

Volume 3, Number 2, 2014  
ISSN 2324-6375

# Orality Journal

*... came Fresh*

**Delivery of  
Training  
in a  
Digitiphrenic  
World**

**Wu • Macalinao • Overstreet • Handley • LeFever  
Petersen • Terry • Trinh**



# The Seven Disciplines of Orality



*Courtesy of Dr. Chuck Madinger who leads Global Impact Mission and serves on the International Orality Network's Leadership Team facilitating the Research Task Force.*

# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

Volume 3, Number 2, 2014

ISBN 978-962-7673-29-3

ISSN 2324-6375

## **Cover Photo**

This lone shepherd was near Bethlehem with his lone sheep. He was distracted by his phone, the tourists and the little sheep, which was still trying to get away. Shepherding as a way of life has witnessed the pre-printing era, the printing age, and now is mentally engaged in the digital world. We introduce a word made popular by Douglas Rushkoff: digiphrenic, a compound of “digital + phrenic” resulting in digiphrenic.

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you,  
my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Psalm 63:1

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have  
no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without  
money and without cost.

Isaiah 55:1

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a  
loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.  
Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living  
water will flow from within him.”

John 7:37--38

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as  
crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the  
middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the  
tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Revelation 22:1—2

# 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 is welcomed.

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ISBN 978-962-7673-29-3

ISSN 2324-6375

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In cooperation with Capstone Enterprises Ltd., Hong Kong

PRINTED IN HONG KONG

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# Editor's Note

*Samuel E. Chiang*

## Digiphrenia and Our Worldview

The kids sat there with undivided attention and full participation to the proceedings of graduation ceremony within the church setting. We worshipped; but it was the children and early teens who led us. We prayed; but it was all led by young teens that prayed and cried out to God from their hearts. God's Spirit was there in the midst of the service.

I sat there fully bewildered and appreciative to see children and early teens that are spiritually mature beyond their physical age. This scene was repeated from place to place. This is a slice of an image of the Church in Liberia that shall remain with me; yet I am struggling with dissonances within me. How is it that the children and youths in other cultures can become so distracted, so high maintenance, and so unappreciative of the Word of God? How can non-formal and formal training be delivered so as to have impact?

## Time

In a fascinating and not so easy to read book (due to longish chapters), Douglas Rushkoff's *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*,<sup>i</sup> he curates the culture of the West that is accelerated through technology, reexamines our cultural assumptions (including the function of time), and derives new words to fit the new century.

Rushkoff explains that because of the proliferation of multiple screens that is tethered to the digitally mediated social networks, we are divided in our attention. We are living in the tension of a real present narrative (one that is bound by your location and time), and a false present of digital information (which is happening elsewhere). This struggle is a "Present Shock" (thus, one of the theories supporting the name of the book). Hence, a new condition exits in the mind and body, digiphrenia: a disoriented condition of mental activity.<sup>ii</sup>

**digital + Phrenia = digiphrenia**

The author goes on to explain that "time in the digital era is no longer linear but disembodied and associative. The past is not something behind us

on the timeline but dispersed through the sea of information.”<sup>iii</sup> There are many examples in life of the author’s assertion, but something happened recently that made me reflect deeply about time, disembodiment, and associative. During FIFA World Cup soccer, I was in Chicago and having my watch fixed. The lady serving me was from Syria and she had her internet radio on at the same time. I inquired about the content and why the announcer was so excited speaking in Arabic; she told me that she was listening to a station in Jordan on the internet that was describing her favorite team, Brazil, who was playing at that moment.

There are time zone differences between North and South America, and there are time zone differences between Brazil and Jordan. At that very moment she was fixing my chronographic watch that is axial driven, and at the same time she was listening to digital reporting from eight time zones away about a game that is played that is only two time zones away. Time: disembodied, but associative! Digiphrenia at work!

Could it be that the technologically driven West is operating much more on divided attention even to the present task at hand that we are creating habits which embrace the habits of digiphrenia, and inviting consistent interruptions?

Is it possible that our modeling in the work place, meals with families, friends and colleagues, and in group activities, we are so accustomed to time, disembodied, but associative through digitally mediated social networks, that we are practicing digiphrenia? And we have extended this into the Church!

### **Screens**

But let us take this one step further. The existing condition of digiphrenia is further accelerated by multiple screens and this has consequences on our worldview. When we are working with one “screen” for decades, and that primarily of the television, it was simply a toleration of an addition to the family. However, when the traditional understanding of “family” started to change, that singular screen became a welcome addition to the family as it was able to baby-sit latch key kids. Fast forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and with multiple screens in our midst from smartphones, to digital devices including computers, to the iPads,

---

TV screens within a screen, we have digital screens everywhere. We are surrounded by multiple digital screens.

Those screens are able to mediate social networks digitally. Each social network platforms have different values, voices and opinions of peers, friends, acquaintances, and the general public, all straddling huge age differences. The family units (blended, traditional, and any other combinations thereof) cannot escape this, and in fact, welcomes it. This has a large impact on our worldview!

Previously our worldview was determined by our parents, with a sense of guilt-innocence (rule-centric), which flowed from the authority of the Word of God, and is reinforced by the social network that was formed in activities with the local parish.

Now our worldview is determined by our various family units, with different worldviews that is digitally mediated through social networks; we are driven less by a sense of guilt-innocence, but more so by a worldview of shame-honor.<sup>iv</sup> Where previously we were raised by two parents, now we are raised by a community (digital and those who are “present”). Our code of conduct is different.

*Two different pictures:* children in Liberia, devoid of technology, and able to lead their own worship services with spiritual maturity beyond their physical years; children in the West, drenched in technologies, would probably be challenged to lead their own worship service.

*Two different communities:* children in Liberia raised by a community as is the tradition in Africa; children in the West becoming raised by a community of those who are physically present and digitally mediated and fast becoming the new norm in society.

*Two different training systems:* children in Liberia received non-formal theological education in a much lesser “formal structured” textual transmission are able to “theologize” it through music, songs, skits, drawings, and dramas; children in the West receiving non-formal theological education in a slightly more “formal structured” textual transmission might have challenges to do the same.



**Two Different Training Systems**



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*Similar worldviews?* Shame and Honor, of which this Journal will visit more often into the future, is a worldview that has been well served in the anthropological realm, but massively underserved in the biblical and theological research and writing domain. Yet, the Bible was written and given to a culture that lived in the shame-honor codes. Might it be that the “syncing” of the worldviews of the West and of the Majority Church will finally cause us to revisit shame-honor worldview of the Bible?

In this issue, we explore both formal and non-formal delivery of theological education. We will note together that because the non-formal training piece is by far the largest in the delivery and distribution of theological education, we have primarily focused on that larger slice of the theological education pie.

We also recognize that in the delivery of non-formal and formal theological education, we must encounter worldviews. Jackson Wu looks at the delivery of theological education in light of the shame-honor worldview, and Romer Macalinao explores one institution in the Philippines is encountering elements of non-formal training in a formal setting. In contrast, Mark Overstreet’s article looks at leaders development in highly oral contexts and in non-formal setting. In a further contrast, Joe Handley’s Leaders Development “lab” invites Kathay Oyama to describe leaders training in an extremely high literate context in the country of Japan. Marlene LeFever looks at the delivery of training amongst the 4-14 year-old age group. Michelle Petersen’s article looks at how to turn training into high impact engagement with scripture; full of hints and steps, she shows how high impact can take place through solid consideration of worldviews and orality principles. We are grateful to J.O. Terry who thoughtfully responds to some frequently asked questions by new storytellers. Finally, we are happy to introduce Paul Trinh, whose extensive experiences will allow us to see the application of storytelling in everyday life. He will also be providing a regular blog at [orality.net](http://orality.net).

On the journey together,

Samuel E. Chiang  
From Monrovia, Liberia

<sup>i</sup>Douglas Rushkoff, “*Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*”. New York, Penguin Group, 2013.

<sup>ii</sup>Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>iii</sup>Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>iv</sup>The discussion of each worldview can range from a day’s seminar, to a course, to a program, and to doctoral studies. My purpose is to simply provide some level of exposure. For initial solid in-depth discussion please see Hannes Wiher’s paper here: WIHER, Hannes, *Shame and Guilt: A Key to Cross-Cultural Ministry*, Bonn, Culture and Science Publications, 2003, 521 p., downloadable at the following link: [www.wearesources.org/publications.aspx](http://www.wearesources.org/publications.aspx)



# Theological Education in Honor-Shame Cultures: Why Worldview Matters for Oral Learners?

*Jackson Wu*

*Jackson Wu, Ph.D, teaches theology and missiology in a seminary for Chinese church leaders. Previously, he also worked as a church planter. In addition to his published works, he maintains a blog at [jacksonwu.org](http://jacksonwu.org)*

## I. Contextualization Answers “Why?”

In recent years, evangelicals have gained greater appreciation for the needs of oral learners. In particular, people increasingly realize the importance of storying in theological instruction. This contrasts traditional, reading intensive methods. In effect, evangelical ministries, such as the International Orality Network (ION), shift our focus from the “what” question to the “how” question. <sup>1</sup>Rather than debating the content of our message (“what”), we now consider the way (“how”) we convey the truth.

Although communication and application are critical, they are not most fundamental to contextualization.<sup>2</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, contextualization begins at the level of interpretation, which is dependent on worldview. How often do we overlook the cultural lens through which we

reach our theological conclusions? We desperately need humility to acknowledge how denominational and organizational subcultures can mislead us into “theological syncretism,” whereby we confuse the gospel with our theological tradition.

We address worldviews by asking “why” questions. Worldview questions involve our rationale (Why do we believe this?) and heart (Why is this important?). We need to consider a number of more basic issues before asking, “What stories should we tell?” (information) or “How do we tell them?” (technique).

“Why” concerns understanding; thus, it determines and shapes application (i.e. what? how?).

Oral cultures tend to share certain characteristics. For instance, many oral learners have an “honor-shame” worldview. By contrast, western missionaries are likely to emphasize themes like law and guilt. Even if the

**Oral cultures  
tend to share  
certain  
characteristics.**

latter have good doctrine (“what” should we believe?) and strong communication skills (“how” to tell a story), a more basic problem remains. They do not speak the same “worldview language.” Therefore, missionaries may not answer the key “why” questions that matter most to oral learners. Worse still is that the missionaries potentially convey the notion that the Bible mainly speaks about Western concerns.

In this paper, I will briefly answer two important “why” questions. First, why do oral learners think the way they do? Second, why are honor and shame important for gospel ministry? I will conclude by suggesting a few applications for theological education.

## II. Why Oral Learners Want Face

Western evangelicals tend to have a negative or superficial understanding of honor and shame.<sup>3</sup> Some think “honor” is nothing more than a medieval idea. Others only associate it with honor killings. For many missionaries in China, the concept of “face” is essentially synonymous with pride. Many who study anthropology have the idea that honor and shame

are “Eastern” ideas. Conversely, Western cultures emphasize law and guilt. Some would assert that this is due to the influence of Christianity in Western history. In contemporary society, modern psychology has led people to regard shame as a purely negative idea that should be eliminated.

## Beyond a Superficial Understanding of Honor and Shame

There are significant problems with these pessimistic but typical perspectives. At some level, there is a seed of truth to each of the above impressions. Nevertheless,

**Honor and shame, whether we realize it or not, drive nearly every social sphere.**

people ignore a few plain facts. First, honor and shame are human categories. Westerners simply use different symbols and language to express their own view of honor and shame. People use social media, particularly Facebook, as tools to compete for and save “face.” Honor and shame, whether we realize it or not, drive nearly every social sphere. This is why we use respectful titles (e.g. “doctor” or “professor”), name drop, wear the clothing of our favorite sports team, seek other people’s approval, tell white lies, and take certain jobs.

Second, honor and shame are essential themes in the grand biblical narrative.<sup>4</sup> God’s plan for creation centers on his glory (Ps 8:4–6; 19:1; Isa 43:7; Hab 2:14; Eph 1:12, 14; Phil 2:11). Conversely, the fundamental problem with the world is defined in terms of God’s honor and human shame.

Even in Romans, *prima facie* a law-oriented book, unrighteousness and sin are explicitly explained in terms of honor and shame (cf. Rom 1:21–27; 2:23–24, 29; 3:23).<sup>5</sup> Salvation consists in the Father imputing Christ’s glory to us (John 17:22; cf. Rom 8:17, 28–30). According to Jesus, we only have true faith when we seek face more from God than from others (John 5:44). Everything from ethics (Matt 15:4–6; Rom 12:10; 1 Cor 10:31; Pet 1:7, 17) to eschatology (John 12:26; Rom 2:7; 10:11; Rev 21:26) concerns honor and shame.

In the face of these observations, people have typically prioritized the law motif. No doubt this is due partially to the many lawyers-turned-theologians in church history (e.g. Tertullian, Calvin, etc.). People forget that “law” is every bit as “anthropological” as honor-shame. Although Christians

might not teach “wrong” doctrine, the Church’s silence on key themes (like honor-shame) *de facto* results in the piecemeal deconstruction of biblical theology. Inevitably, people generally conform to collective opinion, fearful of being excluded if they publically disagreed with the traditions of their theological ancestors. Our exegetical muscles atrophy, having too long depended on the support of (western) systematic theology. Consequently, we compromise the gospel when we settle for truth.<sup>6</sup>

**it is not surprising that Scripture consistently uses honor-shame related themes, which pervade all world cultures.**

In the Bible, God reveals himself to all nations. Therefore, it is not surprising that Scripture consistently uses honor-shame related themes, which pervade all world cultures. In order to be fully “biblical”—and indeed “human,” we will need a more holistic view of Scripture, one that uses an honor-shame worldview lens.<sup>7</sup>

If missionaries want to reach oral learners, they must be willing to lose face within the evangelical subculture. They will resist the relativistic tendency to tell the biblical story and objectify theology only from within their own cultural view. One’s worldview has implicit assumptions that shape his or her

“implicit gospel.” An “implicit gospel” is the message people hear as a result of the way a speaker, consciously or unconsciously, frames a gospel presentation.

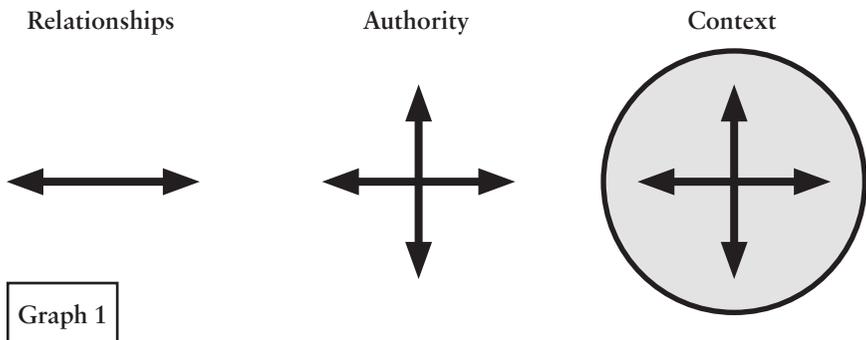
When working among oral learners, we face a latent danger when choosing the stories, themes, and method of our presentations (whether in evangelism or theological education). Due to selectivity and silence, we could inadvertently “judaize” our listeners, even while speaking the truth. This happens when we present the biblical message in ways that compel others to give priority unnecessarily to a foreign cultural lens in order to be regarded as a faithful Christian.

### Three Characteristics of Honor-Shame Cultures

First of all, honor-shame cultures place a high value on relationships, represented by the horizontal arrow in graph 1 below. Identity is determined based on one’s similarity to others

(e.g. shared ancestors, traditions, land, language, etc.). Westerners more frequently emphasize differences or uniqueness. One gets “face” (i.e. honor, praise) by conforming to the group. Put plainly, a person’s “face” refers to the way others regard him or her. Having face is a vital means of protecting relationships and ensuring one’s own security (cf. Gen 11:4).

“Face” is important both in determining one’s sense of belonging and maintaining harmony. It is an inherently public concept. Because people from face-cultures tend to prioritize the collective over the individual, it is important to distinguish insiders from outsiders. Loyalty to one’s in-group thus is a critical virtue. Ethical behavior arises from a sense of shame and concern for relationships. Moral decisions are grounded on more than the fear of punishment consequent of breaking impersonal laws issued by those whom one does not even know.



Second, oral cultures have a high respect for authority (represented by the vertical arrow in graph 1 above). Formal and informal hierarchies exist within any society. Social status confers on a person certain roles and responsibilities that must be maintained for the sake of personal face and group harmony. Children, for example, are obligated to show filial piety to their parents and ancestors. The head of the group is responsible for protecting the honor of those whom he represents.

Finally, oral learners are highly sensitive to context (noted by the circle in graph 1). After all, face is always ascribed and achieved within a relational context. They humbly recognize that one's understanding of truth depends on his or her perspective. Thus, it is generally wise to follow tradition. In this way, stories, rituals, and symbols enable people to learn from various historical contexts. They convey value systems that are pragmatic without being individualistic. Oral learners are not inclined towards abstract religions and moral theories that separate individuals from particular relationships and concrete situations.

### III. Why the Gospel Is Framed By Honor And Shame<sup>8</sup>

Western theology does not typically reflect an honor-shame worldview. As a rule, evangelistic presentations focus on the individual, not the community. They accentuate guilt and law-metaphors (e.g. God as judge), sometimes to the point that certain concepts hardly

carry their original sense as found in the Scripture.<sup>9</sup> Naturally, this approach leads people to use narrower selections of biblical texts, such as Romans and Galatians. Appeals are often made to time. Thus, one hears this type

**Western theology does not typically reflect an honor-shame worldview. As a rule, evangelistic presentations focus on the individual, not the community.**

of question "If you died tonight, would you have eternal life?" In this environment, honor and shame is regularly "downplayed as mere anthropology or psychology, secondary to the 'real' problem of law and guilt."<sup>10</sup>

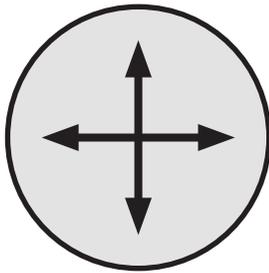
The gospel announces an entirely new worldview, one that both transcends and includes elements from every human culture. Not surprisingly, gospel presentations in the Bible appeal to a distinct overarching narrative that spans the entire canon.<sup>11</sup> In Christ, the one true Creator God establishes his

kingdom and restores the human family in keeping with his covenant promises.

Without exception, the biblical writers consistently use three themes to frame the gospel.<sup>12</sup> They are kingdom, creation, and covenant. Respectively, these themes highlight God's sovereignty, the scope of his kingdom, and his solution to the world's problem. They also correspond to the three characteristics of honor-shame

fallen human cultures? It is not mere anthropological categories, like shame, guilt, fear, etc. The gospel overturns the world's view of honor and shame. With respect to authority, Christians esteem God as Father and Christ as king. With respect to context, they have a renewed perspective on the world and the meaning of history. With respect to relationships, they identify even with "outsiders" because God's family consists of all nations.

Fallen Worldview



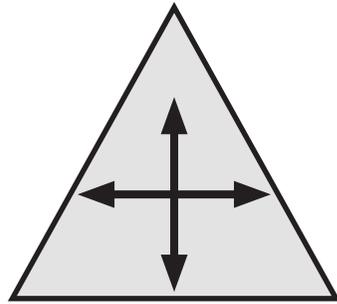
Graph 2

cultures discussed above. God reigns (authority). The entire world is his realm (context). Through covenant (relationship), the one true King brings reconciliation to the world.

### A Gospel Worldview of Authority, Context, and Relationships

What distinguishes a gospel worldview from those found within

Gospel Worldview



A Christian worldview is reoriented and thus resized. This is depicted by graph 2 above. Believers envision the entire world as a temple in which God will dwell with his people (cf. Rev 21:1–3).<sup>13</sup> Their scope of concern is not restricted merely to their own social group according to the flesh, whether money, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. Christians seek face based on a different view of the world.

**Honor and shame help us make better sense of the world and thus the gospel. Oral learners are more likely to seek ascribed honor (based on position, title, relationship, birth, etc.). They value similarity and conformity to the collective.**

Faith in the Bible essentially concerns one's specific sense of "face," one's reason for boasting (Rom 2:17, 23; 1 Cor 1:29, 31; 2 Cor 11:30–12:9). Jesus asks his opponents, "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44; cf. Rom 2:29). Christ changes our answer to the question, "Whom do you want to please?" Now, we seek above all the acceptance of God and his people (cf. Rom 14:18; 15:31).

The world's problem and solution are depicted in terms of relationships. The nations fell when those at Babel sought to "make a name for themselves" (Gen 11:4). In contrast, the LORD "preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'" (Gal 3:8; citing Gen 12:3). In Acts 17:22–31, why does Paul use creation to frame his gospel presentation? He challenges Greek pride by exposing

their "ignorance." Because God is the "Lord of heaven and earth," all nations should repent, reconsider social boundaries, and recognize God as the Father of the human family. The gospel fundamentally transforms one's group identification because it re-categorizes "insiders" and "outsiders."<sup>14</sup> In this way, believers can resist the allure of what C. S. Lewis called the "Inner Ring."<sup>15</sup> In short, a different perspective of honor-shame redefines relationships.

Honor and shame help us make better sense of the world and thus the gospel. Oral learners are more likely to seek ascribed honor (based on position, title, relationship, birth, etc.). They value similarity and conformity to the collective. On the other hand, Westerners are more concerned with achieved honor. They emphasize difference and individuality. For example, Christians traditionally focus their teaching to resist "works-righteousness," the idea that people can somehow "earn" salvation. This is simply one expression of "achieved honor." What if an oral learner is not seeking achieved honor? Instead, what if we addressed more basic worldview problems related to authority, face, and relationships?

#### IV. Theological Education For Oral Learners

How do we contextualize theological education for oral learners? Contextualization requires a transformation of perspective (i.e. worldview). It is more than a methodology to translate cultural ideas. We get ahead of ourselves when we focus on good doctrine (“what?”) and storying (“how?”) yet neglect to consider how worldview influences the story we tell.

Accordingly, this essay suggests we rethink how we understand the relationship between worldview, theology, and story. If we don’t read the biblical Story through an honor-shame lens, one’s theology might be true but seemingly irrelevant to listeners. We need to understand why oral learners see the world the way they do. To do so, we too must be changed. Only then can we tell the biblical story from within the worldview of oral learners.

#### Recommended Applications

First, theological education among oral learners needs to prioritize biblical theology before systematic theology. Methodologically, this is intuitive since interpretation precedes the synthesis of ideas. However, this will not be easy to

implement. From my experience, most missionaries cannot clearly distinguish between biblical theology and systematic theology. A few years ago, I spoke with two people charged with developing the curriculum for a seminary in Asia. One had a PhD in missions; the other a PhD in evangelism. Yet, they thought that biblical theology was simply theology that is “biblical.”<sup>16</sup>

There are systemic problems to be considered. Western seminaries (and those they influence) have largely de-emphasized exegesis, as evidenced by the trend against requiring biblical languages for graduation. A person’s systematic theology thus becomes the lens through which he or she interprets Scripture. Prioritizing systematic theology is like someone assuming the answer before hearing the question. In contrast, in doing biblical theology, we attempt to develop a worldview, not simply take up the worldview of our denominational subculture.

Starting with systematic theology subtly undermines contextualization. This is because systematic theology begins with the reader’s questions (What is the church? What is salvation, etc.). These concerns arise from

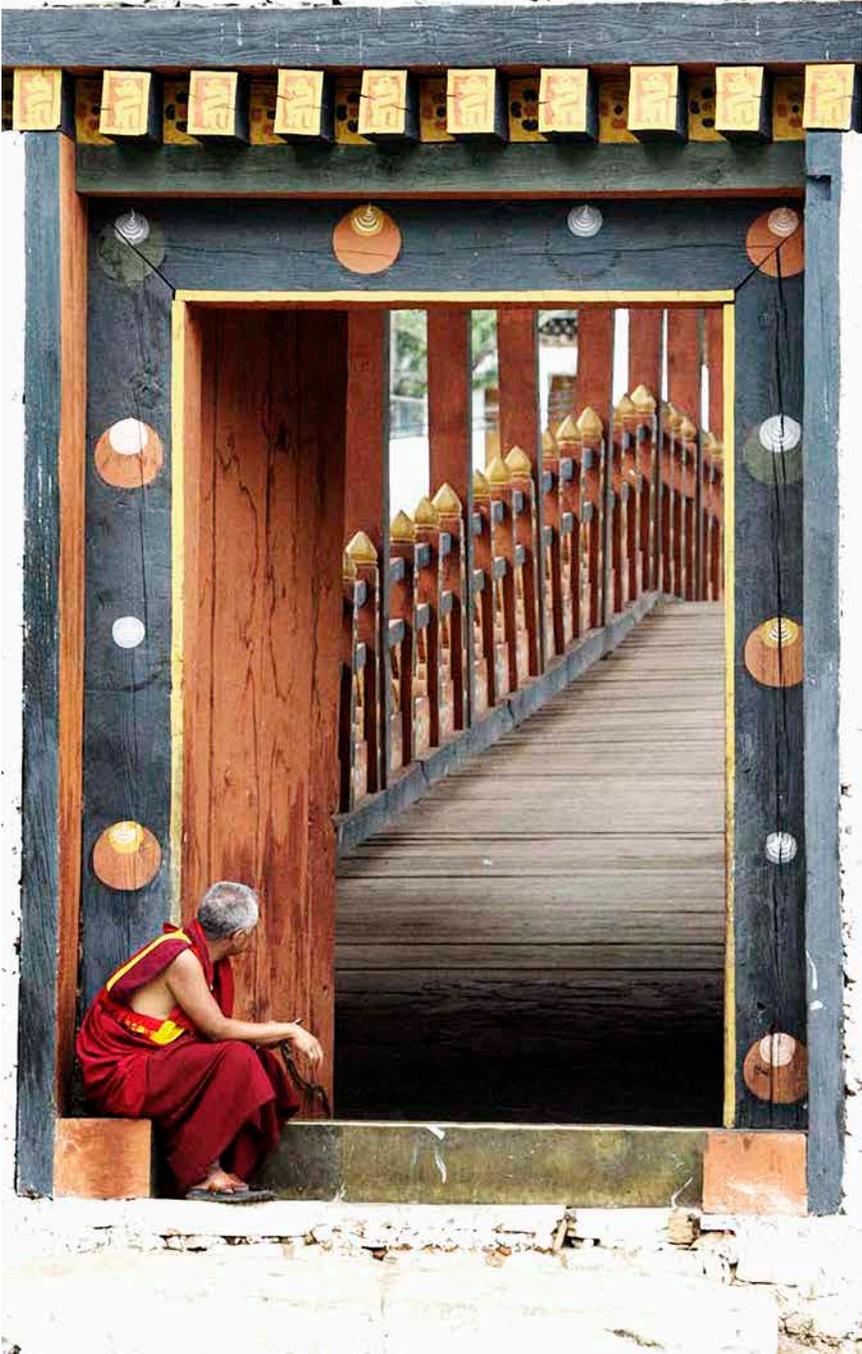
particular historical and cultural contexts rather than the biblical text itself. Consequently, instead of telling the grand biblical Story on its own terms, we reframe and explain the Bible in ways implicitly oriented towards our worldview. Systematic theology not only can become a quick substitute for exegesis, it also creates unnecessary complexity. The complexity of the biblical story is preferable to that of a systematic theology.

To illustrate the point, consider the meaning of God's righteousness. Systematic theology texts typically contrast God's love with his righteousness, which connotes his wrath or judgment against sin. Now imagine someone hears Ps 143:1-2, 11, "Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you . . . For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!" If listeners begin with the assumption that God's righteousness mainly concerns wrath or judgment, they will be unable to make sense of these verses. Thus, they will either ignore the passage or create a theological system to compensate for their assumptions.

Second, we need to evaluate the relationship between teaching methods, student response, and authority. Due to their reverence for authority and ancestors, many oral learner cultures are prone to accept uncritically whatever a teacher says or whatever is considered "traditional." For instance, if students don't know how to interpret the Bible, they have little choice but to accept the conclusions of the older or more educated teacher. Additionally, if teachers string lessons and stories together according to an implicit systematic framework, they infuse unnatural complexity into the material. This leaves students confused and overly dependent on the teacher's authority.

Tradition can likewise usurp biblical authority. Given Christianity's prominence in Western history, this practically means that students might baptize doctrinal emphases and methods as "Christian" when in fact they are merely "western." Sadly, missionaries may then confuse the fact that locals adopt their ideas or practices with genuine contextualization.

It follows that teachers should also distinguish normal and normative, particularly when using narrative.



Hence, students need to know that wisdom literature and historical books cannot be interpreted and applied in the same way as epistles. Likewise, when interpreting and applying the four Gospels, we should note two distinct contexts. At one level, there is the immediate story (concerning Jesus and his disciples). However, we must not forget that the biblical writers have also crafted their Gospels to suit their audience. Therefore, we need to consider what a writer prescribes whenever the text describes a command from Jesus to his disciples or other Jews.

Third, we need to rethink strategies that reflect an ethos of pragmatism. There is an unmistakable emphasis on speed within missionary subculture, which stresses “rapid reproduction”, reproducibility, and 3-minute evangelistic presentations. This sort of ethos is counter to worldview change. Theological education, on the other hand, is concerned with DNA. Such training requires long-term vision. It defines success over a period of years, not a few lessons. Discipleship that is truly “obedience based” involves head, heart, and hands; it cannot be reduced to learning set doctrines or counting how many times a person shares the gospel in a week.

There is a more subtle danger with “theological pragmatism.” Theological pragmatism presents students with a worldview that distorts a biblical perspective. According to one version of this thinking, people only need to learn theology inasmuch as it helps them do evangelism. If it doesn’t help people “get saved,” it is dismissed as “abstract” theology. This reaction frequently comes from more conservative circles of the church. Seminaries and organizations need to ask themselves, “Does our theological curriculum favor one aspect of Christian ministry and theology? Does it actually balance the range of priorities found in Scripture?”

Nothing is more practical than worldview. How we see the world affects everything else we do. Worldviews resist systematization because they are full of ambiguity. Evangelicals have much to learn from oral peoples, who are far more comfortable with nuance than typical western intellectuals.

Thinking is a part of Christian worship.<sup>17</sup> Jesus said that the greatest commandment is “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37). I have heard people insist

that non-Western Christians are not able to do rigorous analysis. I fear this attitude can easily lead teachers to patronize students. In fact, logic and critical thinking are not “Western” inventions; they belong to humanity.

Theological education among oral learners must not settle for methods that only utilize memorization. We cannot forsake analytical thinking just as western seminaries should not forsake memorization in their curriculum. Among oral learners, part of the solution might come in the ways we convey logic within our stories. Perhaps, we could emphasize a few more key words like “therefore,” “because,” etc. (logical conjunctions) as a way to help learners clearly connect ideas. We want to help people “think the Bible’s thoughts after it.”

Fourth, how might honor and shame influence the way we do storytelling? To begin, we need to recognize that emphasis is an aspect of meaning. In other words, we should not be content merely to find out whether an idea is right or wrong. Instead, we want to pay more attention to discerning and communicating the major and minor points of a biblical text. (“Major” and “minor” do not mean “important” and “unimportant.”)

Not only is this important for biblical fidelity, it also helps oral learners, who are quick to pick up on subtle implications.

The way we *frame* a story conveys some kind of worldview.<sup>18</sup> Story selection is only one aspect of the process. One’s terms and metaphors derive their meaning from their context. The first principle of biblical interpretation is “Context is king.” No one is more equipped to apply this principle than oral learners. Countless assumptions are built into the context of a story. If we are not intentional about framing our presentation, we will inevitably piecemeal our teaching in accordance with our own agenda, theological tradition, or systematic theology. Biblically speaking, even the gospel is consistently framed by three key themes (discussed above); other doctrines and motifs are subject to this framework.

Consider how the biblical authors present their message. In an Ancient Near Eastern context, Genesis 1, as a whole, paints a picture of a Temple over which God reigns.<sup>19</sup> Both John’s Gospel and Colossians 1 depict Christ as bringing about a “new creation.” Romans 5–8 uses Israel’s exodus narrative to frame a theology of redemption.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to framework, how one begins a story has disproportionate influence over what follows. Many modern evangelistic tools, such as Creation-to-Christ (C2C), begin with the Fall of Adam and of demons, despite the fact that no gospel presentation in the Bible starts in this fashion. Even though demonology is a highly speculative part of theology, its placement gives it a degree of prominence not found in Scripture.

It will be much easier to do theological education when concepts belong to a structure that is coherent, concrete, and reflective of the biblical narrative. Thus, instead of saying that God is “omniscient” and “omnipotent,” why not consider how the Bible describes him? Rather than using abstractions, writers typically speak of the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” “the LORD who brought [Israel] out of Egypt.” These descriptors highlight his works in historical and relational terms.

Fifth, one asks, “How do we think about this in a classroom setting?” We need to think both in terms of

the students’ worldview and unity of Scripture. In my experience, I find it helpful to design course lessons in ways that integrate various themes yet clearly demonstrates an overarching coherency. Michael Bird, a biblical theologian, has recently attempted to do this when writing a systematic theology textbook.<sup>21</sup> This year, I am using biblical theology to develop an ethics class oriented towards an honor-shame worldview, which emphasizes face and relationship (*guanxi*). In the process, a more direct relationship between the gospel and ethics arises than I find in typical approaches. I hope to provide students with a lens through which to make ethical decisions, not simply abstract principles and difficult-to-apply rules. By properly framing our lessons, we enable listeners to more easily retain and relate vast amounts of information.

How do we help students see this framework? When I first began teaching, I presented the material like a syllogism, establishing each point until I finally arrived at a conclusion. At that point, students could see the “big picture” of the lesson or course. However, with

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this approach, students get lost in the details because they lack a clear context or framework to organize the information. I did not want to forsake critical thinking and simply assert conclusions to be memorized for the test. Therefore, I have made the following adjustment. From the very first class, I give students the “big picture” of the course. In this way, they can see how all the material will eventually fit together. Throughout the course, I constantly remind students of this framework that brings coherence to all they are learning.

A number of visual tools nicely supplement this sort of teaching. Many people have listed things like liturgy, dance, and music. Additionally, teachers should consider drawing pictures and graphs that link various strands of thought.<sup>22</sup> Although analogies can be helpful if used thoughtfully, they still present oversimplified worldviews. People are especially prone to lose sight of their function.

How might an honor-shame culture influence the way we manage a classroom? Many students, fearful of losing face, are hesitant to ask questions and suggest answers. When teachers ask a question to

the entire class, they often meet a long initial period of silence. Sometimes teachers will simply need to endure the long silence until someone speaks; other times they may need to rephrase the question. In order to get students talking, I have students break up into small groups for very brief intervals, perhaps 3–5 minutes. They are more willing to talk with each other. Also, I warn them that I might ask 1 or 2 groups to give their answers; therefore, they need to choose a spokesman. This warning helps them mentally prepare to speak publically. It also motivates them to think of better answers.

I suggest a few ideas regarding assessment. Since oral learners are good at memorization, they tend merely to regurgitate what teachers say but without having a deep understanding of their answer. Therefore, I have adjusted the way I assess learning. I now make sure I ask integrated questions that cannot be memorized but rather presuppose memorized information. Furthermore, teachers can give group grades to selected projects. Group projects mirror real life situations. Students learn to self-manage, communicate with others, and work together to solve problems.

Sixth, how do we train missionaries who work among oral peoples? To begin, we need to reconsider how missiology and theology relate to one another. Missiology should be understood primarily as a sub-discipline of theology, not anthropology. In too many seminaries, there is a vast difference between the theology school and the missions school. Why is this? Theologians should learn about the world's cultures.<sup>23</sup> As I have already mentioned, missionaries desperately need biblical theology and exegesis. Both groups should become more familiar with cross-cultural theology.

In order to improve contextualization, we also need to train more generalists who are comfortable working across multiple disciplines. In Christian academia, hyper-specialization has become the norm. However, this does contribute to holistic worldview thinking. It atomizes the world into abstraction, ignoring ambiguity of the concrete. Ministry in honor-shame cultures requires more integrative thinkers.

Finally, we need a more comprehensive view of the gospel. Theological education starts with evangelism. One's understanding of the gospel establishes his or

her categories of thinking. It prioritizes theological topics and types of application. In short, the gospel frames one's view of the Bible. It reorients one's worldview. The gospel defines what Christians regard as honorable and shameful.

Teaching for the sake of worldview is more than swapping out terminology. Though a good beginning, it is not enough merely to say that Christ takes away shame (as opposed to sin). Our entire language of discourse will change as we simultaneously do two things: (1) shift our attention to the biblical metanarrative; (2) learn to empathize with the concerns of our listeners, having grasped the inner coherency of their worldview.

Do we have a superficial understanding of theological education among honor-shame cultures? This paper challenges us to take a new perspective on oral learners and ourselves. Our task is about more than "what" we should teach (content) or "how" to do it (technique). Teachers need a deeper level of understanding about the Bible, honor-shame cultures, and perhaps even themselves. Only then will oral learners receive training that is theologically faithful and educationally meaningful.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Samuel Chiang and Grant Lovejoy, eds., *Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*, Hong Kong: Condeo Press, 2013.

<sup>2</sup>What follows is explained in Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*, Pasadena, Calif.: WCIUP, 2013, 10–68.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 148–92.

<sup>4</sup>See chapters 4–5 of *Ibid.*, 148–292.

<sup>5</sup>Ironically, people have often settled for a superficial reading of “law,” overlooking its unmistakable implications for ethnicity, an important theme in many face-oriented cultures. *Ibid.*, 240, 281–92.

<sup>6</sup>Jackson Wu, “We Compromise the Gospel When We Settle for Truth: How ‘Right’ Interpretations Lead to ‘Wrong’ Contextualization,” *Global Missiology* 2, no. 10 (2013), n.p. Online: [www.globalmissiology.org](http://www.globalmissiology.org).

<sup>7</sup>This statement’s affirmation is not an implicit rejection of “legal” motifs.

<sup>8</sup>This claim is further developed in Jackson Wu, “Rewriting the Gospel for Oral Cultures: Why Honor and Shame are Essential to the Gospel Story.” Paper presented at the International Orality Network consultation. 8–9 July 2014. Houston Baptist University. Houston, Texas. This paper will be a chapter in the forthcoming *Beyond Literate Western Contexts: Honor & Shame and the Assessment of Orality Preference*, ION and Capstone Enterprises, Hong Kong.

<sup>9</sup>For discussion, see Wu, *Saving God's Face*, 224–29.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>11</sup>For example, in Acts, gospel presentations consistently appeal to Israel’s story via the themes of creation, the Abrahamic promises, and the Davidic covenant.

<sup>12</sup>I fully develop this line of thought in a forthcoming book to be published by William Carey Library.

<sup>13</sup>See Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, Leicester, England: Apollos, 2004; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009.

<sup>14</sup>The point of Matt 25:31–46 is sometimes missed: how we treat Christ’s people is how we treat Christ. The passage is about more than helping the poor. I often hear people omit the phrase “my brothers” from v. 40, which says, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

<sup>15</sup>For a summary and application of Lewis’ idea, see Andrew Cameron, “C. S. Lewis: Inner Circles and True Inclusion,” in *The Trials of Theology: Becoming a “Proven Worker” in a Dangerous Business*, ed. Andrew Cameron and Brian S. Rosner; Scotland: *Christian Focus*, 2009, 75–93.

<sup>16</sup>For a few introductions to the topic of “biblical theology,” see James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns*, Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2014; Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*, Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010.

<sup>17</sup>John Piper, *Think*, Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2011.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Atlanta, Ga.: Augsburg Fortress, 1992, 38–44. This important book illustrates the point from the perspective of New Testament studies.

<sup>19</sup>Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*; Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002, 508–14.

<sup>21</sup>See Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2013. All doctrines are discussed with reference to the gospel.

<sup>22</sup>For one example, see my model for teaching biblical theology, which can be downloaded at [www.jacksonwu.org](http://www.jacksonwu.org).

<sup>23</sup>Wu, "We Compromise the Gospel When We Settle for Truth."

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Sources: Bible Gateway, Operation World 2010 and Percentage of Individuals using the Internet 2009-2012 (International Telecommunications Union)

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**ISBN 978-962-7673-29-3**