

A man with a beard, wearing a brown head covering 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.



Church Planting Movements among Oral Learners

Pam Arlund

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Church-planting movements are one of the major ways God is moving today. In fact, these movements are the only method of church reproduction that seem to move faster than population growth in our twenty-first-century world where everything is “mega”—mega cities, mega populations, mega economies. There appear to be perhaps as many as twenty-five church-planting movements in the Arabic-speaking world today alone.¹

For such movements to take place, several vital elements seem

necessary. Although it is true that these movements are ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit, that there



are several ways church planters can either help or hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in how we go about our work of commissioning with the Father.

One of the ways church-

planting movements can be either helped or hindered is in how we approach oral learners. If church planters insist that those who are naturally oral learners become

print learners to be good followers of Jesus, then church-planting movements (and therefore the conviction of the Holy Spirit) will be inhibited. This article details how church-planting movements and orality work hand in hand.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ORAL LEARNERS

It has been estimated that two-thirds of the world are oral learners.² This does not mean that two-thirds of the world cannot read. Although it is true that some oral learners cannot read, the main way oral learners are identified is through preference—not through ability. For example, many people in the West are capable of reading, but do not prefer to learn through reading. Instead, they prefer to learn through oral formats, primarily through video and movie in the industrialized West.

Ask any group of Europeans or North Americans if they would rather read the book or watch the movie and their preference becomes obvious almost instantly. The vast majority of westerners are oral learners, but they are capable of reading. Therefore, principles of orality are not just things that apply “over there,” but are extremely relevant to pastors and others promoting discipleship in developed contexts as well.

In fact, it could very well be that a realization of the needs and preferences of oral learners in Western contexts could be critical to a revival of the Western Church. The National Adult Literacy Survey conducted in the United States in 1992 determined that “90 million adults, almost all of whom can read, have difficulty using the written word to accomplish everyday tasks with consistency and accuracy.”³ Add to this those who are able to accomplish everyday literacy tasks but do not prefer to read and write and the number of oral learners in the United States could soar as high as 80%.⁴

This has profound implications for our traditional methods of discipleship in the West, which are based on reading. In fact, the first thing that usually happens when westerners become believers is that they are given one or more books to read.

On the other hand, in the Developing World, many oral learners are not able to read or may read at only very low levels. In the past, church planters coming primarily from the industrialized West and trained primarily through institutions of higher learning assumed that everyone in the world wanted to learn to read and write.

However, this assumption has not turned out to be true. Not everyone has the desire to read and write. Interestingly enough, this becomes almost irrelevant in the early stages of a church-planting movement because stopping to create a literacy program would certainly take too long and be too slow to help spark a church-planting movement. This is not to say that there is no place for churches to run literacy programs, but the early stages of a church-planting movement is not the ideal time for reasons that will be outlined below.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENTS

For churches to reproduce rapidly, certain key elements must be in place. This is not to say that planting churches is formulaic. Indeed, it may be possible to have all the right elements in place but not have the spark of the Holy Spirit and not see a church-planting movement. On the other hand, it is possible to have that Holy Spirit spark but to put inhibitors in place, thereby limiting through poor principles the rapid move of the Holy Spirit, or at least initially slowing that move of the Holy Spirit.

Researchers have identified a list of ten common characteristics of church-planting movements:

1. **Extraordinary prayer** by the missionaries, for the new believers, by the new believers
2. **Abundant evangelism** that includes over-sowing and a buzz in the air about Jesus
3. **Intentional planting of reproducing churches**
4. **The authority of God's word**, which demonstrates that the answer to almost every question is, "What does God's word say?"
5. **Local leadership**
6. **Lay leadership**
7. **House churches**
8. **Churches planting churches**
9. **Rapid reproduction**
10. **Healthy churches** that worship, love each other, love the lost, and love the word of God⁵

Several of these factors have direct implications for oral learners, orality, and storying.

First, abundant evangelism can only take place if young believers feel empowered to share Jesus immediately after beginning to follow him. If young believers are made to feel that they are inadequate to share Jesus for any reason whatsoever, they will hold

off and develop a fear of mistakenly sharing Jesus. Ultimately, even if they are told to wait for a short period of time to go through a small introductory Bible study before being allowed to share Jesus, this inhibits abundant evangelism. To tell young believers that they must first learn to read and write before being allowed to share Jesus would slow down that process so much that abundant evangelism would simply not be possible.

Second, local leadership and lay leadership are critical to church-planting movements. If leadership is only turned over to those with high literacy levels or to those who are good at reading and writing at high levels, then it is likely that the group outsider will remain in leadership for too long. The young churches will begin to believe that reading is necessary to leadership and the entire movement will slow down.

Since lay leadership is also critical to a church-planting movement, many of these early leaders will work at other jobs. Very few pastors and elders will work full time for the church. This means they will have very little time to devote to a

literacy program. It also means that if a highly-detailed discipleship and leadership training program is introduced, many of these young leaders will lose heart and give up.

The requirements will be more than they can meet.

...it bears remembering that the written word of God was first the oral word of God.

Third, none of this need for rapidity is in conflict with the absolute need for these church-planting movements to understand the written word of God. However, it bears

remembering that the written word of God was first the oral word of God. Even people who cannot read the word can listen to it and can receive the stories of the Bible through oral formats.

Many languages have oral Bibles in recorded formats that are available. Where these are not available, someone can teach the Bible in ways that oral learners can remember and then pass on to others. Even people who could potentially read the written word of God may not prefer to receive it in that way. For the word of God to advance rapidly, we must cooperate with people's natural learning styles. This might mean using drama, stories, video, artwork, and songs even when the written word is available, but not preferred.

Fourth, church-planting movements are vulnerable in the early stages. One of the main reasons they are undermined is because the person sparking them uses a means or technology not available or easily accessible to the locals. For example, a westerner opens his or her laptop every time he or she studies the Bible. The locals quickly understand that if they do not have a laptop, then they cannot lead others to Jesus.

The same problem can come with literacy when print learners begin to spark church-planting movements. Oral learners will see a model of sharing and following Jesus that requires high levels of literacy. When they realize that they are not good readers, don't read much, or don't like to read, they recognize that they are not qualified to lead others to Jesus or to lead churches. When this signal is sent, two-thirds of the world becomes ineligible for leadership and church-planting movements become impossible to spark.

Last, the early stages of a church-planting movement are particularly

vulnerable to anything slow. Even the simplest of literacy programs will take months or years to get off the ground. Likewise, complicated Bible classes or seminary classes will work contrary to this principle of rapid multiplication.

This does not mean that literacy programs, Bible colleges, or seminaries are off the table for church-planting movements, but it does mean that they will be contrary to what is needed at the initial stages. They are also likely to kill a movement if introduced too early.

...“don't like to read”...when this is the signal sent, then two thirds of the world becomes ineligible for leadership and church planting movements become impossible to spark.

TRANSMITTING THE WORD OF GOD ORALLY: CASE STUDIES

How can the word of God be transmitted quickly from oral learner to oral learner while still preserving the integrity of the word? How can pastors and other leaders become teachers without learning to read and write?

Case study #1: Central Asia

The first case study comes from a persecuted church area in Central Asia, so some of their details have been suppressed. The people are a

minority in the country in which they live. They speak a Persian language with no writing system and come from a folk Muslim worldview. When they first became actively engaged with the gospel nearly twenty years ago, there were no known believers among them.

The church planters in the area knew that they had to adopt an oral approach to sharing Jesus stories because there was no writing system for the language and many people could not read or write in any language. However, it soon became clear that even those who *could* read and write *did not prefer* to do so. All seemed to prefer to hear Jesus stories in their own mother tongue (as opposed to the trade or national language), which meant that the oral means of transmission was the only possible method.

This particular people group had almost no Bible translation at that time, so a small number of Bible stories were prepared in an oral format and distributed in extremely

limited quantities. The church planters adopted a stance of telling Jesus stories whenever they could and encouraging the locals to do



the same. Due to the location of this people group, access was difficult and only possible during certain times of the year due to extreme weather. Thus, transmission of the gospel had to be fast and accurate.

This particular people group had heard of Jesus in the context of Islam, so it was easy to have conversations about Jesus. Church planters simply said, “Tell me stories about Jesus or some of your other prophets.” The idea behind this was to learn as much as the locals knew about their prophets and therefore where their hearts were. Most locals knew very few stories about any of the prophets. In fact, the stories locals often knew about Jesus were not biblical; however, the church planters simply listened, nodded, and thanked them for the stories.

The church planters were also interested in and collected local folk stories and proverbs. This was simply part of the process of discovering the local culture and values. The church planters wrote down and recorded the stories and soon gained reputations as people who loved stories. The process of recording local stories revealed many important aspects of the culture that were helpful in sharing the gospel.

For example, the local culture already had a concept of “blood brothers” and how exchanging blood can seal a relationship. This concept was used as a bridge to the gospel. The stories revealed a real and deep belief in witches and witchcraft and opened conversation to spiritual forces in the area. The stories revealed that there was going to be an “end of time,” which meant that part of their worldview already coincided with the biblical worldview that time will end.

Proverbs were deeply held and highly regarded, so the church planters began to focus on translating the Book of Proverbs. This appealed to the culture and provided a way to talk about David, a prophet in whom the locals already believed. As the church planters collected stories,

they eagerly began to share similar biblical stories. When stories were from the shared prophets, they stressed that these were real historical accounts, different from the other stories.

Sometimes, the church planters only met a person one time and knew that they were not likely to get another chance to meet the locals, so they immediately asked the locals to tell them stories about the prophets. They explained that the two cultures held these stories in common, since Muslims already hold the Gospels and prophets in high regard. Typically, the locals only took a minute or two to tell their stories.

The church planters would then ask, “I know a lot of stories about Jesus. Would you like to hear some?” The locals always agreed; sometimes the church planters used pictures to illustrate the stories. The church planters occasionally read the stories from notes, but sometimes told them from memory.

After sharing a few stories, usually including the creation account, locals were invited to follow Jesus based on what they knew of him. Most agreed Jesus was worthy to be followed and prayed a brief prayer. This was not considered a prayer of

salvation, but rather a step toward Jesus. For many, it did end up being their prayer of salvation, but this was judged later based on the fruit of the spirit in their lives.

After the prayer, the church planters asked, “Which of the stories I told you today did you like the best?” The local would identify one of the stories and the church planters would acknowledge what a great story it was and tell it again. Often, at this point, they would ask some of the children to help act out the story as they told it. This was fun for both the kids and the adults.

The church planters would then ask if any of the locals thought they could tell the story. If no one could, the group would practice until everyone was able to tell the story. Finally, the church planters would ask, “Who do you know needs to hear this story? Jesus people tell Jesus stories. That’s what Jesus people do.” They would help the locals to identify several people who needed to hear the story about Jesus. They would then pray and ask God for opportunities to share the story.

Sometimes, the church planters never saw the person again. Often, however, there was lots of follow up. In every case where

follow up occurred, people told Jesus stories to the rest of their villages. In this way, the gospel spread among this people group through a simple method of telling and practicing stories. To the best of our knowledge, there are now forty churches among this small people group, and the churches have reached multiple generations. There are several key principles to be noticed in this case study:

1. The church planters were interested in stories of all types and explained from the beginning that they wanted to hear all stories. They felt this opened people’s hearts and established the right tone in the relationship from the beginning. It also helped them bond with the locals and learn their language.
2. Biblical stories were highlighted as being special and different from other stories.
3. Locals were invited to tell Jesus stories from the beginning and were not corrected when they told non-biblical Jesus stories.
4. People practiced telling the stories, and pictures and drama were used in story-telling.
5. When possible, stories were memorized rather than read to emphasize that it wasn’t about reading, but about the story itself.

6. Locals practiced telling stories and were told that this was a normal part of the Jesus life.
7. Locals were released to tell Jesus stories immediately after beginning to follow Jesus.

There are several other points worth mentioning.

First, the church planters made use of gospel portions in the trade language. Those who could read would usually read the stories and then translate them “on the fly” into their own mother tongue. Usually, the very formal version of the Gospels was considered intimidating, but most people readily embraced the comic book version of the Bible.

Second, the church planters would translate the stories into the mother tongue for those who couldn’t read the trade language, so literacy was used at some level in the movement. However, most people who were following Jesus were listening to the stories as a bridge person translated them from the trade language. Since there was a minimum literacy level and the Bible was available, this was deemed most expedient to allowing a rapid spread of the gospel. Waiting for a complete preparation of the Bible into their



mother tongue would have violated the principle of speed and slowed down the movement. Sometimes in church-planting movements church planters cannot aim for “purity of philosophy,” but must simply do the most expedient and practical thing possible.⁶

This “wedding” of literate and oral approaches worked well for this people. It allowed those who didn’t read to be immediately empowered and it elevated the mother tongue. On the other hand, introducing the written Bible portions on the trade language meant people didn’t have to rely on outsiders to gain access to new Bible stories. The group of outsiders who were the church planters knew that their

access would be limited and that providing new stories would not be practical.

Case study #2: Southeast Asia

The second case study also comes from a persecuted church area. These

people come from a Buddhist background and number around three million people. Their church-planting movement was catalyzed by several cross-cultural church planters who decided to train the locals to plant churches rather than to plant churches themselves. Orality was a major part of

their strategy. In the past nine years, 365 new churches have been planted among them.⁷

As a part of the church-planting training offered in this movement, local believers were taught Bible stories and asked to practice the stories until they were able to tell them well. They were given pictures to go with the stories since pictures

are a normal part of the culture. The pictures were initially brought from another country and then adapted with the help of a local artist.

While testing the usefulness of the pictures, the church planters

discovered that if Jesus had a beard, then the locals thought Jesus was a Muslim. This was because the only people in their context with beards were Muslims. So new pictures were drawn of a beardless Jesus and these have proven very popular. These pictures have been key to the Bible



storying strategy.

When preparing the stories, the church planters were taught to use terms that were appropriate to the worldview of their Buddhist audience. This was accomplished as the foreign church-planting coaches encouraged the locals to indigenize local Buddhist worship forms to the worship of Jesus. This led to a

change in how some terms had traditionally been used. For example, older versions of Bible stories in the area had used the local word for “sky” to refer to “heaven”. However, the local church planters felt that “sky” was not a place to which people wanted to go. Instead, they chose to use the term “Golden City of Nirvana,” because this was a place of no more sin and suffering in the Buddhist worldview.



Orality and storying training were not taught separately, but were always an integral part of the training. Church-planting training also included instruction in obedience-based discipleship, instruction on how to carry out the nine basic commands of Jesus, and an introduction into how to share the story of Buddhism first before sharing the story of Jesus. These trainings were normally held in Buddhist monasteries.

This integration of church planting and storying can be seen in the basic structure of how the first churches multiplied.

When asked to describe her training process, (TT)₍₁₎ explained it this way: At 11 a.m. on Sunday we strike the

gyizee three times as the lawyer showed me and pray to Abbot Jesus. My 9-year-old daughter tells a Bible story using the pictures and then I ask the questions to help seekers and new believers find the truths from the stories. Then, I tell the house church members and seekers to repeat this same story and pattern of worship in their homes. So at 2 p.m. that same day most of these members meet in their own homes. There are fourteen churches now.⁸

The 9-year-old Bible storyteller is the best preacher out of fifty house churches in that area. The gyizee is a bell struck in the Buddhist cultural context to initiate worship. In the case of the followers of Jesus, they struck the bell three times for each of the members of the Trinity. Buddhists not following Jesus also strike the bell three times, but for different reasons.



During the process of indigenization, the local church planters felt this method of worship was most appropriate for their local context. In addition, rabbis are foreign to their context, but an abbot is well understood, so Jesus is referred to as an “abbot”. This is the local cultural equivalent of a rabbi, as abbots are religious teachers and leaders in the local context. The lawyer refers to the person who led her to Jesus and trained her in church planting.

In this context, the church planters felt it was important to not only tell the good news of Jesus, but to first tell the bad news of Buddhism. Young believers were taught to talk

about how one achieves freedom according to Buddhism before telling stories about Jesus. This was because the locals were familiar with Buddhism, but didn’t really understand the full implications of the path of salvation in Buddhism. When the story was told and pointed out that Buddhism demanded perfection, most people realized that they would never be able to achieve perfection.

Realizing their need for a better way, the church planters then told the story of Jesus. As in the earlier case study, church planters here also started with stories that were not Jesus stories but instead were familiar to the locals.

There are several key principles to be noticed in this case study:

1. The process of adapting the language of the Jesus stories to the local culture was led by locals. They decided what words needed to be changed or adapted.
2. Orality was simply a part of a church-planting strategy, not a separate component.
3. Local stories were studied, understood, and adapted to new purposes.
4. Storytellers began with stories the locals already knew and then moved to new stories.

5. Pictures were an important part of telling stories, but they had to be adapted to the local context. Pictures were also tested for intelligibility and cultural appropriateness.
6. During the church meeting, all believers practiced telling Jesus stories and had an expectation that they would share the stories with others. They immediately went and shared the stories that same afternoon.
7. Lay people, women, and children were included in the process and even empowered to become some of the best preachers in the area.

...orality was not a separate strategy or component but simply a part of an overall church planting strategy.

CONCLUSION

In each case study, orality was not a separate strategy; it was simply a part of an overall church-planting strategy which involved learning local stories, indigenizing the gospel, training locals to lead churches, and storying. Spreading the gospel orally was not a particular philosophy, but a pragmatic answer to a pragmatic question: *How can the most number of people hear about Jesus in the shortest amount of time?*

Church-planting movements are the fastest-growing expression



of Jesus on the planet today. They seem to give more people a greater chance to hear the gospel, respond to it, and get plugged into a fellowship than any other current vehicle. For these movements to continue to expand rapidly, they must be led by lay leaders who can create a general buzz in the air about Jesus.

Orality is simply a way for new disciples to effectively engage with Jesus and his stories and then to effectively engage others with Jesus and his stories.

They must also have a love for God's word. If the only way to know and love God's word is to learn to read and write well, then much of the world will not be able to effectively follow Jesus.

Orality is simply a way for new disciples to effectively engage with Jesus and his stories and then to effectively engage others with Jesus and his stories.

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- ¹ David Garrison. Interview by author. Personal interview. December 2, 2011.
 - ² Grant Lovejoy, ed., *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*. Lima, NY: International Orality Network, 2005.
 - ³ Joanne G. Shwartzberg, Jonathan B. VanGeest, and Claire C. Wang, "Literacy Demands in Health Care Settings." In *Understanding Health Literacy*, 69-84. Chicago: American Medical Association, 2005.
 - ⁴ Lynne Abney, *Orality Assessment Tool*. 2001.
 - ⁵ David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*. Richmond, VA: Wigtake Resources, 2003.
 - ⁶ The particular language in question has neither significant oral bible nor written bible. There is no writing system for the language and the government has expressed active opposition to developing a writing system. The church planters involved knew that this lack of Bible development was likely to be the case for a long time to come. Indeed, roughly a decade have come and gone and no further missionaries have learned the local tribal language as well as the missionaries mentioned in this article. There is a possibility of a young linguist coming along soon, but it still hasn't happened. So, the original missionaries had a strong heart value of wanting the local tribe to be able to hear the gospel orally in their heart language. Yet, they also needed to be practical. Some of the local tribe could read and write in either the trade language or the national language. The trade language has 2/3 of a written Bible and the national language has a complete Bible. So, should they be purists and insist that they receive only an oral Bible and only in the heart language or should they introduce them to the idea that there were written Bibles in languages that some of them spoke fairly well, knowing that any development of any kind of Bible in the local tribal language was probably years and years away? So, they chose to model a hybrid system, hoping to pass on to the locals the idea that those who could read and write in one of the other languages could translate and make an oral Bible "on the fly" for their local kinsmen who did not have access to these other languages (because they didn't know the other languages). They felt it was less good than people having a fully developed oral Bible made just for them in their mother tongue, but they also felt that introducing them to Bibles in other trade and national languages that were accessible to some was the only practical way given social, political, and missionary realities.
 - ⁷ J. Pratt, *How God Is Multiplying Networks of House Churches through the Buddhist Background Believers' Movement*, 2011.
 - ⁸ *Ibid*, 14.



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