

SCRIPTURE IN THE CLASSROOM: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF CURRENT PRACTICES AND A PROPOSAL FOR A NARRATIVE CHANGE

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Some interpretative approaches used in explaining Scripture in religious education emphasize moral instruction or literal interpretation, often without sufficient attention to context, dialogue, or learners lived experiences. Interpreting Scripture in this way may unintentionally reinforce forms of violence such as exclusion, gender bias, and marginalization. To address this gap, I propose using the Narrative Change Approach (NCA), a framework originally developed in peacebuilding, communication, and social advocacy. I will adapt NCA for Scripture pedagogy by operationalizing the Four Baskets method, which is a step-by-step application of the NCA process. Religious educators, using the Four Baskets model of NCA, can guide their students in examining these dominant Scripture narratives and reframe violent interpretations toward a more life-giving understanding of the word of God.

Keywords: *religious education, Scripture interpretation, Narrative Change Approach, Four Baskets model, violence in the classroom*

INTRODUCTION

In December 2024, Pope Francis urged theologians and educators to rethink how to think”¹ about the way the faith is

1. Pope Francis, “Address of the Holy Father to Participants in the International Congress on the Future of Theology,” Hall of Benediction, December 9, 2024, accessed November 6, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/december/documents/20241209-convegno-teologia.html>.

understood. I believe that this is a call to make the faith more responsive to the world's wounds and the cries of those on the margins. These words challenge theologians and religious educators to examine not only what they teach, but also how they teach. An important element in teaching religious education is the interpretation of Scripture, which, together with Tradition, forms one sacred deposit of the Christian faith.²

Many scholars, however, acknowledge that the interpretation of scripture has not always been life-giving. There are ways of interpreting Scripture that are used to justify violent conditions in the church and society. Studies of patristic exegesis, for instance, reveal how the story of Hagar in Genesis 16 was read through patriarchal presuppositions that silenced women and reinforced male dominance.³ Other scholars have also lamented how biblical women are frequently reduced to subordinate roles, perpetuating gender inequality within Christian thought.⁴ This problem does not undermine the authority of Scripture. It rather calls for a re-imagining of how Scripture is used and taught by and within the Church.

Pope Francis' challenge invites religious educators to move beyond static and uncritical methods that reproduce inherited biases. Instead, teaching should foster dialogue between faith and culture, reason and imagination, and Scripture and life. The Narrative Change Approach (NCA) responds well to this call. NCA

2. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (*Dei Verbum*) par. 10, November 18, 1965, accessed November 6, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html. Hereafter cited in the text as DV, with paragraph numbers.

3. See, for example, Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, 40th Anniversary ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022).

4. See, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), and Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

can be used to highlight the transformative nature of the Scripture. Using NCA's Four Basket model, it can help students see Scripture as truly life-giving by leading them to encounter the word of God not as a rigid moral code but as a living story that engages and shapes their identity, community, and actions.

This paper is divided into four parts. First, I look at and talk about some examples of religious education textbooks that may have harmful interpretations of Scripture to show how moralistic, or literalist readings may support subtle forms of violence. Second, I look at the theological and pedagogical roots of this problem considering what the Church teaches about how to read the Bible. Third, I will talk about the Narrative Change Approach (NCA), its educational and religious roots, and how to use its Four Baskets model in the classroom step by step. Finally, I reflect on the implications, strengths, and limitations of this proposal, particularly the need to integrate a more explicit Christocentric hermeneutic within the approach.

TRACES OF VIOLENCE IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Violence is understood in public health, human rights, and social theory not merely as deliberate physical harm. Johan Galtung, a peace theorist and "Father of Peace Studies," says that violence isn't just physical aggression. It can be structural when social systems stop people from reaching their full potential, and cultural when traditions or beliefs, such as religious beliefs and interpretations, support or make such inequality normal.⁵ For him,

5. Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (August 1990): 291, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>.

violent outcomes can be built into systems even if no one sets out with malevolent intent.⁶

As a religious educator who has taught for eight years in basic education and eleven years now in college, I have spent much of my professional life guiding students to encounter Scripture as a source of wisdom, hope, and moral insight. Over the years, I have also been asked to review numerous Christian Living Education or Catholic religion textbooks submitted to schools for evaluation and adoption. In this work, I have encountered examples of scripture interpretations that, although I believe are unintentional, I also consider as violent or harmful to students because they reinforce exclusion, unjust feelings of guilt, and harmful physical submissions to injustice. The following examples illustrate some of the interpretations I am referring to.

Sample 1. “Keeping God’s Day Holy (The Third Commandment)”

This lesson for Second Year High School students (now called Grade 8 under the K to 12 Curriculum) draws from Exodus 20:8-10 and uses the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2184–2185) to explain the meaning of the Lord’s Day. The authors build on Church teaching by adding their own interpretation, as shown below.

The institution of the Lord’s Day helps everyone to enjoy adequate rest and leisure to cultivate our familial, cultural, social, and religious lives. On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the

6. Johan Galtung, “Direct, Structural, and Cultural Forms of Violence and Peace,” in *Peace & Violence – What We Do*, Harvard Divinity School, accessed November 6, 2025, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/what-we-do/our-approach/peace-violence>.

faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day (CCC 2184-2185).

In addition to attending Mass, we are to focus the day on God and His gifts to us by refraining from "servile work", which is work that is necessary for a living.

This is opposed to "liberal work"—work that is recreational, relaxing, or performed out of charity for others.

By the same token, Catholics should refrain from putting others in the position of performing servile work on Sundays, too. Shopping, eating in restaurants, going to movies, etc., requires that others perform servile work at shops, restaurants, and cinemas. We are not to encourage others to break God's commandments.

However, there are some professions that require work on Sundays, such as some aspects of medicine, law enforcement, firefighting, etc. Such work is necessary or which serves charity. This is always allowable on Lord's Day, as charity is always the highest law and the very purpose of law.

Moreover, Sunday is traditionally consecrated by Christian piety to do good works and humble service of the sick and the elderly. Christians will also sanctify Sunday by devoting time and care to

their families and relatives. Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind, and meditation, which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life.⁷

I believe that this interpretation intends to promote reverence for the Sabbath and the importance of rest. However, the explanation risks fostering violence and exclusion. The use of the term “servile work,” carries a historical and classist undertone. This word can be disrespectful and oppressive. There are learners whose parents or guardians work on Sundays because of economic necessity. Teaching learners that engaging in commerce or leisure on Sundays “encourages others to break God’s commandments” can shame those whose livelihood depends on such a work schedule. Such an explanation can imply a moral judgment toward those who are forced to work on Sundays, even when their situation is shaped by social and economic inequality.

The description of Sunday as a time of “silence” and “cultivation of the mind” also assumes that all families have the privilege of rest and quiet. Many of our learners, however, do not have this luxury. They live in busy or noisy environments, or they must help their parents with household responsibilities. The emphasis on family life in this explanation may also exclude learners from nontraditional or broken families. I do not believe these biases are intentional. However, teachers must exercise pastoral and pedagogical care in explaining the faith. Students who are still discovering the meaning of their faith may feel guilty, left out, or inadequate. These forms of violence go against the spirit of the Third Commandment, which seeks to give all people rest, renewal, and dignity.

7. Constantina S. Arrogante, et al., *We Celebrate God’s Love, Foundations of Morality* (Quezon City, Philippines: Vibal Publishing House, Inc., 2010), 181.

Sample 2: “Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit”

Another example appears in a Grade 5 lesson that shows how the Holy Spirit strengthened Abraham in his faith and obedience to God, using the story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son. The explanation reads,

Whose parent would be willing, without any question, to sacrifice his/her own child, whom he/she loves so much? Abraham would, if the angel did not stop him from doing so. This reflects the great love, and trust Abraham has for God. In sacrificing His son, Abraham accepted a greater purpose from God. His love for God is not only his own act but a gift from the Holy Spirit, who is Love, enabling him to surpass the test. Why did the Holy Spirit move Abraham to perform such a difficult task? Who is the Holy Spirit that enabled him to give up the most precious thing in his life, surrendering everything to God?⁸

The presentation raises serious concerns despite the lesson’s goal to highlight Abraham’s trust and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Grade 5 students are still in the stage where they are developing their sense of safety, empathy, and moral reasoning. It can be morally and psychologically distressing for them if you ask them which parent would be willing to sacrifice their own child. Because children are still developing emotional regulation, moral reasoning, and a sense of safety, posing the question ‘Which parent would sacrifice their child?’ risks causing

8. Emerita Lorelie Y. Tapia, Aleli G. Katipunan, and Delia Paz A. Flores, *Signs of the Times 5* (Manila, Philippines: Rex Bookstore Inc, 2017), 5.

psychological distress. This is backed up by ethical research-with-children guidance and empirical work on children's moral dilemma experiences.⁹ This question also conflicts with the Christian understanding of the Spirit as the source of life, peace, and love, since it may suggest that the Spirit encourages violence or tragedy. The explanation attributes to the Holy Spirit the motivation for Abraham's willingness to kill his son, when, in fact, the biblical account presents this as a test of faith in which God ultimately prevents the sacrifice and rejects violence as an expression of devotion.

Similar to the first example, I do not think the authors intended this message to be harmful. Their purpose was clearly to demonstrate Abraham's faith and to connect it with the work of the Holy Spirit. But teachers need to be very careful when they teach young kids so that they understand that this story does not show obedience that hurts others as a model of faith. Instead, this scripture story reveals how God values life over sacrifice and who desires love that is trusting, not fearful. There is a danger that children might develop the mistaken idea that faith sometimes requires violent or painful acts to prove one's love for God. This is a misunderstanding that runs contrary to the Gospel image of God as compassionate and life-giving.

Sample 3: "Jesus' Law of Love"

A third example can be found in another Grade 8 textbook. The goal of this lesson is to show students how Jesus'

9. See United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Ethical Principles, Dilemmas and Risks in Collecting Data on Violence against Children: A Review of Available Literature*, (Technical Working Group on Data Collection on Violence against Children, Child Protection Monitoring & Evaluation Reference Group, UNICEF, October 2012), 50. PDF available at https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/EPDRCLitReview_193.pdf.

command to love goes beyond justice and even includes people who are hard to love. The textbook says,

If we are to love as Jesus did, our love goes beyond justice because He loves us still, even if we are sinners. Our love for our neighbor, then, should go beyond justice. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that we should no longer be a slave of the “an eye for an eye” mentality, rather, we should love even our enemies; He tells us that if somebody slaps us on the right cheek, we should offer the other cheek and if somebody asks us to walk with him for a mile, we should walk with him for another mile. This is love beyond justice. This is loving as Jesus loved.

Jesus commands us to love our neighbor. But who is our neighbor? It is everyone.

Every human being on earth is our neighbor. We can love even strangers and even our enemies, even if it does not feel good to love them. How do we love an enemy? Jesus said pray for your enemy and do good to those who hate you. If we are only loving those who love us and helping those who can help us in return, then we are not yet Christians, for pagans do this.¹⁰

The interpretation of the authors about Jesus’ law in this lesson is very literal and unnuanced. It does not take into

10. Jerry Bangues, *Jesus Christ: The Moral Norm*, MAPSA K to 12 Christian Living Series (Quezon City, Philippines: Vibal Group, Inc., 2015), 131.

consideration the experiences of learners who are experiencing bullying, exclusion, or emotional harm. The interpretation may lead them to think that the call to “offer the other cheek” and “love even our enemies” is an instruction to endure mistreatment silently or to forgive without boundaries. When people are bullied or mistreated, they may feel more helpless and guilty instead of being able to get justice and safety. Moreover, learners who belong to other faiths or beliefs could also feel like they are treated as less than Christians in the phrase “pagans do this”.

I don’t think the authors meant to hurt anyone, but the lesson’s lack of context and pastoral balance can lead to misunderstandings that could hurt people emotionally and morally. Teachers need to make it clear that Jesus’ law of love does not mean putting up with injustice or harm. The empowering message that could be taught, rather, is about the compassion and courage Christians must have in protecting human dignity, both theirs and their enemy’s. Presenting Jesus’ teaching with proper context and empathy can inspire students to see love not as a passive endurance of harm but as an active decision to remain good while resisting violence.

FROM UNINTENDED HARM TO HEALING

There is a consistent pattern that emerges in how Scripture is interpreted and presented across the three examples. In all three, the interpreters employ what may be described as a literal or moralistic reading of the text. According to the *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*,¹¹ this corresponds most closely to the fundamentalist or uncritical literalist approach, which “refuses to

11. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, April 15, 1993, accessed November 6, 2025, https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm. Hereafter cited in the text as IBC with paragraph numbers.

admit that the inspired Word of God has been expressed in human language and that this word has been expressed under divine inspiration by human authors” (IBC II.F.1). This way of Scripture interpretation isolates the biblical text from its historical, cultural, and literary contexts and tends to draw direct moral lessons or behavioral prescriptions from the narrative without sufficient mediation through theological or contextual reflection.

The interpretative goal in the analyzed passages is commendable. It is to form a moral conviction and religious devotion among students. However, the interpretative approach tends to emphasize obedience, moral correctness, and self-sacrifice in ways that lack nuance and contextual awareness. The lesson about the Sabbath is more like a list of rules for what is right and wrong than a story about human dignity, freedom, and healing. The story of Abraham almost sacrificing Isaac could make suffering or violence seem like signs of faith. Learners might think that Jesus’ commandment tells them to be passive victims of harm. The approach reflected in these samples is more didactic than interpretive. It seeks to impart ethical principles rather than pursue deep comprehension. As a result, it overlooks the complex human experiences present in Scripture and in the lives of learners. Because of this, there is a disconnect between what the Bible says and its pastoral relevance. The lessons affirm faith, love, and trust in God, but they do so in ways that can desensitize or even distress young learners, especially those who experience exclusion, bullying, or trauma. In short, the problem is not the choice of texts but the way of interpretation.

From a theological standpoint, what is missing in the samples shown and analyzed is the contextual dimension of biblical interpretation that is advocated by the Church. IBC states that “what characterizes Catholic exegesis is that it deliberately places itself within the living tradition of the church” (IBC III) and notes that “the Spirit is, assuredly, also given to individual Christians, so

that their hearts can ‘burn within them’ (Lk. 24:32) as they pray and prayerfully study the Scripture within the context of their own personal lives” (IBC III.B.3). The document further affirms that “very early texts have been reread in the light of new circumstances and applied to the contemporary situation of the people of God,” describing this process as one of actualization (IBC IV.A). Taken together, these statements imply that a faithful interpretation of the Scripture must connect the biblical Word with the lived faith and historical situation of believers today especially those on the margins. The Narrative Change Approach that this study proposes directly responds to this call. It allows Scripture to be read as a living story that interacts with the learner’s own narrative and social reality, and this helps overcome the potential violent interpretation found in some interpretations of Scripture in religious education.

The Narrative Change Approach (NCA) began as a tool for social work and community development. This approach draws from Narrative Therapy¹² that was developed by social workers Michael White and David Epston in the 1980s. White & Epston emphasized the power of “re-authoring” one’s life through storytelling. NCA was first used to reshape the understanding of marginalized individuals and groups by challenging harmful social norms, beliefs, or narratives. It is used as a way to help people reframe their life stories by moving away from narratives of stigma, powerlessness, and victimhood toward stories of agency, dignity, and transformation. From this foundation, NCA evolved into a broader framework for social transformation, as seen in advocacy and community practice initiatives that use storytelling to challenge structural injustice and shift public imagination.¹³

12. Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative Therapy: Principles, Applications, and Limitations*, Psychology Choices, accessed November 6, 2025, <https://www.psychologychoices.com/NT/>.

13. See for example, Narrative Initiative, “Who We Are,” accessed November 6, 2025, <https://narrativeinitiative.org/who-we-are/>; Community Change

The conceptual theory behind NCA is simple yet profound. People who use this approach believe that changing stories changes lives. When people learn to question destructive narratives and reimagine them, they begin to see new possibilities for themselves and others. This same insight makes the NCA relevant to the cases in religious education where Scripture interpretations tend to be violent or harmful. It is essential, then, to explore some educational and theological foundations that could support the use of NCA in religious education to ground this approach within the context of faith formation. The understanding of why this approach can serve as a meaningful framework for interpreting Scripture and nurturing faith in religious education can be drawn from seeing NCA's alignment with transformative and liberative pedagogies, as well as with the Church's theology of revelation and inspiration.

EDUCATIONAL AND THEOLOGICAL GROUNDS OF NCA

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire offers a theoretical foundation for integrating the Narrative Change Approach into education. Freire critiques the “banking model” of education in which teachers make the students passive learners by simply depositing information during learning sessions.¹⁴ He argues

Action, “*Narrative Change*,” accessed November 6, 2025, <https://www.communitychangeaction.org/what-we-do/narrative-change/>; Social Change Initiative, “*Narrative Change*,” accessed November 6, 2025, <https://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/narrative-change/>; The Opportunity Agenda, “*Storytelling for Social Change*,” accessed November 6, 2025, <https://opportunityagenda.org/insights/storytelling-social-change/>; Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), “*Shifting the Narrative: Report and Toolkit*,” accessed November 6, 2025, <https://cesr.org/shifting-narrative-report-toolkit/>.

14. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra B. Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 72, <https://www.hccc.edu/abouthccc/resources/documents/freire-pedagogy-of-the-oppressed.pdf>.

that this manner of teaching is oppressive. This is because instead of treating people as subjects who are capable of transforming their lives and the world, they are merely treated as vessels where teachers simply deposit knowledge. Freire proposes a “problem-posing education” that engages learners in dialogue.¹⁵ He advocates the manner of teaching where learners are invited to read both the word and the world critically to participate in their own liberation. This dialogical pedagogy aligns well with the Narrative Change Approach. When used in religious education, NCA can help encourage learners to become active interpreters of Scripture rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Learners are invited to interpret Scripture in light of their own experiences, emotions, and social realities, especially when certain interpretations may cause harm. In this way, learners are not merely told what to believe but are guided to ask, “What does this story mean for us today, in our context?” In Freire’s work, this question may help students develop their critical consciousness (*conscientizagao*) that he believes helps people “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”¹⁶ Furthermore, the NCA also helps learners to uncover how certain interpretations of Scripture, such as those that normalize suffering or silence victims, function as oppressive narratives. NCA can guide them in reframing these stories in ways that affirm life, dignity, and justice.

The ideas of Freire can be used to challenge religious educators to go beyond a moralistic or literalist interpretation of scripture texts. Learners must be allowed to interrogate Scripture texts and their interpretations and reflect on the intersection of these narratives with their personal experiences. As gifted with the guidance of the same Spirit who also guided the human authors of

15. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79-81.

16. *Ibid.*, 35.

the Scripture, the learners can collectively construct new meanings that help them pursue God's call to love and justice. Freire's ideas posit that this methodology enables learners to become "co-creators" of meaning, engaging in both spiritual and social transformation. When used to interpret the Bible, the Narrative Change Approach has the same goal.

Just as Freire calls teachers to make their students co-creators of meaning rather than mere passive receivers of knowledge, the Church also encourages the faithful to take an active participation in the interpretation of Scripture. The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* teaches that the "Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony that exists between elements of the faith" (DV 12). The Holy Spirit did not only inspire the original authors of Scripture. The Spirit who guided the original authors of Scripture continues to guide people in understanding the meaning of words of Scripture today. "The Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (see Col. 3:16) (DV 8). This dynamic view of inspiration agrees with what Hebrew 4:12 affirms: "the word of God is alive and active." In the Scripture, the Spirit continually engages people and new communities in new contexts. This understanding is aligned with the nature of the Narrative Change Approach. The NCA intends for people to interact with stories dynamically. It helps people not just to receive narratives or interpretations but also to engage with them and the ideas they have.

Furthermore, the Church also teaches that the capacity to discern the truth of faith belongs not only to theologians, religious educators, or Church authorities. Understanding of faith is a gift given to the whole community of believers through the *sensus fidei*

fidelium or the “sense of faith of the faithful.” The International Theological Commission explains that the *sensus fidei* enables believers, under the guidance of the Spirit, to perceive how God’s Word speaks authentically within their lived experience.¹⁷ The learners are also participants in this Spirit-led process of interpretation as members of the believing community. Using the Narrative Change Approach can help operationalize this ecclesial principle in the classroom by allowing learners to bring their stories, emotions, and social contexts into dialogue with Scripture. NCA can be used to help learners experience that revelation unfolds not only in Scripture texts but also through and with their lives and daily experiences. In this manner, biblical interpretation becomes not a one-way transmission of teachings but a participatory encounter in which God, who is in heaven, continues to meet with God’s children and speaks with them with great love (DV 21). This ecclesial vision is reinforced in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, which states that “what characterizes Catholic exegesis is that it deliberately places itself within the living tradition of the Church” (IBC, III). This means that there is a dynamic process in interpreting the Scripture where “very early texts have been reread in the light of new circumstances and applied to the contemporary situation of the people of God” (IBC, IV.A.) Such rereading shows that attentiveness to new historical contexts belongs to the Church’s tradition itself and manifests the continuing vitality of Scripture in the life of the believing community.

17. International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, par. 49-52, accessed November 6, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html.

OPERATIONALIZING THE NCA

There are different methods used by different groups and organizations to operate the Narrative Change Approach. One of these is the Four Baskets model, which was developed by the group called Narrative Initiative.¹⁸ It is called “baskets” because each part “holds” a variety of different possible practices and methods that can be used for each step along the way. This method offers educators a process-oriented manner of creating, translating, deploying, and seeing together the new narrative they formed and its effects. In religious education, Scripture itself functions as a “narrative of faith” or a living story of God’s action in history and the human response to divine love. By using the Four Baskets, teachers and their learners can approach Scripture as both text and encounter. This means engaging in Scripture through interpretation that is dialogical, experiential, and communal.

We can use key theological and pedagogical perspectives to show that the Four Baskets model is useful in religious education. One is from the *General Directory for Catechesis*, which is a guide published by the Catholic Church to help teachers and catechists understand how to effectively teach the faith, says that the teaching of faith must be incarnational.¹⁹ This means that faith must be taught based on the real-life experiences of the people. The people's lived experiences of struggles, hopes, and encounters in daily life are what help them understand their faith. The Four Baskets align with this incarnational approach because it intends to help learners

18. Narrative Initiative, “*Four Baskets: A Narrative Change Framework Guide*” (Brooklyn, NY: Narrative Initiative, 2019), <https://narrativeinitiative.org/resource/four-baskets-field-guide-for-narrative-change-practice/>.

19. Pontifical Council for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, August 11, 1997, no. 138, accessed November 6, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_11081997_gdc_en.html.

see the stories in Scripture from their own experiences and insights as human beings.

The Four Baskets' process, which includes defining the current story, co-creating new meaning (create and translate), embedding the narrative in life (deploy), and engaging in reflection (observe), also reflects the dynamic movement from life to faith and back to life.²⁰ This movement shows how religious education must come from concrete life experiences and then go back to them, refreshed by faith and understanding. This movement aligns well with religious educator Thomas Groome's idea of Shared Christian Praxis.²¹ Groome presents a cyclical process of teaching the faith. This process guides educators to first lead their students to name current realities, then interpret them through the lens of the Christian narrative, and finally, respond with dedicated action. The Four Baskets and Groome's Life to Faith to Life framework both see an interactive and dialogical process in which learners are not just passive recipients but also active participants in making meaning.

The following is an attempt to use the Narrative Change Approach through adapting the Four Baskets model in interpreting Scripture in religious education. I will propose a different grouping of the baskets in the interest of adapting and presenting an organized process of using the model for religious instruction.

Basket 1: Scouting the Narrative

In the original model, the Four Baskets immediately asks people to create a new narrative as an alternative to the existing

20. To learn more about how this process is done, you may see Narrative Initiative, *Four Baskets Field Guide for Narrative Change Practice*, Narrative Initiative, accessed February 15, 2026, <https://narrativeinitiative.org/resource/four-baskets-field-guide-for-narrative-change-practice/>.

21. Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry - The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998), 146-148.

one. To help learners in religious education do this, they must first have a close reading of the text and be familiarized with the text and its existing meaning or interpretation. This means guiding learners to identify what the text is all about and the dominant interpretations and assumptions that are present in a narrative. In Scripture interpretation, this familiarization requires surfacing how a story or its interpretation sustains or promotes exclusion, moral rigidity, or narrow understandings of the word of God. A helpful way to do this process is to look at the text or interpretation from the perspective of characters who experience marginalization or oppression, whether this character is from the narrative or from real life. The questions that can guide this process are “Who benefits, and who is silenced in this narrative? What does this narrative look like from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed?”²² These questions help awaken empathy and critical awareness and transform the act of reading Scripture into a practice of compassion and justice.

For example, instead of a message of liberation, the Sabbath is often taught as a rule about rest and obedience which emphasizes prohibition, such as “Do not work” or “Do not make other people work. By asking learners to see this teaching from the perspective of those who are overworked, taken advantage of, or, because of poverty and social injustice need to work, they may see

22. Similar questions can be found already in other critical analysis frameworks. This similarity suggest that these questions are important in interpretative models that aim to bring out changes in human life and relationships. See, for example, Julie E. Owen, “*Fostering Critical Reflection: Moving from a Service to a Social Justice Paradigm*,” *New Directions for Student Leadership* no. 150 (Summer 2016): 40, accessed November 6, 2025, <https://www.elon.edu/u/service-learning/wp-content/uploads/sites/519/2017/08/Fostering-Critical-Reflection-Moving-from-Service-to-Social-Justice.pdf>; and Tia L. Serrant-Green, “Silenced Knowing: An Intersectional Framework for Exploring Black Women’s Health and Diasporic Identities,” *Frontiers in Sociology* (2020), accessed November 6, 2025, <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00001/full>.

that the Sabbath is not just about rules for rest or worship. They may reimagine the Sabbath as a story where God demands rest because God desires the restoration of human dignity and equality especially for people who are frequently victims of oppressive social conditions such as the workers, caregivers, and the poor.

Similarly, inviting students to see the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son through Isaac's eyes, a child facing fear and vulnerability, helps reveal the danger of glorifying pain as proof of faith. In the story of Jesus' commandment to love one's enemies, teachers may lead their learners to see the story from the perspective of those who suffer bullying, rejection, or loneliness, to discover that Jesus' command is about resistance to further violence and not about passively allowing it.

Basket 2: Co-create or Reframe an Alternative Narrative

The teachers and students will move from exposing existing interpretations to creating new and life-giving narratives. They will discover how God's story in the Scripture and its interpretation can be healing, empowering, and inclusive. This means that they will do a theological reimagining where they will create a new narrative with those whose lives have been silenced or marginalized. The focus is on listening together for how God's Word may speak anew today through the experiences of the marginalized. At this point, the question that they may reflect on is "How might this story from the Scripture sound if told as Good News for those who are excluded or suffering?"

Applied to the Sabbath, this could mean reimagining it as a celebration of liberation and human flourishing, which is a divine reminder that every person, especially the poor and weary, has a right to rest and dignity. The story of Abraham and Isaac can alternatively focus on God's interruption of violence or that moment the divine voice stops the act of sacrificing Isaac. This can

be the Good News for those facing violence and a challenge to people who oppress others in the name of their religion. Focusing on God's act of stopping Abraham from sacrificing the life of his son affirms God's definitive "no" to suffering in God's name. For Jesus' commandment to love one's enemies, the teachers and learners can reframe the story in a way that it does not simply reveal love as mere emotional warmth. The command to love one's enemies can be reinterpreted as an invitation to engage in God's transformative love, which transitions from retaliation to the breaking of cycles of hatred through compassion that upholds the dignity of both victim and offender.

Basket 3: Translate and Deploy the Narrative

The new narrative will then be put into practice. The teachers and learners will apply the new insights they formed in concrete experiences. The question that can guide them here is "How can this new understanding of the story take flesh in our actions, relationships, and the way we help build a more compassionate community?" Responses to this question can be, for instance, inviting learners to express their reimagined narratives through storytelling, journaling, visual art, drama, or community service. Learners may celebrate the Sabbath by designing a project that promotes the well-being of overworked individuals by organizing a "Day of Rest and Renewal" for school staff or caregivers. Using Isaac's perspective in looking at the story of Abraham's sacrifice, students may write reflective letters or perform dramatizations that emphasize divine mercy rather than fear to highlight God's desire for life rather than violent sacrifices. In Jesus' commandment to love one's enemies, teachers may ask learners to explore what it means to respond with patience instead of anger, to forgive without erasing accountability, or to reach out to someone they have excluded or harmed.

At this point, it's important to make one thing clear: the teacher and students do not literally rewrite or change the Bible, and they do not replace official Church teaching with an altered version of Scripture. The inspired text's integrity is still intact. The wording of Scripture does not change. Rather, it is the interpretive lens through which it is received and appropriated that changes. The goal is not to replace the biblical story, but to examine dominant interpretations and reframe them in ways that remain faithful to the text while more clearly reflecting its life-giving message.

Basket 4: Observe by Reflecting Together

The work of continuous reflection and growth is the task in the fourth basket. Like faith, interpretation grows and involves the community of believers. Here, teachers and learners evaluate how the reimagined narrative affects their understanding of God, self, and others.

Guiding questions might include “How does this new narrative shape my image of God? How does it influence how I treat those who are usually unheard or unseen?” The teachers and learners can then engage one another through group discussions, prayer meetings, and creative feedback sessions, and share how the new narrative they expressed in action continues to challenge and inspire them in everyday life.

Returning to the First Basket

After the fourth basket, the teachers and students may revisit their entire process by starting again from the first one. In doing this cyclic process, they will continue to ensure that the message they found from the Scripture is responsive to experience and open to the Spirit's continuous movement. Returning to the

first basket and engaging the process again can help the teachers and their learners see that the interpretation is not a static knowledge but as an ongoing journey of conversion where God's Word continues to liberate and renew.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A HOPEFUL AND CHRIST-CENTERED READING OF SCRIPTURE

I have proposed in this paper the use of the Narrative Change Approach as a framework for interpreting Scripture within the context of religious education. By offering the NCA, I have invited teachers to help their learners experience a dialogical and participatory way of engaging in the scripture texts. The NCA's emphasis on narrative, points of view, and meaning-making can enhance the teaching of religious education by illustrating how certain interpretations of Scripture may inflict harm, such as normalizing violence, justifying suffering, or suppressing marginalized voices.

I have also shown in the analyzed samples from Christian Living Education textbooks that biblical stories such as the commandment about the Sabbath observance, the sacrifice of Isaac, and Jesus' teaching on loving enemies can unintentionally convey violent messages if read in isolation or through moralistic literalism. The NCA addresses this gap by fostering critical awareness and helping both teachers and learners to change the interpretation of Scripture through life-giving, contextual, and faith-rooted reflection.

The strength of the Narrative Change Approach lies in its capacity to reveal and transform underlying narratives. I demonstrated this by using the Four Baskets model, which teachers can use to guide their learners from passive receptors of the meaning of the faith to active participants in theological understanding. The Four Baskets, which guide teachers and

students in assessing the current story, co-creating new narratives, translating and embedding that meaning in practice, and engaging in reflection, echo the Church's call for contextual and dialogical interpretation of Scripture, as expressed in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (See IBC, I.E).

However, while the NCA offers substantial pedagogical and theological promise, one important limitation is the need for a more explicit Christocentric lens within the process. In Catholic religious education, Christ is the definitive hermeneutical key to all Scripture. As *Dei Verbum* affirms, "The principal purpose to which the plan of the old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ" (DV 15), and this "the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away" (DV 4). The *Directory for Catechesis* also affirms the centrality of Jesus in teaching the faith by proclaiming that "by dwelling as a human being among human beings, Jesus not only reveals the secrets of God but brings to fulfillment the work of salvation."²³ Moreover, the *National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines* also highlights the same point by insisting that teaching the faith must be "centered on the person of Jesus Christ, who not only communicates 'the word of the Lord' but IS the incarnate Word of God . . . Christ is the center of salvation history and the ultimate meaning of all human history."²⁴

Therefore, there is still a need to develop the integration of a Christocentric hermeneutic lens in the NCA's application in interpreting Scripture in religious education. This will help ensure that the interpretation of the Scripture narratives will be for both

23. Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis*, Study Edition, par. 12 (Manila, Philippines: Word and Life Publications, 2021).

24. Catholic Bishop Conference of the Philippines, *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines*, par. 219 (Manila, Philippines: Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, 2007).

human liberation and participation in the liberating work of Jesus Christ Himself.

I also acknowledged that the NCA is not a definitive solution to all hermeneutical challenges in religious education. The endeavor I have undertaken in this study to employ NCA for Scriptural interpretation in religious education necessitates additional investigation. In the context of pluralistic and postcolonial Philippine religious education, the NCA's integration with Christological exegesis, inculturated theology, and catechetical formation requires further examination.

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