something humorous does happen it, it’s not at their expense but, that it’s something fun fer for all of us. Um... hmm. Gee I’m drawing a blank on this one.

Narrative 8.15

I: You’ve not been, shown up by a kid er, um, I don’t know what else, like, trying to do like a some kind of drama pageant or something and, it’s just gone all wrong or anything like that or...

C8: Oh my, my my my. [pause] Well, I know a lot of those things that just go, particularly in, rehearsals, everything goes all wrong then somehow it all comes together. You know I do remember another story. It’s not with children but it happened last year.

I: Uh huh.

C8: Bu yo ah maybe something else will come back to me. But it was on Good Friday and I had written this drama... which is, kind of like a a reader’s theatre.

I: Right.

C8: And it had to do with the, em, the witnesses to the crucifixion. The three Marys and the three Simons.

I: Uh huh.

C8: Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdelane and Mary of Bethany. And Simon Peter, Simon Syrene the one who carried Jesus’ cross, and Simon, the ah zealot, one of Jesus’ disciples.
And so I got six people, and I played Joseph of Arimathea, the person that took Jesus’ body. And it was uh, we all wore these big black hoods, we had microphones hooked up and I had a wireless, lavaliere on me. And this, it was this, very very poignant, somber, heart-wrenching dialogue, it was one of the best things I’d ever written. And, and people just pouring their hearts out. And the sanctuary was completely dark, except for, um, seven candles, and at the end each one of us was to, um, extinguish a candle, except for the last one. So we were all working from scripts, um, on music stands. And everything was, was going proceeding very nicely. And, the other three were seated and would stand up to do their, monologue and sit back down again and come back up a second time. After I did mine, I kneeled on one leg, in front of the cross. And all of a sudden, about twenty minutes into it I realized, I’m too old to, [laughs] to kneel for this long. And fortunately the, it was coming to a close. But then I had to stand up and do a closing monologue that would lead into the other six doing these one-liners at the end. And, and I, I I could, I just barely got up and I made it over to the music stand and I was in such pain in my legs, when I started reading. And all of a sudden I realized I was reading... the wrong paragraph.

I: Oh no!

C8: And I was reading, the, an, so what I had to do was improvise, re-read the whole thing, come back to where I was supposed to be, and, so that the other characters would have their right lead-in line. So, that worked out okay and we all extinguished our candles and we went out, the rear of the sanctuary. And so we were going up and you know it was, su, such a moving piece that people were in tears and they so moved and as we got to the rear of the sanctuary I started... griping and groaning how I had missed the cue and I started apologizing to the others, and we all stood in a circle and hugged and I started talking about how I had just screwed things up and I’m sorry and they said don’t worry about it it’s okay,

I: Huh ha!

C8: and all of a sudden I looked down and I realized that my microphone was still on.

I: Oh no.

C8: And, people hadn’t left the sanctuary, they were just sitting there listening,

I: [Laughs]

C8: listening to our conversation in the back. [Laughing] and I was just so mortified, I quickly
turned off the microphone and I wouldn’t go out. A dha pipl buh I waited until almost everybody
had left. And the well-meaning people said don’t worry we could barely hear what you were
saying. You didn’t goof up that much. So, and I was so mad because I was trying to leave people
with this really
I: Yeah...
C8: very powerful kind of message but instead they just ended up chuckling and laughing. But
I wouldn’t go out, until just about everybody was gone and then I showed my head and it was
just, I’m usually not embarrassed to the depth but this time I was just, totally, totally mortified.

Narrative 8.15a
I: Alright, on the road again. Um... we’ve spoken a lot about, ah, your interaction with,
people now. But mostly it’s been people in the congregation in worship or people who, ah, are
going to get married and funerals that kind of thing. What about, uhmm your, interaction and... I
don’t know what else to sayb, with, other religious leaders? Is there any, are there any kind of
inside religious jokes or, anything like that or, anything interesting that’s kinda gone on say at
conferences or at uh, meetings or anything like that, or just, just over the phone?
C8: Well, I suppose that just as with any other profession there’s a lot of inside jokes and,
gossip that that gets going. And, that that happens all the time but, um. But there’s a lot of
competition between ministers, too, and churches, which is not always a very healthy situation.
Um.
I: What do you mean by competition, as far as... defined like, members or...
C8: It can be seen as members or, trying to outperform or outdo other, ministers or churches,
try to be, um, no, I guess trying to draw attention to your church whether it’s it’s gimmicks or
programs or, um, let’s see, so there’s an element on one hand of collegiality and also, a sense of
competition too and it depends upon, you know, the particular ministers involved and, um, gee,
I’m trying to think of any good minister jokes, uh, none come to me at, at the moment. Ah...
I: How bout being at a conference. Likeah... I know they have some of the national
conferences or regional conferences or anything, are there any interesting things that go on?
C8: Well, national or regional conferences there’s a combination of, celebration and work and
there’s always a lot of politicking that goes on. And, issues to be defined and people standing on
both sides of the issues and, um, people vying to get their voice heard on the floor when dealing
with a resolution or an amendment or whatever. Aaand, um, you know, clergy and lay leaders can get pretty outspoken at time and, eh, very ah passionate about their, their plea. Um.
I: Any particular instances, or... pri....
C8: Yeah, I’m trying to think if there’s any particular instances I can... remember about that. Um... I don’t recall anything specific that comes to mind at the moment but it’s always been interesting. Because a lot of the work that I’ve done at conferences and assemblies has been behind the scenes when I’ve been documenting the work or creating a product there. And it’s, just interesting to me to see some of the um, the competition and the politics that goes on there as, as well. Um, and that can be pretty disheartening. And at the same time there’s a lot of... well meaning dedicated people who just really work hard ’t, deal with issues and ta make the church a better place to do, ministry. So, I, I guess I’m just coming up with a blank again.
I: That’s okay...
C8: I mean, I.

Narrative 8.16

I: Ah. Sorry. I was going to say, what are some of your, ah, your views maybe or kinda the, interesting paradox almost of being, ah, you kinda alluded to it, being a leader, a religious leader and and working hard and doing it for people and for God, and that kinda stuff but also making a living and getting caught up in that and the government and the political kind of aspects. Wha, wha.... How do you draw the line like, between making a living and, doing this as something that’s important and meaningful? that’s more than just making money.
C8: Well, that’s that’s a good question. I think there are a couple different levels there. Ahm, you know first of all, I guess th the choice of words is important, ah between the word job, work, and vocation. And, and I, I tend to view a job as, doin’ a job and you’ve got something you gotta get done, good bad or indifferent. Work is something that chyou, ah, something that comprises a, a longer amount of time and it’s, it’s what your work is. In a sense, what you slave over, what you commit yourself to, but, on the deeper level it’s the word vocation. And, the Latin, um, translation of vocation is vocare which means, to to call. And so to have a vocation is to be called to work.
I: Uh huh.
C8: Aand... I guess, theologically I have this understanding that, that th the task that each of us
in life has to do is to try to listen to that calling to discern our vocation. Now, for some people that’s ministry, but... the ordained ministry, but, a person can be called to be a cellist, to be a musician. A person can be called to be a parent or a home maker. A person can be called to be an accountant. A person can be called to be a doctor. I mean, obviously some of these seem to be more people oriented and helping oriented, but, in a sense... all vocation should be something that strives to, make a better mark in the world and put yourself in a place where you’re doing what you need to do. Frederick Beuchner is one of my favorite authors and his definition of, um... of a vocation is to be called, is a, he says uh, “The place God calls you to is where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” And so, I think it’s important for everybody to try to find that in life that, brings about deep gladness in their life... and have it be that it helps, to heal a hunger in the world. Now, I, the person that comes to my mind is someone like Charles Ives, the composer. Who was an insurance salesman, but his deep gladness was composing and he would compose music on the train to work every day, and, that, if you think about that, maybe his true vocation, maybe most people would see that as an avocation, as a hobby.
I: Right.
C8: But he saw his music as his real vocation and that music has touched the lives of many people. So for me it’s trying to understand what I’m doing, my work as a vocation, so that, I can find meaning and depth in a way that brings me some joy and some deep gladness and I, I guess I seem to find that in the, the church where I’m able to, create my own little niche of creativity. And try to help other people see that as well. But it’s not always easy because... I wonder if Charles Ives would have been able to write his music, if, he didn’t have any money.
I: Right.
C8: And he wasn’t able to be a successful insurance, executive. And so, the hard thing for me has always been to try to figure out in life, how to make ends meet and do what I feel that I need to be doing and what needs to be done, and it isn’t always, it isn’t always very easy. And sometimes it would just be easier to go our and just get a job. Um, and yet... for me trying to do something in my off hours... doesn’t feel right to me in so the whole aspect of ministry, for me, is to try to, live out that calling, and place myself in God’s hands and hope that, if I’m following the right path I’ll be able to make a living and we as a family will be able to exist, at least on a level of not being destitute and impoverished. Although at times we were close to that, at points along the
I: Well, I think we’re going to try a battery change.

[tape off]

[tape on]

**Narrative 8.16a**

I: Okay, fresh batteries. So, we were talking about, um, vocation, and calling and uh, I guess what I’m wondering is how, looking back how, how were you first called to do, a ministry or something like that. ‘Cause I know... you didn’t grow up in a religious household at all, an... I was just wondering how you, if you could speak about how you found your calling or how you see that you found it. Um, looking back on it.

C8: Is this something you’re asking others, too?

I: Um, they, some people have.

C8: Shared that?

I: Shared it...

C8: Oh, boy, that’s a looong story because I, didn’t grow up in a house that was religious. And yet, I always felt that there was something missing but I didn’t know what it was an... after my father’s death, when I was 20 years old, I became more or less an avowed atheist. Not understanding God’s action. So it was, um, it was through um, my, my first wife Betty Jean who got me into the church, and involved. And, when, she died, people in the church were very ah, supporting and caring to me. And I had um, I had dropped out of college after my father’s death and was working in data processing and as a computer programs systems analyst. And it was at that time when people in the church felt that I should go back to school and pursue ministry because of my sensitivities and, ya know, what I had been doing. So I, I um, I guess the classic story is, after meeting with the minister one day, who is now my father in law, but, he-cc uh, shared with me that he felt that I had gifts for ministry and that I should go back to college. And I should, dum, try his alma mater. So, I ah left his office thinking about that and was very excited and I decided to go pray about it and I went into the sanctuary and nobody was around so I kneeled down, in, in front of the altar and I just started praying asking God for a sign whether or not I was called to ministry. And to go, back to college and to seminary. And I must have been in there at least a half hour, maybe longer kneeling down. Back in those days I could kneel. And just
waiting and waiting and listening, and, the, an, did, an nothing came and I was kneeling there in
the silence and all of a sudden it occurred to me that while God wasn’t saying yes he wasn’t saying
no. Ey, an half an answer was better than none, so to speak.

I: Yeah.

C8: And what did I have to loose, and I was being drawn in this direction so, give it a shot. So
I, y, that’s when I started going back to college and I guess it was over a period of time, in college
in getting my, theology in order and learning about that an, trying to wrestle with faith issues that I
began to see more and more that there was a need for, ministry in the church that didn’t show the
traditional line and that there were obviously people like myself who had a great deal of trouble
with the church and this was during, the late 60’s early 70’s when there was tremendous upheaval
in society. An the church wasn’t being relevant. And, the more people I met the more that I did, I
I just felt that I was being pulled in a direction. [coughs] a direction that... seemed to me, to be
one of uh, a lot of satisfaction but a lot of risk. An I just, kind of felt pulled in that direction. I
mean there were a lot of other incidences, I suppose, of people along the way that.. have helped
and pointed me in that direction. Some’ve them been ministers some’ve been lay people some’ve
been artists, some’ve been atheists, um... very interesting, collection of people... and um, in many
ways I’ve not had what some people would call a dramatic, invitation to ministry or call. But on
the other hand, my whole life has been like a drama,

I: Heh.

C8: it’s been unfolding. And uh, just amazing coincidences of people and situations, at any
given time that have been there to help me, and to, and to guide me. Not sure, what else there is to
say about that.

I: It seems the way you tell the story, it seemed like at first, eahh, people... um, noticed that,
um, people noticed that you had gifts and talents and skills maybe before you did or before you
fully realized that. Um, and then you kinda of realized that on your own. Was that, the truth, was
that kind of, correct?

C8: Yeah, I would say so. I think, it’s all part of growing and growth for any person to, over
the span of time be able to at any time look back and reflect and to see... what you’ve
accomplished and where you’ve been. And to try to humbly acknowledge what you perceive to be
your gifts an your talents. Um, I mean I try not to take them too seriously. Um, but to realized
that, um, for me, God uses all those talents, in ways that we can never begin to understand.

**Narrative 8.17**

C8: When I was at college in Central College, I became very involved in the ah, campus church. And, dum began to take quite a prominent role. And, an, and in in leadership. And I worked with the campus minister an, uh, and uh other people and we decided to do a a creative worship service in the chapel. With uh, drama and dance and jazz so I got together, musicians an, dancers, and uh, some of the actors and we put together this, service. We really worked on it a long time trying to perfect it and to get it ready. And, Sunday morning came along, and uh, I was in charge of kind of choreographing and playing with the jazz group. And sometimes, sometimes you can just feel you’re in the zone, everything is just, perfect and you’re being lifted to new heights and uhm, you know, you can’t do anything wrong and other times you feel like, no matter what you do you’ve got two left feet, and that’s what it was like that Sunday morning.

I: Ow, really?

C8: Ah, and I remember, after the whole thing was finished, I was just so angry at myself and just feeling so let down and felt that the whole worship service had been a total failure. And the music was terrible and the cues didn’t come off correctly. It was just, so poor. And the next day, on Monday, I stopped off to see the campus minister and we were talking. And I was complaining about how badly I had performed and how terrible it was and he said to me some words I’ll never forget he said, “Cliff, just stop it right there.... You don’t know, what a tremendous impact, that service had on people yesterday.” And I wouldn’t believe him. And he said, “I need to tell ya, I’m counseling with a student. And she’s attempted suicide a couple times. And is in a really bad place. She went to that service yesterday, and was so inspired that, she’s told me that life has meaning and she is was able to understand some things, and that it was the high point of her life.”

I: Wow!

C8: And I walked away, and so he said, “You know, don’t um, don’t ever underestimate how God uses, you.” And I walked away from that feeling very humbled and, uh, here I was, wrapped up in my own ego. About trying to make something perfect, to, elicit the response that I wanted. And an really, even though I considered it to be a failure, it was a real significant success. And life-changing for, at least one other person.
I: Wow.

**Narrative 8.17a**

C8: So... that was, that was very humbling, for me. What was your original question?
I: I guess what I, my original question was more along more along the lines of, of, it seemed as though the way you were describing as if um, you used phrases like being pushed into it and pulled into. And, ah, I was just wondering if, if, I guess if you were surprised when, people told you that you should go back fer to be a pastor, if that surprised you or if that was something that you, uh, you suspected or you kind of knew that you were good at.
C8: Well, yeah I was surprised because at the time I was, twentyyy- three, years old, and, it was only four or five years earlier in high school that I took one of these vocational aptitude tests, and I think in the 96th percentile, um, I would, it said that I should be a professional musician.
I: Yeah. Huh.
C8: And I think the next highest was down about 85, or 88, as an accountant, which
I: Heh! Ha!
C8: I can’t understand that. But way down at the bottom, I’ll never forget, the 17th percentile, the two lowest marks, were, a mortician and a minister.
I: That’s terrible!
C8: So, I used to joke about that. I’m never going to be a funeral director I’m never going to be a minister. And now all of a sudden, five years later, here I am, talking about, well maybe I should pursue the ministry. So I think at that time in my life, it was, it was not a real strong sense, of calling, but a whim.
I: Yeah.
C8: Because my life, I’d been torn apart by the death of my father and my wife. And I was, not finding satisfaction in computers. Didn’t know what to do with myself. I was 23 years old. And, here were people telling me, go back to college. And I had always lived in New Jersey. And my family life wasn’t a very positive one. And I really wasn’t communicating well with my mother and my brothers. And here was an opportunity to go to Iowa, half-way across the country, and go to school. And, when I had gone to school before I was a commuter. And so, here I was to go away to school and to,
I: Live there.
C8: live there. And I had been involved in the church with some very conservative, almost fundamentalists, and I was feeling, very lifted up and, supported, and I thought, I should just really try all this and see where it leads me. I mean, God’s opening doors, who am I to close them.

I: Huh!

C8: So, I think that was the big thing for me, in realizing that, I... was so different from my family, that here was an opportunity, a very different opportunity, that I had no experience with, that I might as well pursue it and see where it takes me. And I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. And, um, on the other hand, it was a risk. I had to sell my car, I was... going off to school an and I had no money, no income. Nothing. And ah, so it was a risk but is, on the other hand it was nothing to lose. And it was along the way of the next several years of college, and seminary that, uh, I began to ask deeper questions and I was, in an arena with people who were very, conscious about changing the world and, making a difference and, bringing about God’s kingdom that, I got, you know, caught up in all that, and the possibilities of, making a difference.

Narrative 8.18

I: Great. [pause] You kind of briefly mentioned that, your childhood and how it wasn’t religious at all. And ah. You now, you didn’t grow up in a church environment at all an, can you just, talk a little bit about that. Did you go to church at all, or, um I don’t know, if so what were some of your experiences in the church and were they good, bad, indifferent. Ah, something along those lines.

C8: ...Well, actually I got a couple of hilarious

I: Oh. Really.

C8: experiences with the church. I guess I must have been about... eleven, twelve years old. And a neighbor up the street was going to church, and she ah, she persuaded my mother to have, me go along and the neighbor down the street by the name of Richie. And, ah, it was Grace Evangelical Church in Pikwanik New Jersey.

I: [laughs]

C8: Which was... less than a ten minute ride, over there. A couple towns over. Had to go though Pompton Lakes Riverdale to get to Pikwanik. And I had an uncle who lived in Pikwanik, my Uncle Wally. And so, I didn’t wanna go to church. Richie didn’t want to go to church.
And my parents were only sending me because, “eh, it would probably be good for him”. We would go there, and I don’t remember much about the church, I, I, think we sat in church and then we went to Sunday School. And I just remember being so totally bored. And it was the most boring thing and it was just terrible. Made no sense to me whatsoever. An I remember, as we got out of the car one Sunday, and we started walking through the front doors to the church, I turned to Richie, and I said, “Hey you know... Richie, my uncle lives here in Pikwanik. Why don’t we, skip church and go over to his house? And then, we’ll walk over there, nobody’ll ever miss us, and we’ll come back at the end of church, and go home.” So we walked in the front door walked out the back door. And, then we started walking down the street. Well, at that age I really didn’t know my way around.

I: Yeah.

C8: We got to the end of the street, we should have turned left I guess, and we turned right, and we just got ourselves hopelessly lost. And of course, a couple of hours later we were still walking around Pikwanik not knowing where we were, what was going on, until finally a police car came over. Saw us, put its flashing lights on, put us in the car and drove us home because, we had been reported as missing.

I: [Laughs]

C8: And the police had been searching all Pikwanik for these two boys. And of course, we got home, and I got scolded and scolded, my mother and father were so embarrassed. And they said, “We’re going to have to punish you.” And I figured, well, any punishment is better than go to church.

I: Oh no!

C8: And so they said, “Your punishment is... you’re going to church! [laughing]

I: [Laughs]

C8: You’re gonna keep going to church!” And it was the biggest punishment. And I think we only went for several more weeks but it was pretty hopeless an, my parents realized that we weren’t going to get anything out of it an we stopped going.

**Narrative 8.19**

C8: And I wasn’t, that much older, maybe a couple years later. We might go, we would go to church maybe on Easter. I don’t think we ever really went to church on Christmas or Christmas
Eve. But we did go to church on Easter, occasionally. And we went to the Reform Church. We went one year, and because of that... I guess we ended up being sent to Sunday school again. Actually, it was a youth program we went to, me and my brothers. And that particular day, at, I me, it was a youth program and I didn’t know anybody and I sat down and they were having a bible reading contest.

I: Heh!

C8: And, so they lined us up on the front of the stage and they gave us bibles. And, they, they announced the verses. And the one who could find the verses fastest, would win the prize. And there were like, 10 verses. So, I stood there I had the bible, and they reeled off chapter and verse. And I must have gotten 6 or 7

I: Wow!

C8: out of ten on the first one!

I: Wow.

C8: And I didn’t, I didn’t read the bible. And I won the prize.

I: Oh wow.

C8: Which I’m not even sure what the prize was. I think but the funny part was, but the reason I got it so fast was ‘cause everyone else was leafing through the bible, I just looked in the table of contents.

I: The index, right?

C8: The index, yeah, just found it, went to it, found chapter and verse. Everybody else was just trying to find the bible, trying to remember where it was.

I: [Laughs]

C8: So that was, that was pretty hilarious that the one who never went to church

I: Yeah.

Narrative 8.20

C8: And then it was not long after that that the elders came to visit our family.

I: Uh oh.

C8: And, um, ‘cause it was the stewardship, they were asking for money for either the annual stewardship appeal or some special program. And, because, I guess my parents had signed a guest register
I: Oh!

C8: they came to see us. And they were talking about the church and needing to join the church and, giving money to the church. And at one point, I was sitting in the living room and I was overhearing the conversation. And they were getting nowhere with my father. And ah finally one of them said something like, “Well, you know, if you took the money you spent on cigarettes I: Uh-oh

C8: and gave that to the church, why that...” Why, my father just stood up he pointed his finger and said, “Out!” “Out of my house! Don’t you ever come back! Don’t you ever tell me what to do! Give up my cigarettes. Out!” Almost literally, picked up these couple of guys and threw them out of the house! And they were so intimidated! And I remember my father just, just so angry after that, and uh, wiping his hands clean and, an “never going to go back again to that church, never again, all they want is money, money, money!”

I: Uh-huh.

C8: So that was kind of my view of the church growing up.

Narrative 8.21

I: Yeah. [pause] So now that you’ve got to do your own stewardship drives, what ah, are there any interesting stories about that or what ah, similar stories except you being on the other end as far as, I mean, to ask for the money, or having, members of your congregation having to ask for the money.

[tape off]

[tape on]

C8: Well, I guess... I, I never ask for money. Rather, what I do is ask for commitment. And I guess what I’ve tried to do is help people understand that, the church is just not raising money but that we’re involved in something called stewardship. And if we understand that stewardship is one of the great fundamental, foundation blocks of the church, I will have a better understanding of it... and that the word stewardship in Greek, in the bible is, is oikanomos, which, which has three meanings to it. It means economy, so how we, how we use our cash resources, how we use our money for life-enhancing ways. It’s also the root word for ecumenical, which means, how we relate to one another as, children of God, rather than kriesing creating barriers we’re all, part of one family, and the third, word that comes out of oikanamos is, ecology.

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I: Huh.

C8: That we are supposed to take care of, God's creation, the world. And so, as stewards, we're stewards then of, God's creation, we're stewards of relationships, one another as well as stewards of our financial assets. So, I've really tried to downplay asking for money but rather having people come to an understanding of their role as, as stewards, and, and doing that can be rather creative. Um, one of the things we did in the Allendale church was, we had um, we took a look at the parable of the talents. A talent in, in the bible is, is a measurement of money. It's, it it's a unit of money, in, in the ancient Palestinian world. Now, also, also means talent, the talents that you have. So we had a talent fair. And the parable it's about how, people use their talents, their money, and how they invest them and make more money than to have more talent. An had about one person who did, an who went out and buried his and didn't use it to save it. Aand, he, an, he an he was dealt with harshly because he wasn't, living up to his potential and he wasn't, increasing his talent. But, anyway, so what we did was, we had an offering in church one Sunday, but instead of people putting money in the offering plate, we took... I think it was five hundred or a thousand dollars and put it in the plate and invited people to take the money.

I: Wow.

C8: And take the money, how, however much they needed, and from that, use that as an investment, and to take, and invest that money in something which they could share at this talent fair.

I: Huh.

C8: So I remember I took about thirty dollars from the offering plate. And people, did a lot of neat things. Ah we, when we had the day of the fair, it was a big fair, on the church lawn... and people came from far and wide and people um, invested, they bought um, um, materials and did um, crafts and quilts, an all sorts of neat things. Some others took it and invested it into food and sold food. What I did was I bought, paper plates, and shaving cream.

I: I remember!

C8: Aand, took a big, um old cloth, a sheet, and cut a whole in the center and I gotta I also bought a jar of a little jar of spraypaint and wrote on the sheet, "Plaster the Pastor."

I: [chuckles]

C8: And then we had people... throw whipped cream pies, at the pastor, I think it was fifty
cents a throw.
I: Uh huh!
C8: And to try to hit, hit me. And of course, it’s not that easy, to hit
I: Yeah.
C8: But I got clobbered, a few times. And what was really interesting was that so many people wanted
I: [Laughs]
C8: to have the opportunity to stick their head in fact you did too.
I: Yup.
C8: To stick their head through the hole and have people throw, shaving cream pies at them. And so I never had to do it much more than an hour all day. Twenty minutes here, a half hour there or whatever.
I: Everybody else wanted ta....
C8: Everybody else wanted to stick their head through there so they could, plaster the pastor.
I: That’s great.
C8: So, that’s one of the most fun stewardship stories, that I have, and probably would like to do it again sometime here.
I: That’s a really neat idea. We’re near the end of the tape.

Narrative 8.22

C8: Real quick story about children. When I was in seminary I was preaching, I was preaching at a church in, Queens or Yonkers or the Bronx. And I was doing a children’s message and at that time I had very long hair almost down to my shoulders and a big full beard. And one of the little boys, ahm when I came into the church, just sat there with big wide eyes. And when he came forward for the children’s message, he just stared at me and stared at me. And at the end of the children’s message when they were supposed to go back to their seats, the little boy got up and started running down the aisle. And he started shouting down the aisle, “Mommy! Daddy! Jesus is in church!”
I: [laughs]
C8: “Jesus is in church!” “Jesus is here!” And everybody just [chuckling] chuckled. And, at, at the end when we came out eh they were shaking hands the little boy came out [end of tape]
**Consultant 10**

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Consultant 10

Transcript

Prepared: C. Matt Newburn  440 774 1117

Interviewer (Joshua Aerie):   I
Consultant (#):     C(#)

I:  ...should be fine.  But, um, yeah, so this is a story that I always tell to get people started, it’s actually my father’s first experience in the pulpit, he uh... stood up to do his sermon, an, he said his prayer, you know, “may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, and looked up and was about to say this his word, and a little girl in the front row stood up and projectile vomited all over the place...
C10:  Ugh!  [laughs]
I:  all over the place, all over the...
C10:  [laughs]
I:  and ah, that really helped him to ah, break the ice...
C10:  This was his very first sermon, right?
I:  Yeah, can you believe it?  So... Anything like that.  A lot of people go with their childhood, the... childhood experiences they’ve had either in the church or I guess, yourself being a “P-K” or something like that...

Narrative 10.1

C10:  The thing about um, standing up, I remember the words, the words in the mouth, I was a... a potential seminarian.  We have a postulency, we happen to have, um... what’s the one before postulency... um, an aspirant, aspirant postulent candidate deacon priest.  So, I was an aspirant at the time, I was real new, at saying the priest part, I hadn’t been ordained yet, and I remember turning around and saying, “Remember the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ when he
says, 'More blessed, than received.'”

I: [Laughs]

C10: I got the give and receive confused.

**Narrative 10.2**

C10: [ahem] As you’re talking about illness. In the Episcopal Church we have midnight mass, you have that at Christmas Eve?

I: Yup.

C10: And small children like my three running around here, um, always have to be acolytes, uh, and it’s always a custom to collapse, in a dead faint, to the point we’d have a master of ceremonies, a master of ceremonies with lot of, uh, um, assignments. But one of the assignments is to do, uh, you know, meet that person who is, eh, about to collapse. An, Stewart Switzer, St. Luke’s Church in Richmond, Virginia, was one of the finest masters of ceremonies I ever saw because he could anticipate. And as they started falling, he would cross the altar, without rushing, and catch them, [claps] midway. [ahem] and it looked like it was part of the liturgy. [laughs]

I: [laughs] that’s great

[slight pause]

**Narrative 10.3**

C10: Um, it’s not always done gracefully. We have a woman who’s gonna be ordained in May, and midnight mass, and oftentimes, because it’s midnight, people wait, and uh, Episcopalians, like Congregationalists, have no prohibition against alcohol, and so often they’ll have Christmas dinner and then they’ll just wait and drink and drink and drink. And sometimes drink too much. And with the heat of the room, uh, of the church, nave, the worship area, and the incense, and all that, it makes a lot of people sick. And this particular young lady, who’s, who’s thir-, who’s going to be ordained in Texas, uh, saw somebody throw up, in, um, the second pew. And, did not do it as gracefully as Stewart Switzer, coming up to catching them. She ran out to get the drop cloth and all and ran back, so it could of been done quietly and instead she brought such attention by being so startled, going back and forth.

I: Oh, man...

C10: And then of course you’ve already heard about all those who get sick, and a nurse or a doctor, in the middle of the service, you know, rushing up.
I: Righ, righ...

C:10 So, liturgy is work for work for people. Translated, it is, work of the people. And at times, people are hard at work.

**Narrative 10.4**

I: Right..... Yeah. What about, uh, interesting experiences with kids in services. Like, uh, I don't know if you have like a children's message kind of thing or anything like that, but uh, boy, I've seen some pretty hilarious children's messages where the kids are just, have some great answers that weren't unexpected

C10: [laughs]

I: or things like that, or...

C10: Sure, there are lots of them but I can't recall any of them. Uh, the most recent ones was uh... one of wiseacres who were, I guess he was, eleven, and he wanted to, uh, be St. Peter. It was the, acting out the uh... when our Lord tells St. Peter to, uh, put the nets in to get the fish in. And Peter says, "Lord, we've been doing this all night long and we aren't going to get anything."

[ahem] And, uh, uh... one of us is supposed to assume the role of the Lord and one of Peter and one of James and John, and I said, I said to Luke, Oliver, Luke's brother, I said to Oliver, um, "Now, if you were in real life, you would be naked, 'cause, um, you'd be out in the water and there was nothing but men, and, two thousand years ago, people didn't have the sense of modesty that we do now. But because we're uh, in 20th century America, you oughta have something."

And so, he picked up a... uh, towel, that was going to be one of these, you know, Biblical, uh, but didn't realize that it had been cut out

I: [laughs]

C10: So as he wrapped it around, well, obviously he had pants, as he was symbolizing the kind of modesty of the twentyfurf- almost the 21st century, there was a split right there...

I: [laughs]

C10: But, like I tell ya, it happens all the time, asking questions...

I: Yeah!

C10: and then not getting the answer you think, uh, having them blurt out, and ask you questions you can't handle. We do it once a month, we do it on the second Sunday of the month, Youth Sunday, but, we sit on the chancel steps. It's tough, it really is. But the adults say that they
learn more from those children’s, sermons because, yer assuming that they know nothing

I: Right.

C10: therefor you’re saying things that, uh, the assumptions, there are no assumptions being made. And so, some of the basic things that are being said, are really teaching tools... for the adults....

**Narrative 10.5**

C10: [to his son:] Do you remember any children’s sermons? I remember a children’s sermon where you were supposed to be... um, Joseph? and um, every character was supposed to stand up, [ahem] when they hear their name. And Joseph and Mary and the Shepherds and, I forgot to call Joseph. And my five year old, then three, stood up and screamed and hollered, threw a temper tantrum saying, “You didn’t let me stand up! You didn’t let me stand up!” Through the whole thing, and it was just ruined. Couldn’t have the uh, uh presentation you were... throwing a temper tantrum. You never throw a temper tantrum, do you?

Son: No I didn’t!

C10: I know you didn’t, I know you didn’t.

Son: Tol diya, you lie!

[pause]

I: What about when you were a kid..... anything interesting....

**Narrative 10.6**

C10: Um [laughs] I grew up in the south, an I, uh, um, in the Episcopal Church we have a thing called Low Church and High Church. And the Low Church crowd emphasize our Protestant heritage, and the High Church emphasize, um the Catholic side of the church. So, coming from the High Church side where we emphasize the Catholic thing, it’s very difficult to do that in the south, ‘cause in the south um, there is tremendous, at least when I grew up, in the 50’s and 60’s, pressure directed towards three groups of people: Jews, Blacks, and Roman Catholics.

I: Right.

C10: And therefore we accentuated the Catholic side, and that was accentuating the Roman Catholic side, and that wasn’t cool at all.

I: Right. [chuckles]

C10: An, uh, there was a uh, acolyte festival, an all the acolytes all the boys and all the girls,
there’s, in those days we didn’t have altar girls, came to my daddy’s parish in, uh, Richmond Virginia. And the preacher was the Bishop of Northern Indiana, who was a decided Catholic.

I: Heh he.

C10: An he got up in the pulpit and he said, “Now, I want you to repeat after me: ‘I am a Catholic.’” An, two hundred and fifty acolytes kinda mumbled, “iamacatholic”. [ahme] And, uh, he said, “I wanchyou really to say it.” He said, “I am a Catholic.” [ahem] so they finally got a little more, and finally by the third time they were sayin’, “I AM A CATHOLIC.” And then mass was over and we went downstairs to have our hot dogs and beans and the lunch afterwards and I was sixteen years old and a little boy was just in tears, uh, and they’d traveled two, three hours all the way to get to Richmond, was just in tears. And I said, “Little boy, what’s wrong?” I was uh uh, trying to be an aspiring teenager, an he said, “Ohw, mah momma’s gonna whip me when she, I get home an I tell er I’m a Catholic.” [laughs]

I: [laughs]

C10: [ahem]

[slight pause]

**Narrative 10.7**

I: So what was it like being a, preachers kid at home? It’s interesting to me... um, I don’t know, I guess the church an... um, my dad’s work, at home, he does a, a good job of keeping them separate for the most part. We have a good time, an

C10: You, you’re talking about within the uh house itself?

I: Yeah, sure, just...

C10: outside the house was very difficult because the expectation was

I: Yeah

C10: Um, I wu, once was caught, um, as a little boy throwing prayer books using them as missiles, and throwing them, you know... the altar guild, com, I remember the altar guild coming and grabbing me by the ear and say, “You of all people ought to know! You’re the rector’s son!”

An that happened over and over again, you know, the expectations

I: Yeah.

C10: [ahem] But in the house itself, like you say, was pretty normal. I knew that I wanted to be a priest when I was, oh, four or five years old, so it wasn’t an issue. Uh, I have three boys...
five, eleven and thirteen, and not a one of them wants to be a priest. [laughs] Probably ‘cause they know, what, what’s, what they’re entering. And the, uh, the priesthood of the 90’s certainly isn’t like the priesthood of the 60’s.

I: Yeah.

C10: That whole environment... uh, the homelife was ah relatively the same... we were formal people. Uh, dinner at 6.30, candlelight, sitting at the dining room table. Uh, having conversations that were, worldly. Dad was a, philosophy major. Mom was an English major, so a lot of literature and philosophical thinking

I: Sure.

C10: Um, so it was a formal setting but it made sense because we were formal people and our worship... instilled a formality in the house. [ahem] It was a good childhood. Because you did, there was a certain kind of protection, from uh, oh, you’re the son of the rector. An...

I: Yeah.

C10: An I was a hellian, I had two sister and I really was mean to them. An, I would hear that, on occasion. “How can you possibly think about even going into the priesthood when you’re mean, you’re so mean to these sisters of yours?” I tortured their dolls [laughs]

I: [laughs] Yep, me too. Yeah.

[Narrative 10.8]

I: How about... I know in, the Episcopal Church, ceremonies is a lot more, I’ll say, strict I guess, that’s not quite the right word but, a lot more so than the Congregational Church and things are much more... I don’t know, you know what I mean... we kinda talked a little bit about it a little bit, has there been a time when that kind of liturgical, doctrinal, very, strict—this is coming across wrong—but, has this broken down

C10: oh, yes!

Yeah, like you said, it’s not strict, but it plays a larger... part in, in the life of our church

I: yeah, yeah

C10: than in your church. mmm... before the priest goes to uh, celebrate communion, he holds out his hands an, um, uh, water is poured on his hands, to remind him of how Pontius Pilate washed his hands, and we’re preparing ourselves. More than once the priest would hold out his
I: [Laughs]
C10: over you. I heard a great analogy last week, this is... more of a sermon than folklore. They, a, a, Roman Catholic priest had an acolyte, came up to him, and, uh, held, handed to him a cruet, and the cruet fell and broke. And, smashed in a million piece. He cuffed, the priest cuffed him. He said, “Don’t you ever come back here.” And, an that acolyte grew up to be Tito, the dictator.
I: Oh, Really?
C10: A similar experience happened, uh, where it was a Roman Catholic priest, uh... a Roman Catholic bishop, and the Roman Catholic acolyte came up to the bishop and did the same thing, a dropped, into several pieces. And, the Roman Catholic bishop with a twinkle in eye said, “You’re going to be a priest when you grow up.” And he turned out to be Fulton Sheen, which was, who was one of the leading, in the 1950’s, the leading televangelist...
I: Oh really?
C10: Had a sweeping cape on TV... you know, Tito and Fulton J. Sheen, the contrast between the two.

**Narrative 10.9**

C10: Aa.. we oftentimes use incense in our service, and our very first day as a deacon, I knelt down, the bishop put his hands on me and said, “You’re a deacon” and then, after a year of being a deacon, you’re a priest,
I: Hm.
C10: and, um... the man who, uh, did the therable, the uh, incense, came from Washington, D.C., and he did it a different way. And his way was to, raise it two or three inches so that he could get more of a breeze, and therefor the charcoal would burn more intensely
I: Right.
C10: which meant the charcoal would be more potent, and I didn’t realize that
I: right
C10: well, he handed it to me, and out of respect for your elders, you’re supposed to cense them. And I came up in my brand new boss not even a day old, and uh, censed him and sprayed him with incense. My first day, and there I was [clomping noises] walking around like that, stomping out the uh, charcoal. And the uh, incense. But the idea is, to make it look like it’s part of the, uh, part of the show, and no one will notice, just like that, Stewart Switzer, grabbing this acolyte which collapsed into a dead faint

I: collapsed [laughs]

Narrative 10.10

C10: Do things like you’re supposed to, an it makes it look like, then you’re, you’re all set. More than once, uh, we have processions that go around the church an you’re supposed to do it clockwise, during festive occasions, Christmas and Easter, and you’re supposed to do it counterclockwise at penitential seasons like Lent. And, more than once, the acolyte, or the person carrying the cross, or carrying the incense, would take us in the wrong direction, and we’d just simply smile and follow the acolyte and pretend that’s the way, who’s going to know

I: Yeah, right, who’s going to

C10: So, oftentimes our liturgy, the uh, that we, uh, that we have, um, ends up being quite laughable.

[Narrative 10.11]

I: A lot of people have had a lot of interesting commentary, this isn’t even so much a folklore aspect, but, it’s uh, I’ve spoken to people about kinda the, duality of being called by God, in a sense, to be a priest or a religious leader. And also, it’s a way to make a living, it’s a way to survive, to make money, you know, that kind of thing an. Just, any comments on that, people have had some interesting... where that line is.

C10: I think it’s receding more and more, uh, this idea that we are called by God and therefore... I can remember the 1950’s, when, ah, people would say, “Oh, Father”, to my father, O Father,” uh “Don’t pay” or “this is on us.” Or, giving him some extra, um, we use in a town an country ministry, uh in upstate New York a long time before we moved to Virginia, and how they would give us, uh, produce,

I: Righ.
C10: ‘cause they didn’t have the money and that kind of stuff. But now ah... a lot more people curse me [laughing] when they see my collar, a lot more spit in my direction, than in the 1950’s. So, this kind of higher calling doesn’t seem as, as we get more and more secularized, seem to be as nearly as important this didn’t happen to me, but it happened to one of my colleagues, who ah, was pulled... in the south, the cops call you Reverend and in the north they call you Father and I remember going back and forth from Chicago, where I went to seminary, to Richmond where I lived and you could some kind of almost Mason-Dixon line, some kind of imaginary line where you’d stop being called a Father and start being called Reverend. The Catholic influence of the north versus the Southern Baptist influence of the south.
I: Right.
C10: This happened to my classmate, who was pulled by an Irish police officer, so it was up in the northeast, uh, for speeding. So, he walked up, saw the collar, and said, “Father, I wanna get to heaven as quickly as you do, but I gaaata give you, a ticket.”

**Narrative 10.12**

C10: So, there’re lots of times when that... collar, that higher calling... uh, clashes sharply with secularism. ... it’s amazing when I think of, bemoan the fact that we’re not getting the respect, uh, the church doesn’t get the respect that it used to. But there uh is a different attitude, when, my father, in the 1950’s... uh, he was paid $3,600. Even though we have the inflationary changes, imagine trying to live on thirty-six hundred dollars, he’d talk about supplementing his income riding, driving a bus
I: Really....
C10: or selling peanuts or things like that, uh. An now, I make at least ten times that much. An, an, the congregation sensed that this is, indeed, a calling, but you gotta bring up kids in the world.

**Narrative 10.13**

I: Yeh, yeh.... You kinda mentioned, um, interacting with, uh, people weren’t necessarily in your in your congregation, people who were outside, within the secular world. I know my father, being on the corner down there has had some real interesting experiences, and the street people were coming in, and, um, stories about him trying to decide when to give them money and who not, and what to do, and uh...
C10: I’ve gotten so cynical now that I don’t, uh, I now insist that if they’re gonna, uh, if they’re
gonna get any kind of cash, because... 99 percent of them are, uh, are con artists, are gonna be
involved in alcohol, or addicts. I remember one of my mentors who taught me, said, uh, uh, we
were talking about con artists, and he said, “Yah, Frizz, uh, 99% of them are indeed con artists
who are just trying to rip you off. But, one of them is Jesus.” [laughs] one of them is Jesus!
I: Yah, yup.
C10: But, now I’ve gotten to the point of somebody saying, if you want some money, I’ll pay
you five and a half dollars, um, 80-85% say, “Thanks but no thanks.” About 15, 15% will work
on the yard or poke around. Oftentimes, the discouragement, of walking, of people walking in
and hitting on you, you know, when they see the collar, or, in a your father’s case,
I: Yup,
C10: if they know he’s a pastor. Um, I hear a lot of people saying, “No, I’m not going to wear
my collar on a plane, or sitting in a train station, ‘cause I know people are gonna come in and
they’re going to tell me their hard luck stories.”
I: Yeah, yeah.
C10: [to someone else] Good bye family! When are you going to be back? You going to
catch your free hamburger? I’m doing that for a, a certain dog.
[off-tape voice]
C10: Someone’s gotta take care of the dog, don’t they?
[off-tape voice]
C10: Heh.
[noise]
C10: [to someone off-tape] My five-year-old, don’t! Get back here! ... you walk that was
you’re gonna cut yourself. [to I] Like you say, typical parsonage.
[noises]
[off-tape voice] Somebody hold the dog, somebody move the bike.
C10: [to someone else] Christopher please come here. Josh’s trying to do some work. Come
up here.
[child speaking]
C10: [to child] No, you’re goin wi’ me.
Child: No I’m not! [whining]
[off tape voice: we’ll be back in a minute]

C10: Fine

[pause, background voices, noise, tape off momentarily, tape on, noise, background voices.....]
[pause]

Narrative 10.14

I: So, you said, you knew, um when you were four or five

C10: That’s unusual! Uhm, but when I was in seminary, uh, 80% were kind of adult converts either through college or graduate school or after graduate school, um, I remember one having a, describing him as, having a conversion experience when he could tell me the exact hour, the exact second. He said it happened as he was driving through, the forests of Florida, and he heard the announcement on the radio of what time it was. Uh, mine wasn’t nearly that dramatic, I was, an, my best man, my best friend, who was my best man at uh, my wedding, he’s fifty-two years old today and still doesn’t know, he’s an attorney, but uh, he just, he’s just an attorney because his dad was an attorney, an. He still hasn’t decided what God has told him to do. But I was real lucky, that I knew. Our eleven year old’s changed from a, a midshipman in at Annapolis to a physician, to a, the list goes on and on...

I: Sure. Oh sure, yeah!

C10: When I was four or five, all my friends were talking about being a fire fighter or ah, a police officer or something like that, and I always, I wanted to be Archbishop of Wyoming. We don’t have archbishops in America,

I: Righ...

C10: but, I thought. Archbishop was an important title, I knew that at age five Wyoming meant that I could have horses.

I: [laughs]

C10: It was great fun that I could be at the same time a cleric and at the same time have a horse. So, I made up this Archbishop of Wyoming. [laughs]

I: So, you just knew, there was no rhyme or reason...

C10: In college, I got involved in politics, um... I got, became a liberal democrat during the LBJ “Great Society” thing, and uh, I liked... affecting people’s lives, through politics. So, there was a time... that I was, uh, toying with the idea of... politics over pulpit, but, the pulpit won
over. Um,... other time was when I was a journalist, when I was a student at undergraduate school in North Carolina. But uh, I never, said, I want to be a Dan Rather. I did it, but, there was tug. My bishop, in Raleigh Virginia, he was the exact opposite. He was a journalist, who then became an attorney, then went into the priesthood, and eventually became bishop.

I: But, yeah, I think, everybody that I talked to never thought they’d ever be a religious leader.

C10: If you sat down and talked to Jean-Anne, she would have never, 18 years ago would have never guessed that she was gonna marry a priest. Although, my mom was that way, um, she was Congregationist, like you all, uh, you have to be Congregationist if you grow up in New England

I: Yeah.

C10: She lived in Waynestown, Massachusetts...

I: Oh, I

C10: She knew, she always knew that she was going to be a pastor’s wife. Well, she didn’t always know it, but she wanted, the tug, to be a pastor’s wife. But, Jean-Anne certainly didn’t know it.

[pause]

I: I don’t know how much time you have, but I’m going to take a little more...

C10: Well its a Saturdat afternoon... [laughs] have a beautiful Saturday afternoon, at that. I was try. When your mom mentioned it the other day, I was thinking, folklore within the church, but you’re talking about, uh, clergy lore.

I: Well, yeah, there is folklore in there, you know, whatever.

C10: There’s a lot of, uh, like you say... you’re interviewing a variety of traditions?

I: Yeah, trying to, from uh... uh, Islam, with, uh, Imam_?

C10: Yeah, he was Jeffrey’s coach, my eleven-year-old.

I: Oh, really.

C10: Yeah. ‘is soccer coach. [laughs]

I: Oh, really? How neat. Um, Gary _... um

C10: Yeah... United Methodist

I: Yeah Doctor _..... ahm Sister Karen, from...

C10: I don’t know her.
I: She’s ah she works in the parish office. An...

Narrative 10.15

C10: The uh, the wife of the Presbyterian minister, um, now deceased, at the First Presbyterian Church... we were talking about uh drinking, and, uh, she said, Oh, being a uh, my husband was uh, president of one of the theological seminaries, of the Presbyterian tradition, but it was very... ecumenical. Lots of denominations represented. She said, “And when we’re invited to dinner, there was always a cocktail hour before, and, uh, we knew that if you’re an Episcopalian you got to drink, if you’re a Baptist you can’t drink, or Methodist, and if you’re Presbyterian you have a choice.” [laughs]

I: [laughing] Right. Righ, righ...!

C10: But all these various traditions where, for example we are encourage to have non-flesh meat on Fridays during Lent.

I: Imhm...

C10: And, uh, I was in an undergraduate school in North Carolina where the vice president was, um, he was an Episcopalian, and we were on a buffet in, on a Friday in Lent, and I was right behind him. And, somebody said, uh, “Dr. Fishburne, you’re about to cut into that steak.” I guess it was a roast. “You’re about to cut into that roast, and it’s a Friday in Lent.” So, uh, this professor made a sign of the cross over it and said, “Swim, damn you, swim.” [laughs]

I: [Laughs]

C10: But it’s typical to keep up with all these, you’re talking about these, Islamic fasts. Can you drink or can’t you? Or, do you dance? Or something like that.

I: Yeah. I imagine!

C10: Growing up in southern Baptist culture... the running joke was... why was the southern Baptist minister terrified by, terrified when he saw his daughter lying on the couch with her boyfriend? Looked a lot like dancin’. [laughs]

I: [Laughs]

C10: I remember growing up as a boy when you couldn’t, uh, you know, I wanted to go to the movies on Sunday, and my Baptist friends, all my friends were Baptist, um, they couldn’t go, and... playing cards and all that. And I was struck, when I came up here in 1989, to see, uh, alcohol... we have champagne and wine and things in our great hall and the parish house, but, eh,
see these Roman Catholics bringing out *rum* and uh, bourbon and whiskey, following a service. That was very... strange. And bingo.

I: Sure.... Yes.

C10: The gambling and the drinking. We didn’t see anything wrong with it, but I was in such a culture where it certainly wasn’t *seen* in the church like that. So, there are cultural clashes.

I: Yeah

C10: Uh, but, uh, that Christians have. But, of course, the ecumenical movement of the 1960’s has changed that, because we’re uh much more, um, pretty much more, you know, you have a Congregationalist and an Episcopalian priest, all what, within six houses of one another.

I: Yeah.

C10: But that’s not usual, to bump into one another, until relatively recently.

I: Huh.

**Narrative 10.16**

C10: I remember my father um, ah, 1961, asking me, this was two years before the Vatican... council, the Vatican II council was, you know, tremendous fresh air into the Roman Catholic church,

I: Sure.

C10: um, but, said, “Son, you wanna be a priest, uh, why donchyou join the, this must of been when I was twelve or thirteen years old, um, why donchyou come join me an Pastor Paul?” So, I’d just follow him along, an uh, uh, there was a Roman Catholic Sister... in those days, the hospitals were run *all* by Sisters, now they’re all just a handful. I was walking down the hall, said, “Good morning, Sister.” The Sister wouldn’t speak to me. Wouldn’t, raise her eyes in my direction or nod or anything. And I said, “Dad, why won’t she speak to either of ‘em?” He said “I’m not a Roman Catholic.” Un, unwashed and, and a heathen. Nowadays, you just, you just mentioned, you interviewed Sister... Karen?


C10: Uh, there was a time when you couldn’t go into a Roman Catholic church, um, and a Roman Catholic couldn’t come into our church. Even today, I have a, the Irish and the Italians walking in, just a couple days ago, during the Lenten program, looking
around, said, “This is the first time I’ve ever been in an English church.”

I: Really?

C10: As children and young adults they were told they couldn’t.

I: Yeah, I... [ahem] wow...

C10: So, things have changed tremendously, you know... bemoan the fact what’s, the sad things that have happened, but there’ve been some good things, the Ecumenical Movement being one [to child] Okay, wait a couple minutes, son. [to I] So, you don’t have a series of questions, you juss...

I: No, I... juss....

C10: jus, stream of consciousness [laughs]

I: Leave it open instead of asking too many pointed questions, I guess.

Narrative 10.17

C10: But, yeah. ... ah, great stories about uh Father Doris, who lived here in the 60’s and early 70’s. Uh, seeing our dog, he went to see your father’s predecessor, Phil Mitchell

I: Oh, yeah!

C10: They were good friends, and eh, he uh, was walking with his dog, and he told the dog, to sit down outside, uh, this dog would always follow him. And apparently Phil had some problems with dogs coming in churches with us, dog’s sitting at the altar, and all Phil had some problems with that. So he told the dog, “Stay here.” But the dog wouldn’t stay. So he took off his belt, put it around the dog, and then, the dog’s neck, and attached it to the uh, um, parking meter... and, um, somebody walked by and said, “Father Doris, aren’t you afraid you’re going to lose your dog with this, uh, belt being attached?” I’m sorry... “Father Doris, aren’t you afraid that your pants are gonna drop down, that you don’t have a belt?” He looked at the person, as lore says, whether it’s true or not, he says, “I’d rather lose my pants than lose m’ dog.” [laughs]

I: [laughs]

Narrative 10.18

C10: And this dog’s name... uh, well, I better not give ya tha punchline, uh, the dog’s original name was Bishop. And, he was walking down the steps, uhm, to answer the doorbell, that had rung. And, uh, Father, uh, Doris, really had a blue tongue. He didn’t hesitate to tell somebody to go to hell. And he walked up to uh, he was walking down the steps, the dog got in his way, and
he started tripping over 'im, and he was cussin'. “Damn you, Bishop, damn you, Bishop, damn it, Bishop, get the hell outta the way!” And he opened the door, and who’s standing at the door?

I: Right. Righ righ....

C10: Right, the bishop. So, he said, “You will change the name of that dog today.” And uh, so he changed it to Deacon.

I: Deacon!

C10: So, for the rest of the dog’s life, existence, it was Deacon and not Bishop.

I: [laughs]

C10: But there’s some great tales about Father Doris.

[slight pause]

Narrative 10.19

I: That’s terrific. I’ve heard some interesting stories about, communion going awry. And, Gary had a great story about flies landed in the communion chalice. Heh, fishin’ them out.

C10: How did he do it?

I: A piece of bread. I guess, I guess he was, sort of, the other, I don’t know what they would have been, the other two, associate pastors or whatever... the fly landed in, and I guess then they served him and he took his bread. And, luckily the fly flew away

C10: [laughs]

I: ‘Cause, I guess he was wearing, you know, white robe, and he couldn’t...

C10: We have spoons.

I: Yeh....

C10: Spoons there, just in case that happens. Um,

I: Oh, really?

C10: The, young Methodists don’t believe in a real presence, but we do, we, we believe that, uh, after the words been institutioned, using bread and wine, and a valid priest, it becomes the real presence of Jesus, it becomes the body and blood of our Lord. And, it would have been a good theological debate, had that fly landed in a Roman Catholic or an Episcopal or Orthodox wine, would that fly have receive the body [laughing] of our Lord?

I: Right, right!
Narrative 10.20

C10: An I’m, there’s a, a story that, uh, the nuns… ah because it’s consecrated, we have to reverently pour it down a piscina. Piscina is a pipe, it’s a sink, and the pipe underneath the sink goes directly in the ground, so it won’t go through the regular, uh… gutter. There’s a story that uh, it’s a true story that uh, uh, some nuns didn’t have a piscina so they had to go outside with the extra bread and throw the bread out. And then some birds landed and consumed the consecrated bread. And there was deep theological discussion saying, did these birds, who have no soul, receive the embodiment of the Lord?
I: Interesting.
C10: Um, what kind of...
I: Baptism is another, trying to think of...

Narrative 10.21

C10: trying to think of communion, any folklore… Dad had these acolyte festivals.
I: Yeah.
C10: Every year he’d invite them back, two hundred, three hundred acolytes would come. And... we would have a prominent preacher an, an one of my, I was telling you the story about the Northern Indiana. And, uh, the bishop that was standing at the altar... was very hard of hearing. And, the organist gave him the pitch, to sing the creed. [singing] “da da da; I believe” [speaking] dead silence. So he did it a little louder: [singing] “I believe” [speaking] still didn’t get it. Uh, then the bishop is supposed to lead the congregation in singing “I believe.” So, finally he said, finally they played it a third time, [singing] “I believe.” [speaking] Nothing. By now, the congregation’s getting a bit restless. So, the master of ceremonies came up and whispered in a stage whisper, “My Lord” - he was an English bishop “My Lord” -um- “I Believe.””
“I turned around and said, “Of course you do, that’s why we’re here!” [laughs]
I: [Laughs]
C10: The bumbling, uh, cleric there are lots of stories about them, bumbling clerics. … never gone away.
I: [laughs]
C10: Yeah, I guess we do have this image of the fuddy-duddy. No matter how hard your father tries, he’s dismissed as one of those silly clerics. You know, TV does that Hollywood does it

I: oh yeah

Narrative 10.22

C10: There’s not much respect for the ordained. In those circles.

I: Hmm.

C10: ... we had a, still trying to think of the holy communion. Um, we had, uh, one of these old clerics, um, Doctor Julian Victor Langley Cassoly. Because we’re the Church of England we have a lot of English clergy. And he was my professor of moral theology. And Doctor Cassoly ahm... was getting on in age. But he had a good name and he’d written all these books and they didn’t wanna encourage him to retire. And, uh, he had a stroke, so the point was, that he could memorize the missile, the service, so they put these huge, uh, literally this large, prints so he could see it, because his sight had been affected by the stroke, um....

[Child: Dad?]

Narrative 10.23

C10: He just a minute, son. An, he, he was um, having difficulty seeing anything. And, bread, and the tha Host, and it dropped somewhere and he couldn’t find it. We were all looking for it and we’re all looking for it and we could never find it. So, ah we assumed it was in the cuff of his pants, so all day long when he was walking down the hallway, we’d genuflect like [laughs] the uh, the slacks... [to child] not right now, but I will getchyou some. [to I] um, there was the blessed sacrament being carried, so we’d genuflect.

I: Well, I don’t want to keep you much longer, we’ve been here for almost an hour.

C10: WOAH! Really?

I: Almost. Yeah.

[end of tape]

I: That was informant number ten, he was an Episcopal priest here, in Binghamton I interviewed him at his home in Binghamton two doors down from my own. And, the date, today is 3-28-98. That was informant number ten.
Consultant 11

Personal Title: Monsignor
Faith Practice: Roman Catholic
Gender: Male
Approximate Age: 65
Ethnicity: White—European descent
Native Language: English
Interview Location: Consultant’s Rectory, Binghamton, New York
Interview Date: March 28, 1998
Interviewer (Joshua Aerie): I
Consultant (#): C(#)

I: But um, yeah, ay, people tell me a lot of different things. Um, what, what I like to start out telling is, is one of my dad's first time stories, story about his first time in the pulpit. He, um, stood up to do the prayer before his sermon. He finished the prayer, looked up to do the sermon. And, a little girl in the front row stood up and just vomited all...
C11: Oh, dear. Before...
I: Yeah
C11: Before the sermon?
I: Right. But luckily that broke the ice for him... in in a a sense since that was his first time.
So, I, that's one way that we can go, stuff like that, that, things that happen in the worship service that uh, huh, kind of aren't normal or aren't
C11: Heh heh.
I: expected. Um... other things I'm interested in are...uh, childhood experiences, uh, I've got some great stories about people, how they... decide to become religious leaders. Um... I don't know. Yeah, so... we can go from there. Just any stories, experiences, it doesn't have to be funny. It can be, you know...

Narrative 11.1

C11: Well, you mentioned your dad's. uh, first time in the pulpit. Bring to mind my, my first night at St. James in Johnson City.
I: Uh-huh.
And, uh... I'd been in the area but, it was my first time as a pastor. And, uh, on Saturday night I was with this seven, seven o'clock service. And I stood up, or I got into the pulpit to begin, my sermon or homily. And [ahem] I was going to introduce myself, to the people there. So I started off, and I only got about two sentences out, when, this person in the third pew stood up... and that's very unusual... and I was trying to keep going with what I was saying and uh, he stepped out into the aisle, put this big overcoat around himself and this was like in October first. And, I thought well maybe he's just leaving, maybe he's had a little too much to drink or something, so he's leaving but instead he turned around, came up to the pulpit and I'm thinking this doesn't happen except in Chicago or New York or San Francisco or something.

I: Yeah, really

C11: [ahem] then I though, well maybe he wants some money. So, I'm reaching into my pocket.. uh to give him a buck or something. But at all the same time, uh, I'm trying to keep the talk going, you know.
I: Yeah

C11: Pretty much... so he leans gets up to the pulpit, he leans over an he says, [in an inebriated voice] "Father," he says, "I'm not walkin out on your hom, or, your sermon," he says, "but I gotta go, I had too much to drink."

I: [laughs]

C11: With that he turned around and walked down the aisle, and out the door. Again, like your dad it broke the ice, with those people it became one of those like folklore.
I: Sure, sure. That's great.

C11: I'm trying to think there's another one. That happened... um.... lost it now. My problem is my old age is that, forget things...
I: Oh, well...I get that, I'm not that old yet, but....

Narrative 11.2

C11: [coughs] um... a lot of stories about a lot of other clergymen around here, other priests, I don't know if they're what you want also.
I: Sure. Well, anything.

C11: I first came to uh, Binghamton about forty years ago in 1958. And, at that time, all the pastors were the kind of uh elderly... uh, the Catholic pastors were the elderly um... oh, what I
wanna say, gentlemen who you know had a lot of experience and things like that. Some of them were from Ireland and some of them had been trained in Ireland. And so there was uh, Father Morris at St. Paul's, who was kind of a gruff guy. But, uh, soft heart, had a great soft heart. But, uh, the other clergy, his fellow priests always, uh, they liked him very much because he was very kind to them and uh at the same time, they were a little in awe and fear of him because he could be kind rough, on ya

I: Right.

C11: He was noted for having, for turning out lights in church. So as, as the funeral, as the casket would be, uh, leaving the church, coming down the aisle the lights would be going off behind it, all the way down

I: Right.

C11: So, it got to be uh... kind of a symbol of his, to show like that. A man that was here, a Doc, we used to... call him Doc, Doc, Kurtin. Dean Francis Kurtin his name was, and uh he lived here he was a great walker he liked to walk the streets here and uh, he got to know people that way very well.

I: Yeah

C11: An, he uh, the kids would follow him an... he would up buying them candy and things like that

I: [chuckles]

C11: Which was kinda neat, in those days, that's back, back in the forties and fifties.

I: Right.

C11: And, he became quite an image in the southern tier, in this area. An he used to sit upstairs, right above us, and uh wear a green eye shade.

I: Yeah.

C11: When he was reading and he would wear that to keep the glare keep the light

I: Right.

C11: And he'd invite you in, and once you got in there he'd sit down and talk to you for about two or three hours. And there was nothing you could do to get out of there.

I: Woah.

C11: And, I don't know if these are things that you're interested in or not
I: Sure, yeah

Narrative 11.3

C11: There are all kinds of characters. I lived, ah, my first four years I lived with, um, Monseignior Phelan uh, P-H-E-L-A-N., up in Hillcrest, at St. Catherine's, and uh, he [ahem] actually, I was just ordained six months when I came and it was my first assignment. So I arrived at the rectory... and I knew there was another priest there, too, a Father Mulranen M-U-L-R-A-N-E-N. [ahem] And uh [coughs] so I was expecting to see Father Mulranen there, but, when I rang the doorbell, uh, those days our letter said you're assigned to St. Catherine's you are to report by noon. on such and such a date. So this is like 12.05 and I'm thinking, "Uh-oh I'm late already, so he going to think that's part of me", you know. So, uh, it was, in August... of uh '58. And as you look in the door of the rectory you could see all the way back into the back which was obviously the kitchen. And there was a window there, too, so in that time of the year you could look right through and see the, tha, bright window of the back. So you saw, pretty much this hallway. Well, all of a sudden that light went out, in the back window. And I thought oh my gosh, what happened? And this voice says, "Can I help you?" And I looked, and it was just black in front of me, so I started to look up, and six foot five he was

I: Oh!

C11: Huge, uh, head of hair, all white hair, you know, and uh, so I introduced myself and he let me in, but that was kind of uh... you know, kind of surprising to me that that light went out and it was him in his black suit and, j.. and, I'm 6'2", by the way, he was much bigger than I was.

Narrative 11.4

C11: So that afternoon he decided, uhh, that he would take me around to the hospitals to show me the hospitals. And, uh, he drove, and I sat in the front seat and everything went fine until we're coming back to Hillcrest from General Hospital an we were going up the ramp that goes up the Brandywine goes up to Chenango Street. And, uh, I realized I was sound asleep in the car. Of course, that's not something you do with, uh, pastor, especially the first day that you're there

I: Right, right

Narrative 11.5

C11: Got to be funny. Uh..... I, I've been known to go to sleep easily, at times. One of them

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was I was teaching at Catholic Central High School here

I: Yeh
C11: And, uh, I knew I wasn't feeling too, uh wide awake, so I had this class of forty girls, Sophomore girls, and we were doing religion, and so I said, start over here on the left and each of you read a paragraph then the next person pick up on the paragraph. Read it out loud so we can understand it and, to get it, and when I tell you to stop, we'll discuss that section of the book. So, the next thing I realized was, again, in your consciousness, or unconsciousness, I realized that I was, asleep.
I: [laughs]
C11: So, I had to wake up, without letting them know that I was asleep
I: Right.
C11: So I didn't want to make any quick moves.
I: Right.
C11: So, I just opened my eyes, gently and, lo and behold, there was a stack of erasers and chalk. They'd gone around during my sleep period collecting all the erasers and chalk and placed them in front of me. So, uh, that was...
I: Heh. But they were still reading
C11: They were still reading, oh yeah, it was still going on [laughs]
I: [laughs]
C11: Things like that...
I: That's great! That's terrific.
C11: Had a lot of good times down here at the southern tier, I'd, it's been a good place to minister in. And met a lot of good people like your dad and your mom, uh. An, so many people through the Broom County Council of Churches, you know
I: Right

Narrative 11.6

C11: And, been active in those ministries. Awh, let me think... they tell the story about one of the pastors here back in 1906. There was a huge steeple on the top of the church here at St. Pat's
I: Right
C11: And, uh, came-up way up to a point. The pastor knew it was rotting out it was wooden
and it was rotting out. But the people thought it was the greatest thing, 'cause you could see it from almost any place in Broome County, it was so high. So they were adamant that it should not be taken down. Finally one day, uh, the pastor did have somebody come in, I don't know how they got it down, but they got it down and he placed it at the curb so that all the parishioners comin' to church on S on the weekend would see it.

I: Right
C11: how it was rotted out so there were no complaints from that. After that.
I: Better that. It would have fallen, on someone
C11: Right. Uhm.
I: What about in the services or ceremonies. I was talking with Father Frisbee,
C11: Mhm.
I: and uh, he had some interesting stories, and I was telling him that you, obviously the, the Catholic and the Episcopal services are, uhm, I don't know how to put this, more doctrinal, and liturgical than
C11: Right
I: than in the Congregational obviously. And, um, have there been any times when that kind of order has broken down or, anything

**Narrative 11.7**

C11: Well I'm sure he didn't tell you, did he tell you the story about the two of us?
I: I don't think so, no. Uh oh!
C11: Well, uh, uh, there was a wedding in, uh, Christ Church, th, the boy was a Catholic boy and the girl was Episcopalian from Windsor.
I: Uh-huh
C11: And so, she, she wanted the wedding at Christ Church but, uh, the boy wanted a priest to be there, for it too
I: Right
C11: he didn't tell you this story?
I: No.
C11: So, ah, I went down and uh, and uh, we started off. Went out, to greet the people and Fri, Father Frisbee had this huge red cope on. I me-iwasa beautiful, beautiful piece, I mean, heavy, it
was awful heavy to me, it was really beautiful wool. And, uh, he started into the, the introductions and we got maybe... three or four minutes into the ceremony when he, he kinda backed up and got near a candle and, an this cope caught on fire.

I: Oh no! [laughs]

C11: An, it literally, I didn’t realize, because I was standing right next to him, and so my vision wouldn’t see back there but the people let out a gasp, you know. And I thought what’s that and I looked and, here there were flames.

I: [laughing]

C11: And he didn’t realize it at all. So I’m hitting him on the back, putting out these flames, you know. And I said, I said to him afterwards I said, "I, I think, uh, Friz, that, uh, you’ll have to admit that it took a Roman Catholic to come to save you, as an Anglican."

I: That’s great. [laughs]

Narrative 11.8

C11: We got a lot a, a lot a laughs about that. [laughs] [coughs] Some of the other ceremonies around, uh, trying to think of some of the other things that might have happened.... uhm, ........

I can remember in the seminary when, you know, when you’re supposed to really be on your toes, but we’d have a procession, and half of it would go one way, half the other way [chuckles]. They’d miss out on it. But, I’m trying to think here, now, what uh... what happened...

Narrative 11.9

C11: I’ve never had anybody faint at a wedding, probably done... close to seven hundred weddings.

I: Woah. Thas incredible.

C11: We used to do about thirty a year at St. Jame’s, thirty, thirty-five when I was there for nineteen years so,

I: Woah!

[slight pause]

C11: Um

I: That’s almost one every weekend, almost....

C11: Well, it is, it’s quite a few, quite a few.... whew

I: That’s ok
Cll:  Something might come up,

Narrative  11.10

I:  So, how, you mentioned seminary, how would you, did you always know that you wanted to be a priest, or....

Cll:  Well, almost always. My story is this, and uh... it sounds very corny but it’s not. When I was in fifth grade in the fall of my fifth grade, I... came home from school one noon and uh had a terrible itchy chest. So my mother looked at it and thought, gee, that’s a terrible rash. So she called the doctor. The doctor said, well, put him in the tub and use borax or something like that, I forgot. But then he decided that he’d better come up and see me an, he decided it was scarlet fever.

I:  Oh, wow.

Cll:  So.. you had two choices in those days. You could either go to the hospital quarantine place, or you could stay home but nobody else could come in or out. So, my dad, my brother, my three sisters were all out of the house at that time, my mother was in with me,

I:  So,

Cll:  so, if they came in they’d have to stay in they put a sign on the door even, the health department would put a sign on your front door saying this property is quarantined

I:  Woah

Cll:  no was, heh, in or out. So we decided, of course then that I had to go to this hospital. So I went over to the hospital and I, I had this cubicle and it was on the first floor. And, so I was there for two weeks, three weeks. And uh, this thing never really, I, awh, the first week it never cleared up. And in the second week I really caught scarlet fever, so they decided it wasn’t scarlet fever the first week but I caught it from the other kids who were there.

I:  Aw, jeez!

Cll:  So, I was raising Cane the first week, and uh, this nurse came in and she said, “Here, read this book, and that’ll keep you quiet for a while.” So it was a book on the life of St. John Basco who’s an Italian priest, a young priest whose life was given to, ah... taking young, uh teenagers in and teaching them trades. And getting them through their schooling and then sending them out to, uh, make you know, make their way in the world. So I read it and I thought, that’s really neat, I like that, that’s what I wanna do. So, that’s when it started. And, that never left me. I led a
normal life in grammar school and high school, uhh. Dated, had a girl friend and all the rest of that stuff. I just never lost the, the desire for that,

I: Huh

Cl1: And the spirit carried though, so, it was probably the right thing to do

I: Sure

Cl1: I’ve been happy.

I: That, sounds great....

Cl1: So, it started with that book, or it started with the scarlet fever, I guess.

I: Right.

Cl1: Heh.

I: So, now, was your family a Catholic family? Yeh

Cl1: Yes. Yah. ... Yeah, they were Irish Catholics, except for my mother’s, father. He was, a an English Presbyterian.

I: Huh.

Cl1: But, we took care of that eventually.

I: [laughs]

Cl1: [laughs] No he, I don’t know when he converted but, uh, sometime in that, in the years way before me he did convert. And he lived to be ninety-three. Got hit by a car, that’s how he died.

I: Oh, really?

Cl1: Yah [chuckling] At ninety-three. ... So.

**Narrative 11.11**

I: So... you... obviously went to church regularly, or...

Cl1: Yeah. We

I: you were a religious family?

Cl1: Yeah. The family we uh, prayed together at certain times of the year and just certain, certain like in May and October, the devotion to Mary and uh, during Lent and during ah Holy Week, especially. My dad was a member of the choir and he used to sing around at different churches around the city. I was, I’m from Utica.

I: Oh.
C11: Up north. And, uh, so we were pretty faithful to that. And every Saturday, I can remember, every Saturday, the whole gang, all seven of us would have to pile into the car and go over to church to confession.
I: Right.
C11: Whether we needed it or not.
I: [laughs]
C11: And then, that was one of the things we did. And, a lot of times on Sunday I would go, uh the family, children’s mass, I guess back then was at nine. And you had to sit, the boys sat on one side and girls on the other. An parents would sit someplace else. Then I’d go back sometimes to 11:30 with my father ‘cause that was the choir mass, that’s when he was singing in the choir. And I’d go back for that. And, uh... we we stayed very strongly Catholic. I mean, my sisters and brother are very strongly Catholic in their practice today, uh, and it’s been the way with my cousins and most of the family. Now, my nieces and nephews, that’s a different story.
I: Right.
C11: You know that’s uh, a different generation and
I: Sure
C11: Uh, they’re not a-all like that. Some of them are. I’ve got a nephew I’m working on, he hasn’t had his two children baptized yet.
I: Oh, really?
C11: I’m workin’ on him. [chuckles]
I: Wow.
C11: So you see, it’s... families are pretty normal. But, you know it’s, I think, too, Josh, that, in those days families pretty much stayed together in their faith expression, you know
I: Yeah
C11: went to church went to church pretty regularly
I: Did you ever find the want or need to rebel against this, this Catholic upbringing?
C11: Yeh
You know, I guess, I guess I didn’t, have too many problems with that. Uh... I’m trying to think if there ever was a time when I really wanted to rebel. I, I don’t think so. Which is, unusual
I: Yeah, yeah.
C11: Sometimes I think maybe it was because, I think at times, maybe because I wasn’t thinking, I wasn’t really, generating some kind of thought process that might bring that about. But then on the other hand it was a gift, and uh, I didn’t have to do it, didn’t have to put up with that.

**Narrative 11.12**

C11: I remember distinctly, ah on the main street in Utica, is a beautiful, beautiful stone church, it’s Episcopalian and uh, I remember going by that when I was a kid, in grammar school or high school. And, gee, I wish I could go in there, I’d love to go in there. But I was always afraid somebody’d see me coming out and tell my mother and father or something.

I: Right, right.

C11: But they wouldn’t mind, anyway, butah, I never did, I never got into that church. Until I was much older, I think I went in one time.

I: Righ...

C11: Kinda ridiculous, you know.

I: Yeah.

C11: But, I, you know, the upbringing, with the sisters in school and, in high school, uh, the religious brothers. Yeah. It’s not too exciting, but, uh [laughs]

I: No...!

C11: but, it’s got me as far as I am now.

**Narrative 11.13**

I: Yeah. So, speaking of children, uhm... that’s interesting to see my father do some of his children’s messages or working with children. Some of the greatest stories come from the kids who

C11: Oh, yah

I: you know, say things that are a little unexpected when asked a question... or act unexpectedly or blurt out things, you know, during a service or anything like that, just wondering if you... had any, experiences?

C11: [coughs] Well, just last, uh... last Christmas, uh, had the kids come up around... see we don’t do children’s uh, sermon, usually, but sometimes I will just have the kids come up around and talk just to them and tell ‘em, you know, we’re just going to talk to, among ourselves, an, your parents can’t hear this, now. And, they wouldn’t understand anyway, they don’t, they aren’t
able to comprehend what we’re gonna to talk about. So you’ll have to go back and tell ‘em, afterwards. So we talked about the um, ... the three gifts of not the magi but, um, oh, the shepherds
I: Oh
C11: the gifts of the shepherds. The shepherds brought something too you know.
I: Right.
C11: So one brought, brought an apple and another brought uh.... oh, some, uh marbles or beads to play with, another one brought a ball. An, an it got to that point and this kid said, “Was it a basketball?” [laughs]
I: [laughs]
C11: I said, “I think it was, yeah.” [laughs]
I: [laughs]
C11: ... ah, the kids come out with some great stuff. I was watching TV just the other night, Sunday night, and I don’t even know where this was from, it was local. One of the ministers was doing the children’s, homily, and he really did a nice job with them. So that they were really into it. They were asking him all kinds of things, and there was a lot of pretend stuff about the tree that was growing in front of him. “See that tree?” you know
I: Right
C11: Off the tree there’s candy bars. And so the kid would go up and pull, make this like motion that he’s pulling off a candy bar. And about sharing and so it was really neat stuff.

Narrative 11.14
I: Well... I’ve asked most people this question an... in a sense it doesn’t apply as much to you in a sense but um... where do you see the line, or... whatever you want to call it, between being called by God t’ minister, and.. making a living
C11: Mm-hmm
I: Like, surviving and providing for yourself a living’n just the, not necessarily folkloric, but what are some of your views on that.
C11: Well, I, I think its, the scripture that uh, he who ministered, or the person he or she, who ministers to the people who are uh, spreads the word of God has the right to be, uh... to be uh, supported, you know materially
I: Righ...
C11: Uh, in their work... and that meaning, therefore, that the people, of the church, have a responsibility to support that ministry itself. And the people in it... but um, I never really got interested in making a lot of money.
I: Yeah, yeah.
C11: I, because I was supported our our system here aplai- what our system is that we’re, uh, provided a place to live, and the quarters are certainly comfortable enough and some of them are very comfortable and nice.
I: This looks...
C11: This is a very nice house.
I: Yeah! Yeah!
C11: And that’s up to the parish to keep that up. Ah, we’re, we have a part time cook and the parishes are expected to provide meals and things like that. And we receive a stipend or income.
I: Mmm.
C11: [coughs] which, uh, is personal to ourselves, and it’s nothing like your dad’s, but, I think like your dad and Father Frisbee and ah, many of the other mainline churches, oh this, work for far less than anybody else of their, of their, uh, level, educational level things like that you know. They make far less than they should, and um but they do it because I think it’s partly it’s, you’re not in it for the money.
I: Yeah, yeah.
C11: If they’re in it for the money they’re the wrong place to be, first of all. Secondly, it just has a poor connotation I just don’t think you can do a good job if that’s what yer objective is.
I: Yeah, s...
C11: So I have never been poor, I have never had want for anything, and, most priests don’t, and again it differs if you get into mission countries, different areas of this country. That’s the way it is most of the generally. I don’t know if that answers

**Narrative 11.15**

I: Yeah, uh, great thank you. Um... any interesting experiences with people who have come who were not necessarily part of the congregation like um... my father’s had a lot of people come in off the street looking for handouts, he’s had some pretty fun stories about uh, you know, some
of the characters and what they asked for and things like that um... or just, experiences, um with people who... like, for my father he's, people don't know what the United Church of Christ is or anything. He's been called Father, and priest, and and all sorts of things. Very rarely minister or pastor, it’s kinda funny so I don’t know. Um, if there are any experiences like that that you’ve had or

C11: Yeah, I’ve been called the reverend and things like that, one one point in time, it was Thanksgiving time we were delivering ah food baskets to some of the poor families in St. James. And I had this religious sister was going with me

I: Uh-huh.

C11: So, ah, we delivered this basket and left it on the kitchen table or something and we were walking out the door and down the steps and there was a kid came out from, evidently came out of one of the rooms and said to his mother, “Who was that?” She said, “Oh, it was the minister and his wife.” [laughs]

I: [laughs]

C11: So we were known then, we used to kid about that, we were the minister and the wife.

I: That’s funny.

Narrative 11.16

C11: Ah, yeah, there was a character in town who I’m sure your dad knows, and uh, were just talking about it the other day, she ah, asked somebody for for uh, food, one of our parishioners. So the parishioner herself got, went out and bought some of these things for her, and she said, she went through it all, “there’s no meat here.” And ’n the parishioner said, “I didn’t, you know, I didn’t think I was supposed to get everything.” “Well, there’s no meat.” [laughs] So I guess the parishioner went out and bought her some meat, besides.

I: Wow!

C:11 Then she said to the parishioner she said, ah, to the parishioner, “Uh, could you let me have twenty dollars. I need it for such-an-such.” She said, “No, I can’t let you have twenty dollars.” She said, “Well, I really need twenty dollars.” She said, “I’ll give you five dollars.” “Is that all you can give me? I’m kinda disappointed, I’d really like twenty.” But this is a person who shows up all the time, you know.

I: Yeah.
C11: It's a way of life with her.
I: Sure, Sh...
C11: And, bringing up her family with this, this is the way she does it.
I: Wow. Wow.
C11: And, I always get the id the thought, 'cause I won't give her any money, unless it comes through the CHOW program.
I: Yeah.
C11: And, uh, will only give her food if it comes to the child, because I, I know er.

**Narrative 11.17**

C11: But, I always think, you know, someday I'm going to turn somebody down and it's going to be Christ. And I'm going to be in some pretty hot water. [laughs]
I: [Laughs]
C11: I, I, you hesitate...
I: That's funny. Yeah, Father Frisbee said the exact same thing.
C11: Yeh, we do, ah, we give out sandwiches everyday to ah, people who come in, they've gotten to know who we are. Yup, we've got this one guy who's name was Denver. And he would come every day and pick up a sandwich, or maybe not every day but, two or three times a week. And he got to know the housekeeper here, you know. And she's not with us anymore, she's 87 years old. She's up in a retirement home but ah, he got a, they got on pretty good terms and, uh, she would give him all the, the uh, soda cans or beer cans or whatever we had around to return for deposit, you know
I: Right
C11: And, uh... when she, what happened was, she broke her hip and when we told him that he just broke down in tears.
I: Oh, no!.
C11: Wow. This guy really has a, really has a, I think he lived in the street.. And ah... there'd been people like that at the back door. tha CHOW pantry, it's pretty much the same thing... but, people are generally grateful, an good about those things.

**Narrative 11.18**

I: Yeah.... With ah, you mentioned that you've... you've interacted with a lot of other clergy
members throughout the community, is there anything I... you mentioned some fun experiences like Father Frisbee um bd and are there any... um, religious

C11: Mm.
I: jokes you folks share or anything like that, orah experience that you’ve had with, with other religious leaders?
C11: We always have, uh a couple funny stories or two or jokes, ah to share with each other, you know
I: Yeah.
C11: I mean, I, ah... I love to, I’m very happy to be able to tell them some of these things. Like, Frisbee, did you hear about the cop. came upon this guy who was about to jump off the bridge? And, uh, he went, ran right up to him and said, “Don’t jump don’t jump.” He says, “Think of your mother!” He says, “I haven’t got a mother.” Have you ever heard this?
I: No, I uh-uh.
C11: And ah, he says, “Well, think of your father!” He says, “I don’t have a father.” “Well, think of your family!” “I don’t have a family.” ... “Don’t jump don’t jump! Think of Blessed Mother. Think of Mary the Mother of God!” “Who’s she?” “Aw, jump ya, blasted Protestant!”
I: [laughs]
C11: [laughs] So, I tell those things. That.... Heh. They’re good, they put up with me.
I: [Laughs]
C11: But, they always have some things, too. Father Frisbee told us once that he felt that it was his job to keep the feet of the Roman Catholics to the fire.
I: [Chuckling]
C11: So, he was going to make sure that in the dialogues that we have once a month, that we were on the spot all the time. He does a pretty good job of it, too.
I: [chuckling] I bet I bet he does. I’m sure!
C11: [chuckles] I’ve uh, uh, stories. [slight pause] Sorry, Josh, uh... I jus don’t
I: No problem, you’ve uh, that’s great. You’ve had some great stories! ...I don’t want to hold you up much longer.
C11: Yeah, I should be gone by three anyway.
I: Ok, yeah. Well, great then, that’s fine. You’ve helped me a great deal.
C11: Okay.

I: It's been a pleasure talking.

C11: It's been enjoyable talking to you.

[end of interview]

I: That was informant number eleven, on 3.28.98. That was at a Catholic rectory and the gentleman was a monsignor, uh, a little above a Father. So, we sat in the living room there, and spoke.
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### References Cited

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