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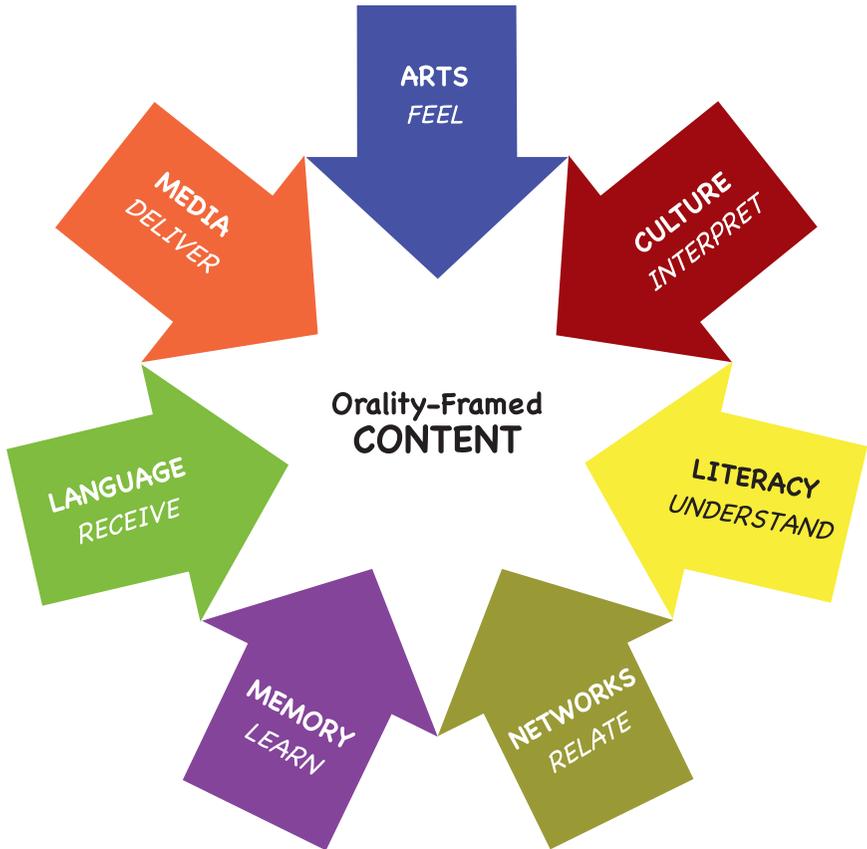
# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

## **Arts & Orality Part 1: Foundations and Applications**

**Piper • Kreider • Hawn • Lim • Oswald • Pierce  
Rowe • Carson • Rayl • Ferguson • Unseth  
Hoogerheide • Krabill • Bowman • Lowther • Atkins**

# 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.*



**ION**

INTERNATIONAL ORALITY NETWORK

# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

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## Cover Photo

A group of women who are part of a choir react with delight as they hear a story told by pastor Elasi, in their mother tongue—Nyanga.

## Additional Photos

All photos not otherwise credited have been contributed by members of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE).

## Word Art

The word art at the beginning of each article was created using Wordle.net with the font *Loved by the King*.

## Articles

All of the articles in this issue—aside from those by authors Atkins, Hoogerheide, and Unseth—have been adapted or directly reprinted with permission from William Carey Library from the volume *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, edited by James R. Krabill, gen. ed., and Frank Fortunato, Robin P. Harris, and Brian Schrag (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013).

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft.’”

Exodus 31:1-5 (ESV)

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!”

Psalms 30:11-12 (ESV)

# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. It is published online semi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Occasionally, print editions will be provisioned. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement is welcomed.

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# Co-Editors' Note

*Samuel E. Chiang and William Coppedge*

*"In the beginning God created..."* Genesis 1:1

*"In the beginning was the Word..."* John 1:1

The International Orality Network and the International Council of Ethnodoxologists are excited to collaborate in both 2016 editions of the Orality Journal. The two networks, through this publication, are exploring the relationship between orality and the arts.

The beginnings of both Genesis and the Gospel of John offer a natural starting point for a consideration of this unique relationship. God Himself is a creative God, creating not from impulse nor for mere utilitarian purposes, but *creatio ex nihilo*: he creates out of the overflow of his creative being. This Creator God is the Triune God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus far from being an individualized activity, divine creation maintains an inherent communal component as each member of the Trinity participates (Genesis 1:1-2; Isaiah 42:5; Proverbs 8:22-31; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-4, 11:6) in bringing creation into existence.

This Triune God creates by communicating though: *"All things came into being through the Word."*<sup>1</sup> Creation and communication are inextricably bound together in the nature of the Triune God. Naturally, every human person, made in the image of a Triune Creator, is inherently creative and communicative. The articles offered in this edition of the Orality Journal provide an array of opportunities to consider such creativity and artistic communication from various cultures around the world.

What needs to not be missed, though, is the Trinitarian component that threads its way through these case studies. Whether discussing henna art or music, these stories describe individual artists and their artistic expressions, yet every one of them creates and communicates within a communal network of relationships. Herein lies a subtle witness to Trinitarian nature of the creative God who made all human persons like himself.

The authors and participants within these case studies are seeking to probe the depths of the creative arts and oral communication as both a means to discovering echoes of the Triune Creator but also as a means to understand specific human cultures. Far from extracting human persons from their cultural context, they believe the Incarnation is a testimony to God's commitment to enter into human culture. Like Jesus, they are not mere observers of culture only. These writers and artists desire people from all cultures to be in communion with their Triune Creator which ultimately makes possible the restoration of human creativity (the arts) and human communication. For when one enters into communion with the Triune God, transformation becomes possible, not only for an individual person but for one's cultural community. As editors, we gladly commend these articles to you in the hope that they may stimulate godly artistic creativity in your current cultural context as well as deeper communion with the Triune Creator.

On the journey together,



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<sup>1</sup>John 1.3.

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# Note from Guest Editors

*Katie Hoogerheide and James R. Krabill*

*Katie Hoogerheide serves as Associate Director of the Center for Excellence in World Arts at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics in Dallas, Texas. Her work and graduate-level studies include experience in the areas of organ performance, ethnoarts, linguistics, and education. She also works as Associate Editor for the Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith ([artsandchristianfaith.org](http://artsandchristianfaith.org)).*

*James R. Krabill served from 1978–1996 as a Mennonite mission worker teaching Bible and church history in oral culture settings among African-initiated churches in West Africa. Currently serving as Senior Executive for Global Ministries with the Mennonite Mission Network, Krabill has authored or edited various works, including *Music in the Life of the African Church* (with Roberta King and others, 2008) and *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (2013).*

**R**esonate. All of us who have a message we want to share with other people want that communication to resonate in their hearts. When the message is the greatest news ever to come to earth, the story of a Savior, the stakes seem particularly high. And so we seek knowledge, pursuing the wisdom of others who have reported some measure of success in their quest for sharing the message across boundaries.

In that quest for shared knowledge, the International Council of Ethnodoxologists has been asked to guest edit this volume of the Orality Journal. We have been tasked with sharing with you just how much impact the arts can have in cross-cultural communication. Their absence impoverishes communication; their distortion disrupts communication; their genuine presence enriches communication. As you read the articles in this edition, you will see over and over again how the arts help messages with brand-new content to be perceived as more familiar, less foreign. The arts form one critical component for making our messages resonate.

The three articles in the FOUNDATIONS section provide a grounding in biblical, historical, and cultural perspectives on engaging the arts. As Piper explains, the inclusion of indigenous artistic expressions in

worship emerges naturally from biblical principles. Looking at the Early Church, Kreider gives us a view of the timelessness of incorporating artistic expressions into worship. In order to introduce us to the range of physical senses that can be involved in worship through the arts, Hawn & Lim draw from various symbols used across cultural boundaries.

The arts have been identified by the International Orality Network as one of at least seven aspects influencing orality-framed content (see “The Seven Disciplines of Orality” graphic on the inside front cover). Although these seven aspects appear as discrete arrows, in reality each of the seven is inextricably woven through the others. None can carry a message independently. All join together to create effective oral communication.

The arts are no exception. This volume highlights the arts, but even a cursory glance through the articles in the APPLICATIONS section shows the great extent to which the arts play an indispensable role in strengthening the other six disciplines in the act of communication. As just a few examples:

- **MEDIA:** Oswald shares how “vivid indigenous arts” in Tibet have brought the story of Jesus to life through film. Authentic arts content makes even the best delivered media resonate more deeply with the local people.
- **LANGUAGE:** Hoogerheide and Unseth address the importance of using language with the nuances of form familiar to an audience. Relevant artistic structures, discourse markers, and storytelling conventions make even the most accurate pronunciation, vocabulary, and word order seem more familiar and less foreign.
- **MEMORY:** Both Unseth and Bowman tap into the arts as ways of internalizing biblical stories and their messages. Familiar artistic expressions provide vehicles for more rapid and satisfying retention of new content.
- **LITERACY:** Unseth mentions the value of written collections of proverbs for understanding how to communicate more naturally within a culture. Only locally-recognized forms and expressions will serve to inform connecting effectively with the oral traditions.
- **NETWORKS:** Pierce, Rowe, Carson, and Rayl (“Sharing Faith”) each illustrate natural relationship building around the arts. Well-loved art

forms draw people to connect with others through their hearts rather than only through their minds or their physical presence.

- **CULTURE:** Krabill and Krabill depict the power of interpreting biblical concepts through the lens of local cultural rituals. Everyday artistic elements speak into local people's lives organically from the rhythms in the place they call home.

In each scenario, we see how arts are part and parcel of communities, inseparable from so many contexts of communication. Our attempts at sharing about Christ in a way that resonates with any group of people will not ring true without the natural colors, gestures, sounds, and communication frameworks familiar to those people. Without them, any incarnation of the gospel remains incomplete, a robotic, lifeless framework, rather than a living creation.

Just as the arts saturate their communication contexts, so the different elements within the realm we call "the arts" also blend together. We often speak of artistic domains such as music, dance, or drama. In reality, any artistic element is nearly always accompanied by several more, blurring our attempts at drawing boundaries between types of artistic expression. Consider the Balinese paintings inspired by another form of visual art, carved masks, and also by traditional dance postures and shadow puppet figures (Rayl, "A Balinese Painter"). Consider the tendency towards multi-arts descriptions such as "dance drama" (Rowe), or the account in which people hearing music spontaneously break into dance (Lowther). We can neither extract the arts from their communicative contexts nor specify one kind of artistic expression as consistently distinct from another.

Terminology changes. Arts research around the world continues to uncover new ways of talking about arts within different societies. The ancient Greeks used to indicate music, dance, lyrics, and poetry all with the one word *mousikē*.<sup>1</sup> English speakers might refer to both lyrics and melody by the term "song" but may or may not think of lyrics when they speak about "music." The point is not to separate and label artistic expressions, but rather to become aware of those elements of artistic expression that make communication contexts authentic for the people in a given culture.

That's why we chose a few artistic keywords from each APPLICATION article for listing in the Table of Contents—as you scan the list, you'll get just a taste of the rich array of artistic combinations within the cultures of the world. For example, through her description of trauma healing, Atkins introduces us to carving, wood burning, hat weaving, wall decorations, songs, laments, and dances. Likewise, Ferguson's journey with storytelling taps into drama, dance, song, painting, henna, and music videos. As you read the articles, you'll discover just how much these different artistic elements interact with each other. The Wordles at the top of each article also provide a sense of how all artistic expressions are connected through the commonality of their communicative effect, although some rise to the surface more in certain contexts compared to others.

It is our hope and prayer that the articles found in these pages will encourage you to new levels of finding and appreciating the power of artistic expression in your own communication contexts. We think you'll start noticing artistic elements in places you might not have thought to look before—in the materials, sounds, sights, and body movements around you. And, as with all the other disciplines of orality, our best results will come from encouraging the people of the culture to share the good news with others around them. They embody communication in a way no outsider ever can.

### ICE and ION Collaborate

It has been a special privilege as guest editors of this journal and as representatives of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE) to partner with ION in this important collaborative effort. ICE began in 2003 as a small group of people working in cross-cultural arts ministries with a shared vision “to see Christ-followers from every culture express their faith through the own heart music and other arts.”<sup>2</sup> In its first decade the ICE network grew to over three hundred associates, some of whom launched their own national and regional initiatives in Latin America, the Philippines, and the Korean diaspora.

Several charter members of ICE (Tom Ferguson, Frank Fortunato, Robin Harris, Roberta King, Paul Neeley, Brian Schrag, and others) were involved in the orality movement in its early years, giving papers at ION gatherings on the ways in which music and arts connected to storying and orality. In 2007, Avery Willis approached ICE leaders to launch a Music and Arts Task Force in ION, and the foundational meetings that took place were energized by the vision of promoting a global movement for the use of all culturally-appropriate arts in making disciples of oral learners.

In addition, the Task Force was committed to the idea that storytelling, singing, dancing, dramatizing, drawing, sculpting, and other local arts are fundamentally interrelated means of telling God’s story. They affirmed that music and arts support other strategies to evangelize, disciple, and empower oral people, but that they can also stand on their own in communicating God’s story. Robin Harris served as the first Task Force coordinator, eventually passing the baton to Frank Fortunato, who served for several years and was succeeded by Erica Logan.

The arts presence grew steadily at ION with Task Force participants teaching and learning about ethnodoxology approaches, and bringing multicultural worship to ION gatherings. Collaboration between the ethnodoxology movement and its orality counterpart also grew, resulting in regular participation in one another’s events, publications,<sup>3</sup> and other initiatives. Arts was recognized within ION as one of the “Seven Disciplines within Orality”<sup>4</sup> and storytelling, once the primary

concern of the orality movement, came to be considered as only one of many effective forms of communicative art forms to be employed in the complex task of discipling oral learners.

The ION and ICE networks thus have much in common in our desire to see God's kingdom grow and mature through every form and means of communication God has graciously put at our disposal. May the collaboration illustrated in this issue of the *Orality Journal* be a sign pointing to even more such efforts between us in the days and years to come!

With special thanks to Samuel Chiang, who first invited us to consider this project, and to Robin Harris, President of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists, who offered invaluable counsel and logistical support as the project took shape and moved toward completion.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Mike Cartwright's article on "Greek Music" in the *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, online at [www.ancient.eu/Greek\\_Music/](http://www.ancient.eu/Greek_Music/) (accessed November 6, 2015).

<sup>2</sup>From the ICE website at [www.worldofworship.org](http://www.worldofworship.org).

<sup>3</sup>There were several chapters which specifically focused on Bible-storying methods and case studies in ICE's large volume edited by James R. Krabill, Frank Fortunato, Robin P. Harris, and Brian Schrag—*Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (William Carey Library, 2013), [www.ethnodoxologyhandbook.com](http://www.ethnodoxologyhandbook.com).

<sup>4</sup>Samuel E. Chiang, "Learning from my own mistakes," *Mission Frontiers* 36 (2014):3-4.

# The Biblical Basis for Indigenous Arts in Worship<sup>1</sup>

*John Piper*

*John Piper is Founder and Teacher of [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org), and Chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He served over thirty years as senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. His books include *Desiring God* (Colorado Spring: Multnomah, revised and expanded 2011); *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006); *God Is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004); and *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003).*

## The Centrality of Worship

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the *goal* and *fuel* of missions:

It is the *goal* of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. "The LORD reigns; let the earth *rejoice*; let the many coastlands *be glad!*" (Ps 97:1 ESV, emphasis added). "Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise

thee! O Let the nations *be glad and sing for joy!*" (Ps 67:3-4 KJV Cambridge ed.; emphasis added).

But worship is also the *fuel* of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. We will never call out, "Let the nations *be glad!*" if we cannot say from the heart, "I rejoice in the Lord . . . I will be glad and exult in thee, I will sing praise to thy name, O Most High" (Ps 104:34 ESV; 9:2 KJV Cambridge ed.). Missions begins and ends in worship.

I am not pleading for the diminishing of missions but for a magnifying of God. Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centered on the exaltation of

the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to “declare his glory among the nations” (Ps 96:3). But when the flame of worship burns with the heat of God’s true worth, then the light of missions will shine to the most remote peoples on earth. Even outsiders feel the disparity between the boldness of our claims upon the nations and the blandness of our engagement with God.

The deepest reason why our passion for God should fuel missions is that God’s passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God’s delight in being God. And the deepest reason why worship is the goal in missions is that worship is God’s goal. We are confirmed in this goal by the biblical record of God’s relentless pursuit of praise among the nations. “Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!” (Ps 117:1 ESV). If it is God’s goal it must be our goal.

Probably no text in the Bible reveals the passion of God for his own glory more clearly and bluntly than Isaiah 48:9–11 where God says:

*For my name’s sake* I defer my anger, *for the sake of my praise* I restrain it for

you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. *For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.* (ESV, emphasis added)

I have found that for many people these words come like six hammer blows to a human-centered way of looking at the world:

For *my name’s sake!*  
 For the sake of *my* praise!  
 For *my own sake!*  
 For *my own sake!*  
 How should *my* name be profaned?  
*My* glory I will not give to another!

### **The Modality of Worship**

Having said this, we should note the startling fact that the New Testament contains remarkably little explicit teaching about corporate worship—what we call worship services. Not that there were no corporate gatherings for worship. First Corinthians 14:23 speaks of “the whole church” assembling together. Acts 2:46 speaks of the early church “attending the temple together



and breaking bread in their homes” (ESV). And Hebrews 10:25 speaks of “not neglecting to meet together” (ESV). But this is not much, and the remarkable thing is that even when the gatherings are in view, the apostles do not speak of them explicitly as worship.

Let me illustrate this so we can feel its full force. In the Old Testament, the most common word for worship is the Hebrew word *hishtahavah* (or a related form of that word). Its basic meaning is “bow down,” with the sense of reverence, respect, and honor. It occurs 171 times. In the Greek Old Testament, 164 of those instances of this Hebrew word are translated by the Greek *proskyneom*. In the Greek New Testament, this is the main word for worship.

But when we look at its use, we notice something astonishing.<sup>2</sup> It is common in the Gospels (twenty-six times)—people would often bow down worshipfully before Jesus. And it is common in the book of Revelation (twenty-one times) because the angels and elders in heaven often bow down before God. But in the Epistles of Paul, it occurs only once, namely, in 1 Corinthians 14:25, where the unbeliever falls down at the power of prophecy and confesses that God is in the assembly. And the word doesn’t occur at all in the letters of Peter, James, or John.

This is remarkable. The main word for worship in the Old Testament is virtually absent from the letters of the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Why is this?

Why are the very Epistles that were written to help the church be what it ought to be in this age almost totally devoid of this word and of explicit teaching on the specifics of corporate worship?

**The Locality of Worship**  
**Jesus becomes the new “place” of worship.** I think the reason is found in the way Jesus treated worship in his life and teaching. His main statement is found in John 4:20–24. But before we look at this text, consider a few other things he said. For example, his attitude toward the temple, the main place of Jewish worship, was not at all what the Jewish leaders thought it should be.

When he wove a whip and drove out the moneychangers, he said he did so not for the sake of proper sacrifices but for the sake of prayer—in fact, prayer for *all the nations*. “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mark 11:17 ESV). In other words, he focused attention away from the outward acts of Jewish sacrifices to the personal act of communion with God for all peoples.

Then he said two other things about the temple that pointed to a radically altered view of worship.

He said, “Something greater than the temple is here,” referring to himself (Matt 12:6 ESV), and “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19 ESV). This attitude toward the temple got not only him killed (Mark 14:58; 15:29) but also Stephen (Acts 6:14). That’s how important it was.

Jesus identified himself as the true temple. “Something greater than the temple is here.” In himself he would fulfill everything the temple stood for, especially the “place” where believers meet God. He diverted attention away from worship as a localized activity with outward forms and pointed toward a personal, spiritual experience with himself at the center. Worship does not have to have a building, a priesthood, and a sacrificial system. It has to have the risen Jesus.

**Jesus loosens worship from place and form.** What Jesus did to worship in the way he related to the temple is made explicit in John 4:20–24. Here he uses the word *proskyneom*—the dominant Old Testament word for worship—and shows that it is laden with outward and localized meaning. Then he transforms it into a concept that is mainly inward rather than outward and mainly pervasive rather than localized.

The woman at the well said, “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” [The word for “worship” used here is the common Old Testament word *proskyneom*. Note the localized emphasis in her mind.] Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (John 4:20-21 ESV).

Here Jesus loosens worship from its outward and localized connotations. Place is not the issue: “neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” He goes on: “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24 ESV).

Here is the key sentence: True worship, which was anticipated for the age to come, has arrived: “The hour *is coming* [in the age to come] and *is now* here [in me!].” What marks this true future worship, which has broken into the present from the glorious age to come, is that it is not bound by

localized place or outward form. Instead of being on this mountain or in Jerusalem, it is “in spirit and truth.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus strips *proskyneom* of its last vestiges of localized and outward connotations.<sup>5</sup> It will not be wrong for worship to be in a place or to use outward forms, but he makes explicit and central that this is *not* what makes worship worship. What makes worship worship is what happens “in spirit and truth”—with or without a place and with or without outward forms.

This is likely the best explanation as to why *proskyneom*—the central Old Testament word for worship—was virtually boycotted by Peter, James, John, and Paul in the letters they wrote to the churches<sup>6</sup>:

- The word did not make clear enough the inward, spiritual nature of true worship.
- The word carried significant connotations of place and form.
- The word was associated with bodily bowing down and with the actual presence of a visible manifestation to bow down before.

In the Gospels, Jesus was present in *visible* form to fall before, so the word *proskyneom* is used

with some frequency. In the book of Revelation, the act of bowing down usually happens before God's manifestation in heaven or before false gods on the earth. Therefore the word *proskyneom* is widely used in Revelation as well.

But in the Epistles something very different is happening. Jesus is not present in visible glory to fall before. As a result, the tendency of the early church was to deal with worship as primarily inward and spiritual rather than outward and bodily, and primarily pervasive rather than localized.

### The Totality of Worship

The next most frequent word for worship after *proskuneo* in the Old Testament is the word *latreuo* (over ninety times, almost always translating 'abad). This is usually rendered "serve," as in "You shall not worship their gods nor serve them" (Ex 23:24 NASB).

When Paul uses it for Christian worship he goes out of his way to make sure that we know he means not a localized or outward form for worship practice, but a nonlocalized, spiritual experience. In fact, he takes it so far as to treat virtually all of life as worship when lived in the right spirit.

- "I serve (*or worship*) [God] in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel" (Rom 1:9 NASB; parenthesis added).
- True Christians "*worship* God in the Spirit of God . . . and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3 NASB, emphasis added).
- "Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of *worship*" (Rom 12:1 NASB, emphasis added).

The praise and thanks of the lips is called a sacrifice to God (Heb 13:15). But so are good works in everyday life (Heb 13:16). Paul refers to his own ministry as a "priestly duties [of worship]" and he calls the converts themselves an "offering acceptable [in worship]" to God (Rom 15:16 NIV 1984; cf. Phil 2:17). The money that the churches sent Paul was described by him as "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God [in worship]" (Phil 4:18 NASB). And Paul's own death for Christ he calls a "drink offering [to God]" (2 Tim 4:6).

The same thrust is furthermore seen in the imagery of the people of God—the body of Christ—as the New Testament "temple" where spiritual sacrifices are offered (1 Pet 2:5 NLT), where

God dwells by his Spirit (Eph 2:21, 22) and where all the people are seen as the holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:5, 9). Second Corinthians 6:16 shows that the new covenant hope of God's presence is being fulfilled even now in the church as a people, not in any particular service: "We are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people'" (NASB).

Worship, thus, in the New Testament is significantly deinstitutionalized, delocalized, and deexternalized. The whole thrust is gradually taken off of ceremony and seasons and places and forms and is shifted to what is happening in the heart—not just on Sunday, but every day and all the time in all of life.

### **The Radicality of Worship**

Worship in the New Testament, in short, moves toward something radically simple and inward, with manifold external expressions in life and liturgy. One of the reasons for this stunning indifference to outward form is a vision for missions that is usable across thousands of cultures and therefore not to be laden with externals.

All the focus of this worship is on the reality of the glory of Christ, not the shadow and copy of religious objects and forms. There is no authorization in the New Testament for worship buildings, or worship dress, or worship times, or worship music, or worship liturgy, or worship size, or thirty-five-minute sermons, or Advent poems, or choirs, or instruments, or candles. In fact, the act of getting together as Christians in the New Testament to sing or pray or hear the word of God is never even called worship. Do we distort the biblical meaning of "worship" by using the term almost entirely for an event for which the New Testament *never* does?

All of this makes us very *free* and, perhaps, very *frightened*—free to find place and time and dress and size and music and elements and objects that help us orient radically toward the supremacy of God in Christ. And *frightened* because almost every worship tradition we have is culturally shaped rather than biblically commanded. The command is a radical connection of love and trust and obedience to Jesus Christ in all of life.

There is a reason for this radical spirituality of worship in the New Testament. And the reason

is this: the New Testament is a missionary document! The message found here is meant to be carried to every people on earth and incarnated in every culture in the world. And that is why our High Priest came and ended tabernacle and sacrifices and feasts and vestments and dietary laws and circumcision and priesthood.

The Old Testament was mainly a “come-and-see” religion. The New Testament is primarily a “go-and-tell” religion. And to make that possible, Jesus has not abolished worship, but made it the kind of radically spiritual engagement with God that can and must happen in every culture on the earth. Worship is not trivialized in the New Testament, but intensified, deepened, and made the radical fuel and goal of all missions.

The frightening freedom of worship in the New Testament is a *missionary* mandate. We must not lock this gospel treasure in any cultural straitjacket. Rather let us find the place, the time, the dress, the forms, and the music that kindle and carry a passion for the supremacy of God in all things. And may our communion with the living God be so real and the Spirit of God so powerfully

present that the heart of what we do becomes the joy of all the peoples we are called to reach.

### Conclusion

The New Testament is not a manual for worship services. Rather, it is a vision for missions in thousands of diverse people groups around the world. In such groups, outward forms of worship will vary drastically, but the inner reality of treasuring Christ in spirit and truth is common ground.

I believe that God intends to leave the matter of form and style and content to the judgment of our spiritual wisdom—not to our whim or our tradition, but to prayerful, thoughtful, culturally alert, self-critical, Bible-saturated, God-centered, Christ-exalting reflection driven by a passion to be filled with all the fullness of God. I assume this will be an ongoing process, not a one-time effort.

God is pursuing with omnipotent passion a worldwide purpose of gathering joyful worshipers for himself from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He has an inexhaustible enthusiasm for the supremacy of his name among the nations. Let us bring then our affections into

line with God's and, for the sake of his name, let us renounce the quest for worldly comforts and join his global purpose.

The Great Commission is first to delight yourself in the Lord

(Ps 37:4). And then to declare, "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy" (Ps 67:4 ESV). In this way God will be glorified from beginning to end, and worship will empower the mission efforts of the church until the coming of the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter was compiled by James R. Krabill, the general editor of the *Worship and Mission for the Global Church* handbook, with permission of the author, from two sermons, one chapter, and one article by John Piper. The four sources are as follows: John Piper, "The Supremacy of God in Missions through Worship," *Mission Frontiers*, July–August 1996, [www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-supremacy-of-god-in-missions-through-worship](http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-supremacy-of-god-in-missions-through-worship); John Piper, "The Inner Simplicity and Outer Freedom of Worldwide Worship," in *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 239–54; John Piper, "Our High Priest Is the Son of God Perfect Forever" (sermon, December 8, 1996), Desiring God Foundation, [www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/our-high-priest-is-the-son-of-god-perfect-forever](http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/our-high-priest-is-the-son-of-god-perfect-forever); and John Piper, "Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning, Part 1" (seminar for the Bethlehem Institute, September 12, 2008), Desiring God Foundation, [www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/seminars/gravity-and-gladness-on-sunday-morning-part-1#InwardExperience](http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/seminars/gravity-and-gladness-on-sunday-morning-part-1#InwardExperience).

<sup>2</sup>Heinrich Greeven, in Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 765, observes the “astonishing fact” that while *proskyneom* is abundant in the Gospels (twenty-six times) and Acts (four times) and Revelation (twenty-one times), it is almost completely absent in the epistles (Heb. 1:6 and 11:21 are Old Testament quotations). Apart from Acts 24:11, where *proskynein* is a technical term for worship in the temple, the only instance of *proskynemesis* in the primitive Christian community is in 1 Corinthians 14:25, where there appears to be an actual falling down. Elsewhere there is reference to kneeling in prayer (Acts 9:40; 20:36) and lifting the hands (1 Tim. 2:8), but the word *proskynein* is not used. Greeven concludes: “This is, however, a further proof of the concreteness of the term. *Proskynemesis* demands visible majesty before which the worshiper bows. The Son of God was visible to all on earth (the Gospels) and the exalted Lord will again be visible to His own when faith gives way to sight (Revelation).”

<sup>3</sup>See the note above for the few apparent exceptions in the Book of Hebrews.

<sup>4</sup>In line with what we saw in note 2, Heinrich Greeven remarks that “if instead of naming a place to which the pilgrims should go to worship, Jesus says that the true place of worship is in the spirit and in truth: this is an oxymoron. Undiluted *proskynein*, the act of worship which is concrete in place and gesture, is lifted up to a new dimension: ‘spirit and truth.’” Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, 764.

<sup>5</sup>I am aware that Jesus may not have spoken Greek with this woman at the well and so may not have actually used the word *proskyneom*. But I take it that John’s rendering of Jesus’ intention is accurate and that John’s use of *proskyneom* faithfully captures what Jesus wanted to communicate about the meaning of worship carried by that word.

<sup>6</sup>Another important word for worship, *sebomai*, is used twice in the Gospels (“In vain do they worship me” [Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7 ESV; emphasis added]) and eight times in Acts, always for God-fearing Gentiles except once for pagan worship (Acts 19:27). The absence of this word in the Epistles is again remarkable. It is as if the apostles, in their letters, avoided words that were current for synagogue worship, both *proskyneom* and *sebomai*.



## Artistic Expression in Early Christianity

*Eleanor Kreider*

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In the early centuries, Christians inculcated their faith by using symbols which deeply affected common life and worship. The following examples of historical, symbolic forms reach across cultures and enrich the transmission of the gospel. These examples pose questions for contemporary Christians seeking deep symbolic expressions in worship.

### Catacomb Art

Around the beginning of the third century, Christian communities began to produce and use visual art forms. Why so late? Injunctions against idolatry, resistance to the culture around them, and insistence on an invisible God may have been reasons. We cannot know for sure. As we see in the Roman catacombs of the third century, Christians began borrowing and adapting a variety of contemporary symbols. Their theological reflection in written texts correlates with a visual language of sacred images. Visual art may have been illustrative or didactic, but it also could be richly exegetical and liturgical.

In catacomb paintings and as bas-relief sculpture on *sarcophagi* (tombs), heroes and stories of the Bible appear clad in the iconography of Greco-Roman culture. Jesus, as healer and wonder worker, sometimes carries a “magic” wand. Depicted as a clean-shaven youth, Jesus could as easily be taken for an adolescent Orpheus, who in Greek mythology charmed all living beings with his music and challenged the power of the underworld. Apostles sculpted as full-bearded men look remarkably like heroic Roman statues. Favorite Bible stories (Jonah, the fiery furnace, Lazarus) and depictions of Christ or saints are frequent subjects. Birds and flowers, trees and rivers evoked more than appreciation for nature—they could also be symbols of paradise, of life after death. It is often difficult to differentiate early Christian symbols from pagan prototypes. In the century after the emperor Constantine, when it became safe and advantageous to be a Christian, Christian symbolism became more explicit.

### Signet Rings

In Roman times, men of substance wore signet rings, which they used to authenticate documents or to label goods for trade. In the late second century, Clement of Alexandria instructed Christian men to wear the signet ring at the base of the little finger. On no account could the ring's image be a lover, for "[we are a] chaste people," nor a sword or bow, "for we cultivate peace," nor a drinking cup, "for we practice temperance." The image on the ring could be of a dove, a fish, a ship in full sail, or an anchor, which could discretely evoke the cross.<sup>1</sup> In this



way, Christians used distinctive and potent symbols to reflect their faith, values, and life practices.

### Peace Greeting

In the mid-second century, Justin Martyr mentioned the peace greeting as a part of the eucharistic liturgy of the church in Rome. This gesture continued throughout early Christianity in weekly eucharistic services and also at the conclusion of believers' morning prayer following catechetical sessions. The kiss of peace is one of the oldest Christian liturgical practices, noted in several New Testament epistles as the holy kiss, or the kiss of

peace (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). Kissing in public in Greco-Roman culture was reserved for relatives or social equals. The Christian liturgical kiss of peace was countercultural, even scandalous. Enemies of the Christians gossiped and slandered them because Christians exchanged the greeting across social and economic lines in their weekly eucharistic services, as they sought to be reconciled with each other following the teachings of Matthew 5:23-24.

At the appropriate time in the eucharistic service, a deacon announced the peace greeting, often asking if any member of the assembly had a grievance against another. This was the time to greet and be reconciled with the estranged person.

Later, during the Christian centuries in Europe, this practice faded, becoming infrequent and in many places confined to the clergy. Since the twentieth century when the peace greeting was reintroduced into Christian liturgies, the physical gesture has varied according to culture—a bow, a hands gesture (*namaste*), an embrace, a kiss, a handshake.

### **Eucharist as a Form of Roman Banquet**

In 1 Corinthians 11–14, the Apostle Paul addresses the Christian community in Corinth about its worship practices. The church had adopted the familiar cultural form of Greco-Roman banquet (meal plus *symposium*—the after-dinner conversation) for their Lord’s Supper. These chapters address a single worship event in a Corinthian house church. Chapter 11 relates to the meal. Chapter 14 deals with the *symposium* (conversation). Between these two chapters, chapter 12 presents Paul’s vision for the

multi-gifted church, and chapter 13 is a paean of praise to the virtue of love and a call to “table manners” of courtesy, deference, and honor. Paul, as a missionary theologian, accepted the inculturation of the church’s worship within the forms of the banquet.

However, as a pastoral theologian, Paul pointed to distortions in the church’s practice of the meal and advised the church on how they should rectify these abuses and align their worship with the distinctive values of their Christian faith. For the meal, Paul admonishes the richer believers to stop showing contempt to the poorer believers and to share food equitably (“discerning the body”; 1 Cor. 11:29). For the *symposium* (conversation), Paul rebukes the church’s chaotic use of spiritual gifts, which prevented outsiders from participating in worship and which kept Christian worship from expressing the character of the God of peace (14:33). “Each” and “all” were to contribute according to the gifts of the Spirit (14:26, 31). Multi-voiced worship at table was what Paul considered to be “decently and in order” (14:40). This inculturated form of liturgy included countercultural gestures and practices which created social bonding and radical equalization.

### Architectural Space

New Testament churches were domestic gatherings. The host of the home often served as leader of the church. Worship on this domestic scale continued for several centuries, although in some instances the apartments or houses could be fairly large. In the fourth century, by imperial favor, churches in some cities were able to build large buildings to house growing congregations. But house churches continued into the fifth century, when in many places they were displaced by purpose-built church buildings. This new scale of worship necessitated an “amplification”—rhetorical sermons, glorious processions, and dramatic liturgy. Now churches were filled with

standing crowds and kept in order by patrolling deacons. Imagine the change in how individuals experienced worship! No longer face to face in someone’s home and courtyard, worshipers now stood in a grand public space, craning to see and straining to hear what was going on.

### Questions Then and Now

All of these symbols and gestures we have considered in early Christianity—in art, jewelry, meal practices, space—raise questions for today. *How can followers of Christ engage practices and create artifacts through which Christian truths become comprehensible yet challenge aspects of wider culture in the name of the gospel?*

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<sup>1</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *The Paedagogus*, *The Instructor*, book III, chapter 11, “A Compendious View of the Christian Life,” [www.newadvent.org/fathers/02093.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02093.htm).



## Cross-cultural Communication through Symbol

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Second only to the translation of scripture is the spread of the gospel through various symbols. Symbols provide modes of communication, establish identity, and engage the affective dimensions of personality. Many symbols communicate through nonverbal means. The imprecision of symbolic forms of communication allows for easier transmission across cultures and helps to establish Christian identity, especially in societies where Christianity exists in the midst of religious pluralism.

Historical symbols such as the cross may be adapted to any cultural context and still maintain their central shape and

meaning. Musical forms and styles can also bridge cultures, often being creatively adapted in new environments. Symbols are more complex than signs. Signs are arbitrary indicators that point to some aspect of reality (e.g., a green light indicates that a car may go). A symbol embodies in some way the reality to which it points, and participates in its meaning. The Lord's Supper, for example, mirrors to some degree historical meals that Christ had with his followers and ritualizes the sayings of Christ as "the bread of life" and "the true vine." Through the symbolism of Communion we may participate in the reality of Christ's life and ministry on earth and the promise of eternal life in heaven.

The following are a sampling of historical and current symbolic forms that reach across cultures and enrich the transmission of the gospel.

### Visual Symbols

**The cross.** The cross, though not exclusively Christian, is central to followers of Christ. The origins of the cross as a symbol are difficult to ascertain. However, from the Latin *crux*, the cross referred historically to an instrument of death by crucifixion during the Roman rule at the time of the life of Christ. Several meanings have been attributed to the crossbeams of the Christian cross, including the four quadrants of the earth and the intersection between heaven (vertical beam) and earth (horizontal beam).

Numerous Christian traditions and cultures throughout history have designed variations on the simple crossbeams used for Christ's crucifixion. Thus, one can distinguish the symbol used by Orthodox, Coptic, Celtic, and many other Christian groups throughout history. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the crucifix bears the body of the crucified

Christ. Some Protestant traditions, such as the Reformed Church, have avoided any visual symbols in worship. Today, however, the cross as symbol appears in many worship spaces.



The cross functions as a part of Christian worship in several ways. In the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions a crucifer bears the cross on a pole and leads processions into the worship space. Both Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, as well as some Anglicans and Lutherans, observe special feast days related to the cross. These include the Feast of Corpus Christi on the Thursday

after Trinity Sunday, the Feast of the Glorious Cross celebrated in some form by Roman Catholics and Anglicans on September 14, and the Veneration of the Cross observed on Good Friday by the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and some Anglican churches.

The cross has also served as an object of personal devotion and adornment throughout Christian history. It has been, for example, attached to rosary beads, worn by men and women on a necklace, or embedded in a piece of jewelry. As adornment, it is used by Christians and non-Christians alike and may serve for some the role of an amulet.

**Iconography.** The use of icons has often been associated with the Eastern Orthodox Church. However, this sacred art form is broader and may originate in the first centuries after Christ's resurrection. Some scholars have indicated that the third-century Christian paintings found in the baptistery room of the house church in Dura-Europas, Syria, depicted biblical imageries and could have been the forerunner or catalyst to this sacred visual art form.

Suffice it to say that icons are not considered works of art, but rather artistic narrative about the Kingdom

of God. They serve as avenues for anamnesis—the actualization or active remembering of past saving acts of God—for those who choose to use them. Thus, icons are venerated—shown great honor and respect—in stylized ways such as by being carried high in a procession or by physical acts of respect like bowing. They are not, however, worshiped. Unfortunately, some Christians have not understood this representational sacred art form and its worth in deepening Christian spirituality.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, Christians clashed violently over the use of icons (the “iconoclastic controversies”), at the end of which the Orthodox tradition affirmed the centrality of icons in their worship.

Today, the use of icons is experiencing a revival. While the Orthodox and Coptic churches continue to lead in the use of icons as a part of liturgy, the Taizé Community in France also uses them in their worship space. They find that icons facilitate prayer in an ecumenical setting where too many words could encourage divisions. Likewise, congregations associated with the Emerging Church movement have also wholeheartedly embraced

this liturgical practice. Interest in icons as a liturgical expression is also growing among mainline denominations as they seek a holistic approach in worship.

**Icthus, the fish.** The fish (ictus) symbol has long been a significant expression of Christian identity. Originating in the Greek word ἰχθῦς (fish), its individual letters serve as an acrostic for a Greek phrase that is generally translated as “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.”

This particular symbol was especially important to the Early Church, as members faced persecution from Roman authorities for their faith in Christ. It was used as a code for believers to recognize each other. Equally important is the fact that this symbol resonates strongly with the scriptural theme of fishing in relation to God’s plan for people’s salvation, as exemplified in verses such as, “And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people’” (Mark 1:17).

The fish symbol is typically used to mark catacombs, caves, or any places that denote the presence of Christians. This marking is said to have originated from Alexandria, Egypt, in the first or second century and to have subsequently spread to

Europe. However, it is important to note that Christianity is not the only faith tradition that has used this symbol. Other faith traditions such as Egyptian mystery cults, Buddhism, and Hinduism have also done it. However, Christianity has been deliberate in fully developing the ictus as a distinctive symbolic faith expression.

**Vestments.** No special clothing set clergy apart from lay Christians before the fourth century. From that time onward vestments became associated with Christian ritual and have served several functions in the subsequent history of Christian worship.

Vestments often indicate the role that a lay member or clergy holds in the church. For example, in various parts of Africa, one may distinguish between Anglican, Methodist, or Presbyterian women by the uniform clothing that is distinct to each denomination. Various African initiated churches may be distinguished by their clothing. Choirs often wear special vestments, including various colors and styles of robes, depending on local and denominational tradition. Ministers or others who officiate often wear vestments to emphasize their vocational role and disguise or mute their individual identity.

In some Protestant traditions, especially Presbyterians and some Methodists and Baptists, academic gowns, usually black, are worn as a vestment that indicates the authority of the minister to preside.

While primarily associated with worship leadership, some vestments may be worn in the broader community, especially the ministerial collar worn by Roman Catholic and Anglican priests, Lutheran pastors, and ministers in some other Protestant groups. This collar is a witness to their vocation in the broader community, especially in hospitals or at civic events. Members of Roman Catholic monastic orders often wear their robes and habits in public as a sign of their special commitment to Christ and the Church. Rather than a symbol of distinction, the simple cassock is a sign of humility and shedding of as much individuality as possible, since those committed to monastic life are servants of the church.

In other traditions, especially in the West, the differences between clergy and laity are blurred, and no specific ecclesial vestments are worn. In these cases, a business suit or more informal apparel is normative. The context distinguishes the leader, rather than any specific liturgical

garb. Some worship teams wear uniform clothing and others choose clothing that might be worn by a secular band or that is similar to what is worn by the worshipers who attend. Although not historically thought of as vestments, intentional choices in clothing are made that reflect the witness, identity, and cultural context of those leading or presiding in worship.

### Aural Symbols

**Congregational song.** Singing is for Christians a biblical mandate. Psalm 96:1, 98:1, 104:33, and 149:1 are but a few passages that link singing with praising God's name. Furthermore, the biblical witness is replete with canticles—songs beyond the Book of Psalms—that were sung by men and women within the context of specific narratives. Representative Old Testament examples include the songs of Moses (Exod. 15:1–19) and Miriam (Exod. 15:20,21), the song of Moses (Deut. 32:1–43), the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1–10), the song of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:1–19), the song of Isaiah (Isa. 26:9–20), the song of Jonah (Jonah 2:2–9), and the song of the Three Holy Children (Dan. 3:57–88).

The primary canticles in the New Testament are found in Luke 1 and 2: the song of *Zacharias*, or

*Benedictus* (1:68–79); the song of Mary, or *Magnificat* (1:46–55); the song of the angels, *Gloria in excelsis* (2:14); and the song of Simeon, *Nunc dimittis* (2:29–32). In addition, the New Testament includes creedal hymns, the most famous of which is the *Kenosis* (self-emptying) hymn in Philippians 2:5–11. Finally, there are the great hymns of praise in Revelation (e.g., 5:12–13; 11:17–18; 15:3–4; and 19:1–8).

Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 encourage variety in song—“psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”—though scholars do not agree on the exact meaning of these terms. Acts 16:25 records an example of songs being a witness to the Lord when the prisoners Paul and Silas sang while in jail.

Although little is known about music in the worship of Christians in the first three centuries, some hymn texts have survived. What we do know is that music in worship meant singing—human voices. The purpose of this singing within the congregational setting is fivefold:

- It is a point of identity for Christians throughout the ages. While there have been times when the people’s voice was silent in worship, generally

congregational song has been a primary element in Christian worship across the years.

- Congregational singing has been one of the ways that the Church has connected with its heritage. The witness of those who have gone before is contained in the great hymns of the Church.
- Congregational singing bears theological insights; it articulates the way Christians in various traditions express their theology.
- Congregational singing promotes unity of spirit among those gathered for worship. Unity may be experienced not only among those physically gathered for worship, but also with the “faithful of every time and place”—those Christians who have gone before and who are scattered throughout the world.
- Congregational singing bears witness to those in the congregation who need the message of the song.

For many Protestant Christians who have either avoided or never explored visual symbols in worship, congregational singing bears an iconic quality. Many hymns indicate that the hosts of heaven begin the song and the earth responds with its own song. The

idea of a cosmic song that is sung simultaneously in heaven and on earth represents the iconic quality of congregational singing.

**Sacred music.** Sacred music may be defined broadly as music with holy or religious themes. As such, this music extends beyond the church to the concert hall or other public venues and beyond the Christian context to any religious or cultic context where it is used for religious purposes.

In most Christian traditions sacred music generally adorns worship in some way. This sacred music, perhaps more appropriately called “church music,” is most often vocal, including solo, choral, and congregational singing, but also includes instruments ranging from orchestra and organ to piano, guitar, electronic synthesizers, percussion, and various indigenous instruments, pitched and non-pitched, throughout the world. Related art forms such as dance often fall under the purview of the music director in local congregations.

Music is one of the primary forms of contextualization of Christian worship. Various denominations, ethnic traditions, and generational groups use music to establish their identity and promote the

Christian message that represents their theological tenets and ecclesiological understandings. In Western Church tradition, specific genres of musical composition developed to support the liturgy of the Church. These genres included the mass, oratorio, passion, requiem, motet, anthem, and cantata. As Christianity has spread, many of these genres have been embraced by cultures around the world in modified forms. More recently, the term “ritual music” is used in some contexts to refer to music that supports the sacred ritual. This music may include the congregation’s participation, as well as that of specialized choirs and instrumentalists.

Throughout history, some styles have been identified almost exclusively with Christian worship, including plainsong and Protestant hymns. Other styles of sacred music have drawn from secular sources including opera, popular song styles of the day, gospel, rock, rap, and various ethnic styles around the world. Generally, the text and the context of the music are better indicators of the sacred nature of the music than musical style.

**Instrumental music.** Instruments have often played a significant role in worship. The *shofar* (ram’s

horn) was very important for specific Jewish festivals. Psalm 81:3 states, “Blow the ram’s horn at new moon, and again at full moon to call a festival.” Psalm 150 refers to a variety of instruments.

For both practical and ethical reasons, instruments were less common in the Early Church. A persecuted church could not risk the louder sounds of noisy instruments that might call attention to their worship. The young church was also distinguishing itself from its Jewish ancestry. And within the Greco-Roman context, the Church’s resistance to the use of instruments—e.g., flutes and reeds—revealed concern about importing elements into the worship music that might evoke pagan rituals or entertainments.

The medieval Western Church favored vocal music, preferably *a cappella*, even though instruments of various kinds may have been used locally in liturgy. Eventually, the organ became the dominant instrument. Perhaps as a result of abuses of instruments in liturgy, the *motu proprio* (1903) of Pope Pius X on sacred music proposed a restricted role for instruments. The document echoes the principles set forth at the Council of Trent (1545–63), clearly favoring

unaccompanied vocal music. The Reformers took various approaches to instruments, from banning them (Calvin and Zwingli) to incorporating the organ fully into liturgy (Luther).

During the 1960s in the United States, the folk song revolution brought first acoustic and then electric guitars into churches, adding a sense of informality and accessibility to music making. Not only did the increased use of guitars and percussion identify more closely with the culture of the day, it also fostered music making that incorporated lay musicians and not just highly trained professionals. Today, the use of instruments within Christian worship ranges from no instruments (Church of Christ) to primarily organ and/or piano to a fully electric ensemble with a percussion-based sound.

In missions, instruments continue to be a source of enrichment and controversy. In West Africa, for example, specific drums and drum patterns may communicate non-Christian associations with traditional deities or rituals. In Asia, gongs and bells may be associated with indigenous temple worship and deemed, in some cases, inappropriate for Christian ritual.

As a result of these non-Christian associations and because of increased globalization, Western instruments became somewhat predominant in Christian worship around the world. However, as Christian missions mature and ethnomusicologists have an increasing role in communicating the gospel, the use of indigenous instruments in worship is becoming more common. A process of gradual “sanctification” is required, allowing the once “profane” instrument to assume a character appropriate for Christian worship.

Following the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), the Roman Catholic Church led the way in the use of indigenous instruments in the Mass. Protestants have more often incorporated Western instruments in worship. However, today indigenous instruments may be found in Protestant and Pentecostal worship around the globe.

### **Movement Symbols**

**Lifting hands.** Typically known as the orans position, lifting extended hands upwards is one of the earliest documented postures in worship. A popular practice particularly for charismatic Christians, lifting hands is commonly associated with petitionary prayer (Ps. 28:2; 63:4;

1 Tim. 2:8), although this symbolic gesture has other meanings as well. In Exodus 17:11–16, Moses lifted his hands, and as he did so, God gave the Israelites victory over the Amalekites. In Leviticus 9:22, this gesture conveys a blessing by Aaron on the Israelites. Like all other physical expressions, the practice of hand lifting is not exclusive to the Jewish or Christian worship tradition. Other faith traditions, such as Islam and Hinduism, also draw on this gesture in their times of worship.

This common expression of raising hands may sometimes be seen as an instinctive gesture rather than only as a liturgically prescribed *stylized* movement. Prior to the emergence of the charismatic renewal movement, this posture appears to have been used only in a limited way by the clergy of the Roman Catholic tradition. For example, it was used in the ritual act of narrating portions of the Eucharistic Prayer or in leading the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. However, with the onset of the charismatic renewal movement in the mid-twentieth century, this gesture has been significantly reclaimed by the laity and freely used by individuals to express their personal experience with God.

**Tambourine and dance.** Dancing with a tambourine was first mentioned in Exodus 15:20 following the destruction of the Egyptian army by Yahweh at the Red Sea. Apart from this biblical reference, dance activity has a long history and can be found in ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome.

Aside from its presence in festive functions, the tambourine also occupies a prominent place as an instrument in religious and cultural events. In the eighteenth century Mozart was known to have included its use in his musical compositions. Tchaikovsky in the nineteenth century was also known to have included the instrument in the “Arabian Dance” of the *Nutcracker Suite*.

At the present time tambourine dancing continues to be featured in Middle Eastern countries in both folk and religious settings. For some charismatic Christians the tambourine is primarily used as an instrument of praise and worship. Dancing with tambourines may be employed in spiritual warfare. Analysis of the use of tambourine with dance in Christian worship reveals that strict tambourine movement patterns often denote specific

theological concepts such as covenant or grace. These patterns typically follow a sixteen-beat cycle. Tambourine dancers also tend to favor costume designs that bear specific colors associated with particular spiritual concepts. At the same time, such tambourine dancing may be used with the intention of establishing a link, albeit tenuous, to the Old Testament.

### **Olfactory Symbols: Incense**

From the earliest times incense was frequently connected with religious ceremonies. Typically speaking, the use of incense seeks to acknowledge the presence of deities, to possibly appease benevolent spirits, or to drive away evil spirits.

In Exodus, the offering of incense was a mandated ritual act in worship (Exod. 40:27). The purpose of this liturgical act was to symbolically acknowledge the presence of God. At other times, its use had the expressed purpose of placating the anger of God so that he would not destroy the Israelites (Num. 16:47).

In our present time there are two primary approaches to understanding and employing the use of incense. The evangelical segment of the Church seems to

focus on the symbolic equivalence of incense as prayer (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8). Within more liturgical traditions, the use of incense in such rituals as censuring the assembly or reverencing the altar or Communion table has several meanings. Such a ritual may symbolize the “setting apart” of people and things to experience God’s holy presence, or it may serve as a tangible sign of God’s blessing or to express the importance of the censured people or things in the worship experience. The response on the part of the assembly in such a ritual would either be the signing of the cross on oneself or bowing as the censuring occurs. There is no liturgical significance in the manner of censuring, although censuring techniques are described in some present-day liturgical leadership books.

### **Film**

Just as stained-glass designs served as a tool in the early years of Christianity to educate generally illiterate believers, film has been harnessed in the twentieth century to convey the gospel, teach its principles, and do evangelism.

Christian organizations involved in web-based ministries such as Christianfilms.com, Outreach.

com, and Christiancinema.com are providing another way for believers to nurture their spirituality or to view life’s issues from a Christian perspective. Comparable to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) organization, parallel organizations like the Christian Film Database (CFDb) and Christian Film News help believers nurture their faith through film media.

Christianity in the Southern hemisphere has harnessed media products such as films for the purpose of evangelism rather than entertainment. Campus Crusade for Christ has been in the forefront of this effort. Its most popular work, the *JESUS* film, is presently available in 1,100 languages. Unlike Western Christians, who show such films in homes or churches, Christian organizations in developing countries take advantage of the rural lack of technology and show films in open-air settings. These settings encourage the whole community to gather for this recreational and evangelistic activity.

With increased ambivalence among governing authorities regarding the presence of Christianity, it remains to be seen if this media will be viable

in the long run, particularly if it is perceived as a tool of spreading Western ideals and values. In addressing this concern, indigenous Christian organizations like Sri Lanka-based Kithusevana Ministries and Hong Kong-based Media

Evangelism Limited seek to contextualize Christianity with their own film productions rather than merely translating Western works. For the moment, film remains an effective way of communicating the gospel to a broad spectrum of people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For additional reading, see Dowley (2011), Mayer-Thurman (1975), Ramshaw (2009), and Routley and Richardson (2005) in the *Handbook* bibliography.



## Arts Open Tibetan Hearts to the Gospel

*John Oswald*

*John Oswald is author and compiler of several books and articles on Tibetan Christian music. These include A New Song Rising in Tibetan Hearts: Tibetan Christian Worship in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century (CAF 2001), “Gospel Communication in Tibetan Song” in Communicating Christ through Story and Song: Orality in Buddhist Contexts (ed. Paul De Neui, 2008, William Carey Library), and a Tibetan Songbook Offer Up a Praise Song (compiled 2011, Central Asia Publishing, contact@CentralAsiaPublishing.com).*

story  
masks  
thangka  
song  
lament  
dance drama  
painting  
film

The best of storytellers capture the imagination of their audiences such that their enrapt listeners remember and enthusiastically retell the story to others. Surely it should be no different with the gospel of Jesus. *But how can this “greatest story ever told” be communicated so it becomes relevant to people whose understanding of life is so different from that of the people of the Bible?* In the following arts-rich story, I relate how one group of people responded to this challenge by drawing on a variety of vivid indigenous arts to share the biblical story in modern video form with Tibetan people.<sup>1</sup>

Two couples in Nepal dreamed of creating a storytelling tool that would help Tibetans understand the gospel and overcome two typical reactions: (1) “Jesus is for westerners,” and (2) “This is just like Buddhism.” Unfortunately, much Christian media unwittingly reinforces these misconceptions, but these couples drew up plans for this production using artistic media that match both the culture and the subject matter. Then, they assigned a year to research.

In 2002, the team met a dedicated and gifted film producer and also discovered a new movie called *The HOPE*. Created by Mars

Hill Productions, it is a masterful 80-minute dramatic motion picture of God's redemptive story, from creation to the return of Christ. This movie has already been translated into many languages<sup>2</sup> and addresses many of the Tibetan project's biblical needs. Mars Hill gave the team permission for the existing movie to become the foundation for an extended production about a Tibetan man searching for truth, discovering answers through the Bible, and eventually becoming a storyteller of God's promised deliverer, Jesus. Using Tibetan song, dance, art, and poetic narration, the Tibetan movie tells the Bible's story of hope for all humanity.<sup>3</sup>

This adaptation currently exists in Central Tibetan, with options for English and Tibetan subtitles. Subtitles will be added in other languages, and new dubbed versions will be produced in various languages for people groups who share Tibetan culture.

### **Music, Dance, and Drama**

Five lyrical songs reinforce the film's storyline and provide time for reflection. Two use an indigenous question-and-answer format and, in keeping with Tibetans' love of music videos, four are choreographed with Tibetan

regional dances. The final song is a call to all nations to join the dance of faith in Christ, illustrated (in the revised version) by Thai, Nepalese, Indian, Mongolian, Filipino, and Western dance, as well as diverse Tibetan styles.

Most of these songs are also dramatized, including one where demonic beings are portrayed<sup>4</sup> with masks that draw on cultural imagery. The third song is a poignant lament in soaring nomadic style. In all five songs the videography features the striking landscape of the high-altitude plateau.

Since animal blood sacrifice in the Old Testament elicits profound disgust in Buddhists, an additional dramatic scene uses an analogy from Tibetan life, graphically demonstrating how nomads build pits to catch wolves, which prey on their flocks. They lure the wolf into the pit with a lone sheep, sacrificed to save the rest of the flock. This illustrates both the concept of a substitutionary death and the meaning of the death of Christ, making it clear that no more animal sacrifice is needed.

### **Artwork**

The project team commissioned four exquisite and intricate paintings (*thangkas*) of the type

traditionally used by traveling religious storytellers in teaching Buddhist stories. Two canvases depict Old Testament stories and two show New Testament scenes.

### Responses

This contextualized production has been used in two main ways: showing the DVD or telling the Bible's central storyline in person, using posters of the paintings. Responses to both have been extremely warm. Tibetan audiences love the songs, dances, and artwork. Some even join in the dances while watching the DVD!

- One Buddhist monk read parts of the Bible and concluded that Christianity was just like Buddhism. Then, he heard the story twice more, once told by a visitor using the paintings and again by watching the DVD. By the next day he had a radically revised conclusion—"This is not the same"—and what's more, he was hardly recognizable. He was dressed in layman's clothes, a sure sign of his new allegiance to Jesus!
- A woman believer was thrilled that she was now able to grasp how the Old Testament relates to the New and said she wanted to show the DVD to her husband and other villagers.

The *thangka* paintings have also been well received. The following four reports illustrate the way the posters have been used separately from the DVD in a wide variety of geographical contexts.<sup>5</sup>

- In southwest China, a believer shared the paintings with a group of Tibetans in a village for a couple of hours. A man at the back was talking, smoking, and not paying much attention. Later, he started to listen to the stories and became very interested. In the end, he believed and later learned to tell the stories himself using the *thangkas*.
- In India, a cross-cultural worker used the *thangkas* in teaching. He said, "People are very responsive." He reports that they enjoy listening to the Bible story in conjunction with the *thangkas* and, although they are initially surprised at their own conclusions, they readily accept the posters as both Tibetan and Christian.
- In a remote, high-altitude town in China, a lady used the *thangka* posters at a Christmas celebration, preceded by much prayer and fasting. To her delight, a local teacher opened

his family home to her. She said, “When I started telling the story, while showing the *thangkas* (Genesis to Revelation), the teacher stood up and helped translate. We really felt the Father’s presence!” The *thangkas* were passed around because people wanted to look at them again and again.

- From Thailand, a missionary reported: “We are actually going to a village tonight where we have shared the gospel now two times using these posters. They are very useful, and the pastor who is sharing the story said

that these can be used both to proclaim the gospel and also to teach believers.”

### Conclusion

The overwhelming feedback to the DVD and artwork shows that it is not simply the story, but the way it is presented that helps hearers respond in new ways. It is the use of familiar forms of music, dance, art, and culturally evocative scenes that engender this positive reaction. Presented in this way, Christ not only comes as deliverer for other people, but he addresses this audience much more directly—through film and the arts—as Tibetans.

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<sup>1</sup>The resulting production is known as the Tibetan *HOPE* DVD. This project is sometimes referred to as *REWA HOPE* to mark it as the Tibetan version, after the Tibetan word for “hope” (*rewa*) and its title *Rewa’i Namthar* (*The Story of Hope*).

<sup>2</sup>For an up-to-date list of *The HOPE* in different languages, see [www.mars-hill.org/media/the\\_hope\\_main/chart.html](http://www.mars-hill.org/media/the_hope_main/chart.html).

<sup>3</sup>The entire movie and all its songs and artwork can be accessed at [www.rewahope.com](http://www.rewahope.com) by clicking the video, music, or art icons.

<sup>4</sup>In a revised version. Two dances were refilmed in 2011.

<sup>5</sup>For a fuller account, please see the blog by artist Scott Rayl, “Tibetan Christian Thangka Ministry,” *Indigenous Jesus*, November 22, 2011, <http://indigenousjesus.blogspot.com/2011/11/tibetan-christian-thangka-ministry.html>.



## Connecting Faith and Arts in Bali<sup>1</sup>

*John D. Pierce*

*John D. Pierce has served as Executive Editor of Baptists Today since 2000. A native of Ringgold, Georgia, he is a graduate of Berry College (BA), Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (MDiv), and Columbia Theological Seminary (DMin). He speaks frequently in churches, consults with congregations concerning communications, and holds interim pastorates.*

painting  
dance music gamelan

**B**ali, Indonesia, is a haven for international artists. Since 1996, Jonathan and Tina Bailey have been living and serving within this diverse, vibrant, and talented community of artists, where they encourage Christians to be true to their culture, craft, and calling.

Tina, a native of Springfield, Georgia, is a dancer, visual artist, and graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design. Jonathan, from Simpsonville, South Carolina, specializes in music and literature. They serve through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship global missions program. “We walked through the doors that

opened,” says Tina. “[The larger art community] knows that we are Christians and artists and involved in the International Christian Church . . . We are artist-ministers working as coordinators for the Arts and Community Engagement. Our hope is that our work will open up doors of dialogue across religious and cultural lines that will enable an authentic experience of Christ.”

Tina and Jonathan encourage Christian artists to use their gifts of music, dance, and visual arts to express faith in a way that is true to their own culture (see photo of Tina dancing). In doing so, the

Baileys believe that relationships are built across cultural barriers and authentic expressions of faith get heard. “We don’t see the arts as a tool,” says Tina. “It’s not a means to an end; it’s an authentic way to be.”

expression than to getting across a religious message.

So Jonathan and Tina offer encouragement and support to Christian artists and help create opportunities for engagement



“Christian artist” can be a tough tag to wear in Bali, as well as in other cultures. If the artists’ works are not solely focused on overtly Christian symbols and themes, fellow Christians will often criticize them for straying from or compromising their faith commitments. On the other hand, the larger arts community can see Christian artists as being one-dimensional, with less commitment to artistic

with the larger arts community. From art exhibits to music and dance classes, to enhancing the use of arts in worship, the Baileys are finding many points where faith and art connect.

In every creative form of art—music, painting, dance—the Baileys see a connection to the Creator. “We see it as a gift from God,” says Jonathan. He and Tina are helping artists grow in their own creativity

and see themselves as gifts from God, as well. They offer spiritual formation retreats, cross-cultural art projects, creativity/body awareness workshops, interfaith music collaborations, art and spiritual formation, dance, visual art exhibits, gamelan lessons and performance, and care for international students.

“It’s not a new idea,” says Jonathan. “It is what the Church did for a millennium or more,” noting its role in music, architecture, and other forms of art.

be a means of Christian service, Tina and Jonathan speak of a more common basis for their work: relationship-building. “Our work is about as traditional as it gets,” says Tina. “It’s about relationships.”

Jonathan adds, “We live in a community where the arts are a way to relate; in fact, a primary way.” Growing, trusting relationships provide opportunities for the Baileys to host an artist-in-residence



The Baileys feel not everyone understands how art can be an intrinsic part of life and faith for people in many cultures. For those who do not appreciate art or cannot grasp how this could

program, teach summer art classes in Hungary, and communicate faith in ways that are understood and appreciated in a pluralistic and artistic culture.

The Baileys often have artists and other guests come to participate in their classes and worship, and they invite collaboration and partnership.

One visiting pastor told them that churches in U.S. could learn some important things from their ways of engaging the arts community.

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<sup>1</sup>Originally published in a slightly different form in John Pierce, “Faith and the Arts: Baileys Share in Bali’s Diverse, Creative Culture,” *Baptists Today News Journal* 29, no. 8 (August 2011): 4–5, [http://issuu.com/baptiststoday/docs/braugust11\\_071611final?mode=a\\_p&wmode=0](http://issuu.com/baptiststoday/docs/braugust11_071611final?mode=a_p&wmode=0). Reprinted by permission of John Pierce.



## Community Engagement through Ethnodramatology

Julisa Rowe

*Julisa Rowe is with Artists in Christian Testimony and is based in Kenya, where she trains leaders in using drama as a powerful tool for communicating God's truth and touching hearts for transformation. She has a BA in Theatre and an MA in Intercultural Ministries. She received a Doctor of Missiology in ethnodramatology from Western Seminary.*

Sigana  
Chavittunadakam  
bharata  
Kuchipudi  
natyam  
Likay  
Noh

“**W**e thought the Bible was a foreign book, but today I see the smells and sounds of my culture. Those who tell of *Bhagavata* (God) are *Bhagavatars*—storytellers of God.” Those were the words of a Brahmin in Andhra Pradesh, India, after viewing a classical *kuchipudi* dance drama with a biblical message.<sup>1</sup> The play met with opposition from Christians, but affirmation from Hindus.

Prior to this, Dr. Suvisesamuthu, former Director of the Christian Arts Centre in Chennai, was the first to use *bharata natyam*—the classical dance drama form

of Tamil Nadu—to present the Gospel of Matthew. His attempt also met with great animosity from the Church, but had wide acceptance and appeal to the general populace, resulting in many turning to Christ, including the dancers themselves. A government minister was the chief guest, and after the performance he said, “You Christians speak about God and heavenly glory somewhere, but I saw God and heavenly glory right here on stage.” Dr. Suvisesamuthu’s work inspired a large number of believers in India to pursue classical art forms to communicate Christ.



Kala Darshini, a Catholic arts training institute in Andhra Pradesh, has done some innovative works, including one piece on the eight beatitudes of Jesus, done in eight different Indian styles of dance (*kuchipudi*, *bharata natyam*, *orissi*, *manipuri*, and others—one style for each beatitude). This piece was an attempt to show India the universality of the beatitudes. The institute has also done folk and classical pieces depicting the life and works of Jesus, such as shepherds dancing for joy at his birth, and a *bharata natyam* on the miracles of Jesus. In the miracles piece, the dance master took the role of Jesus and other dancers took the roles of different people in the calming of the storm, stories of his healing, and other miracles.

In Thailand, the traditional Likay folk drama form has been used with great success for over thirty years by Christian Communications Institute (CCI), under the direction of Alan Eubanks, to tell numerous biblical stories and gospel messages. In Japan, a Noh drama, “Wings of Love,” was created as a dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity and as a means of beginning to bring out the message of the cross.

Kerala, India, has an interesting folk theater tradition called *Chavittunadakam*.<sup>2</sup> It is a Christian alternative to the usual folk theaters and was developed under the influence of Catholic priests and the Portuguese in the mid-sixteenth century. The scripts are from Christian European history, such as

Charlemagne and the early Christian emperors. There are also saint stories and Bible stories. Although it originated as a Christian alternative to Kerala folk theater, it has become its own art form, and recognized by the Kerala government.

An immensely popular Christmas show in Nairobi, Kenya, was produced in 2000–2001. It was a fusion of traditional storytelling, song and dance, and modern theater. It brought together popular faces and comedy acts, such as TV game show presenters, comedy trios, DJs, radio announcers, and leading actors in a loosely woven retelling of the Christmas story, set in modern-day Dandora—a Kenyan housing estate. A jazz vocal group provided Christmas music between scenes, while a popular radio personality narrated the event and encouraged audience participation.

While the acting style was along the lines of psychological realism, the mix of music, interaction, and story showed a more Kenyan structure and gave a model on which to base a contemporary fusion theater that speaks to today’s urban audience. This model is called *sigana*, which seamlessly weaves together acting, narration, music and other expressive techniques, in the form of traditional call

and response, chants, role-play, banter and communal dilemma resolution. *Sigana* performances take off from the traditional narrative form. But because it is performed in a more “contrived” environment, it also incorporates more entertaining forms like song, dance and music. These are organically woven into the shows.<sup>3</sup>

Active participation of the audience is encouraged, as the line between performers and audience is eradicated. This informs the “communal dilemma resolution” that is central to its teaching. Unlike traditional storytelling, *sigana* works in a multicultural setting, mixing music and movements from traditional and contemporary sources and challenging contemporary realities.

The above examples show how indigenous drama forms are being used to communicate Christ with great effect around the world. Plays written out of the local worldview using indigenous styles are best able to resonate with contemporary audiences and show them a reflection of themselves, while entertaining them at the same time.

Classical and folk theater forms are well worth considering as possibilities for incorporating the message of Christ, because their role is to affirm long-established social and religious beliefs. Development and health organizations have realized the potential that these forms have to reach the masses—particularly more rural-oriented groups—when a new message needs to be communicated. Such agencies have carried out a great deal of experimentation in this regard.

It is not a great stretch to understand how people can communicate the Christian message in folk forms that are already accepted and can be adapted for use with messages of various types. Given the lack of Christians trained in the traditional arts and the realities of economics, some have suggested hiring a group of actors to perform Christian plays

instead of giving money to a preacher. In many cases, this has actually resulted in the conversion of the actors as they interact with the message of Christ.

As globalization continues in many countries, it is also important to look at developing theater styles that fuse contemporary realities with traditional, indigenous forms. Christian artists can blend the two worlds into an artistic heart language for today's urban audiences. Christian workers who truly desire to communicate Christ in a way that reaches to the heart of each culture, effecting change for the Kingdom of God, should seek dramas that are indigenous to each country, whether historically indigenous or indigenous through fusion of contemporary culture and traditional cultural elements. In such indigenous drama, ideas and actions are communicated in a powerful language that is truly understood by the people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The *kuchipudi* dance drama “What Is My Duty?” was created by Dr. Solomon Raj in the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup>See [www.chavittunadakam.com](http://www.chavittunadakam.com).

<sup>3</sup>Oby Obyerodhyambo, “Sigana: Re-engaging Contemporary Cultural Reality,” The Swaraj Foundation, [www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/ls3\\_oby.htm](http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/ls3_oby.htm).

<sup>4</sup>For additional reading, see the following resources in the *Handbook* bibliography: Byam (1999), Corbitt and Nix-Early (2003), Eubank (2004), Lapiz (2006), and Nicholls (1983).



## Engaging People through Visual Arts

*Geinene Carson*

*Geinene Carson has a BFA in Painting and Sculpture. She has been with Operation Mobilization (OM) since 1999 serving in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. She now resides in Atlanta, Georgia, serving as a consultant for ArtsLink, the visual arts ministry she founded within OM. She is a wife, mother, practicing artist, and well-traveled advocate and mentor for using the arts as a bridge between peoples and cultures.*

mural  
painting

The small town was full of abandoned houses. Old bricks, doors, and broken pots littered the sides of the streets. Upon arrival, the artists began observing the people, spending time among them, and praying for an understanding of the culture. Every morning as they walked through town, they received invitations to enter homes and drink tea with locals. Over those cups, God began to teach these artists about the area and people he had brought them to.<sup>1</sup>

### The Posture of a Conscientious Artist

The conscientious artist has great opportunities to build bridges with communities of different cultures. When an artist is willing to spend time prayerfully observing a culture and creating informed art, it is more likely that his or her art will attract and occupy people's attention. To go further, artists who invest in the lives of the local people and make

themselves accessible along with their work will likely reap much favor. With favor comes the right to be heard.

“There’s a deeper meaning in this piece. I’m going to return tomorrow to sit and contemplate it,” one young man proclaimed. And return he did, to sit silently for hours in front of a painting entitled “The Passage of Time”—an artist’s

response to the changes she saw in the local village over the course of two years. This North African man had read the Bible but had many questions. Standing in front of the painting, the artist shared her inspiration and the painting's deeper truth, centered on the gospel. This curious student returned for several days to gaze at the painting that had captured his attention and to continue conversations with the visiting artists.<sup>2</sup>

As an expressionistic painting of a tree, there was nothing overtly Christian about the painting. The tree, however, resembled the locally common olive tree. Painted in prayerful response to the artist's perception of changes in the community, the artwork begged deeper engagement. Through the artist's availability, that engagement was made possible and meaningful conversation ensued.

However, particularly in the West, it seems that artists think their work should speak for itself, their only responsibility being to birth and release their work to the exposure received by hanging on a wall or sitting on a podium. What artists can learn in cross-cultural experience is the importance of their own presence to bring further depth and influence to their work.

### **The Role of the Artist as Observer, Learner, and Relationship Builder**

Artists who go into the community as learners not only create informed art, but also naturally initiate genuine relationships. Another opportunity for local interaction is through the artist staying visible during the art-making process by creating publicly or maintaining an open studio. With this approach, art exhibitions, for example, become less about viewing art and more about a celebration of shared experience.

Through being accessible at art events, the artist honors those viewing the artwork as well as the artwork itself. This accessibility places more importance on the actual message and expresses sensitivity to the people receiving it. In spite of the stereotype that art should speak for itself, the artist can show a motivation to communicate and build lasting relationships. Moreover, artwork created with a sense of shared ownership is better appreciated and its message more deeply received.

This practice of working within culture and being accessible to it is not simply a pragmatic strategy. In so doing, we follow in the footsteps of Christ, the incarnation of God,

“full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). God in Christ gave grace through works of healing and provision, and through his death and resurrection. These works were in response to humanity’s need and were a reflection of God’s character. Through his accessibility, Christ also spoke the truth of God represented within his creative acts.

Artists who are believers should respond to this challenge by knowing what they are being called to communicate, standing confidently in their divine inspiration. If artists are never present with their work, then how can it be expected of those not of the kingdom, not of the same culture, to understand or interpret their artwork with the same insight? If there is no effort invested in building relationships with the viewers nor any level of citizenship with the community, people may not feel that questions and curiosities conjured up by a piece of art merit dialogue.

### **Artists in Contexts Where Ministry Is Challenging**

Even though the exhibition was the goal they were working towards, it became quite apparent that much of their ministry would involve personal interaction

with the artisans of the area. The group’s prayer was that their creations would resonate with the very people they had built relationships with, speaking a message of restoration and redemption into their lives.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, God has opened unique doors for artists to minister in parts of the world that are typically closed to the gospel. We have been exploring ways artists can impact Muslim communities through murals, art workshops, exhibitions, encouraging creativity in public institutions, and establishing community art centers. This creative approach has allowed us to be less confrontational and yet more direct in communicating the good news of Jesus. People who would reject gospel tracts stop to ponder scripture associated with images that are familiar to them.

Some years ago, a group of visual artists were invited onto a public university campus in one of these areas harder to reach. They had been warned that the town had the reputation of being one of the most hostile in the country. The artists did what came naturally, building relationships with local people by carefully observing the culture, prayerfully creating art,

and producing an exhibition. The people were welcomed into the studio space to view the artistic process and, in some cases, to directly collaborate on a piece of art. This genuine encounter between the people, the artwork, and the artists helped to draw nearly one thousand visitors to the exhibition. The nonthreatening atmosphere created a perfect forum for reducing the distance between cultures. Locals were shocked to see an art exhibit focused on celebrating their own people. These artists thoughtfully created art that displayed the familiar in a new light, creating a venue for deep spiritual conversation.

Viewers gave each piece of artwork their undivided attention, seeking out each artist to ask in depth about the meaning behind every color, symbol, pattern, and title. Had the artists left their work to simply “speak for itself,” they would have never encountered such keen interest. Through their availability, the depth of the artwork’s inspiration and meaning was fleshed out, and opportunities for truth-sharing and meaningful relationships were seized. The artists, thrilled by such an outcome, discovered that God has an exciting role for visual artists in his kingdom mission.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anonymous, “Restoring Broken Jars,” OM Artslink, 2009, [http://omartslink.org/news/news\\_WAsia\\_09.php](http://omartslink.org/news/news_WAsia_09.php).

<sup>2</sup>Anonymous, “Peace Reflected Artistically in North Africa,” OM Artslink, Summer 2007, [www.omartslink.org/getInspired/inspiredNorthAfrica07.php](http://www.omartslink.org/getInspired/inspiredNorthAfrica07.php).

<sup>3</sup>Anonymous, “Restoring Broken Jars.”

<sup>4</sup>Anonymous, “Restoring Broken Jars,” OM Artslink, 2009, [http://omartslink.org/news/news\\_WAsia\\_09.php](http://omartslink.org/news/news_WAsia_09.php).



## Sharing Faith through Contextualized Visual Arts

*Scott Rayl*

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mehndi henna storying  
Painting

### Henna “Storying”

**M**ina Rowland<sup>1</sup> has lived for the last few years in East Africa and South Asia. In her work, she chose to explore the use of “henna storying.” Henna is a plant that grows in certain regions of Africa, southern Asia, Australia, and Oceania. Among other things, it is used for body decoration in the form of temporary tattoos, which are popular for new brides and for special occasions, including simple fellowship among women. Henna is even mentioned in the Bible in Song of Solomon (1:14; 4:13-14).

Rowland felt that God had gifted her in doing illustrations using henna, and she began to develop

narrative designs based on the gospel story. Although traditional henna designs are mainly decorative and have no narrative content, she found that they lend themselves quite well to illustrating narratives. After developing a series of designs based on feedback from nationals, she began hosting henna parties as a form of outreach. She invited local women to attend the parties and shared the gospel with them while applying the designs to their hands. Some of the women, both believers and nonbelievers, had opportunities afterward to share the stories with others, because henna designs typically remain visible for a few days or even up to a

month. Since then, online resources for henna storying and henna parties have been well developed and are available for download.

Kimberly M. Stephens used a similar approach during her recent time in South Asia. She decided to create a public art exhibit entitled “A True Story.” It was an exhibit of nineteen paintings, acrylic and *mehndi* (henna) on canvas.<sup>2</sup> Each painting depicts a *mehndi* design and tells a story from scripture. Stephens intended her designs to give an overview of the biblical story from both the Old and New Testaments. Some of her

Stephens reports that the art show was very well received. Most visitors had never seen anything like it before and felt proud that a foreigner would take the time to learn their art forms and develop them in such a way. Like Rowland’s henna designs, Stephens’ paintings were very abstract, requiring explanation to understand their meanings.<sup>3</sup>

### **Safina (Fergie) Stewart, an Indigenous Christian Artist**

Safina (Fergie) Stewart is an Indigenous Australian artist, educator, and follower of Jesus who lives in Melbourne, Australia,



BUNJIL<sup>4</sup>

paintings incorporated written scripture as a design element, although Stephens made sure that the scripture expressed God’s character and narrated a part of the painting’s story.

with her husband and three children. Born in Auckland, New Zealand, she was raised in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, where she learned to follow Jesus from her missionary parents and had many

RIPPLE EFFECT<sup>5</sup>

multicultural experiences. Her father is Australian with Scottish heritage and her mother is a Torres Strait Islander and Queensland Aboriginal. At the age of 13 Safina moved to live in mainland Australia.

In the last few years, Safina has pursued a career in painting, working in a style she calls “contemporary indigenous art.” Her work is rich and vibrant, and her subjects range from sea creatures to topographic landscapes and traditional, indigenous totem animals. All of her work is infused with biblical meanings and a sense of joyful hopefulness. Through it, she seeks in part to raise awareness

of issues that hinder acceptance and mutual respect between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Safina makes her living as an artist from the sale of her original works and reproductions both online<sup>5</sup> and at a local indigenous art market, where she is able to informally share the meanings behind her artwork. Her indigenous heritage gives her the right in the eyes of Aboriginal Australians to use their traditional motifs and symbols which, when filled with gospel meaning, shine the love of God into the hearts of both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

<sup>1</sup>Name changed for security purposes.

<sup>2</sup>Henna is known as *mehndi* in Hindi.

<sup>3</sup>For more information and examples of henna evangelism, see [www.go2southasia.org/resource/evangelism/henna](http://www.go2southasia.org/resource/evangelism/henna).

<sup>4</sup>By Safina Stewart, [www.artbysafina.com.au](http://www.artbysafina.com.au). Used by permission. *Bunjil* means “eagle” in the languages of the Kulin Nations of Australia.

<sup>5</sup>For more information and examples of Safina’s artwork, see [www.artbysafina.com.au/gallery.html](http://www.artbysafina.com.au/gallery.html).



## Church Planting with Bible Storying and the Creative Arts

Tom Ferguson

*Tom Ferguson has served as an Ethno-Arts and Orality Specialist with a faith-based nonprofit organization since 1994. He and his wife, Tin, have worked in Africa and Asia, equipping local believers and expatriate workers in the use of creative arts and oral communication strategies. Tom holds music degrees from the University of Southern Mississippi and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is a charter member of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists.*



### Ayizan Festival—The Beginning

**A**ugust 1996—It was time for the festival celebrating the founding of Tsévié, the town where we were living in Togo. The stadium field was covered with traditional musical groups demonstrating their prowess, creating a veritable smorgasbord of sound for a new ethnodoxologist like myself. I went from group to group drinking in the amazing rhythms and phenomenal dancing. As the time for the official ceremony approached, the groups formed a parade around the field.

The central piece was a presentation of the story of the village's

founding. *Atumpani*, the talking drums for the Ewé people, told the epic story that was translated into both Ewé and French languages for those uninitiated in the language of the drum. As the story unfolded, dancer-actors played it out for all to see. The crowd was thoroughly captivated. Then it occurred to me how powerful it would be if God's story could be told in this way. Thus began my journey into the realm of storying with music and other arts.

### A Tale of Two Peoples

The first breakthrough happened among the Ifè people. After successful new song workshops in

1997 and 1998, I was asked to co-lead a music, storying, and church-planting workshop in March 2000.<sup>1</sup> I returned again in 2001 to do a mini-workshop focused on creating songs based on major events from the life of Christ and Pentecost. As things progressed, Pastor Odah Kodjo became the key champion for the use of the Ifè language and musical arts among the Ifè Baptist churches in Togo.

Ten years later, I spoke with Pastor Odah about the state of music in the *Jésus le Chemin* (Jesus the Way) Baptist Association, comprised primarily of Ifè-speaking churches. He shared that the arts and storying are still an integral part of evangelism and church planting. Associational leadership includes a *directeur de musique* (music director). There are annual music seminars and concerts in each zone of the association. Each seminar includes the composing of new songs, as well as topics for discussion. The 2010 topic focused on the role and appropriate use of Ifè traditional dance in the church. During their annual music week, churches are encouraged to take music out of the church and into the public spaces. Emphasis is placed on using indigenous Ifè performing arts. Daily performances include concerts, music-theater, and a picnic followed by traditional dancing.

At that same time I touched base on the work among the Waci-speaking community in Togo. In October 2003, I had proposed the creation of an evangelistic music-drama to the Glévé church. The music-drama would be used in conjunction with a chronological Bible storying pictorial evangelistic tract that was being produced. Over the next year church members created songs and dramatic sketches for each story. Their first presentation was at a conference on Bible storying as an example for the participants. Just as everything was coming together, my wife and I transferred to South Asia. Just before we left, the Glévé church presented some of the music and dramas as part of a church-planting event in the village of Vo Kponou.

When I visited Togo in July 2011, I had the opportunity to speak with some Waci church leaders about how things had progressed. The church in Vo Kponou had an attendance of about forty people. The Glévé church had continued to perform the songs they created at various events but no new songs had been created. They discontinued using the dramas. The difference between the Ifè and the Waci is that among the Glévé church no “champion” arose. We are praying that God will raise up a local champion for the arts in our Waci churches.

### Local Story Crafters and Music

Since that first experience in Tsévié, storytelling has played an ever-increasing role in my work. It became necessary to improve my skills and knowledge of storytelling to the point that my role has evolved from “indigenous music catalyst” to “creative arts and orality consultant-coach.” In this new role I have noted that as local believers around the world begin to craft and use stories for the first time in their heart language, some have naturally moved to creating songs based on the stories.

Among the Kotokoli people of Togo and the Bisa people of Burkina Faso, story-based songs have been used with radio broadcasts of Bible stories. These programs have become extremely popular within the predominately Muslim population. In Mali, a story crafter composed songs for every story in his language’s story set. He also has begun creating music videos from these songs. Story crafters among a North Indian people composed a song in place of a story, finding that the story would be more easily told through song.

After being introduced to “Storying Training for Trainers” (ST4T),<sup>2</sup> a group of Malagasy musicians created a song on the creation

account using a popular music style of the Masikoro. The traditional mandolin player is a popular Masikoro musician. The music group hopes to use the mandolin player’s popularity to gather crowds to hear the gospel message. The group is participating in a story-crafting project, and plans are underway to encourage and assist the creation of more story-songs in local styles.

### Visual arts and storytelling

The visual arts are also being used in conjunction with stories. A small group of believers in North India created songs for a Christmas outreach party for family and friends. Two young artists in the group were commissioned to paint scenes from the nativity story on large canvases. These were hung around the venue and were used to tell the Christmas story. The following year, the believers added drama to their presentation.

Believers in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa combine Bible storytelling and henna art to share the gospel. Women use henna to draw beautiful designs on their hands and feet for special occasions. While drawing the henna designs, the women talk, build relationships, and share the Bible story they are drawing. When

women are wearing henna, others admire the art on their hands, opening doors for the story to be shared again and again.<sup>3</sup>

### Empowering Storyteller Church Planters

The value of using the performing and visual arts with stories is growing among storying practitioners and trainers. Impromptu drama and storyboarding are tools regularly used to help teach a story. A new song creation module is included as part of the storying church formation training in South Asia.

Participants are taught the *Handy Guide for Facilitating New Song Creation*<sup>4</sup> and given the assignment of creating a song for one of the stories from the Book of Acts. When the story is told during “house church” time, they teach their song to the training “church.”

Increasingly, as church planters, storytellers, and creative artists are trained and empowered, creative arts paired with Bible stories become a powerful tool for communicating the message of scripture.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Tom Ferguson, “Ifé Music in Evangelism and Church Planting Workshop,” *EM News* 9, no.1 (2000), 1–4; or Tom Ferguson, “Music, Drama, and Storying: Exciting Foundations for Church Planting,” in *All the World Is Singing: Glorifying God through the Worship Music of the Nations*, eds. Frank Fortunato with Carol Brinneman and Paul Neeley (Tyrone, GA: Authentic, 2006), 199–204.

<sup>2</sup>See Stephen Springer, ed., *Storying Training for Trainers* (ST4T) (n.p.: WigTake Resources, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>See more about henna art in this Handbook, see Scott Rayl, “Contextualizing Visual Arts for Faith Sharing,” chpt. 27.

<sup>4</sup>See Brian Schrag and Paul Neeley, “Tool FF: Memory Aid Hand Motions,” in *All the World Will Worship* (2005) on the *Handbook* DVD.

<sup>5</sup>For additional reading on chanted narratives, see Kaushal (2001).



## Strengthening Ministry and Storytelling with Local Proverbs

*Pete Unseth*

*Peter Unseth spent a dozen years in Ethiopia with his wife, Carole, working under SIL. They now work at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, where Peter is an Associate Professor. He studies proverbs from many languages, with such varied applications as the study of coined proverbs by C.S. Lewis, proverbs in Bible translation, and the relationship between a culture's values and its proverbs.*

song  
 proverbs  
 poetry  
 story

**P**roverbs are a highly valued art form in many societies. They are artistic pieces of verbal art, short poems of wisdom. They may be marked by rhyme such as “Haste makes waste.” Or they may use alliteration, such as “All that is gold does not glitter.” Or they make an image that is striking such as “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” And many proverbs combine more than one of these techniques, for example, “Birds of a feather flock together,” or “A friend in need is a friend in deed.”

The proverb art form is rarely used by itself, but rather embedded in

a context, such as within stories, songs, poems, etc. In stories, proverbs are often used for functions such as introducing a narrative, marking transitions, enlivening dialogue, and, most often, concluding a story.

Using local proverbs makes stories and their messages more familiar and less foreign. Jesus and some of the biblical writers used local proverbs. The best known example is in Luke 4:23, where a proverb introduces a topic—“I am sure you will quote this proverb to me, ‘Doctor, heal yourself’” (cf. 1 Sam. 24:13; Ezek. 12:22-23; 16:44; 18:1-2).

### Collecting Local Proverbs

When planning to use local proverbs, we should do two types of preparation. First, we need a collection of local proverbs. Even for native speakers of a language, a collection of proverbs helps them recall ones that are relevant. This is especially true if the collection is arranged or indexed by topics. Collections of proverbs are available for many languages—in print or on the web—and often translated into English.<sup>1</sup> Cross-culturally, I have found that simply discussing a list of proverbs with a local person leads to excellent conversations. Listening to a person explain proverbs, I am in the position of a learner/listener.

I learn about the meaning and application of proverbs, frequently with a story about how a proverb has been used.



Some proverbs open up spiritual topics very naturally. For example, in Ethiopia, while studying a collection of proverbs, I learned the saying, “Praying with a grudge, burglarizing with a cough.” It was explained to me that the proverb is about the importance of reconciling with people, for grudges hinder our fellowship with God. It is not a proverb from the Bible, but it certainly opened a door for discussion of biblical teaching on this subject. Similarly, in Afghanistan, we find the Dari proverb, “In childhood you are playful; in youth you are lustful; in old age you are feeble. So when before God will you be worshipful?” Asking a local person to explain this proverb can lead to a deep discussion.

### **Analyzing Local Story Structures to Learn When to Use Proverbs in Storytelling**

The second type of preparation for using proverbs is to study how proverbs are used in the community, especially in storytelling. People do not use their proverbs randomly. Skilled storytellers around the world use proverbs strategically. As a general world pattern, proverbs are used at the margins of stories or their sub-units. That is, they

often introduce something new, or more often summarize and evaluate what has just been said. Most of the examples given below use English proverbs, since they are more familiar to the readers, but each point could also be illustrated with proverbs from other languages.

We want to understand as much as possible when and how locals insert proverbs into the stories they tell. To do this, we need to study their stories, hopefully in a fixed form, ideally recorded and roughly transcribed. Video recordings, rather than audio, help us learn more about local storytelling patterns, including gestures, distance between storyteller and listener(s), etc. As we study local stories, here are some basic questions we might ask:

1. Are proverbs used to introduce a story? If so, how?
2. Are proverbs used in transitions between segments of a story? Or in editorial comments about circumstances or people’s actions?
3. Are proverbs used at the end of a story?

The application of such insights can be very helpful. But even if we do not find a specific example of

proverbs being used in a certain way, we can experiment with using local proverbs in various ways in our storytelling.

**Proverbs to introduce stories.**

Local proverbs can be used to introduce stories. For example, in an English-speaking context, we can introduce the story of David and Goliath by saying, “There is an old proverb, ‘Little strokes fell great oaks.’ I’m going to tell you a story from God’s word about how a mighty giant was brought down by a little stroke.” Or we could introduce the story of Paul’s nephew overhearing a plot (Acts 23)—“A proverb reminds us that ‘Little pitchers have big ears.’ Here is a story from God’s word about how the ‘big ears’ of a boy overheard a plot and saved Paul’s life...”

In an Arabic context, we might introduce a story about Jesus telling parables by referring to a local proverb—“Our ancestors gave us the proverb that ‘Allah teaches by an allegory.’ In this story from the Holy Injil, we will hear how the Prophet Isa [Jesus] taught people by parables...”

By using an appropriate local proverb to introduce a story, we can intrigue listeners with

something familiar. In this way, the story is a bit less foreign to them.

**Proverbs inserted by a storyteller.**

If we are telling stories from the Bible, we must be careful about putting local proverbs into the story. Still, we can experiment with inserting proverbs in transitions, spoken as editorial intrusions into the flow of the story. For example, in telling the story of the prodigal son, after the son leaves, a storyteller might refer to a proverb—“But, as this story goes on, you can guess that the son will regret his actions, as the proverb says, ‘A fool and his money are soon parted.’ Then the son...”

**Proverbs used to summarize a story.**

Proverbs have often been used to summarize a story or to emphasize the main point. As we study local storytelling patterns, it is likely we will find cases where proverbs are used at the end of telling a story.

When we use local proverbs in this way, we should make it clear that the story is concluded and that the proverb is a comment or application. For example, think of telling the story where Paul was opposed

by Elymas the Sorcerer (Acts 13). After Elymas had rejected the gospel and tried to hinder Paul's proclamation of it, Paul announced that Elymas would be blind for a time. In fact, Elymas became blind and had to be led by the hand. A storyteller could then end—"This story about Elymas' rejection of the light reminds me of the proverb, 'There is none so blind as he who will not see.'"

In addition to helping underline the point of a story, using an appropriate proverb at the end has been shown to increase listeners' ability to remember the story. We desperately want listeners to remember the biblical stories we tell, so this is important.

### **Challenging Traditional Beliefs as Expressed in Local Proverbs**

Every culture has some beliefs and values that disagree with scripture. These beliefs are often reflected in some local proverbs. Well-chosen biblical stories can counter these beliefs. This is similar to what Ezekiel said about a local proverb (18:1-2).

In introducing a biblical story, or after its conclusion, we can cite a local proverb that supports

a belief that is contrary to scripture. For example, before a story, a local proverb could be cited about being unforgiving to people who have hurt us—"You know the proverb '...' Here is a story that tells what Jesus said about forgiving...." Or, after a story, "We see that God does not support the values reflected by the proverb '...'"

### **Conclusion**

Whatever stories we tell will be more effective when constructed well by local artistic standards. As we find out when and how storytellers use proverbs, we can try to insert appropriate local proverbs into stories in similar ways.

Some will say, "That's a lot of work!" Yes, but let's remember that using oral methods is not a way to dodge serious thinking and preparation. Using oral methods must not mean we simply go into new contexts and tell our stories as we would in our home cultures. Let's do the groundwork to help people in each culture resonate with the stories they hear. Let's do whatever we can to make the biblical stories more familiar and less foreign.

<sup>1</sup>For languages that do not have available proverb collections, read how to collect proverbs (<http://www.gial.edu/documents/gialens/Vol1-1/Unseth-Proverbs-Article.pdf>).



## A Balinese Painter Illustrates Biblical Characters

*Scott Rayl*

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wayang  
 Painting  
 costumes  
 dance  
 shadow puppets  
 masks

**N**yoman Darsane is a Balinese Christian painter (batik and canvas), musician, dancer, and shadow puppeteer. He was born in 1939 to rice farmers, and his father played in the Indonesian orchestra (*gamelan*) of the local king. Due to his family's close contact with this



Nyoman Darsane's HE CAME DOWN (1978)<sup>1</sup>

ruler, Darsane was raised and educated in the king's palace, along with one of the princes. Through this royal education he learned Balinese culture and religion (Hinduism), along with the cultural art forms he is known for today.

When Darsane later studied art at Universitas Diponegoro in Java, he met a Christian woman there named Deze, who introduced him to faith in Jesus. After finishing art school and returning to Bali, he eventually became a professional artist and teacher. As

Darsane sought ways to combine Balinese arts with the message of the gospel, his motto became, "Bali is my body. Christ is my life." Initially, he was rejected by his family and community after becoming a Christian, but over the years Darsane has recaptured much of his family's respect because of his commitment to remain Balinese in his Christian art and life.

While attending art school Darsane was exposed to a variety of Western art forms, which he incorporates into his evolving painting style, one that portrays biblical elements and simultaneously maintains a strong Balinese identity. He frequently features biblical characters in Balinese dance positions.

This earlier painting by Darsane, *He Came Down*, portrays the humility of Christ coming into human experience and sharing the life of the people. The worshiper prays with a lotus blossom between her fingers in an attitude common to the people of Bali. Images of demons are pushed to the edges of the frame by the light that Jesus brings.

The demons in this painting are derived from carved, wooden

masks representing the mythical creature known in Bali as Banaspati Raja (King of the Forest), also called the Barong Ket.

Every Balinese village has a Barong, whom it considers its guardian. The Barong mask is a means of both giving the spirit tangible form and harnessing its energy. Stored in the village temple, the mask is brought out on special occasions and asked to bestow blessings on the community or restore the balance of cosmic forces. At these times, the Barong might be placed on an altar or worn, along with a full body costume, in ceremonial processions or theatrical events. During sacred performances, two members of the community dance the Barong mask and costume, which together can weigh as much as one hundred pounds. When a dancer, another performer, or an audience member falls into a trance, it is believed that the spirit of the Barong has been successfully invoked.

Dancing is a form of worship in Bali. The Balinese believe that the dancer performs before the gods, delighting them. The gods take possession of them while they dance.



Nyoman Darsane's *THE ANGEL'S WHISPER* (2002)<sup>2</sup>

In *The Angel's Whisper* we see Mary, the mother of Jesus, dressed in a white blouse dappled with gold designs. Her colorful Balinese sarong is covered by a golden wrap that reaches to her knees. She wears a crown topped with white flowers. Mary's virginity is underscored by the fact that only premenstrual virgin girls

are allowed to dance before the gods. She uses hand gestures called mudras as she dances.

Looking over her right shoulder, Mary sees a figure who resembles an angel. The appearance of the angel is based on a shadow puppet, or wayang, figure. He appears out of the abstract background to blow/

whisper into Mary's ear through a lotus blossom that he holds between his hands. His message of the birth of a Savior sets Mary into motion.

Darsane's paintings represent a fusing of form and content,

where the gospel infuses the culture and can't be peeled away. Many of the concepts and images in his work would be familiar and recognizable to a Balinese, but probably not to a Western Christian.

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<sup>1</sup>See the second section, "Jesus as Dancer-Servant," at <http://thejesusquestion.org/2012/03/25/jesus-the-dancer-part-7-the-art-of-nyoman-darsane/>.

<sup>2</sup>View online at <http://www.omsc.org/art-at-omsc/darsane/darsane-intro.html>. Copyright by Nyoman Darsane and OMSC. Used with permission.



## The Artful Presentation of a Contextualized Christology

Katie Hoogerheide

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canto  
CONFESSIONAL  
recitation  
narrative

It gripped me the first time I saw it, and the second time, and the third. I kept coming back to it, reading it aloud, being drawn into its flow, wondering how it carried such power. It was called a “Christology,” a proclamation of theology about the Christ. Its author, Martin Parsons, had artfully crafted these truths in the form of a confessional recitation, a kind of creed intended to be presented orally.<sup>1</sup>

### Second Canto

He alone is the one Creator (*al-Khaliq*) of all things, The Father who dwells in unapproachable light is the source of creation from whom all things came.

From all eternity ‘Isa, the visible form of the invisible God, was with God, and was God. All things were created through Him, without Him nothing was made that has been made.

He is the Creator (*al-Khaliq*), the Maker (*al-Bari*), the Fashioner (*al-Musawwir*) and the Beginner (*al-Mubdi*) of all things. We are His creatures.

He is the one Creator God, the Self-subsisting One (*al-Qayum*) who alone has life in Himself, and has imparted life to His creation through His Spirit, who alone is the Quickener (*al-Muhyi*), the giver of life.

This is our God, the only true God.

We worship Him alone.

Excerpt from the full text, available online: [missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/unveiling-god](http://missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/unveiling-god)

The entire work was saturated with scripture that I loved, but they were scripture that I already knew well. *Why was I so drawn to this particular presentation?* Finally, after years of wondering, I set aside time to dig into its depths. Unlocking some of its secrets could benefit anyone hoping to present scripture in powerful ways that draw people into engaging with God's story.

I started by spending time with the text itself: comparing it with scripture, looking for discourse and other linguistic characteristics, and drawing connections between what I found and current understandings of the oral verbal arts. Then I contacted the author, who graciously granted me an interview. The more I learned, the more vibrantly the text came alive. Come with me and I'll introduce you to the world of this confessional recitation.

Let's start by imagining that we're walking over to a filing cabinet and pulling out a drawer called "A Christology." As you crack open the drawer, your eyes land on the labels atop each folder, giving you an overview of the drawer's contents. The first five folders are marked with labels denoting five different descriptions of God:

- (1) There is but one God, whom alone we worship
- (2) The Creator of all things
- (3) The Lord of all things
- (4) The Master of the Day of Judgment
- (5) And the only Savior

In Parsons's confessional recitation, these five statements appear as an opening doxology, after which each one of these topics is realized within its own "canto," or subsection. A final, sixth canto, beginning with the same words as the first, presents a fresh reworking of all the material presented in the first five subsections.

Each canto contains a wealth of information about its particular topic, and you may be drawn for quite some time into that material. Upon reaching the end of each subsection, however, you will encounter a phrase nearly identical to the words that open the first and final cantos: "This is our God, the only true God. We worship Him alone."<sup>22</sup>

Returning to our file cabinet analogy, it's like spending time in a particular folder and then closing it again, at which point you're back to the top level of seeing the main labels of the whole drawer. The first and final folders catch your

eye, summing up the contents of the whole drawer. Finally, when you've finished perusing all the folders in the drawer, your eyes run over all the labels again as you close it. Similarly, the confessional recitation closes with the original doxology of the five statements about God.

Parsons developed this picture of the filing cabinet as he studied and attempted to imitate Urdu-Persian ways of organizing oral discourse. Of course, the fact that he chose a filing cabinet reflects Parsons' own grounding in a Western, paper-based society, and it's just one possible picture for conceiving of how the human mind organizes information at various levels. Those familiar with computer organizational systems might find similar inspiration by thinking about file directories. Let's move now to another possible picture.

We'll take our imaginations to the base of a large tree, its stately trunk and massive branches towering above us. That trunk carries the load of the whole tree, representing a storyline that occurs over and over throughout the confessional recitation: "God (the Father) empowered 'Isa, who in turn poured out the Spirit." No matter which major branch—presented as cantos

about God as Creator, Ruler, Judge, or Savior—you choose to follow, every branch contains, at its core, this same storyline. Consider two examples:

3<sup>rd</sup> canto (Ruler): "Therefore the Father...put all things under 'Isa... From heaven He ['Isa] has sent the Spirit of God to His church."

4<sup>th</sup> canto (Savior): "The Father... sent 'Isa...to save us.... And 'Isa...has poured out the Spirit of God...."

Just as in a tree, other, smaller branches may stem from the larger branches, so each canto contains additional information related to its own primary topic. In the end, however, all of the branches in the tree, and all of the statements in the cantos, return to the trunk, the main line of the story. By the time we've reached the crown of the tree, it's almost as if the sixth canto takes us shimmying down the trunk again, past all that we've learned, making the story line explicit with its review of the descriptions of God we've covered: "We know Him as Father...we know Him as 'Isa... and we know Him as the Holy Spirit."

A local man gave Parsons this picture of the tree in response

to the question, “How do you tell stories?” From his particular cultural background, the picture of the tree made the most sense in guiding him in organizing a narrative structure. Once again, we see evidence of the human mind creating levels in order to remember and recount material.

In his original publication of the confessional recitation, Parsons specifically identified narrative and repetition as key elements to making theology more accessible in oral contexts (2005, 226-227). So far, we’ve seen an overall narrative structured by two kinds of repetition—repeated descriptions about God outline the overall form of six cantos, while the core narrative itself is also repeated in each canto.

Parsons employs yet another powerful feature of repetition—he consistently uses formulaic phrases when referring to certain concepts or characters. For example, God the Father is described in every canto but the first as “The Father who dwells in unapproachable light.” Likewise, ‘Isa is introduced in each canto except the first as “the visible form of the invisible God” or, in one case, with the slightly condensed version “the visible form of God.”<sup>3</sup>

In addition to reinforcing important theological concepts throughout the course of the recitation, these formulas also provide a “resting place” for purposes of memory recall. The familiarity of a phrase allows someone reciting the poem to say those words on autopilot while mentally preparing for the upcoming subject matter.<sup>4</sup> In another example, Parsons has also streamlined recall by consistently ordering the terms *tribe*, *language*, *people*, and *nation* despite the fact that the book of Revelation itself only presents those four elements in that particular order one time, in Revelation 5:9.

Space precludes the exploration of the many other devices of narrative and repetition present in Parsons’s work. Already very powerful, this confessional recitation has the potential to become even more so if performed orally in the language of a specific context. The experience of hearing vocal expressive elements such as intonation, rhythm, and choices in syntax will bring out new levels of meaning in the text, as will the experience of being able to see other expressive elements such as gestures and facial expressions.

In presenting this confessional recitation, Parsons intended to

provide a well-grounded prototype from which others can draw to create a gripping narrative account of God's role throughout the history of the universe. His own footnotes on the recitation indicate that he incorporated material from at least 85 verses of the Old Testament and over 250 verses of the New Testament.

Parsons's footnotes also suggest that he has connected concepts of his Christology with at least one hundred lines taken from seventeen different *suras* of the Qur'an. Readers familiar with Islamic practice will also recognize the similarities between the opening of the doxology and the first part of the Islamic *shahadah*—"There is



Having identified a good number of additional direct references or strong allusions throughout the text, I estimate that this confessional recitation embodies concepts from nearly 150 verses in the Old Testament and over 300 verses drawn from nearly every book in the New Testament.

no God but God.”<sup>5</sup> This compelling story, solidly grounded in God's word, has been intentionally designed both in content and in form to connect with the Urdu-Persian context.

Given Parsons's model as a possible starting point, let us

seek to stimulate local people to create their own confessional recitations. Especially in contexts where established churches expect something resembling a formalized creed, let us encourage them to craft such works in the narrative forms that resonate with the common people. As necessary, let us guide them in discovering the

linguistic and artistic conventions that will make the internalization of such a rich, scripture-infused Christology accessible to the average member of society. Most importantly, let us pray for the creation in every community around the world of an irresistibly compelling presentation of this one God, whom alone we worship.

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<sup>1</sup>Originally published by Martin Parsons, in *Unveiling God: Contextualizing Christology for Islamic Culture* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 227-238. The full text of the confessional recitation is also available online: [missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/unveiling-god](http://missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/unveiling-god) (accessed November 7, 2015).

<sup>2</sup>Only the fifth canto doesn't end with this statement, presumably because the sixth canto immediately begins with very similar words.

<sup>3</sup>Compare these formulas for God the Father and 'Isa with 1 Timothy 6:16 and Colossians 1:15.

<sup>4</sup>In *The Singer of Tales*, Albert Lord refers to the usefulness of formulas to accommodate the "demands of performance at high speed," in which the performer "depends upon inculcated habit and association of sounds, words, phrases, and lines." Quoted in *The Singer*, edited by Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 65.

<sup>5</sup>See Ruthven, Malise and Azim Nanji, in *Historical Atlas of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 14.



## Scriptural Impact through a Dramatic Reenactment

*James R. and Jeanette Krabill*

*James and Jeanette Krabill served from 1978–1996 as Mennonite mission workers with African-initiated churches in West Africa. They currently live in Indiana, where James is senior executive for the Mennonite Mission Network and Jeanette teaches third grade. The Krabills' adult children—Matthew, Elisabeth Anne, and Mary-Laura—were all born in Côte d'Ivoire, but now live in the U.S.*

Colors procession  
 dance liturgy  
 choir  
 song  
 ritual

Rituals play many important and diverse functions in society. They ground people in history, foster community identity, mark life's passages, reinforce cultural values, and create continuity and meaning for both individuals and collectivities. Jesus understood the importance of rituals when he took common practices already “ritualized” in Jewish culture—like washing feet, eating bread, and drinking wine—and invested them with additional meaning by commanding his disciples, whenever they gathered, to “do this in memory of me.” Faithful Christian communities have passed along these practices for now over two thousand years.

Rituals take on particular significance in oral cultures where they become a primary, if not *the* primary way for socio-religious values to be transmitted from one generation to the next. When faith communities, following the model of Jesus, do the creative work of embedding Christian rituals in already existing, culturally appropriate societal patterns, the meaning of such practices is deepened in the minds and hearts of believers.

We experienced this in a significant way as a family during the nearly two decades we spent sharing life with African-initiated churches in West Africa. Our two oldest

children, Matthew and Elisabeth Anne, spent their early years living with us among the Dida people of southern Côte d'Ivoire and worshipping in the Harrist Church, an indigenous movement with some 200,000 members.

Rituals of all kinds shaped life in the village during those years and often served to reinforce the central beliefs and activities of the church as well. One such example took place during Holy Week in 1985, when our oldest child, Matthew, was five years old. Here is what happened that year in the days leading up to Easter, as recorded in our diary:

**March 18:** Today, just two weeks before the beginning of Holy Week festivities, death hit the village when one of our neighbors, Pita, left this world to join the next.

**March 19:** As Dida tradition prescribes, on the night before burial the body is placed outside on a spacious double bed in the courtyard of the deceased, and the entire community gathers around to pass the night in singing. In order to attend the death watch, Mama and Papa put Matthew and Elisabeth Anne to bed a bit early tonight and left them for several hours in the care of Lassina, a

Muslim friend from Mali who sometimes helps with work around the place.

**March 20:** This morning was Pita's funeral service and burial, and Matthew accompanied his mama and papa throughout the entire affair, even walking the long distance in the scorching midday sun to the cemetery and back again.

Most people came dressed in black or dark blue and, before the service, assembled quietly around Pita's bed to pay last respects. Pita's sister sat beside her brother on the bed, wiping his brow and chasing away a growing number of flies also drawn to the occasion. "Fight, fight the war for me!" sang the choir in muted voices and without the usual musical instruments. "It is you, my God, who can fight for me!"

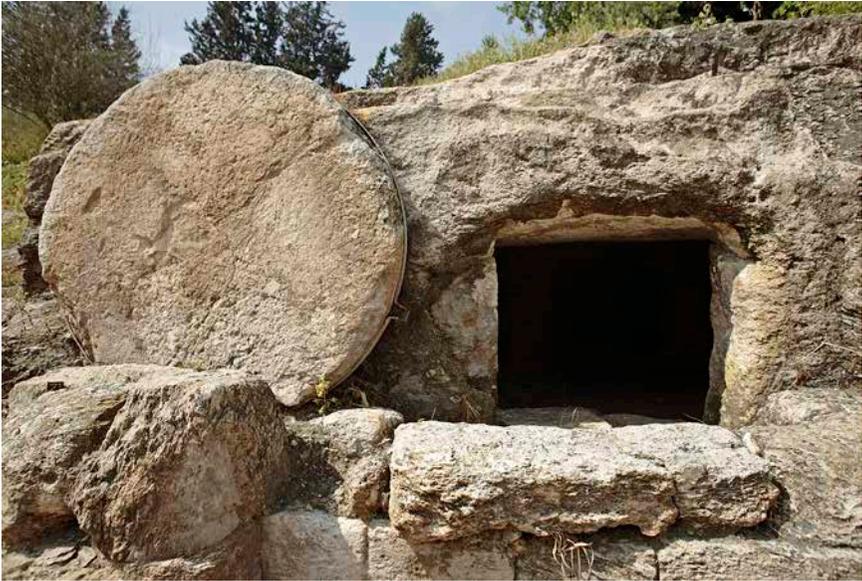
When Pita's body had been washed and placed in the casket, the mourners proceeded to the church in two long lines—men on the right, women on the left—on either side of Pita. "Women of honor," dressed in black uniforms, led the way, carrying bouquets of freshly cut flowers to be spread about Pita's grave.

We paused for several brief moments at the church to offer

final prayers. The middle row of benches had been removed to make way for the casket. Everywhere one looked were signs of sadness: the sanctuary candles remained flameless, the flowerpots flowerless, and the floor unswept. Across the altar was draped a large black cloth in place of the usual white one. Preacher Alphonse's comments were short and barely audible; from where we stood, only snatches reached us.

**April 1—Good Friday:** The practice here on Good Friday is to reenact a funeral—the funeral of Jesus. And so today we did it all over again. Black dress, muted singing, the symbolic removal of the benches and freshly cut flowers, this time deposited at the foot of the altar.

We explained the rerun to Matthew by telling him Jesus had died and on this day all other activity ceased in order to think about his passing.



Matthew, normally bubbling with questions, was caught up in the solemnity of the occasion. He remained silent and, like the rest of us, simply moved along with the flow of things until Pita had been lowered into the ground and we had headed for home.

“You mean Jesus is like Pita?” Matthew wanted to know. “He’s like Pita lying there on the bed?” “Yes,” we said, “Jesus is like Pita lying there on the bed.”

**April 3—Easter Sunday:** Easter morning! We got up and began

preparing for church. This day, we knew, would be one of great joy! There would be singing and dancing with bright flowers and palm branches decorating the sanctuary. And the musical instruments would be back in full force!

We dressed the children in their little white outfits prescribed for the day. “Hey, why aren’t we

wearing dark clothing?” asked Matthew, confused by his revolving wardrobe. “Because Jesus isn’t dead any longer,” we replied. “He’s come back to life!”

Matthew stopped, reflected for a moment, and then with a burst of inspiration added, “Jesus isn’t on the bed anymore!” “No,” we said, “Jesus isn’t on the bed anymore!”



## Arts Enliven Scripture-based Storytelling

*Carla Bowman*

*Carla Bowman, with her husband, Jim, founded Scriptures in Use (siutrain.org) in 1987. The curriculum they authored, Communication Bridges to Oral Cultures, has been taught around the world. In 2006, Carla developed Bridges for Women, a course to empower non-reading women with the memorized word of God in story. SIU holds over two hundred training events each year in over fifty countries. The Bowmans served as missionaries in Latin America and subsequently extended their training courses worldwide.*

song  
dance  
costumes  
ritual  
dholak  
drum  
story  
drama

At nightfall in Dulumpur, a hamlet in Jharkhand in eastern India, thousands of stars cling randomly onto an ebony sky. The welcome foot-washing and artful, ritually paced meal served on giant leaves take place as if in slow motion. Below the star-encrusted sky, this place seems suspended in time. Shrouded women dance in a millennia-old line. To the silken movement of saris, they rock faintly back and forth on bare feet to an irrepressible, soft, high-pitched, repetitive chant of a biblical song.



The perceived sluggishness of the dance, foot washing, ritual meal, and hypnotic sounds of the

music-chant are illusory because evidence of hard work is all around us: rice and lentils cooked for hours

on dry dung fires; swept dirt streets; immaculate, smooth, plastered, mud-brown walls adorned with white geometric designs and painted with whimsical gazelles floating in a line under tiny windowsills.

Abruptly, a loud beating of the *dolak* assaults the night silence. It is a drumbeat contradicting the slow rhythm of swaying hammocks that creak as the rope ends make contact with the trunks of *kikar* trees. Contrasting with the slow motion of village ritual, the drum heralds an arrival. A team of community church planters has arrived at the house of peace—a place for night fellowship consisting of a ceremony of scripture story, song, drama, dance, and prayer.

On this night, the community church planters tell and enact the story of Adam and Eve. It is part of the Old Testament series, a set of stories being presented in Dulumpur and other villages. A pervasive silence hangs in the air as the drum stops and actors playing Adam and Eve stroll forward. The subtle chant-song of the narrator begins. Her voice penetrates the night as she begins to sing the enthralling tale from Genesis 3: “Now the serpent was craftier than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made.”

At this instant, a large serpent slithers across the dirt, weaving and gliding toward Adam and Eve. The observers, enraptured and speechless, are gathered under the thatched roof veranda. One can hear a simultaneous, forceful gasp from the audience as the serpent moves across the ground. It is in reality a small woman wrapped in a silk-striped sari, slinking realistically in curved, slow motion toward Eve.

As the serpent lets out a hissing sound, the narration in the form of song continues: “The serpent said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”’” Eve is startled. Her face shows incredulity. The narrator continues in song, changing nothing from scripture, not adding to or deleting from the word of God. The story moves on to its conclusion as the villagers of Dulumpur have watched electrified, spellbound.

The success of these talented and creative performer church planters is due in no small part to flawless training by master trainers from Engage India, an Indian church-planting agency based in Madhupur, located in the geographical center of the large state of Jharkhand. Engage India

focuses on training church planters in an orality-centered curriculum called Communication Bridges to Oral Cultures (Bridges for short), developed by Scriptures In Use (SIU, [siutrain.org](http://siutrain.org)). The Engage India trainers have insightfully identified the communication style of the Santali people group and have used, to huge advantage, tribal skills in dramatic arts, music, and dance. Their repertoire of stories, complete with drama, song, and dance, reaches upward of thirty. The stories are sung to one of twelve traditional tunes with total fidelity to the biblical text.

Other stories have been memorized but are not yet developed in drama and song. The church planters have been taught to revisit these same stories with dialogue, as villagers sit in a circle around the storyteller. Trainers have taught the church planters to help listeners discover the meaning of the story through dialogue. Semiliterate storytellers use the printed Santali Bible as an aid to memorization. They are the ideal practitioners of this orality-based method of evangelism and church planting that has gained popularity and momentum in the past decade.

The SIU ministry ethos/vision is that a systematic church-planting

curriculum designed specifically for oral cultures is a powerful tool when in the hands of national churches, agencies, and trainers. We have seen evidence of the effectiveness and innovation of Indian trainers through the results in Dulumpur and in scores of other villages dotted around Jharkhand where many scripture stories have been adapted to drama.

We have seen results north of Dulumpur several hundred miles away in the country of Nepal, where teams of master trainers travel by foot, boat, bus, train, jeep, donkey, and yak to reach their venues. For years now, these teams have faithfully multiplied Bridges training all across Nepal and on the borders with Tibet and Bhutan.

We have seen the effectiveness of national trainers multiplying this training among dozens of Majority World churches and agencies of South Asia. Their ownership of the method and material has inspired the translation of manuals and video supplements into many languages of the Indian subcontinent alone. We have observed the leaders of training hubs develop their reproducible innovations. These include the House Church Bridges Model, Bridges in a Nutshell, Bridges for

Women onsite demonstrations, integrated children's ministry, the Esther Institute, story Bible schools, Bible story training during tailor classes, story memorization after prayer meetings, and multiplying the Bridges for Women training in small groups.

Other innovations to multiply training and encourage self-sustainability have emerged. Some believers bring goats and rice so food may be shared with participants. Trainers meet with church planters once a month for coaching and mentoring. It is no mystery why oral communication methods have been so successful in South Asia. For people groups like the Santali of Dulumpur or the Banjara of South India, the creative arts are their heart and soul. But

the success national trainers have had is not limited to that region of the world.

In Vietnam, storytellers journey with their "traveling Bibles," the word of God safely stored in their minds and hearts, as they go from village to village. In Sumatra, storytelling teams dramatize Old Testament stories of the prophets and chant corresponding Psalms. In Latin America, we have seen innovative nationals create urban barrio story groups in Peru, as well as rainforest story groups in Brazil.

Across the Atlantic to the continent of Africa, innovation and multiplication abound:

- Among the Pygmies, an oral Bible school, which is in reality



a simple grass-roofed veranda in the heart of the rainforest, is created.

- There are long storytelling afternoons under the acacia trees among the Turkana of northern Kenya.
- There is storytelling among the nomadic Mbororo of Niger.
- There is story and dance by firelight among the Tuareg, who have come to the Lord by family group conversion.
- In Ethiopia, hardworking trainers travel long distances to be greeted by church planters who welcome them eagerly and embrace their teaching.
- In Khartoum, non-reading oral-culture believers internalize stories from God’s word after effective training by a Kenyan.
- In Chad, classes on oral culture communication are filled to capacity, sometimes exceeding seventy students.
- In Mauritania, stories are encouraged as sweet mint tea is passed.

All across the globe national training teams are presenting what we consider the essential elements of effective oral communication of scripture. They instruct new storytellers to memorize the biblical story exactly as it is written. They teach that printed

scripture is an aid to memorization and that stories must be told with complete biblical accuracy and fidelity to the text.

At the same time, storytellers learn how to create introductions and develop dialogue. They are taught how to differentiate wisely between dialogue for “stone clearing” (pre-evangelism) and dialogue for discipleship. They are instructed to follow chronological order in their storytelling, as well as to select from worldview story collections. They are encouraged to have command of 50 to 225 stories. Although scripture tapes, media, and radio presentations are useful tools, participants learn that face-to-face interaction and community relationships developed through storytelling and dialogue are crucially important. They have also learned that literacy is not dispensable. Literate mentors are essential to teach stories to non-reading believers and are a key to maintaining fidelity to the word.

In addition to the quality of instruction in the essential elements of oral communication presented in hundreds of events yearly by national training teams, it has been a significant joy to the Scriptures In Use team to see innovative adaptations made by nationally-

led training hubs. It is a credit to mission leaders and practitioners in the Majority World that they have so quickly become staunch advocates and champions of oral communication of the scripture.

They have demonstrated vision, adaptability, and willingness to venture forward in a new paradigm for missions, utilizing ancient communication methods of the oral arts.



## Music Brings Comfort in Disaster Relief

Roger W. Lowther

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Flute keyboard  
shakuhachi dance  
instruments

It was hard not to stare at the devastation surrounding us or shrink at the stench of decaying fish and squid washed in by the tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2011. Our group of twenty-two volunteers—pastors, missionaries, church members, and others—drove two trucks and two vans into a gravel lot, recently cleared of debris, and started unloading supplies. Others started making meat and veggie stew on large propane burners. A little over a month after the earthquake, we were doing our

best to help the survivors of a community in Ishinomaki.

The pleasant aromas of the cooking soup drifted through the air, a smell almost forgotten by those who began to line up. It awakened a hunger, an appetite, not only for delicious, hot food, but also for life. Hope itself was wafting through the air.

Bruce Huebner, graduate of Tokyo University of the Arts, walked up and down the lines of waiting people playing his *shakuhachi*

(bamboo flute). The traditional melodies gently carried familiar stories of both pain and peace, awakening a joy for life that had been forgotten. Bruce played not to distract people from the boredom of waiting in line or as mere entertainment. His music brought a delicious aroma of a different kind, one just as real and meaningful, pointing to something that will always satisfy and can never be lost. Workers and survivors alike heard it and remembered.

*What part does music play in disaster relief?* was not a question on my mind at the time, as I and everyone else were overwhelmed by the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters. But at the very first shelter I brought supplies to, I spied an old electronic keyboard in the corner. When I mentioned to the shelter manager that I was a musician, everyone started to set up chairs and gather around. Once I started playing, they did not want me to stop.

Hundreds of thousands of people resided in shelters after the earthquake, grief-stricken and unable to move forward with their lives. People need love, and music opened doors for us to remain in the shelters and share that love

long after the need for material supplies had ended. In the scores of relief concerts that first year after the disaster, building relationships was paramount. After hearing us play, people willingly opened their lives to us and shared their stories.

We have witnessed dramatic changes in the mood of a shelter during a concert. “Bravo!” and “Wonderful!” ring through the air in a festive way. Children come up to play with us. People repeatedly break down in tears as some deal with their grief for the very first time. As a thank you to us, one energetic 84-year-old gentleman sang songs from his youth, bringing cheers from everyone in the shelter. One damaged community center was transformed for a little while into an elegant concert hall as the music transcended the surroundings.

The most dramatic response occurred at Onagawa Nuclear Power Plant’s shelter following a moment of silence for the two-month anniversary of the tsunami. The mood was incredibly somber, and we realized the usual upbeat opening to a concert was far from appropriate. Bruce came

up with the brilliant idea to call out a melody on his *shakuhachi* from one side of the gymnasium. Steve Sacks echoed a varied response from the other side of the room on his flute. Calls and responses of comforting melodies crisscrossed the room, mesmerizing us with their healing power. As we were leaving, one of the junior high girls got up the courage to play her flute. Bruce and Steve quickly joined in, and before long a whole group of adults were joyfully dancing in their celebration of life!

I have played with other Tokyo-based professionals in schools, hotels, sports complexes, community centers, and even outdoors. Setting up my portable digital organ never fails to draw crowds and comments, but nothing compares to the reactions when I start to play. “Wow! You’ve turned our gymnasium into a beautiful cathedral,” one shelter manager told me. People always send us away with, “Please come back, and play longer next time!”

Ten Christians from The Juilliard School came with me to the Watanoha Elementary School shelter to help in musical relief work (one of fourteen concerts

they gave in twelve days) three months after the tsunami struck. As the afternoon light began to wane, refugees pulled out their flashlights and lanterns so we could all see the music. The howling winds of a typhoon raging outside had knocked out the power and created an eerie atmosphere inside the gymnasium full of people. Torrential downpours created lakes of standing water surrounding the building. Yet the music allowed us all to relax and feel like everything was going to be okay.

At an International Arts Movement conference in New York City years ago, Jeremy Begbie encapsulated the importance of music in disaster relief. He said:

In a world that is so obviously not as it ought to be, it is the calling of artists to be agents of a new world, a redeemed world. Whenever we start to believe that nothing can ever be different, that our homes, relationships, careers are basically stuck in a groove and can never change and never will change, whenever we start to believe that the horrors of the world just have to be, the emaciated child compelled to beg at a

road side, or the prostitute forced to the streets to feed her drug addiction, whenever we start to believe that there can never be anything new under the sun, *it's the artist's calling to make us believe things can be different, that life can be new, that a new world is possible*, a world that ought to be.<sup>1</sup>

Neither my training in conservatory nor my job as a church musician could have prepared me for that first year after the earthquake. However, my role as an artist in disaster relief fit as clearly and naturally as if we had planned for it all along. The aroma of beauty plays a powerful part in the healing of individuals and community reformation.

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<sup>1</sup>International Arts Movement Conference, "Redemptive Culture: Creating the World that Ought To Be," February 23, 2007. New York City.



## Arts and Trauma Healing

Wendy Atkins

*Wendy Atkins has been ministering in eastern and central Africa since 1986. Since 1992, she has lived among the Azande in Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo. Her passion is to see Zande believers use their traditional art forms for evangelism, worship, and edification. She is currently working on a MA in World Arts from the Center for Excellence in World Arts at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics in Dallas, Texas.*

woodburning  
decorations  
carving  
lament  
dance  
weaving  
song

With traumatic situations resulting from war, tribal conflict, disease, famine, and the breakdown of the family rampant in our world today, the role of the Church in promoting biblically-based trauma healing is becoming an essential aspect of missions.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it has been said that “trauma is perhaps the greatest mission field of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>2</sup> Combining the power of the performing and visual arts with the word of God provides an important tool to facilitate the healing of the emotional and spiritual wounds received when people experience trauma.

When Congolese refugees fled north into the Central African Republic (CAR) after their villages had been attacked by members of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony in October 2009, feelings of trauma permeated that population.<sup>3</sup> But soon after they crossed the Mbomou River into CAR, the realities of beginning new lives as refugees brought their artistic talents to the surface.

Men began carving mortars, used for centuries by the women of this area to husk rice and pound dried cassava into flour. Artistic lines and wood-burned designs were



order in the people's lives and public expressions of their joy and frustration. The visual arts expressed in survival activities helped the refugees deal with the horrific situation that they had been through, as well as spur them on to begin again in the new situation into which they had been thrust.

incorporated into the carving of these ordinary domestic utensils. Young Congolese men started weaving straw hats traditionally worn by the ruling class of this people group. Their peers in CAR were not aware of this tradition, but when they became aware of the symbolism of the headwear, they quickly purchased the hats.

Music also played an integral role in helping the Congolese refugees

These artistic creations were made and sold to obtain much-needed cash for refugees in order to purchase food and other supplies essential to their survival. As temporary shelters and more permanent dwellings were built, artwork became an important way for these traumatized people to express themselves.



From the positioning of the supporting struts to the decorative sayings painted on the walls, these shelters became signs of desired

deal with the trauma they had experienced. The musical practices of the evangelical church people within the refugee population continued to be an important part of their church life as refugees.

Two weeks after the majority of the refugees arrived, a Sunday morning church service of thanksgiving was held in the refugee camp. People prayed, pastors preached, testimonies were given. Throughout the three-hour long service, musical expressions of grief mingled with hope infused the experience. Due to a long history of brass instruments being one of the main forms of instrumental music used in this church, the refugees had carried their trumpets, cornets, trombones, and baritone horns with them when they had fled their persecutors. These instruments were played at this church service to accompany congregational singing.

After the preaching, the Congolese refugee pastors and Bible schoolteachers sang a hymn as a testimony of God's goodness and care. The power of song set to biblical texts helped those who attended to focus their thoughts on the protection and provision of God as a way of dealing with the immediate trauma they were facing.

The most significant opportunity for the refugees to put their pain into song came several months later when a song-writing workshop was held at the evangelical church established among the refugees. More than one hundred refugees

attended the four days of teaching. Songs were composed each evening by more than six groups of church members. Songs of praise and thanksgiving were composed using scripture as text.

After lessons that taught them about the process of grieving, the participants were encouraged to present their experiences in the form of laments. Psalm 13 was used as an example of a lament, following the details presented in Lesson 2 of the book *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church can Help*.<sup>4</sup> The pattern of expressing felt anguish, turning to God in trust, then praising him for his goodness was used by the various groups to compose new songs expressing their pain. Several examples are worthy of note.

One of the choir groups based their lament on the text found in Psalm 59:1: "Rescue me from my enemies, O God. Protect me from those who have come to destroy me." Here is the English translation of the song based on the text written by the choir group (listen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n6sWLjPo\\_s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n6sWLjPo_s)).

[Leader] Oh, you the LRA, you chase people across the river!  
 [All] O God, save us from this!  
 To leave our houses for the termites to run to Digba or to

Zemio. *O God, save us from this!*  
 You, the LRA, you eat people  
 by your fires! *O God, save us  
 from this!*

You, the LRA, you beat people  
 as a blacksmith beats iron. *O  
 God, save us from this!*

Pastors have died. Joseph is the  
 one who killed them. *O God,  
 save us from this!*

God's work has died. Joseph has  
 killed it. *O God, save us from this!*

Choir members have died.  
 Joseph is the one who killed  
 them. *O God, save us from this!*

Man, you, Kony where are you?  
 When will you repent? *O God,  
 save us from this!*

The pastors who attended the  
 song-writing workshop composed  
 a song based on Psalm 13:6 and  
 Joel 2:18, accompanied by a dance.  
 As the men shuffled around in a  
 circular motion, replicating a  
 traditional dance done by hunters  
 and fishermen of this people group,  
 they sang (listen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJW3mi45YYM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJW3mi45YYM)):

[Leader] Sin is troubling us. [All]  
*God be merciful. God forgive us.*  
 Great sorrows are troubling us.  
*God be merciful.*

Many wars are troubling us.  
*God be merciful.*

Hunger is killing us. *God be  
 merciful.*

Great poverty is troubling us.

*God be merciful.*

Difficult illnesses are troubling  
 us. *God be merciful.*

AIDS is killing us. *God be merciful.*

Oh God, this is troubling us.

Oh Father, this is troubling us.

The LRA are killing us. *God be  
 merciful.*

Desire to return to our homes is  
 troubling us. *God be merciful.*

The LRA are killing us. *God be  
 merciful.*

Joseph Kony is troubling us.  
*God be merciful.*

Difficult deaths are troubling  
 us. *God be merciful.*

Bad words are troubling us. *God  
 be merciful.*

Oh God, this is troubling us.  
*God be merciful.*

Your power covers us. *Thank  
 you, God.*

Your love covers us. *Thank you,  
 God.*

Your grace covers us. *Thank  
 you, God.*

The LRA are troubling us. *God  
 be merciful.*

Desire to return to our homes is  
 troubling us. *God be merciful.*

Your power covers us. *Thank  
 you, God.*

Your love covers us. *Thank you,  
 God.*

Your grace covers us. *Thank  
 you, God.*

The LRA are troubling us. *God  
 be merciful.*

A group of widows, some of whose husbands had been either abducted or murdered when the LRA attacked their village, chose to reflect on heaven (the time when they would be relieved of all their sorrows), including those inflicted on them by the LRA. They used the verse found in Revelation 21:4 as the text for their composition. You can see them singing the song on a video clip at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zj8FDdvsVuU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zj8FDdvsVuU). The English translation of their song reads as follows:

Truly, truly, Jesus will wipe the tears from our eyes.

Truly, he will wipe the tears of sorrow from our hearts.

Truly, he will end the pain that is in our hearts.

Truly, truly, he will wipe the tears from our eyes.

As the songs were heard for the first time, those attending the workshop sat in silence, some with tears streaming down their faces. As each group was allowed to express their pain and hurt publicly, the trauma these refugees had experienced, having to flee their homes and travel over eighty-five miles by foot through dense, tropical jungle to arrive in a small town with only those items they could carry on their backs, was brought to the surface.

Discussions that followed revealed many symptoms of acute stress: nightmares, formerly excelling students doing poorly in their schoolwork, feelings of depression, and deep anger. Composing the laments opened the doors to their souls as individual refugees poured out their pain. Pastors and Bible school teachers, having been through the same traumatic experience, were able to bring individuals to the point of reaffirming their faith in the sovereign God who is always in control even when it does not appear so. The result was their songs being sung, recorded, duplicated on cassette tapes, and then distributed to key church leaders in the refugee camp. Healing had begun as deep-seated emotions produced by the traumatic situations they experienced were released through song and dance.

Jesus Christ told us to expect troubles in our day-to-day lives (Matt. 6:34). Throughout scripture, human agony is expressed as a normal part of life here on earth. The contemporary situations many face today prove these words of Christ to be true. *How will the Church of Jesus Christ respond to these needy situations where thousands of people are traumatized?*

The use of the arts to help people express their deepest hurts is an avenue that artists, trauma counselors, and the traumatized need to further explore and utilize today. Giving hurting people the opportunity to present their emotional and spiritual wounds through painting, sculpture, song, dance, drama, and other artistic

expressions will provide a way for the hurting to find a measure of peace. But true healing and wholeness will be experienced by the traumatized only as these artistic expressions draw people to focus ultimately on the sovereignty and faithfulness of God. Such biblically-based artistic expressions will provide hope for a hurting world.

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<sup>1</sup>This article is adapted from Wendy Atkins, "The Use of the Arts in Trauma Healing Ministry." *GIALens* 7 (1), 2013. Available at [www.gial.edu/documents/gialens/Vol7-1/Atkins\\_Arts.pdf](http://www.gial.edu/documents/gialens/Vol7-1/Atkins_Arts.pdf) (accessed October 7, 2015). Both photos featured in this article were taken by Wendy Atkins.

<sup>2</sup>Diane Langberg, "Trauma as a place of service." Paper presented at the National Church Leaders Summit, Bible House, New York City, May 5, 2011, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>BBC News Africa, "Joseph Kony: Profile of the LRA Leader," 2012 [[www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17299084](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17299084). Accessed May 29, 2012].

<sup>4</sup>Harriet Hill, Margaret Hill, Richard Bagge, and Pat Miersma, *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help* (New York: American Bible Society), 2013. For more information on the Trauma Healing Institute, see <http://thi.americanbible.org>. The Center for Excellence in World Arts at GIAL in Dallas, TX (USA) has built on this training to offer a graduate level, faith-based course incorporating the more extensive use of a variety of artistic domains cross-culturally in trauma healing.







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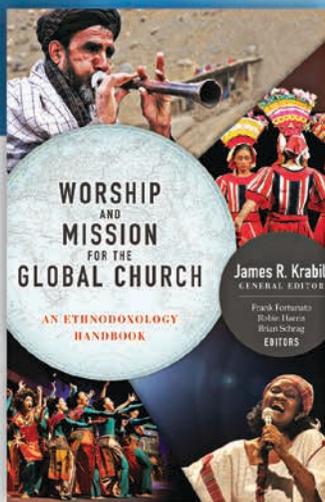
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