

A man with a beard, wearing a brown head covering with a braided band and a matching robe, is looking down at a smartphone held in his hands. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his face and the texture of his clothing against a dark background.

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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

**Scalable Experiments:
Bible Translation, Church Planting, Disciple
Making in the Digital Era**

**Gravelle • Arlund • Moon • Taber • LeFever • Evans
Terry • Rye**



THE LOGO

- ... a movement
- ... reaching the unreached
- ... engaged in all domains—including Church, Business and Education
- ... continuous
- ... multi-generational
- ... Spirit-led

Our new logo expresses the multi-disciplined and multi-faceted nature of the orality network.



... **BLACK** represents the lack of light (*lack of the knowledge of our Triune God*) among the people groups.

... **SILVER** represents the message of bringing the Gospel through oral teaching.

... **RED** represents the blood of Jesus. It is the act of salvation represented by Christ's blood/sacrifice.



... **GOLDen** globe symbolizes the utmost value of people everywhere. We recognize people groups—not political boundaries.

The choice of the side of the globe represented is in recognition of our emphasis on the 10/40 window where most oral preference learners live.

These elements represent the ethos of the International Orality Network.

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Cover Photo

The Levant Arab peoples include several clusters of Arabs: Jordanian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Arabic Jewish, Chaldean, and Syrian Arabs. Levant, meaning East of Italy, covers a geographical land from Eastern Mediterranean to Greater Syria. Levantine Arabic is considered a language with urban and rural dialect distinctives. Daily oral Levantine Arabic usage has witnessed the pre-printing era, the printing age, and now welcomes the digital era. Cover Photo courtesy of A. Steve Evans; also know as ‘babasteve’ on the popular photo sharing site flickr.com.

The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain
with a word
him who is weary.
Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.

Isaiah 50:4 (ESV)

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 provisioned. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement are welcomed.

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Editor's Notes

Samuel E. Chiang

In the inaugural issue of the *Orality Journal*, we noted that the “Gutenberg Parentheses” is now here. We might recall that academicians have labeled the period from the fifteenth to the twentieth century the Gutenberg Parentheses which was anchored to the printing press. Thus, it would appear that there is a vacuum, an interregnum.

Filling the Vacuum

The business sector has been quick to fill in the interregnum and have in fact started to label this era as the rise of the “digital” era. Googling “digital” yields 6,870 search results in 0.44 seconds. Clearly, “digital” is nascent in its usage. But is it fitting? Could it be used to describe the next chronos period?

In a book published by Harvard Business Review Press¹, noted speaker, author, and businessman Jonah Sachs seized the opportunity to describe this compound word:

digit + oral = digital

Sachs suggests that in oral traditions, “ideas begin in the mind of a creator, but their path to their audience is far less prescriptive. Instead of being processed through an elite device that replicates and delivers them directly, orally transmitted ideas must replicate themselves, passing from the mind of one listener to the next.”²

In fact, Sachs further asserts how ideas get transmitted is through “meme”, which is commonly described as a “unit for an idea, behavior or style that spreads from person to person within a culture.”³ This unit of information might mutate and the core message will be forgotten—or it may survive even though it might have been tweaked or adjusted. The best unit of information survives because it is memorable, compelling, and adaptable.⁴

Unsurprisingly, Sachs came to the conclusion that the “memes” which survive are stories, and that each one of us hold a worldview which is a collection of stories.⁵ Establishing the “oral” tradition of the second half

of the word “digital” is not difficult, but what about the first part of this compound word?

Digit, amongst various meanings and usage, can denote part of a limb (finger), a number (in mathematics or science), or a unit of measurement. Sachs captures the meaning of digit well in the context of social networks. In the swamp of indiscretion, the messages sent through social media may get adjusted, tossed, twisted, rated, commented, shared, and perpetuated. Like the oral era, “ideas today are never fixed; they’re owned and modified by everyone. They move through networks at the will of their members and without that activity, they die.”⁶ (Sachs is not shy to suggest why the “broadcast” era is not working.)

Conversely, in the twenty-first century, with social octane through networks and fuelling through 24/7 technologies, each powerful story may go viral with digital platforms sustaining and immortalizing the story.

From an idea-transmission perspective, and how a story gets moved along, a powerful combination of the spoken and hearing (oral) catalyzed with the technology that tethers social networks together, and ‘digital’ was birthed.

Rise of the Digital Era

One doesn’t need to go far to taste the digital era. Ample antidotal experiences affirm the emergence of this era. For example, some time ago Sunday School teachers in the Philippines initially complained about kids in classes who were being disrespectful by sending SMS messages during teaching sessions.

In fact, some teachers were so ill-at-ease about this that they thought the kids were bullying the teachers through SMS messaging. While some of their suspicions might be true, little did they realize that the kids were talking about what they were learning in the class. The kids were passing on stories they were learning and the stories were alive because they were passing them on. My reinforcement of this story is also digital.

Another example is a group of congregants in a church in the United States who were really enjoying the sermon preached by the pastor. However, one

of them opened his iPad to check on a small detail of the sermon during the worship service. To this man's surprise, the pastor had spoken the entire message from "Sermon Central." As good as the message was, the digital story that got passed along was not the sermon, but the pastor who had taken the entire sermon from someone else. My reinforcement of this story is also digital.

Or who can forget Mitt Romney, 2012 U.S. Presidential candidate saying, "They brought us binders full of women" or "Oppan Gangnam style," the signature line from PSY, the Korean megastar's hit song with over a billion views on the Internet. The oral-visual effects were self-reinforcing and passed along and sustained on multiple platforms. Both items quickly went viral, with the video story of PSY continuing unabated.

Finally, I shall not soon forget the retired Bishop William Tuimising from Kenya who was addressing participants at the launch of the East Africa Orality Network. As he took his place at the podium, he jovially asked everyone to take out their mobile phone and switch them to 'on', noting how many people actually have the Word of God in digital form on their cell phones. The bishop read from his cell phone and provided a sermon. Participants not only SMS messaged a portion of his message, but also spoke of his avante garde method of keeping the cellular device in the 'on' position when most pastors would insist otherwise.

In this issue, we examine powerful experiments which are working and are scalable. Gilles Gravelle leads off with the implications of social networks in the work of Bible translation in the digital era. Pam Arlund looks at church planting through orality. Jay Moon describes one of the disciplines of orality and the use of powerful rituals in discipleship. Clyde Taber follows with calling the Church to consider visual media in the context of storytelling. Marlene LeFever continues in her column of how an oralized curriculum is working in India, and Steve Evans joins us with a column to remind us to "Mind the Gap." We are pleased to have the veteran storyteller extraordinaire, J.O. Terry, describe ten mistakes people often make. Tara Rye concludes with an insightful book review.

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. This journal is online in PDF and also in audio format. It is available bi-annually, with provisions for printed editions. 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.

As a preview, our next issue fully features “The Seven Disciplines of Orality” and is due out in September 2013; we will also introduce ‘laboratory’ section to journey along those who are experimenting and implementing orality. We welcome submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement for future journal publications. We also welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions! Send your feedback to: oralityjournal@gmail.com.

On the journey together,

Samuel E. Chiang
From Manila, the Philippines

¹ Jonah Sachs, *Winning the Story Wars: Why Those Who Tell—and Live—the Best Stories Will Rule the Future*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2012.

² *Ibid*, 17.

³ See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme. Accessed January 7, 2013.

⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

⁵ *Ibid*, 21.

⁶ *Ibid*, 19.



Contextualizing the Gospel in a Visual World

Clyde Taber

Clyde Taber leads the Visual Story Network, a coalition launched to expand a global movement of visual story for the Kingdom of God. From 2000-2006 he led the development of innovative media initiatives for the JESUS Film Project, including “Magdalena: Released from Shame,” the Damah Film Festival, and “JESUS: Fact or Fiction?” Prior to this, he directed the campus ministry in Paris and coordinated the campus work of Campus Crusade for Christ throughout North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Clyde’s wife, Shirin, is a writer (Muslims Next Door, Wanting All the Right Things), speaker, and mother.

The dust settled and most of the crowd now dispersed. The weathered man leaned in asking the pastor with sadness in his voice, “Does your God love widows?”



“Yes, he loves widows,” replied the pastor.

“Does your God love orphans?” he asked.

“Yes, he loves orphans as well.”

The man shifted his weight to his cane, keeping his eyes fixed on the pastor.

“Among our many gods, we do not have one like this; I must know this God of yours.”

This man in India had just watched the “Widow and the Oil,” a ten-minute dramatic recreation of Elisha and the widow from the book of 2 Kings. Although this visual story, produced and used by Crown Financial Ministries, was intended to teach Christians about God’s provision, it opened this man’s heart to the God of the Bible. In an effort to more effectively teach biblical stewardship to oral-speaking peoples in developing countries, Crown created a six-part series of biblical short films

called “God Provides.” Crown stepped boldly into the new wave of communication—the wave of visual story.

AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CHURCH

We live in a transitional time in the history of the Church when a great opportunity exists to preach, print, and portray. For 1,500 years, preaching was the primary means by which the Church communicated its message. For the last five hundred years, print media has accelerated the spread of the gospel. We are now able to visually portray Christ and his kingdom. This is the third wave of communicating with the world around us.

As the world grows more media-saturated and sophisticated, young people and adults are becoming more visually oriented. The heart language of a growing number of people worldwide is visual story. Every day, four out of five people on this planet are molded by visual story. The

orality movement is addressing the need to contextualize the gospel among those who are illiterate or

functionally illiterate.

A new movement to contextualize the gospel among the world’s population that is “visually literate” (able to interpret meaning from an image) is expanding.

One of the greatest gaps in the global outreach of the Church is the lack of culturally-relevant visual media. Through film, television, computers, and mobile devices, stories are being told on large and small screens. This deluge of stories is captivating

the hearts of men, women, youth, and children, and raises the question, *Who will shape the stories that shape the hearts of people around the world?* The destiny of a generation depends on the answer.

It is critical that God’s people connect and communicate with the lost through “kingdom” visual stories. A “kingdom” visual story combines narrative and visual

As the world grows more media-saturated and sophisticated, young people and adults are becoming more visually oriented.

It is critical that God’s people connect and communicate with the lost through “kingdom” visual stories.

media to communicate the message of Jesus and his kingdom. They may be as direct as the *JESUS* film, or stories that stimulate thought and reflection. The truth of creation, fall, and redemption revealed in scripture and expressed in everyday life is the missing message in the stories shaping the lives of billions of people.

The Church is beginning to awake to the possibilities of communicating in visual story. The *JESUS* film has been viewed by billions of people and churches in America and Africa are developing films that speak to real-life issues from a biblical perspective. Christian television networks are beginning to broadcast content beyond preaching alone. Much more, however, remains to be done. The Global Church must address urgently the following concerns.

1. **Local churches must learn to create visual stories.** Culturally-specific, locally-produced visual media should be available in every language of the world as technology and distribution become more affordable.



It should become common for leaders in churches and parachurch organizations to consider a visual component to sermons, outreach programs, and discipleship material. Increasingly, this media must be

story-driven, and not limited to “talking heads.”

2. **New models of evangelism and discipleship using visual media must be developed.** As more visual

story content becomes available, the Church must find ways to use the content to effectively reach and teach.

3. **The gap between creative and missional Christians must be bridged.** Historically, the Protestant Church has not embraced the artist in its midst. The Body of Christ must identify, encourage, and equip emerging visual storytellers. As a result, faith-based storytelling will be innovative rather than merely copying the example of the host culture.
4. **We must understand that the big screen is the small screen.** In October 2011, the world’s

population surpassed seven billion people. By late 2012, mobile phone subscriptions worldwide were projected to reach seven billion.¹ Video accounted for more than half (52%) of all mobile web traffic in 2011 and will increase to 70% in the next five years.² “Feature phones” account for most of the world’s subscription base, but “smart phone” subscriptions have surpassed one billion and are gaining market share in developed nations. We live in the age when media and technology saturation is globally approaching 100% through mobile devices. The opportunities to use the mobile platform are expanding and must be leveraged for the Great Commission. The Mobile Ministry Forum is a new coalition of mission practitioners helping the mission community learn to appropriately integrate mobile device technology into their outreach and church-planting strategies.

CONCLUSION

It will be impossible to fulfill the Great Commission if we do

not learn to speak the language of visual story. When my wife and I arrived in France as young missionaries, we understood the success of our ministry would depend greatly upon our ability to learn French. In many countries, church services are televised, but this is essentially a model of “preaching to the choir.”

We must learn the art of story and new forms of visual communication that speak to the teenager surfing the web, as well as the Bedouin tribesman whose most prized possession is his cell phone.

If God’s people invest time, energy, and resources into contextualizing the gospel in a visual world, the Church’s ability to communicate visually should be equal to or better than that of the local culture. Messages of the kingdom will not be limited to a subculture, but permeate and leaven the host culture. Believers will be prepared to give a visual answer to everyone who asks about the reason for their hope. Within a generation, it will be possible for every person on earth to have the opportunity to encounter the truth of Jesus and his kingdom every day.

¹ See www.cellular-news.com/story/51223.php. Accessed January 18, 2013.

² See techcrunch.com/2012/02/14/the-number-of-mobile-devices-will-exceed-worlds-population-by-2012-other-shocking-figures/. Accessed January 18, 2013.



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