Narrative Song as a Transitional Rhetorical Device in the Agape Church at Ellettsville, Indiana

Linda Kinsey Adams
Indiana University

John H. McDowell has identified "narrative epiphany" as a transcendence uniting narrative discourse and its experiential substrate into a "palpitating theater of life" (1982:134). He showed how two realms—one of real experience versus one of presentation of real experience—are parallel, with markers heightening the differences between these two realms, but how at the same time, through "the illusion of ostension, the direct presentation of experience," the two realms are fused into (or strive toward) moments of epiphany containing characteristics of religious epiphany, as well as the well-known Joycean notion of epiphany. In this paper, I would like to borrow this kernel idea and apply it on a grander scale to an entire religious ritual event—to show how the use of narrative (in this case, narrative song) itself helps to unite the world of experience and the world of presentation into a heightened experience of epiphany, once again calling up all the connotations that the term epiphany commands; and to show how narrative song itself acts as a transcendental agent, in its moment of ostension, helping to fuse the iconic realm with the experiential realm.

I will be using as my example a two-night religious program conducted at the Agape Community Church in Ellettsville, Indiana, in 1989. At that time the church was thriving with a membership of more than 300 people, but following the resignation in 1990 of a popular pastor who was involved in a divorce and the resignation in April 1991 of a subsequent pastor, the membership had shrunk to 20 families; the church was forced to disband, and its building was put up for sale (Bloomington [Indiana] Herald-Times, 21 July 1991).

Before it disbanded, the church met in a new, large building where the sanctuary doubled as a gymnasium. A stage at one end of the large meeting
room held musical instruments, drum stands, and sound equipment. Although the church professed to be nondenominational, it had strong Pentecostal leanings, as evidenced by occasional references to "tongue-talking" and "Holy Rollers" in song and commentary, as well as in the liberal use of musical instrumentation during services. In a two-night presentation held November 8-9 in 1989, two members of the church, John D. Baker and Larry Mitchell, led a revival-type meeting entitled "Exposing Satan’s Tactics." Fliers which advertised the meeting identified Baker as a "converted nightclub singer" and Mitchell as a "converted motorcycle gang leader" and promised to discuss "Rock Music—Drugs—Satan Worship." Baker and Mitchell had formed a partnership known as "Frontline Ministries" and had traveled to various churches and organizations presenting their program which featured electrically amplified music and a multi-media show that included video, slides, and audiotape. The first evening was called "Frontline Ministries Exposes Rock Music," and the second evening was called "Frontline Ministries Exposes the Occult."

Before developing the proposed argument, it will be necessary to outline the format of the two nights of services to show the situational context surrounding the performance of narrative song, and to show the syntagmatic connections within—and the paradigmatic connections in relation to—the services as a whole.

Format of the Services

The two evenings of services shared a similar format, as shown in the outline that follows:

(1) Before the services began, people gathered in an open space at the back of the church auditorium to converse, mill around, and visit casually as they looked at billboards filled with clippings from newspapers, magazines, and other printed sources about witchcraft, the occult, demon possession, and drugs, as well as album covers showing rock bands using satanic symbols. The display at the back of the room also included a table covered in black cloth with a pentagram imprinted on it as the backdrop for a goat’s head, two skulls, a dagger, a sword, a silver chalice, black candles, a Ouija board, and books on Satanism. Lyrical religious music played in the background.

(2) The people were summoned to their seats by the pastor over the loud speaker; the pastor introduced himself, read a Bible verse, asked the congregation to stand in prayer, and then asked everyone to shake hands with somebody, before turning the program over to the guest speakers, Baker and Mitchell.
The congregation was asked to sing familiar songs. On the first night, the songs in this segment included: "This is the Day that the Lord Has Made," "There Is Power in the Blood," "Amazing Grace," "Oh How I Love Jesus," and "Thank You Lord For Saving My Soul." On the second night, the songs included "I'll Fly Away," "When the Saints Go Marchin' In," "I've Got a Home in Gloryland that Outshines the Sun," "This Little Light of Mine," and "Sing, Hosanna."

Introductory comments were made by the speakers. On the first night, Baker talked about the war between Christians and the Devil, using much warfare imagery in his talk, followed by Mitchell, who told how he learned to lean on Jesus. On the second night, in this segment of the program, Mitchell talked about what he gained by giving up a life of sin.

Special music, including one narrative song each night, was performed by the speakers and their band. On the first night, the group performed, in the following order, "Praise the Lord, Hallelujah," "This is War," the narrative song "Secret Place," and "I'm a Jesus Junkie." On the second night, the group sang "Jesus in the Backfield," the narrative song "One God," followed by "If You're Tired and Weary, Weak and Heavy-Laden," and concluding with a repetition of "I'm a Jesus Junkie" from the previous evening.

The ushers were called forward to the altar, a prayer was recited by one of the speakers, and then the ushers passed the offering plates to the audience in the pews as the speaker gave information about the group's ministry and told about their monthly newsletter and items for sale (tapes, T-shirts, buttons, videos) at the back of the auditorium. When the ushers returned to the altar with the offertory, another prayer was given.

One more song was sung after the offertory. On the first night, it was "I Will Bless Thee, O Lord"; on the second night, "We're an Army."

The lights were lowered, and a mass media show utilizing slides, videotape and audiotape was narrated by one of the speakers, interspersed with the speaker's performance of numerous legends, memorates, personal narratives, jokes, anecdotes, proverbs and even a folktale (the Pied Piper of Hameln).

A prayer was given to launch the invitational segment of the program, people were invited to be saved by coming forward to the altar, and anyone wishing to publicly join the war against Satan and drugs was invited to come forward as well. On the first night, the invitational song was "Just As I Am," with several families coming to the altar. On the second night, several teenage girls came to the microphone to sing "Amazing Grace," while almost all of the high-school-aged people came forward in an emotion-filled moment that included much crying and hugging.
A concluding prayer was given; the lights were turned on; and people were commissioned to shake hands with other people ("24 people each"). The congregation moved from their seats and dispersed to the exhibits to purchase buttons, T-shirts, videotapes, audiotapes, and to pick up free leaflets with printed narratives such as "It Was Only a Ouija Board." The people visited and socialized while lyrical religious music played in the background.

The Function of Narrative Song

The use of lyrical song is on the outer edges of the event, helping to give a frame to the event, intensifying from piped-in background music to audience-sung participation near the beginning, and reversing this sequence near the end. Within this framework, on both nights, we see four phases of song: the beginning congregational singing, the special music by the guest performers, the congregational song following the offering, and the invitational song prior to the conclusion of the event. On both nights, only one narrative song was performed; and on each night, this narrative song was performed in the second of these phases (in what has been identified as Segment 5 above).

The term narrative here is used in the sense set forth by William Labov, who defined a minimal narrative as "a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered" such that a rearrangement of that temporal sequence would alter the "original semantic interpretation" of those clauses (1972:360). So, when we speak of narrative song, we are speaking of a song that tells a story, as opposed to a song which expresses feeling, emotion, state of mind, or the present state of things, for example, "Oh, How I Love Jesus." (The term song is used in the sense described by George List as a melody "exhibiting relatively stable pitches, possessing a scalar structure at least as elaborate as the heptatonic, and showing little, if any, influence melodically of speech intonation" [List 1963:3]).

The placement of the narrative song at a specific place in the program serves to make the audience particularly receptive to the program that follows, and thus more prepared for an (attempted) epiphanous experience. The beginning section of the program is filled with music; the main part of the program, the mass media presentation, is filled with oral narrative performances. Narrative song could be looked at in this instance as a bridge containing elements of both sections—music and narrative, thus serving as a transition between the two main modes of the service. While lyrical music helps to mark the boundaries of the event and allows the participants to set themselves off from the world of everyday experience, narrative song functions internally (syntagmatically) to smooth the passage from the musical segment to the major narrative portion within the service. However,
the narrative songs also function paradigmatically, as discussed in the next section.

Content of the Narrative Songs
and their Paradigmatic Significance

The texts of the two narrative songs which were performed at the revival follow. "Secret Place" was sung by Larry Mitchell on the first night. Written by Steve Chapman, the song was recorded by Mitchell in 1987 on the Un-Chained Ministries label. The narrative song known as "One God" was performed the second night by Larry Mitchell, his wife Tina Mitchell, and John Baker. Its author is unknown. Accompaniment on both nights included electric guitar, acoustic guitar, drums, and electric keyboard. The texts are my own transcriptions from tape recordings of the event, double-checked for accuracy through conversations with the performers. The line breaks are governed by words held for significantly longer counts than others. I use capitalization to signal that the word was shouted rather than sung, or was sung with a notably louder emphasis.

"Secret Place"

My heart is like a house
One day I let the Savior in
And there were many rooms
where we would visit now and then
But then one day he saw that doo-o-oor
I knew the day had come too soon
I said, "Jesus, I'm not ready,
For us to visit in that room."

For that's a place in my hea-art
Where even I don't go-o
I had some things in there
I didn't want no one to know-ow-ow
But he handed me the key
With tears of love on his face
He said, "I wanna make you clean,
Just let me in your secret place."

And then I opened up the door
And as the two of us walked in
I was so ashamed
His light revealed my hidden sins.
But when I think about that room now
I'm not afraid anymore
'Cause I know my hidden sins
No longer hide behind that door.

There was a place in my heart
Where even I wouldn't go
I had some things in there
I didn't want no one to know-ow-ow
But he handed me the key
With tears of love on his face
And he made me clean
I let him in my secret place.

Is there a place in your heart
Where even you don't go-o?
You have some things in there
You don't want no one to know-ow-ow
But he's handing you the key
With tears of love on his face
And he wants to make you clean
Just lock him in your secret place.

(REPEAT LAST CHORUS)

In this song we find a series of Lévi-Straussean oppositions: a person's interior space, "my heart," is divided into places that are open versus closed (hidden, secret), unlocked versus locked, public versus private, clean versus dirty, sinless versus sinful, light versus dark. Thus the "many rooms" in the person's heart are open, unlocked, public, clean, sinless, full of light; as opposed to a single, secret, sinful, hidden, locked, dark, dirty, private place. In the following song, "One God," we again find a series of oppositions, but these are external, involving oppositions of the individual against the world, rather than conflicts within the one individual.

"One God"

(CHORUS:)
Well, I'm a one-God apostolic tongue-talkin' holy-roller born-again, heaven-bound believer in the liberatin' power of Jesus's name.
Well I've been washed in the blood, sanctified by the spirit
I believe in holiness and I suggest that you should do the same.
I was set FREE at a Pentecostal altar on my knees,
Pardon me if I'm not ashamed
To be a one-God apostolic tongue-talkin' holy-roller born-again heaven-bound believer in the liberatin' power of Jesus's name.
Well you don't catch me preachin' on the street
I'm too shy to talk to people that I meet.
But one day up on Times Square
A bunch of kids were gathered there
Throwin' beer cans at the law and shoutin' PEACE!
Well I did not intend to interfere
But someone started shoutin' in my ear
So I laid both hands on his head
Then I prayed while he turned red,
And all those other kids said
"Let's get OUT of here."

(REPEAT CHORUS)

Well I never testified in SCHOOL
Well all the other kids MIGHT think that I'm NOT cool
But then one day I'd had enough
Of that evolution stuff
And I just stood right up and said
"GOD's word is TRUE." [AMEN]
My teacher didn't know just what to do
And it seemed like he was shakin' in his shoes
Although he knew I meant no harm,
He took me by the arm,
And he said, "Son, tell me what religion ARE YOU!"

(REPEAT CHORUS)

Well, on the job, I never speak a word
Well, I figured that they all KNEW that I went to church
But when the boss man called me in
For a tonic and some gin
Well, I began to think, "Perhaps he hasn't heard."
I said, "NO, SIR, I'm not the drinkin' kind
Except for a thing they call NEW wine.
And upon his cigar smoke
I thought that he would choke
And I proceeded to explain just ONE MORE TIME.

(REPEAT CHORUS)

[Now that you've heard us sing the chorus and you know all the words
(laughter) we's going to invite you to sing that last chorus with us.]

(REPEAT CHORUS)
In contrast to the divisiveness of a single person's "heart" in the first song, this second song pits the religious "one-God apostolic tongue-talkin' holy-roller born-again, heaven-bound believer" against beer-drinking, PEACE-shoutin' nonbelievers on the street; against evolutionist-thinking nonbelievers in the schools; and against smoking, gin-drinking nonbelievers at the workplace. Contrastive spheres include heaven versus hell, washed versus [unwashed], holy versus [unholy], free and liberated versus [trapped], true versus "stuff" [false], alcohol versus "new wine." Plotwise, the person in each stanza of the second song is converted from a person who doesn't preach, testify, or speak a word into a person who is "not ashamed" to state his or her religious convictions.

Viewed together, in sum, we have the individual with internal conflicts and the individual with external conflicts, both gaining relief through the liberating power of Jesus, both conflicts arising from questions of belief.

The "conflict" imagery within the songs is developed throughout the evening. We can begin with the name chosen by the presenters: "Frontline Ministries." Baker and Mitchell use as a logo on their promotional material a Roman warrior, brandishing a spear and sword, hoisted as if in mid-battle on the "frontline" of a war (ironic in view of the persecution of the early Christians by Romans). The introductory Bible passage read by pastor Clint White on the first night contains warfare imagery:

Last of all I want to remind you that your strength must come from the Lord's mighty power within you. Put on all of God's arms so that you will be able to stand safe against all strategies and tricks of Satan. For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies—the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world. So use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy whenever he attacks, and when it is all over, you will still be standing up. But to do this, you will need the strong belt of truth and the breastplate of God's approval. Wear shoes that are able to speed you on as you preach the Good News of peace with God. In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. And you will need the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17, Living Bible)

Other songs performed during the two-night service employ the warfare image: "We're an army, made of children"; "Victory in Jesus"; "When the Saints Go Marchin' In," and a song with the words:

I've been like a battlefield--
The enemy is out to kill...
This is WAR,
It's not a game we're playing
Pick up your sword and shield,
Get on the battlefield.

Early in the service on the first night, Mitchell stated, "We are engaged in a warfare. To understand how to fight this warfare, we need to understand our enemy." Mitchell's and Baker's comments were interspersed with numerous interjections such as "have you entered into the fight?"; "we believe it's very important to blow a trumpet of warning"; "you can't play on both sides of the fence"; "the battle is raging for the gain of man's soul or his loss."

Just as the narrative songs contained numerous oppositions, so do the revivalist's comments: "The devil will promise you pleasure, but he'll give you pain; he'll promise you life, but give you death"; other oppositions referred to throughout the service include: lost but found; blind but now can see; God versus Satan; calm versus storm; "New wine" versus beer and gin and tonic; God's word versus evolution theory; saved versus damned; liberated or freed versus imprisoned; light versus dark; washed (cleansed, sanctified) versus unwashed (unrepentant); religious music versus rock music; open testimony of God's love versus hidden, subliminal messages in rock music; heterosexual relations versus "sexual perversion" (homosexuality); Star of David versus inverted pentagram; Christ versus anti-Christ; destitution versus fulfillment; safety versus danger; teenage rebellion versus parental control; and peace versus war. A recent article in the Louisville Courier Journal quoted Philip English, a Berea College professor, who, in his analysis of the television ministries of Jimmy Swaggart and other evangelists, found that "they were constructing their sermons around themes of disunity, themes of opposing forces and attacking, most of the time in very generalized terms, other groups and people" (Embry 1991).

Leach's analogy of ritual sequence (in general) with an orchestral performance, his modification of an example used by Lévi-Strauss, is instructive here, since the event can be interpreted horizontally (sequentially) or vertically (synchronously, with other events occurring at the same time): "For the musically sensitive listener, each phrase, each movement, and the symphony as a whole, form a system of interconnected unities" (Leach 1976:44). Narrative song in the Agape service can be read as part of a sequence, and it also resonates vertically with synchronous events, such as musical accompaniment. At the same time, it also functions paradigmatically as a structural model of the group's worldview, through its crystallized oppositional analogies (Lévi-Strauss 1966).
Comparison with Another Narrative Song Tradition: The Corrido

The imagery of conflict developed in the narrative songs of the Agape service is reminiscent of the corrido, another folkloric tradition discussed by McDowell, and it is useful here to see what traits they share:

The corrido may be characterized as an enactment of the serious sort, departing from the everyday through intensification of conventional codes and orders.

The corrido is propositional in this broadest sense, asserting a collective sense of identity by incorporating signs and symbols which have special resonance in the corrido community. The propositional character of the corrido is implemented through several devices, all of which interact to reinforce a common cosmological orientation. To begin with, the corrido's very selection of events worthy of narration proceeds from a notably ethnocentric bias. The corrido seeks out moments of active, violent confrontation, in which death to either or both parties is a distinct and immediate possibility. It is in these tense moments that individuals show their true nature, whether heroic or cowardly . . .

The song concentrates on vignettes of mortal struggle with the hero's life in the balance. (McDowell 1981:50)

McDowell's comments about the corrido (really about how a cultural performance resonates symbolically with that culture's mythological framework, its metaphorical underpinnings) can be fitted almost like a template over narrative song at the Agape church: "The very selection of events worthy of narration proceed from a notably ethnocentric bias." The two narrative songs selected for performance at the Agape church illustrate the basic issue of confrontation that pervades church doctrine: (1) conflict between interior parts of the self ["Secret Place"]; and (2) confrontation between inside and outside the religion ["One God"]. Whereas the corrido as described by McDowell seeks out moments of active, violent confrontation, the Pentecostal narrative song seeks out moments that test a person's faith in the religion—turning points, crisis points, stepping-over-a-threshold moments. "It is in these tense moments that individuals show their true nature, whether heroic or cowardly" (1981:50). In the corrido, the hero's mortal life hangs in the balance; in the Pentecostal narrative song, the person's spiritual soul hangs in the balance. "Part of the propositional intent of the corrido," McDowell continues, "is to stipulate that a man should die honorably, should confront death fearlessly" (1981:53). Part of the propositional intent of the Pentecostal narrative song is that people should openly face their conflicts, internal and external, no matter how painful or humiliating or socially ostracizing these experiences may be, in
order to be a Christian. The Agape narrative song, much like the corrido as described by McDowell, is a symbolic microcosm of the group's cosmology.

Granted that these two narrative song traditions share similar symbolic orderings, what can their comparison here tell us about narrative song in general? In both cases, persuasion—or "propositional intent," as McDowell terms it—are involved. In the corrido, as McDowell points out, the corridista "hastens to shape our interpretation of these events" (1981:54); the Agape narrative song fits symbolically into a service whose whole intent is to persuade people to a certain belief system or to maintain them in that system. Obviously, in both cases, the tool of narrative is a powerful device for shaping beliefs and behaviors.

**Narrative Song as Transition in the Agape Religious Event**

Ostension is the "pointing to the object" (Wittgenstein in Nöth 1990:101). As discussed by McDowell, ostension operates on several levels—inferentially, through gestures, through direct quotation, and through imitative speaking styles (1982:127-129)—all with the goal of the "provisional collapsing of the narrative and performance frames" (128), that is, going "beyond iconicity." Within the framework of the Agape religious service (described in Segment 3 above), lyrical music as a frame for the event very obviously is a performance, quite separated from everyday routine, even though the shock of the transition has been partially absorbed by playing lyrical music on the loud speakers as the crowd mills around (Segment 1 above). Lyrical music, while having some ostensive qualities, would rank indexically low on a continuum of connections between the experiential and performative, whereas skillful performance of narrative would rank high on such a continuum. Narrative song would fit somewhere in between. In other words, a person telling a story would be more likely to use more gestures, imitative speaking styles, and direct quotation than a person singing a lyrical song. If lyrical song is on one point of a continuum showing the ostensive relationship between narrative performance and its experiential substrate, then the skillful performance of oral storytelling would be at a higher point on that continuum. Narrative song would fit somewhere between these latter two points on the continuum.

If one of the goals of narrative is to persuade, and if the goal of an event is to persuade its participants into a particular propositional or partisan course, then it seems logical that a religious event such as that at the Agape church would find the use of narrative efficacious. But it also seems that for narrative to have its most beneficial effect, it must be introduced gradually. To suddenly plunge into narrative without foregrounding or preconditioning...
would in effect be calling too much attention to its performative qualities, heightening its separation from the experiential world, and thus possibly negating its potential perception as truth—a result which, of course, is not the goal.

Beginning the service with soothing lyrical music may help to ready the mind for suggestibility (Professor McDowell has alluded in lecture to the potentially engulfing, narcotic effect of sound on the central nervous system). A soothed mind, transported away from the experiential realm, is more receptive to messages. A sudden switch from lyrical music to pure oral narrative would be too abrupt, would call too much attention to the markers separating the experiential realm from the performative realm, and would have the effect of negating the possibility of an epiphanous experience; the participant would be more aware of the cues to iconicity, would thus be drawn back closer to the world of everyday reality and farther away from the ability to transcend iconicity into a moment of epiphany. However, transition from song to narrative song to narrative leads incrementally from one point to another on the experiential-performative ostension continuum, with the markers of change thus being less noticeable. Narrative song bridges the disparate genres of song and narrative and serves as the most effective transition from lyrical music to oral narrative performance; and provided the oral narrative is skillfully performed, the chances increase for an experience of epiphany.

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze the oral narrative performed by Mitchell and Baker on both nights; nevertheless, to give an idea of the flavor of the event, and thus a better understanding of how narrative song fits into the entire event, a listing of some of the stories they told follows. *First night:* Pied Piper folktale, used to illustrate how rock music is luring young people; stories of how teenagers were affected by subliminal tapes which, when played backwards, gave messages like "It's fun to smoke marijuana." Other story topics included: a rock group's act showing girl tied to torture rack, throat cut, and blood thrown to audience along with raw meat; rock stars' sexual exploits with girls on the back of the bus; Janis Joplin's goal to sleep with more than 1,000 men and to try every different kind of drug—only to die face down in her own vomit; a man under the influence of drugs who carved a cross on his own chest; a mother on drugs whose child was horribly deformed; deaths blamed on Ozzy Osbourne's *Suicide Solution*; how Alice Cooper got his name from a Ouija board; a teenager who murdered three in his family because "Eddy made me do it" (he had been inspired by the *Killers* album). *Second night:* women telling about being raped by a demon spirit that comes while they're trying to sleep, after listening to the *Serpent Temptation* album by Incubus; the rise of power of Anton LeVay, high priest of the Satanic Church; a
delivered person's description of his participation in Satanic rites (reciting Lord's prayer backwards, conjuring up demonic forces with fingernails, hair, clothing); the rebellion that occurred when one teenager's father hauled all his rock albums to the dump; a woman who drew pentagram on wall with her own bodily waste; slitting one's own artery and sucking the blood with a straw; severed legs linked to Satanic black market; Satanist raiding fresh graves for necessary body parts for ceremonies; a homosexual who was delivered of his demons and who told of field mice dropped through a tube into a man's rectum; description of a snuff film in which a 7-year-old boy was murdered by severe anal penetration "until all the guts came out of that poor boy's body"; story of a woman on drugs who put baby in oven and turkey in crib; stories of necrophilia; story of a demon-possessed man who, when removed from magic circle by police, released a fury of Satanic howls (audiotaape of howling played); how "Smurfs" were created ("reincarnated dead babies—that's why they're blue"); how a girl who tried to kill her mother with a butcher knife was delivered of her demons (her gurgling vocal noises were played on tape); disaster with a Ouija board; a woman sexually molested by 13 men, forced to fill skull with menstrual blood and men's urine and then drink it, before having her private parts mutilated; how woman who was being delivered of demons fell on the floor and crawled on her belly like a snake.

The mass media presentation employed by the speakers had its own ostensive effect on the Agape service, serving as documentation to make the orators' stories seem as real (connected to an "experiential substrate") as possible. While the performers were deeply involved in telling narratives about one gruesome event after another, their playing of audiotape examples—such as the howling of a woman possessed by demons—and their showing of videotape and slides of countless examples of everyday objects—rock album covers, for example—served as additional instances of rhetorical "pointing to" (Nöth 1990: 101) that further helped to fuse the two experiential and performative realms in the quest for the transcendental moment of epiphany. One is tempted to say that the closer the narrative discourse can be allied with a perceived experiential substrate, the stronger is its power to persuade, but such a statement does not account for such phenomena as parody and satire, except maybe conversely.

The second night of the Agape services concluded with what I would gauge was an occasion of epiphany experienced by many members of the congregation—the climax of the two-night event, a moment when emotions were heightened, a moment in which performance seemed reality, when the two seemed fused into a higher spiritual plane, "a moment of radiance" (McDowell 1982:134), manifested by the joyful tears and embraces of the congregation in the darkened room, precipitated by the skillful ability of the narrator to tell stories that took the audience to the depths of hell and back.
again, his performance enhanced by all of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic interweaving of elements that have been described.

My contention that narrative song plays a role in this process was supported recently when I accompanied a professor who was collecting oral testimonies at another Pentecostal church in Bloomington, Indiana, on September 5, 1991. I noted that only one narrative song was performed during the service (a song about Daniel and the Lion’s Den), and this song was performed as special music occurring two songs before the offertory, in a segment equivalent to Segment 5 discussed in the Agape format of services above. Interestingly, though, the event did not conclude with what I would call an epiphanous experience; the preacher tried and tried to work the congregation into a state of radiance, unsuccessfully so, even though he beseeched them with comments like "Come on! Come on now! Let the Holy Spirit come through!" and even though he held them for over an hour longer than usual (until after 10 p.m.), before finally giving up and releasing them to go home. He had spent much of the sermon telling women how to wear their hair and skirts, telling men how to cut their hair, admonishing people to quit drooping their heads in the audience—clearly the audience was weary and ready to go home. What was lacking in the sermon was narrative. I recall only one or two short narrative stories being performed during the hour-and-a-half sermon, which never seemed to "come alive," never seemed to achieve the necessary transcendental unification of narrative discourse and its experiential substrate (McDowell 1982:134), primarily because the narrative discourse itself was missing.

Thus, even though narrative song may play an efficacious role in transporting an audience into a state of readiness for an epiphanous experience, the true test of the power of narrative in a church service obviously lies in the skill of the oral narrative performer. The implications of this paper are that narrative song moves people into a narrative state of mind, and that a narrative state of mind is where people can be touched, where persuasion is most effective, and where people can be swayed to change their behavior.

Acknowledgments

I visited the Agape Church at the invitation of Professor Linda Dégh, who herself was conducting fieldwork there for her studies of legend material. This paper was originally written for a course called "Narrative Song," taught by Professor John H. McDowell of Indiana University in 1989.
References Cited


