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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

**Honor and
Shame
and Oral
Preference
Learners**

**Mischke • Wilson • McFarland • Doll • Hall • Trinh
Patrick • Kabete**

THE 3D GOSPEL

MINISTRY IN GUILT, SHAME, AND FEAR CULTURES



Jayson Georges



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Orality Journal

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Cover Photo

A royal knight of chivalry kneels in prayer in a chapel of the Tower of London. The Tower is one of the residences of the British monarchy – it was founded in 1066 and houses the crown jewels. This whole complex has witnessed the Bohemian Reformation of the 14th century, the Gutenberg Press revolution of the 15th century, the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and the English Reformation of the 16th century; now, silently it is witnessing the digital revolution of the 21st century.

Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced.
Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know
I will not be put to shame.

Isaiah 50:7

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and
be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify
many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality
with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature² of a servant, being made in human
likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled
himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him
the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the
earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to
the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5—11

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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Editor's Note

Samuel E. Chiang

In Sync with the Majority Worldview: Honor and Shame

Our discussions on the “gospel” were lively. The participants at the Houston Baptist University consultation on orality and theological education were fully engaged; this included chancellors, presidents, provosts, academic deans, professors and practitioners. The issue was not the incorrectness of the gospel, but the incompleteness of the gospel presented from a Western evangelical viewpoint. In our modern, reductionist approach to speaking about the gospel, we often neglect the biblical worldview that is included in the Scripture, that of honor and shame.

Ever since the printing press revolution, the reading and understanding of Scripture has helped the spiritual growth of the individual, the understanding of doctrine, and the anchoring of theological moorings. However, in the process we have also privatized our faith; as some would describe it, we have become little popes interpreting the Scripture and expediently transmitting the gospel as we see fit. Often times, I have been reminded on this orality journey, that one of the central objectives is to make available the full counsel of the Word of God to all peoples. Contrary to popular association, orality is not merely storytelling. It is a broad discipline that provides the Church with potential tools from different communication paradigms which can be used so that people of different communication backgrounds can engage the whole Word of God.

Somewhere along the way the Church in the West got side-tracked. We did not teach every book of the Bible. We started to reduce what was to be taught. Combining this trend with the fact that people are engaging with Scripture less robustly, we teach only portions of Scripture—usually the New Testament—often skewed towards certain genre. I was speaking recently with a NT professor who teaches at a famous evangelical university. The professor was lamenting the trend in his NT Survey course: the students cannot even read through the entire New Testament. As a result, the professor was assigning only the book of Luke (not even Luke -- Acts) to be read as a course textbook; the shocking reality is that the students are not even able to finish the book of Luke!

Scripture engagement needs attention, but also understanding of the Scriptural worldview that includes “honor and shame.” The West and the Church in the West are facing the acceleration of societies embracing “honor and shame” so much so that *Christianity Today* devoted major coverage to the topic of “honor and shame” in its 2015 March issue. Incidentally it quoted three of the participant-authors who were at the Houston Baptist University Orality Consultation. (Note their newest books are shown on the inside, outside, and back cover of this issue of the Journal.)

In the West, our literature, reflections, and theological approaches to “honor and shame” have been negligent. On the other hand, the rest of the world, the global south-east, the Majority Church continually to function within an “honor-shame” worldview. A treasury of riches awaits discovery and exploration by the Church. In this publication we intend to invite the richness from the Majority World to speak into this matter so that we can all appreciate better the “fullness” of the gospel.

In this issue, we are well-served by Werner Mischke, who provides an overview of biblical passages covering honor-shame and its implications to oral preference learners. Michael Wilson and Joe Handley disclose from the leadership lab what is succeeding in a highly literate Japan working with a predominantly oral culture. We are grateful to Andrew McFarland for tracing William Carey’s challenges with communication and how he came to embrace oral preference learners. Margaret Doll helps us to look at how the integration of literacy and orality can really work and how important it is to recover orality within the culture so as to be effective. Veteran orality practitioner Annette Hall discusses overcoming the temptations to “over-teach and explain,” which can often short circuit the learning experience for oral preference learners. Paul Trinh’s blog updates us to his own journey in orality and we are grateful to both Susangeline Y. Patrick and Irene Maonei Kabete for their book reviews.

I am personally delighted that Geoffrey W. Hahn has joined the Editorial Committee and that William Coppedge is agreeing to serve as Associate Editor.

On the journey together,

Samuel E. Chiang
From Hong Kong, SAR, China

William Carey's Discovery of Oral Learning Preference in the Propagation of Indian Christianity

Andrew D. McFarland

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Abstract

By the time of his death in 1834, William Carey had authored six complete Bible translations, 26 partial Bible translations, and a substantial number of other works. Even by today's standards, his accomplishments are staggering. Nevertheless, he did not go to India for biblical translation, but gospel propagation. This meant he sought the most efficient strategy to communicate the gospel for the maximum number of people. However, his strategy changed as he became increasingly aware of the social context. Recent evidence suggests that Carey became convinced of the fruitfulness of embracing an oral learning preference for evangelization. For this reason, his translations were only part of his missionary strategy as he also recognized the significance of oral learning preferences and modified his approach to reach oral learners. Eventually, this became a principle

feature of Carey's strategy for the propagation of Indian Christianity. His approach contains valuable lessons for missionaries today.

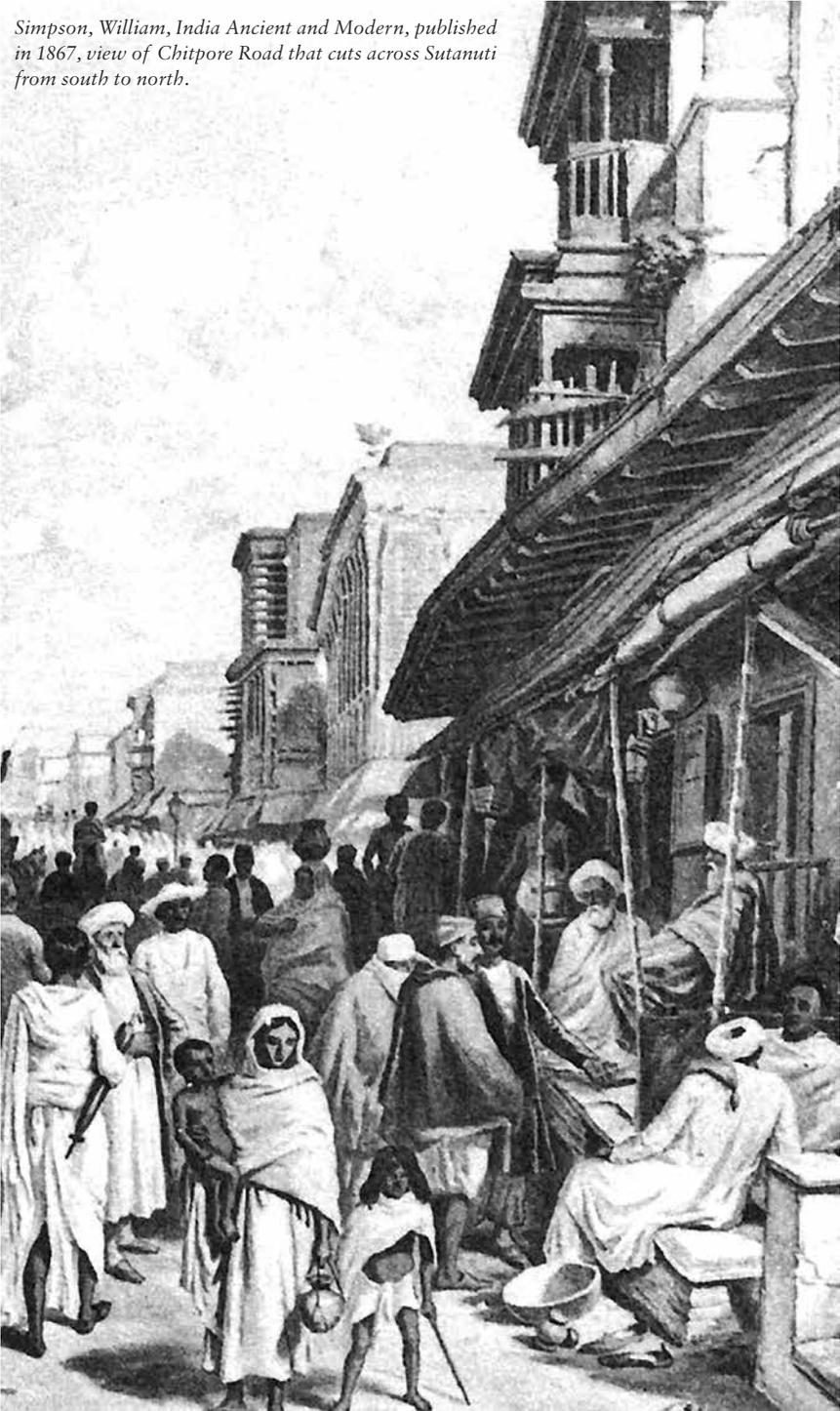
Introduction

When we consider William Carey's missionary strategy for the propagation of the gospel in India, we generally assume it was first and foremost a plan for translation. Perhaps we picture him alone in his study feverishly composing his translations by candlelight; after all, some of Carey's biographers have even described him in this way as one who had an aversion to "direct evangelistic outreach" and preferred rather to "beaver away in his study" (Smith 1994, 249). What if, rather, we could imagine him as a storyteller surrounded by Indian inquirers wanting to know more about Christianity, or as a singer of Bengali hymns in the crowded streets of Calcutta?



*William Carey DD, Professor of Sanskrit,
Marathi and Bengali in Calcutta, 1885.*

Simpson, William, India Ancient and Modern, published in 1867, view of Chitpore Road that cuts across Sutanuti from south to north.



The truth is both of these examples illustrate parts of his approach. At the same time, neither of these is connected to his efforts in translation. In fact, we find that when the missionary partnership between Carey and the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) was forged in the fall of 1792, “the propagation of the Gospel amongst the heathen” was the declared intent, not translation. This warrants a careful survey of how Carey expected to accomplish this goal once in India. For instance, what was the message that he communicated? How did he communicate that message? How did the message encourage the founding of Indian Christianity?

In each case, we have assumed the answer is simple—vernacular translation. Nevertheless, Indians were far more interested in hearing and experiencing the text. This study seeks to show that his translations were only part of his missionary strategy as he also recognized the significance of an oral learning preference and modified his approach to reach oral learners. Yet Carey not only intended to produce Indian translations, he sought to propagate indigenous Indian Christianity. For this reason, his approach contains valuable lessons for missionaries today.

However, Carey’s missionary strategy developed over a period of time. In November 1793, when he and his missionary colleague, John Thomas, arrived in India, they assumed Indians had access to and could read their sacred texts. In their first encounter with Hindus, Thomas asked two poor fishermen if they had any Shastras (religious texts), to which they replied, “We are poor men. Those who have many cowries (or are rich) read the Shastras but we do not know them” (Carey’s journal, November 9, 1793, in Carter 2000, 7). But Carey soon became aware that the social dynamics governing such privilege were produced by caste divisions. By the following July, he concluded that caste was “one of the strangest chains with which the Devil ever bound the children of men” (Ibid., 36). Yet this conviction led him to assume too much. Caste was not the only system influencing the dissemination of knowledge in India. Oral transmission also had a role.

Carey’s earliest exposure to oral learning is likely to have come from his relationship with his language teacher (munshi). Ram Ram Basu had been Thomas’ teacher on one of his earlier trips to India in the service of the East India Company. Now having been informed of their

arrival, he came to meet them (Chatterjee 2004, 204; George 1991, 72). The arrangements were made for Basu to become Carey's teacher and the two men became close friends (Chatterjee 2004, 205).

Just two years later, Carey confessed, "I have read some of the shastras, they are the most like Homer's Iliad of anything I can think of both in manner and matters" (Carey to Ryland, November 26, 1796, in Carter 2000, 137). However, while Basu taught Carey the Bengali language for the purpose of producing a Bengali Bible, he never officially converted to Christianity. Nevertheless, even before Carey's arrival, Basu had started voluntarily composing Christian hymns in Bengali for the purpose of his own missionary effort (Chatterjee 2004, 203). By 1798, Carey had begun to do the same. He wrote, "The people are very fond of singing hymns and I have been forced to commence as poet to furnish them with hymns to sing" (Carey to Sister, January 10, 1798, in Carter 2000, 108).

Even so, at this point, Carey was largely unaware of the significance of this oral learning preference;

rather, he was convinced the propagation of the gospel in India would come through translation and preaching. He declared, "I know there are only two real obstacles in any part of the Earth, a want of the Bible and the depravity of the human heart" (Carey to Fuller, March 23, 1797, in Carter 2000, 64; cf. Drewery 1979, 95).

Therefore, he set himself to regular preaching in 200 villages for gatherings of 200-600. He explained, "I took a boat for my lodging . . . but performed the journey on foot walking from twelve to twenty miles a day, and preaching, or rather conversing, from place to place about the things of God" (Carey to Society, January 12, 1796, in Carter 2000, 146).

When he was not preaching, he was translating. By 1798, he completed his Bengali translations of the last few chapters of Revelation and all the books of the Old Testament from Deuteronomy through Malachi (Arangaden 1993, 178; Smith 2010, 65). Still, all his efforts failed to produce Indian converts. Late in 1799, he confessed to his sisters that "little fruit [had] appeared to encourage our labors in the Gospel" (Carey

**By 1798...
all his efforts
failed to
produce Indian
converts.**

to Sisters, November 30, 1799, in Carter 2000, 108), and as a result, he was deeply discouraged and perhaps even desperate.

It was at this moment of despair that new missionary recruits arrived from England. The new arrivals included the Marshmans and their three children, the Grants and their two children, the Brunsdons, Ward the printer, and Miss Tidd. Nevertheless, due to the British government's prohibitions on missionaries

at the time, it became necessary for Carey

to relocate the mission to the Danish settlement of Serampore. By January 1800, they had purchased property, agreed on communal living arrangements, and committed themselves to the work of the mission.

At Serampore, Carey came face to face with oral learning preference. In December of that year, Krishna Pal became Carey's first Indian convert. This was at least in part due to Carey's provision for evenings of Indian inquiry. But Krishna was a gifted evangelist. Moreover, he did not see theological instruction or European authorization as prerequisites for evangelization.

Therefore, soon after his baptism, he began a missionary effort in his own neighborhood. In fact, one biographer explains, "Close to his home he built a preaching shed where he talked with his neighbors. He gathered lads about him to be taught with his own children. He [used] Bengali tunes [to compose] hymns soon sung everywhere" (Carey 1924, 233). Not only did Krishna's whole family become Christian, but neighboring families did as well (Ibid., 234).

At Serampore, Carey came face to face with oral learning preference.

Carey witnessed these developments as he visited them every Friday and

taught them from the Bengali scriptures. In time, he began to recognize the fruitfulness of embracing oral learning for evangelization. Regardless, this "first native meeting house in Bengal" was Carey's introduction to Indian Christianity (Baptist Missionary Society 1817, 67).

Oral Learning Preference in 19th Century Indian Culture

Even so, oral learning preference in 19th century India was complex. It was governed by powerful sociological, theological, and historical traditions. For instance, Walter Ong points out, "There is no doubt that oral transmission

was important in the history of the Vedas. Brahman teachers or gurus and their students devoted intensive effort to verbatim memorization . . ." (Ong 2002, 65).

One of Carey's fellow missionaries, William Ward, even observed that the Vedas were "put into the hands of children [upper caste] in the first period of their education; and continue afterwards to be read by rote, for the sake of the words, without comprehension of the sense" (Ward 1811, 212). However, students were carefully instructed to pay special attention to the author, subject, rhythm, and purpose (Ibid., 211). In the same manner, he explained, "Thousands of Hindus and Muslims spend an incredible portion of time in audibly reading what they have no apparent wish to understand" (Ibid., 313).

Yet this does not mean they were indifferent to the text. On the contrary, Ward wrote,

It must be acknowledged, that the Hindus in some former age or ages... made considerable progress in several branches of learning. Their grammars and dictionaries of the Sanskrit language are proofs of much ability in the science of philology (Ibid., 191).

Therefore, it becomes necessary to reconcile this apparent contradiction between orality and literacy.

Ong offers some helpful terms pertinent to this dilemma—primary and secondary orality (Ong 2002, 12). He explains that primary oral cultures are "untouched by any knowledge of writing or print" (Ibid., 11). However, this does not mean they suffer from a lack of shared knowledge. Neither do they suffer from sociological disconnect. Rather, he adds, "Listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group" (Ibid., 134). Secondary oral cultures, he points out, are "touched" by writing, albeit through intermediary devices (Ibid., 11). This implies they lack a reliance on the "spoken word."

Jay Moon writes that they "have the ability to read and write, but they prefer to learn or process information by oral rather than written means . . ." (Moon 2012, 30). These insights suggest there is a potential for both primary and secondary oral learners to co-exist. In fact, this is precisely what Carey encountered in 19th century India. But this observation makes little sense without an understanding of the caste system.

Carey had not been in India long before he recognized the priest (Brahmin) and ruler (Kshatriya) castes had access to India's sacred texts, whereas the commoner (Vaisya) and servant (Sudra) castes did not. He complained that "not one in a thousand [Hindus] has ever seen or heard [their shastras] . . . and many [Brahmins] who are esteemed learned don't know the difference between the Sanskrit grammar and a religious book" (Carey to Fuller, January 30, 1795, in Carter 2000, 79; cf. Ward 1811, 199).

Mary Drewery explains that the caste system "separated one group of people from another from birth to the grave without any possibility of change through education, marriage, or by any other means" (1979, 66). Furthermore, Ward wrote, "The shastras threaten the heaviest penalties on a Brahmin who shall teach the knowledge of the sacred books to persons of low caste" (1811, 311). This implies the upper caste groups exhibited secondary orality whereas the lower caste groups exhibited primary orality. Moreover, this clarification

accounts for Carey's discovery of oral learning preference among both groups.

Carey's Discovery of Oral Learning Preference

At this point, it is important to clarify that Carey never actually used the term "oral learning preference." In fact, he had no terms for what he observed. As Wilbert Shenk explains, ". . . by 1800 the human sciences had not been established and there still was no explicit and abstract concept of culture" (1992, 68). Nevertheless, without the benefit of the conceptual framework, Carey managed to identify and embrace certain aspects of Indian culture that he perceived as distinct from European culture. He discovered at least five features of oral learning preference that were important for the propagation of Indian Christianity—story, song, dialogue, ritual, and proverbs.

1. Story. The first feature of oral learning preference that Carey discovered was story. Ong explains that stories are important because, "Oral cultures cannot generate [abstract] categories, and so they

Carey managed to identify and embrace certain aspects of Indian culture that he perceived as distinct from European culture

use stories of human action to store, organize, and communicate much of what they know” (2002, 137). Therefore, if Carey was to tap into the knowledge of Indian culture, it meant he needed a familiarity with their stories.

Already, by 1795, he was collecting and sharing Indian stories. He sent at least three to his brethren back in England noting, “So far I have given you extracts from my journal. I will now add a fable or two which the Brahmins repeated to me yesterday from some of their ancient books.” Most interesting are the titles he ascribed to each of the stories—the evil of keeping bad company, the value of good counsel, and the danger of ambition. The problem is no abstract titles would have been given in the Indian context. Furthermore, each of these titles point to potential biblical themes. These facts suggest that he intended not only to study Indian stories, but sought to communicate Christianity through them.

Regardless, these “examples” are but a fraction of his larger collection. In 1812, he published a collection of 150 Indian stories in a book entitled *Itihasmala* or *Garland of Stories* (Carey 1924, 216; cf. Chatterjee 1993, 169). Commenting on the work, one biographer adds, “They

were his own gathering and telling, and not just brought together by one or more of his pundits” (Carey 1924, 216). Some of the stories Carey collected were:

[A] rat, coming into possession of a rupee, grew vain and contentious, molesting all that came its way, even the king’s elephant. “This rat must have money,” said the king, “or it would never be thus insolent. Let its hole be searched and cleared.” When this was done, and its rupee had vanished, the rat ceased its arrogance, and was sensible once more.

[B]irds in a sandal tree were in very great peril. “See!” said the dove to her mate, “below, a fowler aims at us his arrow: above us is a hawk. Only heaven’s mercy can save us!” At that moment a snake bit the fowler, and he swooned, and his arrow flew forth and struck the hawk.

[A] king had a small tank dug in his courtyard, and resolved to fill it not with water but with milk. So he promised reward to all who, on a given night, through certain outer conduits,

should pour a kalshi of milk into the tank. Yet on the morrow the tank was full of water, and no trace of milk. For each had judged that, if his was a kalshi of water, it would be undetected in a tank of milk. So each had poured water, and the king was indignant, and none could get reward (Ibid., 229).

All three of these stories could have easily been used by Carey to communicate biblical concepts for oral learners. Unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence that he did so. Nevertheless, this represents one area of Carey scholarship which has been virtually unexplored.

2. Song. The second feature of oral learning preference that Carey discovered was song. He had initially become aware of the Indian use of song through his relationship with Ram Ram Basu, though he failed to grasp its significance at the time. However, by 1800, he was convinced that Basu's 1788 hymn would be useful for the work of the mission. Therefore, he not only published it, he distributed copies of it for Bengali readers (Chatterjee 2004, 210). Ward even reported that one Brahmin complained, "They were all over the country. He could go into any house and read one."

This was Carey's first attempt at an oral approach to evangelization. Jay Moon explains why this is so important for oral cultures. He writes,

Good oral performers often use sounds and gestures to create a pleasing and memorable experience... This may be in the form of a refrain that is sung at key points, questions asked, or simple role-playing. All of these techniques are used to aid people in remembering the story (2009, 226).

Mnemonic repetition is noted throughout Basu's hymn. A portion of the English translation of the hymn (Chatterjee 2004, 202) reads,

[O] who besides can recover us
 O who besides can recover us
 From the everlasting darkness
 of sin
 Except the Lord Jesus Christ
 Lo! That Lord is the Son of God
 The intermediate of a sinner's
 salvation
 Whosoever adores Him
 Will get over his eternal ruin
 O who besides can recover us
 In all this earth
 There is none free from sin
 Except the savior of the world
 And His name is Jesus
 O who besides can recover us

In fact, Carey encouraged Indian converts to incorporate song in their evangelism. In 1801, he concluded, "It appears to us all we ought to make the most of the gifts of our Hindu friend and we are thinking how to employ our friend Krishna [Pal] so as to make him useful in the Lord's vineyard" (Carey to Fuller, August 14, 1801, in Carter 2000, 172).

While Carey does not specifically identify song as one of the gifts they intended to "employ," he was well aware Krishna was a bhajan singer. Eleanor Jackson even points out that he "maintained his practice of singing devotional songs all night long when he became a Christian" (Jackson 2008, 187). But he also composed numerous hymns in Bengali which were printed by the mission, distributed, and sung throughout the region. Moreover, he was not alone. Indian converts, Raghu Nath (1805), Vrind Havun (1807), and Tarachand Datta (1813) all evangelized in the same manner (Ibid., 187-190).

Even Carey and his missionary colleagues tried the approach. Timothy George explains, "Ward had printed up copies of the ballad they sang and gave them out to the curious onlookers. It was a hymn Carey had composed in Bengali

depicting an Indian renouncing his idolatrous past and embracing Christ as Lord" (George 1991, 128). Here, we find Carey not only embracing the oral learning preference for song, but also the oral learning preference for storytelling.

Ward explains why this practice was so important. He wrote, "In this country, it is common for a few of the lowest of the people to take up the trade of ballad-singers, or beggars, for they have no written or printed books to sell." Regardless, although Indian evangelists continued in this practice for decades, there is no evidence that it ever became a widespread practice for European missionaries.

3. Dialogue. Carey also discovered a third feature of oral learning preference: dialogue. This was an important discovery since Indians were not likely to respond to an approach that required reflection as individuals. Rather, George Edward explains that oral cultures "tend to communicate in groups and don't think very long without dialogue . . . They prefer to read aloud to groups" (2007, 7). So as early as 1794, Carey had begun to engage in public dialogue with Indians (Carey's journal, May 25, 1794, in Carter, 2000, 30). The following year he had even set

aside a day for “inquirers” to come for instruction (Carey’s journal, February 15, 1795, in Carter, 2000, 53). However, during this period, his communication style demonstrated a tendency toward monologue. It was not until 1800 that he began to show a significant commitment to conversation, especially after the publication of the Gospel of Matthew in Bengali.

More than anything else, this publication paved the way for dialogue. Carey used one of Basu’s “poetic tracts” called the Gospel Messenger (*Hurkura*), consisting of 100 lines of verse, as an introduction to his newly completed Bengali translation (Chatterjee 2004, 210; cf. Marshman 1864, 62). A few points about this work are noteworthy. First, Carey included Basu’s “introduction” only in this work. Second, Carey printed only his translation of the Gospel of Matthew and some Old Testament prophecies, although he had completed the entire Bengali translation by this time. Third, he made just 500 copies with an aim to distribute them immediately. Is it possible he intended this work to be read by Indian evangelists to groups of oral learners?

There are at least two pieces of evidence that support this

conclusion. First, Carey thought it best to begin with the New Testament, but he also reasoned, “There are many people who would scarce read four volumes, who would read one with attention” (Carey to Ryland, August 17, 1800, in Carter 2000, 154). This means he already had oral learners in mind when he sought to print the Gospel of Matthew. Second, he did not expect this work to be used for the evangelism and discipleship of individuals. Rather, he explained,

I have opened a book in which I insert, the name, and place of abode of every person to whom a book is given. The design of this is that when we go to any part we may be able to know whether the Word of Life has been sent thither or not (Ibid., 154).

This implies he expected his “target audiences” to be specific villages or geographical regions. If this is true, it suggests he composed his Bengali translation, not for individual reading, but for the oral transmission of the gospel throughout India.

Perhaps this should come as no surprise since Carey later developed and practiced an oral approach to translation.

One biographer describes his approach. Carey knew, "All his pundits knew Sanskrit. If he could put a Sanskrit Bible into their hands, they could make thence first-draft translations into their own vernaculars" (Carey 1924, 134). He would then check the translations for errors. After all this, he later concluded, "It appears that our business is to provide materials for spreading the Gospel" (Carey to Ryland, June 23, 1803, in Carter 2000, 138). This plan meant that every day Carey and as many as 30 Hindu pundits read the Bible together verse by verse and discussed what it meant (Drewery 1979, 133; cf. George 1991, 141). This, in turn, led to the development of a small pundit community.

However, his emphasis on translation does not mean he assumed a passive role in the propagation of the gospel in India. Rather, he sought to strategically distribute not only copies of the Bengali translations, but also Bengali tracts, in the hopes that a reader would discover them and share them with his or her neighbors. Moreover, he did not have to wait long for results. By 1803, the *Christian Observer* could report that "...a body of the natives amounting to two

hundred . . . had voluntarily laid aside their caste, together with all their idolatrous practices and their reverential acknowledgment of Mohammed and had sent three deputies to Serampore to inquire into the nature of Christianity" (*Christian Observer* 1803, 317). Three years later, Carey explains what happened:

[H]e wrote, "Brother Ward, more than three years ago, went to that village [Ram Krishnapore] to see our friend, Mr. Cunningham. On this occasion he went into the market place, and distributed a few pamphlets, having but one New Testament, he left that at a shop for the use of the village, telling the shopkeeper to put it into the hands of any one who could read it. One of these papers fell into the hands of a devotee whose name is [Jager Nath], he employed a neighbor named Krishna to read it. This Krishna got information about it, and afterwards read it frequently to a few neighbors; the consequence was that God begins a work of grace upon the hearts of several, and carried it on long without our knowing any thing

of the matter” (Carey to Morris, February 17, 1806, in Carter 2000, 185; cf. Carey 2000, 251).

Nevertheless, the smaller results were no less significant. During this period, Indians from every caste and region were showing up at the mission desiring either Baptism or instruction. Carey even wrote that in 1813, “Five natives of high caste have lately been baptized who have been brought to a knowledge of the truth without any communication with us. They met with Bibles, and other tracts, and God wrought them” (Carey to Fuller, March 25, 1817, in Carter 2000, 163; cf. Carey 2000, 299).

4. Ritual. The fourth feature of oral learning preference that Carey discovered was ritual. No festival in India was complete without an elaborate display of ritual. In fact, the whole Indian year was carried along by its festivals (Drewery 1979, 86). His introduction to this reality was the festival of the Incarnation of Krishna in March of 1794. However, since he refused to expose himself to idolatry on the Sabbath, he remained indoors to watch the dancing of worshipers as they returned from the celebration covered in red powder.

Carey’s first real exposure to Indian ritual came the following month with the festival of Churruk which was the practice of “self-tormenting” in the final days of their calendar year (Carey’s journal, April 9, 1794, in Carter 2000, 23). These rituals, or acts of worship (puja), were performed as a kind of penance. Most commonly, they consisted of falling on iron spikes, thrusting bamboo through their sides, and hook swinging. But he noticed only the lower castes participated in these rituals while the upper castes never did. Still, it was three years before he declared caste to be incompatible with Indian Christianity (Carey to Fuller, March 23, 1797, in Carter 2000, 64).

By 1800, Carey understood these rituals were more than idolatrous practice or cultural superstition. As Jay Moon points out, rituals are “used in oral cultures to help people understand and experience God” (Moon 2009, 264). This meant that these rituals were part of a much larger divine narrative which worked to reinforce caste divisions. Therefore, Carey determined to introduce rituals that emphasized an alternative narrative—the narrative of intercaste community.

As Eleanor Jackson explains, “intercaste community” for Carey,

Marshman, and Ward, was “a theological statement of the authenticity of the gospel and the Church in Bengal” (Jackson 2008, 170). It was, first and foremost, a statement about the nature of God and his purpose for creation. However, rituals are meaningless without symbolism. Moon writes that symbols “help people feel, touch, taste, see, or smell God’s presence” (Moon 2009, 264). For this reason, Carey sought to make the process of entering intercaste community experiential for oral learners. Furthermore, his approach follows the three stages of ritual outlined by Arnold Van Gennep (Moon 2013, 46).

First, Carey invited Indians who had been inquirers to eat with Europeans. But this was no ordinary meal. Both Indians and Europeans knew quite well that if they were to eat with Europeans, they would lose their caste and be ostracized from Indian society. So, when Krishna Pal and Gokul, his friend, expressed a willingness to eat with them, they entered into a time of prayer. Next, they were asked if they understood what they had heard during their period of inquiry (Smith 2010, 84; cf. Drewery 1979, 120). After this, they shared a meal. Unfortunately, there is no detailed record of anything

else that happened at this meal. What is clear is that even the Indian servants recognized the ritualistic nature of this event as they cried out that Krishna and Gokul had “become Europeans” (Smith 2010, 84; Drewery 1979, 120; Marshman 1864, 65). This was also cited as the reason for their being attacked on their way home. This was a time of separation.

Second, Carey included Indians who had eaten with Europeans as members of the mission family through baptism. After all, he had long suspected that Indian converts would “become outcasts immediately” and would thereby need support (Carey to Ryland, November 26, 1796, in Carter 2000, 137). However, he also insisted that if Indians joined them, “all should be considered equal and all come under the same regulations” (Carey to Fuller, November 16, 1796, in Carter 2000, 137). In fact, after 1804, this statement of Indian equality was one of the confessions recited by every mission station three times annually (George 1991, 123).

Regardless, some, like Krishna Pal, chose to remain in the village from which they came. Others chose to take up residence in the Christian village, near Serampore, which had

been established for that purpose (Chatterjee 2004, 95; cf. Jackson 2008, 176). Either way, Moon explains, “This important stage is marked by uncertainty, confusion, and chaos” (Moon 2013, 46). This was a time of transition.

Third, Carey initiated Indians who had become part of the mission family into intercaste community through communion. One the one hand, he sought to present this reality in the most potent way. Therefore, when Krishna Prasad, a Kulin Brahmin, the most esteemed in India, attended his first communion, he was served the common cup from the hands of Krishna Pal, a Sudra (Nicholls 1993, 121). Indeed, this image would have been seared into the mind of every Hindu in attendance.

On the other hand, he sought to produce disciples who would propagate Indian Christianity. Whereas some previous traditions had given converts a new name, Carey insisted they keep it (Carey to Fuller, August 4, 1801, in Carter 2000, 173). Instead, he gave them a new way to worship as they served Christ with their various gifts. After all, by 1805, he was convinced that only Indian missionaries

could win India for Christ. This made the training up of pastors, teachers, and evangelists one of their highest priorities. This was a time of reincorporation.

5. Proverbs. Carey also discovered a fifth feature of oral learning preference—proverbs. As early as 1795, Carey explained to the BMS, “Partly from local circumstances, and partly from paucity of words, my preaching is very different to what it was in England” (Carey to Society, August 13, 1795, Carter 2000, 84). However, it may be that his poor Bengali vocabulary, during this period, was the very thing that created space for Indian expression. Moon points out why this is important for oral cultures: “Indigenous proverbs capture many of the core values of a culture using terms and metaphors that the people recognize as ‘their own’” (Moon 2009, 262). Two occasions in particular show that Carey understood this.

The earliest evidence comes from one of his Bengali sermons for 200-600 Indians in May 1795. He recorded in his journal, “I told them that their books were like a loaf of bread, in which was a considerable quantity of

He gave them a new way to worship as they served Christ with their various gifts.

good flour, but also a little very malignant poison, which made the whole so poisonous that whoever should eat of it would die" (May 9, 1795, in Carter 2000, 58). The following January, he used a similar imagery in conversation with a group of Hindus. He declared, "Try to make your heart good, you will find it harder work still. See the buffalo, he feeds upon grass. See the tiger, he feeds upon flesh. Go and make the buffalo eat flesh, or the tiger eat grass, you will find either of these easier than to make your evil heart good."

By 1802, Carey could write, "I may say, indeed, that their manners, customs, habits, and sentiment are so obvious to me as if I am myself a native" (Chatterjee 2004, 94). While it is unclear to what degree this understanding influenced his translations or evangelism, a hint may be found in the preface to his *Dialogues Intended to Facilitate the Acquiring of the Bengalee Language*. He wrote that "many allusive expressions, and idiomatic forms of speech, have scarcely any intelligible meaning when translated literally" (Carey 1818, iii). Moreover, he hopes the reader

will "see the reason of these apparent irregularities, and gain a flexibility of expression" (Ibid., iv).

Some of the proverbs Carey identified were:

[M]an is like a clod: which way soever the gods throw him, there he remains truly
 One can stay four or five days nowhere, and have the wind blow on one's body
 Your light did not come on well this morning
 Nothing sticks in the mouth: a man may say anything
 He was all the ability which there was: all others are stupid elephants
 What can I say, there is no path for words

Unfortunately, no record has survived which illustrates how Carey used such expressions. It

He recognized that metaphorical imagery was important for understanding Indians and communicating the gospel to them.

must suffice to say that he was aware of them, thought them valuable, and encouraged others to use them. At the same time, he recognized that metaphorical imagery

was important for understanding Indians and communicating the gospel to them. In some ways, it even came natural for him.

Conclusion

William Carey's translations were only part of a much larger strategy. He did indeed recognize the significance of an oral learning preference and modified his approach to reach oral learners. Nevertheless, his strategy was experimental and his conclusions were tentative. He simply kept what worked and discarded what did not. This is precisely why some have found it difficult to categorize his approach. Still, he did not immediately recognize the preference for oral learning or its importance for translation. It was only after he gained a considerable familiarity with the Indian context that he began to see the insufficiency of an approach which emphasized translation alone.

However, if this is true, we must reconsider our assumptions about him. We can no longer perceive him to be the antisocial scribe obsessed with the production of vernacular translations. To be sure, he devoted much of his time to translation, but he never imagined the translation of the gospel to be disconnected from the propagation of the gospel. Rather,

he expected his translations to bear fruit which could be seen and tasted. Therefore, he did not perceive his labors to be merely "preparatory," as some biographers have supposed. In fact, it made little sense to him to produce translations that did not also lead to salvations. For this reason, his translations were only the beginning of his strategy for the evangelization of India.

He learned how to make his message memorable. He sought to treat Indians as equals, and likewise, partner with Indians as family.

Even so, what was the message that Carey communicated? At a period when most Europeans were preoccupied with extracting India's resources, Carey sought to invest in India's people. He longed to encourage the gifts of Indians, especially where it pertained to India's evangelization. His primary conviction was that God had placed an immeasurable value on the human soul. However, it was not only the salvation of souls in the afterlife that concerned him, but the suffering of souls in this life as well. For this reason, the very heart of Carey's strategy for India was an expectation for God's kingdom.

Still, how did Carey communicate this message? Perhaps, the answer

is simple. First, Carey left his home, his country, and all he had ever known for an unfamiliar place to invest in people he had never met. In short, he was willing to be the catalyst for the message. Second, he learned how to make his message memorable. He sought to treat Indians as equals, and likewise, partner with Indians as family. We must remember, in 19th century India, that message had no parallel in Indian or European culture.

Third, he took seriously the cultural context in which he would communicate this message. He studied Indian culture nearly as much as he studied scripture. He found that story, song, dialogue, ritual, and proverbs were all deeply interwoven with Indian culture, and more specifically oral learning preference.

Nevertheless, Carey did more than communicate the message: he released the message for the propagation of Indian Christianity. He nurtured the development of Indian evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He knew that the evangelization of India would never be possible for missionary recruits from

England. Yet, somehow he came to realize that raising up Indian evangelists under European superintendence was not the answer either. Instead, he seemed to sense that the time for Europeans was coming to an end and that the time for Indians was dawning. He became convinced that releasing Indian evangelists was as important as raising them up for the evangelization of India. Carey also encouraged them to work within their own cultural framework. He understood that a foreign Christianity was no Christianity at all. He believed

Carey also encouraged them to work within their own cultural framework.

the gospel had to be personalized for Indians, and thereafter by Indians. So he modeled Christianity for them with his own life and then invited them to improve on his example. He knew that only Indians held the key to Indian Christianity and he gave his life helping Indians find that key.

Whatever we may think of Carey and his approach, he expected all his labors would eventually lead to the establishment of indigenous Indian Christianity. Likewise, this meant he assumed the gospel would be propagated by oral learners. The significance of this

strategy cannot be missed. After all, this one small detail prevented the transplanting of European Christianity and ensured the maintenance of a strong Indian identity. This was essential if

reaching all of India was the goal. Regardless, Carey's embracing of an oral learning preference for the propagation of the gospel continues to serve as an important example for missionaries today.

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Endnotes

¹Ibid., 219.

²Ibid., 229.





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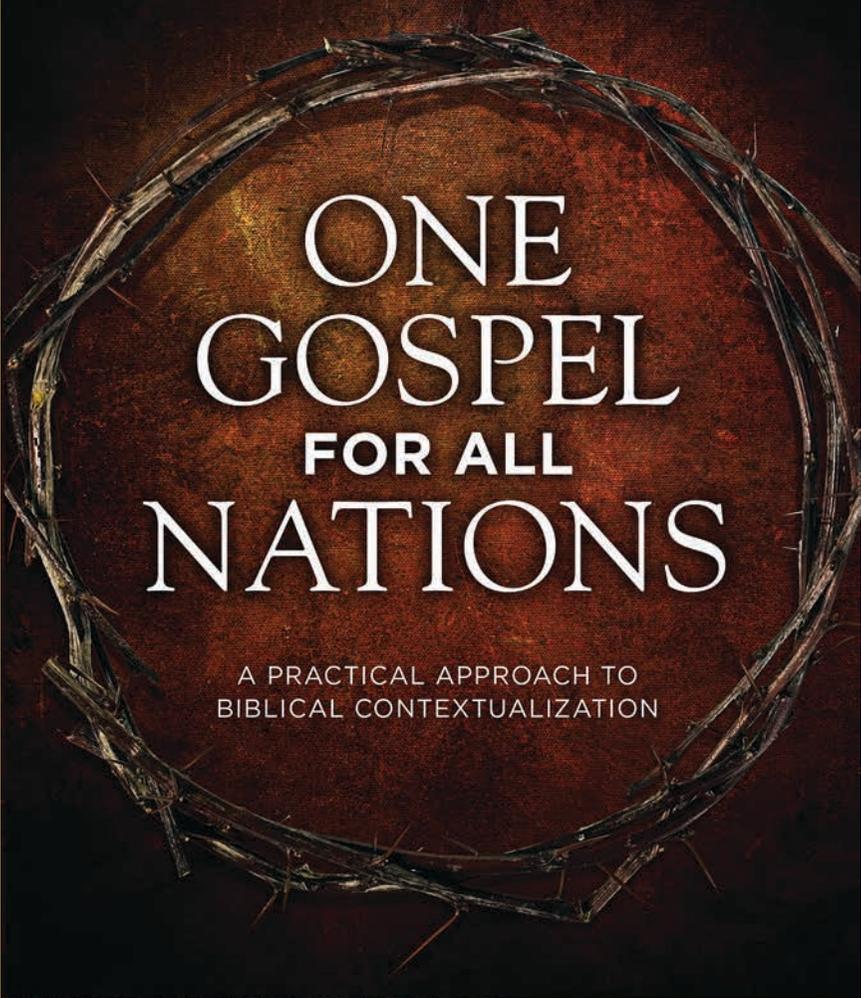


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