

**STORY/SIGN AS HISTORY/DRAMA**

(Way #2: "The Creation of Community through Myth and Ritual")...Elliott #1931

When a folk's story (not a folkstory, but the story at the heart of a people's life) fades, cotermporal with this process [in whatever relationships] is the decline in that people's celebration of its story both in quality of sign-experience and in frequency of enactment. (whatever other external/internal dissuasives may be in force). Technically, we call such a story "myth" and its repeated signative celebrations "sacraments" (some, "ordinances"). In this thinksheet's title I've used another set of polar terms: "history" for the people's world-and-cosmos story, and "drama" for its ritual-regular re-enactment. In this anomie, people and myth/ritual are "lost" to each other, and the myth/ritual-hungry folk find or create another or other stories/signs...Every myth is inadequate (though I hold the Christian to be closest to adequate), and every ritual imperfectly represents its myth: God so teaches us modesty and openness, in addition to faithfulness.....Efforts to transcend the anthropological fact of the myth/ritual need --such as Jn. Dewey's "common faith" and Jn.-Paul Sartre's "freedom in good faith" --have failed; "Transculture, Inc." now offers a more modest and, I think, more hopeful proposal, viz., media for coming together, each with his/her own commitments (roots/myth/rituals), around common human experience and needs and hopes.

Now, within and between "communities" (in the above, full, sense), METAPHOR is the transportation system. Etymologically the word means to "carry" meanings "beyond" their experiential birthplace "across" to other areas of actual and potential meaning--so the meanings in life are not like trees, rooted in one place, but like birds that can fly from one tree to another...This thinksheet illustrates this metaphorical dimension of human life, the transporting of meanings between masteries and mysteries and between our four personal powers (spirit, mind, psyche, body) and between "us" as individuals and groups and "communities." Mainly because I had to work hard, for a lecture last summer ('78), on Christian initiation ("baptism"), I've selected the metaphor-history of baptism as illustration.

1. At the Qumran community in NT times, communards self-baptized daily in anticipation of soon entrance into "the Kingdom of God." John "the Baptist" may have adapted that form of baptism, or the baptism of pagans into Judaism ("proselyte baptism"), in creating his own rite or ritual of purification toward the same world-end/beginning event which Qumran before and Christianity after looked forward to. As "the Spirit" was to usher in the new age, John's water-baptism was, he said, also "in Spirit." And as a purifying judgment was to end the old age in preparation for the beginning of the new age, John qualified his baptism with also the word judgment-"fire"--thus "baptized in Spirit and fire" (Mt.3.11, L.3.16; see also M.1.8, Jn.1.33)--or rather Jn., who saw his own baptism as rather a preparation for the Kingdom-entrance-preparation, saw the Coming One's baptism in the double terms of "Spirit"-grace and judgment-"fire," the latter avoidable if one were to "repent and be baptized" with John's baptism...Because of Christian influence, it's not easy to recover exactly how John saw his baptism in relation to the oncoming New-Age-initiatory events.

2. Jesus rejected nothing in John's developed metaphor of baptism-entrance, but added to judgment the note of suffering and then reversed the direction of the suffering: while the impenitent would suffer, the focus was on the Coming One's own suffering (L.9.54; M.9.49; the meaning of the suffering for Jesus, L.12.49f).

3. After the Resurrection (Ac.1.5, 11.16), the element of judgment fell away, and we have "baptism in Spirit" and "Spirit baptism," the latter tending (as in modern Pentecostalism) to get farther and farther away from the original physical reality, viz. water.

4. Paul built all the metaphorical angles into "baptism in Christ" and his death, thus adding burial/resurrection of Christ and us as visible in immersion/emersion.