BEYOND LITERATE WESTERN PRACTICES: Continuing Conversations in Orality and Theological Education

Edited by Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy
Endorsements

“The Manifesto of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education has clearly emphasized its belief and support for multi-level approaches to leadership training for God’s kingdom. Today, approximately 80% of the world’s population cannot or will not hear our message when we communicate it to them in textual and literate ways and means. The insightful case studies in this book provide potential pathways forward in the theological education process.”

- Rev. Dr. Riad Kassis, International Director
  International Council for Evangelical Theological Education
  Director, Langham Scholars Ministry, Langham Partnership

“Beyond Literate Western Practices is a much needed and wholly helpful resource for missiologists and missionary practitioners around the world. The case studies and paradigms developed within it are an invaluable resource for missionaries and will undoubtedly result in greater kingdom fruit. I wholeheartedly recommend it to all those seeking to serve Christ among the world’s oral learners.”

- Dr. M. David Sills, President, Reaching & Teaching International Ministries
  Professor of Christian Missions & Cultural Anthropology
  The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Learning is what matters, and these chapters wrestle with how spiritual leaders learn and grow. They ask good questions, challenge the status quo, stimulate our thinking, and provide positive examples of what can enable good learning. This book is a must read for those of us who are passionate about helping others learn.”

- Jane Overstreet, President/CEO,
  Development Associates International
“The models of theological education and leadership development that have received greatest attention and investment in the last hundred years have been those focusing on written materials. Students are required to read books and write papers. Theological books from the West have been translated into almost every language, strengthening the idea that learning only presupposes good literacy ability.

Accelerated changes are taking place in both formal and non-formal training, and theological education is undergoing a much needed renewal to meet the needs of the 21st century. The innovative practitioners in this book invite you into this journey of exploration with them. You will be challenged and you will wish to explore.”

- Dr. Bertil Ekström, Executive Director, World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission

“Orality is a complex of how oral preference learners best receive, process, remember, and replicate (pass on) news, important information, and truths. This book explores the deep resets and changes in both formal and non-formal theological education. We are invited once again to examine how content is framed and delivered in the midst of spiritual formation.”

- Dr. Bruce Wilkenson, President, Teach Every Nation Author, Prayer of Jabez

“When you consider that 70% of those outside the current reach of the Body of Christ—the unreached and least-reached—the issue of how we communicate is even more crucial. Not only are there cultural barriers we have often failed to effectively understand, but the issues in this book get to the ‘way’ we try to both understand and reach Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhist—not to mention those who already have a solid witness of Christ.”

- Dr. Greg H. Parsons, Global Director, U.S. Center for World Mission Chancellor, William Cary International University
“With the pull towards oral-visual media, the framing of the content of our message must change, and our distribution and application of messages must be tailored accordingly for the new generation. This book provides real cases with thoughtful experiments; we are challenged to think about the oral preference learners for this new century. This book will also drastically challenge our theological curriculum to meet the needs of oral learners.”

- Dr. Joseph Shao, General Secretary, Asia Theological Association
  President, Biblical Seminary of the Philippines

“Pushing their previous and widely-read conversations into the arena of practical implementation, Samuel Chiang and Grant Lovejoy have now provided this useful companion volume for those eager to employ orality as an essential component of theological education. Beyond Literate Western Practices will stimulate both thought and practice for those who grasp the significant role of orality in the future of missions.”

- Dr. Tom Elliff, President, International Mission Board
  Southern Baptist Convention

“These chapters represent the very best from the consultation on theological education and orality. We who have dedicated our lives to theological education to equip church leaders worldwide have a whole new world and a different set of church leaders where watching and listening and imitating now dominates the learning methodology. The demand to balance literacy with orality has never been stronger. High text has to expand to high tech and high touch if we will fulfill God’s purpose for us in our generation. I highly recommend your attention to Beyond Literate Western Practices.”

- Dr. Mark L. Bailey, President and Professor of Bible Exposition
  Dallas Theological Seminary
“Making disciples is a key calling for Christians. Jesus said this was a priority for his followers. But what if new believers can’t read the Bible? What if even pastors can’t read? For tens of thousands around the globe, that is the case. How can they grow to maturity in their faith and understanding? This book presents principles of oral learning, curriculum development, and evaluation assessments for Christians who don’t read. They can indeed develop into leaders who grasp the Big Story and the whole counsel of God in its fullness. Through the cases in this book, we see how.”

- Dr. Miriam Adeney, Associate Professor of World Christian Studies
  Seattle Pacific University
  Author, Kingdom Without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity

“Beyond Literate Western Practices is an excellent set of case studies and essays on the power of orality to break through the challenges of existing educational models and provide new paradigms for the growing number around the world seeking to learn and grow. It addresses both the opportunities ready to be leveraged and the challenges that still must be overcome. There is a fresh and encouraging message that education can change and further engage the millions of oral learners in the Majority World who seek to grow in their faith, skills, and ministry effectiveness.”

- Jon Hirst, President and CEO,
  Global Mapping International

“Increasingly missions practitioners and educators are recognizing that, in a world where 5.7 billion are oral preference learners, many of the current training strategies cannot, and will not, serve adequately a large proportion of the church. From several continents this volume has collected a variety of case studies illustrating creative new approaches for training oral preference learners. Each context is different, but the principles provide guidance for those willing to explore new pathways and strategies for orality.

For 40 years The Lausanne Movement has been calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. Oral learners and leaders are 80% of that “whole.” This volume both echoes and answers that call.”

- Dr. David W. Bennett, Chief Collaboration Officer & Teaching Pastor
  The Lausanne Movement
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That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

Matthew 13:1—9 (NIV)
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The gracious request from International Orality Network to co-host a mini-global consultation in Hong Kong came at an opportune moment when Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary sought to redefine and redirect ourselves as a disciple-community of Jesus Christ. The proposed theme, “Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts,” prompted me to ask the seminary community some deep, soul-searching questions: Where do we come from? Why are we doing what we are doing? Who are we as human persons on earth and citizens in the Kingdom of God?

I am thankful to witness the seminary faculty-participants being receptive to the challenges presented at the consultation through sixty fellow “thought leaders” and theological educators from around the world. There are so many unreached people who are oral learners and possible leaders for Christ's churches.

It is one thing to state that theological schools exist for the mission of God. It is quite another for theological schools to carry out their mission and to define in concrete terms the purpose of their existence. The task is enormous and the responsibility is demanding. The call of God to today's theological schools is to devise and implement educational models and processes that will also equip oral learners for ministry. Theological educators of today must learn to accept the challenges of new perspectives. Work that has been done and will be done through International Orality Network holds the promise of leading to a new world of theological education.

Joshua Wai-Tung Cho, Ph.D.
President, Dean of Academic Affairs
Professor of Christian Thought (Systematic Theology)
Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary
Theological education is vital for the transmission of Christian tradition from one generation to the other another and for integral integrated Christian mission in today's world. Theological education is essential for the renewal and continuity of the church and its leadership. Theological education is a matter of survival for an authentic and contextual mission of the church in contemporary contexts. Theological education is crucial for the interaction between church and society where many issues demand for a sharpened stand and position of Christianity. Theological education is deepening biblical knowledge and the capacity to distinguish and to assess the different powers and spirits, and to discern God's working in this world.

The above can happen only when theological educators are conscious of orality strategies. A major withdrawal from this monumental task at this point of history can only lead to a continuation of the plundering of Africa by its political leaders and a continuation of the ignorance of oral masses which who long for more education, liberation and human rights.

Training structure, training curriculum, the class teaching, the course examination, the field project, and practicum should all be orality-driven. We should be able to evaluate our audience's culture competently and also understand how people learn in the local culture and then contextualize those concepts to orality principles.

In this book, the case studies on current innovations and discussions impacting orality strategy implementations are deserving of attention. In relevant theological educational training, we should begin with case study models, concrete realities, and seek to reflect upon them and other identifying principles or processes that
have a breadth of application. Theological educators must help the literate learners and/or societies to understand the value that oral learners have. This book, drawn from many fields, in turn points people to resources in many fields that will assist in contextualizing theological education for oral learners. These case studies are recommended to well-meaning theological education experts. The best theological education must arise from the seedbed of the local cultural realities.

Bauta Motty, Ph.D.
Provost, Jos ECWA Theological Seminary
The global resurgence of orality is upon us. Cyberization and the wide-spread acceptance of habit-forming virtual apps have resulted in patterns of digitized communication similar to verbal forms. Societies across the world are communicating in a style that mimics natural speech patterns. From the Middle East to the Amazon Basin, people are moving towards digital communications, but in communicative structures that more closely resemble verbal speaking on the streets than the grammatically correct sentence structures of the courts.

Orality’s global resurgence, measured on a continuum based on the United Nations population datasets, aggregates a global population of 5.7 billion who are oral preference learners (Lovejoy 2012, 11-39). This continuum of oral preference learners ranges from those who are highly oral (including those who do not have a written script) to those who are highly digitoral (including those who are highly literate, but prefer to learn in an oral-visual and digital means) (Chiang and Lovejoy 2013, 3).

Rapid iterations in cyberization are also melting practices, industries, and domains, and the foundation of education has not been exempt from the high-octane change process. The educational foundation of “knowledge, access, and authority” is being liquefied: knowledge is redefined, access is renegotiated, and authority is redistributed.¹

Theological education (both formal institutions and non-formal training organizations) cannot escape this change. Under the severe heat of the digitoral era, we shall continue to feel the residual effects of the Gutenberg textual-print era for a long time to come. But we also recognize that we are actively exploring and experimenting with the current tools in the digitoral playground. This effect is fast blurring the lines of formal and non-formal delivery of theological education.
The percentage of Christians in the global population has remained stable over
the last century, increasing from approximately 32% to 35% in over one hundred
years (Pew Research Center 2011, 9-11). However, during the same period, world
population has increased approximately four times. Drilling through the analytics,
we find not only declining shifts in the Christian population in both Europe and
North America, but also massive rises in the Christian population in Africa, Asia,
and Latin America.

While Asia has seen a ten-fold rise in Christian adherents, the lion’s share
of growth is Africa, where there has been a sixty-fold increase in the Christian
population during this period (Pew Research Center 2011, 15). These trends
shall continue unabated: by 2020, approximately 65% of the world’s Christian
population will reside in Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Center for the Study
of Christianity 2013, 7).

With (1) a Christian population growth predominately coming from the
Majority World, (2) a global resurgence of orality, and (3) a seismic change
in theological education in this digitoral era, we have a confluence of trends
and trajectories inviting reflections and conversations. How do oral preference
learners, who represent 80% of the world’s population, receive more theological
education? What are the worldviews of the followers of Christ in Asia, Latin
America, and Africa? Most theological educators in the Majority World have
gone to the West to receive higher education and gone back to their countries
of origin; often, they have imported theological models, which might not serve
their audiences well.

Furthermore, since short-term missions and mission societies have measured
effectiveness of training based on a Western textual-based model, how would these
modalities serve the growth of the Church in the non-West? Finally, how does
one conduct assessment in this digitoral generation? How are the oral preference
learners receiving, processing, remembering, and passing on the word of God?

The Backstory to Hong Kong

The search for location to host this second consultation crossed over several
countries. We already knew that people were interested. In fact, funds had already
been provided by an anonymous donor, but we could not find the right location.

I requested Harry Lucenay, my pastor in Hong Kong, to help. He arranged a
luncheon meeting with Joshua Cho, president of Hong Kong Baptist Theological
Seminary, in order to float the idea of a consultation. Days prior to that lunch, Harry called to say that Bruce Wilkinson, author of *Prayer of Jabez* and *Secrets of the Vine*, was coming to Hong Kong and would join our lunch. I welcomed the meeting with Bruce, but had no idea what God was up to.

On the day of the lunch, mystery deepened further when my pastor revealed that he had no connection to the man who had introduced Bruce to my pastor. My stomach was growling at me while the chitchat went on, and I still did not know where we would host the second consultation on “orality and theological education.” Finally, we ordered.

Over lunch, it became clear that the Spirit of God was affirming and leading. Parts of that conversation spilled over well into the late afternoon on that day near October’s end. Finally, I personally had to end the conversation because I had not packed and I was leaving for South Africa that evening.

Looking back on that day, our Lord co-joined my pastor to two significant events: the launch of a new orality-friendly ministry called Teach Every Nation through Bruce Wilkinson, and the hosting of the second Consultation on orality and theological education at Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary (HKBTS).

God’s gift of a site to host the consultation was both overwhelmingly generous and caring. We did not know until later that we had state-of-the-art media capabilities and facilities. Additionally, everyone at the event felt deeply cared for by the staff of HKBTS.

God brought together sixty of us, from visa-free countries to visa-challenging nations. From the previous Consultation at Billy Graham Center at Wheaton, we knew that out of the ten projects proposed, eight of them had already been completed; thus, we were anticipating how God would lead us in this Consultation, and how men and women would come together to collaborate. Which spicy conversations would allow further examinations? And what might emerge that would be lasting?

**Consultation Participants, Scope, and Design**

The men and women participants in the Hong Kong mini-global consultation came from twenty-two different theological institutions and universities and over thirty organizations, churches, and denominations. The denominations represented were not small: one West Africa denomination has over eight million adherents,
and another has tens of thousands of churches. We were graced with thirty-two individuals who hold doctorates and who were creatively engaged. Chancellors, presidents, and academic deans were peer learners and practitioners. Practitioners felt their heart cries were heard by the “academy.” The unique chemistry allowed organizational and church leaders to dream together and pose forthright questions to the academy which resulted in collaboration.

Grant Lovejoy, Chuck Madinger, Mark Overstreet, David Swarr, and I were the Programming Task Force anchored through prayer by Linda Bemis and her core team. We continued what we had done previously, as described in our first book, *Beyond Literate Western Models*.

We imagined sitting in a circular room with the oral leaders in the center. Moving on a horizontal circular plane, we imagined that the room was divided equally by four radii, resulting in four equal arcs of 90° each. (For our purposes, we shall call each equal arc a “Perspective.”) We were curious about the “what and how” each Perspective offered to and affected oral leaders. In conducting a horizontal 360° with the oral leader, we used four different Perspectives, each covering a 90° arc: formal institutional training and the oral leader, non-formal training and the oral leader, worldview and the oral leader, and empowering and affirming the oral leader.

The participants had to read the papers ahead of time (all the 2013 consultation papers can be found at orality.net). Within the consultation, we were in a talk-show style, holding panel discussions on each of the Perspectives. We intensely processed each Perspective and identified key issues. On the second day we chose a modified “open-space technology” methodology, and the participants self-selected into a Perspective of their own interest, so that they might contribute to further conversations and potential collaborations. Since the participants were an integral part of this consultation, we have listed all of them along with a short biographies on pages 161 - 168.

Conversations flowed within each of the Perspectives and the participants derived top ideas from which to build action plans. These ideas included:

1. What does it look like to establish academic legitimacy for orality-based curricula?
2. Is there a need to set up an accrediting body for oral programs?
3. What does contextualizing a strategic balance of both oral and other forms of instruction and learning within an integrated curriculum look like?
4. Could we make a database of case studies that would relate specifically to issues in the orality movement?
5. How do we assess oral preference learners in both non-formal and formal theological education?
6. Is there a competency-based approach for assessment of oral preference learners?
7. How is a proper biblical hermeneutic expressed in the oral spheres of different cultures?
8. Are there good or excellent orality practices that are considered effective for discipleship and church planting?
9. How do we suspend and or unlearn our own cultural biases, and can we name those biases before we start doing anything else?
10. Are we able to listen carefully when we do not show love and/or affection to the people with whom we are working?
11. Are we able to evaluate our audience’s culture competently?
12. Are we able to understand how people learn in the local culture? And how do we contextualize those concepts to orality principles?
13. What does a healthy partnership look like within an oral context?
14. How can we help literate learners/societies understand the value oral learners have?
15. How do we move away from the dichotomy mindset so that oral learners/leaders are not denigrated?
16. How do we create a cyclical oral learning model?

Conversations and Collaborations

We discovered that conversations flowed into the night, and six projects had flowed out of the Hong Kong Consultation. Weeks and months have passed, and all six collaborative projects have been completed as this book is published. Moreover, we just discovered that two more projects are in the creative planning stage, which would not have happened if the participants had not met.

The chapters in this book were the catalysts and drivers that took our conversations forward. The author of each chapter was often referred to by participants as having spurred them into reflection, consideration, and action. We have decided to group the chapters into two parts: Case Studies on Current Innovations and Conversations Impacting Orality Strategy Implementation.

In Part I, we begin with case study models and concrete realities, and seek to reflect on them. In Part II, our reflection leads to identifying principles or processes that have breadth of application. We move from narrower to broader in focus. The last two chapters are especially wide-ranging, drawing from many
fields and pointing readers to resources in many fields, which may assist in contextualizing theological education for oral contexts.

We are delighted to introduce the significance of the chapters to you. The authors write from a mosaic of contexts: Kenya, Uganda, northern India, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Australia, USA, and parts of Latin America. They are leaders—overseeing institutions with single or multiple campuses, training in both rural and urban settings, and working among the deaf. The scope of each author’s exploration ranges from the broad to the narrow, or at times, a combination. We are delighted that the experimentations also involve how to work with the accreditation agencies and systems, and how to experiment with orality within the heady subject of systematic theology.

Recently, a new theological institution was trying to receive accreditation in the USA. The accreditation body of the State of Texas did not know how to do it because it had been decades since any theological schools had been accredited. Not only is “change” difficult, but there also appeared to be no changes for such a long time that people had forgotten how to make adjustments.

In comparison, theological education outside of the USA is extremely active. Different revivals and awakenings have resulted in many new followers of Christ, and the demand for theological education is actually growing. The accreditation agencies and systems have had a stale template to perform accreditation. However, with the pressing-in of the digitoral era and changing models of theological education, the accreditation bodies do not have sufficient models to consider the new realities. *Can they go back to older models, or should they experiment? But how do they experiment when the often-cited roadmap is not so obvious?* Emmanuel Chemengich, principal of Africa Theological Seminary, writes thoughtfully about how to integrate orality curricula throughout the school, but faces accreditation challenges.

William Coppedge, Alex Abraham, Gil Balignasay, and Phil Thornton write about training in the context of Uganda, northern India, Philippines, and Latin America, respectively. Issues of assessment and worldview (both that of the West, representing the educated and donor countries, and indigenous) came up again and again. Experiments were performed to see if adjustments in evaluation and reporting would affect people’s acceptance that oral preference learners do receive and consume the messages differently. Furthermore, an example was raised to help us consider how to build competency-based evaluations for oral preference learners.
Because of its dominance of the textual transmission teaching methodology, the Western culture has caused us to forget that all human culture is intrinsically oral. We are continually trying to recover and understand that all human societies are primarily “oral,” and now “oral-visual.” The Deaf communities are also oral communities—the only difference is that they are visually-oriented and not spoken. Mark Sauter shares how one organization is training its missionaries to work with deaf communities across the world.

Nick Bekker’s chapter transitions us into Part II of the book and is as much a plea for the transformation of theological education globally as it is a description of the Thai situation. Sam Chan provides an insightful case study from Sydney Missionary and Bible College on how to teach systematic theology, employing narrative biblical stories that teach doctrines.

“For oral learners, art-making is not an optional aesthetic experience. Art is functionally necessary,” William Goold writes. Goold brings a historical perspective of the oral arts and how we have missed this practice in Christendom. He discusses means to integrate theological education and creative arts in the practice of orality. His proposal provides steps and markers for curricula and those who conduct accreditation.

Larry Dinkins follows with observations about institutional gatekeepers and themes on how to legitimize orality in academic settings. In particular, he does this by identifying and explicating the relationship of orality and oral teaching methods with other disciplines, well-established mental models, and theoretical frameworks.

Hannes Wiher is both a theologian and a medical doctor. He lived in French West Africa for twenty years and worked among oral preference learners daily. His chapter on “Worldviews and Oral Preference Learners and Leaders” brings together the multiple trajectories of the first ten chapters. Wiher helps us to understand cognitively and theologically how we were created, the soteriological model that is at work, and how the model impacts oral preference learners and leaders. There are huge implications for the subject matter of worldviews and assessments of oral preference learners.

Finally, Calvin Chong provides a proposal with eight recommendations to implement orality within theological education. This chapter looks across the disciplines in the academy, and with thoughtfulness helps educators integrate, implement, and assess.
A Faith Journey Continues…

The conversations from these chapters have continued in light of the global resurgence of orality, a seismic shift in global Christianity and the oral preference learners in the digitoral era. Theological educators, in both formal and non-formal domains, continually seek to assist oral preference learners with theological studies. But are we doing it well? Western theological education, which has served the Church well, has had an outsized influence. How will it serve the growth of the Church in the Majority World? The digitoral era has changed knowledge, access, and authority—the very foundations of education. How do we reconsider our curricula and assessments so that oral preference learners are able to receive, process, remember, and pass on the word of God?

We invite you into this conversation and to join us in this journey of reflection, discussion, and collaboration…to the edge of possibilities.

1Although this idea is variously quoted today, it was first presented by John Sener (2012).

References


PART I:
Case Studies of Current Innovations
Chapter 1

The Case of Africa Theological Seminary

Emmanuel Chemengich

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Chemengich is an ordained Anglican minister from Kenya. He is Principal of Africa Theological Seminary (ATS) in Kitale, Kenya, a non-denominational institution with main campus in Kitale and other campuses in Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Ghana, and Nigeria. ATS is committed to integrating orality into all study programs.

Introduction

Below I give an overview of the processes being undertaken by Africa Theological Seminary (ATS) to integrate oral learning methods into its curriculum and overall seminary-wide learning culture and environment. In addition to sharing on what and how ATS is accomplishing this initiative. I will highlight why ATS chose to embrace orality in its theological training, its selected assessment tools for evaluating oral learning approaches and outcomes, challenges experienced and questions emerging from this new undertaking.

Overview of ATS and How it is Contextualizing Orality

ATS is a non-denominational theological institution whose main campus is based in Kitale, Kenya, and has other campuses in Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, DR Congo, Nigeria, and Ghana. ATS offers study programs at certificate, diploma, and BA levels. In order to allow its students to continue their ministries while they study, all ATS study programs are in-service, where students come to seminary for four to five weeks, three times a year. ATS is committed to inculcating values, imparting knowledge, and instilling skills in its learners, a philosophy that is well captured in its motto: Training the Heart; Instructing the Mind; and Empowering the Hands.

In the last couple of years ATS has been engaging in a deliberate process of overhauling its curriculum to address two key issues: on the one hand, how to make our curriculum responsive to latest trends in scholarship; and on the other, how to place discipleship and transformation of learners at the center of our curriculum. It is in this process that ATS made an intentional decision to incorporate oral learning methods and strategies into its curriculum.
In this journey ATS has gone through the following overlapping three phases:

First, the **exploration phase** included training key faculty and board members through their participation in seminary-initiated seminars, as well as national and international conferences. These trainings have brought the needed awareness to key stakeholders and facilitated their desired ownership and implementation of this integration process.

Second, the **implementation phase** has taken several levels: ATS has hosted and conducted orality training workshops and seminars for its faculty, staff, alumni, and all other interested parties. Further, ATS has established an Orality Resource Center in our library where books and audio visual materials are displayed and available for our students and library users. We are also working with several key partners (ION East Africa, DAVAR, T4T, etc.) to assist ATS in implementing orality training and making learning tools available to church leaders in the East Africa region.

Also, ATS has engaged the process of reviewing and overhauling its entire curriculum in order to include oral learning approaches at every level of its teaching and learning processes. Among other curriculum changes, ATS is working on introducing an orality introductory course and including oral learning approaches in all course syllabi.

Third, ATS is currently in the **formulating phase**, which will provide a theoretical and scientific basis for why we are integrating oral methodologies into our theological training in order to satisfy our accrediting agencies and answer questions of seminary stakeholders. In this regard, ATS is settling for the orality approach not as a learning style (that is, how people learn or prefer to learn), but rather as a vital aspect of social learning theory and method. Consequently, we are discovering that as a social, as opposed to an individual, learning method, oral learning methodologies are crucial to achieving transformation.

In integrating oral learning, ATS has taken a three-pronged approach:

The first approach is at the **course curriculum level**. Here, ATS is training and orienting faculty to embrace and incorporate oral learning approaches in classroom teaching. This process includes the ongoing engagement in reviewing and reformatting entire institutional curriculum to include oral learning objectives, assessments, and outcomes.
The second approach involves integrating orality at the meta-curriculum or extra-curricular level of seminary learning. ATS has meta-curriculum that goes beyond classroom settings, which allows seminary community members to interact with one another in small-group settings, as well as seminary-wide community gatherings for transformation within the desired social learning framework.

For students, these forums take place daily for one hour from Mondays to Fridays, and include student accountability groups, faculty-student mentoring programs, community chapel worship, and prayer and fellowship times (separate for staff and students). To enhance the effectiveness of this seminary’s meta-curriculum in relation to an oral learning approach, ATS is committing to distribute Walk Thru the Bible’s Story Thru the Bible to all students and staff to be used in their daily devotions. In this way, all seminary members focus on one Bible story and its spiritual themes throughout these various weekly forums so that together as a community we meditate, preach, and discuss on the same weekly spiritual theme toward a transformative life process.

Finally, ATS has begun targeting churches and Christian leaders outside its seminary walls in order to raise awareness and to train all those interested in acquiring and utilizing skills of oral teaching and learning. This task began with training in the use of stories to teach the gospel, and will continue to target all interested seminary alumni, church leaders, and other Christian leaders (e.g., institutional chaplains). Key members of ATS faculty and board are offering these trainings with help from our key partners.

**Strategy and Challenges with Implementing Orality-based Curriculum**

Among other aspects of integrating oral learning methods into theological training, ATS recognizes the primary importance of designing a curriculum that consciously incorporates orality. In this regard, ATS is committed to designing orality-based curriculum through the following approaches:

1) **Course syllabus**: ATS faculty is currently working to include oral learning approaches in the following sections of the course syllabi: course objectives, course methodology, and course reference materials. Further, ATS is attempting to incorporate oral learning approaches in courses that lend themselves to orality, such as OT and NT survey, Christian education, homiletics, expository preaching, etc. Each faculty member has been mandated to introduce these aspects in all the syllabi of the courses they teach.

2) **Course delivery method**: ATS is considering incorporating oral approaches in delivering its teachings (e.g., audio and visual approaches) in all class lectures in order to reach out to all learners in their most preferred learning modes.
3) **Field projects**: ATS is encouraging and providing opportunities for students to use culturally relevant and preferred forms of oral communication and learning through their field projects (20% of all courses) and field practicums (eight credit hours for BA program).

4) **Orality course**: ATS is formulating a new introductory course on orality, which will be mandatory for all seminary students. This course will cover the theory and practice of orality, as well as the history, justification, and relevance of orality in theological training, discipleship, and overall effectiveness in all aspects of Christian ministry.

5) **Course assessment**: ATS is working on changing all course evaluations to include oral exams to cover up to 20% of all course work. This will be incorporated into each course’s final exam.

6) **Meta-curriculum**: ATS has, since its inception, recognized the importance of learning framework outside the class settings. In this regard, ATS will integrate orality into its entire social learning environment.

In its attempt to integrate orality into its curriculum, ATS continues to experience the following challenges:

1) **Faculty**: It has been difficult for faculty members who have been oriented toward literate learning methods to adjust to oral learning teaching and learning approaches. Furthermore, there is limited literature and learning material on orality.

2) **Curriculum**: It has been difficult to get right terminologies and tools to use in designing course objectives and methodologies for oral learning approaches. Further, the limited written materials on orality make it difficult to get sufficient reference materials needed to design courses on orality.

3) **Accrediting agency**: Kenya’s Commission for Higher Education (CHE) has a rigid course-assessment procedure that does not lend itself to an oral evaluation system at undergraduate levels. Thus, CHE system is more comfortable in accepting oral evaluations for students in the post-graduate study levels. As a result, our orality-oriented curriculum approach faces the real danger and risk of being rejected and rendered unacceptable by the national accrediting body.

4) **Field project & meta-curriculum**: Since by their definition field projects are done by students in their areas of ministry, ATS has experienced cost and logistical problems in performing site supervision for the field projects and practicums. By attempting to tie oral methodologies to these field projects, ATS has bound itself to the same problem of inability to guarantee effective
field project evaluations. The same problem is experienced in assessing effectiveness of extra/meta-curricular activities and their ability to enhance the learning process.

**How ATS Is Conducting Assessments for Oral Preference Learners**

With regard to assessments in oral learning strategy, ATS is adapting or has adapted the following levels of evaluation in oral/social learning methods:

1) **At the class teaching level**: At ATS, we are keen at assigning grades to individual presentations and participation in class discussions. These are individual student presentations (and general class responses to them) that are often done in oral forms. In most cases, this constitutes up to 10% of the course work.

2) **At the examination level**: ATS is committing to include oral exams to assess our students so that we give them the opportunity to receive, process, and transmit learned facts in oral-learning mode.

3) **At the field project and field practicum levels**: ATS curriculum requires students to do a 20% field project for all courses while they are back in their ministries (the three months they are out of the institution). In addition, BA students do a total of eight credit hours for their field practicum. As they do these field-oriented projects, we are encouraging our students to do oral projects that include teaching in seminars using oral learning strategies.

4) **At the general seminary life level**: We seek to use our daily rhythms and rituals of the seminary life to inculcate values by impacting the unconscious mind, the source of all behavioral change. In ATS, every faculty, student, and staff washes his or her own or each other’s dishes after meals to remind us of Jesus’ calling for us to be servants.

**Questions & Challenges**

Below are two questions that need to be answered on the matter of integrating oral learning methodologies into theological training processes:

1) How can ATS and other theological institutions overcome the barriers of rigid primary stakeholders (board and faculty) and lack of oral learning materials in order to effectively integrate oral learning methods into its curriculum and teaching processes?

2) How can seminaries develop relevant and credible assessment tools for oral learning approaches that will overturn age-old tradition and conviction, which only affirm non-oral, literate mechanisms for assessing student learning?
Below are three key challenges experienced by ATS in its ongoing implementation of oral-based curriculum:

1) **Challenge of accrediting agencies**: The difficulty of providing credibility and validation to new oral learning methods. The daunting task is to convince and satisfy our accrediting agencies, especially Kenya’s Commission for Higher Education (which accredits all universities) on the validity of oral/social learning methods and the need to include them in assessing students at the examination levels.

2) **Challenge of new educational orientations**: The challenge of selling this new educational methodology to key seminary stakeholders such as the governing council (the board), faculty members, and students—all of whom have had a strong, life-long orientation toward literate learning methods.

3) **Challenge of limited literature and oral learning materials**: This new approach lacks sufficient literature and other learning materials, which are needed to develop orality courses in the different study programs.
Chapter 2

Training in the Ugandan Context

William Coppedge

Billy Coppedge and his wife, Joanna, live in northern Uganda with their four daughters. They work with World Gospel Mission, facilitating pastoral training using Bible storytelling in both Uganda and South Sudan. Billy completed his undergraduate at Asbury University and received an M.Div. from Wesley Biblical Seminary.

The purpose of this paper is to (1) present an overview of a pastoral training program in Uganda that has introduced oral methods into the curriculum, (2) share some practicalities of our integrated model, and (3) offer several considerations for those looking to use oral methods within theological education.

WGM & AGC Training History

World Gospel Mission (WGM) has been training pastors primarily with Africa Gospel Church (AGC) in a non-formal training program since 1999. Over those years, an extensive literate-based curriculum was developed, including the traditional pastoral topics: Old and New Testament survey, basic doctrine, preaching, pastoral responsibilities, etc. The typical lesson included a lengthy topical outline and numerous scripture references usually communicated via lecture.

As the training expanded throughout Uganda, questions arose as to the effectiveness of the training. Evaluations and fieldwork revealed that indeed something was missing between theory and praxis. This gap forced significant reconsideration of our training methods.

In 2008, WGM and AGC began to explore using oral methodologies. While literacy is a high value in Uganda and many of our key church leaders were literate, almost all of the pastors in training were coming from oral preferenced communities. In 2009, a pilot program was initiated using Bible storytelling exclusively among a small group of pastors. The oral Bible training program employed 20 selected stories from the Gospel of Mark using the organization God’s Story’s methodology called Simply The Story.
Concerns did arise: written copies of the discussion material were requested, language barriers complicated training, and some people declined to participate with little effort.

Overall though, the feedback was positive. The pastors expressed their delight at being able to communicate the gospel through biblical stories in both contexts. When visiting the sick, the pastors shared a story of Jesus’ healing. The stories provided opportunities for the pastors to engage people around the word of God.

**Our Attempt at an Integrated Model**

This empowerment for communicating the gospel, evidenced in the pilot program, necessitated consideration of how we could implement Bible storying throughout our training. After further discussion and prayer, it was agreed we would redesign the pastoral training program. While not exclusively oral, it would be story-based. Literate aspects would be introduced over time, but each lesson would be grounded in the biblical narrative. Furthermore, the training would include elements related to personal spiritual development and discipleship and introduce basic holistic health components.

In 2012, we designed an intensive facilitator training program for key regional church leaders who then assisted in training additional trainers. With these rising facilitators and trainers, the church and mission started a three-year pastoral training program in January 2013.

**Training Structure**

In this new program, the training team prepares the regional facilitators. The regional facilitators then instruct the area trainers who are then responsible to conduct trainings for local pastors. The local trainings include approximately twelve to fifteen participants.

With many key church leaders being schoolteachers as well as pastors, the Uganda school calendar, divided into three terms, has become the training schedule. We have three training terms with preparation for both facilitators and trainers taking place during the three school holidays (January, May, and August).

**Training Curriculum**

The first year’s emphasis is learning and implementing Bible storying, giving each pastor a tool for communicating the word of God, whether in an oral or literate context. The focus is on the life of Jesus, drawing from the Gospel of
Luke, and a biblical worldview, drawn from Genesis 1-11. During the second year, stories come from the Book of Acts, focusing on pastoral issues such as sacraments, church finances, and spiritual warfare. During the final training year, using stories primarily from the life of Abraham, we address broader theological issues such as election and free will, other religions, angels and demons, etc. Therefore, whereas each year of the training will use increasingly more print material, all three years will maintain a story-based foundation.

Overcoming Arising Complications

Why integrate oral and literate methods? Why not just use the oral methods as done in the previous pilot program? While wanting to utilize the strengths of oral communication, we feared an exclusive oral program. First, it would deny the pastors (most of whom are literate at some level) the advantages of any printed resources. Second, having encountered certain challenges during the exclusively oral pilot program, we felt certain concessions were necessary. Three specific complications warrant additional discussion as to why we are using an integrated model even as we seek to be more effective in engaging oral preference learners in Uganda.

Complication #1: Society’s Literate Bias

One of the primary reasons we are implementing an integrated model is because literate-based education carries more respect within the community.

While we are convinced of the effectiveness of Bible storytelling to communicate, at least in Uganda there is a certain stigma that oral methods are “of a previous generation.” Many people are oral preference learners but they want to be identified as literate preferred. They are empathetic toward oral methods like storytelling as many admit to learning cultural stories from their grandmothers, seated around the fire while growing up as a child. But due to a literate bias within their contemporary society, print-based methods are preferred. Everyone wants something written, almost as evidence that learning is taking place, even if the pastor cannot read or never will.

Our response: In response, the training team is working on a one-page “lesson” that will be given out with each story. The basic template of the lesson will give a brief setting for each story, introduce unusual words or cultural issues, and provide several starting point observations, as well as a few key application questions. While we recognize the inconsistency of handing out printed material, this is a concession we have found necessary, particularly in our first year during which we are trying to emphasis oral Bible storytelling.
Further consideration: We realize the danger that such an approach could immediately disadvantage the oral preference learners, particularly if lessons are handed out. We are trying to avoid literate-only paradigms. But for all the warnings of excluding oral preference learners, consideration must also be given to the educational expectations found within the students’ communities. To dismiss these can actually disservice the students, even if they are being taught within their preferred learning method. In Uganda, people struggle with the oral-literate tension, whereby they learn best orally, but want to appear literate.

Therefore, consideration as to how to balance students’ preferred learning styles with their community’s educational expectations is necessary in both formal and non-formal theological education.

Complication #2: Evaluation of Oral Methodologies

Another reason why we have chosen to integrate oral and literate approaches is the challenge related to evaluation and assessment. We began to ask, “How do we orally evaluate someone’s learning and proficiency?”

Oral evaluations are a valid possibility. Pastors can be asked to tell certain Bible stories and then interact through discussion on the story and be graded on various elements of the process. What we found to be the challenge was consistency between evaluations: How do we help the pastors keep the stories they are learning so they still know them well at the time of evaluation?

Our response: From our experience, to ensure the pastors are learning and maintaining the Bible stories, a consistently maintained record is necessary. Some may argue that maintaining a record is too literate, but without written records of how often students were practicing the stories, measurable improvement was very difficult to monitor. In fact, when the pastors have been allowed to set their own goals per week for learning and sharing stories, their success rate has been high and the enthusiasm of some has motivated others.

We have also discovered that the larger the number of people being evaluated, the greater the challenge it is to maintain those consistent records. As we have sought to implement evaluation throughout our national training program, it has been challenging to coordinate consistent reporting from each training center. Unfortunately, we can testify that when there is less written accountability, fewer stories are mastered.
Further consideration: For those grappling with theological assessment in the oral-preference learner, the question for many is: How does one maintain consistent standards whereby oral students are graded? I suggest a few thoughts for consideration. First, exact measurements may not be possible in the same way they are in a literate model. This could be a necessary concession as we incorporate oral methodologies into our training schemes.

Having said that, however, how can we be creative in what we can measure? We found it very enlightening to evaluate not only the pastor, but also someone he or she had discipled. If the disciple knew the stories and could handle discussion around them, we knew the pastor was learning. Second, there is no substitute for personal evaluation—a teacher or facilitator personally overseeing the evaluation process. While this may appear obvious, in today’s world of short-term teaching modules and visiting professors, it is easy to allow time or travel constraints to limit the facilitator’s involvement in the evaluation. While this type of face-to-face evaluation is time-consuming, it may be another concession necessary for accurately evaluating how well oral preference learners are progressing.

Complication #3: Selectivity of Material

In a literate setting, the facilitator can refer students back to written resources. Due to the nature of oral methodologies, those resources are either not accessible or only accessible in very limited ways. Thus, repetition and review become essential for true mastery of material. This requires time. The more material is covered, the more revision is necessary; thus, more time is necessary for effective training. We were faced with a difficult question: With a limited time frame, what really is essential for the pastor’s education?

Our response: The training team agreed that learning how to handle the word of God was top priority. We wanted people to engage scripture and learn how to ask the right questions. Selecting to focus the first year of oral Bible study on knowing Jesus and a biblical worldview is a curriculum limitation. Yet, we felt that was the foundation needed by each pastor.

Furthermore, with the second year focused on pastoral issues and the third on larger theological topics, there is a granted acknowledgement that much more could be studied. By design, however, the training program has had to be less interested in providing all the answers and more in trying to equip church leaders with tools for finding answers, specifically in scripture.
In addition to printed lessons, we are trying to supplement the limited resources of the pastors through recording Bible stories. These are recorded on micro SD cards and played from cell phones. There are limitations due to necessary resources and expertise and we are still doing initial fieldwork. Ideally, however, the pastors will have audio recordings of all the Bible stories taught from the training in addition to other available oral resources.

**Further consideration:** If theological education is going to incorporate oral methodologies, it will require a reconciliation that either less material will be covered or more time must be allocated for the learning process. Our experience has led us to believe that we may need to focus less on an all-encompassing curriculum, and instead look for an all-empowering curriculum. If time will not allow us to teach all of the answers regarding scripture, theology, or pastoral care, let us teach how to engage the word of God so that those significant questions can be addressed as they arise personally, communally, and even nationally.

**Conclusion**

Over the last five years, WGM and AGC have worked not only to investigate the potential benefits of oral methodologies, but have sought how to integrate oral and literate paradigms into an effective non-formal theological training program. While acknowledging challenges, we believe integrating oral and literate approaches is the future for multiplying biblically-equipped leaders in Uganda.

**Questions & Challenges**

1) Are others in theological education experiencing the oral-literate tension when society expects literate-based education, but the culture is made up of predominately oral preference learners? If so, how are they reconciling that tension? Are they choosing to use exclusive oral methods, or are they trying to integrate the two?

2) Has anyone encountered suspicion of oral methods from oral learners themselves as tools like storytelling appear “less” sophisticated than lectures, notes, and workbooks? How have they overcome such opposition from oral learners?

3) Do educators bear the responsibility of offering literacy training so that oral learners, if they desire, can gain access to print resources?
Chapter 3

Contextualized Theological Education for Equipping the Unreached Unengaged People Groups in North India

Alex Abraham

Dr. Alex Abraham is a neuro-physician and CEO of Operation Agape, which is involved in church planting among Unengaged Unreached People Groups and training indigenous leaders through non-formal Church Based Theological Education. He is part of several Great Commission initiatives, including Finishing the Task and Issachar Initiative. He is actively involved in the orality movement and has drafted Bible stories into Bible-less languages.

Introduction

The Church in north India is seeing growth like never before. In fact, 50-70% of new believers in the emerging churches are non-literates or semi-literates. Although the literacy rate in India is around 70%, only about 25-30% are functionally literate within the churches. An estimated 30-50% of the pastors and house church leaders in the unreached, unengaged people groups (UUPGs) are oral learners who are either illiterate or semi-literate and need solid theological foundation to establish their churches.

This leaves us with a significant challenge to modify training programs to suit the needs of the large number of non-literates in the Body of Christ. How do we train them to be mature leaders who will in turn be discipling others and building a strong church?

Basic Assumptions

Every believer, literate or non-literate, needs to be trained and equipped with the word of God. In 1 Corinthians 1:4 the Apostle Paul encourages the church to be rich in word and knowledge. Theological education is not for a select few “chosen” people; instead, every believer and leader should be educated in the word of God. This includes oral learners. Therefore, theological education should be inclusive.
What are the challenges? The present theological education (TE) paradigm is not oriented toward oral learners at all. TE does not consider nor address the need to include non-literates.

**Question 1: How do we design a training course that includes oral learners? What should we teach to the new believers and emerging leaders?**

First, we need to have a clear theological encyclopedia; we need to define what they should learn and the order in which they learn before we look at how they can be trained.

The theological encyclopedia should aim at teaching the whole counsel of God and not just a few portions of scripture selected at random. Although stories may be a good way to begin, are they alone sufficient? For example, Paul’s strategy to establish the churches was not simply a collection of stories, but also included strong proclamation of the gospel (Kerygma) and a firm emphasis on Apostolic teaching (Didache). Pauline epistles brought out solid biblical principles that aimed at establishing the community of new believers in the scriptural foundation and helping them form a clear biblical worldview as guiding principles of Christian life and the foundation of their faith.

Can oral learners learn deep theology? If not, what was Paul’s strategy when he was trying to establish the church of his time, which consisted of 90% oral learners? Oral learners can assimilate beyond stories and understand abstract concepts and principles as taught by the apostles.

**Question 2: How did the apostles train the new believers, and in what order?**

As we read in Paul’s early letters (which were written long before the Gospels were even compiled), we see that he had a strong emphasis on the understanding of the gospel and teaching the foundations of faith. His subsequent letters emphasized the need to live out faith as an ordered community under mature leaders who passed on their faith to subsequent generations. Today, as we design a theological encyclopedia, we need to make sure we give these believers the solid meat of the word of God as they mature in their faith.

The Bible Story Model of Training

Bible stories are a good way to begin the training for oral learners. How can we use Bible stories for TE? Let me share a quick note about storytelling. A better
way forward than simply teaching Bible stories in isolation is to select Bible stories of different categories for different situations and add Pauline teaching along with stories. Paul not only used Bible stories in his proclamation but also did a follow up with strong didache.

We also need to make sure the learners understand the Bible as one big story and how each story within it fits into the big picture. Often, we take a Bible story in isolation and try to interpret it out of context, missing the core message of the passage.

**Question 3: How should we train oral learners?**

We see solid models of training for oral learners in both the Old and the New Testaments. How can non-literate retain what we teach?

In the Old Testament period, scripture was passed on and learned primarily in oral form by memorizing the law, songs, poetry, and prophetic utterances with very few copies of the written scrolls, which were often read in public. In the New Testament, Paul was in a place in Rome for two years and taught the people through interactive teaching like Socratic discussion.

In both the Old and New Testaments, scripture was passed on through oral traditions such as psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Moses reminded the people of Israel to memorize scripture and repeat it in their daily lives. We see the prophets acting out the stories with prophetic messages.

Can we use these principles today as training strategies for oral learners? One thing we need to make sure of is that learners understand the story as recorded in the Bible. However, it is equally important that they understand the author’s intent and the context of the story. Repetitions, questions and discussion, and acting out the stories are useful ways to help oral learners understand the story. It is a common practice in Indian culture to use songs to learn and teach Bible stories. Bible stories, in fact, are a good way to begin in the process of leadership development among the non-literate.

A serious objection to using only Bible stories comes from the fact that in Indian Hindu culture, it is all about mythology and stories; therefore, new believers coming from a Hindu worldview may think about Christianity also as a set of stories.
Beyond Bible Stories

H. R. Weber has an insightful book called *The Communication of the Gospel to Illiterates* in which he portrays the Bible as “God’s great picture-book.” Weber points out that “God does not reveal the deepest mysteries by word (expresis verbis) but through signs: immersion in baptism, the breaking of bread, the cross” (Weber, 1957). All these metaphors (picture, drama, and symbol) are oral methods of communication, and thus God does communicate with oral learners.

The assumption that non-literates cannot understand Pauline teaching is baseless. Our goal should be to teach them the whole counsel of God, which goes beyond Bible stories.

*Question 4: How do we modify the training based on the worldview in varying cultures?*

We recommend a menu approach by selecting the right story for the right group at the right context, along with an appropriate theological basis for the cultural context.

*Question 5: How do we evaluate the oral learners?*

The present TE model of evaluation, certification, and award of degrees are based on head knowledge proven by written examinations. Very little emphasis is given to competency and character in the whole evaluation process. How can we then evaluate oral learners in a non-formal TE system using competency-based evaluation tools? We need to design tools that are simple and effective for evaluation, which should be based on their character and competency, rather than on a pure knowledge-based evaluation.

Operation Agape’s Training Model

Operation Agape (OA) is involved in pioneer church-planting discipleship and leadership training in more than one hundred major UUPGs in north India. With Hindu and Muslim worldviews deeply rooted in their culture, it is all the more important to have a well-designed plan to establish the new believers in their newfound faith and biblical worldview.

We have discussed this at length and worked on creating a theological encyclopedia for training both new believers and higher leadership levels. We
have also attempted to define the competences for each level, designing a graded theological encyclopedia for people of all skill levels.

We are now experimenting with a graded training program using a spiral learning model. The content is a mixture of Bible stories and didache based on Pauline epistles as the initial step, followed by more solid leadership lessons using a biblical theology approach. The emphasis is on Socratic discussion early on in order to stimulate their thinking. It is based on a 2 Timothy 2:2 principle of training others. We use the acronym “HOT Christians,” meaning Hear, Obey, and Teach, as a basic philosophy in all training programs.

We also use culturally appropriate forms to augment the students’ learning skills. The training pattern includes:

- From new believers to disciples (emphasis on Kerygma and Seven Commandments\(^2\), using Bible stories in each lesson)
- Disciple to disciple-maker (A set of Bible lessons as basic foundations prepared by Operation Agape, augmented by Bible stories and cultural stories for each lesson)
- Disciple-maker to a Type 1 leader (using competency-based evaluation and BILD\(^3\) first principles, with a strong emphasis on didache and no Bible stories)
- Type 1-5 leaders (using first principles series two and three and leadership series, with a strong biblical theology approach using Socratic discussion)

**Evaluation**

Unlike conventional evaluation models which are purely knowledge-based, we are attempting to do competency-based evaluation at all levels. We believe evaluation should be an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. For every level of training, we have an evaluation tool which can also be used for oral learners. Let me share the story of two illiterate ladies from north India whom we are training using our curriculum-based competency evaluation system.

*Indira, mother of nine children, lives in a slum and earns her livelihood by collecting waste materials. She is from the Maratha people group from the state of Maharashtra. She came to the Lord ten years ago and for the last five years she has been in our training program. She started with a set of four Bible stories which were taught by my wife, Annie, in a monthly one-day training session. The stories were taught orally and discussed in depth in small, homogenous groups. She also*
learned to dramatize the story and practiced the art of telling it to others during the training. She started sharing these stories to her friends and neighbors in the slum. About 20 ladies came to the Lord through her and she started discipling them. Later, we introduced her to BILD first principles and she completed her course, which has no Bible stories at all. She was evaluated using a competency-based oral evaluation system using BILD tools and was given Leadership Mastery 1 certification. Now she is in her Leadership Mastery 2 course, which she is able to pick up fairly well.

Ruby is a non-literate lady and wife of a non-literate man—whom she led to the Lord. She is now pastoring a church with more than 100 believers, all from a Hindu background. She joined the women’s training program for oral learners about seven years ago and learned several Bible stories and memory verses associated with Bible stories. She then trained and mentored several second and third-generation leaders using oral principles. Gradually, she got also enrolled in the BILD first principles series and has been evaluated and certified as Leadership Mastery 1 leader. She is now doing the level 2 course, which summarizes the Pauline epistles. She has a total of 40 disciples (e.g., oral leaders who are non-literate or semi-literate) on her leadership team and has been building a strong church among the marginalized people with several unreached people groups.

We refer to BILD’s resources also as helping to make oral learners out of literate leaders. There are very important principles of oral learning (interactivity, active learning, big ideas, community learning, verbal processing, etc.) that are deep in God’s design of humans, but are usually neglected the farther “up” you go in academic training.

Harvard School’s literature shows that dialogue around the stories is where the change is—where you make leaders and establish thinking believers.

Ethnomusicology
The use of music as a training tool is becoming popular in an Indian context where people like music. For example, JESUS Film audio files were released with Indian music in between, and this was widely accepted. OA has crafted Bible stories, songs, and cultural stories in 15 Bible-less languages, distributed them in audio format, and started several house churches and story fellowships in these languages.
Conclusion

There is a great response, primarily from oral learners, to the gospel in India. Theological education is meant for all—not a select few called out to be professional leaders in ministry. We need to create a well-defined theological encyclopedia for both oral and literate learners, which should include Bible stories and didache followed by the whole counsel of God in a graded manner. We need to emphasize the need for Socratic discussion; evaluation can and should be done primarily using competency-based oral evaluation tools.

Questions & Challenges
1) What should the oral learners learn as they grow from new believers to mature disciples and leaders, and in what order?
2) How should the training form look for oral learners?
3) How do we evaluate the oral learners using a competency-based evaluation system rather than knowledge-based written format?
4) How should we modify the training content and methodology for oral learners based on their worldview and cultures?

References


1OA is a pioneer church-planting movement involved in establishing churches, equipping leaders, and empowering the poor. The primary focus of the ministry is the Unreached and Unengaged People groups of north India and the neighboring countries of Nepal and Bhutan. (www.Operationagape.com)

2The Seven Commandments is a summary of all the commandments of Jesus described in the gospels and is a simple initial discipleship tool for the new believers being extensively used in several church planting movements globally.

3BILD stands for Biblical Institute of Leadership Development. It is a global network of church-planting movements involved in training leaders in the way of Christ and the apostles using a church-based leadership paradigm and a competency-based evaluation system all the way from disciples to doctor-level courses (www.bild.org)
Chapter 4

Training in the Philippines Context

Gil P. Balignasay

Rev. Gil Balignassay is National Training Director of WorldTeach Philippines and Senior Pastor of Marikina Faith Bible Church. He also ministers as an Executive Committee Member of TOPIC-Philippines (Trainers of Pastors International Coalition). He completed his B.Th. at the Higher Ground Bible College and his M.Div. in Pastoral Leadership at International Graduate School of Leadership (formerly ISOT-Asia). He has been married to Emily for twenty-eight years and is blessed with two lovely daughters, Johanan and Jezreel.

Below I explore and present essential issues relating to perspectives and challenges of oral leaders in a Filipino setting. I will (1) present some basic historical roots of Filipinos as oral learners that have been rooted in their cultural orientation, (2) assess potential need areas for oral communicators, and (3) address questions raised for non-formal and informal training perspectives in the Philippines context.

I have conducted various interviews with church leaders and evaluated their insights in terms of relevance and potential among Filipino oral learners. I have also attempted to synthesize various perspectives and insights from the respondents, who are engaged in reaching out to oral communicators. My connection and exposure to various Christian communities both from the grassroots and urban setting build credible documentation (though limited) through the feedback of a few selected respondents being interviewed concerning this subject.

Historical/Cultural Background

Historically, pre-colonial Philippines had a very rich oral culture and tradition. This cultural heritage was deeply embedded in our beliefs and values. On the other hand, other cultures labeled Filipinos as visual people and learners. Various forms of storytelling reinforced our visual consciousness and imaginations (Agoncillo 1990). Oral preference practitioners who took the center stage, entertaining both small and large audiences, were accepted in a wider spectrum in Philippines society. These oral practitioners were patronized and gained a huge following, for they connected the ethos and surfaced the pathos of the audience.

Spanish accounts are unanimous in saying that Filipinos did not use their alphabet for literary compositions or record-keeping. They had many verbal art
forms, in particular epics, poetry, eulogies, and folk tales, but all were in oral form (Scott 1994). Walter Ong aptly supported this observation when he said, “description of these oral art forms is an evocative characterization of oral art forms as being repetitive, toned…and participatory” (1982).

During the 16th century there was a gradual shift from orality to literacy with the influx of introduction of various forms of learning through adaptation, technological advancement, and influence from other cultures imposing new ways of learning and education. Because of this changing cultural orientation on orality, the Philippines Church has been affected especially in the way the Church presents the gospel message and in terms of training and equipping their congregations. Focusing on the growth of Philippines churches today, the number of churches planted over the past four decades has gained momentum and increased. This growth can be attributed to a strong partnership in evangelism and collaboration between denominations, mission-minded organizations and churches.

In 1970, DAWN (Disciplining a Whole Nation) envisioned planting one church in every barangay throughout the Philippines. The DAWN leadership plotted a 30-year goal of planting fifty thousand churches throughout the Philippines. The goal was surpassed. Dr. Reynaldo Taniajura claims:

…based on the official May 2000 census of the Philippines, evangelicals and other Protestant groups in the Philippines combined constitute 6.5% of the entire population. However, according to a later research by DAWN 2000, there are now 51,555 Evangelical/Protestant churches in the Philippines, comprising approximately 9% of the population. (Taniajura n.d.)

Today, there are approximately seventy thousand evangelical churches planted, and more than forty thousand churches are being led and shepherded by pastors without formal theological/seminary background and training. Pastors serving in the countryside (tribal/ethnic) have great opportunities to share the gospel through storytelling, which enables biblical truths about Jesus Christ to be shared simply and relationally. Since there is a growing interest and demand for an oral teaching approach, pastors need to be trained. The majority of pastors strongly embrace a classroom type of lecture and teaching. By training church pastors/leaders in oral teaching methods or storytelling, we hope to see greater effectiveness in the spiritual growth of churches in the Philippines.
Challenges and Changes in the Context of Non-formal Training for Oral Preference Pastors/Leaders in the Philippines

I conducted interviews with church leaders in various ministry engagements and evaluated their insights and observations based on their experiences. Let me share several challenges that oral leaders in the Philippines are confronted with.

Challenge #1: Need for a Paradigm Shift

Pastors trained in the Western academic setting and accustomed to classroom learning find it difficult to rely on oral teachings. The Western approach, especially the American one, uses academic experience to teach and develop materials which relies heavily on textbooks so as to develop written answers. According to Herman Moldez, this has limitations when you are teaching people how to live.

Another challenge for oral preference leaders is how to convince those who are schooled in Bible seminaries to accept “orality” as one option to educate oral preference learners. This will be hard. According to Norberto Mercado, this initiative “is like convincing Ateneo de Manila or University of the Philippines Bar topnotchers to accept ‘unschooled paralegals’ to be their co-equal in the practice of law.” This kind of change will meet stiff resistance, especially if this mode of teaching preference is based on heavy lecture and lengthy discussion. One of the consolations “oralists” have is the fact that most of the apostles and the disciples of Christ during the first century did not go to seminaries and Bible schools, but studied and taught the Old Testament just as Saul of Tarsus and other disciples did. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest teacher who ever lived on earth, exemplified teaching to oral preference learners by using object lessons, parables, and narratives so much that his listeners were astonished and amazed at his teaching (Mark 1:22; 6:1-2).

It is important for Bible schools and seminaries to offer non-curricular training for young believers who don’t have the time or money to enroll. Schools need to train young believers in the fundamental doctrines of biblical Christianity so that they will not swerve to unbiblical teachings/cults. Likewise, non-curricular/non-formal trainings on how to effectively communicate to oral preference learners should be offered by Bible schools and seminaries, thus developing and raising learners’ level of competence to become oral leaders.
Challenge #2: Lack of Trainers for Oral Preference Learners

In the Philippines, many training organizations engaged in church growth, discipleship, evangelism, and missions employ a lecture-structured format, which is basically a formal instructional monologue imparting information in an organized manner (i.e., live teaching or use of video). There must be a gradual change from the traditional way of teaching biblical truth to oral preference teaching. At a glance, orality teaching is an unaccepted method unless Filipino teachers are educated and well informed on the effectiveness and advantages of its use. This means that teaching Bible truths to oral learners requires greater awareness so that the teachers will have a change in perspective and teaching style. According to Bong Baylon, to address the need of training trainers, oral facilitators and practitioners must organize training workshops, hands-on coaching, and seminars for potential prospects to enhance their confidence and competence.

Challenge #3: Develop Core Curriculum and Tools that Are Culturally Relevant

Curriculum development and preparation of related resource materials/tools both for oral preference learners and for oral preference teachers/facilitators should be culturally relevant and sensitive. Aside from training oral preference leaders, the lack of material resources compounds the problem of untrained oral preference instructors. In order to develop a Bible story curriculum for oral preference communicators, several important elements need to be considered: (1) a story that illustrates and makes the learning point clearer and more vivid; (2) a story that captivates and makes the boring something compelling; and (3) a story that motivates and makes a bridge to personal reflection and response. These developed tools must first be field-tested to a specific and more responsive target audience to validate their impact and effectiveness. Over time, this approach will be an avenue where oral communication technique of Bible storying will be gradually introduced.

Challenge #4: Study the Demographic Needs of Oral Preference Learners while Not Sacrificing the Teachings of Orthodox Christianity

Some critics of oral preference teaching deplore its methodology by saying that biblical storytelling has the strong tendency to deviate from the text during the process of communicating God’s message in a certain context, thus blurring the author’s intended meaning. Sometimes, this is inevitable if one is not careful. To address this concern, a seminar on hermeneutics for oral facilitators is needed
to equip them to be fully grounded in the word of God. Jesus, our model Master Teacher used simple words to talk about even the most difficult subjects. He spoke to his hearers in their language, using images and words common to their experience. Sensitivity to cultural norms without sacrificing biblical truth makes oral preference teaching not only biblical, but also incarnational and transformational.

**Challenge #5: Diverse Orality Approaches for Varied Audiences**

One of the challenges in storying is the type of audience being reached out to engaged and their level of understanding. Interaction is heavy, which allows boredom to diminish. When teaching people how to live, telling stories that learners can identify with is powerful. Story speaks to their hearts and increases their desire to live out what they see and hear.

Ordinary people love to share their thoughts and hearts. According to Moldez, the monologue lecture type has stifled their oral learning preference; instead, they need a safe group where they can speak and interact. There should be a balance of oral (stories, songs, proverbs) and written forms in conducting non-formal training among pastors in the Philippines. According to Roli Manuel, pure orality limits passing of learning knowledge transfer because not everyone has an excellent memory. No doubt Filipinos are oral people. Their visual imagination is sharpened as they engage in listening to oral narratives. They learn about life through telling stories while eating and drinking, much as Jesus did.

**Challenge #6: Opportunity for Kingdom Expansion**

In spite of the high literacy rate among Filipinos, surprisingly many still are illiterates. Stanley Chi reported the “National Statistics Office of the Philippines conducted a Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey last 2005, in which about 84% of about 58 million Filipinos from ten to sixty-four years old were found to be literate” (2011). This reflects that only two out of ten Filipino citizens could neither read nor write—and the eight others are functionally literate. This is a big opportunity to enlarge the scope in teaching scriptural truths thru Bible storying. The challenge lies ahead in reaching the marginalized populace that is hungry to hear biblical stories told in a fresh and creative way.

Given these statistics and facts, orality engagements must not only be confined within the four walls of church buildings, but must penetrate and gain ground in every sector of society (workplace, schools, prisons, civic-oriented organizations,
government, and private institutions, etc.). Christ’s mandate of making disciples is a challenge for the entire Church. Oral preference leaders whose calling and passion cannot be questioned must be ready to use their giftedness and skills in helping fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

Assessments for Philippines Oral Preference Learners

I must admit my own difficulty in assessing Filipino oral preference learners for two valid reasons: (1) the analysis device(s) to assess oral preference learners to guide me in this pursuit is very limited, so intelligent assessment for Oral Preference Learners cannot be done at this time; and (2) there are few Christian organizations engaged in taking this assessment; therefore, the findings may not be conclusive. However, after being exposed to various ministry involvements and pastoral trainings in the Philippines for more than three decades, I believe there is a great need and urgency in Philippines churches today to reach oral preference learners. Oral preference learners are assessed in the following manner.

1. Informal discussion. Feedback from pastors and church workers is highly valuable. During informal discussions with pastors and church leaders, questions are raised concerning the needs of their congregations, methodologies used in their teaching and preaching, evangelistic programs implemented in their own churches, ways church members are being intentionally discipled, holistic outreach programs in the community, and how people are learning and growing in their walk with God. One can gain a better and clearer picture of the situation of the church and its audience. Answers from respondents will give clues concerning the spiritual situation of the congregation.

2. Personal interviews. One-on-one interviews from oral preference learners can be a tool for assessing their needs and level of receptivity. A casual and non-threatening environment will enhance personal interviews with them. At the same time, interviewees can express insights from their point of view—especially those that affect their disposition, cultural orientation, cognitive and educational levels, and their personal growth in the Lord. You can ask what method of biblical teaching they prefer.

3. Field ministry exposure. Seminars and conferences have plagued the Philippines churches over the past three decades. As an event organizer myself, I have observed this phenomenon over the years. There is one thing that emerges
during conferences and seminars: the uniformity in communication and teaching style by speakers. They lecture a lot. Filipino audiences are accustomed to this kind of approach and changing the mindset is quite difficult.

Future Action Plans to Be Initiated for Oral Preference Leaders

Moving forward, I recommend the following action steps be undertaken with non-formal training for oral preference pastors/leaders.

1. **Formation of a missional working team.** A select group who is passionate to teach God’s word and will champion and spearhead this advocacy to a Filipino audience is needed.

2. **Invite facilitators to train and equip pastors for creative storytelling.** This action step will enhance the skill and giftedness of oral preference leaders. This will further add value to their role as Bible teachers.

3. **Field-test available and developed materials on orality.** Undertake and launch field-tested materials for oral communicators in a specific context. This must be done with intentionality. Synthesize feedback from field-tested materials and reevaluate accordingly in terms of applicability and receptivity in certain contexts.

4. **Proliferate workshops on orality.** Workshops are led by orality-trained facilitators. During workshops, oral teachers will learn to lead classes in a Bible storying session. According to Panz Alvarez, each oral preference leader (a potential recruit) will learn to preach and teach using a story in a storying style.

In the Philippines, seeking to equip fifty thousand pastors with no theological or seminary background and training is quite a challenge. In my observation, many Bible schools and seminaries in the Philippines have designed a curriculum to equip these pastors at the grassroots level through their theological education by extension programs. The limitation of this approach is that it is academically heavy for the average pastor who has other ministry and family obligations and a lack of support (both financially and administratively).

According to Philip Flores, TOPIC Philippines was birthed one and a half decades ago with the focus of training and equipping pastoral leaders in the Philippines to form “a new breed, a new generation of pastoral leaders.” This training outfit is the official training arm of the largest evangelical group in the
Philippines, the Philippines Council of Evangelical Churches, which has a total membership of 71 different denominations in the Philippines. TOPIC facilitators’ methods of teaching and imparting biblical training are closely akin to a classroom approach. This is a challenge that Filipino Bible teachers should explore in order to reach more oral preference learners. According to Manuel, one TOPIC trainer shared, “I use, and will continue to use, Jane Vella’s adult learning process, a combination of written and oral form. I believe this is the best way to impart knowledge that would lead to transformation.”

One good development happening to oral preference communicators is through the approach of International Care Ministries (ICM) in the Philippines. Dr. Herman Moldez, the National Coordinator of Mentorlink and one of the training partners of the Philippines Council Evangelical Churches, claims that their materials for mentoring use spiritual conversations, an informal sharing of one another’s thinking and feeling, prayer, and a passion to obey Jesus. It is wonderful to see pastors in ICM gather in groups of five, doing oral learning through mentoring conversations. Pastors receive encouragement to live the life of Jesus. It is life-on-life speaking to one another in truth and love.

Conclusion

How ready and responsive are the Filipino oral educator and Philippines Church in embracing this new approach of teaching oral preference learners biblical truth? Given the right perspective, training, and motivation, Filipino oral preference leaders can creatively bring alive the gospel message to non-formal and informal settings.

Developing and empowering Filipino oral leaders to make God’s word available to oral communicators in culturally relevant ways is a big task and challenge to pursue. Trained and gifted oral preference leaders/facilitators will create a huge impact in the Body of Christ, thus enabling Filipino churches to revitalize their evangelistic fervor, subsequently bringing more converts to Christ. Teaching biblical truth in a fresh and creative way to oral learners will diminish boredom and raise the level of interest and understanding among oral preference communicators, which will result in a life change.

With the conviction and illumination that the Holy Spirit brings to darkened minds, transformation takes place once the gospel message is presented and understood in the light of their own language and culture. Orality teaching also
has a big role to play in discipling believers and equipping them “for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up to become mature in Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13).

**Questions & Challenges**

1) What forms of orality will best suit a given culture? How will the message be retained and passed on to others? How do we ensure that this will lead to the transformation of lives?

2) What story sets, Bible stories, and cultural stories can be used for teaching? (I would presume that Jesus had his sets of parables he used in different occasions to teach the Kingdom of God.)

3) What training will pastors need in order to learn the skill of writing and telling stories and facilitating oral conversation as a way of learning?

4) Can we develop sound theology by using storytelling?

5) What are the limitations of oral learning, especially in a culture in which one-way communication is heavily engaged?

6) What is the role of biblical storytelling in evangelism and discipleship?

7) How can an oral preference leader prevent conflict that may arise between culturally accepted norms and biblical truth presented? How can we balance the tension?

8) In employing oral communication of the gospel in a certain context, how can we gauge its effectiveness and impact?

9) Can orality be used or applied in all recognized biblical genre (prophecy, poetry, proverbs, and didactic)?

10) What are the limitations of oral preference teaching?

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Chapter 5

Orality and Theological Education in Latin American Culture

W. Philip Thornton

Phil Thornton served as a missionary in Colombia, South Africa, before assuming the job of Professor of Missions at Asbury University, a position he held for twenty-seven years. Phil has extensive experience in cross-cultural communication and church leadership training in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. He holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology.

While missionary practitioners in Latin America have been influenced by the orality movement, most theological education programs have remained relatively static. Seminary and Bible school curricula are still very Western and highly literate. Changes in the way we train church leaders are certainly needed, especially if we are going to meet the needs of oral audiences. However, these changes will be effective only if done with a keen understanding of the complexities of Latin culture.

Making the Message Oral: Cultural Issues in Latin American Society

Cross-cultural communication presents the Christian worker with three cultural challenges: (1) understanding the culture of the Bible, (2) understanding the culture of the target audience, and (3) understanding his or her own culture. The dissimilarities in these three cultures pose significant challenges; challenges which become even more complex for those working in theological education. Students coming from an oral tradition, but educated in a Western-style institution, must take a biblical message originally transmitted orally, learn that message in a highly literate (academic) setting, and then convert what he or she has learned back into an oral structure for effective communication with an oral audience. It is this last step where we have fallen short in our theological education process.
Making the message “oral” involves two processes. The first entails how we deliver the message. Thus, we turn to storying, drama, and songs. We look for connections with local proverbs and folk tales as potential footholds for presenting the gospel. The greater challenge, however, comes with how we structure the message. Each culture has its own way of organizing the content of the message so that it is understood by—and has a high impact on—the hearers. While orality practitioners have grown quite proficient in the delivery of the message, we have given less attention to structuring that message in a culturally appropriate way. A careful, in-depth understanding of the target audience is essential to good contextualization (Kraft 1980).

What follows is an attempt to give a brief introduction into the kinds of cultural issues, both positive and negative, that theological educators face in Latin America. This list is far from complete. The issues are not necessarily the most important ones, but rather a sampling to emphasize that the transmission of the gospel message and the training of Christian workers in Latin America must be culturally and socially sensitive in both its packaging and its delivery.

Latin society is not monolithic, but rather a mixture of Mestizos, Whites, Blacks, Mulattos, Amerindians, and Asians, all influenced by class, caste, and strata rank. Thus, my observations are at best generalizations which will need modification with each segment of the larger society.

1. The interaction of religion and culture. Culturally, Latin Americans are concrete, relational thinkers (as opposed to conceptual or intuitional) (Hesselgrave 1981). With traditional Roman Catholicism, the dominant religion of Central and South America, elements of theology are always tied to concrete objects (e.g., the use of statues, candles, and prayer beads) and actions (e.g., crossing one’s self and specified verbal responses to the priest). Making the abstract concrete fits well with what we know about oral learners where symbols, stories, and events, rather than general propositions, are generally used in the communication process.

On the other hand, this same traditional Roman Catholicism presents a dilemma. Historically, Catholic dogma has not been something to be discussed, but only to be accepted. Religious practice implied no great personal involvement (MacKay 2001). In church ritual, the worshiper was an “onlooker” rather than an active participant (Nida 1969). In contrast, members of oral
cultures are much more participative (Kohler 1982). They don’t just hear a story or see the drama; they enter into it. They live it vicariously. Training church leaders whose lives have been shaped by the authoritarian Catholic tradition and practice in a more participative oral style of teaching/learning may be challenging.

Because of its fear of “idolatry,” the evangelical Church has by and large shunned the use of concrete objects and focused on interior religious experience. However, this circumvention has frequently made theological expressions such as prayer and worship difficult for the Protestant convert. Unless we intentionally replace those concrete objects formerly used as aids in religious practice with some type of dynamic equivalent, we leave the Protestant worshiper in a quandary.

The same type of issue arises in the area of aesthetics. Again, reacting to what we have considered pictorial idolatry in the Roman Church, evangelical theology has most often insisted on plainness and simplicity in our church buildings. This can leave the one accustomed to the elaborate adornment of Catholic cathedrals with a sense of sterility and coldness in our Protestant churches.

Likewise, our evangelical emphasis of faith over works in our preaching shifts the Protestant convert toward a faith that is much more abstract and propositional than concrete. The question before us then is this: How does evangelical theological education incorporate that which is culturally appropriate from traditional (cultural) Catholicism in Latin America while at the same time avoiding what we consider to be its theological pitfalls?

2. Critical thinking. In education, the authoritarianism of traditional culture and religion in Latin America has encouraged students to develop often uncanny abilities to memorize and quote large bodies of material; however, it has ill-equipped them to discuss and understand it. While the emphasis on rote memory can be a positive for recalling and telling Bible stories (a major emphasis in orality), it can also short-change the process of critical thinking, which many believe is necessary to good theological education.

Some educators would argue that you cannot engage in any kind of in-depth analysis or problem-solving (including Bible study) without applying critical thinking skills. This leads to a few crucial questions for those of us
involved in theological training: Is critical thinking uniquely Western? Is it necessary for sound Bible study and teaching? How will orality address this issue of critical thinking versus rote learning in Latin America?

3. Whole-life needs. The most significant philosophical development in Latin America has been its constant striving for a complete (total) system. This idealism is vividly portrayed in Cervantes’s character Don Quixote. Missionary linguist Eugene Nida (1969) has noted that nothing as partial and incomplete as pragmatism would ever satisfy the typical Latin. This stands in contrast to the Western emphasis on practicality; for the westerner, “if it works, it must be good.” As a general rule we are simply not interested in grand systems; we are interested in results (Stewart 1972).

Again, this raises some interesting questions for theological education. Has our Western emphasis on results (i.e., winning people to Christ) short-changed the development of a broader theology that speaks to some of the crucial issues of Latin America such as poverty and inequality? Will the Latin theological student be frustrated by our lack of attention to a “total system” (i.e., a theology which speaks to all issues)? More importantly, will our Western education render him or her ineffective, or at least less effective, in “scratching his people where they itch?”

4. Fatalism. The other side of the philosophical coin in Latin America is seen in Quixote’s sidekick, Sancho Panza. He is the realist as opposed to Quixote’s romanticism, symbolic of practicality over idealism. Octavio Paz (Nida 1969) sees Quixote and Panza as reflective of Latin history, in which the people have gained independence only to take on new masters; established republics only to find themselves ruled by dictators; fought for freedom only to be enslaved by new forces or old powers in some new guise. This has created a certain fatalism which pervades much of Latin culture.

Thus, in the midst of tragedy you will hear “así lo quiso mi Dios” (God willed it this way) or “que será será” (what will be will be). In the realm of theology, this fatalism is expressed in terms of a limited good (Foster 1965) (e.g., grace is controlled and dispensed by the church). Conversely, Western culture and theology is optimistic and sees the world through the lens of an unlimited good. How will orality-based theological education address this pessimism-optimism dichotomy? Can it do so more effectively to our traditional modes of theological training?
5. **Real-life application.** The afore-mentioned cultural idealism of Don Quixote has expressed itself in the Church providing all the answers while asking no questions. This has been true in both Roman Catholic and Protestant circles. Once religious (denominational) doctrine has been formulated, it is to be believed and defended, not critically examined. Such a position limits theological inquiry and leaves many pertinent questions unaddressed. In other words, it separates theology from real life (Nida 1969). This dualism is foreign to oral cultures. *How will orality-based theological education address this cultural tension?*

6. **Sacred vs. secular.** A similar issue arises in the cultural acceptance of a strong distinction between the sacred and the secular. For example, the Catholic priest’s functions are not dependent on his own holiness, but rather on his consecration to the task. He may sanctify the elements without himself being holy; he may declare a person innocent without being guiltless himself. The same difficulty arises with the Protestant pastor who preaches the gospel enthusiastically on Sunday but has a mistress on the side. This disconnect between the sacred and the secular is foreign to most oral cultures. Where animism is the religious norm, the sacred and the secular blend almost seamlessly. *How will an orality emphasis in our theological education address this issue?*

7. **Machismo.** Talk to anyone familiar with Latin American culture and the subject of *machismo* will surface. To address this issue, we need to have some frame of reference. The Spanish conquistadores came to the New World without families. Children born from the temporary union of these conquerors with lowly Indian women faced a unique psychological and social problem. The father, whom they admired, was largely absent from their lives. On the other hand, the mother, who cared for them and to whom they were emotionally attached, belonged to a socially inferior, if not despised, class. The result for the Latin man is a psycho-social state where he continually strives to “prove his manhood” (i.e., *machismo*). *How will orality address this unique cultural issue? Does it bring a distinctive perspective on the subject to the training of church leaders (including women) in Latin America?*

8. **Indigenous issues.** The indigenous populations of Latin America present their own unique set of challenges. While it is true that these native populations are oral cultures, they may not readily embrace orality. As a conquered people, they are often embarrassed by their own cultural heritage. A Quechua seminary
student in Peru attending an orality workshop expressed it this way: “Once when I spoke Quechua in the presence of my parents, they scolded me severely. They said that I should always speak Spanish, not Quechua. To speak Quechua places me in a socially inferior position in society.” Not only did these students at this seminary not have a firm grasp on their native language, they also did not know the stories, songs, proverbs, myths, etc. of their heritage. Getting over this social hurdle in Latin America will not come easy, at least for the Quechua, and it tells us that not all oral people will automatically embrace orality!

9. **Bullfight.** Last, I would be remiss not to address the all-important bullfight in Latin culture. No event portrays the life and soul of the Latin like the bullfight. For us in the West, it is a sport; for the Latin, it is a drama. There is music and there is sculpture; there is ballet and there is opera; there is poetry and there is prose. No one laughs at a bullfight. Sometimes they cry. People do not go to see competition. They go to applaud triumph over tragedy. They leave satisfied only when they have seen victory of right (the matador) over evil (the bull).

The bull represents all the forces arrayed against humanity—disease, floods, famine, fire, hunger, etc. They conspire to bring a man to his knees. The matador stands alone to face the enemy on behalf of those who watch. He is often weak and frail, just like the people who watch. He is dressed in pastel shades, covered in gold and silver sequins, wearing pink stockings and flat black slippers. If the matador does well, the public feels good; fear has been defeated. He does not have to be the most expert, but he may not show cowardice! If he is injured, the onlookers will share in his pain (Marvin 1994).

Some have likened the matador to Christ, one who stands in my place. Others note the parallel between the bull and matador and David and Goliath. *How will theological education in Latin America capture and use the drama of the bullfight in the preparation of Christian leaders?*

**Conclusion**

Admittedly, I have raised many questions and offered few answers. Those answers will come only as we understand Latin culture in all its diversity and then shape and deliver the message in a culturally appropriate way. This is orality at
work in its broadest sense. Some changes to traditional educational models will be obvious, such as the sequential logic of the West giving way to a more flexible way of teaching, or compartmentalized theology with individualized courses surrendering ground to a more holistic approach to the study of scripture. Just how much change theological education, both at the formal and informal levels, is willing to embrace remains yet to be seen.

References

Chapter 6

Theological Education for the Deaf

Mark Sauter

Mark Sauter, formerly a pastor, felt the call to missions at an early age. He has been working, with his wife, as a church planter among Deaf communities in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia for the past twenty-two years.

It may be surprising to see a presentation about Deaf people at a conference about oral communication. By definition, oral communicators rely on speech and hearing and Deaf people do not. The Deaf are oral learners, because they too are non-print communicators. Since the Deaf strongly prefer non-print forms of communication, especially sign language, Deaf cultures have many of the same characteristics that are found in other cultures that make little or no use of neither written nor printed communication.

Introduction

In 2009, the International Mission Board, SBC (IMB) was restructured into nine affinity groups to give attention to people groups instead of countries and their geographical boundaries. Based on sustained research for a period of nearly ten years, the organization came to the conclusion that culturally Deaf people ought to comprise one of those nine groups. This decision was the beginning of a more narrowly-focused strategy for reaching the 35.5 million Deaf around the world.

With the advent of the Deaf Peoples Affinity came the challenge of how IMB-appointed Deaf missionaries could meet the requirements for theological education that was established by the board of trustees. Initially, twenty credit hours from an approved SBC seminary were required, but more recently, in an effort to make sure that newly-appointed apprentice missionaries have a well-grounded theological foundation, specific courses have been suggested: Old Testament survey, New Testament survey, systematic theology, church history, hermeneutics, etc.

This has led the leadership of the Deaf Peoples Affinity to determine the most practical method for delivering theological education to its Deaf personnel in order to make sure that the tools they have available to them in their efforts to
reach out to Deaf communities worldwide are comparable to those offered to hearing colleagues who have completed the required courses and hours in an approved seminary.

**Unique Challenges to Theological Education for the Deaf**

One of the most obvious challenges to ensure that credible theological education is available to the Deaf is the fact that Southern Baptist seminaries are not really accessible to Deaf people who would like to attend. Whether it is the need for highly-qualified interpreters, the high levels of reading and writing that are always a part of the entrance and curriculum processes, the lack of contextualized teaching, or a system that is based on a hearing model of church, theology, and education, the results make practical, applied theological training inaccessible for nearly all culturally Deaf people.

Asking culturally Deaf people to engage in the exercise of learning theology strictly from an academic process that is focused on learning strictly for gaining knowledge, is considered ludicrous by some (cf. Morris 2008, 84). Since American Sign Language is the heart language of most Deaf people in the USA, and since it is not a written language, their understanding and use of written English texts makes academics more than just a little challenging. Even the use of a qualified interpreter in colleges and seminaries does not facilitate contextualized learning for Deaf students. The worldview and values of the Deaf must have more consideration than just the translation of words into signs.

For a minority, oppressed group, such as the Deaf, any examination of theology always means more than learning facts. It is always contextual! Wayne Morris states it accurately when he says:

...the notion of seeking knowledge for its own sake is not really part of Deaf culture. The academic pursuit of theology, therefore, is irrelevant to the Deaf community as Deaf people rarely have the opportunity to obtain the skills needed for such an academic pursuit or the context in which to interact with academic theologians. (2008, 84)

Over the course of history, strategies within missionary organizations have typically focused on the planting of local churches for individual ethnic groups. For a local Chinese community in Los Angeles, efforts are made to plant a Chinese church. For a local Hispanic community in Atlanta, efforts are made to plant a Hispanic congregation. Yet the method for pursuing the Deaf community is to
find a hearing church, enlist the services of an interpreter, and translate everything in the service, including the music, into sign language. The Deaf are relegated to objects of ministry instead of co-laborers in efforts to reach their community.

In an effort to include the Deaf as a part of hearing churches and their structures, the Deaf continue to be left as outsiders when it comes to service and leadership. Their cultural ways are ignored and eventually a generation of spiritual dependents is born. Worship is not natural since it follows the values and practices of a culture that is foreign to their own: “... access to worship for Deaf people has often been on hearing people’s terms using hearing people’s ways of worshipping” (Morris 2008, 84).

All of this leads to a disempowerment of the Deaf who are part of the church and translates easily into the kinds of unrealistic expectations for Deaf people interested in theological education at colleges and universities. Those Deaf who would pursue a natural approach to theology, an oral approach where scripture storytelling is used as an effective means of communicating biblical truth, are almost always looked down on and viewed with suspicion.

**Content of Training**

The planned content for the training to be offered by the Deaf Affinity to its Deaf missionaries will be story-based. More will be said about its delivery in the next section, but suffice it to say that the training will be centered on the foundational requirements of the trustees of the IMB.

Both of the survey courses for the Bible are designed to introduce the foundational stories within each Testament and build a solid doctrinal foundation for the Deaf Apprentice missionary. In the Old Testament, training will cover highlights and stories on historical backgrounds, stories of historical beginnings (Gen. 1-11), stories of Israel becoming a people (Gen. 12-Deut.), stories of Israel’s new home (Joshua and Judges), stories of the Monarchy (Samuel, Saul, and David), stories of the Monarchy divided (Solomon and the Northern Kingdom), stories of the Southern Kingdom, stories of the Exile, stories of the major prophets and minor prophets, stories from Wisdom Literature, stories from Daniel and the period between the Testaments, and stories on the oral traditions of Judaism. Plans are to complete this part of the training during an intensive, three-week period.
In the New Testament training, the basic outline will cover the historical backgrounds of the NT, stories of Jesus and the Gospels (Matthew-John), stories of the birth of the Church (Acts 1-10), stories of the growth of the Church (Paul’s letters), stories of triumph and trials in the faith community (Hebrews-Jude), and stories of the Apocalypse (Revelation). As mentioned with the OT survey, this will be a three-week, intensive course.

Although there will not be an emphasis on reading and writing, textbooks have been selected as the basis for each of these surveys. The selected OT text is *Discovering the Old Testament: Story & Faith* by Alex Varughese, and the selected NT text is *Discovering the New Testament: Community & Faith* by Alex Varughese, editor.

In addition to the basic OT and NT surveys, a subsequent training course on biblical theology will be offered. This course is designed to utilize stories from the Old and New Testaments as a solid doctrinal foundation. With the completion of the OT and NT surveys as a foundation, stories that center on key biblical doctrines like God, humanity, salvation, the Church, the Kingdom of God, end times, evangelism and missions, cooperation, Christian ethical issues, the family, etc., will be a part of the biblical doctrine course. *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* will serve as the text for this training.

A training focused on church history will follow. This course is designed to introduce church history and Baptist history in a storytelling format. The plan is to follow the outline of the text selected for this class (*Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* by Mark Noll), but to do so in a storytelling format. Stories on the Church’s beginning (fall of Jerusalem), the realities of the empire (Council of Nicaea), the politics and life in the world (Council of Chalcedon), the Monastic rescue of the Church (Benedict’s rule), the culmination of Christendom (coronation of Charlemagne), the divided Church (schism of East and West), the birth of Protestantism (Diet of Worms), the new Europe (English Act of Supremacy), the reform of Catholicism and world outreach (founding of the Jesuits), the New Piety (conversion of the Wesleys), the discontents of the modern West (French Revolution), the faith for the world (Edinburgh Missionary Conference), and the turning points of the 20th century are all a part of this overview.
The hermeneutical training will be founded on the current Base Camp Training that the Deaf Affinity has developed to help Deaf nationals learn the art of story crafting and Bible translation. This will be integrated with the methods that have been employed to offer biblical backgrounds in support of the crafting process. This methodology has been used in training that has taken place in Egypt, Russia, Thailand, Kenya, and China. The result has been a clear, accurate translation of Bible stories because of the clear, accurate interpretation of these same stories.

There is no text available for this training course, but the materials and methodology have been developed well and plans include a practical, sign language-friendly text to emerge soon.

One final area of training is being proposed, which would be interwoven into the schedule for the entire period of months that are planned. This training would be practicum related for church-planting efforts in support of the host Deaf church. Each individual would work during the week to share the stories he or she has learned in an attempt to engage the local Deaf community, or communities, of that area. Since these missionaries will already have had training in church planting and church-planting movement (CPM) methodologies, they will be expected to be actively involved in the local Deaf church and community. While working with the Deaf leaders, the students should be able to disciple and train other local Deaf in how to reach Deaf people, how to start a Deaf group, how to plant a Deaf church, and how to train local Deaf leaders to do their work in an indigenous, reproducible manner.

Delivery System of the Training

When considering the best methodology for teaching Deaf missionaries, one cannot ignore the fact that the effective educational process for Deaf people is more than just passing on information. The typical setting in institutions of higher learning often centers on a lecturer and a group of students. Often, it is a passive experience where students are little more than receptacles of information but there is little, or no, valuable interaction with what is passed on to the students. John Dewey stated, “Education is not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told, but an active and constructive process” (1966, 38). Morris adds, “Deaf people are a people of vision and touch . . . The very idea that Christian faith theology could possibly be divorced from everyday life is thus inconceivable to Deaf people” (2008, 85). In order to make sure that this training is viable, it must be very interactive within the Deaf classroom setting.
It has already been mentioned that the training will follow a storying format. Stories will be crafted from scripture for the OT, NT, and biblical doctrine courses. Those stories will be told a number of times in order to assure that the Deaf students have a full understanding of them. The process that follows with each story will be the same as is used whenever Bible story crafting is done among Deaf nationals on the mission field. The list of interactive questions that produce a thorough understanding of what is being said in the text will be followed. The Deaf student will be required to know the story well enough to repeat it accurately. Each story will be tied to a mnemonic icon that will assist in remembering the individual stories.

The emphasis in the church history course will be on the stories of the significant movements of God throughout the past 2,000 years. Noll’s book will be the guide for the timeline and the training, but supplemental stories, distinctive to the Baptists, will be included at the end of the training.

The training will be delivered in three-week courses, Tuesday through Friday, for six to seven hours per day. The plans include a one-week break between most courses with a goal of completion of all five courses within four to five months. The instructors will be proficient in American Sign Language so that each course will be taught in the heart language and not through an interpreter.

Assessment of Individual Learning and of the Training

A weekly evaluation will be done each Friday afternoon in a dialogue with the course instructors and a final exam will be conducted on the final day of each course. The exam will be done in video format in which questions will be asked and answers recorded on camera, without the use of the written text. The exam will focus on the recollection of individual stories that relate to periods of time in the OT, NT, a particular doctrine, or over a period during the history of the Church.

However, the overall assessment of the training for each individual will be evaluated when he or she can respond to questions like:

- Can you share five stories from scripture that describe the nature of God?
- Can you give a five-story overview of the history of Israel during the period of Saul, David, and Solomon?
- What doctrinal themes do you see over the course of the OT stories and timeline?
• Can you share a ten-story overview of the growth of the early Church during the time of Paul’s missionary journeys?
• What themes do you see throughout the Gospels and the ministry of Jesus?
• What themes can you identify in the foci and practices of the early Church?
• What are some conflicting themes that can be identified from the biblical stories that were covered during the entire training?
• Can you describe in three to four stories what happened within the Church during the Reformation period?
• Can you look at the mnemonic icons in the timeline for the OT or NT and tell the individual stories related to them?
• Can you take this given passage or story and demonstrate how to craft effectively the story in another sign language and then teach another group how to do the same?

These questions reflect what might be considered in evaluating how well the individual did in completing the assigned materials and training. Accuracy in retelling the stories will need to be at a 90% level at the conclusion of each course, but an overall evaluation of the accuracy of all stories will need to be evaluated at the end of all of the training. Stories will also be evaluated by Deaf Americans for naturalness and understandability.

A plan will need to be submitted by each student for how these biblical stories, doctrinal stories, church history stories, and story-crafting methods will be reproduced in the Deaf nationals where they will be serving once they return to the field. A schedule for training will need to be part of this plan.

References

PART II:
Conversations Impacting Orality
Strategy Implementation
Chapter 7

Empowering Oral Learners / Leaders

Nick Bekker

Nick Bekker trained as an attorney in Johannesburg, South Africa. After a few years in the legal field, he studied theology and worked as a pastor. In 2003, he and his wife, Trish, went to Thailand as missionary church planters with OMF International. He is Assistant International Director for Evangelization at OMF International’s Headquarters in Singapore.

Introduction

I was involved in church planting in urban and rural Thailand for nine years. Though I have sat on the Boards of two Bible colleges in north Thailand, I have not taught at any academic institutions. I do not pretend to be an academic and this paper merely reflects my rambling thoughts on theological training as it pertains to oral learners, as I would like to see it done, or how I think it could be done.

The Problem

The unbiblical and unhealthy distinction between clergy and laity is the root cause of many of the problems Christianity has to grapple with today. It is this distinction that has led to the general assumption that an effective church leader or Christian leader must have formal theological training. With the passage of time, we have consciously or unconsciously linked Christian spiritual leadership ability with academic qualifications, which in turn has given rise to the professional salaried Pastor¹.

Despite Paul’s exhortation in Colossians 2:8 not to be taken captive by the basic principles of this world, we have superimposed the world’s system and values on the church, a spiritual entity, which has automatically led us to apply the world’s standards and measures of ability and performance. When a church is run like Microsoft, it needs a CEO with the appropriate qualifications. As a result, seminaries have been burdened, according to Timothy Dearborn, with the “daunting responsibility” of preparing “wise, compassionate, theologically astute and pastorally proficient servants” (quoted in Harkness 2010, 106).

These servants are then expected to single-handedly run churches and lead congregations toward spiritual maturity. These congregations will in turn transform societies and impact the world.
This issue is serious enough in literate societies. When in an Asian or Southeast Asian context we add the issue of oral learners to the mix, and the problem is compounded. Not only are we focusing on developing leaders by filling their heads with knowledge, we are also taking oral learners, teaching them to think in highly literate ways, and then releasing them back into their oral contexts where they dutifully apply all that they have been taught.

My personal observation from a Thai perspective is that we condemn these young men and women who are called, gifted, desirous to serve God, and sent to seminaries at great cost and personal sacrifice to a lifetime of frustration. Many spend years serving in small, struggling churches that show little or no growth. Many leave the Pastorate, burned out and disillusioned. Here’s one account of what may happen:

This educational mismatch was most pronounced when we took young tribal converts, who grew up in a rural, illiterate area and transported them to our mega city where we taught them systematic theology in a classroom setting. After convincing them over three or four years of the “right” way to study and proclaim the Bible, we sent them back to their home village. Although they had our “coveted degree” they lacked the seniority, experience, or communication style that was acceptable in their villages. (Dinkins 2006, 16)

No matter what is done to tweak theological education to make it more palatable for oral preference learners—and no matter how well we equip, empower, or affirm them—until we see a definite breaking away from the clergy-laity distinction that emphasizes and perpetuates the need for a paid, professional Pastorate, we are merely pouring new wine into old wineskins. I say this because as long as Christian faith communities expect their Pastors to be professionals, there will be pressure on them to attain some level of recognized academic excellence and anything less will be seen as inferior to what is already in the market.

Only when the church embraces, in practice, the priesthood of all believers, will it be willing to support full-time leaders who have had training that is not necessarily academic in nature.

The Solution

The change that needs to take place if we are to move away from a highly literate and academic emphasis in training pastors and Christian leaders, which leaves
little or no room for oral learners and leaders, needs to happen at multiple levels. It cannot merely be a matter of providing non-literate training for oral preference learners. For a start, the church needs help in understanding that Christian leadership and service is not the exclusive domain of trained theologians. This may be easier said than done, because many Christians prefer the convenience of paying someone to shoulder the responsibility for ministering and shepherding. In the minds of many, “It’s better to hire a religious specialist to tend to the needs of God’s people than to bother themselves with the self-emptying demands of servanthood and pastoral care” (Viola 2008, 160).

One of the biggest challenges in countries where the church has already taken root is convincing the church that the priesthood of all believers is a present reality. The outworking of the implications of that reality is that every member has a role to play in the life and ministry of the church.

In addition to strong pushback from existing churches, I suspect that there are thousands of trained Pastors in the world who would vehemently oppose any argument that may be perceived to render their salaried and high status positions redundant. There is hope, however, in the emerging grassroots movement toward smaller, less formal, more relevant Christian faith communities.

According to a Barna Group study, “Millions of people are experiencing and expressing their faith in God independent of any connection to a conventional church” (Barna Group 2009). It is to be hoped that as more and more informal Christian faith communities are formed without the traditional office of Pastor, elders and leaders will be recognized and affirmed not for their theological academic qualifications, but for their spiritual maturity and gifts. This could also provide an opportunity for a new type of theological education for full or part-time leaders that is not academic or highly literate in nature, but intended to provide the setting conducive to pastoral formation; which Patricia Lamoureux suggests should include “conversion of mind and heart, fostering integrative thinking, character formation, promoting authentic discipleship, personal appropriation of faith and knowledge, and cultivating a spirituality of the intellectual life” (quoted in Harkness 2010, 104).

There needs to be boldness in experimenting with a new model, and the best seed beds for such “experiments” are those groups operating on the margins of institutional Christian life. Robert Banks reminds us that in the past, the
most significant change has often come from such groups whose insights and practices only later influenced the mainstream (1999, 258).

A New Definition of Theological Education

As a starting point, we should either move away from calling it “theological education” (TE), or give it a wider, more inclusive definition than it presently has, or possibly, do both. These words are loaded with meaning strongly tied to the existing paradigm that produces trained theological professionals.

The word “educate,” although wide in its scope of meaning, historically has associations with scholastic training or schooling. If we can agree with W.B Yeats who said, “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire,” then we can acknowledge that education is much more than a set curriculum pursued over a set period of time.

Given a wide definition, therefore, education does encompass “the common ‘process’ terms we use in our Christian settings: terms like Christian education, discipleship, spiritual formation, nurture, faith-equipping, etc.” (Harkness 2013, 3). Similarly, the word “theology” tends to have scholarly overtones, reserved exclusively for academics and the intelligentsia.

The reality, however, is that theology is something every Christian engages in when they try to make sense of how to live in the light of God’s revelation. Understood in its widest context, theology is not restricted only to those seeking formal qualifications or who are engaged in so-called “full-time” ministry. Its practice is not restricted to a particular setting. It is “done” across a wide range of modes of learning, from formal to non-formal to informal.

Furthermore, theology involves an appreciation of the fullness of God’s Kingdom as it breaks into every facet of human life: personal, relational, social, moral, physical, biological, and spiritual. According to Allan Harkness, “TE considered in this way encompasses all the processes that enable us to work towards the goal of ‘presenting everyone mature in Christ’ (Col. 1:28) and ‘building up the body of Christ’ (Eph. 4:12ff)” (2013, 4). I believe that a move away from a limited, academic understanding of TE will go some way toward creating space for affirming and empowering non-literate learners and it will open the door for alternative pedagogical styles more suited to oral learners.
A New Paradigm for Theological Education: Modern Monasticism

In New Testament times a range of teaching styles existed. Jesus was frequently referred to as “teacher,” and it is widely accepted that his teaching style was outstanding in both content and process. Ted Ward points out:

Jesus deliberately chose not to adopt [the Greek concepts of knowledge and learning]. He built no school, put himself in no high-status lectureships, and raised no funds to perpetuate his teachings through an endowed institution. He could have done so; among the elite of that day, such practices were more acceptable than what he chose to do. He selected a handful of candidates and lived among them, an itinerant community of friends. (quoted in Harkness 2010, 113)

Jesus clearly did teach in the formal setting of the synagogue (Matt. 9:35, 13:54; Mark 1:21) and the temple (Matt. 26:55; Mark 12:35; Luke 21:37), but as Harkness points out, he did not limit himself to those settings as a rabbi of the day would have (2010, 114). With his disciples, Jesus made use of non-formal learning environments in which life context, modeling, discipleship, and a shared life were the key features. His disciples learned as they lived with Jesus and participated in ministry with him.

Jesus’s method of teaching was more of a “life transmission” than a “knowledge transmission,” and as such provides the perfect model for oral learners. In 1989, Robert Ferris did a study of ten seminaries and colleges around the world that had taken deliberate and positive strides toward renewal of TE. One of the common factors he identified was awareness on the part of the faculty of adult education principles and a willingness to design instruction relevant to adult learners (1999, 130). If this principle were applied to oral learners, then it would be a matter of substituting textbooks and lectures with oral or non-literate methods. In fact, given that even in highly literate societies many people are preferred oral learners, it could be applied more widely (i.e., not only in oral societies but in literate societies as well). But it goes beyond this because it is more than just knowledge. Ferris also found that there was a conscious effort directed toward spiritual formation and ministry skills development, with “deliberate attenuation of academic stress” (1999, 129).

Given the above, a possible new paradigm for TE could be one that focuses on learning in a community—a type of “modern monasticism” where the primary focus is mentoring rather than lecturing, and where the intended outcome is
a transformed and empowered life, not a degree. In this paradigm, faculty members are spiritual guides and “educators [are] emancipated from an inappropriate separation of self from truth” (Payne 2010, 185). In a modern monastic community, mentoring is not just the responsibility of faculty and staff, but senior students mentor junior students. Students are seen not as people who need to be educated with theological and theoretical knowledge, but disciples on a journey. The role of the teacher thus changes from one who imparts knowledge to one who equips, mentors, disciples, and “entrusts to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2).

The Cape Town Commitment calls for TE that “serves first to train those who lead the church as pastor-teachers” (Cape Town Commitment 2011, II-F-4). In order to be relevant and to empower oral learners, a seminary that adopts a modern monastic community style needs to have much more of a “churchward” orientation than TE institutions have at present.

TE institutions, therefore, should seek to work very closely with Christian faith communities. Some of the other common factors that Ferris identified was the giving of careful attention to the school’s constituent church and its training needs, and a focus placed on training outcomes (i.e., ministry effectiveness) (1990, 129).

Based on this, a possible model for TE institutions that offer modern monastic type training is to partner with both literate and non-literate Christian faith communities and to invite them to identify and commission leaders to join these institutions. The partnership would require the students to be actively engaged in their respective faith communities, feeding back into those communities what they are learning. The evaluation of these students should then be a joint exercise between the institution and their faith community. After the prescribed, or agreed, period of study, the student and the faith community receive some kind of recognition or accreditation. This would help to ensure effective partnership between institution and church, where both play a role in practical equipping, transforming, and evaluating the learner. This process would also help the learner have the necessary credibility in the eyes of the community he or she is serving, because it has been a journey walked together.
Conclusion

If we want to affirm and empower oral learners, it should not be by merely providing oral teaching methods in the existing paradigm of TE. It has to go further than working out what kind of degree or accreditation we give to oral learners to put them somehow “on par” with literate learners. This would be akin to putting new wine into old wineskins. Rather, a multi-faceted solution must be sought which addresses a number of issues, including:

- The age-old clergy-laity divide
- Removing or reducing the elitist academic perception connected with the term “theological education”
- A “modern monastic” community that seeks to equip and transform and not just teach academically, and which seeks to do so non-formally, incorporating oral teaching forms and
- A closer relationship and partnership with Christian communities of faith.

Getting these things right will serve to affirm and empower oral learners by bringing oral teaching forms into the mainstream for use by both literate and non-literate learners, not only in Asia, but across the world. This would remove the distinction between oral and non-oral learning styles and any potential stigma attached to oral learning.

Questions & Challenges

1) A challenge would be to help seminaries rethink the how, where, and why of theological education. The “old guard” would also need encouragement in seeing the value of less formal, academic classroom training.

2) How do we help churches without a Pastor embrace the process of identifying and equipping leaders from within, in partnership with TE institutions, rather than appointing qualified Pastors from outside?

3) Setting up a “modern monastic” type of TE that has an emphasis on transformational learning in the context of a close-knit community may face challenges in an increasingly individualistic world.

\[1\text{Wherever I have written “Pastor” with a capital “P” in this paper, I’m referring to the institutionalized office of the professional pastor. It is not a reference to the biblical function of shepherd.}\]
References


Chapter 8

Storytelling Seeking Understanding

Sam Chan

Sam Chan is husband, father, deacon at his local Chinese church, medical doctor, and rugby player. Sam teaches at Sydney Missionary and Bible College in Australia. His Ph.D. (TEDS, Chicago) is in applied speech act theory to preaching. Sam and his wife, Stephanie, have three young boys, Toby, Cooper, and Jonty.

Introduction

In systematic theology, we typically teach speculative concepts, systems of thought, propositional proof texts from the Bible, and—if time permits—we end with personal experiences and application. The problem with this typical method is that it privileges literate learners and disadvantages oral learners. Another problem is that it reverses the definition of theology from “Faith Seeking Understanding” to “Understanding Seeking Faith.”

An alternative method of teaching could be to begin with Bible storytelling and case studies (where the learners immediately experience the biblical phenomena and personal experiences) and then ask the learners to generate their own questions and thoughts. The learners could then integrate their questions and thoughts with those of historic and systematic theology.

The Challenges of Teaching Theology to Oral Learners

When we teach theology, we need to accommodate oral learners. Nonetheless, there remain challenges.

First, most theological educators are not oral learners.

Reasons
- Theological education privileges literate learners
- Advancement in theological education privileges literate learners
- Theological educators become accustomed to literate learning styles

Effects
- Educators do not see a need for oral learning styles
- Educators will not know how to teach oral learners
- Educators might perceive the oral learning style as inferior or “light”
Second, conservative traditions privilege literate learners.

*Reason*
- Emphasis on propositional revelation, expository preaching, inductive Bible studies

*Effect*
- Suspicion of the use of stories, illustrations, or personal application

Third, higher education typically measures literate learning outcomes.

*Reason*
- Students need to demonstrate analytical, critical, and constructive thought to earn a degree

*Effects*
- Learning outcomes are typically measured with readings, written reports, and written exams
- Hard to conceive how such learning outcomes could be measured orally

Suggestions for implementing Orality in Theological Education

First, begin with a case study. Theological education typically begins with the abstract concept prior to talking about the personal experience. For example, we might begin the lesson by saying, “Today, we are going to talk about the sacraments,” and then proceed to talk about the concept of the sacraments. Then, we might describe what different schools of thought (e.g., Lutherans, Baptists, Roman Catholics) say about the sacraments. Then, we might describe what various influential thinkers (e.g., Augustine, Luther, Zwingli) have said about the sacraments. For most learners, especially oral learners, this is all meaningless without a personal experience of the sacraments.

An alternative method could begin with a case study:

*You have just given birth to a baby daughter. Your spouse asks you, “So when are we going to baptize our daughter?” But you say, “We’re not going to baptize her, because our family has never baptized infants.” But your spouse replies, “But in our family, we’ve always baptized infants.” So what are you going to do— are you going to baptize or not baptize your daughter?*

The case study begins with the personal experience of infant baptism. It engages the learners at a concrete relational, existential, and pastoral level. After this case
study the learner is better orientated to discuss the topic of sacraments at the level of concepts, different schools of thought, and the history of influential thinkers.

Second, **begin with Bible storytelling.** A similar alternative teaching method is to begin by storytelling from the Bible. That is, instead of beginning with the concept, we begin with the biblical phenomena. In doing so, the learner experiences the original biblical stories and then engages in conceptual thought, rather than the other way around. Here are some examples that I have tried:

- Acts 16:12-34 (the conversion of Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer) for the doctrine of salvation
- Mark 15:1-39 (the crucifixion of Jesus) for the doctrine of atonement
- Luke 18:9-14 (parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector) for the doctrine of justification
- Matt 22:1-14 (parable of the wedding banquet) for the doctrine of election
- Genesis 3, 4, 6:1-7, 11:1-9 (the Fall, Cain, the pre-flood world, and the Tower of Babel) for the doctrine of sin
- John 20 (the resurrection account of Jesus) for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit

**Example 1: Acts 16:12-34**

After storytelling, I ask the class to discuss the following questions in pairs. Afterwards, I ask them to report to the rest of the class what they discussed.

- What impressed you about the story (i.e., made you go hmmm or wow)?
- What questions about the story would you like to be answered?

**Sample Questions**

- Why did Paul wait so long to cast out the demon from the slave girl?
- How did the families of Lydia and the jailer come to be believers?
- Did the slave girl experience a conversion?
- Why was it so important to get baptized immediately after believing?
- What were they being saved from?
- What did they have to do to be saved?

The whole exercise takes about 30 minutes. After this, I proceed to teach the doctrine of salvation as it is typically taught in systematic theology (e.g., looking at different views and looking at different debates). For example, typical debates might be:

- What is the role of the sacraments in salvation?
- What is the scope of salvation (i.e., is it spiritual, social, or existential)?
- What is the object of salvation (e.g., is it the individual or is it the collective)?
Amazingly, the story of Acts 16 raises many of these same issues—as expressed in the students’ questions that they want answered. I can refer back to the story as an example of how different schools of thought can use Acts 16 differently to answer the questions. For example, with the scope of salvation, we could ask, “What exactly was the jailer saved from?” Was he saved spiritually from his sins? Or was he saved socially from an oppressive socio-economic structure (e.g., as a member of the working class poor)? Or was he saved existentially from his own internal, psychological situation (e.g., was he looking for purpose in life)?

Thus, by beginning with the story, the students could relate to the conceptual world of systematic theology. They could also imagine what the issues in systematic theology look like. And they could see the pastoral and existential needs that are met by systematic theology.

Example 2: Mark 15:1-39

After storytelling, I ask the class to discuss the following questions in pairs. Afterwards, I ask them to report to the rest of the class what they discussed.

• What impressed you about the story (i.e., made you go hmmm or wow)?
• What questions about the story would you like to be answered?

Sample Questions

• What did the centurion see that made him believe that Jesus was the Son of God?
• How does Jesus’ death on the cross save us from our sins?

After this, I teach the doctrine of atonement as it is typically taught in systematic theology (e.g., looking at the different theories of the atonement). Amazingly, many of the theories can be seen in the Mark 15 story. For example, the sufferings of Jesus illustrate the satisfaction theory; the cry of “My God, why have you forsaken me?” illustrates the propitiation theory; the freeing of Barabbas illustrates the substitution theory; the splitting of the temple-curtain illustrates the reconciliation theory; and the centurion’s confession could be an illustration of the moral example theory.

Thus, by beginning with the story, the students can imagine and see what the theories in systematic theology look like. They can also see how the doctrine of atonement is trying to answer their question: How does Jesus’ death on the cross save us from our sins?
Example 3: Genesis 3, 4, 6:1-7, 11:1-9

In this example, I divide the class into four groups, and each group reads one of the stories. I then ask each group to discuss the following questions in pairs. Afterwards, I ask them to report to the rest of the class, including the other groups, what they had discussed.

- What impressed you about the story (i.e., made you go hmmm or wow)?
- What questions about the story would you like to be answered?
- What does the story tell you about sin?

The stories vividly express the intensification of sin—from Eve eating a fruit, to Cain murdering his brother, to a pre-Flood generation becoming so wicked they need to be wiped out, and to the Tower of Babel story, in which people try to become like God. The stories also vividly express the magnification of sin from something that affects individuals to something that affects collective peoples.

After beginning with the stories of sin, it is much easier to explore the theological doctrine of sin, in which we explore questions such as:

- What is the essence of sin?
- Does sin have an ontological existence?
- Is sin a state of being, or is it an action?

Guiding Principles for Storytelling

- Before storytelling, tell the students that this is an exercise in post-literate learning—so it works better if they don’t look at their books, Bibles, and computer screens. Instead, they should look at you. Warn them that there will be questions afterwards, so they need to listen carefully.
- After storytelling, ask them to discuss in pairs because this generates peer-to-peer discussion (it removes the teacher-student hierarchy) and gives them the warrant to talk out loud.
- Have them share their answers with the whole class. This gives them the warrant to talk out loud.
- Resist the temptation to comment or summarize what they have said. This removes the teacher as the all-knowing expert from the discussion. It keeps the discussion at a peer-to-peer level. More importantly, it means that you will neither patronize their answers nor shame them if they say something you perceive to be wrong.
- The sequence of questions is important. The first question: “What impressed you about the story?” is a safe question, for which there is no wrong answer. The second question: “What questions do you want answered from the story?”
is also a safe question, for which there is no wrong answer. The subsequent question (e.g., “How does Jesus’ death on the cross save us from our sins?”) introduces them to the questions that are generated by systematic theology.

• “What questions do you want answered from the story?” also exposes the class to different questions. This demonstrates that systematic theology exists to answer questions generated by people from their own cultural and existential contexts.

• As each student asks a question from the story, do not answer it; instead, open it up for the whole class to answer. In this way, the students are responsible for helping each other to learn. It also removes you as the all-knowing expert from the discussion.

• If a student asks a significantly important question, divide the class back into pairs and ask them to answer the question, and then have them report back their answers.

• After this time of storytelling, when you are back into the traditional mode of teaching systematic theology, frequently refer the students back to the story to give them a concrete reference point.

**Conclusion**

In systematic theology, we typically begin with abstract concepts, and then apply these concepts to concrete situations. The difficulty with this method is that it both privileges literate learners and reverses the definition of theology into “Understanding Seeking Faith.” I have suggested an alternative method in which we begin with concrete situations—either with Bible storytelling or case studies—and then integrate them into the concepts typically learned in theology. Such a method engages the oral learner and is truer to theology as “Faith Seeking Understanding.”

**Questions & Challenges**

The biggest challenge is the issue of assessments. Institutional education measures education primarily by “learning outcomes.” Undergraduate learning outcomes are typically “outline,” “describe,” and “identify.” Graduate learning outcomes typically add “analyze” and “compare and critique.” Traditionally, written assessments such as essays and exams have been used to assess these learning outcomes. However, for oral learners, perhaps we could try the following suggestions:

• Ask the student to storytell from the Bible, and then use that story to “define,” “describe,” or “outline” a particular concept.

• Storytell from the Bible, and ask the student to “describe,” “compare,” and “critique” how different theological viewpoints would interpret the story.

• Use case studies and ask the students to “describe,” “analyze,” “compare,” and “critique” how different theological viewpoints would engage differently with each case study.
Chapter 9

Integrating Theological Education and Creative Arts in the Practice of Orality

William C. Goold

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In the ancient world of primary oral cultures, art forms conveyed a supra, mega-message significant to those presently engaged in oral Bible storytelling. This message is equally important to those engaged in training others for practice and ministry of storytelling. This vital message is easy for storytellers to miss because it is seldom verbalized. Carbon 14 dating now verifies evidence of its importance in oral cultures millennia prior to literacy. The mega-message is conveyed through numerous visual images carefully drawn in multicolored etchings and wondrously preserved locations such as the ancient rock shelters in Bhimbetka in south India (30,000 B.C.), and also the cave paintings discovered in southern France at Lascaux (15,000 B.C.) and Chavet (30,000 B.C.) (Robinson n.d., 1-8).

These two-dimensional visual images by gifted artists portray a narrative of a three-dimensional world that included animals, humans, hunting, dancing, procreation, and numerous other life experiences. They shouted a mega-message ahead to those in this age who care to hear and profit from it. Their silent, unlettered, mega-message is this: Yes, we are an oral people, but orality in itself is not sufficient. We must also speak our story through picture. When you find us, know we also spoke through our art.

Countless cultural anthropologists and human scientists have investigated these cave paintings, attempting to discern their intent and meanings accurately. Theories of interpretation abound, but with little agreement. The scientists’ single point of consensus is this: By itself, verbal communication was insufficient. Long before literacy, artists were augmenting their speech through their preserved, visual art. Their art spoke supra-orally then and continues, albeit with mystery, to speak today: “Aside from orality, the only other form of human communication that existed until relatively recently was simply image-making...” (Mizrach n.d., 2).
For oral learners, art-making is not an optional aesthetic experience. Art is functionally necessary. “Purely oral societies pass along everything that matters from one generation to another without putting anything into writing” (www.Oralitystrategies.org). Without its complementary, second voice of artistic expression, communication remains incomplete for oral learners.

Historically, Christians have struggled to arrive at an acceptable apologetic for a proper use of art in communicating the story of God in Christ and also in their personal and communal worship of the Risen Lord. Not without reason, the oral culture of a newly birthed, emerging church, which was simultaneously beginning its own transition into literacy, shared significant apprehensions regarding adopting and appropriating any of the visual apparatus of pagan worship that surrounded them in their Near Eastern urban settings.

Early Jewish Christians and converted Gentiles were fully aware that the Yahweh they worshiped through his incarnate Son had, early on, orally mandated from Sinai that he could not and should not be imaged (Exodus 20:4; 24): “Maintaining a sense of identity inevitably depends upon the assertion of difference, and Christians, unlike their pagan (Greco-Roman, sic) counterparts, were not to live in a world furnished with religious images and artifacts” (Irvine and Dawtry 2002, 17).

In his contemporary world filled with Roman and Greek statues, altars, and temples of the gods, second-century African theologian Origen of Alexandria spoke forcefully about safeguarding the vision of the transcendent God, revealed in Christ and present in the Spirit. Origen advised, “Christians and Jews are led to avoid temples and altars and images…” (Irvine and Dawtry 2002, 16).

With equal passion, Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225) expressed considerable caution about the risk in admitting painters and craftsmen in the Christian community “since their work could easily bring them into contact with pagan artifacts and religious objects. Behind it was an overriding concern to maintain the social identity and religious cohesion of the Christian community as the ‘new Israel’” (2002, 16).

Centuries later, some reforming fathers, including Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli, reacted strongly to perceived artistic excesses within the Catholic Church. William Dyrness quotes Calvin’s unreserved insistence: “Whatever men learn of God in images is futile, indeed false; the prophets totally condemn the notion that
images stand in place of books” (Dyrness 2001, 52). More cautiously, “Luther was more open to the use of images in worship and in private devotion, based on his emphasis on justification by faith. Once one is justified one is free to use images if they are helpful; on the other hand, if one does not believe, no image will help” (2001, 52).

Interpreting artistic excesses as bordering on idolatry led to a latent anti-art theology which gained new credence. Not infrequently, early evangelical Protestant mission efforts in oral cultures tacitly equated indigenous, concrete artistic expression as an open doorway for idolatrous practice and an invitation into the spirit world. But century after century, the silent message illustrated and implied by the cave painters continued to speak: By itself, verbal communion is insufficient.

However, this “polemically charged character” of early Christian apologetic should be seen as caution, not total opposition (Irvin and Dawtry 2002, 17). Quoting Murray, Christopher Irvin offers a word of cautious optimism: “But as Mary Charles Murray argued in a seminal article on art in the early Church, we must also be cautious of reading into the literary evidence a general hostility to art per se” (2002, 17).

Considerable contemporary, Western worship pastors and leaders, including their global exports, and also some current theological and worship educators, are hearing the ancient oral call to consider seriously the place of art in communication. According to a Barna Group study, about 62% of Protestant churches in the United States are now using live drama in worship services (Huyser-Honig n.d.). They are presently engaged in resolving the considerable tension that has existed between balancing on one hand the strict prohibition of Old Testament law against sculpted images of God himself and on the other hand owning this remarkable insight expressed by Dorothy L. Sayers, “The characteristic common to God and man is apparently just this: The desire and the ability to make things” (quoted in Ryken 1981, 50-51).

Frank Gaebelein affirms Sayers: “Moreover, the pattern for this making is the relation of Father, Son, and Spirit in the Trinity... For one of the marks of the image of God that we bear is that we, too, in our creaturely way, are makers. And in no human activity is this aspect of God’s image more evident than in our making of art” (quoted in Ryken 1981, 51).
For thousands of years, oral cultures have seemingly largely bypassed and thus avoided the conflicted processing sequence that arose within early Christendom and later carried over into later evangelical missionary enterprise. For oral societies, art has always been functionally necessary to achieve satisfactory communication. One may rightfully conclude that in the 21st century, oral and literate societies are now possibly aligned in parallel, functional agreement at three points: artistic expression is purposeful; art is necessary to enrich the process of communication; art is unique in its capacity to do so.

Here I attempt to initiate discussion and suggest possibilities for using recognized, indigenous global art media for the purposes of enhancing and potentially expanding the effectiveness of the practice of orality in communicating the mega-narrative of scripture to oral preference learners. This investigation is an uncompleted journey; it moves toward a destination not yet fully or clearly seen.

Four initial assumptions propel the discussion forward: (1) The process would likely begin with one seminary, selected from a core group of theological seminaries, with expressed interest in developing a model; (2) appropriate faculty from related departments and schools (social sciences, theology, music/art) within the launch school, collaborating with administrators, could initiate discussion with the goal of designing an art-focused, curriculum-specific pathway toward increasing understanding and use of art in oral learning: (3) gifted students with artistic skills, interest, motivation, and expressed calling would be encouraged to enroll and move through the designed curricular process, and (4) the model would be subject to continuous review and revision.

The goal would not be duplication of existing orality curricula. Rather, it would be a greater understanding of how to increase effective uses of art in the practice of orally telling the narrative of God. Orality, theology, and art are means in the process; they are not ends. The end is more effectively communicating the gospel to oral learners.

Western or global, the learning theological context for a potential partnership between ION and existing theological schools is and will likely continue to be majority literate. Graduate theological training is generally limited to and transacted by and for literates (Thornton 2013).
Literacy and its corresponding skills are required for admission. Metrics for satisfactorily advancing those skills are required for graduation. Literate theological students who are called by God into ministry partnerships with oral preference learners and who also desire to embrace and utilize a fuller, expanded communication through the use of the arts will face at least three specific steps in their process. These steps are neither isolated nor exclusive; they will likely occur simultaneously. Western theological curricula are presently, at best, minimally designed to address these challenges.

**Step One: Orality**

The first challenge for the literate theological student will be the learning curve involved in entering into the world of the primary and secondary oral learner. No theologian-artist will teach or use art effectively in orality without first gaining a working knowledge of the oral learner’s world. This is initially problematic because few students entering Western theological schools or non-Western schools still rooted in Western methodology grasp the numerical size of the world’s oral population.

Few comprehend the nature and challenge of embracing and entering into such a world. The starting point for more and better use of art in orality should not be art itself. Literates desiring to use art effectively in orality need to grasp, as deeply as possible, the nature and essence of the oral world inhabited by those who will experience the art forms to be employed. Thankfully, selected papers and journal articles indicate that a limited number of theological schools have begun to address the issue of the oral world, though most are non-Western (Verghese 2012, Walker 2012, Moon 2012).

Are there foundational concepts that should be taught and expected of all interested students? Of multiple rubrics now known, practiced, and published by persons and organizations presently working in and with orality, which are most important and in what sequence should they be taught and internalized? Is there an existing metric to establish adequate competency? These and other questions might serve as a starting point.

To illustrate briefly, three foundational concepts are offered here for artists who may consider the pathway suggested in this paper.

First is the *place of memory* for the oral learner. In a world of photo-capable iPhones, laptop computers, iPads, and similar tech devices, literate learners
have little reason to give attention to the role of memory. Those presently engaged with oral learners know well that oral cultures receive, process, and retain streams of information data much differently than do persons in lettered cultures. T4Global candidly states:

Oral culture people only know what they can remember and reproduce from memory at a given moment of need. Conversely, lettered cultured people tend to feel they ‘know’ whatever they have been exposed to and whatever is available to them in their notes, files, computers, materials and books. (Quoted in www.t4global.org)

A second significant point for those desiring to comprehend more about orality is the place of community. As with the issue of memory, all who are engaged with orality grasp the importance of community. Western theological students, deeply imprinted with a highly prioritized, individualist worldview are community-challenged in understanding orals. Oral cultured people exist, process, depend upon, and sustain themselves in community. Learning patterns evolve around group orientation and participation. Repeated, concrete experiences form the very basis for internalizing information that may produce learning. For those in orality movements, this is obvious; for those desiring to enter, this point is vital.

A third illustrative point is perhaps more subtle to lettered students. It is rooted in the distinct contrast between a Western bias toward objective, linear reasoning and the nature-tied, subjective world of oral culture. David Abram expounds this issue:

By apparently purging material reality of subjective experience, Galileo cleared the ground and Descartes laid the foundation for the construction of the objective or “disinterested” sciences, which by their feverish and forceful investigations have yielded so much of the knowledge and so many of the technologies that have today become commonplace in the West. (Abram 1996, 34)

Pushing this point of these contrasting worlds further, “In a society that accords priority to that which is predictable and places a premium on certainty, our spontaneous, preconceptual experience, when acknowledged at all, is referred to as ‘merely subjective.’” What is primary for the oral learner who subjectively experiences the story, drama, dance, or visual art is secondary for the lettered learner. Things primary to the lettered learner such as “objective
outlines, principles, precepts, lists, steps, and logically developed discourses” are for oral learners nonexistent (Quoted in T4Global).

**Step Two: Theology**

Theological process presents a second challenge. Art used in oral cultures will connote theological meaning. To the oral learner, doing art that reinforces and enhances storytelling is doing theology. To the Western observer, the art medium employed may, when studied closely, contain a teaching. If the taught message is processed rightly, it may at some point convey a message to be learned. To the oral learner, the art medium, be it visual, musical, kinetic, dance, drama, or other, the message is received as story and is vicariously lived and assimilated with the artist and also with the community. Doing art is doing theology. Doing art is communal dialogue. In such a contextual process, theological implications and teachings hold huge significance.

In most seminaries, literate theological students are admitted and immediately engaged in a discipline that is significantly Western, European, linear in method, and systematic in format and sequence. Further, resulting specialization has segmented theological pursuit into sub-disciplines, any of which may easily focus intensely on a specific, related issue at the expense of the unity of the whole.

For multiple arts mediums to be rightfully and effectively employed in the practice of orality requires thoughtful theological guidance. By its very essence, art is human creation holding huge potential symbolic purpose, interpretation, and meaning. To use art meaningfully in an oral culture may require a significant shift in theological paradigm. It will most certainly require a solid theology of God’s creation. Mars Hill Audio founder Ken Meyers notes,

> Creation is not simply a collection of materials (i.e., art supplies) for us to manipulate; rather it is a reflection of God’s own creativity. Creation is ‘an epiphany’. . . Of course, God’s identity is not determined by creation, but it is through God’s actions in and through creation that we know him. (Quoted in www.biologos.org)

For Western, literate, student theologian-artists to develop necessary skills for navigating in the world of the oral preference learner, keen theological tools become a must. Properly identifying biblical issues that are theologically other and non-negotiable, those that are other and are negotiable and those that are other and yet equal presents a significant challenge. Theological schools intending to address
meaningful use of art in oral context must also address theological methodology. Admittedly, it is impossible to equate all oral cultures, but one example from Africa illustrates the point. The example is the problem of Jesus Christ, Jesu Kristi.

To Western theological students and to artists, Christology is a fairly straight-line issue, usually a left-to-right timeline. Jesus was a Jewish child, born of the Virgin Mary. When understood through the lens of the Old Testament, he was indeed the Messiah of God. He grew up in a given location within a land promised to his ancestor Abraham and his sons. Jesus taught in stories, healed people, mentored twelve men, was unfairly tried, crucified, buried, raised from the dead, ascended to his Father, gifted the Spirit, and will ultimately restore all things and reign forever.

But to the African, Jesu Kristi presents a problem: “The name Jesu Kristi is relatively new in Africa. Africans did not call upon this name before the advent of the Christian missionaries” (Orobator 2008, 72). Theologian Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, himself an African Catholic priest, poses the question:

How can we recast the alien and expatriate images of Jesus Christ in the mold of the rich and colorful African religious and cultural worldview in order to discover an authentic and meaningful African identity and personality of Jesus? This question is not academic; it represents an ongoing search for a Jesus Kristi who will be able to respond to questions posed by Africans themselves. (2008, 72)

Orobator elaborates on the quest for an African answer to his African question:

So far, the result of this quest, at least in the African theological circle, is a striking litany of Christological titles, models, and proposals, along with an extensive job description for the African Christ. We have, for example, the following models or proposals: ancestor, diviner, traditional healer, healer, chief, guest, warrior, life giver, family member, initiator, mediator, intermediary, friend, loved one, brother, elder brother, ideal brother, universal brother, proto-elder, kin, kinsman, chief priest, chief elder, ruler, king, leader, liberator, black messiah, and so on. (2008, 72-73)

Joseph Healey and Donald Seibertz, Maryknoll priests with decades of combined years in Africa conclude:

The challenge in evolving an authentic African Christianity is graphically symbolized in the controversy over the “African Christ” or the “Black Christ.”
During our many years in Africa we have been involved in the on-going debate over how to portray Jesus Christ in picture, in art and in drama. For many Africans it is still important to portray Jesus as a Jew who lived in Israel 2,000 years ago with all the historical and cultural details of the time. Others want to portray Christ as an African living here and now. Both ways have their meaning and relevance. The goal is “both . . . and,” rather than “either . . . or.” (1999, 91)

For those oral learners in Africa, the theological challenge presented by Jesus is also an artistic challenge. Much of it has to do with reconciling the relatively new personality of Jesus with their long-held understanding of God, existent long before the advent of missionaries. Is there a metric to be developed for competence in both understanding the issue and then resolving it? Theologian-artists in oral cultures will be required to wrestle with portraying the very Jesus to whom they are committed.

Theologian-artists in training for art in oral cultures will also be faced with traversing similar challenges in issues such as sin as a communal transaction rather than a personal issue; God who has revealed himself as triune in Personhood, yet who may not be ontologically grasped as three persons in one person; relationship between the living and ancestral living-dead; and the oral learners’ long-standing relationship with a natural creation that speaks to them in unique ways that are unknown and unheard by literate learners. According to Ken Meyers:

Modern Christians, moreover, have tended to pursue an understanding of God that was more and more abstract. It focused on his attributes, on invisible realities rather than history, and as theology has aspired to be more like a science, it has assumed that we can think about God apart from his relationship with creation. (2011)

Old Testament scholar Dennis F. Kinlaw helpfully frames the issue:

Theology books are always written in third person. They present God as an object to be studied, and one rarely hears of anyone being converted while reading a theology book. The only way a person can ever be converted is if God is understood not in the third person but in the first person. He must become the subject and we must become the object. Unfortunately, most of Christianity is a massive effort to keep God in the third person. But there is no salvation until he is in the first person and we deal with him face to face. (2002)
Step Three: Art

Few existing theological schools focus even minimally on the arts and their various roles and possibilities in Christian life and worship. For years prior to seminary, this void is compounded by economic budgetary realities significantly limiting the exposure of high school and college students to art. A strategy and pathway for developing theologian-artists will require art-curricular intentionality and art-specific pedagogy.

If art is to partner meaningfully with oral storytelling, what rubrics or metrics should be considered as markers for learning outcomes? Further, is it reasonable or even possible for such to occur within the context of theological education? Some initial markers are here suggested for possible further discussion.

Marker one: Initially, artist-theologians should rightfully distinguish between orality as preaching/proclamation and art’s role in the process. The two are not synonymous. Hans Rookmaaker suggests clear distinction:

But we must be aware that art cannot be used to show the validity of Christianity; it should rather be the reverse. So art should not be used to preach even if it can help (italics mine). . . . Art has too often become insincere and second-rate in its very effort to speak to all people, and to communicate a message that art was not meant to communicate. . . . So, to put it in a metaphor; art should not be compared with preaching. The best work of art would still be bad preaching. (1978, 34-35)

Good art can and does stimulate individual and communal thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and ideas through its multi-sensory impact on the senses. This is especially significant for oral learners. According to Wikipedia, recently thinkers influenced by Martin Heidegger have interpreted art as the means by which a community develops for itself a medium for self-expression and interpretation.

Marker two: Artist-theologians will do well to deepen their understanding of storytelling itself as artistic medium. Storytelling is universal and pan-cultural. Oral cultures record story in memory and memory in story. Unlike lettered learners, for oral learners, memory is the predominant script. For the oral learner, this “chronicle factor” encompasses every aspect of life.

Brian Boyd comments, “We can tell stories to explain things, from a child’s or a country pouty, ‘They started it,’ to why the world is as it is, according to myth or
science” (Boyd 1). In the interface between story and any art medium potentially used in proclaiming the narrative of God in Christ, the art of storytelling is the primary gateway.

Story, in other words, continues to fulfill its ancient function of binding society by reinforcing a set of common values and strengthening the ties of common culture. Story enculturates youth. Story defines the people. Story tells what is laudable and what is contemptible. Story is the grease and glue of society. Story homogenizes us; it makes us one. Jonathan Gottschall speaks of the irresistibility of story: “Human minds yield helplessly to the suction of story. No matter how hard we concentrate, no matter how deep we dig in our heels, we just can’t resist the gravity of alternate worlds” (2002, 3).

Gottschall reinforces this further by making a point of the particular importance when complementary art genres may be used to augment storytelling: “How bizarre it is that when we experience a story—whether (from) a book, a film, or a song—we allow ourselves to be invaded by the teller. The story maker penetrates our skulls and seizes control of our brains” (2002, xv). Of necessity, oral cultures understand this in practice.

**Marker three:** Conversations about oral learners and art often center on song, dance, and two-dimensional visual art. Serious theologian-artists should learn well the distinct and specific meanings of form, genre, media, and style, and the constraints and limitations of a particular medium (i.e., its formal qualities). For example, this issue has particular importance in considering Islamic art’s rejection of iconography, leading to its emphasis on geometric patterns apparent in its calligraphic writing.

**Marker four:** No artist is equally skilled, interested, or motivated in all possible art media. Theologian-artists should deeply comprehend their preferred medium. Why and how does it function as it does? Music, because it is an aural art and perhaps the most frequently and widely practiced art medium, may best illustrate the point. For the vast majority of oral learners, singing is not a piece of scenic background. Unlike much of Western, religious, and even evangelical sub-culture, oral communities are not spectators. Through a unique spiritual encounter, the majority become participants. In characterizing African worship, Mopson quotes Henry Mitchell, “... what he calls ‘ritual freedom,’ that is the spirit dictates ...” resulting in what he terms “... melodic license and uninhibited use of improvisation” (Quoted in Webber 130-131). But why does music do what it does?
Oral preference learners seem to employ very little instrumental “background music,” elevator music, so called. Singing, using indigenous vocabulary, is the preferred medium of oral learners. Why is this so? Music educator Eric Jenson, himself a member of the Society for Neuroscience, offers research findings and comments:

These findings remind us that music is not a right-brained activity, a common fallacy. It’s interesting to note that brain actuation in non-musician subjects when listening to either words (consonants-vowel combinations) or music as an instrument was played, follows predictable responses. Background music activates the right hemisphere to a greater degree, but concentration on the lyrics activates the left hemisphere. Correspondingly, a right-ear superiority in performance of music was noted. (2000, 12)

Apparently, oral learners have long known what modern research is discovering: music with words activates the brain differently than purely instrumental music. For oral learners, singing is something special, both for what it is and also for what it accomplishes.

Daniel J. Levitin runs the Laboratory for Musical Perception, Cognition and Expertise at McGill University. His research likewise supports and explains something of the intrinsic personal and communal connection oral learners make through music:

Each time we hear a musical pattern that is new to our ears, our brains try to make an association through whatever visual, auditory and other sensory cues accompany it; we try to contextualize the new sounds, and eventually, we create these memory links between a particular set of notes (sic the story-in-song) and a particular place, time, or set of events (sic the oral Gospel narrative). (2006, 39)

For oral learners, “...a community’s survival is based not only on the cognitive strengths of its members, but on the unity and tenacity of the culture as well. The musical arts help define and support and transmit the culture from one generation to the next” (Jenson 2000, 6). Space does not permit parallel illustrative examples of the uniqueness of dance, two-dimensional visual art, three-dimensional sculpture, carvings, and fiber arts in the lives of oral preference learners. Each medium merits intentional study if it is to be employed.

**Marker five:** Theologian-artists should comprehend the nature, roles, and implications of multiple types of metaphor, simile, and symbol if art is to be
partnered with orality in narrating the gospel. Margaret Parker suggests, “Biblical writers don’t use metaphors to decorate plain ideas. They use them intentionally to pack profound meaning into just a few words” (Quoted at intervarsity.org).

The richness offered by art through graphic use of metaphor is also paralleled by the need for understanding and wisdom regarding art’s additional capacity to imply unintended and incorrect use of simile. In Psalm 63:7-8, the writer speaks in descriptive metaphor: “Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me” (NIV).

To a lettered learner, broadly exposed to scripture, it is obvious that Yahweh has no wings, does not cast shadows, and has neither a right hand nor a left hand. Likewise, God is not a rock nor is he a hammer. Metaphorical use, with its non-literal language, can lead to vastly different interpretations of its meanings. Careful understanding of metaphor as word picture and simile as application (i.e., “Yahweh is like the wings of eagles or like chickens who cover and protect their young,”) may avoid mistaken and incorrect applications of the metaphor, simile, or symbol conveyed through various art media.

The critical nature of this point (marker five) is illustrated well through the findings of pioneer neurosurgeon Michael Gazzaniga. Commenting on Gazzaniga’s research, Gottschall reports:

But the storytelling mind is imperfect. After almost five decades of studying the homunculus who resides in the left brain, Michael Gazzaniga has concluded that this little man—for all his undeniable virtues—can also be a bumbler. The storytelling mind is allergic to uncertainty, randomness, and coincidence. It is addicted to meaning. If the storytelling mind cannot find meaningful patterns in the world, it will try to impose them. In short, the storytelling mind is a factory that churns out true stories when it can, but will manufacture lies when it can’t. (2012, 103)

This tendency, termed by anthropologists as “interpretational reflexes,” illustrates the critical importance of congruity between biblical narrative and artistic expression of it. The theologian-artist should grasp that we humans must have the gospel as our unchangeable, outside center as our point-of-reference or we will exercise the Giver’s divine gift of creative free will and create our own. In short, we will invent our own story. Used unwisely and inappropriately, art may offer a rapid avenue for misdirected creation.
Several additional markers are worthy of consideration, including distinguishing between Western subjective perception of art and the subjective experience of entering into the medium/story predominantly experienced by oral learners, the oral learner’s community ownership of experienced art media, contrasting art for worship with art as evangelism, and distinguishing between useful, authentic, indigenous art, and commercial art produced by enterprising indigenous artists who have become savvy to global marketing. Space does not allow development here.

Conclusion

I have attempted to initiate discussion toward a potential goal of training theologian-artists who comprehend the ways and means of oral learners. A preparatory sequence of orality, theology, and art has been proposed. It is assumed that this sequence will, of necessity, be intertwined and convergent.

Questions

1) How might Western students be offered a helpful immersion experience in oral learning cultures?
2) Is it feasible and worthwhile to consider and envision the possibility of formalizing and codifying the training of multiple theologian-artists?
3) If further thought and processing is worthwhile, how and at what point might further processing result in specific action steps and how might these steps occur?
4) …of formalizing and codifying the training of multiple theologian-artists?

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Chapter 10

Presenting Orality in Academic Contexts

Larry Dinkins

Dr. Larry Dinkins arrived in Thailand (OMF) in 1980 after completing a Th.M. at Dallas Theological Seminary. After six years of church planting, he transitioned to the Bangkok Bible College. Following Ph.D. studies at Biola, he returned to Chiang Mai as the Founding Director of Chiang Mai Theological Seminary. He is Simply The Story Director for Thailand.

Introduction

Biola University asked me to teach students in their Ph.D. program a course on the topic of orality. I had been involved in numerous workshops on this topic, but those workshops were of a more informal nature taught mainly to church members. If there was one thing I had learned from putting on story workshops, it was the need to learn and tell stories in a practical way as a core aspect of the training.

I came to this Ph.D. class with the same mentality, and since my exposure to orality had come mainly through Simply The Story, I decided to entitle the class with that name. Biola, however, was concerned that such a title would not suit the academic context of these Ph.D. students and changed it to "Biblical Theology and Narrative Texts." More than once, I was asked what I intended to teach, but had trouble remembering the long title I had been given. Since then, I have taught this basic subject in other institutions and as a result see more clearly the challenge that orality poses for those who seek to introduce or teach this topic in highly literate and academically-minded Bible schools or seminaries.

One incident at the Trinity Theological College (TTC) in Singapore stands out in this regard. I happened to meet an Old Testament professor at TTC and was asked to describe what orality was all about. After an hour and a half of explanation, the professorsurprised me by asking me to teach part of her class on the Minor Prophets the next day. I prepared an oral treatment of Jonah 1, but as I entered the room, I saw a PowerPoint slide with "Textural, Form and Redaction Criticism" on the screen. In an introductory course it is important to touch on such topics, but how do you incorporate a truly oral approach within such a highly literate, propositional, and Western academic environment?
Gatekeepers. The origin of this word comes from a guard who monitored the flow of goods and people through a physical gate. The definition that we are concerned with speaks of "a person who controls access." Academically, gatekeepers are the directors, academic deans, and professors who control and monitor access to biblical and theological information. The institutions in which they teach invariably shape the mindset of all who pass through their portals. Anyone seeking to spark a grassroots movement or proposing a new or innovative approach to biblical training will eventually come under the scrutiny of these gatekeepers. Their influence is often extensive and flows from their alumni into the life and ministry of the churches and their members. This is why it is important to present orality in such a way that these gatekeepers can see the validity and value of oral strategies within their curriculum.

On more than one occasion, I have been warned concerning a possible "push back" by those with reservations about orality and a more narrative approach to Bible education. This push back is understandable, especially for those with a vested interest in a highly literate communication paradigm. In such an environment, telling a story in a more dramatic way (rather than reading it from the text) and then asking students to repeat it so that the teacher can ask questions of the class likely makes many think they are in a summer Vacation Bible School or backyard Child Evangelism Fellowship class rather than a seminary classroom. When you have become used to a basic lecture pedagogy for decades, a strongly oral approach will seem unsettling, if not shocking. Instructions to put up your Bibles so you can listen more clearly and refrain from taking notes no doubt add to the shock factor.

So it is not surprising that some people become skittish when they hear that a teacher is "storying" the Bible. Are they going to hear a dramatic rendition of Ruth in costume, a Christianized Aesop fable, or possibly an embellished children's sermon? So acute were these concerns that a church actually called a special meeting of the elder board to discuss at length whether they would allow one of our story workshops to take place on their property. They came up with seven questions that needed to be answered in detail before they would allow the workshop to take place. Such concerns are valid and need biblical answers. Churches and gatekeepers in educational institutions need to be confident that what is being proposed with an oral approach is solid both pedagogically and biblically.
Thus, the following are twelve considerations, questions, and proposed actions that should be considered by any institution seeking to incorporate orality into their curriculum:

1. **Most institutions have Western accreditation requirements, which shape the courses that are taught.** Classes that stress an oral approach do not neatly fit into these descriptions. For instance, academic deans are often at a loss as to where to place a class on "Story Telling" within their present framework. Does it fit under Christian education, homiletics, missions, or evangelism? Academic deans should work with their faculty to develop titles and descriptions for classes that reflect an oral component, yet satisfy accreditation requirements.

2. Good biblical storytelling includes not just the presentation aspect, but also the unpacking of the meaning of the story, yet in an oral way. How can one demonstrate the validity of an oral inductive Bible study method that allows both literate and nonliterate students to discover deep truths in God's word? For instance, could oral discussion and dialogue in a small group be seen as a valid interpretive tool for a hermeneutics class?

3. **Orality is much broader than just storytelling and needs to be taught in a holistic manner.** Institutions should investigate how to use drama, music, proverbs, dance, and poetry within their curriculum. Experts in ethno-arts could be invited to present how these aspects factor into a culturally appropriate communication of truth.

4. **With truly oral people groups, one does not need to stress the undergirding philosophy or present apologetics for its use.** Academic institutions, however, will invariably encounter a resistance to oral methods. There are some who have found that the mere mention of this new word "orality" sets off red flags, particularly in conservative and more traditional schools. As a result, some have chosen to emphasize the power of Bible stories and narrative in and of itself without the need to buttress their arguments by referring to how this subject relates to the nonliterate and preferred oral learners of this world. We can stress the biblical basis of a more narrative approach by referring to the nature of the Bible (70% narrative), the model of Jesus (using story/parables), and the use of questions/dialogue (Jesus was asked 183 questions but answered only three directly, choosing rather to answer back with questions or story/parables or refusing to answer at all). Stressing these three aspects has proved to be a helpful starting point for those who question the validity of orality in an academic context.
5. In church history classes, you will hear virtually nothing about the place that oral strategies played in the expansion of the Church. As others in the Orality Movement have noted, "The gospel has walked on literate feet since Gutenberg." What historic basis can we marshal that will show orality as a valid approach, not just within the last 20 years, but at different points in the history of the Church? Those who teach church history should be encouraged to develop lessons that trace this oral development over the course of the Bible up until our day.

6. Seminary libraries are often virtually bereft of the key texts on the oral movement. How can we ensure that faculties and students have access to qualitative research and reputable books on orality (whether in print or digitally)? What bibliographies and literature reviews are available for those interested in studying this subject? Librarians should be encouraged to do a literature review of orality and make sure that key texts are available to staff and students.

7. Many people can accept the validity of orality for primary oral people groups, but have a hard time understanding the more sophisticated secondary orality issues. Since gatekeepers are more likely to identify with secondary orality, how can we present these concepts in a compelling way? What type of curriculum can be developed to address the unique needs of secondarily oral people? Usually there are certain staff who have a natural bent toward technology, media, and digital communication. Those individuals should be encouraged to study how those aspects can be incorporated into the curriculum.

8. Most people would see an immediate use for orality in Christian education, but there are classes like Christian family, discipleship, and counseling that would also benefit from an oral emphasis. Once again, teachers working in these disciplines should discover what oral teaching materials are available or under development and incorporate them in a kind of "hybrid" fashion into their more traditional lesson plans.

9. Faculties often have experts for various fields of study. How can a school promote an "orality expert" among its ranks? Every school should have at least one faculty member who has been given the green light to pursue this topic of orality. Such an "insider" will have a much better chance of influencing the curriculum and teachers within the school than an outsider (no matter how solid the outsider's credentials might be). What accredited courses are available for someone pursuing this emphasis?
10. Chapels are often the showcase of approved communication approaches. How can oral presentations be promoted and accepted in a more academic context? What if one week of the month were given to chapels presented in an oral manner?

11. What basic texts can be suggested for those who are just being introduced to orality issues? *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (2005) should be read first as an initial introduction to the subject and can be obtained online. *God’s Stories with Power* (2010) is based on a Fuller Seminary doctoral thesis and begins by laying a solid theoretical basis for orality and supports it with field-based examples. *Truth That Sticks* (2010) is a more popular treatment with a stress on secondary orality and discipleship.

12. In most classes, assigning homework to a class of students is fairly straightforward. Typically, a student is required to read certain texts, interact with the material, and answer a set of questions and write a report. However, with orality as a subject, you want your students to interact with the material in a more holistic and truly oral manner. With that in mind, what type of homework assignments are best suited to ensure that students get a feel for the unique aspects of orality?

If you have been in cross-cultural education on the field for any length of time, you no doubt have received invitations to attend various seminars and workshops. Each claims that its approach is the "key" that will unlock a people movement, multiple conversions, and rapid expansion of the Church. Thailand, as a free country in the midst of closed or creative access nations, has become a breeding ground and launching point for many of these innovative approaches. The nationals here have seen many of these teachings come and go, and some have become quite skeptical. I will never forget how a national leader reacted after hearing my impassioned plea for orality among the Thai. He basically said, "We will see. I’ve heard this claim for numerous programs that have been introduced in my country and so far have yet to be convinced."

For such gatekeepers, orality often sounds like yet another new teaching that was developed in a Western context, gained unusual success, and then was exported overseas. The tried-and-true literate courses they were trained in and now teach seem a much safer and universally-accepted route to pursue. They fear that opening the door to oral pedagogy in their curriculum would somehow undermine the solid academic foundation they have worked so hard to establish.
In such contexts, the challenge is to present orality in such a way that it does not appear as a threat, but as an ally in the goal of developing effective ministers of the gospel. We do not want academics to see this as an "either/or" question, but a "both/and" melding of the best practices of literate pedagogies with proven methods from those working in the oral world.

References


Chapter 11

Worldview and Oral Preference Learners and Leaders

Hannes Wiher

Hannes Wiher has an M.D. and Ph.D. with postgraduate specialties in Internal Medicine (FMH) and Theological Studies (M.A. CIU, Ph.D. Missiology, Potchefstroom, South Africa). He has twenty-two years of missionary service in West Africa and serves as Professor of Missiology in Africa, Asia, and Europe, particularly developing missiology in the French-speaking world since 2005.

In my missionary life, and traveling and teaching on three continents, I have made two basic observations: (1) people of different cultures do not understand each other’s behaviors and reactions, and (2) all over the world, Christians who are at church on Sunday behave like non-Christians on Monday. These two observations pushed me to think about the deep layers of personality, culture, and religion that make up worldview. After presenting the concept of worldview, I will explain one of the worldview models—the conscience orientation—and apply it to oral preference learning and leadership.

Deep Layers of Personality, Culture, and Religion

The Bible speaks about the deep layers of humans in terms of heart, kidneys, bones, bowels, inner person, and conscience. During the 19th century, philosophy introduced the notion of worldview. This term has been taken over by other social sciences like cultural anthropology and is widely used today. In the 20th century, psychology developed the concept of identity. The common feature of these concepts is that they all are so fuzzy that a good number of scientists have abandoned their use. Here, I take the opposite approach to operationalize the concepts of conscience, worldview, and identity by an interdisciplinary model touching theology, philosophy, psychology, and cultural anthropology, which is particularly useful for understanding orality and the communication of the gospel.

Definition of Worldview

Worldview is at the core of personality, culture, and religion. It is like the BIOS that streamlines the functioning of a computer. According to American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, worldview is “a way to see the world and ourselves.” It is the image of “how things really are” that the members of a
culture share, “a conception of nature, of self, of society” (Geertz 1973, 303). Worldviews are like “glasses.” Paul Hiebert defines worldview as the “fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things and which they use to order their lives” (2008, 15, 25). Thus, worldview has not only cognitive dimensions as mostly used by philosophers, but also the evaluative and affective aspects that touch deeper layers of personality and culture than the cognitive aspects.

Worldview Models

The stratigraphic model of creation is based on the way worldviews organize the different elements of creation, visible (matter, plants, animals, human beings) and invisible (spirits and gods). Hiebert finds four ideal-typical ways of doing so: the holistic, Hebrew, dualistic and secular worldview (Hiebert, 1985:158).

The model of the five basic soteriological concepts includes the concepts that are basic for the way to salvation: the concepts of God, Man, sin, evil, and salvation. These five concepts build up a worldview, biblical or other. They have to be worked on during evangelism and discipleship in order to transform a worldview into a biblical one. Based on these insights, missiologists have started to implement chronological Bible studies, and in oral cultures, Chronological Bible Storying (cf. McIlwain 1991; Sa’a 2000; www.goodseed.com).

The stratigraphic model of creation and the model of the five basic soteriological concepts emphasize the cognitive aspects of worldview. The evaluative and affective aspects are represented by the model of conscience orientation. Because these two aspects represent the deepest layers of personality, culture, and religion, and because orality is particularly linked to conscience orientation, we will concentrate in this article on this model.

Conscience Orientation

Every human being is born with a disposition to develop a conscience. Norms are learned from significant others through reinforcement or withdrawal of love in the dialogical tension between self and other. Conscience is thus developed during early childhood in ways that depend on the cultural context producing different conscience orientations—in our model two ideal-typical conscience orientations.
Development of Conscience Orientation

American anthropologist Melford Spiro (1958, 408ff) observed that children raised by few educators (e.g., only a father and mother in a nuclear family) integrate not only the norms presented, but also the educators into their conscience.

They function with a fixed set of rules and develop rules-centered personalities. Typically, they organize their lives with an agenda, tend to be punctual, and pursue clear objectives. Work is more important than relationships. Since their conscience functions autonomously, they tend to become individualists. When they violate the norms, they feel guilty. This is why Spiro calls this conscience a guilt-oriented conscience.

When children are raised by many educators (e.g., in an extended family) they integrate the norms but cannot integrate the educators into their conscience. They remain dependent upon the presence of these significant others in order that their conscience functions properly. When the mother is present, the mother’s norms are functional; if the grandmother is present, the grandmother’s norms are functional. These children tend to develop a relational personality with a group identity. They prefer personal interactions to work, and if work, then teamwork. Their focus is status rather than achievement and objectives. If nobody is present, then no norms are functional. This fact represents the basis of the phenomenon of corruption: “As long as nobody sees it, you can do anything.” But if the violation of the norm becomes known and public, shame arises. This is why Spiro calls this conscience a shame-oriented conscience.

With the number of educators influencing the outcome of worldview, Spiro gives us an interesting model for worldview transformation. But of course, Spiro’s model does not show the entire reality. A Chinese baby growing up in a nuclear family will still be relational, even though he or she is raised by few educators. There are other factors influencing the conscience development, especially the mode of education.

If the educators present the norms by giving explanations and arguments (rules), the child’s conscience will become predominantly rules-centered. If the educators emphasize the relational aspect of the norms like, “What will the neighbors say?” or “When daddy comes home, you are going to be spanked,” then the child will develop a relational conscience. If very few norms are presented, then the conscience either becomes relational or does not develop properly. This
happened in the postmodern generation that rejected the traditional norms of Western society. Their children have either become predominantly shame-oriented or have underdeveloped consciences, neither shame nor guilt-oriented, nor functioning properly.

**Relationship of Conscience Orientation, Worldview, and Identity**

In psychological perspective, identity develops also in the dialogical tension between self and other. In this process, identity development is closely related to the emergence of shame and guilt (that is conscience orientation). The link between worldview and identity is established through the priority of certain values in conscience orientation. Identity is then constructed in a process during which past experiences, values, and thought systems are integrated into a unified, organized, and coherent personality structure.

**Conscience Orientation and Basic Values**

Adapting Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers’ model of basic values (1986), we can develop a personality typology based on the conscience orientation (Wiher 2003, 282-294):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rules-centered Conscience (guilt-oriented)</th>
<th>Relational Conscience (shame-oriented)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>Collectivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Orientation</td>
<td>Event Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Orientation</td>
<td>Person Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Focus</td>
<td>Status Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Thinking</td>
<td>Holistic Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage to Lose Face</td>
<td>Fear of Losing Face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The typology represents ideal types, every person being a mixture of both conscience orientations. It is useful to know our own profile (“glasses”) in order to understand better how and why we behave as we do and also to understand our partners, friends, colleagues, and disciples.
**Conscience Orientation and Soteriology**

Shame and guilt being expressions of sin, the model of conscience orientation becomes a soteriological model. The conscience tends toward peace expressed through harmony or justice. The rules-centered conscience searches to repair the fault in order to regain innocence and justice.

Martin Luther’s main concern was to find innocence through reparation (justification) of his personal, individual guilt given freely by a gracious God. Relational consciences want to restore harmony and honor with significant others through reconciliation. As they are caught in the shame, they need a third person, a mediator, to help them in the restoration process. The main emphasis of rules-centered persons is justice expressed in rights and order, while relational persons look for harmony, power, prosperity, prestige, and wellness. For rules-centered persons and societies, human rights are an important issue, whereas for relational persons and cultures, the corporate honor is in the forefront.

The following table shows the positive and negative basic values of the shame axis at the left, the guilt axis at the right, and of neutral biblical terms in the center:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harmony / Honor</th>
<th>Reconciliation (Mediator)</th>
<th>Shame / Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prestige / Glory / Power / Prosperity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Repentance</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocence</td>
<td>Reparation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rightness</td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

At conversion, a deep personality structure like the conscience orientation will not change automatically. The only way to transform the different values is to work on them conscientiously. The deep layers established during early childhood will allow little change, but the later elements of conscience orientation will be open to modeling. Relational elements can be added through a relational education or lifestyle (e.g., an intimate covenant relationship with the biblical God). Rules-centered elements will be accessible for insertion of rules into people’s lives (e.g., the Ten Commandments).
Conscience Orientation and Communication

Communication can be considered as a function of conscience orientation. Communication styles differ considerably between the two conscience orientations. Guilt-oriented communication is typically direct without a mediator; shame-oriented communication is rather indirect, taking advantage of mediation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Communication</th>
<th>Indirect Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(guilt-oriented)</td>
<td>(shame-oriented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main message is</td>
<td>The main message is communicated by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicated by precise</td>
<td>the mutually known context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words</td>
<td>The main message is communicated by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>figurative speech (e.g., parables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main message is</td>
<td>The main message is communicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicated clearly</td>
<td>non-verbally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main message is</td>
<td>A lot of non-verbal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicated verbally</td>
<td>Strong consciousness of the context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little non-verbal</td>
<td>Silence is acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>You rarely say “no.” A “yes” can mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“no”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak consciousness of</td>
<td>You have to maintain the harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>context</td>
<td>in the relationships at all costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence is considered</td>
<td>Conflict should be avoided as it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suspect</td>
<td>shows disharmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have to say “yes” or</td>
<td>The conflict is hidden, dissimilated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“no”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have to tell the truth,</td>
<td>You have to maintain the harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>even when it breaks the</td>
<td>in the relationships at all costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td>Conflict should be avoided as it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict is normal in</td>
<td>shows disharmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The conflict is discussed</td>
<td>The conflict is hidden, dissimilated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>openly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One has to accept direct</td>
<td>Direct critique breaks relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critique in a constructive</td>
<td>should be avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>way</td>
<td>You should not lose face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should not lie</td>
<td>Tendency to listen a lot and speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>little in an unfamiliar group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to speak a lot</td>
<td>The main focus is on relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and listen little in an</td>
<td>and trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unfamiliar group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main focus is on the</td>
<td>Spiral logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution and the action</td>
<td>You need a mediator for important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communications and for conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear logic</td>
<td>resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mediator is perceived as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hindering direct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Worldview and Conscience Orientation

One cannot ask a person, “What is your worldview or conscience orientation?” Participant observation of one’s own or others’ behavior gives clues to the basic values of personalities, cultures, and religions. Through a questionnaire, everyday observation can be further objectivized (Wiher 2003, 432-434). Thus, we can do an assessment on an individual or group basis. When groups are assessed (societies, cultures, religions), the result will indicate the most frequent or dominant personality type in the group, and will thus be a generalization.

Conscience Orientation and Orality

Conscience Orientation and Oral Preference Personality, Culture, and Religion

Based on the preceding reflections, we can say that oral persons, cultures, and religions will be preferentially shame-oriented. The inverse is not true: shame-oriented persons or cultures can be literate. Thus, we can conclude that oral preference persons have the following basic values: collectivism, indirect communication, event orientation, person orientation, status focus, holistic thinking, and fear of losing face. Their basic objective in life (synonymous to salvation) is harmony, honor, prosperity, wellness, and power.

Conscience Orientation and Oral Preference Discipleship and Education

Education, behavior, and consequently ethics, are essentially questions of motivation. Gerhart Piers states that “social conformity achieved through guilt will be essentially one of submission” whereas “social conformity achieved through shame will be essentially one of identification” (1971, 53). According to Piers, this is the case because in a guilt-oriented person, a transgression of the conscience’s norm leads to guilt and fear of punishment (1971, 16).

On the other hand, in a shame-oriented person, shame and shame-anxiety are caused by a shortcoming when a goal presented by the ego ideal is not reached. Shame-anxiety is one of abandonment, not of mutilation as in guilt-oriented persons (1971, 24). The ego-ideal is a psychoanalytical term that describes the projected self, or in other words, the identity (in comparison with the real self). Consequently, shame orientation goes along with identification, while guilt orientation goes along with submission. Piers concludes that “one might, therefore, easily expect to find various cultures characterized and differentiated according to the prevalent use of either shame or guilt-inducing sanctions to ensure social integration” (1971, 53).
Spiro refines the concept of social conformity in his two systems view (1961). He sets the social system in relation to different psycho-social structures as presented in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Social System</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Psycho-social Structure²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>Rewards individual needs and drives</td>
<td>Fills the roles of the social system</td>
<td>Identity and ego needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalized motivation</td>
<td>Prescribes values and norms</td>
<td>Learns and internalizes values and norms</td>
<td>Super-ego and ego-ideal needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic motivation</td>
<td>Uses positive and negative sanctions (reward and punishment)</td>
<td>Conforms to receive positive and avoid negative sanctions</td>
<td>Alter-ego and super-alter needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intrinsic motivation refers to the basic needs of the identity and the ego, such as hunger, thirst, sex, and security that are satisfied by filling roles of the social system. Through the conscience, represented in psychoanalytical theory by the super-ego and the ego-ideal, the individual internalizes values and norms and conforms to them.

Additionally, the significant others and authorities of the social group influence the individual directly through extrinsic motivation or sanction. The fellowship of the social group can, for example, create an in-group feeling which helps shame-oriented people withstand temptations (Loewen 1969, 120).

For this reason, Ruth Lienhard stresses the importance of the social group for motivation (2001, 236ff). When the standards of the social group are internalized, they become a matter of the conscience. Thus, the conscience and the social group play key roles in motivation of behavior. In conclusion, motivation is based on the fact that those who comply will (1) have their needs filled and will have a role in society, (2) will have a good conscience, and (3) will belong to a social group. Fear of punishment following non-conformity can also work as motivation, but it is not the primary incitement (Spiro 1961; Lienhard 2001, 214).

The church is also a social system. People will enter into it and participate in the rules and roles primarily by motivation. A guilt-oriented person will look for
an orthodox community that complies with the rules of the Bible and/or Christian tradition. A shame-oriented person will be attracted by harmony, honor, and power. Mega-churches with fellowship, worship, mighty events, and members of a certain affluence and status in society will be preferred (cf. Hiebert et al. 1999, 250). Common rituals as public celebrations in the calendar year, baptism and communion, days or weeks of prayer and fasting, moments of confession, even events of discipline with the reinsertion of church members, can enhance fellowship and maturity (Lienhard 2001, 227ff; Singgih 1995).

What happens when motivation breaks down—that is, when needs are not fulfilled? Christian teaching of humility goes against the search for the honor of natural humanity. Jerome Neyrey explains:

The bottom line is that Jesus’ disciples, because they cannot play the honor game as usual, will lose respect, value, and worth in the eyes of kin and neighbors. They will lose what is considered vital to meaningful life among the ancients, namely respect. We cannot emphasize enough how bitter and difficult an experience this would be. Following Jesus can lead to a wretched fate according to worldly standards. (1998, 228)

Exclusion from the Lord’s Supper is an effective form of discipline in a shame-oriented context, but it disturbs harmony and honor and produces shame. It can cause a member to stay definitively away from church and change denomination, village, or town. Less harmony- and honor-oriented persons will be less affected by such disciplinary measures. For guilt-oriented individuals, they provide an opportunity for reparation. But God introduces a new dimension to the anthropological mechanisms. Neyrey observes that Jesus transformed humanity’s search for honor:

Matthew portrays Jesus, not as destroying the traditional honor game, but rather as reforming it in his own interests. Worth, respect, and praise remain the aim of disciples; and Jesus himself generously makes grants of these. But he challenges the conventional definitions of honor, the typical ways of achieving it, and the obligatory public forum for gaining it. Indeed, Jesus “honors” those who were “shamed.” . . . The expected defense of one’s honor when challenged is proscribed for the disciples. The public forum for seeing and being seen is denied them. New rules, new umpires, and a new playing field are envisioned for the game of honor. (1998, 227)
Even though the social system may not be able to fulfill the needs, God through his Holy Spirit can give harmony, honor, and justice. Even the shame-oriented disciples of Jesus are finally more motivated by the fact of being children of God than being first in rank (Luke 22:24-30; John 1:12ff, 13:13-16). As an academic, Paul is not ashamed of the gospel in front of the Greeks for whom it is foolishness (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23). He is ready to humiliate himself in the steps of Jesus (1 Cor. 9:19-23). He identifies with Christ and wants us to identify with him (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:5; 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6). God introduces a paradox: whoever loses his life, will win it (Luke 9:24, 17:33). Green and Lawrenz put it this way:

The Christian Gospel says much about self-esteem but in a different context than our culture offers. Our call to love God fully and love ourselves as we love others is a radical departure from what surrounds us. Rather than doing, performing, or obtaining, we are to love. Rather than competing in our attempts to be good enough by being better than others, we are to find our value in relationship to God and to others. (1994, 106)

God wants us to reckon with his power beyond all anthropological mechanisms. In the transmission of ethical standards, it is important to consider motivation by identification and submission. Covenantal ethics covers both conscience orientations: identification with God in the covenantal relationship and submission to his standards.

The Hindu concept of karma seems to be an ethics of submission. So is Islam’s ethics as the meaning of the Arabic term *islam* “submission” indicates. The Apostle Paul is concerned with both aspects: he explains in his letters the new covenant with God through Jesus Christ and our new identity as children of God, disciples and sent ones of Jesus Christ. After laying the soteriological foundations, he goes on with the detailed explanation of the ethical imperative of God’s commandments. Covenantal ethics is essentially an ethics of responsibility: responsibility toward God and fellow humans (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-39; Rom. 13:9ff). It lives from the identity as covenant partner and child of God, and it manifests itself in their respect of God’s commandments. It responds to God’s identification with our shame and guilt in Jesus Christ (Kraus 1990, 204).

**Conscience Orientation and Oral Preference Learning**

Children in predominantly shame-oriented societies are accustomed to learning in an informal manner through personal relationships and through praxis.
They learn through play; memorization of riddles, proverbs, and parables; and songs and dancing, often using antiphony (Griffith 1985, 249ff). Often, formal institutions also refer to these methods. Teachers must realize that people with different conscience orientations have different learning methods. Desmond Tutu sums up the differences as follows:

It is important ... to note the differences in the African perception and that of the Westerner. ... The Westerner is largely analytical, whereas the African tends to be synthetic. ... The Westerner breaks things up and the other tends to see things as wholes. That is why Westerners can be such good scientists, but they are not so good at putting things back together. The African may be good at seeing the woods, but most often will miss the significance of the individual trees. The Westerner will tend to be cerebral, whereas the African gives great play to feelings. The former, particularly in his worship, may be cold and intellectual, while the latter might be emotional and warm, sticking loosely to intellectual content. The Westerner emphasizes the individual person, whereas the African will give an important place to the community. The one encourages initiative - the Western view - and is concerned about individual liberties, whereas the latter tends to stifle personal initiative for fear of being out of step with the herd. (Tutu 1987, 161 qtd by Bowen 1989, 270ff)

With “Westerner” and “African” we realize that Tutu describes roughly guilt and shame-oriented personality types and thought patterns. Shame-oriented students prefer rigid structuring and leading by teachers. They like to learn in small groups and dislike lectures. They need a clear-cut course program with well-defined objectives, a course outline, graphic helps, and practical learning. Achievements should be acknowledged by personal feedback, or in the form of grades. This learning pattern is also called “field-dependent.” The term emphasizes the fact that the students are dependent on external referents to guide them in processing information and that they perceive situations globally (Bowen and Bowen 1989, 272). Whereas in Europe and in the USA, about half of the students are field-dependent, in Africa the field-dependent students account for about 90%. “Field-independent” students function rather autonomously.

The characteristics of field dependency as compared to field independence and their relation to conscience orientation are presented schematically on the next page (adapted from Bowen & Bowen 1989, 273).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field-dependent (shame-oriented)</th>
<th>Field-independent (guilt-oriented)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Display of physical and verbal</td>
<td>Formal student-teacher relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expressions of approval and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warmth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of personalized rewards</td>
<td>Instructional objectives, atmosphere secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher guides clearly</td>
<td>Loose guidance of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as model</td>
<td>Teacher as consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and main principles of</td>
<td>Development of purpose and main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesson obvious from the beginning</td>
<td>principles of lesson with the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation and group feeling</td>
<td>Individual learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student is measured in</td>
<td>Competition between students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relation to a pre-defined standard; no competition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating concepts to students’</td>
<td>Task-oriented learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress global aspects of concepts</td>
<td>Details, facts, principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized and humanized</td>
<td>Graphics, charts, and formulas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal class discussions</td>
<td>Inductive learning and discovery approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group tasks</td>
<td>Lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned questioning</td>
<td>Impromptu questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback to improve performance</td>
<td>Not dependent on feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field experiences</td>
<td>Structured learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teaching should be adapted to conscience orientation. While shame-oriented students tend to think in a synthetic and analogical manner, guilt-oriented students present analytic thinking. While the first group will learn by copying and learning by heart, the second group will have an inductive learning and discovery approach. The former will function better in groups, while the latter prefer to learn individually. Teaching according to conscience orientation is a challenge for
teachers from the other orientation. Obliging a student to function in a school system of the other conscience orientation can represent a major drawback in school performance. A main warning for teaching in shame-oriented contexts is to avoid making a student lose face.

As often as possible, teachers should refer to the traditional learning methods: riddles, proverbs, songs, antiphonal songs, drama, scripture memorization, practical and experience-related learning, group learning, and teacher-disciple relationships (mentoring) (Griffith 1985, 252ff). Jesus himself referred to traditional Jewish teaching methods. He used imagery, symbolism, parallelisms, stanzas, rhythms, rhymes, and chiasms as mnemotechnic aids (Riesner 1981, 392-408).

For biblical teaching, this means that parables, proverbs, psalms, and narrative elements from the New and Old Testaments are often used. In doing so, it is important to draw from the whole Bible in a balanced way and to give an overview of redemptive history in the sense of chronological evangelism (McIlwain 1991). Fundamental truths like the Decalogue, the Lord’s Prayer, and confessions of faith can be recited during Sunday services (cf. Bammann 1990, 54ff; Müller 1994, 170). The choice of an adapted catechism for baptismal preparation is also important. Istvan Nyeste presents the use of the Heidelberg Catechism relating to shame concerns (2001, 148-178).

**Conscience Orientation and Oral Preference Leadership**

Shame-oriented societies tend to have hierarchical systems. In the Bible, we find the judges, prophets, priests, and kings. In Africa, the traditional chief system prevails. In India, we find the caste system. In the church within a shame-oriented context, the hierarchical system corresponds to the episcopal system. Even when there are democratic structures like committees, the whole decisional power is with the president or director. The members of the committee are the counselors, elders, or wise men in the traditional system. Before a decision, the chief can consult, but it is not compulsory for him to do so. If the elders do not agree with the chief, they are limited in the expression of critique by the norms of the shame-oriented culture. If the chief does not spontaneously consult them, they have no direct means to influence him.

On the other hand, shame-oriented subordinates will not express their opinion when they are not consulted, even if they are heavily dissatisfied with the leader. This goes on until open rebellion creates chaos. It is therefore advisable for a leader to consult with a group of counselors before making decisions.
Because shame-oriented people are sensitive to issues of power and honor, it is of importance to them who is sitting in a committee. A pastor who has become a carrier of mana through ordination ceremony will have more weight than a layperson who has little mana. In the animist’s view, a person bestowed with a lot of mana has direct access to God’s power of blessing and life. Consequently, the word or a prayer of an ordained pastor has greater importance than that of a layperson. In this example, it becomes also evident that animism is a shame-oriented system (cf. Wiher 2003:295ff).

Criticism of subordinates should only be communicated privately. If the leader loses control, he is dishonored and shamed and conduct is equated with sin. Control of emotions is therefore a precondition for leaders. As the working community is perceived as an extended family, the leader also has the functions of a head of the family. This means showing consideration and care in critical situations. It also means showing generosity with subordinates in material and social matters.

On the other hand, respect of the leader and his orders is the first obligation for shame-oriented subordinates. If they do not agree with an order, they are supposed to execute it and only express their opinion after that, in private. A discussion engaged directly after the order, before its execution, is seen as refusal and shames the leader.

Guilt-oriented societies will tend to an egalitarian system with a low-key hierarchy or no hierarchy at all. The leader will be measured at correctness, punctuality, competences and efficiency. Criticism of leadership will be current and open. A pastor cannot hide behind his special access to God through ordination. He will rather have to prove his capacities in preaching, management, and counseling.

Consequently, cross-cultural leadership has to take into account culture and personality differences according to conscience orientation. Special issues concern differences in power distance, uncertainty-avoidance, task or person orientation, and individualist or collectivist tendency (Clinton 1989, 187-190). Additionally, Christian leadership takes its orientation from the Trinity: it directs the Christian to be a child of God, his Father, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and to be a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16) (Beyerhaus 1996, 662ff). A key word for Christian leadership is servant leadership (John 13:13-17), a great challenge for honor- and power-oriented persons.
Conclusion

Conscience orientation is a model providing information and orientation regarding the deepest layers of personality, culture, and religion. With its soteriological dimension, it is very appropriate for the communication of the gospel, discipleship, and church planting. Orality is not its central focus, but one trait of a shame-oriented conscience with its relational personality implying person and honor orientation and many other characteristics of orality.

Questions & Challenges

1) Does shame orientation of the conscience provide a useful model for orality?
2) Is shame-oriented teaching a sufficient basis for theological education in oral cultures?
3) Are shame-oriented ethics as one aspect of covenant ethics helpful for discipleship with oral persons?
4) Is shame-oriented leadership a helpful model for theological teachers in oral contexts?

1This article is a shortened version of a paper presented at the International Orality Network Consultation held at Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, June, 11-13, 2013. The full text is available on www.orality.net.

2Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical model proposes the following psycho-social structures: the ego (the structure in relation to reality), the ego-ideal and the super-ego (moral controlling structures corresponding to the “conscience”), the id (the seat of the drives), and the alter-egos (the others).

3In the animist perspective, the concept of mana can stand for power, charisma, authority, good fortune, and luck. It can be acquired through sacrificial rituals. The term has Polynesian origins and was introduced into the field of cultural anthropology by the missionary Robert Codrington in 1891.
References


Chapter 12

Giving Voice to Orality in Theological Education: Responses and Recommendations

Calvin Chong

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Summarizing the Contributions

The contributions of colleagues at this orality consultation present descriptions of rich experiences with and within theological institutions. Descriptions include:

• Finding rationale for including orality-based elements within theological education
• Envisioning the impact of orality-based training on graduates
• Intentional institutional-wide plans and processes for implementing orality-focused programs in theological institutions
• Partnerships with churches and missions organizations
• Stakeholder interests and concerns
• Exposure to oral-based learning in classroom and ministry settings
• Integrating oral-based learning through multi-disciplinary inquiry
• Faculty training workshops
• Institutional gatekeeper and faculty attitudes toward orality
• Teacher and student experiences with oral-based learning
• Assessment of students’ oral interactions, learning, and performances
• Assessment of institutional support and effectiveness of orality-focused programs
• Suggestions for incorporating orality-based elements into the curriculum of theological institutions

The diversity in the descriptions reflects the many facets involved when introducing innovation in theological institutions. The variety also reflects the social situation of the theological institutions. By virtue of its service to its constituents, a theological school might have a heightened awareness of issues and needs associated with primary orality which another situated in a different culture might not share.
In addition, the contributions of the writers also highlight specific challenges that accompany the introduction and implementation of orality-based elements both at an institution-wide level as well as in a more modest classroom or ministry setting. Some of the challenges observed include:

- Churches and seminaries have yet to appreciate the global realities and statistics on preliterate and post-literate people groups as well as grasp the implications for theological education and for pastoral/missional/educational/ family ministries.

- Institutions of higher learning still overwhelmingly depend on writing and reading to uphold academic standards and accomplish educational goals.

- Institutional gatekeepers and stakeholders continue to harbor deep reservations and need to be persuaded of the value of orality studies and practices in seminary education.

- Accreditation bodies have not provided standards to guide theological institutions in developing and evaluating graduate outcomes related to orality studies and practices.

- A comprehensive profile of an ideal graduate who demonstrates competence and character in the realm of oral communications either has not been put together or is not widely available.

- Faculty are ill-equipped to design learning experiences, which help students master/analyze/synthesize content, develop critical thinking, demonstrate thinking processes, explore multiple perspectives, and problem solve through oral expression and verbal artistry.

- Students are not well mentored to develop mastery in oral competencies.

- Appropriate and comprehensive assessments tools for evaluating excellence in oral competencies are not well developed.

- Issues pertaining to secondary orality have been under-explored, and the digital platforms where engagement takes place are under-deployed by seminaries.

- Academic resources on primary and secondary orality studies and practices need to be identified and developed for school libraries.

**Response and Recommendations**

In response to the descriptions and challenges presented, I would like to present eight recommendations for consideration. These will not address all the challenges that have been articulated, but are aimed at clarifying issues, critiquing assumptions, identifying barriers to progress, fueling imagination, sharing practical suggestions, and catalyzing further inquiry and discussion.
In this way, I try to give orality studies and practices voice and space in the curriculum of theological schools. The eight include: (1) understanding the unique differences between oral and written communication forms, (2) drawing from academic and practitioner disciplines focused on researching and developing oral communications and art forms, (3) recognizing pathologies present in verbal communications, (4) being aware of hermeneutical issues accompanying orality programs and practices, (5) learning from educational best practices in higher education, (6) incorporating digital technologies and platforms for social engagement and learning, (7) creating opportunities for shared academic and professional inquiry around orality topics and issues, and (8) adopting creative as well as non-traditional assessment strategies for oral competencies. Each of the eight recommendations will be elaborated in turn.

Recommendation 1: Understand the unique differences between oral and written communication forms

Whereas oral and written communication forms may share some overlapping features, they also have profound differences in their properties, function, and impact. The differences are summarized by Ann Browne (1999, 155) and presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A continuous stream of phonemes</td>
<td>Words separated by spaces and punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmented utterances</td>
<td>Complete sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intonation and stress</td>
<td>Spelling, punctuation, and layout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The listener is present and may add to the text</td>
<td>The reader is absent when the text is constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context helps the listener to understand</td>
<td>No necessary shared context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The listener can seek immediate clarification</td>
<td>No immediate response from the reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often informal and repetitive</td>
<td>Formal, condensed, clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate, often unplanned</td>
<td>Planned and revised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often emotional and trivial</td>
<td>Often serious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitory</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick and requiring little physical effort</td>
<td>Tiring and demanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beyond developing awareness of these differences, appreciating differing attitudes accorded to the two mediums is also essential. The reality is that despite the fact that “language is so overwhelmingly oral” (Ong 2002, 7), written language is often conferred higher value and status. Sandra Cornbleet and Ronald Carter thus make the following observation:

During the course of an average day we speak much more than we write. Yet most societies value writing more than speech. Most examinations test knowledge by means of reading and writing tasks and most examinations, including the driving test, cannot be passed without competence in the use of written language. The most highly valued texts in most societies are written texts. The term literature is used to refer to written material, including dramatic texts. (2001, 1)

The key to understanding the difference in status lies in the way written communication has been able to extend the functions of spoken communication. Writing, we note, is a form of language technology used to further the purposes of communication. In the words of Walter Ong, “Writing, commitment of the word to space, enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure” (2002, 7-8). Ong goes on to explain the elevated status of writing with reference to its relation to studying and the development of academic disciplines:

Language study in all but recent decades has focused on written texts rather than on orality for a readily assignable reason: the relationship of study itself to writing. All thought, including that in primary oral cultures, is to some degree analytic: it breaks its materials into various components. But abstractly sequential, classificatory, explanatory examination of phenomena or of stated truths is impossible without writing and reading. Human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom, but they do not “study.” (2002, 8-9)

Literacy is absolutely necessary for the development not only of science but also of history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language (including oral speech) itself. There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy. (2002, 14-15)

Ong’s explanation of the affordances of writing and their enhancement of human learning and communication is of great importance. Not only does it recall for us that writing has been a key contributor to the history of higher education, it also reminds us that writing is necessary for carrying out its ongoing purposes.
Ironically, therefore, one of the entryways of orality studies into the seminary is through the very medium that has been identified as the barrier to its access. Paradoxically, it is through writing and researching about orality that orality studies can be better established in theological institutions.

To reduce the creativity and dynamism of oral communications to mere academic study and research, however, would be an unacceptable proposal. Complementing academic study and research, therefore, can be the establishment and embrace of performance and verbal arts in theological institutions. Selected oral performance forms and oral communications technologies appropriate to the culture need to be identified, their impact articulated and demonstrated, and viable communities of practice established. In these ways, synergies between different communications mediums can be developed and polarizations avoided.

**Recommendation 2: Draw from academic and practitioner disciplines focused on researching and developing oral communications and art forms**

Oral expression and impression are central aspects of human communications and historically have been subject to description, development, inquiry, and analysis. As such, there are academic as well as practitioner disciplines where research, teaching, and practical resources have been well developed. Much therefore can be learned, adapted, and applied from communications studies, media studies, ethnography of communications, ethnography of speaking, pragmatics, discourse analysis, performance studies, performance criticism, teaching and learning in higher education, language acquisition, hermeneutics, and intercultural studies.

These disciplines all have long histories and long traditions of developing terms and theoretical frameworks to aid description and analysis of oral events, generating best practices, assessing oral competences, and creating oral artifacts. Illustrations from linguistics and cultural anthropology will serve to support the invitation.

**Discourse Analysis in Linguistics**

Speech act theory in discourse analysis has its contemporary origins in J. L. Austin’s study of performative utterances and his theory of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary speech acts (1962). The theory has been developed by other scholars since its first appearance and critiqued as well as applied extensively in linguistics and communications studies. Whereas the term “locution” refers to the actual utterance made, “illocution” refers to the speaker’s intention,
and “perlocution” to the impact that the utterance has on the audience. The fact that a locutionary act can have its genesis in a range of illocutionary acts as well as spawn multiple perlocutionary effects reveals the complex nuances of spoken language and the need to understand oral utterances in relation to social and cultural contexts.

**Ethnography of Communications in Cultural Anthropology**

In ethnography of communications, helpful distinctions like “communicative situation,” “communicative event,” and “communicative act,” proposed by Dell Hymes (1972) give us the labels to analyze different distinct units of oral occurrences. In the classroom, one would thus observe a communicative situation with multiple communicative events and acts. The 20-minute mini-lecture followed by a Q & A session, and then followed by discussion in groups of fours would represent three different communicative events marked by a change in participant role and setting.

Within each communicative event can be found communicative acts such as the questions posed, the answers provided by individual respondents, or the insult directed at the international student. Beyond the classroom, the labels can be applied to describe or analyze a range of social, relational, and ministry settings.

Another contribution from ethnography of communications is the term “communicative competence.” Interestingly, this term is not used narrowly to describe how well a user has mastered the language or how well an oral performance is delivered. Instead, the term includes a range of competencies including “linguistics knowledge,” “interaction skills,” and “cultural knowledge” (Saville-Troike 1989, 24). Muriel Saville-Troike defines it this way:

Communicative competence involves knowing not only the language code, but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. It deals with the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have to enable them to use and interpret linguistic forms. Communicative competence extends to both knowledge and expectation of who may or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, whom one may speak to, how one may talk to persons of different statuses and roles, what appropriate nonverbal behaviors are in various contexts, what the routines for turn-taking are in conversation, how to ask for and give information, how to request, how to offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how to give commands, how to enforce discipline, and the like - in short, everything involving the use of language and other communicative dimensions in particular settings. (1989, 21)
From the examples provided, it is clear that much profit can be gained by drawing from the knowledge and wisdom situated in the disciplines listed above. Familiarity with the literature and basic concepts provide a common currency for faculty from different disciplines to discuss, identify, analyze, and find solutions to issues of orality encountered by theological institutions, the church, and the world.

In addition, whereas performance and oral communication disciplines focus on honing skills in presentations, preaching, storytelling, dramatization, puppetry, singing, etc., much of the literature from linguistics and cultural anthropology remind us that competencies associated with communications extend beyond performance settings. What else needs to be included are qualities in non-performance settings such as accurate interpretation and representation of what was articulated, social propriety, and intercultural intelligence when relating to others. These aspects of communicative competence should not be missed and have implications for determining the qualities of the ideal graduate as well as for the assessment of student learning and development.

**Recommendation 3: Recognize pathologies present in verbal communications**

In her book *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*, Marilyn McEntyre writes:

> Like any other life-sustaining resource, language can be depleted, polluted, contaminated, eroded, and filled with artificial stimulants. Like any other resource, it needs the protection of those who recognize its value and commit themselves to good stewardship. (2009, 1)

With these words, McEntyre reminds us that communication channels and resources can be muddied as well as carry pathologies that need to be guarded against. Different expressions of verbal communication, therefore, should never be assumed to be neutral or values-free, but can be deployed for affirmative as well as adverse purposes.

To illustrate, Herman Leonard has a chapter in the book *Education for Judgment* in which he shares valuable lessons about artistry in leading a discussion. Central in Leonard’s chapter is a section on diagnosing and treating listening pathologies observed in classroom discussions. Pathological group discussion behaviors (1991, 140-143) he identifies among students include:

- The Mortar Lob
- The Mongoose Strike
- The Spartan Shield
Pathological teacher behaviors (1991, 143-145) Leonard identifies include:

- The Teacher Express
- Hiding the Ball
- Everything Goes

The list of headings highlight pathologies in oral interactions that are not absent in seminary student and teacher behavior. External evidence of pathological verbal behavior is often symptomatic of the inner human condition. Parker Palmer puts it this way in his characterization of teaching:

> Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to my inner life (1998, 2).

Verbal pathologies mirroring inner conditions and dispositions are therefore realities of human life and cannot be ignored by seminaries. These include compulsive lying, inability to keep confidence, slander, sarcasm, condescension, blame shifting, and attention manipulation. These, and a host of other pathological behaviors, regularly manifest themselves in personal life, family, classroom, social, ministry, as well as in organizational management settings. If theological education is to provide avenues of growth, transformation, and preparation for ministry, then the members of seminary communities should be subjected to feedback mechanisms to create personal awareness of this dark side of verbal communications.

**Recommendation 4: Be aware of hermeneutical issues accompanying orality programs and practices**

Despite their significance and impact around the world, orality programs and practices often suffer from deficiencies that their advocates have difficulty identifying or managing. This blind side accompanies many of the oral focused ministries such as preaching and Sunday school, and is thus a common discussion topic in seminary communities. Two common issues include limiting the full counsel of God and missing the focus of the story.
Limiting the Full Counsel of God

One of the key features of orality programs is the use of story sets. Story sets are extremely useful when they try to distill the essence of key biblical events and themes from Genesis to Revelation. They are less useful when they are necessarily selective and reduce the different literary genres of the Bible all to narrative form.

The use of oral story sets is similar to making a trip to a remote jungle and returning with a set of 60 photographs. Using a set of 60 photographs and their reproductions to describe the jungle inadequately represents the fuller understanding that regular firsthand visits or even a movie documentary can offer. The point here is that oral story sets, like sermon series and Sunday school curricula, function as “canons within the Canon” as they are often treated as authoritative, complete, and sufficient. Yet, they must be recognized as abbreviations and partial representations of the whole. Otherwise, they effectively function to limit the community from receiving the full counsel of God contained in the pages of scripture.

Missing the Focus of the Story

Coupled with the omission described above is the often shallow understanding of scripture observed in oral presentations. This condition is regularly reflected in both the telling of the story as well as in the questions imposed on the text by the storyteller.

To illustrate, we note that in the hands of a masterful storyteller, the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 can serve to encourage listeners that God does miraculously provide for your needs in times of lack. Yet, quite contrary to authorial intent, the message of John 6 is not about creating expectations about what God can or will provide for the hearer. The individual segments in John 6 need to be understood in the context of the entire discourse in John 6, which begins with people following Jesus because he offers bread (6:1-15).

The story, however, doesn’t end with the provision, but explores the people’s response to the provision. As the story unfolds, there is a turning point in the text often equally unnoticed by preachers, Sunday school teachers, and orality practitioners armed with story sets. When Jesus begins to speak of himself as the bread of life and clearly defines the terms for following him, we note that both his teaching and credentials are challenged by his own disciples (6:22-65).
In the end, all except for his closest disciples eventually stop following him (6:66-71). Here, Jesus’s ability to feed the 5,000 is a sign pointing to his divinity. Consistent with John 1:11, despite the clear sign, even his own do not recognize or receive him, and eventually end up rejecting him. Contrary to what is popularly presented, the message here is not about the provision of God, but about whether people will follow Jesus on his terms or not. Understanding and presenting the passage any other way disregards the literary and theological context and violates the challenging message intended in the gospel.

It is this propensity to miss the point of the larger narrative, make secondary emphases the main emphasis, and settle for consumer-centered or moralistic applications that faculty gatekeepers from biblical studies departments concern themselves. The same tendencies to represent the text poorly are found in cult groups and churches that promote “health-and-wealth” versions of the gospel. If churches and mission agencies share similar interpretive approaches, they will lose the moral authority to challenge the techniques used by these groups. They will also be guilty of feeding their flocks with need-driven understandings of scripture. These are basic issues of interpretation and application regularly addressed in basic texts on hermeneutics, which need to be paid more careful attention. For practitioners, greater consideration will thus need to be given to the Pauline injunction to handle the word of truth correctly (2 Tim. 2:15) every time telling, retelling, dramatizing, ritual enacting, or any other form of scriptural engagement occurs.

**Recommendation 5: Learn from educational best practices in higher education**

The most commonly deployed mode of teaching and communication in educational institutions is arguably the lecture method. Stephen Brookfield provides a defense for the use of lectures, citing reasons they can be used profitably. These include (1) establishing the broad outline of a body of material, (2) explaining, with frequent examples, concepts that are hard for learners to understand, (3) introducing alternative perspectives and interpretations, (4) modeling intellectual attitudes and behaviors you wish to encourage in students, and (5) encouraging learners’ interest in a topic (2006, 100-101).

Together with Brookfield’s helpful illumination, Donald Bligh’s research on lecturing has significantly informed educational practice. Bligh’s research
concludes that the main objective of lectures “should be the acquisition of information by students” (2000, 4). However, he also concludes that:

a. The lecture is as effective as any other method of transmitting information but not more effective.

b. Most lectures are not as effective as discussion for promoting thought.

c. Changing student attitudes should not normally be the major objective of a lecture.
   i. Lectures are relatively ineffective for teaching values.
   ii. Lectures are relatively ineffective for inspiring interest in a subject.
   iii. Lectures are relatively ineffective for personal and social adjustment.

d. Lectures are ineffective for teaching behavioral skills (2000, 3-20).

Bligh’s synthesis and presentation of research findings have raised questions in higher education circles about the most effective educational processes for impacting students, and by extension, their communities and workplaces.

Presently, the emerging gold standard for educators in higher education is not the ability to deliver inspiring, content-rich lectures dependably. Instead, the benchmark has shifted to the educator’s development of a wide repertoire of learning strategies, which can be deployed in a timely manner to effect indelible learning experiences and to promote sustainable habits. Acquiring this new gold standard requires reflection not just on one’s subject specialization, but also on how the broader holistic goals of formative and transformative education can be achieved.

It is for this reason that faculty in higher education now consider their roles as educators more seriously and have explored more intently alternatives to the lecture. Lectures often encourage passive learning in the classroom. The shift, however, encourages active and participatory learning-in-community. Among the established and often-used active learning alternatives: discussion learning (Brookfield and Preskill 2005; Christensen, Garvin, and Sweet 1991; Vella 1995; Vella 2003; Vella 2007), collaborative learning (Barkley, Cross, and Major 2005), problem-based learning (Amador, Miles, and Peters 2007; Flint 2007), case studies (Kunselman, and Johnson, 2004), simulations (Hertel and Millis, 2002; Thiagarajan 2004; Thiagarajan 2006), and role-playing and social drama (Alpren 1952; Boal 1993; Boal 1995; Duncombe and Heikkinen 1988; Gorvine 1970; Hopkins 1970; Rohd 1998).
These all involve high levels of oral engagement in addition to accompanying reading and writing tasks. When used well, they play a highly complementary role to the lecture, invite multidisciplinary inquiry, and promote engagement with ground level work, family, and societal issues.

Chet Meyers and Thomas Jones provide clear rationale for active learning in higher education:
Students, no matter what their age, need opportunities to engage in activities—with teachers, fellow students, and materials—that help them create their own mental structures and test them, thus making better sense of the world around them (1993, 21).

In addition, the reasons for using discussion in learning situations outlined by Brookfield are also applicable to most forms of active, participatory learning. According to Brookfield, there are eleven reasons for using discussion learning, which can be grouped into three categories (2006, 118-124):

**Intellectual purposes:** (1) To engage students in exploring a diversity of perspectives, (2) to increase students’ awareness of, and tolerance for, ambiguity and complexity, (3) to help students recognize and investigate their assumptions, (4) to increase intellectual agility and openness, (5) to develop the capacity for the clear communication of ideas and meaning, and (6) to develop skills of synthesis and integration.

**Emotional purposes:** (7) To help students become connected to a topic and (8) to show respect for students’ experiences.

**Sociopolitical purposes:** (9) to encourage attentive, respectful learning, (10) to help students learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse, and (11) to affirm students as co-creators of knowledge.

When we reflect on the impact of regular, active, participatory learning experiences on students, we will detect direct as well as indirect nurturing of critical graduate outcomes. Not only are the unique qualities of the eleven intellectual, emotional, and sociopolitical purposes developed in them, but students also see teaching-learning strategies modeled and discover educational design templates, which in turn can be used in ministry and community settings.
These teaching-learning strategies and educational design templates lie at the heart of 21st century leadership and communication skillsets needed beyond traditional oral performance skills such as classroom teaching, preaching, making PowerPoint presentations, debating, delivering public speeches, storytelling, dramatic monologues, and creation of media sound bytes.

The need for acquiring the art of designing and orchestrating impactful classroom learning experiences or of creating conditions where powerful and significant public dialogue and conversations can take place can neither be underestimated nor overemphasized. These form leadership skills essential for leading organizational vision casting, running effective town hall meetings, building strong work-teams, dealing with community tensions, exploring inter-organizational partnerships, or even facilitating therapy groups and family conferences. These leadership skills have particular significance for ministry in oral cultures and deserve attention and recognition in the seminary curriculum.

**Recommendation 6: Incorporate digital technologies and platforms for social engagement and learning**

“Secondary orality” is a term coined by Ong to refer to “a new orality sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print” (1982, 11). The primary driver of secondary orality is the development of sound recordings, films, telephone, television, radio, video gaming, and the Internet. These have all ushered in a renaissance in oral communications and revolutionized how the world thinks, behaves, and defines itself.

Transformations in secondary oral culture mirror the trends found in digital communications culture. In its most recent evolution, secondary orality is often experienced as aggregations or mash-ups of textual, visual, semiotic, musical, and oral elements. In addition, the convergence of functions in mobile communications technologies have enabled users and audiences in the electronic agora to shift from being mere consumers of media to becoming creators, collaborators, customizers, and crowd-sourcers of political, social, intellectual, cultural, and human capital in media spaces.

All these developments have important repercussions when we consider the global reach and convergence of secondary oral culture. Today, even small media footprints can exert deep influence and impact on habits, values, worldviews,
identities, and lifestyles of large audiences. Whether small or large, media presence will influence everyday life across the globe—including the everyday life of our communities, congregations, and children.

It is for these reasons that awareness of new media and communications technologies, platforms, developments, and accompanying issues matters. Today, we live in a moment of world history in which the soundscape and social contexts of contemporary life are dramatically shaped by a digital communications revolution. This is the world of mobile smartphones, music downloads, video conferencing, massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), Internet radio, interactive television, and many other forms of social media.

All these developments have made their way into the social and cultural fabric of everyday life and have deep implications for marriage, family life, outreach to youth, nurture of children, urban missions, and education. All remain critical fronts in the life and ministry of the church as well as significant components in seminary curricula.

Beyond cognitive awareness, however, both churches and seminaries must overcome the common tendencies toward uncritical technophobia and technophilia and develop functional competencies and practical wisdom regarding life involving digital technologies. Several readily available apps used in touch screen computing will serve to illustrate how digital technologies are being actively used for a range of purposes relevant to ministry in advanced secondary oral cultures.

**Apps for Nurturing Biblical Literacy among Children**

GraceLinks™ is an app that functions similarly to teaching the Bible to children using felt board sets. Designed for touch screen tablets, the program has different Bible settings, backgrounds, and characters used for Bible storytelling. This has allowed parents to enter into the world of the Bible with their children, and there construct a shared sense of ownership for the Bible stories told, as well as foundational family bonds.

In addition, in recent years there has been a proliferation of Bible story apps which do so much more than just allow parents to read books to or with their children. Apps like Lift the Flap Bible™, My Bible Stories™, Read and Share™ Story Chimes™ Bible Heroes™, Beginner’s Bible™, Kids Bible™, and Bible BooClips™ combine recordings of oral narration with interactive visuals and video narrations.
In addition, many of these also allow readers to create and save their own voice recordings. This allows Bible stories to be customized and adapted to the reader’s voice and heart language, and opens doors for families to experience special together moments of telling, retelling, questioning, responding, and discussing the relevance of Christian faith for life. Key learning points are also reinforced using matching games, puzzles, and highly interactive quizzes. When connected to the LCD projector, the apps can all be adapted for use with a larger audience.

*Apps for Raising Critical Issues in Church*

Apart from nurturing biblical literacy, touch screen apps can also be used for raising critical issues in the church. Just as skits, role-plays, mimes, puppet performances, and other forms of dramatic dialogues are often used to create awareness of social issues, behavioral blind spots, and community tensions, so stories and dramas created using digital media can do the same. While animation clips as well as film clips involving real actors are costly and laborious to produce, dramatic dialogues can be created with relative ease using digital puppetry.

Sock Puppets™ will serve to illustrate the ease of use that now characterizes digital media creation. Creating a digital sock puppet production involves writing a short script followed by the selection of backgrounds, scenery, props, and puppets. Puppets lip-sync their puppeteers’ voices, and different scenarios can be performed, recorded, and replayed to stimulate discussion and learning. In addition, the productions can be readily uploaded on YouTube or Facebook to involve a broader audience.

*Apps for Recording Instructional Videos*

Instructional video clips have traditionally been created by recording a live teaching session for later use. Presently, it is possible to record only screen content and accompanying voiceovers rapidly and at little costs, using what is commonly known as screen casting. ExplainEverything™, Doceri™, and Educreations™ are just a few examples of screen casting apps that have been used to create accessible and reviewable lessons in any conceivable language and topic of interest. As with all mobile computing apps, content can be uploaded online or connected to the LCD project for use in the classroom and at the pulpit.

The examples cited do not exhaust the scope of digital technologies and platforms available in advanced secondary oral cultures. Other platforms, which can be deployed in formal, informal, and non-formal learning contexts, range from
simple podcasts to video-enhanced digital books and magazines to web-conferencing to complex virtual simulations. Collectively, however, they do point to a world that straddles both geographic and digital spaces. They also remind those involved in seminary education and church ministries that learning, nurturing, engagement, and outreach in the 21st century must necessarily presume use of digital technologies and platforms that extend far and deep into the electronic agora.

**Recommendation 7: Create opportunities for shared academic and professional inquiry around orality topics and issues**

Among the goals of higher education: discovering/creating/diffusing new and established knowledge, examining and deliberating truth claims and their embedded assumptions, challenging unconscious biases, promoting critical thinking, relating the part to the whole, viewing events through the lens of history, inviting multidisciplinary and multi-perspectival inquiry, applying knowledge for the purpose of solving complex problems, and training and honing workplace skills. These goals lend themselves well to the creation of opportunities for shared academic and professional inquiry around orality topics and issues in classroom as well as conference settings.

**Classroom Settings**

In his paper, “Christian Ministry Training and Integrated Learning,” Dennis H. Dirks makes a strong case for integrated learning in theological institutions and provides useful suggestions for shared academic inquiry across subject specializations. These include the use of paired courses, capstone courses, cohort groups, cross disciplinary team teaching, integrative course assignments, and co-curricular activities (2008, 6-8).

One of the drivers of interdisciplinary inquiry, as well as theory-practice integration in higher education, is problem-based learning (Amador, Miles, and Peters 2007; Flint 2007). Problem-based learning is structured in the form of messy and authentic real-life scenarios that invite multidisciplinary and multi-perspectival inquiry. As complex scenarios are presented, learning teams identify researchable issues from multiple fields of study, and in their quest for solutions, draw from rich learner-content, learner-learner, and learner-teacher interactions.

Through their investigations of evidences and interactions with each other, learning groups formulate solutions and judgments which are eventually presented to the entire class either as an oral or written learning artifact (e.g. group oral presentation, recording, or paper).
Conference Settings

Beyond classroom and timetabled learning experiences, seminaries can also organize conferences or roundtable events for both academic and practitioner communities. These events are particularly beneficial when both practitioners and academics work in partnership in planning events, selecting topics, and responding/reflecting on presentations. Six purposes will be particularly helpful in such events:

- To introduce new ideas and innovations
- To showcase platforms and performances
- To inquire about and clarify issues and challenges
- To analyze and critique practices and perspectives
- To organize, summarize, and offer synthesis of key ideas
- To make improvement or resource recommendations

These six purposes can be combined in different formats for roundtables, conferences, forums, and workshops, and eventually lead to further inquiry, deeper understanding, joint publications, joint production of media products, and other forms of meaningful ministry partnerships.

One observation of conference formats is that the greatest percentage of public “airtime” is normally given to keynote and plenary speakers. Here, the assumption is that the key speakers will make the greatest impact on listeners present. However, experience dictates the most significant takeaways from conferences are often derived from the coffee or toilet break conversations and in the networking relationships made.

It is for this reason that there is now greater recognition for the many pockets of useful knowledge and wisdom situated within participants. In recent years, conference formats have changed, and innovations such as UnConference™ (Boule 2011), World Café™ (Brown 2005), and Open Source Technology™ (Owen 2008) are regularly deployed to help solicit participant feedback, create conversations around topics that matter to participants, and to document findings for common distribution and use.

Recommendation 8: Adopt creative as well as non-traditional assessment strategies for oral competencies

The sounds of superbly delivered expositions, compelling new ideas, well-organized thoughts, meticulously crafted arguments, solutions to complex
problems, persuasive ways of looking at a situation differently, practical wisdom, and memorable humor regularly echo within the halls of seminaries. Oral delivery, the use of rhetoric, stories, poetry, proverbs, songs, and other spoken genres are a very important part of seminary education and are even regularly evaluated for excellence, coherence, and impact. The problem is that when these evaluations occur, they are mainly directed at professors. When the focus is directed at students, evaluations of oral competence are often assigned only a very small percentage of the total class grade.

The description above reflects the reality found in most seminaries because formal assessment of student development is almost always conducted in the written medium. While there are practical and pedagogical advantages that favor the use of the written medium, the unfortunate outcome is that competencies associated with ministries in oral cultures are seldom developed to the levels of mastery necessary for effective ministry.

Among the different demonstrable competencies and conditions required for working among oral cultures that have been listed or alluded to in this paper include:

- Delivery of oral performances such as sermons, storytelling, dramatic monologues, oral presentations, etc.
- Design and orchestration of collaborative learning experiences such as problem-based learning, discussion learning, case studies, role-playing, simulations, etc. in Christian education
- Leadership in intra- and inter-community fact finding, exploration, decision making, and problem solving processes such as focused groups, social drama, UnConference™, World Café™, Open Space Technology™, etc.
- Evidence of active listening skills and insights
- Personal awareness, management, and openness to interventions that address undesirable inner dispositions manifested in oral expression
- Exercise of intra- and intercultural sensitivity and knowledge in oral communication
- Practical understanding and use of new technology tools and platforms to serve primary and secondary oral cultures
- Creation of oral and multimedia products that impact congregations and communities

A careful reflection on the graduate outcomes listed above will birth the realization that their effective development is beyond any one seminary’s limited
resources. Many of these competencies and conditions are better developed in cooperation with partner organizations in authentic settings such as the home, the church, the mission field, or the market place. Nonetheless, seminaries will miss wonderful opportunities if little is done within their walls to serve the church by developing men and women with competencies, capacity, character, and courage to impact primary and secondary oral cultures.

Any such endeavor within seminaries requires radical rethinking about how best to help students acquire these graduate outcomes as well as assess successful achievement. By analogy, furnishing a student with knowledge of how to ride a bicycle is quite different from helping a student ride a bicycle. Achieving the goals of the latter will require different processes, teaching competencies, and time commitments from the former. In the same way, developing graduate outcomes for effective ministry in oral cultures will require the seminary community to break the mold of tradition and align goals with appropriate development processes and assessment criteria.

Here much can be learned from institutions focused on developing performance arts where acquisition and development is often attained through persistent repetition and reinforcement, in the company of experienced mentors, and within a community of co-learners. In that context, a significant part of training and learning lies in the hours spent mastering the craft, improving personal fitness and mental stamina, creating and perfecting the performance, committing to memory, developing “muscle memory” spontaneity, consulting seniors, learning and sharing trade secrets, assimilating accumulated knowledge and collective wisdom of the guild, internalizing the ethos and conventions of the profession, and eventually acquiring a personal signature style.

All this has deep implications for course design, structure, and assessment of learning if such learning processes are to be created within seminaries. A key change is the need to stop viewing such courses as typical academic courses. Instead, they need to be thought of as practice-based or skills-based courses, which have different input requirements and evaluation criterion. Typical academic courses demand one to two hours for reading, research, and writing for every one hour spent in class. Practice-based courses demand a greater time commitment outside class. In music, for example, an hour of playing the oboe with the teacher in the music studio might require of the student three hours of personal daily practice and another three hours of weekly rehearsals with the ensemble.
Assessment of development and acquisition will also need to be reconfigured to suit the intentions of course redesign. As noted earlier, excellence in performance is often gained through personal practice, participation in the process of creating and refining oral and performance artifacts with others, and under the guidance and supervision of a mentor. Here, I will highlight and elaborate on two useful assessment strategies.

Rubrics for Defining Criteria and Standards for Excellence

For the development of very specific skillsets and dispositions, the use of rubrics is particularly invaluable. Rubrics are helpful because they provide clear guidance on the criteria and standards that are looked for and valued (Brown 2012; Selke 2013; Stevens and Levi 2012). Looking at the rubric for storytelling (Appendix 1), we note that strengths, weakness, and areas in need of improvement are readily identified as they are captured in the rubric. Rubrics can be readily adapted and have existing criteria removed or new criteria added. Used well by mentors and peers, rubrics can be extremely useful tools for shaping skills, competences, and performance mastery. They are also regularly used to evaluate individual contributions in group work, as well as regulate behavior in group-learning situations.

Portfolios as Evidence of Performance Experience and Professional Development

The use of portfolios of performance experiences provides a legitimate avenue for assessing performance and oral competencies (Cambridge 2010; Heath 2004; Johnson, Mims-Cox, and Doyle-Nichols 2009; Michelson and Mandell 2004). Portfolios contain a collection of artifacts that provide proof of participation and quality of performances. These can include audio or video recordings of performances, created media products, logs and oral journals, peer evaluations, professional invitations, professional performances, audience and mentor testimonials, etc.

Portfolios are well recognized as authentic assessments, and when well organized, provide concrete evidence of accumulated personal and professional experiences. The value and usefulness of portfolios extend beyond the learning institution and have wide currency in ministry and professional settings, as well.

Concluding Remarks

The context of this mini-consultation invites the contextualization of theological education in response to a kindled awareness of both primary and secondary oral worlds. For reasons of history and habit, most seminaries will not be able to
introduce radical and disruptive change readily even if they wish it could be done. However, most seminaries are excited about introducing incremental changes that make a difference.

This paper is done in the spirit of inviting micro-level and doable changes. It builds on the initiatives described, the challenges observed, the insights shared, and the questions raised by colleagues in their response to this critical missional reality. My response has been to appreciate and make sense of the issues first and then, as a second response, to provide fuel for discussion and thought in order to move the discussion a little further.

As my title suggests, it seeks to give orality studies and practices voice and space in the curriculum of theological institutions. The modest attempt to present eight recommendations for consideration has led me down many pathways to listen for insights from many voices located across space and over time. It is this spirit of listening—to each other and to our Master—that I wish to commend to all at this consultation.
### Appendix 1: Rubric for Storytelling

**Task Description:** (Teacher may explain specific assignment in this space.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Exemplary 4 – yes</th>
<th>Accomplished 3 – yes, but</th>
<th>Developing 2 – no, but</th>
<th>Beginning 1 – no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knows the Story</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Knows the story well; has obviously practiced telling the story; uses no notes; speaks with confidence</td>
<td>Knows the story pretty well; some practice; may use notes; fairly confident</td>
<td>Knows some of the story; has not practiced; relies on notes; appears uncomfortable</td>
<td>Does not know story; reads from notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Always speaks loudly, slowly, and clearly; Correct pronunciation; explains unfamiliar words</td>
<td>Usually speaks loudly, slowly, and clearly; Correct pronunciation; does not explain unfamiliar words</td>
<td>May speak too softly or too rapidly; mumbles occasionally</td>
<td>Speaks too softly or too rapidly; mumbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Consistently motivates and assists others</td>
<td>Quick to volunteer and assist others</td>
<td>Generally works well with others</td>
<td>Seldom works well with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Story lasts 5 to 7 minutes</td>
<td>Story lasts less than 5 or more than 7 minutes</td>
<td>Story lasts less than 4 or more than 8 minutes</td>
<td>Story lasts less than 3 or more than 9 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience Contact</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Storyteller looks at all the audience; involves them with questions</td>
<td>Storyteller looks at a few people in the audience; involves only a few with questions</td>
<td>Story told to only 1 to 2 people in the audience; little audience involvement</td>
<td>Storyteller does not look at audience; no attempt to involve audience with questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Story told at the appropriate pace, depending on the story line</td>
<td>Story told well, but some parts may be rushed or dragged</td>
<td>Story rushed or dragged in several parts</td>
<td>Story told at one pace; no excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Story is developmentally appropriate for audience</td>
<td>Most of the story is developmentally appropriate for audience</td>
<td>Some of the story is developmentally appropriate for audience</td>
<td>Story is developmentally inappropriate for audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Props</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Outstanding use of props; props are appropriate</td>
<td>Good use of props; props are appropriate</td>
<td>Uses props some of the time; some props not appropriate or are distracting</td>
<td>Poor use of props; uses no props or inappropriate props</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assignment Score _______ + Beyonder/Bonus _______ = Final Score _______
References


EPILOGUE

Grant Lovejoy

“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips.” Prov. 27:2

Introduction

Should Christian leaders seek their peers’ approval and formal recognition? Conversely, can theological training and education endure if they do not earn the respect of and recognition from their students, supporting churches, denomination, contributors, and accrediting entities? These and related questions were discussed at length at the consultation, both in the formal sessions and in the free hours.

Several chapters in this volume address the matter of educational legitimacy and endorsement. For example, Africa Theological Seminary found that its plans to adapt to its oral context are limited by a Kenyan accrediting body. At the personal level, faculty members often ask how to justify academically their use of non-traditional teaching approaches, assignments, and assessments that fit oral learners well. Calvin Chong describes this need and suggests several ways to meet it.

In a third scenario described by Mark Sauter, leaders of non-formal training initiatives are asked whether they can issue (or arrange for others to issue) certificates or academic credit to the trainees. The trainees expect certificates or credits to enhance their standing in the eyes of pastors, churches, and sending agencies. Hannes Wiher contends that oral cultures are naturally honor/shame cultures; in them education can be an important means of attaining or maintaining honor or status. A key issue in empowering oral learners is whether
the ordained pastors, churches, and denominational officials will extend to biblically-qualified Christian leaders acceptance and full recognition as pastors and other church leaders.

Love the Praise of God More than the Praise of People

A desire for honor or others’ acceptance may be a serious flaw. Giving acceptance to people who do not deserve it is also a problem. Jesus told a group of Jewish religious leaders, “I do not accept praise from people” (John 5:41), because, he said, “I know . . . that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him” (5:42-43). Jesus’ approach certainly makes sense. Why accept—or worse, seek—praise from religious leaders (or theological educators!) who lack the love of God and who thus have a perspective far different from God’s?

Jesus went on to ask them, “How can you believe, if you accept praise from one another and don’t seek the praise that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44). Because they were preoccupied with getting each other’s affirmation instead of the Father’s praise, they failed in faith. That is not a small matter. John’s gospel reports that “even among the rulers [Sanhedrin] many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess Jesus to be the Christ, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue. For they loved praise from men more than praise from God” (John 12:42-43).

They thought that holding an unpopular view would hurt their reputations and weaken their position versus their rivals. So they kept quiet about the most important discovery in Judaism to that time: the Messiah had come! Popularity, politics, and competitive jockeying, however, dictated their (in)action. Like many Christians today, the Sanhedrin members who believed in Jesus as the Messiah could truthfully say that they loved praise from God; nonetheless, scripture faults them because they loved human praise even more.

Hold Praise Lightly and Integrity Tightly

This problem was not limited to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul warns Christians in Corinth about giving too much weight to human criticism or praise. He says that he esteems human opinions lightly because he is a servant of Christ (not of people) and “the one who judges me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:4b). During our earthly life we can try to scrutinize ourselves and live God-honoring lives, but even then we are not capable of making an accurate evaluation of ourselves.
The same principle applies to evaluating others. “So then, do not judge anything before the time. Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of hearts. Then each will receive recognition from God” (1 Cor. 4:5). With God as our ultimate judge, why contort ourselves to get a favorable verdict in the fickle court of public opinion? Knowing that only God knows all, including hidden motives, who are we to pass judgment on other people, including others in ministry?

This determination to seek God’s approval was a cornerstone of Paul’s approach to ministry and was evident particularly in his preaching. He wrote to the church in Thessalonica,

For the appeal we make does not come from error or impurity or with deceit, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we declare it, not to please people but God, who examines our hearts. For we never appeared with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is our witness—nor to seek glory from people, either from you or from others. (1 Thess. 2:3-6)

Paul knew well that people in ministry can prostitute their preaching to flatter their listeners. He purposed not to corrupt his ministry by seeking human praise.

Paul’s discussion about not seeking to please people, however, is filled with appeals to the Thessalonian church members to remember and acknowledge the integrity with which he lived and preached among them. Note how often he refers to this:

• “Surely you recall the character we displayed when we came among you to help you.” (1:13)
• “For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, about our coming to you—it has not proven to be purposeless.” (2:1)
• “But although we suffered earlier and were mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of much opposition.” (2:2)
• “For you recall, brothers and sisters, our toil and drudgery: By working night and day so as not to impose a burden on any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” (2:9)
• “You are witnesses, and so is God, as to how holy and righteous and blameless our conduct was toward you who believe.” (2:10)
As you know, we treated each one of you as a father treats his own children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you live in a way worthy of God who calls you to his own kingdom and his glory” (2:11-12).

See also 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 and 4:2.

Those are not the words of a man who does not care what other people think about his ministry. Paul did care about his reputation—deeply. He made similar appeals in his address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18, 20, 31, 34). In 2 Corinthians 6 he says, “We do not give anyone an occasion for taking an offense in anything, so that no fault may be found with our ministry” (6:3). Paul and his companions wanted to “[commend] themselves in every way” (6:4). For this reason, he reviews at length the sufferings and hardships he and his companions endured for the gospel’s sake (6:4-10).

At first glance, Paul may seem to contradict himself, but it seems possible to distinguish between his personal reputation in general and his reputation when it was inseparable from his ministry and thus from the gospel itself. When attacks on his reputation threatened the gospel message, or his listeners’ receptivity to it, he did respond to defend his reputation.

Judging from 2 Corinthians 11-12, he was reluctant to trot out his spiritual credentials. Seeing that accusations against his apostolic legitimacy threatened the truth of the gospel and the spiritual health of the Corinthian church, however, Paul reluctantly decided he had to counter the slanderous accusations made against him and thus against the gospel and Christ. He went to considerable length describing his spiritual credentials before pausing to say, “I have become a fool. You yourselves forced me to do it, for I should have been commended by you. For I lack nothing in comparison to those ‘super-apostles,’ even though I am nothing” (2 Cor. 12:11).

Lest they misunderstand the purpose of his lengthy defense of his apostolic legitimacy and authority, he explained, “Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved” (2 Cor. 12:19; cf. 13:11). Paul’s express purpose was to build up the church and its individual members, whom he loved. Rather than flaunting his credentials for his sake, he was focused on their welfare. He wrote about his credentials with a clear awareness of being led by Christ and doing it in the watchful presence of Almighty God.
The very act of defending truth and opposing error, of endorsing authentic apostles and opposing false ones, however, required that Paul make evaluative judgments. He was prepared to let God render final judgment on all matters, but Paul still made temporal judgments. In this he followed the example of Jesus, who urged his followers to discern truth from error, authenticity from hypocrisy, true prophets from false prophets, good fruit from rotten fruit, and shepherds from wolves.

In extension of this practice, scripture tells us that church leaders should be examined and then approved if they meet biblical qualifications for leadership roles (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:6-12). Scripture tells Christians to show honor to people to whom honor is due. Extra recognition and respect is owed to some elders: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). Similarly, “those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13).

Churches not only have the option, they have the obligation to evaluate fitness for ministry. Most of the biblical qualifications in these lists deal with character and the quality of relationships in the home, in the church, and among non-believers. Qualifications dealing with skills in ministry are fewer in number, although vitally important.

The fact that a church is supposed to consider a prospective leader’s reputation with the non-Christian community suggests by analogy that there is also a place for a seminary, say, to be evaluated by the non-Christian community. Government-administered accrediting agencies might be part of this, though of course there are other ways of determining community opinion of a seminary. The Christian entity, a seminary in this example, would then evaluate itself partially in light of what non-Christians say about it. Spiritual vitality, doctrinal soundness, quality of relationships within the Christian community, Christ-likeness in personal conduct, and effectiveness in ministry would doubtless get more weight, along with other appropriate factors.

These ancient struggles over identity and credibility, questions of testing and approval, of honor and shame, are fully alive in Christian ministry in the 21st century. In contextualizing theological education for oral contexts and for oral learners, questions of credentials, status, and employability are unavoidable.
Although trainers may offer informal pastoral training and non-formal theological education, all the while blithely telling the participants they will emerge competent for ministry, it is naïve to expect them never to ask who is going to validate their education. Some of the people who ask such questions may be motivated largely by a piece of paper; they want that in order to open doors for positions to which they aspire. They may, unfortunately, be right that churches are not particularly concerned to empower leaders who are competent; having the paper is good enough. Others who ask about this, however, may have admirable motives. Perhaps they want confirmation that they have labored responsibly to equip themselves for ministry.

Considerations for Thorny Issues

Let’s check our motives when seeking human validation, then check them again with the help of honest people who know us well and will tell us the truth. Remember that the Sanhedrin did love God’s approval; their downfall was in loving human approval more. We can reassure ourselves and others that we truly want God’s approval while ignoring even more powerful motives driving us to seek affirmation, honor, recognition, and success on the terms dictated by the surrounding culture. The “Sanhedrin bargain” silenced believing Jewish leaders from speaking the most important message they could have spoken: “Jesus is the Messiah!”

Give honor to whom honor is due. Effective Christian leaders are worthy of honor. Scripture does not distinguish those with formal rabbinic training, like Paul, from those who, like Peter and John, were sneeringly called “uneducated, common men” (Acts 4:13). Oral learners who lead, preach and teach well are to be doubly honored by the churches. It is unbiblical to deny honor simply on the basis of the process by which pastors and church leaders were trained. Churches and denominations who have extra-biblical requirements for ordination, for example, need to look again at the biblical requirements and consider whether they are missing opportunities to equip, empower, and recognize through ordination those who are called by God for Christian leadership. This re-evaluation may be easier if a robust alternative process for equipping oral learners for ministry is available for their consideration.

Remember that the power to approve is the power to disapprove. It is wise to evaluate both the possible benefits and possible disadvantages of seeking endorsement or accreditation before seeking them. Endorsements come from a
wide variety of sources, both Christian and non-Christian, informal and highly formal. Training programs and educational enterprises vary dramatically, so leaders should consider which, if any, of the existing endorsements or accreditations fits their situation well. Almost inevitably an endorsement comes with strings attached. Accreditation brings with it subtle or not so subtle loss of control over certain aspects of one’s work. Accreditation or endorsement may also open the door to more students, more financial and other support, and more placement opportunities through which graduates increase the influence of the training organization and advance the cause of Christ.

Some theological institutions have the option of seeking accreditation from a like-minded accrediting body. Being evaluated by an accreditation organization with the same basic commitments theologically and educationally increases the likelihood that their evaluation will be fair and useful. It has a greater likelihood of being fair because they better understand the institution they are evaluating. It is more likely to be useful because the visiting committee members likely serve in similar situations. At their best, the accreditation process introduces a constructive outside perspective, informs the institution about effective processes at peer schools, and encourages the institution to fulfill its calling more effectively.

In every situation let us remember that ultimately all honor is due to God. As Jesus put it, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).
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Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary
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