

# žč christianity: a story-formed community

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



âžç Christianity: a story-formed community Like the rabbits in Watership Down, Christian communities are " story-formed communities" because Christians are people who have been and are being formed by the stories of the Scriptures that culminate in the story of Jesus âžç Scripture: a community-formed text The converse is also true: the Scriptures are " community formed texts. " The Scriptures were formed out of communal experiences of God that were " handed over" (traditio) from one generation to another. Tradition is the origin of the stories and other writings that eventually formed " The Books" (Ta Biblia) that are the Scriptures. âžç The primary meaning of Scripture: Scripture reveals (primarily) via stories 1. Who is God and 2. Who we are as well as who are called to be in response to God The Scriptures narrate the character of God and of a people who seek to be friends of this God. Theologically, Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the anointed one who most definitively and fully reveals God. Jesus is God become human. The story of Jesus is paradigmatic for Christian moral living. To be a Christian is to identify with the story of Jesus and with others who have done so. âžç What are some challenges to using Scripture in moral reflection? 1. Christian ethics is not identical to biblical ethics. The ethics expressed in Scripture differs from the faithful use of Scripture in ethical reflection. In other words, the ethical practices, rules, and norms as they were communicated to the original audiences for which the Scriptures were written are not entirely identical to those of faithful Christians who live today. Faithfulness to the Scriptures requires translating them so that they are brought to life in the present rather than frozen as a lifeless museum relic from the past. 2. There are a variety of voices and visions in the

Scriptures. They can appear to conflict with each other. Ex. Jesus doesn't seem to embrace the violence in the Old Testament. 3. Differences in historical contexts. Ex. When the Scriptures were written, nuclear bombs, computers, and modern medical technologies did not exist. Again, a slap with the left hand does not mean the same thing as it did during the time of Jesus (see Wink). 4. Multiplicity of possible interpretations. The texts of Scriptures allow for many different interpretations. Moreover, it is possible that two different interpretations can both be true to the text in question because each can shed different light on the text. ¿ç What are some of the ways of dealing with those challenges? 1. Attend to 4 related tasks of interpretation

- a. Exegetical Examine the original historical setting and audience in order to reconstruct the original meaning(s) of the text. What did it seek to convey to its original audience? Ex. Turn the other cheek (see Wink).
- b. Interpretative What might texts mean for us today? Use analogy to catch the rhyme and message of text and translate it into our context so that it comes to life.
- c. Methodological
  - i. Employ a method for selecting and prioritizing texts. Which texts trump others? Ex. Does Jesus story inform all other texts?
  - ii. Use organizing, theological themes found in Scriptures as tools for bringing together different texts around the theme. William C. Spohn gives six examples of organizing themes or ways of approaching Scripture as a(n)
    - i) expression of God's commands;
    - ii) moral reminder;
    - iii) call to liberation
    - iv) revelation of what God is doing
    - v) call to discipleship; and
    - vi) invitation to respond to God's love.
 How does an understanding of God's liberating intent provide an interpretive framework for Wink?
  - iii. Resist reducing the Bible to a single, univocal voice by acknowledging its

complexity. The richness and complexity of the Scriptures calls for a correspondingly complex, flexible range of interpretive strategies. d. Theological What understandings of God do the Scriptures reveal and how does critical, disciplined examination of our faith help us to interpret text? Draw upon the work of theological scholars and "ordinary" theologians (people trying to understand their faith).

2. Respect Scripture's primary function as a narrative that shapes moral character. Scripture shapes character by narrating who God is and who we are to be in response to God. Allow Scriptures to school the whole person—i. e., imagination, emotion, worldview, loyalties, intentions, etc. Allow Scriptures to MEDIATE the relation between self and world such that it forms one's imaginative landscape and serves as a window to the world. Corollary: Treat the secondary moral aspects of Scripture, such as moral norms and rules, as secondary by interpreting them light of the primary narrative that reveals Divine and human character. Ask questions such as "What purposes and values do the rules serve in light of the story?" "How can we apply the rules to enable us to become the kind of people that the story calls us to be?" Ex. Thou shall not kill. How does the story of Jesus reveal the fullest meaning of this command? Does the story reveal that the command calls us to be peacemakers?

3. Avoid biblical fundamentalism and proof-texting. a. Biblical fundamentalism("BF") is attempting to apply the words of the Bible literally without accounting for historical differences (and thus bypassing exegesis altogether.) BF reduces Christian ethics to biblical ethics, treats Biblical texts as if they are self-interpreting, and/or ignores the role of tradition, reason, and experience in Scriptural interpretation. One can avoid BF by interpreting

the specific words and rules of Scripture in light of its larger narratives and seeking mutual correlation of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. b. Proof-texting ("PF") is starting with a moral view that is arrived at independently of Scripture (through some other means) and turning to Scripture for the sole purpose of finding a text to prove what you already believe. PF makes Scriptures morally irrelevant because the proof-texter does not allow herself to be shaped by Scripture. To avoid PF one must listen to the witness of Scripture in a way that allows it to shape one's character and moral views

4. Community & Tradition Inspired, communal texts require inspired, communal interpreters. Immerse yourself in a community that hands over a faithful tradition of seeking to live according to the Scriptures. Consult the wisdom of tradition and the communities through which it lives. Listen to its ongoing conversation about what Scripture means and test your interpretations against those of others (living and dead) deserving your respect.

5. Attend to all four sources as checks and balances upon each other. Christians ethical reflection draws upon four sources: Scripture, Reason, Tradition, Experience.

6. Spiritual practices: prayer, solidarity with the poor, and other spiritual disciplines can help one to hear what could not otherwise be heard in Scriptures.