The background of the cover is a photograph of the interior of a Gothic cathedral. The view is looking up from a lower level towards a higher level. In the center, there are three large, tall, narrow stained glass windows with intricate tracery. Below these windows is a balcony with a decorative, carved stone railing. The architecture features pointed arches and ribbed vaulting. The lighting is warm, highlighting the textures of the stone and the colors of the glass.

Volume 1, Number 1, 2012

# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

**The Oral Reality:  
From Rural to Hi-Tech Communities**  
Lovejoy • Terry • Stringer • LeFever • Evans • Stahl



# **International Orality Network**

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# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

Volume 1, Number 1, 2012

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## Cover Photo

The picture of the most important church in Prague, parts of this castle—building complex started in the tenth century. This church took over six hundred years to complete her construction; her design influenced the architecture of churches across Central Europe and as far as England. She stood during the time when oral culture was thriving; she witnessed the printing age; now, she is gliding into the digital age.

My people, hear my teaching;  
listen to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth with a parable;  
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—  
things we have heard and known,  
things our ancestors have told us.  
We will not hide them from their descendants;  
we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,  
his power, and the wonders he has done.

Psalm 78:1--4 (NIV)

# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. It is published online semi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Occasionally, print editions will be created. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement are welcomed.

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# Editor's Notes

by *Samuel E. Chiang*

*Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Orality Journal.*

Irony is not lost that we are moving to include a print mode to express the importance of this multi-discipline and multi-faceted matter of orality. So why another journal, and why now? Let us explore together.

## **A Gutenberg Parentheses\***

Communications from creation to about the time of the Gutenberg Press were primarily oral in nature as writing systems took time to develop and technology for mass printing had not yet arrived. In the fifteenth century the Gutenberg Press allowed printing en mass; this, coupled with the Reformation, where the Church enthusiastically declared that all should be able to read, fueled the trend toward reading, literacy, and privacy. Memory (community and social memory), which was at the core of society, got outsourced to the containers of paper and filing cabinets.

Oral cultures value face-to-face communication, in context, and living within the 'story' of the community. The literate world communicates through textual means and often is not able to convey the whole context in a communiqué. The textual 'story' is truncated or emptied of meaning. As we enter the digital culture, one that is defined by collaborating with multimodal content and tasks, strangely we are on a converging trajectory with the oral culture.

In fact, academicians are labeling the period from the fifteenth to the twentieth century the Gutenberg Parentheses: a period where the left side of the brain took over and gave birth to sciences, inventions, and philosophies, but silenced the right side of the brain from creativity. Proceeding into the twenty-first century, the captured images, reality entertainment, and online video gaming actually mirror closer to the pre-Gutenberg era, where the right side of the brain was much more in concert with the left side. The result is once again a more holistic approach to society and tasks, thereby recapturing creativity, collaboration, and community.

In oral cultures, the information is local and always rooted in context and history, so that there is meaning with coherence to the community. In digital culture, like that of Facebook postings, the emphasis is on morphing the private and individual into open, specific, contextual, and communal experiences, albeit at a distance.

This form of communal experience with a digital identity and digital narrative imbedded into social networking is reinforced by the F-Factor—fans, friends, and followers. So pervasive is this practice that we often discover products and services by relying on our social networks. We are conscious of how our postings will be rated. We are constantly seeking feedback both to improve and validate decisions. Our social networks (communities) are often buying together, and our digital communities are themselves becoming products and services. The F-Factor put in a hard closing parenthesis to the Gutenberg Press, period!

### **A Rummage Sale**

The Church can be described as a large social network and in her book, *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle has suggested that it is experiencing what amounts to a large rummage sale, one that happens every five hundred years. In the midst of the convergence of oral, literate, and digital culture, coupled with online digital identity and narrative, and further combined with the phenomena of the Gutenberg Parentheses, what does the Church have to say and how do we move forward in this very fluid state?

During the recent International Orality Network mini-global consultation, “Beyond Western Literate Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts” (hosted at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College), forty-two academicians and practitioners from eighteen institutions and fourteen organizations indicated (1) an abundance of oral preference learners in the classrooms, (2) the need to embrace orality as a part of the curriculum, and (3) that what is working on the field is now beginning to speak into formal education, offering rippling implications for accreditation. This is a defining moment for us to explore and learn together!

---

With the hard close of the Gutenberg Parentheses and the onset of the great emergence, we continue with the residual effects of the print-based culture, and we are rediscovering the ancient keys to the oral cultures that are infused with visual digital effects. Thus, we commence this new journey with a journal.

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. Since the network is based on the voluntarism of individual and organizational members, this journal is your journal. We plan to publish this journal online, semi-annually. We aim to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Similar to this inaugural issue which is printed, from time to time we will also print other editions.

We welcome submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement. In future editions, we will commence other departments, including a section on book reviews and noteworthy articles. We also welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions! Send your feedback to: [oralityjournal@gmail.com](mailto:oralityjournal@gmail.com).

Journeying with you,

Samuel E. Chiang  
From Abuja, Nigeria

#### **Endnote**

\*For a more complete discussion please refer to the chapter "*Three Worlds Converged: Living in an Oral, Literate, and Digital Culture*", James R. Krabill, gen. ed.; Frank Fortunato, Robin Harris, and Brian Schrag, eds., *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012).



## Mind the Gap: Bhutan as a Case Study

by *Steve Evans*

*Steve Evans is a communications specialist and cultural researcher since 1982. He studied at Howard Payne University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and East Tennessee State University. He is the 2008 recipient of the prestigious Brimstone Award for Applied Storytelling and has published extensively on the topic of Orality. He lives in London.*

“Mind the gap” is an expression in Great Britain to warn passengers of the dangerous gap between the railway or metro platform and the train stopped on the tracks. A mis-step could wreak havoc! So it is in the world of orality. There are many gaps in our understanding of this world and a mis-step could wreak havoc if we are trying to effectively reach this world.

The Buddhist nation of Bhutan, nestled in the Himalayan Mountains, is facing a severe socio-cultural crisis as conflicting forms of communication bombard its peoples. The gap is ever widening, and quickly. Some in Bhutan advocate for the power of story to help alleviate the problem.

Dasho Kinley Dorji, former chief editor of Bhutan’s Kuensel News Corp, feels his country is going through difficult times and is on the road to a complete destruction

of the country’s values systems. One way to combat this, he believes, is to create stories calling

attention to the situation and ensure that those stories are shared and heard.

His creative non-fiction short story, “Pretty Woman”, portrays how the 1999 introduction of television to Bhutan thrust the country into dramatic and painful change. The story tells how, over a period of seven years, a young boy and a young woman collide with forces much greater than themselves, their community, and even their country. She is the prettiest girl

***There are many gaps in our understanding of this world and a mis-step could wreak havoc if we are trying to effectively reach this world.***

around—strong, sun-darkened, and hard working, with a face as round as the moon and a singing voice that enchants all the men. He is a young boy, growing up in a volatile climate of change, confused by what he observes.

“The story invites important questions,” Dorji explains. “Are the side effects of development taking a toll that is more powerful than the effects of mainstream development? This is symbolized by the immediate excitement over television that far exceeds the advantages of electricity as a source of power for utilities.” (Electricity comes to the story’s setting in 2003.) “In a country where there are now an estimated 50,000 television sets compared with 14,000 computers, television becomes a major status symbol and dominates the altar in the altar room” Dorji continues.

In seven years, the country’s hero is no longer the king; instead, the heroes are the athletic superstars and Bollywood film actors. Likewise, the beautiful image of the hard-working village girl is replaced by singing and dancing Bollywood stars and bikini-clad Pepsi models. The end of “Pretty Woman” is poignant and bittersweet:



Aum Thrimi looks into the distance. “They are so pretty, the girls. They are so thin. They are so fair. They smell so nice.” She looks at Kuenley, a gangly 5’9” boy, standing with his hands in his pockets.

She turns and looks out the window again. “Better study hard, Kuenley. Otherwise, you’ll have to live in the village. You have to work all day in the sun. You have to walk everywhere with no shoes. You have to carry manure on your back and smell of cow dung. In the village, you will quickly become ugly. We

have no choice because we are already old and ugly.”

Kuenley says nothing. He does not know what to say. Thrimi is 27 years old. She has not changed. But the world had changed.

“This story is Bhutan’s story,” Dorji shares. “The metamorphosis of a rural society is documented through the eyes, and the confusion of a Bhutanese youth who personifies a generation in transition. There are no subtleties because the experience is not subtle.”

The message that comes through as the community feels the impact of globalization is that there is an urgent need to put on the brakes before it is too late to do anything about it.

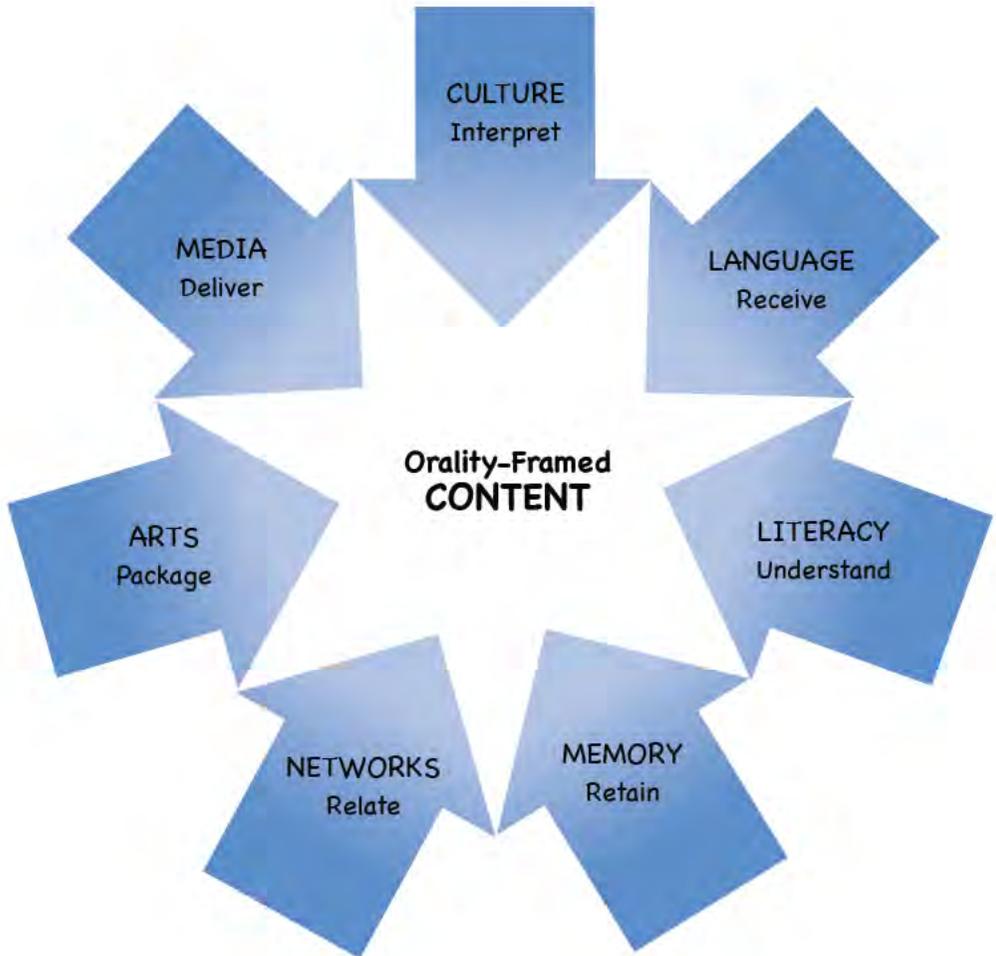
Bhutan is a country crying for help and believes in the power of story to help them.

- How can we “mind the gap”?
- What are applications for you and your work or ministry?

*Share your thoughts with me at [theoralitygap@pobox.com](mailto:theoralitygap@pobox.com).*



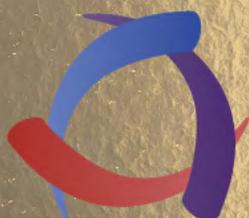
## SEVEN DISCIPLINES OF ORALITY: A Holistic Model



*Courtesy of Global Impact Mission as is published in Missiology April 2010. Dr. Chuck Madinger leads Global Impact Mission and serves on the International Orality Network's Leadership Team facilitating the Research Task Force.*

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