Aquifer Analysis: Told and Untold Stories in Warwick Churches

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Abstract

The boundary between told and untold stories is a good place to observe practices of organizational storytelling and the process of moving from ‘untold’ to ‘told’ stories. Using a storied review by a team of UK churches, this chapter employs an aquifer image to examine which stories were drawn to the surface, which were not and who were key story-tellers. The review drew on the theological ideas of David F Ford and Grace Jantzen, and organizational thinking from Yiannis Gabriel, Gareth Morgan, David Sims and Karl Weick. This chapter analyses the review and implications for the processes of storytelling and sensemaking.

Keywords

Stories, untold stories, storytelling, narrative, sensemaking, Church of England, aquifer, analogy, metaphor, flourishing, sacramental.
Introduction

In his novel *The Prague Cemetery* (Eco, 2011), Umberto Eco employs the device of using three narrators – the Narrator (capital N) who is relaying the diary of the central character Captain Simonini, which itself has interjections by Abbé Dalla Piccola. It is unclear throughout whether the Abbé is the alter-ego of Simonini or a separate person. Both the Narrator and Abbé Dalla Piccola offer their glosses on the main story. This mischievous narrative wash raises questions about which storyteller the reader can trust. In effect *The Prague Cemetery* is a novel about the process of storytelling which teases its readers about who is telling the story and which sources are feeding into the main narrative so that we are never sure which account can be relied upon.

Every narrative involves a process of choice between possibilities, between those stories that are told and others that remain untold, and who makes those choices. This chapter is an account of how multiple stories were collected for an organizational review and provides an analysis of which were ‘told’, which remained ‘untold’ and how those choices came about. Eco’s novel has a single author disguising himself in different voices for the purpose of story as entertainment, whereas this account is one author seeking to identify different voices for the purpose of story as organizational sensemaking (Weick 1995).

The image of image of an aquifer is used to explore the process of filtering told and untold stories from the pool of narrative communities, applying it to a worked example of a storied review undertaken in 2010 by a group of Warwick churches, where I was Team Rector. This metaphorical approach is informed by Janet Martin Soskice’s understanding of metaphor as: ‘speaking of one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another (Soskice 1985: 49). Her definition shares a
good deal of common ground with the approach outlined by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who argue similarly that the ‘essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5) Later they broaden this definition by talking about understanding ‘one domain of experience’ in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 117) and these domains of experience are conceptualised as ‘experiential gestalts’ which are structured wholes recurrent within human experience. According to Lakoff and Johnson metaphors play a key role in the coherent organization of our experience, which extends into the world of organizations.

The use of analogy and metaphor is widely attested in organizational literature, for example in understanding the nature of organizations (Morgan 1997), forms of strategy (Cummings and Wilson 2003) and types of leadership (Alvesson and Spicer 2011). An aquifer is a body of permeable rock which can contain or transmit water and in the process of the water flowing underground and rising to the surface it is filtered. Water is also a frequent image for many aspects of organizational life. Morgan uses it to describe organizational change (Morgan 1988 and 1997), Cummings to portray the process of managing change (2002) and Weick uses the notion of filtering in describing the process of organizational sensemaking (1995).

Interestingly, he also uses an explicitly geological image when outlining his understanding of the overall process of sensemaking:

Research and practice in sensemaking needs to begin with a mindset to look for sensemaking, a willingness to use one’s own life as data, and a search for those outcroppings and ideas that fascinate. (Weick 1995: 191 – my italic)

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1 I have variously considered water as a poetic metaphor for change (Roberts 1997), a theoretical metaphor for change (Roberts, 2002) and a practical metaphor for change (Roberts 2008).
In writing this chapter I needed to address the question of whether places and people described here should be done so anonymously. I thought about using the fictional name of ‘Greyden’ for Warwick and as a reference to the opening chapter of *The Prague Cemetery* (‘A Passerby on that Grey Morning’). However to my mind it was important, in Weick’s terms, to use outcroppings from one’s own life so that others might be free to come to these stories and openly critique this narrative. Names of individuals have been omitted but this account is of real places located at real points in time.

Turning then to the guiding metaphor, *Figure 1* describes one example of an aquifer which gives an idea of the ways in which water is stored in porous rock beneath the earth’s surface and how it interacts with other geological features within which it is set. This chapter uses the natural feature as an analogy for the ways in which stories can be filtered in organizations so that some are ‘told’ whilst others remain ‘untold’. We need to keep in mind that, like all forms of language, analogy and metaphor have their limitations. Morgan has described metaphor as a kind of ‘constructive falsehood’ which has ‘an inherently dialectical quality that binds truth and falsehood into the same process, creating powerful insights that, if taken too literally or too far, can become counter-productive’ (Morgan 1996: 232). In this chapter the aquifer’s vertical dynamic of water passing through a process of filtration will remain the principle focus for this image as a means of understanding the filtration from untold to told stories. Of course, the image could be extended into exploring how stories might flow horizontally as underground streams or rivers across the surface, be held as standing water, or be sites of conflict as water itself can be fought over as a valuable resource. But that would takes us well beyond a single chapter and the scope of the original paper.
It is worth noting that although the chapter is about how a group of six churches was asked to review their work, it is not a theological reflection on that process. Rather it seeks to analyze how it came to be that some stories were told whereas others remained untold. It is in three parts: (1) Organizational Backstories – examines some of the narrative context for the review; (2) Aquifer Analysis of the Review – applying the aquifer analogy to the told and untold stories of that were collected; (3) Aquifer Filters – identifying some of the filters of organizational storytelling that were in play during this process, in particular: (i) The Storyteller, (ii) Other Participants, (iii) Potential Audiences, and (iv) Wider Narrative Culture.

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2 Used with permission from the Regional District of Nanaimo (BC, Canada), artwork by Richard Franklin
The Church of England

For those not familiar with the structure of the Church of England, a brief outline might be helpful. Its website states: “The Church of England is organised into two provinces; each led by an archbishop (Canterbury for the Southern Province and York for the Northern) ... Each province is built from dioceses. There are 43 in England and ... each diocese is divided into parishes. The parish is the heart of the Church of England. Each parish is overseen by a parish priest (usually called a vicar or rector). From ancient times through to today, they, and their bishop, are responsible for the 'cure of souls' in their parish. That includes everyone. And this explains why parish priests are so involved with the key issues and problems affecting the whole community.” http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure.aspx

One of the untold stories hidden in this official statement is that within those 43 dioceses there is an evolving organizational complexity that includes: elected bodies (one diocesan synod for each diocese plus several local or deanery synods), clergy with managerial roles (bishops, archdeacons, area deans), and executive officers (diocesan secretaries, directors of finance, legal and HR advisors). Each diocese configures these roles in slightly different ways but Figure 2 gives a general overview of this structure and how stories move within it:
Some parishes are clustered together in teams or groups. This has been done in an *ad hoc* manner, so there is no nationally recognized system or structure for such clusters as each diocese has gone about this in its own way. There have been some official reports and guidelines but the fact that the most up-to-date report listed on the website at the time of writing is *Good Practice in Group and Team Ministry* published in 1991 highlights not only the lack of structure but that this area of collective church life seems to be noticeably under-researched with this chapter being one of the very few pieces of detailed, published analysis of team ministry in the Church of England.

**The Warwick Team**

The new Warwick Team came into being in 2003 consisting of four Anglican parishes (All Saints, St Mary’s, St Nicholas and St Paul’s) and a conventional district

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3 A research project into cathedrals, team ministries and amalgamation of benefices has been established at the University of Durham but has yet to post results from its work, see Church Growth Research Programme at [http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/cathedrals_amalgamations](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/cathedrals_amalgamations) (accessed 10th March 2014)
served by a Local Ecumenical Partnership (Christ Church). This succeeded the old Warwick Team of 1976, which had brought together Christ Church, St Mary’s and St Nicholas as a single parish. The new Team was established with five stipendiary (salaried) clergy, each responsible for one place of worship, plus a designated team-wide role. At the time of the review in 2010, one of these posts was vacant (St Nicholas) following the early retirement of the Team Vicar based there, which was the stimulus for an appraisal of how the Team was working. A review of the new Warwick Team and Budbrooke Parish was a diocesan requirement for a new appointment.

In 2003 Budbrooke was in a different administrative unit (Deanery and Archdeaconry) and, although the then Team Rector met with certain parish representatives to explore joining the new team, there appeared to be a mutual agreement that the institutional complexities were too great at that time for the parish to join. Since that meeting Budbrooke has become part of the Warwick and Leamington Deanery and a new stipendiary appointment was made in 2005 with a view to the parish exploring the possibility of becoming part of the Warwick Team. Some of the institutional complexities remain but the relationship between Team and Parish has grown over time and the Review has played a significant role in that development. We turn to examine that review in more detail.

**Aquifer Analysis of the Review**

This section is my account of key aspects of the review process, which led to the finished document. In addition, it includes my analysis of some of the untold stories that did not rise to the surface through the narrative aquifer.
The review document is clear about the ambiguity which greeted the original request for such a review: ‘The proposal for a review was met with a degree of concern within the Warwick Team given that there had already been a number of recent opportunities for self-examination and appraisal – including the setting up of the Team itself, the mapping of the Team’s ministry onto the Deanery values in 2006 and individual reviews (e.g. the creation of a parish profile for Budbrooke in 2005 and the review of Christ Church for its Revised Declaration of Intent and Constitution in 2006). This unease was expressed in the observation that we were frequently being asked to “dig up the plant and examine the roots in order to see how it was growing”.’ (A Review of the Warwick Team & Budbrooke Parish, 2010: 4 – hereafter referred to as Review 2010.)

However, two of my clergy colleagues were more enthusiastic about such a project providing we could bring a narrative approach to the undertaking, so they were asked to prepare a brief for such a storied review. Their position paper stated:

All communities hold their share of foundational stories and myths, and many of these stories are held in common. However, individual takes on these stories can be quite different. This can become problematic when a community considers its identity and its mission. If key members of the community are working from different foundational stories (a different sense of how they began, where they are, and where they’re going) then looking at who we are and what we are doing can be fraught with unforeseen anxiety and tension. Unless handled sensitively, tension between individuals and groups as they strive to promote their story as the ‘correct one’ can lead to quieter voices being marginalised, and others being entirely alienated by the process.

(Review, 2010: 4)
The document went on to set out four questions they felt the review should address:

- *Where we’ve been.*
- *Where we are.*
- *What makes us ‘tick’ (personal skills, knowledge and experience)*
- *Where we’re going and how the team can best be configured to serve God and all of God’s children in this place. (Review, 2010: 4-5)*

The Warwick Team and Budbrooke Parish would then create an exhibition and account of our stories which would weave ‘personal narratives with [church] community narratives and wider community narratives’ and would ‘encourage people to bring something of their own story and faith journey, passions and interests in prose or picture form’ *(Review, 2010: 5).*

A formal proposal was taken to the Bishop and after some discussion it was agreed to proceed with this narrative approach provided we could find an external consultant to moderate the project. We found a consultant from the Cass Business School who agreed to fulfill this role and who had a professional interest in narrative approaches to organizations and leadership. In the event the Bishop made a further response to our proposal, asking us to address four additional questions:

- *What does the ministry and mission of the Church in the town of Warwick as a whole require at this point in time?*
- *What makes for the flourishing of the Church and what is the shape of ministry to best serve this?*
- *How can we help to ensure that the best use is being made of the resources available to the Team?*
- *In what ways may the Team serve the Diocese beyond Warwick?*

These were noticeably different to the four questions that we had identified and in addition, he provided a diagram for how he saw the review progressing *(Figure 3):*
These questions changed the framework for the review because in addition to facilitating a process of listening to each other’s stories, we also had to provide responses to these more specific queries. The self-description and evaluation, together with the external audit effectively became the review document which sought to bring told stories within the Warwick Team and Budbrooke Parish into conversation with the Bishop’s questions. In the course of encouraging certain stories to surface through a process of listening, recording and discussion, other stories remained untold. There were three levels of told and untold stories: A) individual communities’ own narratives; B) organizational metanarrative; and C) the review document’s final narrative. The image of the aquifer can help in configuring the different narrative strata, see Figure 4:
This analogy will now be used to explore told and untold stories within the context of the review, before going on to examine how stories from the narrative pools were filtered into the final review document. In my capacity as Team Rector, I met with each of the church councils to listen to their accounts of how the expanded Warwick Team came into being; how they came to join it, or not (as in the case of Budbrooke Parish) and what their experience was of being/not being part of the Team. With the permission of each council the conversations were recorded and I also had a long telephone conversation with my predecessor who had brought the new Team into being, during which I made notes. In addition to the process of listening to the communal stories, I also sought each council’s responses to the Bishop’s four questions.

I wrote up those meetings in a draft report, that wove together congregational stories and their responses to those questions, which I took to a meeting of clergy colleagues for their comments and critique. It was also sent to our external moderator
at this stage for his observations. Afterwards, I re-worked aspects of the review before taking that to an open meeting of the six church councils to which all interested parties were invited for their reflections and appraisal. The document was re-worked once more as a final draft, which was presented again to colleagues before being sent to the Bishop, with the caveat that: ‘this document is intended to stand alongside the exhibition of the churches’ ministry’\(^4\) which was being prepared for the Bishop’s visit later that month.

The final version of the review is a public document for the Bishop and those churches involved in the process itself. In terms of the aquifer analogy it is the ‘surface’ or that place where a number of the organizational stories emerged into the open. The review itself is stratified, containing six sections: (i) Introduction, (ii) Our Stories & the Bishop’s Questions, (iii) Future Options, (iv) Summary & Conclusion to the Questions, (v) Questions & Responses from the Congregational Meeting, (vi) Conclusion. Each response under section (ii) included three parts: a background statement, an account of the discussion at the church councils, and a summary response to the specific question. Using the aquifer analogy this chapter will explore three levels of told and untold storytelling in the Review – communal narrative (A), organizational metanarrative (B) and the Review’s own narrative (C). In particular, we will examine the relationship between the told story (the Review itself) and some of the untold stories which remained in the aquifer and did not make it to the surface.

A) Individual communities’ own narratives

One of the parts of the final review document where its narrative nature is richest can be found in the conversations relating to Question 2: *What makes for the flourishing of the Church and what is the shape of ministry to best serve this?*

\(^4\) Correspondence to the Bishop dated 5\(^{th}\) July 2010.
Discussion of this issue was framed by the independently developed, theological writings of Irish Anglican David F. Ford and American feminist Grace Jantzen on the nature of ‘flourishing’. We shall examine below the implications of this upon the process of organizational storytelling within the context of the review but, in different ways, both Ford (Ford 1999) and Janzten’s (Graham 2009) work introduced themes of birth and death, which informed the Review’s overall narrative arc.

Thus, in the account of the discussion regarding Question 2, the Review states: ‘The death of the first Warwick Team (Christ Church, St Mary’s and St Nicholas) and the birth of the new Warwick Team (All Saints, Christ Church, St Mary’s, St Nicholas and St Paul’s) are remembered as protracted and painful. There are a small number of people on the present Team Council who recall the setting up of the first Warwick Team in 1976 and how All Saints and St Paul’s opted to remain as individual parishes but many more can remember the labour pains of the new Warwick Team and some of the words used about that period of transition from death to birth give a sense of how people felt at the time. For instance, one member of the Team Council describes the process as “fraught” and another spoke about the “animosity” of those discussions. A member of Christ Church depicted it as a “battle” and the final Team Rector of the first Warwick Team says that the clergy team he inherited at the start of the process of exploring a new team was “horrendously dysfunctional”.’ The Review continues, ‘Whatever the rights and wrongs of these perceptions, such recollections paint a consistent picture of a team facing conflict amongst laity and clergy. At this distance little is gained by reliving those events but it is agreed this was not a time when either the Team or individual churches were particularly ‘flourishing’. However
it was a time which had a significant impact on the type of team which came to birth’ (Review, 2010: 13).

In this section of the Review we can see a great deal of bitter water bubbling up from the narrative aquifer. The animosity referred to in the Review is indicative of the lingering sense of mistrust, which was part of the untold story about the birth of the Warwick Team. A good example can be found in the early part of the meeting with the church council at Christ Church, which is a local ecumenical partnership on a 1970s housing estate built on the edge of Warwick between the town and the by-pass. Many of their early questions at that meeting reflected concerns about being on the geographical and ecclesiological margins. In particular, the council wanted to know: what organizational definitions were in play (“what is ‘the Church’ that’s in mind with the first question – the Anglican Church or the wider Church”\(^5\)). Some warned about too much emphasis being given to the churches at the centre of Warwick (“danger of focusing on the Church as located in the centre – it should be broader than this”). Whilst others asked were there hidden agendas (“we are on a journey towards a destination we don’t know yet – does someone else have a destination in mind?”) The council was clearly concerned about Christ Church’s relative smallness (“worry about sense of competition”) and the implications any review might have for Christ Church’s future. Similar and additional anxieties were expressed in the other meetings but none were recorded in detail within the final review document. They are part of the pool of untold stories, the narrative aquifer, lying beneath the report yet with the potential to still irrigate the organizational landscape. At this point the process of filtration comes into sharp focus – who filters these stories so that some become told whilst others remain untold? Why and by what criteria are such decisions made? To

\(^5\) Quotations from my notes of that meeting.
what purpose are these choices between told and untold stories being put? We shall identify some of the key elements of how stories are filtered through this narrative aquifer in the final part of this chapter.

However, it is worth noting here that in this account of the discussion surrounding the Bishop’s Question 2 (What makes for the flourishing of the Church and what is the shape of ministry to best serve this?) we can detect a mixture of what Emery Roe calls ‘story’ and ‘counterstory’ (Roe, 1994). Significantly Roe describes his approach to the analysis of narrative as ‘hydraulic’ and it begins with detailed analysis of the story or stories being presented in a certain situation before proceeding to identify and examine those narratives which run counter to the prevailing story (counterstories) or those that are not included within the dominant narrative (nonstories).

A good example of this dynamic lies on the surface narrative of the review in the statement that: ‘the final Team Rector of the first Warwick Team says that the clergy team he inherited at the start of the process of exploring a new team was “horrendously dysfunctional”. Whatever the rights and wrongs of these perceptions, such recollections paint a consistent picture of a team facing conflict amongst laity and clergy’ (Review 2010: 13). There were some from that period who disputed the previous Team Rector’s account. Once again, there is a large pool of untold stories here. On coming into the role of Team Rector, I was struck by the fact that numerous stories were told by clergy and lay people alike testifying to the dysfunctionality of the Team that my predecessor inherited. Other clergy who have been Team Rectors or had experience of teams frequently attested to the severe friction which can exist in Anglican teams. Yet there were numerous other stories told about this time some of which painted diametrically opposite pictures of events.
Not only was it impossible at that distance to do due justice to these competing narratives and counter-narratives, I felt that in my role as ‘storyteller’ I had to provide a coherent narrative for all the different constituencies ‘above ground’ and therefore filter the told and untold stories for those different audiences. It is clear, therefore, that a key filter in the aquifer model of organizational storytelling will be the judgments of the storyteller, which must themselves be open to scrutiny.

**B) Organizational meta-narrative**

In addition to the pools of local stories, we can extend this model of aquifer narrative analysis to an organization’s meta-narratives, in the sense that there will be a well of ‘grand’ stories which individuals and groups draw upon to make sense of their circumstances. This may include: documents of past times, organizational folklore, academic analysis, leadership myths and more. In the Church these will include scripture, magisterial teaching, theology, stories of the saints and teachers of the faith. Once again the filtered water, the choices made in this respect, will determine what grows on the organizational surface and what plants reach up through the institutional layers. In other words, there are told and untold stories at the level of meta-narrative where different filters could have been applied and alternative stories told.

As already noted, this review employed the convergent yet contrasting work of theologians David F. Ford and Grace Jantzen on the theme of flourishing to address one of the Bishop’s questions. The interaction of their thinking and the stories collected for the Review had a major impact on the final document. Jantzen was Professor of Religion, Culture and Gender at the University of Manchester until her death from cancer at the age of 57 in 2006. Ford has been Regius Professor of

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6 Or in academic terms reviewing ‘the literature’.
Divinity at Cambridge since 1991 and, amongst other things, is a significant theological voice in global Anglicanism.

The Review notes two key elements to Ford’s theological description of flourishing. First, the sacraments of baptism and eucharist are signs of birth and death – for example: (a) the birth and death of Christ; (b) the birth and death of the Church; (c) the dying and living of individual members of Christ’s body; (d) birth and death in congregational life. Second, from Ford’s perspective, the abundance of the eucharist and flourishing of human life means (in the words of the Review) ‘we have to take seriously the diversity of the Church and all its wider relationships’ (Review 2010 p12). This is what Ford calls living in a ‘multi-dimensional habitus’ which is ‘formed through repeated celebration of the eucharist and interweaving that with the rest of life’ (Ford, 1999: 4). The Review drew a link in this affirmation of diversity between notions of ‘flourishing’ and the model of a ‘mixed economy’ Church which had emerged from discussion of the Bishop’s first question: *What does the ministry and mission of the Church in the town of Warwick as a whole require at this point in time?*

A similar dynamic is at work in Grace Jantzen’s elaboration of ‘flourishing’ where she also identifies the importance of birth and death, and notes how to enter into the life of God involves a similar engagement with the web of our relationships. For Jantzen birth is more powerful than death and therefore: “Birth is the basis of every person’s existence, which by that very fact is always material, embodied, gendered, and connected with other human beings and with human history” (Jantzen quoted in Graham, 2009: 6). So once again the importance of human diversity is being underlined. According to Elaine Graham ‘flourishing’ is revealed in Jantzen’s writing as a “life well-lived” and by cultivating those virtues which promote “the values of life, creativity, diversity and justice” (Graham, 2009: 9).
In the Review Ford and Jantzen’s ideas drawn from the pool of theological metanarrative were brought together with Charles Hampden-Turner’s work on corporate culture – in particular, his ideas about socially destructive and creative circles, defined in this way: “Vicious and virtuous circles can be distinguished by whether the dilemmas or tensions within the circle are unreconciled and fiercely adversarial, or reconciled and synergized” (Hampden-Turner, 1994: 30).

The Team Review established the virtuous circle in Figure 5 for a flourishing team

![Figure 5: A Virtuous Circle for a Flourishing Team](Review, 2010 p 18)

The three parts of the circle were summarized as follows:

(a) **birth and death – sacramental lives**: Sacramental lives treat the embodied beginnings and endings (births and deaths) of individuals and groups with proper care and attention, recalling that all we are and all we have is through the grace of God.
(b) lives well-lived – sacramental living: Sacramental living recognises the place of God in the life and worship of others within the Body of Christ and in all Creation, which has its embodied beginning in God.

(c) diversity and individuality – sacramental community: Sacramental community is the Body of Christ in action seeking healthy relationships within the body and with the wider social body which we seek to serve. (Review, 2010 p 18)

This summary represents part of the theological narrative about flourishing that was told in the Review and was referred to directly by the Bishop when he came to preach at the exhibition on 22\textsuperscript{nd} July.\textsuperscript{7} Other stories could have been told. For instance, it could have begun by examining historical research into the life and work of Jesus and its implications for the contemporary Church (Wright, 1996); or by recent understandings of the Church’s mission and their implications for notions of flourishing (Bosch, 1992) or through influential writing on ideas about church leadership and analysis of its embedded principles of success (Hybels, 2002). These possibilities and many others remain in that part of the aquifer of untold stories for the review document as they were not part of localized storytelling (A) which was the main narrative source of the review.

C) The review’s final ‘narrative’

Part of the untold story of the Review includes two significant comments from our external auditor about the first draft which were not included in the final version. In his annotated copy of the original edition, against the Review statement that reads: “One of the aims of this review is to provide a rich, narrative account of how the Warwick Team and Budbrooke see their individual and collective ministries at this point in time,” the auditor has written: ‘But there has hardly been any narrative’

\textsuperscript{7} This is my personal recollection. As part of writing this chapter I approached the Bishop's office for the text of his sermon but no copy of his notes had been retained.
(statement and external auditor’s comments from page 21 of the first draft of the review document).

Then further on, when the review considers “Future Options” it states on page 26: “if we continue this journey and our story together along such lines there are various issues which could usefully be addressed and examples include:

i. Does the Warwick Team wish to continue as a team?

ii. If the response is ‘yes’ does this review provide a helpful foundation on which to build?

iii. How can we develop the Team?

iv. How to strengthen the Team – Possibilities might including existing ideas (Take 5, Lent groups) and new suggestions (taking a theme each year to explore individually and collectively – Finding God has been suggested for 2011)

v. What should we do about the clergy Team-wide roles?

vi. How should the relationship between the Team and Budbrooke be nurtured?”

Once again the auditor observes: ‘A good set of conclusions, though the narrative idea has disappeared’ (External auditor’s comment on page 26 of the first draft of the review document).

The auditor is right at one level – the review became less concerned with collecting, collating and analyzing stories within the Team as it progressed. I would contend that the process of review became an important part of the story in itself and the final review document was a means of recording some of that narrative and telling a version of its story. An important comment at this stage of Review was the auditor’s observation that: discovering that some people were expecting to find a single coherent story for the Team is a ‘big diagnostic finding’. The reason for this is
because within organizations (including the Church) ‘single purposes are always mistaken’ (Review, first draft, p 9). In other words, we became aware that we were a diverse group seeking to tell various stories from different perspectives some of which overlapped. A key aspect in the Review’s narrative approach was to allow as many voices as possible a say in the telling of the story.

The model of team working that the review then identified was that of a ‘mixed economy’ approach. The term was being used at the time by the Archbishop of Canterbury to encompass traditional organizational forms and ‘fresh expressions’ (Williams, 2010 – quoted in the Review 2010: 11, 19 and 29) but it seemed to many of those involved in the ministry of the Warwick Team and Budbrooke Parish that the mixed economy analogy also encapsulated our organizational relationships. It was in itself, a metaphor that would work with the diverse stories and counterstories (Roe 1994) which had been filtered through the narrative aquifer of the review. The congregational meeting on 10th June 2010 explored the collective answers that we had provided to the Bishop’s questions in the context of a mixed economy team.

We submitted the final Review document to the Bishop who came to the exhibition of their ministry mounted by the six churches but there was never any further or formal response to the Review as originally envisaged (Figure 3 above). One can speculate on the reasons why there was never any official reaction. One possibility is that the Bishop and his senior staff were entirely content with the outcome and saw no need to proceed further. Another is that they were happy enough and saw no need for further action. Alternatively, it may have lodged in the middle of a busy in-tray and never rose far enough up the ever-lengthening list of jobs that any bishop needs to address. Or it may be that the approach taken by the Review was very
different to the Diocesan approach of identifying and encouraging the eight essential qualities for growing healthy churches.8

So in the absence of a response from diocesan senior staff and a conclusion as envisaged by the original process, the intriguing question presents itself: was the review a told or untold story? In one sense it was clearly told as many voices spoke and were recorded sharing their perspectives. Yet in another sense, it is a story that seems to have no clear audience and no conclusion. In terms of the analogy of the aquifer (*Figure 4*) the water has emerged from below ground but has not risen through the organization to become part of the organizational culture.

**Aquifer Filters for Told and Untold Stories**

This chapter has examined three pools of told and untold stories in the process of reviewing the Warwick Team and Budbrooke Parish: A) narratives from within the communities; B) the organizational metanarrative; and C) the Review’s own narrative. The final part of this chapter will develop the aquifer analogy further and explore what kind of filters are at work, sifting those told and untold stories as they rise to the surface. We can identify four such filters: i) the storyteller; ii) other participants; iii) the potential audience; iv) wider narrative culture.

**The Storyteller**

At one level, the main narrative voice in the review process was mine, in my capacity as Team Rector and principle author of the story. My research experience of organizational storytelling and sensemaking for my PhD meant that this was a process I was comfortable with (Roberts 1999). If my background had been electrical engineering or international development it is likely that the Review would have

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8 Empowering leadership, gift-orientated ministry, passionate spirituality, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-orientated outreach, loving relationships and functional structures.
taken a very different course. However, throughout the process of review there were also other significant contributors, e.g. papers prepared by Team clergy, the Bishop’s four questions, the experiences garnered from the various church councils and the input from the open congregational meeting.

Nevertheless, choices were made and some stories were included whilst others were omitted. A good example is provided by the meeting with St Paul’s Church Council. A preparatory paper for the review described five models of the Church drawn from the work of Avery Dulles – institution, herald, servant, sacrament and mystical communion (Dulles, 1987). The image of the Church as a servant, attending to and serving its local community was a significant part of the emerging narrative stream. At the St Paul’s meeting members of the council spoke about how that church began life as the place of worship for the servants of those who attended the large civic church of St Mary’s but in the process of reclaiming this aspect of their story they speak of how the “servants’ church” now sees itself as the “servant church” serving their local community.9 Speaking personally, this vignette appeals to me at many levels – not least with its sharp word play and clever juxtaposition of organizational imagery. Yet as the narrative arc of the Review progressed this significant story for the community at St Paul’s remained untold within the much broader narrative of the story I was seeking to tell about the Team.

Other Participants

The filter of other participants can work in different ways, so it is perfectly possible for various storytelling contributors to hold stories back because they either do not want to be known or feel awkward about putting them into the public arena. In the memorable words of the then Secretary State for Defense, Donald Rumsfeld: they

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9 From the Team Rector’s notes of the meeting at St Paul’s Church.
are the ‘unknown unknowns – the ones we don’t know we don’t know’ (press briefing on February 12th, 2002)\textsuperscript{10}. Of course, in the process of analyzing organizational storytelling, it may be possible to pick up hints about these hidden narrative streams and with careful searching discover their courses together with the springs and tributaries which feed them. In the course of such exploration untold stories are told. They are revealed and opened to scrutiny.

However, the withholding of untold stories may not be such a conscious or deliberate act. In the meeting with the Budbrooke Church Council I raised the matter of the meeting that St Michael’s had with the previous Team Rector at the turn of the millennium over the creation of the new Team. All those around the table who had been involved with the church at that time were adamant that no such discussions had taken place.\textsuperscript{11} This was in direct contradiction to the account given to me by my predecessor and the story which had been in widespread circulation within the Warwick Team. Since there seemed to be no obvious reason for either church council members or the Team Rector to be dissembling about this matter, what did this told/untold story mean? It could be that PCC members had forgotten the meeting or that both sides had misremembered. Perhaps the Team Rector had had a meeting with the previous Vicar of Budbrooke, who had now moved on. As the facilitator of the Review, the significance of this story was that in my mind, during the process of reviewing the Warwick Team and Budbrooke Parish, we would be returning to a prior conversation and picking up earlier threads of a discussion. In the event there was no shared story here and what I had thought might be significant common ground was filtered out of the Review’s narrative and became a ‘nonstory’ (Roe 1994).

\textsuperscript{10} http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2636 (accessed 5\textsuperscript{th} March 2013)
\textsuperscript{11} From the Team Rector's notes of the meeting at St Michael's Church.
Potential Audiences

There would appear to be a number of potential audiences for this review. Most immediately the six churches, their church councils and their congregations. Another key audience was the Bishop and his senior staff. Other potential onlookers would be more distant and might include posterity – would the Team churches return to this document a decade hence to consider these discussions and what had changed in the meantime? And what about other teams in the Church of England – could this review contribute to the debates about team-working elsewhere?

As ‘lead’ writer of the Review, I was conscious of all four potential audiences acting as filters on the narrative. So for instance in terms of the six churches, a principle narrative aim was to encourage as many voices as possible to be represented in the final draft so that there was potential for many untold stories to percolate through aquifer’s filters. The Bishop’s questions were another important filter because they focused the Review and storytelling in a certain direction. There was potentially less opportunity to range over the full terrain of the narrative aquifer and as the storyteller I faced a choice – should I extend the project to include the fullest collation of organizational narrative and then subsequently engage with the Bishop’s questions or should I try and run both tasks together?

My judgment in this matter was that over time these two filters might end up in conflict, i.e. if we extended the project the patience of the first audience might be exhausted (the churches) before achieving what was required by the second (the Bishop). Therefore, it would be prudent to run the two together.

Wider Narrative Culture

The aquifer of what might be called a narrative ontology has many streams, which can be seen in a number of detailed analyses of western culture and belief. For
example, when Charles Taylor asks rhetorically: why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy but inescapable? He responds: ‘One important part of the picture is that so many features of their world told in favour of belief, made the presence of God seemingly undeniable. I will mention three, which will play a part in the story I want to tell’ (Taylor, 2007: 25 – my italics). Similarly, Brad S. Gregory’s sweeping account of the same period includes the statement: ‘As we shall see in filling out this story, the secularization of knowledge in the West was not inevitable … it was a thoroughly contingent process derived from human interactions that involved assumptions, institutions, metaphysical beliefs, the exercise of power, and human desires beyond the desire to discover and to learn. The dominant narrative of modern Western intellectual history, of course, suggests otherwise’ (Gregory, 2012: 307 – my italics). My aim is not engage directly with Taylor and Gregory’s different retellings of the last five to six hundred years of Western thought but to note their overt narrative framework.¹²

The metanarrative framing of communal storytelling is, as George Mead contends, biographical¹³ but it is much more than that. It extends into the deepest wells of culture and identity. Therefore, although this review may be about six churches located in a specific place and time, its narrative context is extensive. In addition to streams of story identified in the work of Taylor and Gregory, there are a number of narrative flows operating here. These include: (i) biblical narrative streams – how do participants in the review understand Old Testament concepts (such as being the People of God, the Kingship of God, the role of the Prophets), (ii) New Testament developments (such as Jesus’ ministry, the emergence of Paul and the early

¹² For a critique of the ‘narrative turn’ particularly in North America see Salmon 2010.
¹³ ‘History is nothing but biography, a whole series of biographies’ (Mead, 1962: 36) cf Weick's comment about using ‘one's own life as data’ above (Weick, 1995: 191).
church); (iii) theological narrative streams – understanding of the Church (ecclesiology), ministry and priesthood; (iv) management narrative streams – how are local churches and church leadership understood in terms of contemporary organizational thinking? All of these are being filtered here so that some accounts are told, whilst other stories remain untold.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has described how the Warwick Team and Budbrooke Parish set out to undertake a narrative review of their shared ministry in 2010. As the author of that review and one of the filters for the told and untold stories, I have sought to reflect critically on that process and bring to the surface some of those ‘nonstories’ (Roe 1994) that were originally omitted. This has involved exploring how the Bishop’s directive to identify: What makes for the flourishing of the Church and what is the shape of ministry to best serve this? (Review 2010: 5) was a significant narrative filter for A) individual stories; B) the organizational meta-narrative; and for C) the narrative of the review itself. From this, I have identified four further filters which might shape any process of organizational storytelling: i) the storyteller; ii) other participants; iii) the potential audience; iv) wider narrative culture.

This is not merely an esoteric matter for churches or other religious bodies. As Keith Grint reminds us, imagination: is ‘crucial in the construction of what may be the most important element of leadership: the community narrative … the sense of narrative that roots a community in the past, explains its present, and conjures up a future’ (Grint 2000: 14). The process of filtering organizational stories is fundamental to understanding organizations and to leading them. I noted earlier that presently there is little quantitative or qualitative research into how teams function within the Church
of England. Such a deficit must be urgently remedied in order to better understand both how such organizational storytelling works and what implications this has for leadership.

This chapter began with a reference to Umberto Eco’s work of fiction The Prague Cemetery. At one point in the novel the central character is receiving reports from two colleagues about their battles whilst fighting with General Garibaldi. Captain Simonini asks himself: ‘How can I rely on these two fanatics? They are young and this is their first experience of war. They had worshipped their General from the start and in their own way are storytellers like Dumas, embellishing their recollections so that all their geese are swans’ (Eco, 2011: 123). Through the device of getting Simonini to compare those reports of battle with the historical fictions of Alexandre Dumas, Eco is inviting us to reflect upon the whole process of reportage and storytelling, and to be aware of the filters that are at work as we read narratives of any kind. In this account my aim has been to give an open and critical account of some of the ways in which stories filter to the surface from one particular narrative aquifer, providing lakes and ponds where both (to use Eco’s analogy) geese and swans will continue to swim.
Bibliography and References


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