

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.

Volume 2, Number 1, 2013

ISSN 2324-6375

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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ISBN 962-7673-24-2

ISSN 2324-6375

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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1311 Tijeras Ave. NW
Albuquerque, NM
USA 87102

ISBN 962-7673-24-2
ISSN 2324-6375

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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.



Mind the Gap: If This Is Your Land, then Where Are Your Stories?

Steve Evans

Since 1982, Steve Evans has been a communications specialist and cultural researcher. 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. Steve 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 for Christ.

Edward Chamberlin, Canadian professor of English and comparative literature, shares an incident from which he derived the title of his book on stories and national-cultural identification: *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* He writes:

It happened at a meeting between a [native America] Indian community in northwest British Columbia and some government officials. The officials claimed the land for the

government. The natives were astonished by the claim. They couldn't understand what these relative newcomers were talking about. Finally one of the elders put what was bothering them in the form of a question. “If this is your land,” he asked, “where are your stories?”

He spoke in English, but then moved into Gitksan, the Tsimshian language of his people—and told a story. All of a sudden everyone understood... even though the government foresters didn't know a word of Gitksan, and neither did some of his Gitksan companions. But what they understood was more important: how stories give meaning and value to the places we call home; how they bring us close to the world we live in by taking us into a world of words; how they hold us together and at the same time keep us apart.



“If this is your land, where are your stories?” This question carries with it the importance of a people’s story and its contribution to their sense of identity and community. It is interesting here how identity is tied to land—possession of it—and to history and culture. What’s more interesting is that story is the glue that holds it all together. The original inhabitants in this factual tale told by Chamberlin seem to be saying: “Our land, our

language, our stories, our history, our heritage, our identity—our very being of who we are—are all tied up together, are all integrated.” To challenge any one of these, they imply, is to challenge all the others.

We would do well to reflect on the implications this may have for us as followers of Christ and our identities in the locations where we are. What and where are our stories that help us claim the land?



Are we too shy to claim our heritage and tell our stories? We must be mindful of the ever-widening gap between our national or cultural heritage and our Christian heritage, often resulting in sharp polarization.



Let us rely upon the power of the story to help identify who we are and our place in the land.



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**The Oral Reality:
From Rural to Hi-Tech Communities**



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ISBN 962-7673-24-2

PRINTED IN HONG KONG