

## **Have I got all the story I need?**

*A reflection on the Godly Play story of the Great Family by biblical scholar Ela Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska*

The first time I heard the Great Family story, I was mesmerized. In the course of my training as a biblical scholar, the charm of the narratives from chapters 12-15, 24 of Genesis became replaced with a critical distance. At the Godly Play session, they returned to me as, well, a story: a deeply satisfying sense-giving arrangement of events, set in a vividly depicted scenery, populated with characters to whom I could relate. However, the conclusion (“This went on for thousands and thousands of years until your grandmothers and grandfathers had children... Now you are part of that great family which has become as many as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand in the desert”) left me with a sense that something crucial was left out, that I didn’t have all the story I needed. I spent the entire creative response time filling this gap.

In the literal sense, the Great Family is Abraham’s progeny. The nation promised by God to Abraham is the nation that naturally originates from Abraham and Sarah, and to this day comprises those who identify themselves as their descendants. The Jewish people have held these stories sacred and identity-giving for thousands of years. They ensured their preservation and transmission, first orally, then as written documents, compiled into one book in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when the Judean community was exiled to Babylon, or shortly after they returned to Judah. The Jewish people have read and revered this book as scripture ever since.

The listeners to the Godly Play story are members of the great family in a different, spiritual sense: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3.29). It is Christ who, through faith, gives us the present of the membership in the great family and the participation in its story. From this perspective, the generations of those who preceded us, mentioned in the script, do not necessarily refer to our natural family, but rather to those who have passed on to us the life of faith (there can but does not have to be an overlap).

I really enjoyed the intense process of my creative response. Its material product, a particular arrangement of fridge poetry magnets, served its purpose and disappeared, and I was left with a lasting sense of thankfulness. I reconciled myself with the idea that perhaps the crucial component of the story was left out intentionally, that I can trust the Godly Play script, appreciate the time I had to reflect on it and cherish the spiritual fruit of this process. After all, among the “unspoken lessons” of Godly Play, the discreet, understated Christology is central. Moreover, it reflects the quiet, hide-and-seek presence of Christ in the world and in the Church, requiring our mindfulness, openness and activity in the process of seeking and discovering. But I was left wondering...

I wonder how the realization that our participation in the sacred stories is a present can influence the way in which we are present to the stories and tell them to others.

I wonder how such perspective on the Great Family story can change our thinking about what it means to be family... nation... Church...