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THE SPOKEN WORD:  
GOD, SCRIPTURE, AND ORALITY IN MISSIONS

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Stuart Trevor Yoakum

May 2014

**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE SPOKEN WORD:  
GOD, SCRIPTURE, AND ORALITY IN MISSIONS

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I dedicate this dissertation to my family. First, I wish to thank my wife, Kimberly, for all of the support, encouragement, and prayers for me as I have labored at this project. Second, I thank our children: Tristan, Maryann, Aidan and Christianna. Thank you for all of your patience with me as I spent time away from home in order to write. Finally, I thank my parents, Rodney and the late Marilyn J. Yoakum. Thanks for your support and for instilling in me not only a love for education but also the determination to see this project to its completion.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC-CLIO	American Bibliographic Company-Clio Press
ADE	Association of Departments of English
<i>AJT</i>	<i>Asia Journal of Theology</i>
BDAG	Danker, F. W., W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Christian Literature</i> . 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
<i>BJS</i>	<i>The British Journal of Sociology</i>
<i>BSTJ</i>	<i>Bell System Technical Journal</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Cultural Anthropology</i>
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>DTIB</i>	Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. <i>Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
<i>IEL</i>	<i>International Encyclopedia of Linguistics</i>
<i>IJFM</i>	<i>International Journal of Frontier Missions</i>
<i>INT</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAF</i>	<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>
<i>JASO</i>	<i>Journal of the Anthropological Society of Ox</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JC</i>	<i>Journal of Communication</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>

<i>JMMLA</i>	<i>Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Society of the Old Testament</i>
<i>MIR</i>	<i>Missiology: An International Review</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary of the New Testament
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, A Select Library of the Christian Church</i> , ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2 <sup>nd</sup> ser., 14 vols. (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994)
<i>OJ</i>	<i>Orality Journal</i>
<i>OTJ</i>	<i>Oral Tradition Journal</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>Practical Anthropology</i>
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
SBLSemS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Series
<i>Scriptura</i>	<i>Scriptura</i>
SELAF	Société pour l'étude des langues africaines
<i>Semeia</i>	<i>Semeia</i>
<i>STRev</i>	<i>Sewanee Theological Review</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

## PREFACE

An African proverb says, “If you wish to go faster, go alone; if you wish to go farther, go together.” This dissertation is clearly the result of multiple individuals and groups who have supported me, encouraged me, and lent me their advice. First, I wish to thank the leadership of the Sub-Saharan African Peoples Affinity Group (SSAP) of the International Mission Board for allowing me the privilege of an extended time stateside in order to write the dissertation. Next, I wish to thank the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for granting my family and me accommodation in missionary housing during this last phase of my degree. I also wish to express my gratitude to the elders and the membership at Auburndale Baptist Church for all of their prayers, support, and godly counsel as I labored to finish what I had begun.

I also wish to thank specific individuals including my advisor, Dr. Eric Johnson, for his feedback and constructive criticism as I wrote. Next, Dr. David Sills deserves mention for his advice and encouragement during my moments of doubt and discouragement. I must also thank Dr. Chad Brand for allowing me to pursue this topic in one of his doctoral seminars. Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Kimberly, for all of her assistance and patience as I pursued doctoral studies and wrote this dissertation. Donne wrote, “No man is an island unto himself,” and “all of us are a part of the continent, a piece of the main.” The task of completing the doctoral dissertation has helped make those words abundantly clear to me.

S. Trevor Yoakum

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2014

## CHAPTER 1

### ORALITY: A MINISTRY METHODOLOGY IN SEARCH OF A THEOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

As a freshly minted seminary graduate and recently ordained minister, I arrived at my first place of ministry teaching at the Kaduna Baptist Theological Seminary in Kaduna, Nigeria. As a lecturer in systematic theology, I dutifully prepared my lecture notes, taught my lessons, and preached throughout the country. The manner in which I taught and preached was little different from the way that I did in the United States.

Years later, I returned to West Africa to begin teaching at the Ecole Supérieure Baptiste de Théologie de l’Afrique de l’Ouest in Lomé, Togo. The lesson materials that I prepared, the sermons that I preached, and the manner of my evangelism revealed a sharp contrast to the way in which I performed those same ministry tasks in Nigeria. The difference between the two came from the lessons that I had learned from orality.

The transmission model of communication theory informs us that the effective exchange of information has three essential elements: the sender, the medium by which the message is communicated, and the receiver.<sup>1</sup> As is now well known, the medium of the message (whether oral, written, or electronic) can be a difficult path on the route to the receiver. Consequently, communicating the gospel, whether in one’s own country or abroad requires overcoming certain barriers within the receptor culture.<sup>2</sup> Cultural, socio-

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<sup>1</sup>University of Tennessee, “Communication Theory,” Center for Literary Studies, <http://www.cls.utk.edu/pdf/lis/week1.Lesson7.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2013). There are, of course, multiple theories of communication in addition to the transmission model. I cite this specific example simply to illustrate that communication is much more complex than the model suggests.

<sup>2</sup>Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 366-415.

economic, political, and racial differences may erect hurdles to a meaningful fusion of horizons involved with the proclamation of the gospel. As formidable as these obstacles to understanding are, an even greater difficulty exists. The medium of language itself may arguably present the most treacherous path to follow in successfully communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ as testified in Scripture.

By focusing on language, I will be steering clear of the well-trod territories of epistemological and hermeneutical concerns, important as they are. Alvin Plantinga has well demonstrated how Christian faith can be a rational exercise of one's mental faculties.<sup>3</sup> Using speech-act theory and double agency discourse, scholars such Nicholas Wolterstorff<sup>4</sup> (with the help of J. L. Austin)<sup>5</sup> have argued convincingly that the reader of biblical texts is not trapped in a solipsistic quagmire of subjectivity but can grasp the illocutions of God himself. Nonetheless, the medium of language remains more problematic than that of Lessing's ugly ditch.

With respect to the effective communication of the gospel, a consideration of the medium of language involves more than focus on Bible translation, as noble as that enterprise is. While most languages in the world still do not have any portion of Scripture (as of September 30, 2004, 4,558 languages out of the 6,913 currently spoken are without any portion of the Bible),<sup>6</sup> simply translating the Bible is not enough. Most peoples of the world are still non-literate with as much as seventy percent of the world's population

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In the appendices, Osborne lays the case for a hermeneutical spiral from text to meaning and returning to the text again. In essence, one can engage the biblical text on its own terms.

<sup>3</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>J. L. Austin, J. O. Urmson, and Marina Sbisa, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>6</sup>David Claydon, ed., *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Lima, NY: Elim, 2005), 10.

having minimal to no literacy.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, most cultures are oral in nature despite a large segment of the population that is literate, meaning that language is received primarily via the medium of sound rather than sight (as with dominantly literate cultures) within their socio-cultural milieu.

This difference in the dominant sense by which language is used (sight vs. sound)—what Walter Ong called the sensorium<sup>8</sup>—creates differences in understanding between literate and oral societies. Moreover, the dominant sense used in language by a culture significantly influences how its people perceive reality, organize information, and remember—even speech itself is affected. As a result, while visitors from a dominantly literary culture (like missionaries) should always adapt their methods of communication to those of their hearers, this is especially necessary if the information receivers are members of a dominantly oral culture. This puts a different light on Marshall McLuhan’s quip that the medium is the message.<sup>9</sup> If applied linguistics is the passport to communicating successfully within a receptor culture, orality studies that engage the medium of language itself represent the visa gaining entry past some of cross-cultural communication’s most obstinate anthropological, sociological, and cognitive roadblocks.

Orality is the study of how spoken and written language impacts societies throughout human history to the present day.<sup>10</sup> From its beginnings, scholars such as

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., sec. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, New Accents, ed. Terence Hawkes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 1-16. The distinction between sight vs. sound is not a hard division. Primary oral and residual oral peoples do rely on sight to communicate, particular rituals and symbols. The point that Ong makes is that the dominant sense is what makes a significant impact on a culture.

<sup>9</sup>Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 7-21.

<sup>10</sup>John Miles Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research* (New York: Garland, 1985). Foley has compiled a bibliography of works related to the Oral-Formulaic Theory, totaling more than 1,800 entries and researching hundreds of languages since 1985.

Milman Parry,<sup>11</sup> Albert Lord,<sup>12</sup> and Eric Havelock<sup>13</sup> have maintained that the advent of writing fundamentally shifts an individual's and a society's senses: "Writing transposes language to a spatial medium, but the language so transposed has come into existence in the world of sound and remains permanently a part of this world—to a certain degree the oral-aural world."<sup>14</sup> The shift in senses affects how individuals and civilizations perceive and engage reality, even one's consciousness, literally rewiring the manner in which the brain works and changing how one thinks: "Writing, and most particularly the alphabet, shifts the balance of the senses away from the aural to the visual, favoring a new kind of personality structure."<sup>15</sup> Writing, therefore, has cognitive and social implications that one should not ignore in the process of communication. This maxim applies to Christian ministry as well.

Good practical theology must not only engage *what* oral peoples think but also *how* they think. Oral cultures perceive their environment in ways that may be foreign to those ministering among them. Ministry practitioners operating from a typographic culture—a culture in which sight is more dominant because of the reliance on the printed press—may find difficulties communicating to an oral culture that operates primarily in a world of sound.<sup>16</sup> The thought processes of oral cultures, not just their perceptions, are

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<sup>11</sup>Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup>Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

<sup>13</sup>Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>14</sup>Ong, *Presence of the Word*, 3.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 8; cf. Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 104.

<sup>16</sup>Ong, *Presence of the Word*, 15-22, 93-98. A chirographic (Gk. *cheiros-graphos*, "hand-writing") culture is one in which writing by hand, or a scribal culture, preserves writing as a record. The emphasis on the written text favors a visual rather than an auditory dimension in language, encouraging

fundamentally different.<sup>17</sup> The continuum between oral and literate societies presents yet another obstacle to overcome along the journey of communicating the gospel message.

Those travelling the tortuous path in communicating the gospel via orality have no shortage of travel guides in the way of books on oral strategies and introductory material. Lamentably, few undertake the journey on their own because of no guiding star, no theoretical explanation for how to interface orality studies into ministry practice. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the International Orality Network (ION) have published a good introduction to the subject that explains why we should use orality in our ministry strategies.<sup>18</sup> ION has also developed a web site to promote orality for the average layperson or individual with no background on the subject.<sup>19</sup> Multiple theological schools offer courses that introduce orality and teach oral strategies in ministry. The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention publishes training manuals teaching how to present the gospel using the Chronological Bible Storying, an oral strategy for evangelism.<sup>20</sup> These courses, books,

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more abstract thinking rather than concrete thinking. The visual sense can grow even stronger, however, since the impact of literacy on the consciousness of a society runs along a continuum and includes typographic (printing press) as well as hypertext (electronic methods of information retrieval) cultures.

<sup>17</sup>Aleksandr Romanovich Luria, *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 48-49. In a study of non-literate Ichkari women in Siberia, Luria noted the following observations about non-literate cultures: “Categorical classification involves complex verbal and logical thinking that exploits language’s capacity for formulating abstractions and generalizations for picking out attributes, and subsuming objects within a general category. Subjects who gravitate toward a [concrete or situational thinking] (non-literates) do not sort objects into logical categories but incorporate them into graphic-functional situations drawn from life and reproduced from memory . . . such an ability hinges on situational thinking. This system is decidedly rigid. Subjects drawn to it have the greatest difficulty dispensing with visual thought and switching to another principle of classification.” In another demonstration, Luria observed how non-literate cultures perceive geometric shapes: “Ichkari women . . . assigned no categorical (geometrical) designation to any of the figures presented. They designated all figures with the names of objects. Thus, they would call a circle a plate, sieve, bucket, watch, or moon . . . a square a door, house, or apricot drying board” (ibid., 48-49).

<sup>18</sup>Claydon, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*.

<sup>19</sup>International Orality Network, <http://ion2008.ning.com> (accessed March 14, 2013).

<sup>20</sup>Hayward Armstrong, ed., *Tell the Story: A Primer on Chronological Bible Storying*

and web site have an obvious pragmatic emphasis and are dedicated primarily to praxis, even the *technē* of doing orality. Despite this abundance of practical guides, however, orality studies have no fixed theological maps by which to chart the journey to proclaim the biblical message.

The lack of a theological framework for oral evangelism and discipleship strategies means that their practice could easily go astray from biblical orthodoxy. The performance of orality in specific ministry contexts may be ill-informed and poorly executed without informed direction. Moreover, operating from purely pragmatic concerns (*technē*) without practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) about ministerial engagement could prove fatal to the integrity of the gospel. Developing sound theological direction from which one performs orality in ministry is therefore crucial to the soundness of the proclamation.

It would be erroneous to say that no biblical or theological basis exists regarding the use of orality in missionary activities. To be sure, developers of oral strategies reference Scripture to substantiate their proposal. What little biblical warrant that is provided, however, demonstrates rather weak exegesis.<sup>21</sup> To date, neither

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(Rockville, VA: International Centre for Excellence in Leadership, 2003).

<sup>21</sup>*Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 10. Cf. Mark 4:33-34. The sole Scripture passage referenced in support of orality: “The answer comes from Jesus’ own model: ‘. . . with many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, *as much as they could understand*’ (Mk. 4:33 NIV, emphasis added). In fact, the passage goes on to say: ‘He did not say anything to them without using a parable’ (Mk. 4:34a NIV). Jesus chose his teaching style to match his listeners’ capacities. So should we. Jesus used familiar oral means that they understood. So can we” (ibid.). While the authors are to be commended for seeking a scriptural basis for the use of orality in ministry, they regretfully show an atomistic view of Scripture citation which results in proof texting. The authors unfortunately miss the point of the pericope in the process. The disciples earlier asked Jesus the meaning of the parable that he shared. Jesus replied, “‘To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand lest they return and be forgiven’” (NASB). Within the context, Jesus is teaching in parables not in order to aid comprehension but in order to *obscure* it for those unwilling to believe in him. Craig comments, “Jesus’ adoption of the indirect address of the parable was accordingly an expression both of grace and of judgment. It was an expression of grace which allowed time for reflection on his appeal to penetrate beneath his words to ‘the word.’ It was an expression of judgment upon their lack of preparation to receive directly the word of the Kingdom of God” (William L. Craig, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 172-73). Rather than supporting the argument of *Making Disciples of*

specialists nor practitioners have designed a definitive architectonic framework of orality in ministry.<sup>22</sup> The orality movement is in need of an articulated theological model from which we may create sound strategies. One place in which a theological justification for orality in ministry might begin is with the identification of a paradigm or so-called “central organizing principle” for practical theology and missions. This paradigm would organize as well as evaluate all other theological statements concerning the use of orality in ministry. Building off of the paradigm, we may also develop a more doctrinally informed practical theology for orality that could serve as the theological guide that practitioners need in order to use orality in a manner that is more biblical. Currently, such a model or paradigm does not exist among missiologists and practical theologians, let alone ministry practitioners and missions agencies.

### **Thesis**

This dissertation proposes that Kevin Vanhoozer’s theodramatic revision of the Scripture principle,<sup>23</sup> the communicative action of God by which salvific knowledge is possible by means of the *euaggelion*, offers sound legitimation for the use of orality in practical theological and missiological activity. I contend that an analogical oral dimension within the economic Trinity’s communicative activity as well as the oral-aural characteristics latent in Scripture itself justifies this revised principle as a theological paradigm for orality. Moreover, by functioning as a paradigm the character of God’s communicative action establishes the parameters for performing orality in ministry. In

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*Oral Learners*, the passage cited in Mark actually refutes it.

<sup>22</sup>To date, I have found nothing in various searches.

<sup>23</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); idem, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 63-75; idem, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

particular, Vanhoozer's theodramatic revision of the Scripture principle may provide guidance and direction concerning the viability of an "oral Bible,"<sup>24</sup> a strategy used in some mission organizations for giving non-literate peoples a collection of biblical narratives that outline the story of redemption and function as their own "Bible." When in tune with the theodramatically revised Scripture principle, oral missiological methods would better harmonize with Word and Spirit in a resonant chorus on the world stage within the drama of redemption.

In making the above *claim* that practical theology and missiology should use Vanhoozer's theodramatic revision of the Scripture principle as a theological framework for the use of orality in ministry practice, I have been following a Toulmin-model argument from practical reason.<sup>25</sup> Toulmin developed a model of rational argument for

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<sup>24</sup>"The Oral Bible Concept," [http://www.davidsills.org/downloads/OralBible Concepts.pdf](http://www.davidsills.org/downloads/OralBible%20Concepts.pdf) (accessed March 19, 2013). The article reads, "What is an Oral Bible? It is the Bible portions that a person can recall from memory and retell with reasonable accuracy. An Oral Bible is one which the possessors know as 'oral tradition,' that is, a Bible known by stories, passages, proverbs and memory verses that have been heard and remembered and can be told to others. An Oral Bible exists only orally. It is not written down. It is not *The* Oral Bible as it is neither a fixed Bible nor a complete Bible as it depends upon how much is learned and how much is remembered. But to those who remember the words of the Bible it is to them just as much a Bible as written Bibles are to the literate. There can be limitations and problems with an Oral Bible as we will examine later. Perhaps a better name might have been a 'Memory Bible.' But the term 'Oral Bible' was used early in the development of the present day Chronological Bible Storying methodology and experience and it has become popularized in use. Not everyone is in agreement about what an Oral Bible consists of, nor do they agree on how an Oral Bible should be acquired, or even if it is truly 'Bible'" (ibid.).

<sup>25</sup>Stephen E. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). In order to be consistent in a dissertation that uses Vanhoozer's theodramatic approach to Christian theology, the argument in the thesis should be considered as something that is composed of speech-acts rather than merely propositions. A contemporary understanding of Toulmin arguments as speech-acts rather than propositions can be found in the chapter by Robert H. Ennis, "Probably," in David Hitchcock and Bart Verheij, ed., *Arguing on the Toulmin Model: New Essays in Argument Analysis and Evaluation* (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer, 2010), 145-64. Practical reason or practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) was discussed by Aristotle in Book 6 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999). Aristotle distinguished between *sophia* (theoretical or speculative wisdom), that is, reflection on *what* one should *believe* and *phronēsis*, which considered *how* one should *act* based on those beliefs. Practical wisdom is a type of virtue (*aretēs*). For Aristotle, the highest use of reason was *sophia* but practical wisdom facilitated it in its conclusions. In the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger argued for the priority of practical reason in his understanding of fundamental ontology, cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); idem, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). In later years, Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre

everyday affairs that was not based on formal logic but practical reason. Such an argument has six elements: “(1) *data* or *grounds*, which are the facts or evidence used to prove the argument; (2) *claim*, which is the statement being argued; (3) *warrants*, which are the general, hypothetical (and often implicit) logical statements that serve as bridges between the claim and the data; (4) *qualifiers*, which are statements that limit the strength of the argument or statements that propose the conditions under which the argument is true; (5) *rebuttals*, which are counter-arguments or statements indicating circumstances when the general argument does not hold true; and (6) *backing*, which are statements that serve to support the *warrants* (i.e., arguments that do not necessarily prove the main point being argued but which do prove the *warrants* are true).”<sup>26</sup>

In the following section, I shall develop the *grounds* or *data* of the argument by defining the Scripture principle and its importance to the knowledge of God. I shall conclude the section by explaining what is meant by theodrama and how Vanhoozer revises the Scripture principle according to it. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate the reality of how the dominant sense used to communicate language has a significant impact on human cognitive functioning and perception as a second *ground*.

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Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) argued for a return to *phronēsis* after giving a devastating critique of contemporary ethics. Currently, practical theologians have argued for the use of

practical reason. Browning suggests the use of practical wisdom or *phronēsis* in the exercise of practical ministry: “Reason as *phronēsis* can be distinguished from *theoria* or theoretical reason, which is often thought to ask the more dispassionate, objective, or scientific question of ‘What is the case?’ Or ‘What is the nature of things?’ It is also distinguishable from technical reason or *technē*, which asks the question, ‘What are the most effective means to a given end?’” (Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991], 10). Similarly, in *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer argues for the priority of *phronēsis* over other uses of reason (*epistēmē* or *tēchnē*), later describing *phronēsis* as theodramatic virtue that guides the theodramatic improvisation, i.e., situational, located obedience in following the Script (Scripture). See Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 308, 329, 332, 335-44. Consequently, since this dissertation advocates a theodramatic approach to a dogmatic practical theology, there is good warrant for using a contemporary model of practical reason—namely, the Toulmin Model—in the development of its thesis.

<sup>26</sup>“Toulmin Arguments,” <http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Toulmin.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2013).

Having established the *grounds* of my proposal, I shall proceed to develop a two-fold *warrant* that, first, there is an inherent oral-aural dimension to the Scripture principle and its proclamation, that is, second, made even stronger in Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle. These warrants shall serve as the inferences upon which I base the *claim* that practical theology and missiology should use the theodramatic revision of the Scripture principle as a theological framework for the use of orality in missions as well as ministry practice in general. The first *warrant* is demonstrated in how Scripture itself is to some extent an oral project. *Backing* for the first *warrant* is evident in the fact that some parts of Scripture were first transmitted orally by God himself. Additional *backing* for the first *warrant* may be found in the oral human traditions that may have preceded inscripturation; the oral reading of the Scriptures themselves (the law, epistles); and the proclamation and teaching that occurs through the church of Jesus Christ to the present day. The second warrant is found in the oral-aural nature of the Trinity as revealed to humankind. This discussion will include the Trinitarian relationships themselves; the Trinity's roles in creation and the work of redemption; and how the Triune godhead spoke Scripture to us as *backing* for the second *warrant*.

### **Summary of the Toulmin-Model Argument**

First Ground: *God in divine communicative action is the means by which we know him through human utterances in the canon of Scripture.*

Second Ground: *The dominant medium by which we send and receive communication (visual, auditory, etc.) impacts our noetic faculties as well as the manner in which we interpret the message as demonstrated by studies in orality.*

First Warrant: *The presence of orality is evident in both Scripture and Christian proclamation as indicated in the fields of biblical studies and in practical ministry, specifically in missions and evangelism.*

Backing: *The presence of orality is evident in the composition of Scripture.*

Backing: *Practical ministry, specifically missions and proclamation, exhibits orality.*

Second Warrant: *There is an analogical oral dynamic within the divine communicative action as is witnessed within the Trinitarian economy, cosmology, redemption, and in Scripture.*

Backing: *The analogical oral dynamic in the Trinitarian economy*

Backing: *The analogical oral dynamic in cosmology*

Backing: *The analogical oral dynamic in redemption*

Backing: *The analogical oral dynamic in Scripture*

Rebuttal: *Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle may not apply to every conceivable ministry issue or question.*

Qualifier: *While we cannot prove that Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle can apply to every possible ministry issue or question, the fact that it belongs within the locus of theological prolegomena means that it does have wide-ranging applicability.*

Claim: *Vanhoozer's theodramatically revised Scripture principle is a suitable paradigm for the use of orality in missions and practical ministry.*

### **A Brief History of First Principles in Theology**

To develop the first *grounds* of the argument, this section will provide a definition and brief history of the development of the Scripture principle. This section shall discuss the first principles of theology as understood by the post-Reformation theologians and proceed to modern evangelicalism. Then we shall examine the theodramatic contribution of Kevin Vanhoozer and how it revises the Scripture principle.

#### **Post-Reformation Era**

Classical post-Reformation theology proposed God and Scripture as the first principles of theology, which is to say, they identified the object of theological inquiry (God) and the means by which he is known (Scripture) as the basis for performing the theological task. God as the object of theology is the *principium essendi*. The Protestant

divines understood that we know God through the *principia cognoscendi*: namely, Scripture as the external cognitive principle (the *principium cognoscendi externum*) and the Holy Spirit as the internal (*principium cognoscendi internum*).<sup>27</sup>

A number of Protestant divines from the Post-Reformation era attested to these first principles of dogmatics. Lucas Trelcatius identified the *principia* as God and the Word.<sup>28</sup> Edward Leigh similarly recognized the *principia*, “Two things are to be considered in Divinity: First the rule of it, the Scripture or the Word of God. Secondly, the matter or parts of it concerning God and man. *Principium essendi* in divinity is God the first essence; *principium cognoscendi*, the Scripture, by which we know God, and all things concerning him.”<sup>29</sup>

Other Protestant theologians from the same era referred to the *principia* and made similar identifications. Johannes Wollebius wrote, “There is a two-fold principle of Divinity; the one by which it is, and that is God; the other by which it is known, and that is the Word of God.”<sup>30</sup> Francis Turretin acknowledged similarly that a proper knowledge of God is only possible through Scripture: “The Proper rule of things to be believed and disbelieved is not the apprehension of their possibility or impossibility, but the Word of God.”<sup>31</sup> From these references, one may surmise that there was a broad consensus among the Protestant divines concerning the basis of one’s knowledge of God.

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<sup>27</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology*, in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 93-97.

<sup>28</sup>Richard Müller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 296-99; Lucas Trelcatius, *Scholastica, et Methodica, Locorum Communium S. Theologia Institutio* (Oxoniae, England: Josephus Barnesius, 1604), 1.1.

<sup>29</sup>Edward Leigh, *A System or Body of Divinity: Wherein the Fundamentals and Main Grounds of Religion are Opened* (London: A. M. for William Lee, 1654), I.2.

<sup>30</sup>Johannes Wollebius, *The Abridgement of Christian Doctrine* (London: T. Maub, 1656), Praecognita 1.3.

<sup>31</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:1.9.20.

## Modern Evangelicalism

Evangelical theologians likewise affirm the necessity of both God and Scripture for any saving knowledge of God. Erickson identifies “God as the object and Scripture as the means of knowledge about God.”<sup>32</sup> Yet Erickson recognizes that locating the precise starting point for a saving knowledge of God in dogmatics is problematic, much like identifying which came first—the chicken or the egg. If one starts with God as the basis of knowledge, then one must ask how God is known. On the other hand, if one starts with Scripture one must then ask what legitimates that particular holy text and its God above all others. Priority between God and Scripture for a proper knowledge of God presents a seemingly unsolvable conundrum.

Yet Erickson is not content to leave the problem unsolved. Erickson suggests that God and Scripture as a single proposition articulates what is necessary for a proper saving knowledge of God. Erickson writes, “Instead of beginning with either God or the Bible, either the object of knowledge or the means of knowledge, we may begin with both . . . perhaps we might think of the self-revealing God as a single proposition.”<sup>33</sup> The self-revealing God of the Bible, therefore, is knowable and makes himself known to us through Scripture.

There is a weakness, however, in Erickson’s definition of the knowledge of God, because of its predominantly cognitive basis. According to Frame, knowledge of God entails normative, situational, and existential perspectives.<sup>34</sup> The normative perspective is concerned with the propositions that state what God requires of human beings and how people should respond to God. The situational perspective is concerned

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<sup>32</sup>Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 32-33.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 33; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 237. Bavinck writes, “Objective religion is identical with the *revelation* of *God* . . . and may therefore be called, in the full sense of the word, a *divine establishment*” (ibid., emphasis mine).

<sup>34</sup>John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Philadelphia: P&R, 2002), 89-90.

with how to express devotion to God within concrete circumstances. The existential perspective refers to one's experiential and emotive awareness of God in a specific time and place. Finally, knowledge of God from an evangelical Christian standpoint implies both an affirmation of and a fiduciary response to the apostolic kerygma, also known as the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the primary message of Scripture under God's inspiration.

The personal and social elements of a proper knowledge of God that were included in Frame's model are generally missing in Protestant Scholasticism as well as in modern evangelicalism, and the traditional understanding of the Scripture principle is accordingly inadequate. Evangelical theology is in need of a more theologically robust account of how we know what we know about God. Vanhoozer seeks to remedy such deficiencies, among other considerations, in his effort to "reclaim the Scripture principle."<sup>35</sup>

### **Vanhoozer's Theodramatic Scripture Principle**

Vanhoozer shares Erickson's concern for the proper starting point for a saving knowledge of God.<sup>36</sup> But Vanhoozer goes even further by proposing an analogy that considers God, Scripture, *and* hermeneutics in a "manner that combines theological matter with theological method."<sup>37</sup> The result is a *revised* theodramatic Scripture principle that simultaneously pierces the epistemic fog of contemporary hermeneutical doubt and suspicion in God-talk, reaffirms the Scripture principle, but as the product of

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<sup>35</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 63.

<sup>36</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 15-16. Vanhoozer writes, "[W]hich comes first: the doctrine of God or the doctrine of Scripture? On the one hand, starting with God prompts the question, 'How do we know about God?' Just as starting with Scripture raises the question, 'Why *this* particular text rather than another?' On the other hand, it is difficult to talk of God without appealing to the Bible, just as it is difficult to treat the Bible as Scripture without appealing to God" (ibid.).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 16.

the Triune God's communicative activity, and presents a theological method conveying salvific knowledge of God that is at once cognitive, existential, and practical. We shall first summarize Vanhoozer's understanding of theodrama.

### **Vanhoozer's Model of Theodrama**

Vanhoozer<sup>38</sup> begins by identifying the triune God as “. . . a speech-agent, as a word, and as the breath that carries the word to others.”<sup>39</sup> He further upholds the orthodox position that Scripture itself is a species of divine discourse. Yet Vanhoozer refuses to separate the two as a “first theology” but rather asserts, “The proper starting point for Christian theology is *God in communicative action*. What this means in practice is that Christians must neither think God apart from Scripture nor Scripture apart from God. . . . Theologians should pay . . . greater attention to the Bible as itself a *communicative act of the triune God*.”<sup>40</sup>

It is well and good to acknowledge God as a communicative agent and Scripture as his communicative act. The problem is in recognizing that it is in fact *God* speaking. Furthermore, having established that it is God speaking, it is then incumbent upon the hearers to interpret the message correctly. Vanhoozer is well aware how epistemological issues were front and center in philosophical circles during the modern era and

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<sup>38</sup>By calling this section Vanhoozer's Model of theodrama, I am distinguishing Vanhoozer's understanding of theodrama from that of Hans Urs von Balthasar. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama*, vols. 1-5, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988). While the two approaches differ, they overlap in ways that I will identify in subsequent chapters.

<sup>39</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 63.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 62-63.

hermeneutical concerns likewise in the postmodern. In response he creatively engages the epistemic needle of God-talk with the hermeneutical thread of speech-act theory.<sup>41</sup> An assumption of speech-act theory is that communication is a complex interaction involving the one communicating, the medium of language, and the hearer. Utterances composed of words (locutions) are performative actions (illocutions), rather than mere linguistic abstractions, resulting in either intended or unintended responses (perlocutions).<sup>42</sup> In speaking, the illocutions actually do something, whether it is to promise, issue a command, or make a statement.<sup>43</sup> Relying on the insights of speech-act theory, Vanhoozer proposes that the Trinitarian economy can be understood as communication in action,<sup>44</sup> and the divine self-communication to humanity “rides a train of illocutions” in the Bible.<sup>45</sup> In God’s self-disclosure there, we see God promising, declaring, or commanding us—all of which are illocutionary acts.

Vanhoozer selected drama as an analogy for God’s communicative activity, as well as in the faithful obedience of the church, which conveys *action* rather than

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<sup>41</sup>John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Austin, Urmson, Sbisà, *How to Do Things with Words*. For a comprehensive treatment of speech-act theory in Vanhoozer’s theological development, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

<sup>42</sup>Richard S. Briggs, “Speech-Act Theory,” *DTIB*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>43</sup>John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1-29. Searle identifies five categories of speech-acts: assertive, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations.

<sup>44</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 65n29. Vanhoozer writes, “In what we may call ‘the analogy of speech acts,’ the Father (‘who spoke [*est locutus*] by the prophets’) locutes; the Son is the illocution, the promise of God; the Spirit is the ‘perlocution,’ the effect achieved *through* (per) the speech-act” (Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 148-55). See also Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 455-59.

<sup>45</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 64; idem, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*; Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 75-129.

*abstractions*. The drama begins within the Trinitarian relations themselves,<sup>46</sup> whose divine intercommunication also consists of speech-acts (illocutions). The Bible, then, is simply an extension of the triune God's eternal communicative activity, in both its inscripturation and in its content.

The whole of redemptive history as recounted in Scripture reveals God's dramatic activity, not only in the divine self-communication but also in the grand drama of creation-fall-redemption-consummation.<sup>47</sup> The divine discourse enacted and brought forth the creation *ex nihilo*. In the fall, God declared that Adam would die if he disobeyed his directive; afterwards, God asserted various curses upon humanity (both the man and the woman), the creation itself, and the serpent. In a redemptive history punctuated with covenants, the drama includes the time of the patriarchs, the Exodus, and the various stages of Israel's national history (Judges, monarchy, exilic, post-exilic periods), culminating in Jesus Christ—the Word of God (John 1:1, 14) and the commission that he gave to his disciples and to the church. Each of these stages along the path of redemptive history reveals theodramatic activity not only in God's words (his speech-acts) but also in his saving actions.

Of all of God's communicative acts in Scripture, the cross stands as the most profound. It is the promise of eternal life for those who believe and the just condemnation for those who refuse to repent and believe. Through the cross, God communicates the full range of illocutionary acts to the world. According to Vanhoozer:

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<sup>46</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 181-240.

<sup>47</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar says approximately the same thing in *Theo-Drama*, 151-72. However, von Balthasar's distinctions are God's lawsuit, Christ's dramatic struggle, and the drama of discipleship.

“(1) as an assertive, the cross is a statement that God has made provision for sin; (2) as a commissive, the cross makes a promise that ‘if you believe, you shall be saved’; (3) as an expressive, the cross demonstrates God’s love for the world; (4) as a directive, it is a mandate for Christ’s disciples to ‘die’ with Christ to the world; (5) as a declarative, the cross is an absolution that does what it declares, namely, forgive sins.”<sup>48</sup> The supreme communicative act of the triune God in the divine drama, therefore, is the gospel of Jesus Christ witnessed in God’s salvation of sinners and condemnation of sin at the cross (Rom 3:26).

The story of Scripture, therefore, is not something to be considered apart from the nature of God but is actually an extension of his dramatic communicative activity. The Holy Spirit not only inspired the words (locutions from the Father) but also their intent (illocutions of the promise of the Son) and he acts as the perlocutionary agent (conversion) on the grand stage of redemptive history. Even more, as the church, Christians are able to provide direction in following God’s message to them in Scripture via theology. Even in this age of postmodern uncertainty, the church of Jesus Christ has an authority to which it may appeal. The “*ultimate authority for Christian theology is the triune God speaking in the Scriptures*”:

The impossible task of speaking about God begins with the divine word-acts: with the living Word (incarnation) and with the written word (inspiration). To construe God, Scripture, and theology together in theo-dramatic terms: the triune God is the paradigm communicative agency; Scripture is a human-divine communicative act; theology oriented to the Scripture principle is a means of participating in the theo-dramatic action.<sup>49</sup>

Lived obedience to God’s communicative action in Scripture means that

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<sup>48</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 65-66.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

faithfully responding to God's commands is in itself a dramatic activity, a dialogue between God and the individual as well as the church. Hearers of the good news of the gospel identify dramatically with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ when they respond to it in repentance and faith not only in conversion but also in the on-going process of conformity to the image Jesus Christ. Moreover, Bible study itself is dramatic in that the reader is being invited to become a participant in the drama of redemption in the act of reading the biblical narrative.<sup>50</sup> As Vanhoozer argues, since the Scripture is intrinsically dramatic and the process of reading it is dramatic, doing theology itself (which includes proclaiming the gospel as story) is a dramatic activity.

Vanhoozer also provides a hermeneutical nexus for everything in his revised Scripture principle (theodrama, Scripture principle, gospel). The cord tying all of the elements together is the *missio Dei*.<sup>51</sup> The missional God communicates to us precisely for the task of saving us via the gospel and imparting to us his values and moral character. The incarnation, the cross, and even Scripture itself are missionary acts of the missional God,<sup>52</sup> and mission as “a focus of hermeneutical coherence”<sup>53</sup> based on the

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 18. Vanhoozer writes, “The biblical narrative is a three-dimensional discourse that operates with historical, literary, and ideological principles. The remembered past is rendered through a plot, which in turn renders a proposition: a possible way of viewing and living in the world. The reader, thus propositioned, becomes a player in the ongoing drama of creation and redemption. As a participant in this historical process, the reader is *spoken to* in the text” (ibid.).

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 68-69. See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 58; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 389-93. The term, *missio Dei* has multiple definitions. Contra a Christological or a pneumatological *missio Dei*, I propose a “two hands of God” (Irenaeus) understanding of the *missio Dei*, incorporating proclamation of the *euangelion* as well as humanitarian aid as a faithful, tangible expression of a gospel witness. The two are not irreconcilable.

<sup>52</sup>Wright, *Mission of God*, 22-25. Christopher Wright gives the following definitions for the following terms which I shall hereafter follow. Wright defines the Christian *mission* “(if it is biblically informed and validated) [as] . . . our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation.” Wright defines *missionary* as “those who are sent by churches or agencies to work in mission or on missions,” but acknowledges that “the word is also used as an adjective.” Wright defines *missional* as “an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities attributes or dynamics of mission.” *Missiology* “is the study of mission.” Throughout this dissertation, I will use the

Scripture principle should compel us to make a participatory response to the divine mission in one way or another. Whatever form that faithful response may take is an example of the human side of a covenantal dialogue involving the theodramatic divine discourse of Scripture that communicates the *euangelion* with the purpose of saving humanity, which is the goal of the mission of God. To hear God and respond in faithful dialogue, then, is to join him in His mission.

### **Vanhoozer's Theodramatic Revision of the Scripture Principle**

In multiple ways Vanhoozer's understanding of theodrama revises the Scripture principle. Given this understanding, I contend that Vanhoozer offers a lucid explanation of the first principles of theology using a contemporary framework for understanding how one knows God and how God communicates. In many ways, his work is an improvement to the classical Protestant position. I will examine how a theodramatic framework revises the Scripture principle in its synthesis of the *principium essendi* as well as the *principia cognoscendi* (both *externum* and *internum*). I shall also note its emphasis on wisdom over knowledge, and the priority given to practice over theory.

Vanhoozer's theodramatically revised Scripture principle is superior to the classical Protestant version in that it brings the object of one's knowledge (God) into a close conceptual relation with the external and internal cognitive principles (Scripture and the Holy Spirit). To be sure, Erickson provides his own solution to the problem. However, Vanhoozer's proposal is a creative display of theological imagination that merges ontology (God as communicative action), epistemology (the Bible as God's self-communication), and hermeneutics (by considering Scripture as God's illocutionary acts)

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adjectives "missionary" and "missional" interchangeably as I have done above.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 40.

while bridging the gaps that often separate biblical exegesis from systematic theology as well as theory and practice.<sup>54</sup> I turn next to examine how Vanhoozer relates theory and practice.

Theodrama, according to Vanhoozer, undermines the unfortunate cleavage between theory and practice that has become prevalent in Christian ministry. Because the theodrama is about action, our participation in it in obedient response to Scripture goes far beyond mere intellectual assent. Vanhoozer summarizes it well when he writes, “The drama of doctrine is about refining the dross of textual knowledge into the gold of Christian wisdom by putting one’s understanding of the Scriptures into practice. . . . [Its] proper end is wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of the truth.”<sup>55</sup> *Sapientia* or wisdom embraces *scientia* but goes even further: lived, heart-felt obedience. Because Vanhoozer’s theodrama assigns to theory and practice their proper roles within the dramatic participation in God’s plan of redemption, his theodramatic revision offers a better understanding of the Scripture principle than previous articulations.

Having established the first *ground* of my argument by defining the Scripture principle and giving a brief description of Kevin Vanhoozer’s theodramatic revision, the next step will be to explain the second *ground*, which is to identify the presence of an oral-aural dynamic in human language and its impact on human cognitive function in the next chapter. Following from these two *grounds*, I will suggest in subsequent chapters that the oral-aural dimension in Scripture and its proclamation as well as analogically within God’s self-communicative activity offer two *warrants* that establish a strong inference by which I make the *claim* that Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle is a suitable theological framework for the use of orality in ministry.

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<sup>54</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 20. Vanhoozer comments, “One is hard pressed to say which is uglier: the ditch separating theory and practice or the ditch that separates exegesis and theology” (ibid.).

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 21.

## Conclusion

The orality movement in missiological circles is a ministry methodology in search of a theology. Practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) in ministry based on the Bible will compel us to strive towards a better theological rationale for our practice even as we seek more sound methods.<sup>56</sup> Advocates and practitioners of orality methods have noble aspirations and have focused on an essential tool for missions and ministry practice in general. However, they must look beyond anecdotal support, pragmatic arguments, and the atomistic misapplication of Scripture passages if they wish to present a convincing case for orality in missions.<sup>57</sup> Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle is, as I shall argue, the theological *terra firma* upon which orality may stand as a viable ministry practice.

The form of God's theodramatic self-communication is relevant to practical ministry for it provides a paradigm for the fitting dramatic action of orality in missions. The oral analogy of the divine communicative action presents a compelling metaphor for the legitimate use of orality in ministry. Moreover, the divine self-communication provides theological criteria by which missionaries may practice orality responsibly, avoiding many obstacles along the road to successful communication of the gospel message. This dissertation shall make the case for how Vanhoozer's model of theodrama acts as our guide, not only in our hearing the oracles of God, but also in how we are to proclaim this word in order that others may hear.

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<sup>56</sup>Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 10. As mentioned earlier, Browning suggests practical wisdom or *phronēsis* in the exercise of practical ministry.

<sup>57</sup>The imbalance betrays an unreflective adherence to American pragmatism. See Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Wisconsin Project on American Writers (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2002).

## Background

I considered pursuing this topic as a doctoral dissertation while applying to the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention as a career missionary for the West Africa region, later renamed the Central Sahel Cluster.<sup>58</sup> Pursuing a role in theological education, after missionary orientation and passing language competency, I became a member of the faculty at the Ecole Supérieure Baptiste de Théologie de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (ESBTAO) in Lomé, Togo<sup>59</sup> and have been teaching practical theology. A missionary orientation, as well as lesson preparation as a theological educator in Africa, brought the importance of orality into bold relief.

Orality is of great concern in Sub-Saharan Africa because its ethno-linguistic people groups, including those with a significant literate population, are categorized by many as “oral cultures.”<sup>60</sup> Many people groups have a majority population that is non-literate. The oral character of this culture influences how its members perceive reality, operate within their surroundings, and interact with one another. Communication,

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<sup>58</sup>International Mission Board, “IMB to Reorganize to Face Changing World,” <http://www.imb.org/main/news/details.asp?StoryID=71908&LanguageID=1709> (accessed March 14, 2013). In 2008, the International Mission Board restructured globally from eleven geographical regions to eleven affinity groups organized according to ethnicity, culture, and language. The Central Sahel Cluster, part of the Sub-Saharan African Peoples Affinity (SSAPA) comprises nine countries within the West Africa region, including Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Gambia, and portions of Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

<sup>59</sup>Ecole Supérieure Baptiste de Théologie de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (ESBTAO), <http://www.esbtao.org/> (accessed March 14, 2013). ESBTAO is the Baptist theological seminary for the West African countries comprising the Francophone Union, a consortium of French-speaking Baptist conventions.

<sup>60</sup>Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 1-25; idem, *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 146. Finnegan is reluctant, however, to categorize African cultures as ‘oral’ out of concern for an unintentional binary division between “oral” and “literate” cultures. I am sensitive to her concerns and recognize that all cultures operate along a continuum from primary orality (cultures having no exposure to literacy) to hypertext (highly literate cultures that preserve substantial amounts of written material in electronic format). For the sake of brevity, when using the term “oral culture,” I am suggesting a culture that may in fact have a substantial literate population but still operates predominately in an oral-aural medium or manifests residual orality as opposed to one that is primarily visual with reference to the use of language.

including the proclamation of the gospel, must consider not only the words involved, but also the manner of their delivery. Orality is therefore a topic of great relevance for church planting in an African context.

Orality studies must also be considered with reference to theological education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The education of non-literate people groups must—at least initially—be oral in nature, and so employ each tribal group’s own songs, poetry, and story formats as the template by which to develop a ministry training curriculum, comprised primarily of biblical narratives in the local language. Other non-residential forms of pastoral training, including Theological Education by Extension (TEE), should also consider the insights of orality studies for curriculum development.

Orality studies might also benefit curriculum development and pedagogy at traditional seminaries and pastor’s schools. It is generally understood that African higher education, as a whole, is struggling.<sup>61</sup> Mission organizations like the International Orality Network see the need to adjust current pedagogy in traditional theological seminaries to address the needs of oral learners.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, orality studies should be influential in the development of a contextualized African education philosophy, educational psychology, learning theory, as well as how one should determine and assess educational goals and objectives.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Y. G.-M. Lulat, “The Development of Higher Education in Africa: A Historical Survey,” in *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook*, ed. Dantew Teffera and Philip G. Altbach (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 28-30, <http://digilib.bc.edu/reserves/ed779/altb/ed77973.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2013).

<sup>62</sup>Samuel E. Chaing and Grant Lovejoy, eds., *Beyond Literate Western Literate Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts* (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2013), <http://www.oralty.net/sites/default/files/Beyond%20Literate%20Western%20Models.pdf> (accessed January 14, 2014).

<sup>63</sup>International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) Manifesto, <http://www.icete-edu.org/manifesto/index.htm> (accessed March 19, 2013). Paragraph one of the ICETE Manifesto reads, “Our programmes of theological education must be designed with deliberate reference to the contexts in which they serve. We are at fault that our curricula so often appear either to have been imported whole from abroad, or to have been handed down unaltered from the past. The selection of

Orality studies have the potential to impact every domain of practical theology.<sup>64</sup> Besides evangelism and theological education, orality studies could shape the development of a contextualized liturgy, method of proclamation and sermon delivery, and pastoral care. Before further work in these separate disciplines should begin, however, I am convinced of the need of a developed *theology* of orality to provide direction for a fitting performance in the drama of redemption.

Perusing the academic literature about orality in missions revealed to me a lamentable paucity of sources articulating any sort of theological justification. The emphasis throughout has instead centered on the *practice* of orality. This increased my concern that without any carefully developed theological model, ministry practitioners could potentially misapply orality in ways that could eventually compromise the gospel. This dissertation is my attempt to fill a lacuna that I perceive exists in missiological and practical theological literature.

### **Methodology**

The research for this dissertation will be literary and theological, operating primarily within the four metatheoretical domains of practical theological work in missions according to Richard Osmer's description of practical theology, and likened to

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courses for the curriculum, and the content of every course in the curriculum, must be specifically suited to the context of service. To become familiar with the context in which the biblical message is to be lived and preached is no less vital to a well-rounded programme than to become familiar with the content of that biblical message. Indeed, not only in what is taught, but also in structure and operation our theological programmes must demonstrate that they exist in and for their specific context, in governance and administration, in staffing and finance, in teaching styles and class assignments, in library resources and student services." Including orality in curriculum development is making a deliberate reference to the context in which we serve in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>64</sup>Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains: Manual for Practical Theology*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 285-91. Traditionally, practical theology encompasses a wide gamut of disciplines including liturgics/worship, proclamation, catechetics/education, poimenics or pastoral care and counseling, evangelism and missions, oikodomics (church health), and leadership/administration.

dramaturgy in Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach to theology.<sup>65</sup> Within a canonical-linguistic practical theology in the above missiological and practical contexts, the theologian’s role as a “dramaturge” is to provide theological direction for future methodological development in orality (Osmer’s “normative stage” or Vanhoozer’s “dramaturgy”).<sup>66</sup> As already indicated, the practical theology from which I operate is confessional, working from a classical dogmatic hermeneutical matrix as opposed to ultimate priority being given to the human sciences (as in liberal practical theology) or the identity politics of Marxist critical theory (as in liberation theology).<sup>67</sup> The normative (or dramaturgical) task therefore shall be to elucidate the main relevant themes of the theodrama along the four metatheoretical domains of practical theology and therefore explain how Vanhoozer’s revised Scripture principle directs the use of orality in ministry. It is the burden of this dissertation therefore to demonstrate why the doctrines of God’s communicative activity should serve as the maps by which practical theologians and mission practitioners may implement sound strategies of orality.

At the same time, a confessional practical theology—which also belongs to the classical tradition<sup>68</sup>—does not reject the use of other disciplines, particularly the human

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<sup>65</sup>Richard R. Osmer, “Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective,” *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 67 (2011): 2-3; Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 243-362.

<sup>66</sup>Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4. Osmer summarizes the process of doing practical theology along four stages: descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic. The normative stage is that moment in the process of doing practical theology in which the practical theologian asks, “What should be done?” Browning offers a similar four-fold process of doing practical theology (descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and strategic practical theology). I prefer Osmer’s stages over Browning’s in that Osmer’s stages are more indicative of the organic process of doing practical theology whereas Browning’s systematic theology stage risks confusion with the dogmatic branch of the theological disciplines as opposed to a distinct stage within the process of doing practical theology. See Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 8.

<sup>67</sup>David John Atkinson, et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), s.v. “Practical and Pastoral Theology,” by D. J. Tidball.

<sup>68</sup>Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). See also, Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York:

sciences. Indeed, speech about God also raises multiple questions in philosophy, particularly epistemology and hermeneutics. During the course of the discussion of theodrama, therefore, this dissertation will address (though not exhaustively) some relevant matters in the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of language, and hermeneutics.

As this dissertation is a proposal within the field of practical theology, it will also be necessary to review the relevant literature within the disciplines of missiology and cultural anthropology, particularly writings concerning orality. Missiology is a distinct field to be sure. However, all of ministry is missional<sup>69</sup> so missiology is a discipline within the field of practical theology.<sup>70</sup> While all practical theologians are not missiologists every practical theology should reflect some engagement with missiology.

### **Delimitations**

The dissertation involves interdisciplinary work in biblical and systematic theology, philosophy, missiology, anthropology and linguistics, all guided by the concerns of practical theology. Moreover, the dissertation itself is based on a broad topic—how knowledge of God is possible via human speech. The following general delimitations are necessary in order to streamline the discussion:

First, practical theology often invokes fieldwork (the descriptive/empirical and interpretive domains of reflective ministry practice).<sup>71</sup> However, quantitative and

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HarperCollins, 1983).

<sup>69</sup>Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, 58; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389-93.

<sup>70</sup>Historically, Schleiermacher organized the European theological education curriculum so that missiology was part of practical theology. During the late nineteenth century in the United States, however, history and the social sciences were the major influences on missiology. This dissertation follows Schleiermacher's understanding that missiology is a discipline within the broader field of practical theology.

<sup>71</sup>Osmer, *Introduction to Practical Theology*, 4.

qualitative analysis, though helpful, are beyond the scope and size limitations of this dissertation. To be sure, the proposed thesis has implications for field research.

However, those issues present topics of inquiry for others to investigate.

Second, the descriptive-empirical phase of this exercise in practical theology will consist of the results of a literature review of anthropological and missiological sources, limited to a survey of thought on the issue of the orality movement, instead of conducting a quantitative or qualitative study.

Third, the chapter dedicated to theodrama will focus exclusively on the interrelationship between theodrama and orality as they pertain to matters concerning metaphysics, cosmology, redemption, and Scripture. A full treatment of each of these topics will be impossible, of course. Rather, discussion will be limited to theodrama and orality in each of these broad categories.

Fourth, the practical theology chapter will not present a comprehensive practical theology of orality. Rather, it will be limited to the discussion of the implications of Vanhoozer's theodramatically revised Scripture principle functioning as the theological basis for orality in ministry and missions. Having established the legitimacy of orality for Christian ministry, it may be possible to develop a more comprehensive vision of orality in ministry as directed by theological reflection at a later time.

### **Summary of Subsequent Chapters**

Chapter 2 will give background information concerning the field of orality studies. The chapter will begin with a brief chronology of the discipline since the 1920's. The summary of the history of orality research will review work in literary studies, anthropology, linguistics, and psychology. It will conclude with a summary of the impact of orality on human cognitive function according to Ong and others. Chapter two will provide the second *warrant* in the argument of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 will examine the history of orality studies as they pertain to their influence on theological studies in general. First, it will examine the impact of orality on biblical studies. Next, it will consider the influence of orality on Christian ministry, particularly in the field of missiology but also church planting and evangelism in a North American context. Finally, chapter 3 will provide the first *warrant* in the argument.

Chapter 4 will focus on the implications of theodrama for orality studies, Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle. The rest of the chapter will examine the metaphysical implications of divine discourse, the cosmological significance of the divine communicative action, the impact of divine discourse on the doctrine of redemption, and finally, on Scripture as an extension of theodramatic action. Chapter 4 will give the second *warrant* in the argument.

Chapter 5 will attempt to weave together the arguments from the previous four chapters and present Kevin Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle as the paradigm for the use of orality in Christian ministry, particularly practical theology and missions. The chapter will examine the implications of the proposed locus for orality according to the four metatheoretical domains of practical theology. The chapter will also use the proposed paradigm in order to investigate the legitimacy of an "oral Bible" in missiological endeavors. This theological exploration will serve to illustrate the utility of Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle as a paradigm for ministry. It will also serve to illustrate the paradigm's directive capacity for theological inquiry and the development of strategy for ministry.

## CHAPTER 2

### *IN MEDIA RES: THE HISTORY OF ORALITY STUDIES AND THE INFLUENCE OF ORALITY ON HUMAN COGNITION*

#### **Introduction**

The next two chapters shall chronicle the history and pervasive influence of orality studies in multiple areas of research. Orality as a science is a multidisciplinary field, involving scholars from such diverse specializations as literary studies, linguistics, folklore, history, anthropology, and more recently, biblical research, missiological studies and practical theology.<sup>1</sup> By the 1980s orality studies extended to over ninety national literatures and had almost two thousand bibliographical references.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will provide a broad overview of orality studies by first giving a brief history of the

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<sup>1</sup>*In Media Res* (Lt., “in the middle of”) is a textual allusion implying that the medium of communication, in this case oral communication, is in the middle of epistemological and hermeneutical concerns in missions and practical theology. The term is taken from the chapter by Hent de Vries, “In Media Res: Global Religion, Public Spheres, and the Task of Contemporary Comparative Religious Studies,” in *Religion and Media*, ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, Cultural Memory in the Present Series, ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 3-42. See John Miles Foley, “Introduction,” in *Oral Tradition in Literature*, ed. John Miles Foley (Columbia: Missouri University Press, 1986), 2; Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, New Accents, ed. Terence Hawkes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 7; Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 1-11. Ong notes the interest that scholars have in the *sensorium* (how our senses affect language and meaning) across a wide variety of fields, including art history, literature, economic history, sociology, as well as philosophy and religion.

<sup>2</sup>John Miles Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1985). Foley has continued to make additions to the first bibliography that he has compiled in the *OTJ*. See, for example, John Miles Foley, et al., “Annotated Bibliography,” *OTJ* 1, no.3 (1986): 767-809, <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/1iii/bibliography> (accessed April 18, 2013); Lee Edgar Tyler, “Annotated Bibliography to 1985,” *OTJ* 1, nos. 1-2 (1988): 767-808, <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/3i-ii/tyler> (accessed April, 18, 2013); Catherine Quick, “Annotated Bibliography 1986-1990,” *OTJ* 12 (1997): 366-484, <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/12ii/quick> (accessed 18 April, 2013).

development of orality and listing some of the leading researchers in the field. The second half of chapter 2 will then list the implications of orality and literacy on human consciousness and cognition. The goal is to provide readers with a general understanding of how the study of orality became a recognized field of inquiry. Chapter 3 will then narrow the focus and chronicle the contribution of orality studies to various fields of Christian theological studies including biblical studies and missiology. Both of these summaries shall illustrate the relevance of orality studies for missions and the broader field of practical theology.

Chapter 2, however, will attempt to do more than provide a broad historical survey of orality research. A second goal is to continue the argument from practical reason by stating the second *ground* or *data* in the Toulmin model argument: *the dominant medium by which we use language to send and receive communication (visual, auditory, etc.) impacts our noetic faculties as well as the manner in which we interpret the message as demonstrated by studies in orality*. We begin, then, with a survey of the development of orality science.

### **History of Orality as a Science**

#### **Milman Parry and Albert Lord**

The academic community first became aware of the concept of orality through the analysis of epic Greek poetry, specifically from the writings of Milman Parry in 1928.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, Parry did not intend to create a new field or academic discipline. Nor was he concerned with anthropology or psychology. His focus was on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and led to the publication of two doctoral dissertations. The conclusions Parry

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<sup>3</sup>John Miles Foley, *Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 3; Milman Parry and Adam Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse : The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).

made in his doctoral theses, however, had wider implications than those that related simply to ancient Greek epics.

Parry had attempted to solve the age-old literary conundrum known as the “Homeric Question,” that refers to the identity of Homer as well as the mystery of how he composed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in an Achean epoch devoid of a system of writing. Rejecting the conclusion of multiple authors of the German Analytic School as well as the Anglo-American position of a single author, Parry advocated a solution to the problem that was more dynamic than either view, arguing that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were the creations of multiple generations of storytellers acting from within the same poetic tradition. Rather than memorizing the epic poems by rote, the storytellers or bards would invoke formulas or expressions that acted as makeshift vocabularies and assisted in the retelling of the epic tales. Moreover, Parry also suggested that Homer began the original process of composing his epics in the process of his performances and not by sitting with quill and parchment as many believed. The composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was a performative process that was necessarily oral.

These phrases or formulas (“rosy-fingered dawn,” or “wily Odysseus”), as Parry called them,<sup>4</sup> were literary devices that modern literary critics found so annoying. Among many literary critics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not good literature because they repeatedly employed the same expressions. Parry, however, revealed there was a level of sophistication in both Homeric epics that had been unrecognized by the then-contemporary scholarly consensus. Moreover, Parry inadvertently developed a new way of examining language as it is employed across cultures in various time periods through the impact of literacy and illiteracy on civilizations and their own cultural expression.

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<sup>4</sup>Parry and Parry define formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” (Parry and Parry, *Making of Homeric Verse*, 272; Foley, “Introduction,” 3).

Afterwards, Parry and his research assistant Albert Lord traveled throughout various regions of Yugoslavia, engaging in field research on the *guslari*, non-literate singers and storytellers who performed epic ballads from the Balkans.<sup>5</sup> By recording and interviewing the *guslari*, Parry and Lord attempted to verify Parry's previous conclusions based on manuscripts of ancient documents, current examples of oral discourse from a very different culture whose language was still in use. Their results appeared to yield conclusive evidence that the phenomena Parry identified with regard to ancient Greek epics was also relevant for understanding the construction of oral tales recited by non-literate singers in an entirely different culture of the Balkans. This work was summarized in *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* in 1954.<sup>6</sup>

Albert Lord continued the work of Milman Parry who had died in 1935 and in 1960 Lord published *The Singer of Tales*.<sup>7</sup> With this book, Lord effectively launched the movement of orality studies as a serious field of scholarly inquiry. Lord combined the findings from the research conducted in Yugoslavia with Milman Parry and compared it with epic poems in Byzantine Greek, Old English, and Old French. He described common characteristics in the literatures of these dominantly oral cultures.

Although Parry and Lord conducted their fieldwork in the middle of the last century, many of their conclusions remain valid to this day.<sup>8</sup> After the work of Parry and Lord, other fields of academic research began to explore orality. While Hector Munro

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<sup>5</sup>Foley, *Oral Tradition in Literature*, 4.

<sup>6</sup>Albert Bates Lord and Béla Bartók, *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954).

<sup>7</sup>Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

<sup>8</sup>Mary Sale, "The Oral-Formulaic Theory Today," in *Speaking Volumes: Orality and Literacy in the Greek and Roman World*, ed. Janet Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 53. Sale quotes Russo who writes, "Parry's theory remains impressive for its durability in the face of so many challenges and revisions . . . It is inevitable that today no reader of Homer can fail to be in some sense a Parryist" (Joseph Russo, "The Formula," in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry Powell [Leiden: Brill, 1997], 260.

Chadwick and Nora Kershaw Chadwick had introduced the concept of “oral literature” in anthropological studies in the 1940’s,<sup>9</sup> Ruth Finnegan developed the concept further with her anthropological fieldwork of oral literature in Africa.<sup>10</sup> Other scholars such as Görög-Karady<sup>11</sup> and Bauman further expanded the field of oral studies in the field of anthropology. Jack Goody used orality studies to refine previous conclusions concerning oral cultures. Rather than describing the evolution of cultures as a development from the ‘savage mind’ (Claude Lévi-Strauss’s label) to civilization, Goody attributed the progression to varying degrees of literacy.<sup>12</sup>

Around the same time, developmental psychology had been breaking ground in orality parallel to literary studies and cultural anthropology. Aleksandr Romanovich Luria’s research on non-literate Ichkari women in Siberia from 1931-32 offered independent confirmation of many of Parry and Lord’s conclusions more than twenty years before they conducted their fieldwork in Yugoslavia.<sup>13</sup> Other studies on the

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<sup>9</sup>Hector Munro Chadwick and Nora Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature Series*, 3 vols., (1932-1940; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup>Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). For other work by Finnegan pertaining to orality and Africa, see Ruth Finnegan, *Limba Stories and Story-telling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); idem, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); idem, *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup>Veronica Görög-Kanady, *Bibliographie annotée. Littérature orale d’Afrique noire. Bibliographie analytique* (Paris: Conseil International de la Langue Française, 1992).

<sup>12</sup>Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); idem, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); idem, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); idem, *The Power of Written Tradition* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2000).

<sup>13</sup>Aleksandr Romanovich Luria, *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 18. Luria writes, “We began with some basic perceptual processes, namely the linguistic decoding of the most salient sensory material. After this introductory stage, we studied the subjects’ performance on abstraction and generalization, specifically the comparison, discrimination, and grouping (or classification) of objects—the most fundamental process and a determinant of all the remaining stages” (ibid.).

development of memory and perception within literate and non-literate cultures contributed to our understanding of the cognitive impact of orality and literacy.<sup>14</sup> The research has documented the existence of a continuum that extends from primary oral cultures (peoples who have never even seen writing) to typographic cultures (print media) all the way to hypertext cultures (cultures that use electronic media for information transfer) that are emerging into a secondary orality.<sup>15</sup>

### **Walter J. Ong and Marshall McLuhan**

Other scholars expanded the research begun by Parry and Lord, including Eric Havelock,<sup>16</sup> Walter Ong,<sup>17</sup> and Marshall McLuhan.<sup>18</sup> The work of Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan in particular made orality more commonly known at least in academic

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<sup>14</sup>Thomas Slunecko and Sophie Hengl, "Language, Cognition, Subjectivity: A Dynamic Constitution," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociocultural Psychology*, ed. Jaan Valsiner and Alberto Rosa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 40-61.

<sup>15</sup>Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 301-02. Ong writes concerning secondary orality, "The present state of affairs makes it clear that the new orality is not basically a reconstitution of the old sensorium but rather a new organization which the present electronic media of communication have enforced, bringing the whole globe into continual contact with all of itself at once and thus tending to minimize ingroup feelings. The present orality is post-typographical, incorporating an individualized self-consciousness developed with the aid of writing and print and possessed of more reflectiveness, historical sense, and organized purposefulness than was possible in preliterate oral cultures" (ibid.).

<sup>16</sup>Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (1963; repr., Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982); idem, *Origins of Western Literacy*, Monograph Series 14 (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1976); idem, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); idem, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957); idem, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986). A reprint of much of Havelock's writings can be found in *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>17</sup>Walter Ong, *Faith and Contexts*, ed. Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup, vols. 1-4 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992); idem, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); idem, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New Accents, ed. Terence Hawkes (Padstow, UK: T. J., 1991); idem, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971); idem, *Presence of the Word*.

<sup>18</sup>Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1962).

circles. Whereas Parry and Lord made inroads in the study of orality within the sphere of literary studies, Ong and McLuhan contributed to our understanding of the noetic effects of writing on consciousness, as well as society and culture.

Walter J. Ong (1912-2003) was a Jesuit priest and was the University Professor of Humanities and the Professor of Humanities in Psychiatry at Saint Louis University for over thirty years. As a scholar of English literature, Ong not only brought attention to the differences between orality and literacy; he was among the first scholars to consider the noetic effects of writing upon human consciousness. His first work on the subject, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* did not receive much attention on the subject of orality when it was published in 1967.

Fifteen years later, however, his *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word* received far greater notice from the academic guild. Of particular interest was what Ong identified as the “psychodynamics of oral cultures,” ten characteristics of the mental processes of primary oral cultures or at least cultures with a high “oral residue.”<sup>19</sup> Ong sought to explain how writing impacted civilization by altering these psychodynamics.

Ong received attention from the academic community in part because he identified writing as a technology.<sup>20</sup> While he was by no means the only scholar to say so,<sup>21</sup> his work advanced the identification further than others had done before him. Ong’s work on the noetic effects of writing upon human consciousness led him to suggest

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<sup>19</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 31-77. This chap. will examine the psychodynamics of orality as identified by Ong in a later section.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, *Orality and Literacy*, 81-82.

<sup>21</sup>Ong drew heavily from the ideas of Eric Havelock, mentioning him throughout *Orality and Literacy*, 6, 23, 27-8, 34-5, 41, 43, 46, 49, 59, 65, 80-2, 89-90, 94, 105, 109, 127, 140, 167-68, 172. See, for example, Eric Havelock, *The Origins of Western Literacy*; idem, “The Coming of Literate Communication to Western Culture,” *JC* 30 (1986), 90-98; idem, “The Alphabetic Mind: A Gift of Greece to the Modern World,” *OTJ* 1 (1986): 134-50, <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/1i/havelock> (accessed April 9, 2013).

implications for other modes of research, including structuralism, deconstruction, speech-act theory and reader-response, social sciences, philosophy, and biblical studies among other subjects.<sup>22</sup> Through *Orality and Literacy*, Ong raised the awareness of orality amongst scholars in various disciplines.

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) was Walter Ong's mentor at Saint Louis University when Ong wrote his master's thesis, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*.<sup>23</sup> Yet McLuhan appeared to incorporate many of Ong's ideas in his own writing.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, his pithy, axiomatic language earned him many detractors despite Ong's defense of his former mentor.<sup>25</sup> Titles of books, such as *The Medium is the Massage* both captured the attention of the informed public as well as of the scholarly community, which invited both curiosity and critique.

While McLuhan wrote many other books,<sup>26</sup> we shall focus on those that have a direct bearing on orality and literacy. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962), McLuhan's premise was that the medium of communication has the potential to impact how a society thinks collectively and organizes its

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<sup>22</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 164-79.

<sup>23</sup>Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958). In this published master's thesis, Ong argues how the use of logic in medieval times altered Europe's consciousness by the time Gutenberg developed the printing press. One does not have to reach far to see the connection to McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy*.

<sup>24</sup>McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 18. McLuhan writes, "The interiorization of the phonetic alphabet translates man from the magical world of the ear to the neutral visual world" (ibid.).

<sup>25</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 29. Ong writes, "McLuhan attracted the attention . . . of the public, largely because of fascination with his many gnomic or oracular pronouncements, too glib for some readers but often very perceptive. These he called 'probes'. He generally moved rapidly from one 'probe' to another, seldom if ever undertaking any thorough explanation of a 'linear' sort" (ibid.).

<sup>26</sup>Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1951). *The Mechanical Bride* examined the effects of popular culture on society. See also Marshall McLuhan, *From Cliché to Archetype* (New York: Viking, 1970).

environment.<sup>27</sup> McLuhan examined the effects of movable type on Western culture and warned that society was on the edge of another great transition. Civilization, wrote McLuhan, was at the beginning of what he called, “the electric age.”<sup>28</sup> The effects of this “electric age,” he argued, would be as dramatic as those from Gutenberg’s printing press.

In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), McLuhan argued for the need to understand all media and their effects on society as a whole. He wrote that, “[T]he personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.”<sup>29</sup> Each new technological development brought both negative consequences (McLuhan’s example: automation eliminates jobs) as well as positive (minimized human involvement in strenuous labor).<sup>30</sup> Thus McLuhan urged careful consideration in how television and other media are used in the new “electric” age.

One of McLuhan’s contributions to our understanding of the impact of media (including orality) was the distinction between “hot” and “cold” media. In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan argued that some forms of media demand almost total involvement (hence, “cool”) while others allow greater passivity (“hot” media).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, some media had high information content while others had low. Thus, a medium such as radio (which is “hot,” but has high information content) would differ significantly from the telephone (which is “cool,” but has low information content) in

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<sup>27</sup>McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, prologue. McLuhan writes, “Any technology tends to create a new human environment. . . . Technological environments are not merely passive containers of people but are active processes that reshape people and other technologies alike” (ibid.).

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 278.

<sup>29</sup>McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 7.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 22-32.

their impact. Hence, not only the sensorium itself—which we previously defined as the dominant sense used by a culture in receiving communication—but also the level of involvement of their participants demanded by media has a significant effect on human consciousness and culture.

McLuhan continued to promote his ideas about the effects of media with *The Medium is the Massage* (1967)<sup>32</sup> and *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968).<sup>33</sup> McLuhan argues how different media “massages” or influences every aspect of our lives.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, in *Global Village*, McLuhan and Fiore contend that James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* actually symbolizes ten stages in the historical and technological development within human history.<sup>35</sup>

Although McLuhan died in 1980, his son Eric has published a number of his works posthumously. Many of these titles demonstrate a level of articulation not seen in McLuhan’s writings while he was alive. Furthermore, many key concepts in the study of media are introduced in his later posthumous work. Two titles that deserve mention are *The Laws of Media: the New Science* (1988) and *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1989).<sup>36</sup>

In *Laws of Media*, McLuhan develops the concept of the “tetrad” of media effects, which was an instructional tool he used to illustrate the effect of any type of

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<sup>32</sup>Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam, 1967).

<sup>33</sup>Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>36</sup>Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *The Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Marshall McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Communication and Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

media on society. The model developed by McLuhan was called a “tetrad” because it was a series of four questions concerning media. The first question from the tetrad asked, “What general, verifiable (that is, testable) statements can be made about all media?” and from that question emerged four statements worded as questions:

1. What does it [the medium] enhance or intensify?
2. What does it render obsolete or displace?
3. What does it retrieve that was previously obsolesced?
4. What does it produce or become when pressed to an extreme?<sup>37</sup>

In *The Global Village*, McLuhan and Powers develop a sophisticated model for understanding the effects of a world-wide electronic media network on the consciousness of society. McLuhan distinguishes between “visual space,” and “acoustic space,” as zones by which human consciousness appropriates various media, each favoring either the right or the left hemisphere of the brain. Visual space favors the left hemisphere and is linear, sequential, and quantitative. Acoustic space, however, favors the right hemisphere of the brain and is considered holistic and qualitative.

Moreover, McLuhan argued that society is trending towards a return to “acoustic space” with the advent of continuous electronic transfer of information.<sup>38</sup> According to McLuhan, “Acoustic space . . . is both discontinuous and nonhomogeneous. Its resonant and interpenetrating processes are simultaneously related with centers everywhere and boundaries nowhere.”<sup>39</sup> Rather than existing as binary opposites, McLuhan viewed both visual and acoustic space as complementary. He further argued that his communication model of complementary visual and acoustic space was superior

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<sup>37</sup>McLuhan and McLuhan, *The Laws of Media*, 7.

<sup>38</sup>McLuhan and Powers, *The Global Village*, 5.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

to the long-accepted Shannon-Weaver model,<sup>40</sup> which was responsible for the development of the science of communication theory and was the dominant communication model for over sixty years. McLuhan dismissed the Shannon-Weaver model altogether as “. . . a characteristic example of lineal, left-hemisphere bias.”<sup>41</sup> The Shannon-Weaver model, failed to account for the dynamics of communication which McLuhan believed that he described more accurately in his conceptualization of “visual” and “acoustic space.”

Though critics once panned his work and later dismissed it as obsolete, McLuhan has left a legacy that is still felt in our own Internet age.<sup>42</sup> Besides the theory of “hot” and “cool” media as well as the notion of visual and acoustic space, McLuhan introduced other concepts to help us understand media, including orality. While sometimes criticized for his aphoristic writing devoid of detailed logical development, McLuhan became something of an academic celebrity who gave us some memorable expressions in pop culture parlance, including, “the medium is the message,” and “the global village.” Despite his weaknesses, McLuhan’s conclusions about media and culture are still recognized for their uncanny prescience.

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<sup>40</sup>Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1949; repr., Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). Shannon and Weaver’s book was originally published as a two-part article in a journal. See Claude E. Shannon, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” *BSTJ* 27 (1948): 379-423, <http://www3.alcatel-lucent.com/bstj/vol27-1948/articles/bstj27-3-379.pdf> (accessed April, 22 2013), and Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication: Part III: Mathematical Preliminaries,” *BSTJ* 27 (1948): 623-56, <http://www3.alcatel-lucent.com/bstj/vol27-1948/articles/bstj27-4-623.pdf> (accessed April 22, 2013).

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>42</sup>Ian Austen, “Early Media Prophet is Now Getting His Due,” *New York Times*, July 25, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/26/books//marshall-mcluhan-media-theorist-is-celebrated.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/26/books//marshall-mcluhan-media-theorist-is-celebrated.html?_r=0) (accessed April 10, 2013).

## John Miles Foley

If Parry and Lord were the pioneers of orality studies and Ong and McLuhan described some of the noetic effects of orality, John Miles Foley (1947-2012) should receive recognition as the scholar who consolidated the movement as a respected field of research. Foley taught at the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he sat as the Curators' Professor of Classical Studies and English and the W. H. Byler Endowed Chair in the Humanities. He also founded and directed both the Center for Orality Studies, as well as the Center for eResearch until his retirement in 2011.

Foley was responsible for the development of orality studies as a discipline within the field of comparative literature. Among other accomplishments, Foley wrote the first bibliography of orality,<sup>43</sup> a history of the discipline, including a methodological guide,<sup>44</sup> as well as a textbook on research in orality.<sup>45</sup> In later years, Foley examined the interrelationship between the Internet and its influence on a "secondary orality" which he believed mimicked the natural flow of human consciousness.<sup>46</sup> It is these contributions to the field of orality studies that merits Foley's appellation as the consolidator of orality studies.

Foley also founded the *Journal of Oral Tradition* in 1986 which later became an open access journal available through the Internet.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Foley established another web site responsible for examining the influence of the Internet upon secondary

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<sup>43</sup>John Miles Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1985).

<sup>44</sup>John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988).

<sup>45</sup>John Miles Foley, *Teaching Oral Traditions* (New York: The Modern Language Association, 1998).

<sup>46</sup>John Miles Foley, *Oral Tradition and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

<sup>47</sup>*Oral Tradition Journal*, <http://journal.oraltradition.org/> (accessed April 22, 2013).

orality.<sup>48</sup> Besides these projects and editing three series dedicated to the study of orality in comparative literature, Foley was a tireless researcher and organizer in the discipline of orality studies.

### **Current Trends in Orality Studies**

Orality studies have changed significantly over the years. John Miles Foley revised the discipline through his writings and consolidation of orality studies.

Moreover, orality studies currently do not present a broad, monolithic understanding of the influence of writing on the sensorium. Some of these changes have not been kind to the work of Ong, Parry, and Lord.

To begin with, some have criticized Ong's binary division between literate and oral peoples. In fairness, Ong himself acknowledged a continuum existed between highly literate societies and primary oral cultures, and noted some have a high "oral residue."<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, Ong's "psychodynamics of orality" appeared to suggest that a broad cleavage existed between a highly literate society and a primary oral culture. Current leaders in the field reject this bifurcation, preferring to see orality as more dynamic and pluralistic in its nature and development. Societies are no longer viewed as following the same, monolithic trajectory from primary orality to typographic or hypertext cultures. Societies develop in many diverse ways, according to numerous socio-cultural factors. One of those factors, for example, is diglossia, which is the sociolinguistic phenomenon in which a society speaks two different forms of the same language.<sup>50</sup> In such cases, the spoken dialect is often not regarded with high esteem and is reserved for mundane,

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<sup>48</sup>"Pathways Project," <http://www.pathwaysproject.org/> (April 22, 2013).

<sup>49</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 38.

<sup>50</sup>For a comprehensive bibliography of diglossia, see Mauro Fernández, *Diglossia: A Comprehensive Bibliography, 1960-1990, and Supplements*, vol. 23 of *Library and Information Sources in Linguistics* (Herndon, VA: John Benjamins, 1993). While dated, the bibliography is currently the best source for titles related to the sociolinguistic phenomenon of diglossia.

commonplace activities.<sup>51</sup> The written form, however, is generally much more formalized and is given much higher status. The presence of diglossia in societies with a high residual orality makes it difficult to know where exactly to locate those cultural communities along the oral/literate continuum. Further complicating matters is the fact that various segments of the community may be located in different places along the oral-literate spectrum, depending upon socio-economic status and level of education. Even more difficult is the fact that a member of the community could speak at one level with a high level of oral residue, only to speak at a much lower level of residual orality when employing the prestige dialect in a different setting within the same community. Diglossia, it is shown, demonstrates how difficult it is to classify a diverse linguistic community with regard to its orality and literacy.

The growth of technology, globalization, and urbanization has further complicated orality studies. Finnegan noted that orality studies first approached the African continent more holistically. However, “[s]cholars now incline less towards the uniformities than the diversities, seeing not a generalized African ‘response’ to external intrusion or some impersonal advance forward out of the syndrome of ‘orality,’ but human actions, multiple voices, and many diverse parties in play.”<sup>52</sup> Rather than making broad, sweeping generalizations about the effects of literacy on various peoples, recent orality studies emphasize the local and the particular. Urbanization in societies with a high oral residue seems to have produced a complex interplay between oral and written

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<sup>51</sup>Lomé, Togo, is a prime example of diglossia. Whereas the national language is French, the local dialect is Ewé. French is preferred in most settings involving the upper classes and the educated while Ewé is spoken in more commonplace locales. Yet spoken French is far different from written French. Moreover, written Ewé is much more formal and structured than the Ewé spoken on the street. An educated Togolese man or woman, however, has no difficulty navigating all of the different patterns of speaking in both French and Ewé.

<sup>52</sup>Ruth Finnegan, “Orality Today: Response from an Africanist Scholar,” *OTJ* 25 (2010): 7-16, <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/25i/finnegan> (accessed April 22, 2013).

discourse, with micro-communities exhibiting greater or lesser influence of writing on their consciousness.<sup>53</sup>

Besides changing their perspectives and definitions, orality studies have also branched into other fields of inquiry. Philosophy and semiotics, for example have begun investigating the implications of orality. Influenced by Havelock,<sup>54</sup> others have considered how philosophical inquiry arose in ancient Greece because of the development of an alphabet system with vowels. A system of vowels, as distinct from the alphabet of the Phoenicians, enabled more abstract thinking and an intellectual distancing from the matter of discussion. This abstract thinking, it is believed, may have led ancient Greek civilizations to develop philosophy and the contemplative life. The implications of orality studies for philosophy, therefore, can challenge our very notions of philosophical inquiry. This insight is helpful, since we may be unknowingly captive to a particular socio-cultural orientation given our location along the oral/literate continuum that biases our thinking about such things. What may appear to be a well-reasoned approach to any number of epistemological or hermeneutical issues, may in fact be a symptom of linear (literate) or holistic (oral) thinking.

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<sup>53</sup>Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Revenge of the Spoken Word?: Writing, Performance, and New Media in Urban West Africa," *OTJ* 26 (2011): 3-26, <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/26i/adejunmobi> (accessed April 22, 2013). Adejunmobi chronicles how verbal artists, in local contexts with low literacy rates and the presence of traditional orality, nevertheless refer to themselves as writers even though their works are received solely via oral performance. Moreover, most of these artists first compose their art as a written text before the process of memorization and oral performance. Furthermore, such artists are quick to use smart phones and Youtube in proliferating their art. The creative process—from composition to performance to recording—intermingles oral, typographic, and hypertext media.

<sup>54</sup>Havelock, "The Greek Alphabet," in *Origins of Western Literacy*, Monograph Series 14 (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1976), 39-50; idem, "The Alphabetic Mind," 134-50; Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "Consequences of Literacy," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 42-44. This same article appeared in *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 5 (1963): 304-45.

Semioticians have likewise examined orality. Umberto Eco famously replied to Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* in his piece, *Cogito Interruptus*.<sup>55</sup> Eco wittily deconstructs McLuhan's conclusions about the effects of media as so much discordant reasoning. He critiques McLuhan for describing media's effects upon humanity as immutable truths, using catchy aphorisms, but in the next moment contradicting what he had just affirmed.<sup>56</sup> McLuhan is content merely to state the argument and leave it as an incontrovertible fact. Moreover, Eco charges McLuhan with committing multiple *non sequiturs* (without directly appealing to formal logic) by identifying various consequences of media influence that in fact are mere fabrications and utterly disassociated from one another.<sup>57</sup> Eco delivers a devastating postmodern critique of McLuhan's work, drawing from his own post-structuralist conclusions about the use and interpretation of signs.

Other semioticians have used Eco's theories and have embraced orality studies in literature. Stephen Nimis's examination of epic traditions is one such example.<sup>58</sup> Drawing from Eco's semiotics and the intertextuality theory of Michael Riffaterre, Nimis argues that the use of the simile in much classical literature was more than a literary device but rather itself was a means of communicating certain features of the text.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the Eleventh World Congress of the International Association of Semiotic Studies issued a call for papers addressing the relationship between narrative and

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<sup>55</sup>Umberto Eco, "Cogito Interruptus," in *Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays* (1976; repr., Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983), 221-38.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 230-31.

<sup>58</sup>Stephen A. Nimis, *Narrative Semiotics in the Epic Tradition: The Simile* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>59</sup>Dory O'Brien, "Review of *Narrative Semiotics in the Epic Tradition: The Simile*," *JMMLA* 22 (1989): 33-36.

semiotics in 2012.<sup>60</sup> The call wished to invoke research not only in the inherent structure of narrative itself, but “in the face of contemporary studies of narrative - in the social sciences, cognitive science, postclassical narratology and systems theory - the relations between narrative and semiosis need to be considered on a much wider basis, including those to do with cognition, networks and systems.” Since much of orality involves a great deal of storytelling, narrative and semiotics research would eventually lead to the investigation of predominantly oral cultures.

Other researchers have seen the need to develop a hermeneutic specifically for oral literature. Jan Swearingen sees the transition of many societies from a high oral residue to hypertext creating a problem: how to listen or read (irony noted) oral literature the way that oral peoples do so as to avoid imposing literate understandings on oral peoples.<sup>61</sup> The danger is that people from a more literate orientation will unwittingly interpret oral literature “literately,” thus obscuring its oral mentality. The need, therefore, is to develop an oral hermeneutic specifically for the interpretation of “oral texts.”

Translation studies have also recognized the need for research into orality and how orality impacts the work of applied linguistics. Specifically, the Translation Studies Federation identifies two goals within their discipline: “treatment of orality in interlingual translation practice (including interpretation and audio-visual translation research); [and] issues related to otherness or alterity, marginalized identities, minority or subaltern language cultures—postcolonial language research.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, social justice concerns have become part of applied linguistics. The raising of such issues raised by literacy linguists,

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<sup>60</sup>“Eleventh World Congress of the International Association of Semiotics Studies, “Call for Papers,” <http://www.medienkonvergenz.uni-mainz.de/wp-content/uploads/CFP-Narrative-and-semiosis-4-Nov-2012.pdf> (accessed April 16, 2013).

<sup>61</sup>C. Jan Swearingen, “Oral Hermeneutics During the Transition to Literacy: The Contemporary Debate,” *CA* 1 (1986): 138-56.

<sup>62</sup>“Translation Studies Federation,” <http://tsfed.blogspot.com/> (accessed April 16, 2013).

however, may prove self-defeating since orality studies, by their very nature, have been and will continue to be defined by literate cultures.<sup>63</sup>

Increasingly, orality studies have engaged issues related to social justice. Some researchers, for example, have examined why marginalized groups often fail to have their narratives included in the official telling of their culture's story. Others have explored the various ways in which a literate understanding of orality gets imposed upon oral peoples. Still others seek to preserve the stories of oral peoples that are slowly disappearing due to the inexorable march of literate society.<sup>64</sup>

Orality studies have influenced other academic fields within the last four decades, as well. It is unnecessary for our purposes to examine them all. Our goal is to consider their relevance for biblical studies. Before we do that, it is necessary to examine the impact of the sensorium (particularly one that is dominantly auditory) on human cognitive processing.

### **Cognitive Implications of Orality: Binary Polarities, Psychodynamics, Teleology and Beyond**

#### **Disagreement Concerning the Noetic Effects of Orality**

Stimulated by the writings of Ong, Goody, and McLuhan, linguists have debated the precise nature of the interrelationship between orality and literacy and human consciousness. Two distinct positions have emerged within the field of linguistics. Each

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<sup>63</sup>Sukanta Chaudhuri, "Orality: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," in *The Metaphysics of Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143-55. Chaudhuri describes the inevitable conundrum of orality: "[T]he very concept of orality could arise only with the appearance of script as a binary. When all composition was oral, the designation was superfluous and, as a designation, almost literally inconceivable. It made sense to talk of orality as a distinct mode only after writing came into being. It no longer simply defined what it was—that is to say, everything composed—but acquired a dimension of what-it-was-not: the oral became the non-scriptal" (ibid.).

<sup>64</sup>"World Oral Literature Project," <http://www.oralliterature.org/> (accessed April 16, 2013). The University of Cambridge and Yale University have collaborated in the preservation of oral literatures before they disappear from the world.

view has produced multiple titles and has found support within a variety of other fields of study, including literary studies, psychology, and anthropology. Despite their differences, however, there are some points of agreement.

There is a consensus, for example, that literacy does change the way in which a society communicates information. Furthermore, writing preserves communication in a way that spoken language does not. Writing furthermore encourages greater exactitude and clarity of thinking than would be possible otherwise.<sup>65</sup> Agreements aside, fundamental questions remain that create controversy, as summarized by Cole and Nicolopoulou: “Can literacy itself be treated as a uniform phenomenon that develops in a unilinear way? Can it or should it be considered independently of the specific social contexts in which it is used? What are its specific intellectual effects? And again, can these be treated as uniform and unilinear?”<sup>66</sup> While we cannot possibly resolve these complex issues here, we can summarize the opposing viewpoints and find points of agreement within each of them.

Two distinct positions have emerged within the field of applied linguistics that attempt to answer these pivotal questions about literacy. The first is the unilinear approach, also called progressive/evolutionary or the “autonomous model.”<sup>67</sup> The other is called the contextual or ideological approach. We shall further define each position and summarize the arguments both sides present in support of their understanding of literacy and its effects upon human consciousness.

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<sup>65</sup>Harvey J. Graff, *The Labyrinths of Literacy: Reflections of Literacy Past and Present*, Pittsburgh Series in Literacy, Composition, and Culture (1987; repr., London: Farmer, 1995).

<sup>66</sup>Michael Cole and Ageliki Nicolopoulou, “Literacy: Intellectual Consequences,” in *IEL* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>67</sup>Brian V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Street calls the unilinear evolutionary approach the “autonomous model,” because it suggests that literacy independent of any other sociological factors is responsible for a fundamental shift in human cognitive functioning and progress in technology.

## The Unilinear Evolutionary Approach

The unilinear evolutionary (or autonomous) approach to understanding the effects of literacy on human cognitive functioning is distinguished by its assumptions that there are certain universal characteristics that literacy produces upon human consciousness. Its proponents consider literacy to be responsible for a fundamental shift in the advancement of civilization. The latent qualities within written media encourage a greater degree of sophistication in thought, within societies as well as individuals.<sup>68</sup> In particular, written language encourages greater abstraction and logical categorization than would be possible in an oral context. Literacy's effect upon both individuals and civilization is believed to be so pervasive that Goody and Watt introduced what has been called the "Great Divide" hypothesis.<sup>69</sup>

The complexity of thought increases along with the sophistication and accessibility of the system of writing involved.<sup>70</sup> For example, syllabaries (a phonetic writing system using symbols to represent syllables, e.g., Sequoia's syllabary of the Cherokee language) would not encourage abstract thinking to the same degree as an alphabet. Furthermore, while the Semitic peoples (e.g., the Phoenicians) may have invented the alphabet, it was the Greeks who developed a system with vowels and therefore had a functionally simpler system of writing.<sup>71</sup> This simplified, easier to use alphabet used by the Greeks fostered greater progress of their civilization compared with

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<sup>68</sup>Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 36-51; Goody and Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," 44; Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 280; idem, *Origins of Western Literacy*, 39. See also Robert Hannah, "From Orality to Literacy? The Case of the Parapegma," in *Speaking Volumes: Orality & Literacy in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Janet Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 139-60. Hannah makes the argument that astronomical observations by the Greeks encouraged literacy. Hannah neglects, however, to recall that while the Aztec civilization observed the stars and had developed a system of mathematics that rivaled Europe, it lacked a written language.

<sup>69</sup>Goody and Watt, "Consequences of Literacy," 44.

<sup>70</sup>Robert K. Logan, *The Alphabet Effect: The Impact of the Phonetic Alphabet on the Development of Western Civilization* (New York: William Morrow, 1986).

<sup>71</sup>Goody and Watt, "Consequences of Literacy," 41.

cultures which employed a system of writing that was more difficult to learn and use, according to the proponents of the unilinear evolutionary model.

In addition to abstraction of thought, the advent of writing helps an oral society move from a contextualized method of communication<sup>72</sup> to one that is increasingly decontextualized.<sup>73</sup> By decontextualization, Goody meant that writing permits discourse to be freed from its original context and transferred into new contexts and circumstances. The varied settings in which readers can interact with a text grant new significance to the written discourse that may have been unforeseen by the author. Decontextualization itself encourages abstraction and it also promotes a greater independence of interpretation by the receiver of the text than spoken discourse. Communication via oral exchange, by contrast, lacks this kind of flexibility since hearers must be present at the time of the delivery.

Developmental psychologists affirmed many of the conclusions reached by Goody, Watt, and Ong. L. S. Vygotsky's research in cognitive development led to the conclusion that human cognitive processing matures in a series of transformations. The first step in the transformative process, according to Vygotsky, was that of internalization, the manner by which one processes information. He concluded, "Of particular importance to the development of higher mental processes is the transformation of sign-using activity [such as writing], the history and characteristics of which are illustrated by the development of practical intelligence, voluntary attention, and memory."<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Vygotsky argued that sign operations were directly responsible

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 29. Goody and Watt write, "The transmission of the verbal elements of culture by oral means can be visualized as a long chain of interlocking conversations between members of the group. Thus all beliefs and values, all forms of knowledge, are from the material content of the cultural tradition, whether it be cave-paintings or hand-axes, they are stored only in human memory" (ibid.).

<sup>73</sup>Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 78.

<sup>74</sup>Lev Semyonovitch Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 56-57.

for the inner transformative process in human psychology. Luria concurred with Vygotsky, in his study of the Ichkari women of Siberia, noting that literacy itself restructures the consciousness of individuals and reconfigures their mental processes.<sup>75</sup>

Luria and Vygotsky's psychological conclusions bear some resemblance to Ong's more elaborate model of the psychodynamics of orality. While Ong's analogies based on Sigmund Freud's psychosexual stages of human development are not widely accepted, Ong's observations about the characteristics of primary oral cultures as well as residual oral societies are viewed more favorably.<sup>76</sup> Although he acknowledges that one ought not to make a simple binary distinction between oral and literate cultures, Ong does list some characteristics of those peoples whose culture is dominantly oral in nature.<sup>77</sup> The following descriptions are generalizations and should not be considered as established maxims. The further one moves along the oral/literate continuum to primary orality (a culture that has had no exposure to any writing whatsoever), the greater likelihood these characteristics will be manifest and with greater intensity. The following is taken from Ong's *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word*. Ong identifies eleven characteristics or psychodynamics of oral peoples.

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<sup>75</sup>Luria, *Cognitive Development*, 41. Luria writes, "[A]ll visual perception has a complex semantic and system-based structure that changes with historical development. It incorporates different kinds of visual information processing—sometimes direct impression, at other times refracted through the prism of practical object-oriented experience, and in still others mediated by language and by the forms of analyzing and synthesizing perceived material erected on this basis" (ibid.).

<sup>76</sup>Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 93-94. Ong drew parallels between types of media and the psychosexual stages of Freudian psychoanalysis. Acknowledging that one characteristic of the oral psychosexual stage is permissiveness, Ong observed that oral cultures are more fluid with their use of language. By contrast, writing requires greater control and sustained discipline, inviting parallels to the anal stage, involving "the retention of urinary and fecal matter—which of themselves flow, like words, unless restrained" (ibid.).

<sup>77</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 31-75.

**Sounded word as power and action.** Oral cultures generally perceive words and language differently than people from literate cultures.<sup>78</sup> Spoken words exist in the impermanent world of sound, yet they require some use of power in their utterance. As a result, oral cultures place greater significance in the meaning of names and in the use of words by attributing a sense of power to them. In fact, the power to name something (as in the case of Adam naming the animals in Genesis 2:20 or God renaming Jacob to Israel in Genesis 35:10) is suggestive of a sort of power or authority over the item receiving a name.

With no awareness of the speech-act theory of Austin<sup>79</sup> and Searle,<sup>80</sup> oral peoples have perceived language as action rather than as a complex system of signs. That understanding is based on the fact that a sort of dynamism is necessarily assumed whenever sound is produced. Thus, oral peoples tend to perceive language as an active use of force that *does something* in a specific utterance, as opposed to an abstract system of signs which conveys a logical set of information.

**Mnemonics and formulas.** Ong notes how oral cultures usually produce sustained, complex thought through dialogue.<sup>81</sup> Communication among other members within a group is essential for higher-order thinking among oral cultures. While more complex thought is possible among oral cultures, how are oral peoples capable of later recalling these discussions and the detailed thinking that occurred, without writing?

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 31-33.

<sup>79</sup>J. L. Austin, J. O. Urmson, and Marina Sbisa, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962; repr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>80</sup>John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); idem, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>81</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 33-36.

Some other tools are required by which to recall that which was concluded after lengthy discourse, and that tool itself has to be a function of human speech.

Mnemonic devices and linguistic formulas are the means by which primary oral peoples, as well as residual oral cultures, are able to retain large amounts of information. This practice has been in use since the times of the Greeks and continues in other cultures to the present day.<sup>82</sup> Some societies for example, will develop a complex set of proverbs and sayings by which to aid recall. Imparting large amounts of information without memory aids or proverbs would generally be a useless exercise to the members of an oral culture since no one would be able to recall what had been previously imparted.

Oral cultures must, therefore, preserve the wisdom of the past via expressions that are formulaic in their form in order to facilitate recall. As Ong remarks, “[Y]ou know what you can recall.”<sup>83</sup> Such features of the discourse among dominantly oral cultures may appear to be quaint or outdated to typographic or hypertext cultures. In actuality, they reveal a high level of sophistication in both thought and expression.

**Additive rather than subordinative.** Another psychodynamic feature of oral discourse is the use of “additive” expressions (that is, the repeated use of the conjunction “and”) to form subordinate clauses in place of prepositions and coordinating conjunctions.<sup>84</sup> Primary oral and dominantly oral cultures favor convenience and utility of expression for the sake of the speaker. It is simply easier to remember a story, riddle, or poem with the frequent use of “and.” Typographic, and even more so, hypertext cultures use more complex syntax, specifically, a greater prevalence of expressions such

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<sup>82</sup>Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 87-96, cited in Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34.

<sup>83</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 33.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

as “when,” “thus,” or “while,” in order to lend greater precision in expression and to suggest subtle nuances of thought.<sup>85</sup>

Ong gives a classic example of the residual influence of orality in English-speaking culture and how the influence of a more typographic culture began to be seen. Using different translations from the text of Genesis 1:1-5, Ong highlights the use of additive expressions in the Douay translation (1610) as compared to the subordinative expressions found in the *New American Bible* (1905). The difference between the two translations is quite telling.

The Douay version of Genesis 1:1-5 reads,

In the beginning God created heaven *and* earth. *And* the earth was void and empty, *and* darkness was upon the face of the deep *and* the spirit of God moved over the waters. *And* God said: Be light made. *And* light was made. *And* God saw the light that it was good; *and* he divided the light from the darkness. *And* he called the light Day, *and* the darkness Night; *and* there was evening *and* morning one day. (italics mine)

In comparison, the New American Bible translation of the text mentioned above reads,

In the beginning, *when* God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, *while* a mighty wind swept over the waters. *Then* God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God *then* separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day’ and the darkness he called ‘night’. *Thus* evening came, and morning followed—the first day. (italics mine)<sup>86</sup>

The difference in syntactic complexity between the Douay 1610 translation and the New American Bible (1905) is marked. Additive conjunctions like “and” are simply easier to memorize and to recall than using a long list of adverbial clauses and prepositions. If, however, memory does not have to be so relied upon, because of written discourse, greater subtlety of expression and nuanced thought is possible through the use of more subordinate and temporal clauses.

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

**Aggregative rather than analytic.** This heading refers to the tendency of oral cultures to attribute qualities permanently to objects and persons using a preponderance of formulas and aggregates of word combinations in their discourse, combinations that are inseparable from each other and remain unquestioned.<sup>87</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss famously summarized this tendency when he wrote “the savage [*sic*] mind totalizes.”<sup>88</sup> Lord found examples from Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from antiquity as well as in the Yugoslav epic “Song of Bagdad” in the present day.<sup>89</sup> Thus, ancient Greek culture always thought of Odysseus as “wily Odysseus.” Similarly, a Serbo-Croatian ballad continually refers to a tavern as a “drunken tavern.” These combinations help the community members to remember the essential qualities of the person, place, or thing.

So, while oral cultures tend to preserve such phrases or formulas within their songs, ballads, and in day-to-day discourse, typographic or hypertext cultures are more analytic, that is, they are more likely to question whether Odysseus was consistently wily, the dawn is always rosy-fingered, and a tavern is always drunken. Once again, we note that the advent of an alphabet results in a subtle shift in the conscious awareness of a society and culture. As McLuhan notes, “The interiorization of the technology of the

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>88</sup>Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, *The Nature of Human Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 245, cited in Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 39.

<sup>89</sup>Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 45. Lord clarifies the use formulas and their development, at least in epic ballads among oral cultures, “When we speak a language, our native language, we do not repeat words and phrases that we have memorized consciously, but the words and sentences emerge from habitual usage. This is true of the singer of tales working in his specialized grammar. He does not ‘memorize’ formulas, any more than we as children ‘memorize’ language. He learns them by hearing them in other singers’ songs, and by habitual usage they become part of his repeating, something that one regards as fixed and not one’s own. The learning of an oral poetic language follows the same principles as the learning of language itself, not by the conscious schematization of elementary grammars but by the natural oral method” (ibid., 36). We may conclude that what is true for the bard in the acquisition of formulas is also true for the average member of a primary oral or dominantly oral culture.

phonetic alphabet translates man from the magical world of the ear to the neutral visual world.”<sup>90</sup>

**Redundant or “copious.”** Another psychodynamic feature of dominantly oral cultures is the propensity for redundancy in oral discourse.<sup>91</sup> Orators and storytellers tend to repeat key phrases and expressions when delivering a message before a group of people or recounting an epic ballad. While typographic or hypertext cultures may find this redundancy to be tedious and unnecessary, Ong argues that the use of redundancy mimics the natural flow of human thought and consciousness as opposed to what he calls a “sparse linearity.”<sup>92</sup> The reasons underlying oral cultures’ predisposition for repetition or redundancy are not only pragmatic but also reflective of their cognitive orientation.

One obvious reason for repetition of phrases and expressions among oral cultures is the need to ensure that everyone has heard. This feature also aids in the participation of every member in the audience. Speakers incorporate it in their style of delivery and it lends artistry to their delivery. Yet Ong identifies a deeper cause.

Ong argues that repetition follows a more organic, continuous form of thought. The Spartan linearity of thinking found in printed and some electronic media is the relative newcomer in human history. If someone reading a book becomes distracted, all that is necessary to resume his or her train of thought is to find the place that was last read in the book. However, that is not true in oral cultures. There, redundancy serves as a mechanism by which the group may preserve a train of thought when one gets distracted, or while following the progression of a complex story. In so doing, these

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<sup>90</sup>McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 18.

<sup>91</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 39.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

cultures reflect a kind of human thought that is more natural than that found in typographic or hypertext cultures.

**Conservative or traditionalist.** Generally speaking, dominantly oral cultures demonstrate the psychodynamic trait of conservatism and of preserving their traditions.<sup>93</sup> In a primary oral society, knowledge is difficult to obtain and is therefore cherished with great reverence. Novelty or being intellectually curious is generally discouraged. The group sees the continuation of its established norms as crucial to its longevity.

Such conservatism and traditionalism is no small surprise in societies that must work painstakingly to preserve the knowledge of the past within the community's collective memory. The same spirit of conservation that is at work in preserving a people's oral history permeates their psyche and extends to other facets of their lives. Taboos, social norms, and religious practices likewise receive the same level of respect as does preserving the heritage and knowledge of the community.

**Close to the human lifeworld.** Ong also identifies the psychodynamic feature of a greater interrelationship between life, nature and humanity among primary oral and dominantly oral cultures.<sup>94</sup> Chirographic cultures (societies with a developed system of writing and a corpus of handwritten materials), typographic and hypertext cultures become more distanced and abstracted from natural reality as they organize and become more complex, for example, compiling lists and manuals describing the tasks or skills essential to a trade or profession. One consequence of this practice is a greater distance from the very realities which they seek to classify and compartmentalize. In contrast, dominantly oral cultures do not so objectify the world around them.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, people

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>95</sup>Goody and Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," 44. Goody and Watt remark,

in such societies learn skills and trades via apprenticeships, where they acquire the concrete knowledge and skills they need in relationship with another, namely the mentor. Dominantly oral societies simply could not fathom learning a skill or task via a written manual or textbook. Because life is experienced more immediately by dominantly oral peoples, there is a closer association between human relationships, the natural world, and with life experiences in general. Dominantly oral cultures simply personalize life events to a greater degree than characteristically “literate” cultures.

**Agonistically toned.** Ong also attributes to dominantly oral peoples the psychodynamic feature of their thought and discourse being agonistically toned, meaning that the acquisition of knowledge and its use are associated with a perpetual struggle.<sup>96</sup> Dominantly oral societies tend to be closer to the natural world, characterized by poverty, sickness, and death. The knowledge these societies accumulates is likewise understood in terms of their day-to-day struggle with the vicissitudes of life. This agonistic tone manifests itself in at least two ways according to Ong.

First, the more oral cultures exemplify their agonism in verbal *tête-à-têtes*. Usually these bouts of mutual insults are not personal but are considered to be a form of artistic expression on the part of the participants. Participants in these vituperative

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“[A]lthough we must reject any dichotomy based upon the assumption of radical differences between the mental attributes of literate and non-literate peoples, and accept the view that previous formulations of the distinction were based on faulty premises and inadequate evidence, there may still exist general differences between literate and non-literate societies somewhat along the lines suggested by Lévy-Bruhl. *One reason for their existence, for instance, may be what has been described above: the fact that writing establishes a different kind of relationship between the word and its referent, a relationship that is more general and more abstract, and less closely connected with the particularities of person, place and time, than obtains in oral communication.* There is certainly a good deal to substantiate this distinction in what we know of early Greek thought. To take, for instance, the categories of Cassirer and Werner Jaeger, *it is surely significant that it was only in the days of the first widespread alphabetic culture that the idea of ‘logic’—of an immutable and impersonal mode of discourse—appears to have arisen; and it was also only then that the sense of the human past as an objective reality was formally developed, a process in which the distinction between ‘myth’ and ‘history’ took on decisive importance*” (ibid., italics mine).

<sup>96</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 43-45.

exchanges enjoy exhibiting their stock repertoire of phrases (for example, denigrating the opponent's mother) and level of creativity in the verbal sparring.<sup>97</sup>

Second, oral cultures exhibit greater violence in their tales and epics. Consider, for example, the graphic descriptions of violence found in the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*, the Arthurian romances,<sup>98</sup> or *The Song of Roland* where many gruesome details are included in the description of certain acts of violence. Ong believed this tendency reflected a human lifeworld filled with pain and suffering.

**Empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced.** Another psychodynamic characteristic identified by Ong is the prevalence among predominantly oral cultures of greater empathy and the participative nature of their discourse, in contrast to the greater objective distance found in dominantly literate societies.<sup>99</sup> Writing by nature decontextualizes; it creates a level of objectivity between the sender and the receiver—both by the nature of the medium itself as well as the increased distance of time and place it allows.<sup>100</sup> The empathetic and participatory quality latent in dominantly oral cultures is manifested in the level of emotional involvement in songs and theatrical performances and also in the way they discuss the vicissitudes of their daily affairs. Oral cultures are, in Ong's understanding, more personable in their use of language.

Jack Goody presents an interesting example of this from the Near East that shows how writing can state more explicitly the distance between an office holder and the

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<sup>97</sup>Valentina Pagliai, "The Art of Dueling with Words: Toward a New Understanding of Verbal Duels across the World," *OTJ* 24 (2009), <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/24i/pagliai> (accessed February 27, 2013).

<sup>98</sup>Wace's *Norman de Brut* features a particularly gruesome duel between Uther Pendragon and Frolo of Gaul; Uther dispatches Frolo by thrusting a sword in his mouth. Of this death, Wace tersely comments, "Such food was strange to him" (Wace, *Roman de Brut: A History of the British: Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. Judith Weiss [Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2002], 50-51).

<sup>99</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 45-46.

<sup>100</sup>Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 78.

office held than oral communication. Goody writes, “A separation of public and private is a frequent feature of many states without writing, where the king is nearly everywhere distinguished from the kingship, the chief from the chiefship, the office-holder from the office . . . in the ancient near east . . . affairs of state were embodied in written records which tended to distance them from the personal affairs of the office-holder and to offer some kind of accountability.”<sup>101</sup> The objectifying quality of writing created a marked social distance between the office-holder and the office itself. Oral communication, however, because of its more personable and empathic qualities, made such distinctions more subtly. As Goody comments, “[W]riting tends to make explicit what was implicit in oral communication.”<sup>102</sup>

**Homeostatic.** Oral cultures also manifest the psychodynamic tendency of homeostasis, which is to say that “oral societies live very much in a present which keeps itself in equilibrium or homeostasis by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance.”<sup>103</sup> Genealogies in dominantly oral societies, for example, will change according to the present needs and interests of the communities. The oral genealogist will simply stop using those names that are no longer of interest to the public or do not serve their interests.

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<sup>101</sup>Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 105-06.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>103</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 46. Goody and Watt explain further: “The social function of memory—and of forgetting—can thus be seen as the final stage of what may be called the homeostatic organization of the cultural tradition in non-literate society. The language is developed in intimate association with the experience of the community, and it is learned by the individual in face-to-face contact with the other members. What continues to be of social relevance is stored in the memory while the rest is usually forgotten: and language—primarily vocabulary—is the effective medium of this crucial process of social digestion and elimination which may be regarded as analogous to the homeostatic organization of the human body by means of which it attempts to maintain its present condition of life” in “The Consequences of Literacy” (ibid., 30-31).

The psychodynamic feature of homeostasis also affects lexical categories and meanings attributed to words within the languages of oral cultures. The primary oral cultures tend to retain only the meanings of words that are in current usage. Archaic definitions of words and words that fall into disuse will inevitably be discarded from the public lexicon and are irretrievably lost. Oral cultures therefore retain only words that are used in the present.<sup>104</sup>

Typographic and hypertext cultures, by contrast, preserve the archaic meanings of words in dictionaries and in libraries that preserve texts with outdated vocabularies. The consequence is that words in typographic and hypertext cultures can have a potentially wider semantic range.

**Situational rather than abstract.** Another psychodynamic characteristic found in dominantly oral cultures identified by Ong is the tendency to perceive reality situationally and concretely, rather than abstractly.<sup>105</sup> Non-literate peoples do not use language in terms of logical categories or abstract properties. Rather, their methods of classification depend upon their own experiences.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Ong cites the example of the Lokele in eastern Zaire (present-day Zimbabwe): “African talking drums . . . speak in elaborate formulas that preserve certain archaic words which the Lokele drummers can vocalize but whose meaning they no longer know. Whatever these words referred to has dropped out of Lokele daily experience, and the term that remains has become empty” (Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 47). In contrast, Moon mentions the Builsa of northern Ghana. The Builsa employ proverbs with archaic words. The Builsa hide the true meaning of the proverb from the uninitiated by using words that have fallen into disuse. The Builsa, then, use proverbs to preserve a part of their lexical heritage (in private message with author).

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 49-56. Anthropologist E. H. Smith labeled this type of cognitive processing “concrete relational.” In concrete relational thinking, “[L]ife and reality are seen pictorially in terms of the active emotional relationships present in a concrete situation” (David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommens, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989]). See also David J. Hesselgrave, “Contextualization that is Authentic and Relevant,” *IJFM* 12 (1995): 117.

<sup>106</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 49. Ong writes, “All conceptual thinking is to a degree abstract. So ‘concrete’ a term as ‘tree’ does not refer simply to a singular ‘concrete’ tree but is an abstraction, drawn out of, away from, individual, sensible actuality; it refers to a concept which is neither this tree nor that tree but can apply to any tree. Each individual object that we style a tree is truly ‘concrete’, simply itself, not ‘abstract’ at all, but the term we apply to the individual object is in itself abstract. Nevertheless, if all

Claude Lévi-Strauss identified multiple cases from the Philippines of dominantly oral peoples classifying information differently than those from typographic or hypertext cultures. The Hanunóo people from the Southern Philippines “divide the universe into what can and what cannot be named.”<sup>107</sup> The Subanun, also from the Philippines, divided diseases according to a continuing succession of dichotomies. In each case, the non-literate peoples classified the world around them, but did not according to an abstract system of categorization. In each instance, the tribal societies did in fact classify items in nature; they simply followed a different system than that which would seem sensible to a culture further along the literate continuum.

Logical classification is not found in dominantly oral societies since abstract thinking is fostered by the technology of writing and literacy.<sup>108</sup> Luria, in some fascinating research, demonstrated how non-literate peoples were incapable of deciphering, let alone employing, logical syllogisms as the excerpt below highlights:<sup>109</sup>

The following syllogism was presented: *Precious metals do not rust. Gold is a precious metal. Does it rust or not?* The following are examples of how this syllogism was repeated (the numbers in parentheses represent the numbers of times the syllogism had been presented).

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conceptual thinking is thus to some degree abstract, some uses of concepts are more abstract than other uses. . . . Oral cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld” (ibid.).

<sup>107</sup>Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*, 138.

<sup>108</sup>Havelock details how ancient Greek society felt the tension in the transition from an oral, non-literate culture to a chirographic or handwritten culture with a minimum literate intelligentsia using an alphabet. Plato in his *Republic* identified this tension between the poets and the philosophers. Havelock identifies the source of the conflict when he writes, “Is it not likely that that character called ‘philosophy’ who had been provoking this quarrel with poetry must symbolise an entire movement, a current of effort which involved all who had need of a conceptual language in which to describe phenomena whether human nor natural? Could this include geographers and historians? Could it involve the early medical writers? Would it not certainly embrace those leaders of the Athenian enlightenment whom we have been taught to style ‘sophists’?” (Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 280).

<sup>109</sup>Luria, *Cognitive Development*, 104, cited in Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 52.

Subject: Kurb., age eighteen, peasant from remote region, illiterate.  
“Do precious metals rust or not? Does gold rust or not?” (1)

Subject: Gal., peasant from remote region, almost illiterate.  
“Precious money rusts . . . there was something else, I forget.” (1)  
“Do precious metals rust or not?” (2)

Subject: Sult., age twenty, peasant from remote region, almost illiterate.  
“Precious metals rust.” (1)  
“Do precious metals rust or not?” (2)

Subject: Iganberdy, age thirty-four, Kirghiz, illiterate.  
“Precious metal rusts. Precious gold rusts.” (1)  
“Does precious gold rust or not?” (2)  
“Do precious metals rust or not? Does precious gold rust or not?” (3)

Subject: Mamlak, age thirty-two, peasant, almost illiterate.  
“They are all precious . . . gold is also precious . . . does it rust or not?” (1)

Oral cultures, while certainly capable of sorting and classifying, do so according to known experience, rather than according to objective, abstract categories. The labels of situational rather than abstract are not meant to suggest that oral people have a deficiency in intellectual aptitude. Rather, they identify two basic ways of categorizing. The difference between them is the dominant sensorium used in language: whereas oral cultures exist in the world of sound with hearing as the dominant sense, literate cultures live in the world of sight with vision as dominant. According to Ong, the difference between situational and abstract categorization is largely due to the different emphasis on hearing and seeing in oral and literate cultures respectively. Yet the dominance of sound among oral cultures affects how they perceive reality in other ways as well.

**The interiority of sound.** Language, argues Ong, favors the auditory sense over all of the other five senses: visual, olfactory, gustatory, or tactile.<sup>110</sup> It was the development of the alphabet that slowly fostered an inexorable shift from the auditory to

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 42.

the visual. With that shift came a psychological transformation of interiority to exteriority in the cognitive processes of the individual subject, though cultures vary on this trait on a continuum.

Vision, Ong contends, favors exteriority since it is dependent upon the level of illumination present in a setting. What is seen or not seen is contingent upon the amount of light in an area. Mitigating factors such as opacity and solidity mitigate the capacity to know exactly what is present. As such, the viewer is required to examine more thoroughly in order to perceive what may not be readily apparent at first sight. Vision has the characteristic of disrupting the external world in order to achieve clarity for the one viewing the scene at hand.<sup>111</sup> Cultures whose dominant sense is vision, therefore, will tend to favor exteriority over interiority. Oral cultures whose dominant sense is auditory will favor the interior over the exterior. The reason why is related to the inherent natures of sight and sound.

According to Ong, hearing can determine the characteristics of an object without violating its essential qualities. Sound travels and bounces off of an object. As such, the world of sound does not have the same nature as the world of sight. Sight divides, sound envelopes. Sight distinguishes, sound unifies. The characteristic differences between sight and sound coupled with their respective dominance among oral and literate cultures further influences the psychological dynamics at play.

Dominantly oral societies receive the enveloping, internalizing effect of sound upon their collective consciousness. Such cultures are more at home in the world of

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 42, 117. Ong writes, "Sound . . . reveals the interior without the necessity of physical invasion. Thus we tap a wall to discover where it is hollow inside, or we ring a silver-colored coin to discover whether it is perhaps lead inside. To discover such things by sight, we should have to open what we examine, making the inside an outside, destroying its interiority as such. Sound reveals interiors because its nature is determined by interior relationships. The sound of a violin is determined by the interior structure of its strings, of its bridge, and of the wood in its soundboard, by the shape of the interior cavity in the body of the violin, and other interior conditions. Filled with concrete or water, the violin would sound different" (ibid.).

sound, and have a greater tendency to the “unifying, centralizing, interiorizing economy of sound . . . consonant with aggregative (harmonizing) tendencies.”<sup>112</sup> Ong believes that the phenomenological experience of sound enveloping its hearers makes oral cultures more likely to view their culture as the center of all that exists or all that is than literate cultures. Oral cultures are not being “self-centered,” as we might suppose. It has to do, rather, with their sensory “vantage point,” by which they locate themselves within the world. The bodily sense that dominates a culture, according to Ong, profoundly impacts its psyche as well as how it interprets its environment.

**Verbomotor lifestyle.** The final psychodynamic feature of oral societies, according to Ong, is “verbomotor lifestyle,” which refers to their tendency to use words within the context of human interaction as opposed to the emphasis of more technologically developed societies upon efficiency and visualization.<sup>113</sup> Spoken language is obviously of high value in dominantly oral cultures; the more creative and resourceful someone is in their speech in such a culture, the greater likelihood for social and material ascendancy. Since the use of language requires listeners (outside of soliloquies), opportunities for public discourse are essential. Its diminished status in more literate societies is genuinely felt by denizens of dominantly oral cultures.

The simple act of purchasing the necessities of life is one example. In an oral culture, people must go to the market where they will encounter a row of vendors selling their produce. When they see a certain kind of vegetable they want to buy, there will be an exchange between the potential buyer and the chosen seller. After a time of negotiation, sometimes rather heated, a price is agreed upon and the buyer either continues the process to purchase other items or returns home.

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<sup>112</sup>Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 73.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 68-69.

In a dominantly literate culture, the activity is completely different. Rather than going to a market filled with vendors, people go to a supermarket. Shoppers there locate the items they want by means of signs posted along the aisles in the store. The desired item may or may not be identifiable within its packaging, but signs and product information give the needed information. There is no haggling, bartering, or negotiating about the price. The shopper must pay the price listed. At the time of purchase, even then consumers may avoid human contact because they may use an automated checkout and then bag the groceries themselves before leaving the supermarket.

In the examples given above, we see that in the dominantly oral culture, human discourse combines with social interaction in order to accomplish the exchange. The world of sound predominates in the transaction. By contrast, the visual sensorium prevails in the supermarket and the consumer is less socially engaged. Interestingly, members of both cultures may find the alternative method of economic exchange intimidating if not disturbing. Members of the dominantly oral culture may find the supermarket impersonal, aloof, and cold. In contrast, members of the more literate culture may find haggling over the price to be difficult, particularly if the vendors are overly aggressive in their attempt to make a sale.<sup>114</sup> In each case, the dominance of sound or sight results in very different ways to accomplishing a basic activity of human life. Dominantly oral cultures exemplify a verbomotor lifestyle as opposed to the more visual and detached way of life found in more literate societies.

**Summary of the psychodynamics of oral and literate cultures.** The above discussion briefly summarizes those traits and characteristics between dominantly oral and literate societies. The list given is by no means exhaustive. Ong's writings sought to

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<sup>114</sup>Living in Lomé, the capital of Togo brought this division into bold relief. Shopping in the local markets and bartering with the vendors and then visiting the supermarkets downtown revealed a stunning contrast.

explain the cultural differences that arise from whether the auditory sense, or the visual, dominates a society's communication style. It is important to underscore the inappropriateness of treating oral and literate societies as radically discontinuous. For example, many dominantly oral societies have a sizeable literate population among them; nevertheless, an oral residue impacts the entire culture. In fact, the degree of residual orality may vary from oral society to oral society. Moreover, as spoken language is implicitly auditory by nature, oral influence is inescapable in any literary cultural context, be it typographic or hypertext. However, Ong's conclusions as well as those of the broader unilinear evolutionary interpretation of the noetic effects of literacy have received many critiques and modifications over the years. Some common themes in the critiques are present in what is called the "contextual" or "ideological approach."

### **The Contextual or Ideological Approach**

Some of the scholars who have challenged the unilinear evolutionary model of literacy and its effects on human consciousness have developed an alternative model called the contextual or the ideological approach.<sup>115</sup> Cole and Nicolopoulou summarize this approach as including "the diversity of literate traditions, the multiplicity of goals that are served by multiple writing systems . . . the multiple potentials of different technologies of representation, the socially defined nature of reading and writing practices . . . and the heterogeneity of mental activity."<sup>116</sup> Coming from the same standpoint, Street contends that linguists should concentrate "on the overlap and interaction of oral and literate modes rather than stressing a 'great divide.'"<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 95-125. Street calls the contextual approach "ideological" because ideology within particular socio-cultural contexts is, he believes, a major influence in the development of human cognition.

<sup>116</sup>Cole and Nicolopoulou, "Literacy."

<sup>117</sup>Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 3.

Proponents of the contextual approach argue that in addition to literacy, researchers must also consider the social context, the political environment, and the overall worldview for each society under investigation. Literacy, they argue, is used in a variety of objectives. These objectives in turn will influence the development of the basic psychology of a particular community and its individual denizens. To ignore this constellation of sociological factors and say that literacy alone will foster greater mental aptitude would be naïve, they contend.

Advocates of the contextual approach have presented two major critiques of the unilinear evolutionary model. The first concerns the interpretation of the historical events surrounding the impact of the alphabet on Greek society and the alleged consequent flourishing of philosophical inquiry. The second is based on fieldwork of the Vai culture of Liberia and the unique interaction among three different languages found there.

The primary evidence for the unilinear evolutionary view (UEV) has been the historical example of Greek civilization. Since the Greeks were the first society to develop a full alphabet (reminder: the Phoenicians first developed a consonant alphabet, the Greeks developed the first system with vowels) and also were the first Western culture to develop higher conceptual thinking such as philosophy, proponents of the UEV have argued that the alphabet played a causal role on the development of Greek thought. Such a view, however, confuses correlation with causation, according to proponents of the contextual view. Even Goody and Watt, advocates of the UEV, admit that the “extensive diffusion of the alphabet in Greece was also materially assisted by various social, economic, and technological factors.”<sup>118</sup> While literacy did indeed exist among the Greeks, had the Egyptians not exported papyrus to them—thereby causing the

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<sup>118</sup>Goody and Watt, “Consequences of Literacy,” 41.

purchase and writing of reading materials to be less expensive—it may never have become widespread.

Anthropological fieldwork by Scribner and Cole among the Vai people of Liberia has compiled additional evidence against the UEV. The Vai culture teaches English, Arabic, and Vai among its children. Moreover, the Vai language uses an original writing script and is taught informally at home.<sup>119</sup> English is taught in the public school system, while Arabic is learned in the local Qur’anic school. All three languages are taught in different ways in different settings and for different purposes (Vai: day-to-day living; English: modern settings; Arabic: religious instruction). What Scribner and Cole discovered was that the technological and socio-economic circumstances of individual Vai had more to do with cognitive development than literacy per se.<sup>120</sup>

While the evidence cited above is compelling, Street lists nine additional reasons that support a more pluralistic explanation of the relation between literacy and cognitive development. Altogether they make a sound case for a more contextual or ideological model of the complex interaction between literacy and human cognition at the local level. While not offering a replacement for the monolithic approach of the UEV (which would be self-defeating), the contextual view provides a helpful critique of it. The arguments are summarized below.

**Oral cultures do not use “embedded” or “illogical” language.** Lévi-Strauss, argues Street, had concluded that “primitive” peoples used language in a way

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<sup>119</sup>Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 31-34.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 258-60. Scribner and Cole conclude, “Vai culture is *in* Vai literacy practices: in properties of the writing system, the means used to transmit it, the functions it serves and contexts of use and the ideologies which confer significance on these functions. But literacy activities are carried out by individuals and our research has shown that psychological skills are also *in* Vai literacy practices . . . We can . . . continue to ask questions about cause and effect, but we do not need to conceive these as requiring us to shift from one level of analysis to another” (*ibid.*, 59).

that was devoid of logic.<sup>121</sup> In fact, dominantly oral peoples do use logic, but it works along axes different from traditional Western logic. It would be fairer to say that the logic of primary oral and residual oral cultures is more concrete and therefore makes logical connections that reflect relationship rather than a common set of characteristics, connections that appear arbitrary to more literate cultures. Recognizing the inherent logic of the systems of thought of oral cultures encourages respect for the differences among cultures, all of which are “dependent on the cultural context.”<sup>122</sup>

**“Rationality” is ideological and political.** Street also contends that the entire debate concerning the rationality of primary oral and residual oral cultures has less to do with sociolinguistics than ideological and political interests.<sup>123</sup> Sociolinguists, anthropologists, and others who make sharp distinctions between orality and literacy, according to Street, are in actuality drawing similar kinds of conclusions as the previous generation of scholars and academics who considered oral cultures “illogical.” Both use technical description to lend an air of legitimacy to their “scientific” descriptions. The analysis, he contends, has more to do with power than with classifications of peoples.

**Informal education is favored.** Street defends the informal education found in primary oral and residual oral cultures against claims that a highly structured educational system is to be preferred, in order to develop more logical and scientific thought. With regard to such claims, Street again sees ideological and political bias, asserting that the standard methods of evaluating “successful achievement” in critical

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<sup>121</sup>Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 3-4. In reality, Lévi-Strauss compares the taxonomies of tribal peoples including the Navajo, the Luapala of Rhodesia, and the Wotjobaluk of Australia and concludes that “in this they are not formally distinct from other taxonomies, even modern ones, in which contiguity and resemblance also play a fundamental part” (Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*, 63).

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

thinking are derived from the educational system. The argument favoring a formal institutionalized education system is, therefore, guilty of circular reasoning.<sup>124</sup>

**Assessing logic trans-culturally is impossible.** Street believes further that any type of trans-cultural assessment of logical aptitude is intrinsically impossible. Thus, education specialists from Europe or the United States cannot reliably determine the level of achievement in logic skills within an indigenous educational system in Africa, Asia, or any number of other places in which orality is predominant over literacy. Invariably, the methods and criteria of logical reasoning of the outsider culture get imposed on the logic standards of the host culture. The results obtained by whatever method of assessment only succeed in serving the conceits of the outsider culture.<sup>125</sup>

**Sentence and textual neutrality is erroneous.** Street goes even further and asserts the poststructuralist argument that sentences do not have any objective meaning outside of the text. By implication, Street contends that advocates of the UEV hold to an objective meaning available within the text, as believed by structuralists like Lévi-Strauss.<sup>126</sup> Owing to his poststructuralist assumptions, Street dismisses such claims as erroneous.<sup>127</sup> Textual meaning, rather, is determined by the reader.

**Literacy is restrictive and hegemonic.** Street further argues that literacy across various cultures is inherently “restrictive” and “hegemonic.”<sup>128</sup> This conclusion is

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<sup>124</sup>Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 4.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); idem, *Savage Mind*, 66; 117; 130; 213-14; 254.

<sup>127</sup>Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 4. Jack Goody, a principal advocate of the unilinear evolutionary perspective, reacts against poststructuralism and deconstruction in *The Power of Written Tradition* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), 109-18.

<sup>128</sup>Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 4.

curious, since it directly contradicts the thought of Jacques Derrida, the father of deconstruction. Derrida's quasi-metaphysical claim that *différance* is actually good is based on a preference for writing over verbal communication, since the reading of texts does not face the imposition of 'presence,' such as one inevitably encounters in one-to-one dialogue.<sup>129</sup> Reading texts, however, also reveals language to be merely a play of the differentiation of signs between the reader and the text. For Derrida, textuality implies freedom rather than hegemony. Oral discourse, by contrast, is 'logocentric' and exerts a strong controlling influence. Plato in his *Phaedrus*, for example, extolled the virtues of oral dialogue as opposed to the reading of texts, since reading afforded no opportunity for questioning.

**Orality and literacy are interrelated.** Street also contends that orality and literacy are so mutually intertwined in most cultures that it is truly impossible to separate the two in any meaningful study. Any effort to do so would be arbitrary and reflect the prejudices of the interlocutor rather than yield any fruitful study.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, Street contends that it is futile to chart the noetic changes of any culture that transitions from a dominantly oral to a literate society. Whatever changes that may occur in the given cultural context cannot be determined with certainty. Frequently, oral expressions do continue and extend into writing but often written forms also influence oral performance.<sup>131</sup> This continuity of oral expression in writing and the written forms' influence on oral performances demonstrates the interrelatedness of both media.

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<sup>129</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976), 77; idem, *Writing and Différance*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 3-30.

<sup>130</sup>James Burns, "My Mother has a Television, Does Yours? Transformation and Secularization in an Ewé Funeral Drum Tradition," *OTJ* 20 (2005): 300-19, <http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/20ii/Burns.pdf> (accessed April 29, 2013). From his fieldwork in one section of traditional Ewéland in southeastern Ghana, Burns notes the difficulty in differentiating the traditional *vugbewo* or "drum language," much of which corresponds to the Ewé language, and modern *vugbewo*.

<sup>131</sup>Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 4.

**Understanding of orality and literacy is local rather than universal.**

Rather than studying the “universal effects of literacy,” Street argues for studying *multiple literacies*. Hence, one could also study various “oralities” as well. What is important to consider is that social, economic, and geographical factors influence the development of a society’s cognitive habits in addition to literacy. The UEV proponents err by making literacy the *sine qua non* of societal progress with the belief that it alone confers the ability to engage in cognitive abstraction and formal logic.<sup>132</sup> A culture could, in fact, demonstrate a high level of sophistication without a written language.

Ultimately, more work is needed to further confirm the contextual view. Perhaps the work of the emerging sciences of cognitive cultural studies may help discover how literacy affects culture, since researchers in this discipline combine neuroscience, literary studies, and anthropology.<sup>133</sup> For now it is too early to determine its potential as a resource for the contextual position. Until then, the advocates of the contextual or ideological perspective will remain little more than critics of the UEV.

In addition, its conclusions must be carefully evaluated because of its tendency to be reductionistic in its explaining everything away with sociological data. The devotion to poststructuralist assumptions characteristic of the contextualists often leads them into a diffuse relativism and a sentimental egalitarianism. Contextual proponents would benefit from an examination of their own postmodern, poststructuralist assumptions as critically as they have the structuralist assumptions of those they criticize. Nevertheless, they have pointed to the importance of sociological factors at the local level of cultural activity. There is wisdom in studying various oralities and literacies and their

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>For an introduction to cognitive cultural studies, see Liza Sunshine, ed. *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

effects as opposed to looking for a “universal” model of the development of a culture’s cognition.

### **Conclusion**

Having surveyed both approaches, it seems likely that both perspectives may help to solve one piece of the puzzle concerning the relationship between of orality, literacy, and cognition.<sup>134</sup> At a foundational level, literacy must have a significant impact on human cognitive function. Yet literacy alone is not enough. Proponents of the UEV exhibit a certain sociological naïveté in their description of literacy and its effects on human cognitive function.<sup>135</sup> The social and cultural factors that facilitate literacy likely also have a major impact on the overall consciousness of a society. How all of the variables involved in the sociological development of the thinking of a culture interact may never be determined completely.

The unilinear evolutionary model is incomplete in its description of literacy and its effects on human cognitive function. While it is certainly true that literacy must have some noetic impact on the psychological consciousness of society, other dynamic forces are in play as well. How all of the variables involved in the sociological development of any given culture cannot be determined by the presence of literacy alone. Nevertheless, literacy should be understood to have a powerful influence on the cognitive processes of a society and its members.

We have concluded the second chapter with a historical review of the field of orality studies and with a summary of two competing perspectives concerning how orality and literacy affect human cognition. The goal was to introduce the field of orality research as well as to provide a general description of its importance in understanding the

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<sup>134</sup>Cole and Nicolopolou, “Literacy.”

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

psychological impact inherent within the continuum from orality to literacy. This chapter also supported the second warrant of our argument: *the dominant medium by which we use language to send and receive communication (visual, auditory, etc.) impacts our noetic faculties as well as the manner in which we interpret the message as demonstrated by studies in orality*. While the exact nature of that impact cannot be determined precisely, after reviewing the UEV and the contextual approach to orality studies, it is apparent that literacy has a definite influence on human cognition. That influence has implications for our research in the composition of as well as the interpretation of Scripture and in how we proclaim the message of the gospel in various socio-linguistic contexts. It also influences our understanding of divine discourse.

Chapter 3 will continue our historical review as well as mark a major transition in this dissertation. It will continue our historical survey of orality studies by focusing on Christian theological studies, specifically in biblical research and in missiology. It will also make a major transition in that it will present the first of two warrants in our argument. The warrant in chapter 3 will make an inference from practical reason supporting the claim.

## CHAPTER 3

### DOMESTICATION OF THE LITERATE MIND: ORALITY IN SCRIPTURE AND PROCLAMATION

#### **Introduction**

Previous chapters identified two grounds for the Toulmin-model argument from practical reason, the case for which is the substance of this dissertation: first, *God in divine communicative action is the means by which we know him through human utterances in the canon of Scripture as stated in Vanhoozer's theodramatically revised Scripture principle*; and second, *the medium by which we use language to send and receive communication (visual, auditory, etc.) impacts our noetic faculties as well as the manner in which we interpret the message as demonstrated by studies in orality*. Chapter 3 will pursue two objectives. The first is to continue the progression of the argument in this dissertation by expounding the first warrant. The second is to complete the historical review of orality studies begun in the previous chapter by investigating how academics in biblical studies and missions have relied on orality research. While chapter 2 gave a broad overview of how the field of orality studies began and how they have impacted various disciplines, chapter 3 will focus on the impact of orality more specifically in the domain of Christian theological studies, particularly biblical research and applied ministry.

I begin, then, by recalling that warrants serve as the inferences that proceed from grounds (discussed in the first chapter) and culminate in the claim or thesis. One may summarize the warrant in this chapter as follows: *The presence of orality is evident in both Scripture and Christian proclamation as indicated in the fields of biblical studies and in practical ministry, specifically in missions and evangelism*. The warrant I present

is a warrant by analogy. This type of warrant is fitting since Vanhoozer has identified the triune God as a speech-agent, a word, and the breath that carries that word to others, in a manner which serves as something of a divine analogue of the oral-aural dynamics evident within both Scripture and Christian proclamation. This chapter will provide backing or supporting evidence for the warrant by discussing the relevant research in biblical studies and in providing a broad historical overview of Christian proclamation. Specifically, the survey of biblical studies will focus on research in the oral tradition of Scripture while the history of Christian proclamation will describe the oral recounting of biblical narratives, particularly in missions and evangelism, throughout the history of the church. All of the information from the backing shall strengthen the inference in this chapter that ultimately supports the claim.

### **Oral Tradition Research in Biblical Studies: Implications for Biblical Interpretation**

The fact that oral traditions preceded and influenced the formation of the written text of Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) would seem to have implications for teaching the Bible with oral methods. Research regarding the Christian canon will help to determine the relevance of the revised Scripture principle and its role as a paradigm for ministry practice.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, one could argue that these findings ought to influence how ministry practitioners accomplish their oral tasks and the strategies they choose.

An exhaustive examination of this topic is well beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, this section will concentrate on three aspects: first, the passages

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<sup>1</sup>While there may indeed be a very fruitful study of the oral traditions culminating in the text of the Apocrypha as well as of other deuterocanonical literature, for the purposes of this research dissertation this chap. will focus exclusively on the canon of the Protestant Bible.

<sup>2</sup>For a summary of the history of Old Testament biblical studies, see Mark S. Gignilliat, *A Brief History of Old Testament Criticism from Benedict Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Douglas A. Knight, *Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Atlanta: Society of

in Scripture in which an oral-aural message preceded the written account; second the oral traditions that underlie the formation of the biblical canon; and finally, two critical issues raised by oral tradition research of the Bible: a) the historical reliability of the biblical texts themselves and b) the difficulties in identifying the marks of an oral culture in the final text of Scripture, particularly in the new field of biblical studies known as “biblical performance criticism.” The responses to these critical issues will have implications for practical theology and missions, particularly regarding the use of Vanhoozer’s revised Scripture principle.

### **Oral-Aural References in Scripture**

Within the text of Scripture itself, there are two categories of aural-oral references: (1) the biblical evidence of oral transmission prior to its written composition; and (2) the examples of Scripture reading before the assembly either during feast days in the Old Testament or before the local church community in the New Testament. The findings in both categories demonstrate the level of “oral residue” within the written text of Scripture.

**Oral transmission in Scripture.** Perhaps the most important type of oral transmission in Scripture is those occasions when God himself spoke and it was later written down.<sup>3</sup> The book of Genesis alone recounts more than 30 instances in which God spoke. Yet Scripture elsewhere refers to God as speaking when God is not quoted directly (Ps 16:10 and Acts 13:35; Matt 19:4-5; Acts 4:25; Heb 1:6, 7, 8, 10, 3:7, and

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Biblical Literature, 2006). A brief historical survey of oral tradition and New Testament studies is available by Kelly R. Iverson, “Orality and the Gospels: A Survey of Recent Research,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 8 (2009): 71-106. The historical account of biblical research in this section follows these guides.

<sup>3</sup>Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28-29, 2:18, 3:9, 13-14, 22, 6:13, 8:15, 9:8, 12, 17, 17:1, 3, 7, 8-9, 15, 19, 20:6, 21:12, 17, 26:24, 31:13, 35:10-11, 46:3; Exod 3:6, 14-15, 6:2-7, 34:10 are but some examples of God speaking directly to people.

4:7). In the Old and New Testaments combined, the phrase “God said,” occurs at least 46 times. Evidently, the Scripture places an emphasis on the God who speaks to his people.<sup>4</sup>

God also spoke through intermediaries who delivered their messages orally. Frequently the prophets—particularly the classical prophets—delivered God’s oracles in an oral address. Of the 414 times that the phrase “thus says the LORD” occurs in the Old Testament, 348 of them are found in the Prophets (Isa 35, Jer 147, Ezek 126, Amos 13, Obad 1, Mic 2, Hag 4, Zech 19, and Mal 1). The prophets evidently believed that their message was a direct communication from God.

In fact, the Old Testament understood that the prophets were God’s mouthpiece:<sup>5</sup> “I will raise up a prophet . . . and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. . . . But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak . . . shall die” (Deut 18:18-20); “I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say” (Exod 4:12); “Then the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth” (Num 23:5); “My Spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth” (Isa 59:21); “Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, ‘Behold, I have put my words in your mouth’” (Jer 1:9); “[T]he things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets,” (Acts 3:18). Ezekiel 3:27 is one of the most explicit passages: “But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’” First Kings

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<sup>4</sup>Contrary to the gods of the pagan nations, God spoke verbally and directly. See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth), 216-17.

<sup>5</sup>Of the three Hebrew words given for “prophet” in the Old Testament, *nābī*’ carries the sense of “one who is called.” Heinz-Josef Fabry writes, “Although earlier scholars preferred to assume an active basic meaning ‘speaker, proclaimer’ for Heb. *nābī*’, this theory is less plausible” (G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *TDOT*, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), s.v. “*nābī*” by Heinz-Josef Fabry, 9:133. The message of the prophets was revealed in the New Covenant to be nothing less than the *logia* (oracles) from the Father communicated through his Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

17:24 best summarizes the Old Testament understanding that the prophets spoke with divine authority because their message literally was God's word to his people: "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." The word of the prophets was nothing less than God's words.<sup>6</sup>

The Old Testament also understood the prophets as God's mouthpiece because the Word of the LORD came to them. This encounter between the Word of the LORD and the prophet is intriguing because it is described as an event, as if God himself spoke directly to the prophet. The sheer number of instances in which the phrase "Word of the LORD came to" occurs in the Old Testament is a testimony to the authenticity of the prophets' messages as authentically the words of God himself. Von Rad writes,

The term, 'the word of Jahweh' occurs 241 times in the Old Testament writings; of these no less than 221 (93 per cent) relate to a prophetic oracle. There can, therefore, be no doubt but that this collocation was used as a technical term for an oral prophetic revelation. The phrase 'the word of Jahweh came to so and so' (123 times) is particularly characteristic, because it represents the apperception of the divine word as event, a unique happening in history, which . . . sets the person concerned in a new historical situation.<sup>7</sup>

Others examples, however, are from human speakers who were nevertheless inspired by God and thus participants in the theodramatic self-communication.<sup>8</sup> The New Testament writers not only affirm the Old Testament texts that explicitly identify God as the one speaking, but refer to other passages written by the inspired authors. Acts 4:24-25, for example, reads, "God . . . through the mouth of our father your servant David said, 'Why do the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things?'" Also, many of the biblical texts are the transcription of spoken discourse, including much of the book of

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<sup>6</sup>In saying that the prophets' words were God's words, I am not suggesting a mechanical dictation theory of divine inspiration. Rather, I am arguing for a plenary-verbal view of inspiration that considers every word of Scripture to be inspired by God while reflecting the unique personalities of the individual human authors.

<sup>7</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 2:87-88.

<sup>8</sup>Peter writes that men, "moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet 1:20-21).

Deuteronomy, Joshua, Psalms, Proverbs, the Major and Minor Prophets, the Sermon on the Mount, and Christ's parables. Evidently, in many cases the composition of Scripture as written texts often occurred after an oral delivery of the message.

**The reading of Scripture in Scripture.** Scripture also records occasions in which its own *promulgation* occurred via oral means. God commanded Moses, for example, to read his oracles aloud before the people: "You shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing . . . Assemble the people . . . that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God," (Deut 31:11-12). Joshua also read all the words of the Torah to the people of Israel as God had commanded him.<sup>9</sup> The same tradition of reading the law of God before the assembly of Israel occurred during the times of the united and divided monarchy, the exilic period, and throughout the ministries of the prophets.<sup>10</sup> While the above examples reflect a complex interrelationship between oral and written elements in the biblical canon, the fact remains that the people of Israel heard prophets and other religious leaders read Scripture aloud.

In the New Testament as well, Paul directed the elders to read his letters before the congregation. In Colossians 4:16, Paul wrote, "And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans." In 1 Thessalonians 5:27, again Paul wrote, "I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren." Moreover, in the earliest days of Christianity, the public reading of passages from the

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<sup>9</sup>"Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law" (Josh 8:34).

<sup>10</sup>"And the king . . . read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant, which was found in the house of the LORD" (2 Kgs 23:2); "And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the LORD with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people," (2 Chr 17: 9); "Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly . . . and he read from it before the square" (Neh 8:2, 3); "So you go and read from the scroll . . . the words of the LORD to the people" (Jer 36:6).

Bible was a significant part of congregational worship.<sup>11</sup> While literacy was prevalent during the first century, it appears that the overall culture was still predominantly oral.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, it seems likely that the early Christian congregations heard the Scriptures as much if not more than read from them. The above considerations show that oral dynamics were involved in the formation and transmission of Scripture, thus supporting the first warrant.

### **Oral Tradition of Scripture**

Oral tradition research in biblical studies may also reveal the presence of orality in the text of Scripture. The discipline of orality studies in biblical scholarship, however, is still relatively new, not having developed into its own area of interest until the last thirty years. Moreover, the history of oral tradition research in biblical studies is uneven with regards to the amount of attention devoted to the Old and New Testaments over the years. Regrettably, many of the specialists in Old and New Testament studies who have devoted themselves to orality research of the Bible do not share the same level of confidence in the authority and historical reliability of the Scriptures as do evangelical scholars. There are still, however, many helpful insights we can gain from their work concerning the presence of orality in the biblical text.

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<sup>11</sup>Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 17. First Timothy 4:13 reads, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture.”

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. Kelber writes, “While the craft of writing has deep roots in ancient Near Eastern culture, and was a veritable preoccupation for parts of Judaism, the pre-canonical, synoptic tradition must still be viewed as being firmly indebted to the oral medium. The oral matrix of the material corresponds with the sociological identity of the early Jesus movement. In antiquity, writing was essentially a product of urbanization and compact settlements; in rural areas language was almost entirely confined to face-to-face communication.”

**Old Testament research.** Culley divides the history of oral traditions research in the text of the Old Testament into four general phases.<sup>13</sup> Each phase differs considerably in the span of years as well as the degree to which biblical scholars believed that oral tradition played a role in the composition of the Old Testament canon. This section will summarize the contributions from the third and fourth periods (as identified by Cully) since they provide details that are the most relevant to the discoveries of orality research in Old Testament studies.

The period from 1963 to 1978 can be described as the proliferation of fieldwork in modern oral communication as a means of gathering insights into the production of the text of the Old Testament. Studies in Hebrew poetry and prose used insights from the works of Milmann Parry and Albert Lord.<sup>14</sup> The following is a brief summary of the proposals taken from such fieldwork.

While not all biblical scholars did so, some began to apply the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory (summarized in the second chapter of this dissertation) to the poetic passages of the Old Testament. William Whallon's article, "Formulaic Poetry in the Old Testament" proposed that the parallelism prevalent in Hebrew poetry held oral-formulaic analogies with meter in Homeric verse and alliterative verse in Anglo-Saxon poetry.<sup>15</sup> Stanley Gevirtz likewise used the research of Milmann Parry and Albert Lord in his conclusions regarding "fixed pairs" in Hebrew poetry. Gevirtz claimed that these fixed

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<sup>13</sup>Robert C. Culley, "Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies," *OTJ* 1 (1986): 32, [http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/1i/3\\_culley.pdf](http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/1i/3_culley.pdf) (accessed February 28, 2013). Culley divides the four time periods into the "early period of biblical research," beginning as far back as the late eighteenth century until the early twentieth century; the second period (1932-1962); the third period (1963-1978); and the fourth period (1979-present).

<sup>14</sup>Millman Parry and Albert Bates Lord, *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954); Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

<sup>15</sup>William Whallon, "Formulaic Poetry in the Old Testament," cited in Culley, "Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies," 42.

pairs were the product of oral poets in their oral improvisation, similar to the conclusions by Parry and Lord about the “Homeric problem.” These fixed pairs aided the memorization of the oral poets as they performed Hebrew poetry.

Other scholars began to apply the Parry-Lord theory to Hebrew prose in the Old Testament during the 1960s. David M. Gunn applied the oral-formulaic theory to the narrative passages of the Old Testament in a series of articles,<sup>16</sup> but he eventually brought all his conclusions together in the *Story of David*. Gunn divided the prose passages of the Old Testament into what he called “traditional material” and “oral traditional material.”<sup>17</sup> Gunn defined “traditional material” as those portions of the narrative that employ literary motifs. He identified “oral traditional material” by the use of what he called “stock characters” and type-scenes or themes (woman at the well, trickery in marriage).<sup>18</sup>

Finally, a group of researchers began to examine other features of the Old Testament by using insights from anthropological fieldwork. Having compared oral genealogies among other cultures, Robert R. Wilson assessed the historical reliability of the Old Testament genealogical accounts in his *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (1977).<sup>19</sup> Others, such as Everett Fox<sup>20</sup> and Beat Zuber,<sup>21</sup> either performed

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<sup>16</sup>David M. Gunn, “Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel,” *VT* 24 (1974a): 286-317; idem, “The ‘Battle Report’: Oral or Scribal Convention?” *JBL* 93 (1974): 513-18; idem, “Traditional Composition in the ‘Succession Narrative,’” *VT* 26 (1976): 214-29; idem, “On Oral Tradition: A ‘Response to John Van Seters,’” *Semeia* 5 (1976b): 155-61; idem, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*, *JSOT* Supplement Series 6 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978).

<sup>17</sup>Culley, “Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies,” 45.

<sup>18</sup>Gunn, *Story of King David*, 49-50.

<sup>19</sup>Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, Yale Near Eastern Researches (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); idem, “The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 169-89.

<sup>20</sup>Everett Fox, “The Samson Cycle in an Oral Setting,” *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 4 (1978): 51-68.

<sup>21</sup>Beat Zuber, *Vier Studien zu den Ursprüngen Israels*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1976).

anthropological fieldwork in oral traditions or relied upon the research of others to better understand the oral traditions that contributed to the Old Testament. Yet a new perspective on orality and biblical studies would emerge by the late seventies.

From the late seventies to the present day (Cully's fourth phase), three figures loom large on the field of orality research in Old Testament studies: Susan Niditch, Martin Jaffee, and David Carr. Their work is significant to our discussion because the contributions of the Parry-Lord theory factor prominently in their research. Their understanding of orality is more sophisticated, however, in that these researchers acknowledge the complex interrelationship between orality and literacy, contra the "great divide" view found in the Parry-Lord theory as well as the writings by Walter Ong.<sup>22</sup>

Susan Niditch, in *Oral World and Written Word*, argues for a complex understanding of the interplay between oral and written elements in the composition of the Old Testament documents.<sup>23</sup> Niditch challenges "the romantic notion of an oral period in the history of Israel followed by the time of literacy in which Israelite literature becomes written and bookish."<sup>24</sup> Rather, the composition of the Old Testament documents across the centuries covers a broad span along the oral-literate trajectory. Identifying the oral elements within these ancient documents, however, is problematic because the writers employed an "oral aesthetic." The presence of the "oral aesthetic," furthermore, raises questions about source critical theories, including the Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis and Gunkel's form criticism since these scholars failed to

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<sup>22</sup>Chapter 2 described the two dominant perspectives in orality research: the unilinear evolutionary theory and the contextual or ideological approach. Niditch, Jaffee, and Carr are closer to the contextual or ideological position.

<sup>23</sup>Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, Library of Ancient Israel, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Louisville: Westminster John Knox), 117. Niditch is in greater accord with John Miles Foley and Ruth Finnegan who argue for a complex interplay between oral and literate traits within a culture, contra Milman Parry and Albert Lord who, in their earlier works describe a "great divide" between orality and literacy in a given culture.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 134.

recognize literary features in the text that were not evidence of a particular date of composition; instead, these features reveal a literary style in which the authors attempted to *reflect* a by-gone era.

Niditch does not offer a single monolithic theory for how the Hebrew Bible developed. Rather, she suggests that all the writings progressed somewhere along the oral-literate continuum and therefore followed different trajectories in the process of composition. Niditch presents four scenarios for the production of the various genres found in the Hebrew Bible:

(1) the oral performance, which is dictated to a writer who preserves the text in an archive, creating a fixed text out of an event; (2) the slow crystallization of a pan-Hebraic literary tradition through many performances over centuries of increasingly pan-Israelite tales to audiences with certain expectations and assumptions about shared group identity; late in the process authors write down the shared stories; (3) a written imitation of oral-style literature to create portions of the tradition; (4) the production of a written text that is excerpted from another written text by a writer who deftly edits or recasts the text in accordance with his own view of Israelite identity.<sup>25</sup>

The first model, which Niditch calls the “oral to written-performance dictated and copied” reflects neither Gunkel’s form critical explanation nor the Parry-Lord conception of a long tradition of storytellers that eventually became frozen in a textual format. Yet in this model, Niditch does allow the possibility that at least some portions of the Hebrew Bible, particularly the oracles of the classical prophets, began as oral performances that were later transcribed or even written in an oral-formulaic style at a later time. While the process of writing in either case would affect the overall content of the oracle, nevertheless the essential qualities would be preserved—a conclusion that differs from Gunkel as well as the Parry-Lord hypothesis which would argue for a much greater discontinuity between the oral traditions and the final written copy.

The second model, “oral to written and written to oral,” is the format Niditch believes applies to the formation of the patriarchal narratives and the stories about the

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

Exodus that are essential to Israel's national identity.<sup>26</sup> Stories that began as oral performances before audiences developed over centuries until they eventually became written by an individual for the preservation of their heritage. Later, storytellers relied upon these written documents in their own performances before the people. What began as oral performances later became codified as written texts that served as the script for future oral retellings. This process of composition indicates a high level of interdependence between orality and literacy.

The third model, "literary imitation," suggests that some portions of the Old Testament began as literary productions that mimicked an oral compositional style.<sup>27</sup> Examples from the Hebrew Bible that reflect such techniques, at least according to Niditch, would be the story of the plagues in Egypt from Exodus. Niditch believes that such texts were not originally intended for the general population but for an elite literate minority.

The fourth model, "written sources for written compositions," is clearly on the literate side of the oral-literate continuum.<sup>28</sup> In this model, the author relies heavily upon another document in order to compose a new manuscript. Niditch mentions the references in 1 and 2 Chronicles to the *History of the Kings of Israel*. Such writing, she contends, is obviously literate.

Niditch is quick to mention that the four models of composition that she presents do not explain how the final version of the Old Testament was composed. She also acknowledges that her four scenarios do not explain the development of the Pentateuch. In fact, Niditch admits that the interaction between oral and literate worlds in the Old Testament is so dynamic and complex that any attempted reconstruction of the

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 120-25.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 125-27.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 127-29.

compositional process would at best be an oversimplification. Her four models are simply offered as possible partial explanations of the much more complex process of the composition of the extant Old Testament documents.

The second figure, Martin Jaffee, examined the oral-literary aspects of the Torah as reflected in the oral-written traditions from the Second Temple period and early rabbinism (200 B.C. to A.D. 400).<sup>29</sup> Jaffee concluded that previous scholarship did not have a crystallized understanding of the relationship between the oral recitation of the Torah and the written text. For the Jews of the Second Temple period, the people received the words through the oral recitation of the sacred texts from the rabbis.<sup>30</sup> The interface between orality and literacy was complex and interdependent.

The mentality of the Rabbinic period (post-exilic times until AD 400), however, was dramatically different. It is Jaffee's contention that the oral retention of the Torah, what he calls "Torah in the Mouth," represented how most Jewish people received the Torah during the Rabbinic period. This is reflected in a passage from the Talmud Yerushalmi, indicating that the Jewish people considered Torah the internalization of the sacred words of Scripture in the Rabbi. This internalization, analogous to intoxication, overflowed to the rabbi's disciples who likewise memorized and internalized the words of the sacred text. The rabbinate considered what was retained in memory as superior to what was written: "The written texts of Torah in the Mouth . . . are not *torah* at all as long as they remain merely written on inscribed material surfaces; the real inscription of Torah in the Mouth must be in memory."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE-400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-12.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 28-64.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 155.

Finally, David Carr offers the most recent contribution to the study of oral traditions and the Old Testament. Carr's *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* relied heavily upon the writings of Walter Ong, Eric Havelock, Jack Goody, Ruth Finnegan, John Miles Foley, among others.<sup>32</sup> Carr investigates “how texts—particularly texts used over long periods of time—were produced, collected, revised, and used” during the composition of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>33</sup> While avoiding an anachronistic understanding of the written production of the text of the Old Testament, Carr also sidesteps an oversimplification of the Parry-Lord theory of a “great divide” between oral and literate societies and instead relies upon the idea of a complex interaction between orality and literacy that is almost impossible to untangle. The so-called “orality-textuality interface” suggests that orality influences literacy and vice versa.

Since the processes of producing texts in ancient Israel cannot be reconstructed exactly, Carr examines textuality and education in the Near East and Mediterranean worlds followed by the Eastern Hellenistic world. While these societies undoubtedly differed from the nation of Israel in certain respects, their cultural practices would likely have influenced and served as a reflection of the cultural milieu within Israelite culture, and they were obviously much more similar to Israel with respect to the interaction between orality and literacy than to typographic and hypertext societies of today.

Carr believes that education in the ancient world valued the impression of key cultural, traditional, and religious elements in the thought processes of the people. Memorization and recitation were considered foundational in this enterprise. Texts were not ends in and of themselves but merely the means by which the society ensured the

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<sup>32</sup>David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 299.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

accurate transmission of its key traditions from one generation to the next. What was essential, however, was that instructors ingrained these traditions into their students' minds.<sup>34</sup> This retention was important in order to preserve the culture and the traditions of the society.

While Niditch, Jaffee, and Carr examine the oral traditions preceding the Old Testament, others have examined the cultural context in which they developed. Thomas Boogaart contends that “[Old Testament] narratives as they have come down to us are scripts of Israelite plays.”<sup>35</sup> Barker goes even further than Boogaart and argues that we cannot understand Scripture narratives fully apart from their dramatic reenactment.<sup>36</sup> While we cannot be certain if Boogaart and Barker are correct, their conclusions do seem to give further light to how ancient peoples received the stories of the Old Testament.

Another recent contribution to the discussion of orality and how it affected the composition of the bible is Walton and Sandy's *Lost World of Scripture*.<sup>37</sup> Walton and Sandy consider the implications of orality for the doctrine of inerrancy. While Walton and Sandy are quick to acknowledge the inerrancy of Scripture, they do believe that orality studies may alter the ways in which we conceive it. While evangelicalism should not jettison the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, its adherents should consider how orality studies may contribute to a fuller, richer understanding of it. While we may not agree with everything that Walton and Sandy argue, we should be open to their premise and defend inerrancy even while we develop a more nuanced description of it.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>35</sup>Thomas A. Boogaart, “Drama and the Sacred: Recovering the Dramatic Tradition in Scripture and Worship,” in *Touching the Altar: The Old Testament for Christian Worship*, ed. Carol M. Bechtel, Calvin Institute for Christian Liturgical Renewal Studies Series, ed. John D. Witvliet (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 35-58.

<sup>36</sup>Jeff Barker, *The Storytelling Church: Adventures in Reclaiming the Role of Story in Worship* (Cleveland, TN: Parson's Porch, 2011).

<sup>37</sup>John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

The study of Old Testament oral traditions began long before any such research for the New Testament occurred. While some work had taken place by the mid-twentieth century, the study of oral traditions with regard to the New Testament did not reflect the best orality theorizing until 1983 with the writings of Werner Kelber. Since then, new fields of orality research have emerged within the larger discipline of New Testament studies.

**New Testament studies (1980-present).** Werner H. Kelber was the first scholar to combine the principles of orality research with the study of the written text of the New Testament. Kelber's *The Oral and the Written Gospel* was a landmark book that established orality as an important consideration in the study of the Gospels.<sup>38</sup> Kelber argued that the insights from orality studies provided a *via media* in the debates between Bultmann<sup>39</sup> and Gerhardsson<sup>40</sup> concerning the influence of the oral tradition in the composition of the Gospels.

Kelber began with a devastating critique of Bultmann. He argued that Bultmann, while noting the value of fieldwork in comparative literary studies, nevertheless relied exclusively on studies of the Synoptic tradition. It is no surprise, then, that Bultmann believed that whatever remained of the oral traditions predating the New Testament Gospels was now irretrievably lost. Bultmann's own presuppositions blinded

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<sup>38</sup>Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 14-34.

<sup>39</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). See also Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1931). Bultmann believed that there was an oral tradition behind the Gospels but that it was impossible to discover the elements of oral tradition in the extant texts.

<sup>40</sup>Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis 12, trans. Eric J. Sharpe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

him to any other possibilities concerning oral tradition research of the Gospels. Kelber believed that New Testament studies could investigate these oral traditions.

Gerhardsson's rejection of form criticism in the Gospel narratives was closer to Kelber's position, and Gerhardsson recognized the primacy of the oral tradition in the composition of the Synoptics. However, Kelber criticizes Gerhardsson for not considering more carefully the impact of the oral tradition on the Synoptic Gospels. Kelber also charged Gerhardsson with confusing the oral retention of material with "mechanical memorization" in his explanation of teaching and repetition. Even worse for Kelber was Gerhardsson's backdating of Rabbinic material to the Second Temple period. Moreover, Kelber rejects his suggestion that Jesus himself encouraged the mechanical memorization of his sayings.<sup>41</sup> While Kelber agreed with Gerhardsson over Bultmann, he still found many points of disagreement with some of Gerhardsson's conclusions.

In contrast to both Bultmann and Gerhardsson, Kelber places a much higher emphasis on the study of orality to understand the development and composition of the Synoptic Gospels. Reflecting the ideas of Ong, Kelber's interpretation of orality assumes a fundamental divide between oral and written texts: "Contemporary theorists of orality appear virtually unanimous in emphasizing the linguistic integrity of the difference between spoken versus written words."<sup>42</sup> Even though Ong persistently argued that he in fact did not present such a basic distinction between oral and literate peoples, his writings influenced scholars in other fields such as Kelber to make such conclusions. The idea of a radical separation between oral and written documents has important implications for our understanding of the composition of the Synoptic documents.

The oral transmission of stories, according to Kelber, has several features that differ from written documents. First, the oral stories undergo rapid changes depending

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<sup>41</sup>Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 14.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

upon the social exigencies of the moment.<sup>43</sup> The values of one particular setting may differ in another, requiring the speaker to change elements of the story in order to maintain its relevance and longevity. This social dynamic requires elasticity and the organic development of stories as they develop with every improvisatory retelling. Each story is unique and is a valid example of the oral narrative despite the changes or embellishments that may occur along the way.

These oral variants are so significant that Kelber believes there is no substantial continuity between the oral tradition Synoptic Gospels and the written texts. In fact, the Gospel of Mark was, according to Kelber, Mark's attempt to wrest control from the oral narrative tradition gatekeepers (the apostles).<sup>44</sup> By freezing the narratives as a written text, Mark could seize control of the Gospel story for use according to his own intentions. The Gospel of Mark, therefore, according to Kelber, was the product of an ideological war between the oral storytellers and a Gospel writer who used the technology of writing in order to tip the balance of religious power in his favor.<sup>45</sup>

Mark, the writer, chose the written medium, not to recapitulate oral messages but to transform them. By this logic, his literary production is inherently linked with alienation from living words. Notably, the story that came to be written down is dominated by a sense of distancing. But it is an alienation hardly comprehensible as apocalyptic world-weariness or gnostic aloofness. Mark's estrangement is from the standard-bearers of oral transmission. . . . The story self-authenticates its new, redemptive medium over against the prevailing authorities of oral transmission. It is a story in which its own medium history is deeply implicated.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 24. Kelber writes, "Remembrance and transmission depended on the ability to articulate a message in such a way that it found an echo in people's hearts and minds. . . . [O]ral transmission is controlled by the law of *social identification* rather than by the technique of verbatim memorization" (ibid.).

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 106-07. Kelber writes, "Writing, the inscribing of graphic signs on surfaces, entails the linearization of language. Speech as verbal output, we remember, does not imply spatial direction; spoken words are preeminently sound, and sound does not lend itself to spatializing patterns. By robbing words of sound, language is made subservient to spatial arrangements. . . . Mark exploits the directional potential of writing by threading a journey that draws hitherto unrelated items onto a single path" (ibid.).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 130.

To be sure, many of Kelber's arguments received harsh criticism and outright rejection by other specialists in the field of New Testament studies. In particular, some criticized his assertion of a "great divide" between oral and literate sources.<sup>46</sup> Others derided the conclusion that Mark's gospel was the decisive stroke against the oral storytellers for mastery of the Gospel narrative.<sup>47</sup> Despite the criticism, however, Kelber's work is considered groundbreaking for the introduction of orality research into New Testament studies.<sup>48</sup>

Paul Achtemeier was among those who critiqued Kelber's binary division between oral and written sources. In fact, he argued that the Synoptic gospels are thoroughly oral in their composition according to the exigencies of the first century Greco-Roman world. Not only were the documents read out loud to their intended recipients, their composition occurred through the writer dictating the contents to an amanuensis. Even private reading took place by reciting the text aloud.<sup>49</sup> Achtemeier then identifies several rhetorical clues that suggest aids or helps for a listening audience to understand the flow of the narrative as well as to assist with the retention of the story

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<sup>46</sup>Mournet writes, "In emphasizing the transformation of oral tradition by its incorporation into a text, Kelber does not take into serious account the dynamic interaction between orality *and* textuality at work in the culture within which the gospel of Mark was composed, even though he was fully aware of this phenomenon" (Terence C. Mournet, *Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency: Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q* [Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 83).

<sup>47</sup>Iverson, "Orality and the Gospels," 82; Mournet, *Oral Tradition*, 84-85; Joanna Dewey, "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark," *Int* 43 (1989): 32-44; Paul J. Achtemeier, "*Omne verbum sonat*: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *JBL* 109 (1989): 27. Iverson writes, "Kelber's thesis appears to contradict itself since the *written* text of Mark's Gospel would have, in all likelihood, been re-oralized in future performances, thus reestablishing the very method of traditioning that Kelber claims the evangelist attempts to discredit" (Iverson, "Orality and the Gospels," 82).

<sup>48</sup>Iverson, "Orality and the Gospels," 82; Mournet, *Oral Tradition*, 86: "Kelber's contribution remains, to this day, the single most important and influential work on oral tradition."

<sup>49</sup>Achtemeier, "*Omne verbum sonat*," 3-27. The fact that even private reading occurred aloud explains why Philip overheard the Ethiopian eunuch reading the scroll of Isaiah to himself in Acts 8:30.

that is told.<sup>50</sup> Classical rhetoric, Achtemeier believed, was replete with oral cues and the biblical writers employed it in the composition of the New Testament documents. This dynamic, argued Achtemeier, suggests a complex interrelationship between orality and literacy.

Peter Botha argued for an oral as opposed to textual composition of Mark's Gospel.<sup>51</sup> Botha correctly noted that while Kelber and Dewey had stressed the importance of orality studies for a more precise interpretation of the New Testament, they had still treated the text of Mark as a written one with a high oral residue. Botha contended that the Gospel of Mark should be interpreted as a fundamentally oral document that someone had transcribed at a later date for the preservation of the account.<sup>52</sup> Botha then agreed more with Achtemeier and argued that while Kelber and Dewey had made significant contributions to biblical research, they did not go far enough.

Richard Horsley and Jonathan Draper continued in the same vein as Botha by challenging the conventional notions of the Q document in Markan research. In New Testament research, the Q document (*quelle*, source) refers to the source that Mark and the other writers of the Synoptic writers used in the composition of their gospel accounts. According to Horsley and Draper, Q should not be treated as a *written* text but as an *oral* telling of the gospel narratives that the Markan writer referenced when compiling his source material for the eventual production of a written Gospel account.<sup>53</sup> Horsley and

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 23. Some of the examples that Achtemeier includes are parallelism, anaphora, and *inclusio*.

<sup>51</sup>Peter Botha, "Mark's Story as Oral Traditional Literature: Rethinking the Transmission of Some Traditions about Jesus," *HvTSt* 47 (1991): 304-31.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 322, cited in Iverson, "Currents in Biblical Research," 86.

<sup>53</sup>Richard A. Horsley with Jonathan A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 2-14.

Draper go further, however, by relying on insights from John Miles Foley in his research on the oral-formulaic theory, ethnopoetics, and ethnography. Based on Foley's research, orality research not only contributed to a better understanding of the origins of the gospel narratives but also helped develop a proper hermeneutic for their interpretation. Oral narratives in first century Palestine, they argued, depended upon the audiences, as much as the storyteller, for the proper interpretation of the narrative. As a result, their conclusion, based on Foley's contributions to orality research, was that audiences listening to oral tales in first century Palestine were much more active and participatory during the performance.<sup>54</sup> They suggested that contemporary audiences should likewise be less passive and far more active listeners in the public reading of Mark's Gospel. Only then could modern listeners appreciate the written Gospel as the writer intended it.

The heightened interest in orality within the field of biblical studies has since led to two divergent foci of research in the study of the New Testament. The first seeks to understand more precisely how people proclaimed and heard the New Testament texts during the first century in an emerging field known as "performance criticism." The second seeks to ascertain the historical reliability of the oral traditions concerning the life and teachings of Jesus through the use of orality research. Below is a summary of work in both areas of inquiry.

David Rhoads defines performance criticism as "any oral telling/retelling of a brief or lengthy tradition—from saying to gospel—in a formal or informal context of a gathered community by trained or untrained performers—on the assumption that every telling was a lively recounting of that tradition."<sup>55</sup> Rhoads bemoans the fact that so many other fields in the study of the New Testament have neglected the actual performance of

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>55</sup>David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Temple Studies—Part I," *BTB* 36 (2006): 118-33, <http://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org/index.php/component/content/article?id=12:what-is-performance-criticism&catid=3> (accessed May 30, 2013).

the New Testament texts, documents that originated in a cultural milieu that emphasized the oral performance of texts. Rhoads recommends that biblical performance criticism should both inform and be informed by other disciplines within the field of New Testament studies, including: “historical criticism, form criticism, narrative criticism, reader-response criticism, rhetorical criticism, textual criticism, orality criticism, social-science criticism, speech-act theory, linguistic criticism, ideological criticism and theater studies.”<sup>56</sup> While Rhoads acknowledges that we may never be able to reproduce the performance of biblical texts precisely the same way as the first century, performance criticism should help us to understand the texts of the New Testament in ways that we have not before.<sup>57</sup> Since the recipients of much of the New Testament received these documents orally, New Testament scholarship should examine oral performance as well.

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<sup>56</sup>David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Temple Studies—Part II,” *BTB* 36 (2006): 164-84; <http://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org/index.php/component/content/article?id=12:what-is-performance-criticism&catid=3> (accessed May 30, 2013).

<sup>57</sup>Rhoads notes the exploration of biblical performance criticism at the “Bible in Ancient and Modern Media” section of the Society of Biblical Literature that has continued for several decades now. Rhoads also identifies other scholars who have also contributed to performance criticism. See Rhoads, “Performance Criticism—Part I,” 3; Thomas E. Boomershine, “Jesus of Nazareth and the Watershed of Ancient Orality-Literacy,” *Semeia* 65 (1994): 7-36; idem, “Peter’s Denial as Polemic or Confession”; L. H. Silberman, ed., *Orality, Aurality and Biblical Narrative*, *Semeia* 39 (1987): 47-68; Joanna Dewey, “Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 221-36; idem, “Mark as Aural Narrative: Structures as Clues to Understanding,” *STRev* 36 (1992): 45-56; idem, “Textuality in an Oral Culture,”; Joanna Dewey, ed., “Orality and Textuality in Early Christian Literature,” *Semeia* 65 (1994): 37-66; idem, “The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation”; E. S. Malbon and E. V. McKnight, eds., “The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament,” *JSNTSup* 109 (1994): 145-63; E. S. Malbon, “Echoes and Foreshadowing in Mark 4:4-8: Reading and Rereading,” *JBL* 112 (1993): 211-30; idem, *Hearing Mark: A Listener’s Guide* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 2002). B. B. Scott and M. Dean, “A Sound Map of the Sermon on the Mount,” *SBLSP* (Atlanta: Scholars): 672-725. Peter Botha, “Letter Writing and Oral Communication in Antiquity: Suggested Implications for the Interpretation of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” *Scriptura* 42 (1992): 17-34; idem, “The Verbal Art of the Pauline Letters: Rhetoric, Performance and Presence”; S. Porter and T. H. Olbricht, eds., *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 409-28; idem, “Cognition, Orality-Literacy, and Approaches to First-Century Writings”; J. Draper, ed., *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2004), 37-63. Whitney Shiner emphasizes the importance of the emotive response of the audience in the performance of the gospel of Mark and identifies those elements within the text of the Gospel of Mark that she believes are indicative of delivery imitative sound effects, gesture and movement, as well as applause lines. See Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International, 2003). R. A. Horsley, J. A. Draper, and J. M.

Along with biblical performance criticism, orality research has also influenced some specialists to consider the light it sheds on the historical validity of the gospel narratives. The field of New Testament studies has been marked by with several multiple quests for the historical Jesus over the last hundred and fifty years. Some scholars, however, believe that research in orality may provide clues that could enable us to determine more precisely just how accurate the oral traditions about Jesus actually were. The three leading exponents in this new area of study have been Kenneth F. Bailey, James D. G. Dunn, and Richard Bauckham.

Bailey began his research attempting to find a *via media* between the conclusions of Bultmann and Gerhardsson. He believed that insights from orality research could help him find this middle way in New Testament scholarship. By making comparisons between oral storytelling practices in the Middle East, Bailey seeks to identify the cultural practices that eventually produced the written gospels that we possess today. Based on his experiences living and teaching in the Middle East, Bailey lists three ways in which Middle Eastern people share oral narratives.<sup>58</sup> The *informal uncontrolled* model, which Bailey identified with Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament oral tradition, is likened to the spread of rumors and often pertains to tragic events. The *formal controlled* model, which Bailey believes best represents Gerhardsson's understanding of the oral tradition in the New Testament, was likely very similar to the oral retention of sacred works, similar to certain Islamic imams who possessed an unflinching retention of the Qur'an and *Alfiyat Ibn Malik*. In a *formal controlled* setting, a teacher or religious leader would preside over the session and ensure the integrity of the

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Foley, *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) have lent considerable insights to the field of biblical performance criticism over the years. Still, the discipline is relatively new and needs further development within the larger field of biblical studies.

<sup>58</sup>Kenneth F. Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *ATJ* 5 (1991): 38. Cited in Iverson, "Orality and the Gospels," 89.

oral narrative that his students would recount. Such a scenario would not brook even the slightest deviations from the original.

Bailey believed that the transmission of the New Testament oral traditions was closest to the *informal controlled* model, typified by informal gatherings in the Middle East called the *haflat samar*. Within the context of the Middle East, five genres are shared according to this model, including proverbs, story riddles, poetry, parables or stories, and biographies of important historical personages.<sup>59</sup> The level of control within an *informal controlled* setting depended upon the genre the speaker is sharing. Some types would not allow any deviation. In other examples, however, a level of creativity and versatility is appreciated and accepted insofar as the essential elements of the narrative are retained. According to Bailey, this type of *informal controlled* setting was the model by which communities shared the gospel narratives.

Dunn agrees with Bailey's conclusions.<sup>60</sup> He argues further that the process of forming the tradition could have started with the disciples and Jesus himself. Because of the flexibility and versatility of these oral traditions, Dunn believes that while we do not have exact accounts as told by Jesus we do have reliable narratives that can give us a picture of what happened in Palestine during the first century.

Richard Bauckham offers a counter proposal in his work, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Bauckham believes that, contra the views of many specialists in New Testament studies, the written Gospels did not follow a lengthy and creative period of oral tradition.<sup>61</sup> Instead, the role of testimony and its importance in the New Testament world means that the oral narratives conformed closely

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>60</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1:239-40.

<sup>61</sup>Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1-11.

to the eyewitness testimony of the apostles themselves. Moreover, what they passed along to the churches and believing communities in oral form received very tight control. On this basis, then, Bauckham argues that the Gospel narratives follow what Bailey had identified as the *formal controlled* model of oral transmission. Bauckham, then, relies upon orality research to defend claims professed by orthodox Christianity, namely, that the eyewitness testimony of the apostles attests to the fact of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The written texts of the Gospels, moreover, faithfully represent the same message that the oral accounts shared.

### **Conclusions from Biblical Studies**

A number of conclusions follow from the foregoing that lends support to the first part of the aforementioned warrant of this chapter that *the presence of orality is evident in both Scripture and Christian missions as evidenced in the fields of biblical studies and in practical ministry, specifically teaching and preaching*. While an evangelical understanding of orality would not accept all of the details summarized above (particularly those conclusions that would compromise the authority and inerrancy of Scripture), there are still some helpful insights. The conclusions, which serve as *backing* in support of the *warrant*, are as follows:

1. Scripture itself testifies of oral communication, in some instances by God himself, which is later recorded in the biblical text.
2. Scripture itself testifies of the oral-aural reading of the biblical texts before the assembly of believers (either the nation of Israel or Christian congregations).
3. Though the precise nature of the oral history behind the biblical texts is highly contested, it is indisputable that the written text of much of Scripture most certainly developed in a cultural context with a high oral residue. In some instances, a period of oral transmission preceded the fixed text of Scripture which we possess today.
4. The socio-cultural matrix from which we received the text of Scripture was such that it could conceivably support a reliable oral transmission of the biblical text, assuming Bauckham's model of eyewitness testimony shared within a *formal controlled* social setting.

I turn now to develop the second half of our first warrant by demonstrating the oral background latent within Christian proclamation, particularly in missions and evangelism.

### **History of Orality Strategies in Ministry**

Oral methods in practical ministry existed long before the development of the oral-formulaic theory. In fact, the proclamation of the grand narratives of Scripture extends from the time of the Old and New Testaments, through the Ante-Nicene church fathers, and continues through missionary efforts prior to the twentieth century up to the present.<sup>62</sup> In what follows we will examine this history.

#### **The Biblical Era**

The evidence of oral recounting of the Scripture narratives is evident in the Old and New Testaments. Steffen and Terry identify various Old Testament passages that present a brief summary of stories found in earlier passages of Scripture, including Ps 78; 105; 106; Neh 9:5-37.<sup>63</sup> In the New Testament, however, there are much longer narrative summaries: in Luke 24:27, we are told that after his resurrection, Jesus explained to two of his disciples how he was foretold in the Old Testament; Acts 7 recounts Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin, which includes a lengthy oral retelling of redemptive history based on Scripture; Acts 13:16-40 details the testimony that Paul gave before his listeners at Pisidia Antioch in an effort to avoid a riot based on rumors that Paul was covertly escorting a Greek into the forbidden section of the Temple courtyard. Finally, Hebrews 11 summarizes the lives of eleven different Old Testament characters.

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<sup>62</sup>Tom A. Steffen and James O. Terry, "The Sweeping Story of Scripture Taught through Time," *MIR* 35 (2007): 315-35.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, n. 332.

Similar, shorter passages in the New Testament include Matt 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; Acts 17:22-31; 28:23.<sup>64</sup> Matt 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 list the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Matthew divides the genealogy of Jesus Christ into three groups of fourteen generations apiece: Abraham to David; David to the deportation to Babylon; and the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ's birth. Luke 3:23-38, on the other hand, traces Jesus' genealogy back to Adam. Acts 17:22-31 recounts Paul's sermon on Mars Hill before the people of Athens, which was a form of narrative exposition. Finally, Acts 28:23 mentions how Paul spoke with the leading men of Israel and explained to them the kingdom of God from the Law of Moses and the Prophets, suggesting a more narrative exposition. Taken together, these narrative summaries in various portions of the Old and New Testaments demonstrate biblical support for the oral recounting of Scripture narratives.

### **The Patristic Era**

While the early content of much catechetical instruction is not known, Clinton Arnold comments on the high level of importance the early church fathers placed on teaching the catechuminate.<sup>65</sup> Arnold mentions Origen (Alexandria; 185-254), Clement (Alexandria; 150-215), Tertullian (North Africa; c. 160-220), Hippolytus (Rome; 170-236), Ambrose (Italy; 339-97), Cyprian (North Africa; d. 258), Gregory of Nyssa (Asia Minor; 330-395), John Chrysostom (Byzantium; 347-407), Theodore of Mopsuestia (Asia Minor; 350-428), and Cyril of Jerusalem (Palestine; b. 349).<sup>66</sup> Origen did read large portions of Scripture prior to the delivery of his sermons.<sup>67</sup> It seems likely that he

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Clinton E. Arnold, "Early Church Catechesis and New Christians' Classes in Contemporary Evangelism," *JETS* 47 (March 2004): 39-54.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>67</sup>Steffen and Terry, "Sweeping Story of Scripture," 317.

would have done the same in catechesis. The first manual written for the instruction of catechumens that is extant is Augustine's *On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed*.<sup>68</sup> Augustine recounts the narratives of Scripture from the creation to the close of the canon in his instruction for catechetical teachers.<sup>69</sup> Despite the paucity of evidence, there is enough based on Augustine's writing to conclude that oral retelling of the key events in redemptive history was a method in the early church for instructing enquirers (those interested in converting to Christianity) not only for their conversion but also for their early formation as converts.

Finn also notes the critical role that symbol played in the first three centuries of the church.<sup>70</sup> Most church members were illiterate during this time. Without the use of symbols painted, carven, and fashioned, the church would have lacked any effective means of teaching the majority of its members about the central tenets of the Christian faith. Thus, symbol also played a significant role in the early church.

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<sup>68</sup>*De Catechizandis Rubidis* was written approximately A.D. 399-405. For more information concerning the importance of catechesis, see Arnold, "Early Church Catechesis,"; T. M. Finn, "It Happened One Saturday Night: Ritual and Conversion in Augustine's North Africa," *JAAR* 58 (1990): 589-616; W. J. Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995); A. D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), s.v. "Catechesis, Catechumenate," by W. J. Harmless; L. G. Jones, "Baptism: A Dramatic Journey into God's Dazzling Light: Baptismal Catechesis and the Shaping of the Christian Practical Wisdom," in *Knowing the Triune God*, ed. J. J. Buckley and D. S. Yeago (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 147-77.

<sup>69</sup>Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 123-30; Matthew Mason, "Back to (Theo-Drama) School: The Place of Catechesis in the Local Church," *SBET* 30 (2012): n. 215. Mason comments, "Note also the significance of the *narratio* as one stage of six within a well-established classical tradition of the judicial speech with which Augustine, the former teacher of rhetoric, would have been intimately familiar in using this form, he is making a case for Christianity" (Mason, "Back to [Theo-Drama] School," n. 215).

<sup>70</sup>Thomas A. Finn, "It Happened One Saturday Night: Ritual and Conversion in Augustine's North Africa." *JAAR* 58 (1990): 589-616; Idem "Ritual Process and the Survival of Early Christianity: A Study of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 3 (N.d.): 69-85.

## Medieval Era

From the fifth century until the late sixteenth century, the church encouraged the theatrical performance of Scripture narratives, sometimes to musical accompaniment. Though Catholic clergy spoke Latin in church services throughout this period, we know that in the eleventh century, acting guilds in England performed plays in the vernacular language covering the biblical narrative from creation to the Last Judgment.<sup>71</sup> Full cycles of extant plays can be found in York (48 plays), Wakefield (32 plays), Chester (24 plays) and a cycle of 42 plays called “N-Town.”<sup>72</sup> There was a remarkable similarity on the selection of the biblical narratives chosen, including The Fall of Lucifer; the Creation and Fall of Man; Cain and Abel; Noah’s Flood; Abraham and Isaac; Moses; the Prophets; the Nativity (Annunciation, Shepherds, Purification, Magi, Flight into Egypt, Massacre of the Innocents); the Baptism of Christ; the Temptations of Christ; Raising of Lazarus; the Passion (Conspiracy, Judas, Last Supper, Caiaphas, Trial, Crucifixion); the Resurrection; the Ascension; Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Mary; and the Last Judgment.<sup>73</sup> While there were a large number of Old Testament narratives present, the cycles’ emphasis was on the centrality of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Playwrights selected the Old Testament narratives for their ability to prefigure the life of Christ. The church dramatized key portions of the drama of redemption primarily because of the illiteracy and the low level of education among the laity.<sup>74</sup> These

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<sup>71</sup>Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 318.

<sup>72</sup>“Mystery Plays and Link to Prose,” [http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/medieval/mystery\\_plays.php](http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/medieval/mystery_plays.php) (accessed March 25, 2013), cited in Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 318.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., cited in Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 318; Tom A. Steffen and James O. Terry, “Medieval Drama: An Introduction to Middle English Plays,” <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/medievaldrama.htm> (accessed March 25, 2013).

<sup>74</sup>“Mystery Plays and Link to Prose.” The article says, “We should picture to ourselves congregations of persons for the most part grossly ignorant, of unquestioning though very superficial faith, and of emotions easily aroused to fever heat. Of the Latin words of the service they understood nothing; and of the Bible story they had only a very general impression” (ibid.).

“mystery plays” sought to inform the people in a manner appropriate to their level of education.<sup>75</sup> Communities stopped supporting mystery plays at the time of the Reformation. The emphasis on reenacting key parts of the biblical narrative, however, is abundantly clear.

### **Reformation and Post-Reformation**

Francis Xavier (1506-1552) and two colleagues began missionary work in Kogoshima, Japan on August 15, 1549. After thousands of conversions in Kyushu and Kyoto, the first Japanese converts to be ordained as Jesuit priests occurred in 1601.<sup>76</sup> The priests assumed the role of training the new converts. Besides learning the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ave Maria, etc., the converts received biblical instruction according to its historical order, beginning with the eternal Trinity, creation, the fall of Satan, and the fall of humankind, up until the time of Jesus Christ, and jumping to the Last Judgment.<sup>77</sup>

### **Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

Moravian Brethren serving as missionaries in the Caribbean during the 1730s ministered among the slaves who worked in the sugar cane fields. The Moravians would tell the slaves Bible stories beginning with the life of Jesus Christ. This practice was in keeping with the recommendation of their leader, Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid. The term, “mystery play,” has two possible origins. The first possibility believes that “mystery” is synonymous with “miracle.” The second idea is that “mystery” was a derivation from *ministerium*, or craft. Since the mystery plays were productions of the craft guilds, the term “mystery play,” could be a reference to the craft guilds which made them available to the public. Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 319.

<sup>77</sup>Richard Henry Drummond, “Missiological Lessons—From Events New and Old,” *MIR* 22 (1994), 19-42, cited in Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 319.

believed that since all peoples had an understanding of God, all that was necessary was to teach them about Jesus.<sup>78</sup>

In 1839, Francis Blanchet and M. Demers from the Quebec archdiocese began the first Catholic mission north of the Columbia river in 1839 at Cowlitz, Washington.<sup>79</sup> Since the Nesqually Indians were a non-literate people, traditional Bible study methods were obviously impractical. Father Blanchet made a ladder with markings of dots and bars as a teaching tool for the Indians, called the “Catholic Ladder,” or what the Indians called the “Sa-cha-lee-stick,” which

had forty short parallel lines on it to represent the four thousand years before Christ; these were followed by thirty-three points and three crosses to show the years of Christ’s life and the manner of His death. A church and twelve perpendicular marks denoted the beginning of the Catholic Church at the death of Christ through the Apostles; eighteen further horizontal marks and thirty-nine points showed the time elapsed since the death of Christ.<sup>80</sup>

## **Twentieth Century**

**Christian Keysser.** From 1900 to 1960, a significant outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred in Papua New Guinea at Mount Hagan. By 1960, over two hundred thousand Papuans had received baptism among which over one thousand were national evangelists.<sup>81</sup> Christian Keysser (1877-1961), a German Lutheran missionary to the Papuans, reflected on the best practices for evangelizing the people. Keysser eventually settled on the strategy of “tribal conversion,”<sup>82</sup> in which decisions made collectively

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<sup>78</sup>Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 320.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>“Notable Oregonians-Father Francis Blanchet- Missionary,” <http://bluebook.state.or.us/notable/notblanchet.htm> (accessed March 25, 2013).

<sup>81</sup>George F. Vicedom, “An Example of Group Conversion,” *PA* 9 (1962): 123-28.

<sup>82</sup>Idem, *Church and People in New Guinea*, World Christian Handbooks, no. 38 (London: United Society for Christian Literature, 1961), 16, cited in Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 321.

would result in collective conversions. Keysser implemented his strategy by telling Bible stories that implicated corporate responsibility before God, particularly certain Old Testament narratives. Moreover, all potential converts were required to memorize forty stories from the Old and New Testament.<sup>83</sup> While not all of Keysser's colleagues embraced the Bible storytelling method, the national evangelists enjoyed telling stories of Bible characters and using them as models of upright character.

**George and May Ingram.** In the early 1900s, George and May Ingram implemented a method of sharing Bible stories in North India after encountering much frustration with their previous strategy. Eventually, they would write *24 Bible Stories for Village Workers*<sup>84</sup> as well as *30 Bible Stories for Church Planters*.<sup>85</sup> The Ingrams' method incorporates topical studies taught through telling the narratives of Scripture.

**Hans-Ruedi Weber.** Hans-Ruedi Weber (1923-present) was a missionary-theologian who began laboring in Central Celebes, Indonesia in 1950. When Weber was given the task of providing biblical instruction to thirty thousand Christians in Luwuk-Banggai, most of whom had little more than three years of elementary education, he taught the grand narrative of Scripture by starting with creation and ending with the second coming.<sup>86</sup> Weber later wrote in *Communicating the Gospel to Illiterates* how Scripture is "God's picture book," a "great drama," and a "great symbol."<sup>87</sup> Weber also

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<sup>83</sup>Steffen and Terry, "Sweeping Story of Scripture," 322; Vicedom, *Church and People*, 22-23.

<sup>84</sup>George Ingram and Mary Ingram, *24 Bible Stories for Village Workers* (Rangoon: Burma C. L. S., 1947).

<sup>85</sup>George Ingram and Mary Ingram, *30 Bible Stories for Church Planters* (Lucknow, Madras: India, 1997).

<sup>86</sup>Steffen and Terry, "Sweeping Story of Scripture," 324.

<sup>87</sup>Hans Rudi Weber, *Communicating the Gospel to Illiterates* (London: SCM, 1957), 4, 44, cited in Steffen and Terry, "Sweeping Story of Scripture," 325. Weber's insights resonate powerfully with Vanhoozer's *Drama of Doctrine*.

believes that the written word of Scripture is appropriated well when combined with a “liturgical drama” (particularly the feast days of the Jewish calendar).<sup>88</sup>

**Donald McGavran.** Donald McGavran (1897-1990), the father of the Church Growth movement, also used a narrative approach to evangelism in India. Using eight stories, McGavran started with creation and then the fall, then moved to the story of the birth of Jesus Christ, a miracle story (Jesus healing a leper, stilling a storm, or healing and casting out demons), the story about Jesus forgiving the woman caught in adultery, followed by Jesus teaching about upright living, the story of the rich young ruler, the crucifixion of Jesus, and finishing with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>89</sup> Significantly, one of the leading voices in missiology saw the value of oral narrative approaches in teaching and evangelism.

**Jacob Loewen.** Ministering in Panama in the 1950s and 60s, Loewen taught biblical narratives in chronological order, so as to avoid confusion.<sup>90</sup> He found, however, that new members of the group who missed much of the earlier stories or those who only participated sporadically would miss the overarching arc of the biblical story. So, by the late 1950’s, Loewen developed a “matrix,” or collection of twenty-six lessons that summarized the arc of biblical history so that it could be grasped quickly by most hearers.

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<sup>88</sup>Hans Rudi Weber, *Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology* (Geneva: WCC, 1981), 29, cited in Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 325.

<sup>89</sup>Donald A. McGavran, *The Satnami Story: The Thrilling Drama of Religious Change* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1990), 55-56, cited in Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 325.

<sup>90</sup>Jacob Loewen, “Bible Stories: Message and Matrix,” *PA* 11 (1964): 49-54, cited in Steffen and Terry, “Sweeping Story of Scripture,” 325. Jacob Loewen recalls his experiences during the 1950s and 60s using Bible stories in Panama in a chapter entitled, “Bible Stories: Message and Matrix.”

**F. Glenn and Billie Prunty.** F. Glenn and Billie Prunty, missionaries through New Tribes Missions, taught Loewen's series of stories among the Chocó people in Panama during the late 1950s.<sup>91</sup> By 1959, the Pruntys used the collection as a primer for a literacy training curriculum. By 1961, the Chocó church used Loewen's matrix in the planting of four churches. Although the Pruntys had initially met with discouragement upon first arriving in Panama, once they had followed Loewen's strategy, their labors saw fruit.<sup>92</sup> In later years, the New Tribes Missions organization would experience further success through the use of biblical narrative.

**Raymond and Dorothy Valenzuela.** Raymond and Dorothy Valenzuela worked with the Methodist Mission in Chile during the 1960s. The missionary couple quickly discovered that the church-training curriculum they were using, while adequate for middle-class congregations, would not work for rural churches. As a result, the Valenzuelas developed the "New Life in Christ Curriculum," composed of thirty Bible stories for literate and semi-literate people. When the missionary couple presented their curriculum at a missions conference in Chaco, Argentina, they met Jacob Loewen. Eventually, Loewen and the Pruntys came up with a hybrid curriculum.<sup>93</sup>

**Vincent Donovan.** Vincent Donovan worked among the Masai people in Tanzania from 1955 until 1973. He discovered several major obstacles to evangelism in Tanzania: the practice of missionaries purchasing slaves in order to evangelize them; and schools compelling missionaries to focus exclusively on the evangelization of children even as the government seized control of these institutions.<sup>94</sup> Donovan realized he

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<sup>91</sup>Steffen and Terry, "Sweeping Story of Scripture," 326.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 327.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

needed to change his manner of evangelism of the Masai by presenting the gospel as more of a history, than a set of propositions or philosophy.<sup>95</sup> Donovan mentions how groups of Masai, including non-Christians, would gather around and recount the stories that they knew about Jesus. The biblical narratives would frequently contradict the traditional Masai stories, presenting opportunities for worldview transformation. From these stories, Donovan found a more effective way to evangelize the Masai. As important as narrative was in earlier efforts in evangelism during most of the twentieth century, it was not until the 1980s that ministry practitioners considered the use of orality research to support their use of a narrative approach for biblical instruction.

### **Orality Studies and Narrative Evangelism, 1981 to Present**

**Trevor McIlwain, 1981.**<sup>96</sup> After receiving an assignment from the leadership of New Tribes Ministries (NTM), McIlwain began to develop a church planting model, influenced by biblical theology, to help curb the syncretism taking place within NTM

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<sup>95</sup>Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 31, cited in Steffen and Terry, "Sweeping Story of Scripture," 327.

<sup>96</sup>Two sources incorrectly identify the origin of the story method of evangelism with evangelism among the Mouk people in West New Britain. See [http://www.oralty.net/how\\_we\\_began](http://www.oralty.net/how_we_began) (accessed January 17, 2014) and Harriet Hill, "Conversations about Orality," *MIR* 38 (2010): 215. Tom Steffen attempts to provide a more accurate account of the Orality Movement in missions in "Tracking Orality Movement: Chronological Communication of the Gospel Goes from Country to City," unpublished paper. Steffen, professor of intercultural studies at Biola University, was preparing to publish this piece as an Internet article at the time of the writing of this dissertation. The fact that I have cited it is testimony to the paucity of sources chronicling the history of the orality movement in missions and Christian ministry. In this article Steffen writes, "One of the reasons I decided to document this young movement is because of the inaccuracy or uncertainty of the information that already exists. For example, *some believe, incorrectly, that the movement began with the Mouk people of West New Britain popularized through the EE-Taow! video*. The authors noted correctly, however, that the movement did begin in the countryside, among tribal people, just the wrong group and year. A second reason is that some of the current contributors seem to have little if any knowledge of the early history of the movement, seemingly believing it to be a very recent phenomenon, or uncertain of its origins. For example, 'It seems to have started in crosscultural missions contexts with organizations such as New Tribes Missions and the Southern Baptists' International Mission Board' (Dillon 2012:18)" (Steffen, "Tracking the Orality Movement," 2, emphasis mine).

ministries in Brazil and Columbia. McIlwain hoped that a narrative approach would aid comprehension and help prevent error.

McIlwain’s narrative approach incorporated seven phases that reflected the following principles: “the Bible is history (His Story); the Bible is one story—the story of Jesus Christ; the gospel required a firm Old Testament (OT) foundation; tell stories and define the nature and character of the God conveyed in the stories; the Bible not only tells us what to teach, but by example, shows us how to teach it—chronologically; do not talk about Jesus (the solution) until listeners understand their separation from a holy God.”<sup>97</sup>

McIlwain’s model later became the strategy used by NTM in its church planting efforts. McIlwain himself published a nine-volume series that explained the seven-step process of CBT, called *Firm Foundations*.<sup>98</sup> Volume 1 describes the first phase of church planting and consists of sixty-eight stories (forty-two from the Old Testament; twenty-six from the New Testament). Phase 2 retells the stories with a new emphasis, such as “security as opposed to separation from God.”<sup>99</sup> Phase 3 recounts the stories from the book of Acts. Phase 4 summarizes stories from the epistles and ends with Revelation. Phases 5 through 7 repeats cycles one through four, only addressing issues of sanctification.<sup>100</sup> While NTM changed the name of Chronological Bible Teaching (CBT) in 2005 to Foundational Bible Teaching, the major emphases are still in place. Although McIlwain’s CBT did not develop from orality research, it is what began

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<sup>97</sup>Steffen, “Tracking Orality Movement,” 2-3.

<sup>98</sup>Trevor McIlwain, *Building on Firm Foundations: Guidelines for Evangelism and Teaching Believers*, vols. 1-9 (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1987-92); idem, *Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1993). See also, Trevor McIlwain and Ruth Breadle, *The Chronological Approach to Evangelism and Church Planting* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1981 and 1985), cited in Steffen, “Tracking Orality Movement,” 3.

<sup>99</sup>Steffen, “Tracking Orality Movement,” 3.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

the process for orality studies in missions and evangelism today.<sup>101</sup> Without McIlwain, the “Orality Movement” might never have begun.

**Herbert Klem.** One year after McIlwain presented CBT in the Philippines and in Thailand, Herbert Klem published, *Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art*.<sup>102</sup> In his book, Klem chronicled research among the Yoruba people in West Africa he had done to verify if the Yoruba needed to become literate in order to learn Scripture. In some instances, Scripture passages were sung to traditional Yoruba music. Klem determined that both literate and non-literate Yoruba learned Scripture faster using oral means.<sup>103</sup>

**CBT from 1983-1989.** Throughout the eighties, other missionaries working with NTM developed their own modifications or creative applications of Chronological Bible Training. Jason and Shirley Birkin were NTM missionaries who began working with the Tala-andig people, a tribal group in Mindanao, Philippines since 1983. The Birkins have recorded Bible stories on MP3 players for evangelistic distribution. This creative use of modern technology accomplished more than the Birkins imagined. Because of their efforts, not only has Mindanao received abundant proliferation of gospel proclamation but a dying cultural practice has also revived.<sup>104</sup>

Ron and Michelle Jennings, NTM workers targeting the Higaunon in the Philippines in 1984, developed a way that the Higaunon tribal teachers could evangelize their own people through the use of a scroll that could unroll and show pictures of the

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid.,” 2.

<sup>102</sup>Herbert V. Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1982).

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 196-206.

<sup>104</sup>Steffen, “Tracking Orality Movement,” 4.

Bible stories. While teaching, they would unroll the scroll to reveal the next picture. At first, the Jennings produced the scrolls entirely by hand. Now the couple manufactures scrolls using a computer to draw the images, coloring them with colored pencils, and has replaced the original bamboo with plastic tubing.<sup>105</sup>

In 1984, Delland Rachel Schultze sought to simplify McIlwain's model by reducing the number of stories to thirty-five, while still retaining the general story of redemption. Their publication, *God and Man*,<sup>106</sup> would later influence the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to use the story sets globally. Later, however, the IMB used different story sets based on local worldview studies when IMB missionaries found that the original publication was not effective in their ministry setting.<sup>107</sup>

Mark and Gloria Zook, in December 1986, presented the stories about Jesus Christ to three hundred and ten Mouk in West New Britain. Mass conversions resulted in an evangelistic movement extending to other villages. In 1989, the video, *EE-Taow!* ("It is True!")<sup>108</sup> was produced, chronicling the revival that transpired in West New Britain. Later a sequel, *EE-Taow!—The Next Chapter* was released to demonstrate the sustainability of the work that had begun among the Mouk people.<sup>109</sup>

**CBT expands to more agencies.** In 1983, Jim Slack, a church growth consultant for the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) of the SBC,

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid. Tom Steffen writes that copies of *God and Man* are available at [jot2@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jot2@sbcglobal.net).

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>John R. Cross and Mark Zook, *Ee-Taow!* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1999), DVD video.

<sup>109</sup>John R. Cross and Mark Zook, *Ee-Taow!—The Next Chapter* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1993), VHS video.

met with Dell Schultze of NTM while serving in the Philippines. When Schultze explained McIlwain's model of CBT, Slack became interested and eventually invited McIlwain to teach two seminars in Baguio (1983) and Davao (1984), reaching over six hundred IMB personnel. So the IMB became the second major mission agency to use this narrative approach in missions.

**Chronological Bible Storying (CBS), 1992.** In 1992, Jim Slack enlisted the aid of J. O. Terry, an IMB media specialist in the Asia-Pacific region, to help him teach CBT in different parts of the Asia region. By 1992, Terry felt the need to alter CBT. He thought that CBT was too expositional, too suited for literate learners, and too confining. He reduced the number of stories and encouraged a more dialogical style rather than an expositional one. Terry renamed the model, "Chronological Bible Storying."<sup>110</sup> Terry wanted a model that could be shared faster with some groups where more urgency may be necessary, for example, with short-term mission groups.

Terry also experimented with a technique that he called, "fast-tracking."<sup>111</sup> With this method, Terry began the practice of telling the story from Genesis to the Cross in as little as a few minutes to a few days. Terry believed that first presenting a telescopic view of the grand narrative of redemption might help hearers understand how all of the other stories fit together. "Fast-tracking" was Terry's way of making CBS more conversational and informal, in contrast to the rigid formality of CBT by McIlwain. He also attempted to make CBS easily adaptive to a variety of circumstances. He wrote a variety of materials in an effort to make CBS suited for personal interactions as well as presentations before large groups.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Steffen, "Tracking Orality Movement," 8.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>J. O. Terry, *Grief Stories from the Bible* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 1999); idem, *Water Stories from the Bible* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 2000); idem, *Death Stories from the*

**JESUS Film Project, 1995.** The JESUS Film was developed by Campus Crusade for Christ International (CCCI) in 1979.<sup>113</sup> By 1980, the JESUS Film had been translated into thirty-one languages, more than any other film. However, after five years as CCCI president, Ron Green realized that there was a problem using the JESUS film with cultures classified as unreached and that had no written language, and therefore had no biblical background knowledge. He also noticed that discipleship programs were difficult to develop among predominantly non-literate peoples. After encountering IMB missionary Steve Evans while on a trip to Mozambique, Green requested a meeting with representatives from NTM, IMB, Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), and Scriptures in Use (SIU). Later, Evans and Jim Slack would offer training in CBS at the Campus Crusade headquarters. These and other future training sessions would be responsible for two other organizations: the International Orality Network (ION) and OneStory Partnership.<sup>114</sup> These partnerships resulted in changes in the JESUS Film, including an opening segment that narrated a summary of Old Testament history before recounting the life of Jesus Christ.

**The Lomé Y, 1995.** J. O. Terry later became convinced that simply importing a set of Bible stories into a particular location was insufficient for successful evangelism and discipleship. Rather, Terry believed that worldview study would help missionaries understand what story sets from Scripture would be best to engage a particular culture.

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*Bible* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 2003); idem, *Basic Bible Storying* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 2008); idem, *Bible Storying Handbook for Short-Term Mission Teams and Mission Volunteers* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 2008); idem, *Food Stories from the Bible* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 2009); idem, *Hope Stories from the Bible* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 2009); idem, *Oralizing Bible Stories for Telling* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 2011); idem, *The Holy Rosary Gospel Stories of Jesus* (Ft. Worth: Church Starting Network, 2011).

<sup>113</sup>Jesus Film, “Chronological History,” <http://www.jesufilm.org/aboutus/history> (accessed September 30, 2013).

<sup>114</sup>Steffen, “Tracking Orality Movement,” 9.

During a training session in Lomé, Togo, Terry drew a diagram illustrating the need for ministry practitioners to understand their own worldview assumptions, those of their listeners, and the set of conclusions necessary for story selection. The diagram was later called, “The Lomé Y,” since it involved the letter I (representing the storyteller’s own worldview assumptions) along with two horizontal cross-bars representing the worldview assumptions of the listeners and the criteria for story selection. Since then, the diagram came to be called, “Worldview Informing and Instructing Bible Storying.” Nonetheless, because of the push for more rapid expansion of church-planting and a model that could easily be used by short-term mission groups, many within the IMB leadership preferred a simpler process without the additional worldview study.<sup>115</sup>

**Seminary training in narrative evangelism, 1995.** In 1994, Jim Slack and J. O. Terry went to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas, in order to introduce CBS to the seminary curriculum. They approached Grant Lovejoy, professor of homiletics at Southwestern, and offered the first seminary course (for credit or non-credit) in using story for evangelism in 1995. This also placed a heavy emphasis on the study of orality. Eventually, Slack left Southwestern Seminary to investigate evangelistic outpourings around the world, after having completed his doctoral studies. Lovejoy left Southwestern Seminary in 2004 in order to become the director of orality studies at the IMB headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. Terry continued teaching with Daniel Sanchez at Southwestern. Today, among the six Southern Baptist seminaries, courses in orality are offered at Southwestern, Southeastern, and Southern. Tom Steffen, professor of intercultural studies at Biola University, began teaching a course on narrative in 1995, as well.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

**First oral Bible school, 2002-2004.** Woody and Lynn Thigpen worked as missionaries to the Khmer people in Cambodia. After some initial training in oral story methods, the Thigpens began using them in their work. Eventually, they trained Cambodians to tell the stories weekly. Eventually, the Thigpens became the founders of the first oral Bible school, providing leadership preparation for national believers to evangelize others.<sup>117</sup> This move was significant in that it challenged missionary instructors at traditional theological seminaries to rethink their methods of pastoral formation.

**Rapid expansion of mission networks, 1998-Present.** By 1998, orality as a missions strategy was becoming more widely accepted in mission organizations. Scriptures in Use (SIU) is a smaller mission agency, founded by Jim and Carla Bowman, which offers curriculum training for nationals to help them become church planters.<sup>118</sup> In 1998, the Bowmans founded the Bridges Global TrainingNetwork (BGTN), a consortium of smaller organizations and churches intent on promoting mass evangelistic outbreaks in some of the most politically and socially difficult areas of the world.<sup>119</sup> By 2010, Belhaven University partnered with SIU to grant certification to those trained by SIU, providing a mark of legitimacy for nationals not following the traditional route of church leadership formation.

Among larger organizations, the orality movement began to accelerate in 2000 at the Billy Graham Evangelism Conference in Evangelism held in Amsterdam. At Table

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 10-11. The website for the orality school in Cambodia is <http://theoralbibleschool.com> (accessed September 30, 2013).

<sup>118</sup>The organization website is <http://www.siutraining.org> (accessed September 30, 2013).

<sup>119</sup>Steffen, "Tracking Orality Movement," 13. Currently, BGTN has spread to approximately fifty countries in South Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, having trained over sixty thousand lay church planters and planting more than ten thousand oral Bible churches within a three year span. It is not known if there is any verification of these churches that have been planted or what criteria BGTN uses when it describes a "church."

71, representatives from some of the major evangelism and missionary organizations, including Campus Crusade for Christ International (CCCI), IMB, Youth With a Mission (YWAM), Transworld Radio (TWR), and Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT) discussed the issue of evangelizing unreached people groups (UPGs). The result of that conference was a consortium that focused not only on primary oral learners (those with no exposure to literacy), but also secondary oral learners (literate people who prefer to learn through oral methods based on technology). Training materials among these organizations soon proliferated.<sup>120</sup>

After this meeting, greater consolidation among mission organizations began to transpire. In 2001, Avery Willis and Paul Eshleman founded the Oral Bible Network (OBN), comprised of the CCCI, IMB, SIU, and WBT. Later, the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) began using the Chronological Bible Storying method within its mission agency.<sup>121</sup> The consolidation continued in 2004, with the project, *OneStory*<sup>122</sup> run by Steve Evans and Ron Green, in which they seek to enlist nationals to proclaim story sets of forty to sixty narratives to over five thousand people groups by 2020.

In 2004, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism convened a forum to discuss thirty-one major issues in world evangelism. Twenty-eight people gathered to discuss orality, with Mark Snowden leading the group and Grant Lovejoy acting as editor. The result of their week-long labor was Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP), no.

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid. In 2002, Mark Snowden supervised the production of seven training videos through *Maranatha!* Music at San Clemente, California. The seven videos are separate training modules complete with over four hundred bible stories. The videos include: Module 1: *Making Disciples of Primary Oral Learners*; Module 2: *Choosing to Follow Jesus*; Module 3: *Living in the Family of Jesus*; Module 4: *Becoming Like Jesus*; Module 5: *Serving Like Jesus*; Module 6: *Multiplying Spiritual Disciplines and Leaders*; and Module 7: *On Mission with God*. Similarly, in 2003, Heyward Armstrong wrote *Tell the Story: A Primer on Chronological Bible Storying* (Rockville, VA: International Center for Excellence in Leadership, 2003).

<sup>121</sup>Steffen, "Tracking Orality Movement," 15.

<sup>122</sup>"OneStory," <http://www.onestory.org> (accessed June 3, 2013).

54, which was later published as *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*. The authors coined an important term in that book: the “oral Bible.”<sup>123</sup>

**The secondary orality movement.** The orality movement, however, was not limited to mission contexts among rural, non-literate peoples. Slowly, oral strategies made their way into urban locales in North America and beyond. Particularly, ministry practitioners sought to engage those who identify with what is called “secondary orality.”<sup>124</sup> Secondary orality methods are now being used by Clyde Taber, who directs the Visual Story Network, which seeks to use visual media, including films, videos, webisodes, etc.<sup>125</sup> Authors such as Willis and Snowden, Michael Novelli, and Kurt Jarvis<sup>126</sup> are all working on books that promote storytelling and the use of orality among postmodern audiences.

In 2009, the Mission Exchange bestowed to ION their award for Innovation in Mission.<sup>127</sup> The Mission Exchange explained that ION’s innovation in developing

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<sup>123</sup>Steffen, “Tracking Orality Movement,” 41. Steffen writes that J. O. Terry was the first to use the expression, “oral Bible” in 1992 or 1993. Jim Slack also used the term in a paper titled, *Giving People an Oral Bible*.

<sup>124</sup>As mentioned previously, secondary orality describes literate people who prefer to learn through oral methods based on technology (telephone, radio) rather than through reading texts. Avery Willis wrote, “Little did I realize that addressing the challenge of discipling oral learners cross-culturally would solve a close-to-home problem I had wrestled with for more than forty years: how to make disciples in America—not just with people who can’t or won’t read, but also with millennials under twenty-five who don’t like to read books” (Avery T. Willis, Jr. and Mark Snowden, *Truth That Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in a Teflon World* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010], 22).

<sup>125</sup>Steffen, “Tracking Orality Movement,” 30. Steffen writes, “Images tell stories. They desired to move beyond 1,500 years of preaching and 500 years of printing, to add portraying. The 21<sup>st</sup> century world communicates predominantly through the language of visual story” (ibid.).

<sup>126</sup>Willis and Snowden, *Truth that Sticks*; Michael Novelli, *Shaped by Story: Helping Students Encounter God in a New Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); idem, *Enter the Story: 7 Experiences to Unlock the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); idem, *The Story Teen Curriculum* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); CBS4kids, <http://www.cbs4kids.org> (accessed January 17, 2014).

<sup>127</sup>The Mission Exchange, previously the Evangelical Federation of Mission Agencies until 2007, is a consortium of evangelical mission agencies and the mission arm of the National Association of Evangelicals that was established in 1946.

practical methods for training people on a local level (orality) convinced the Mission Exchange that they had earned this distinction.<sup>128</sup> The use of orality strategies is now considered to be on the cutting edge of missiological research, training, and applied ministry.

**Further research in orality studies.** Orality research encompasses far more than the use of narrative. Other scholars have contributed to orality studies and how they may contribute to ministry. Moon has demonstrated how traditional proverbs can be used with great effect in proclamation, teaching, and evangelism in West Africa.<sup>129</sup> Also, Harris<sup>130</sup> has shown how orality in music (ethnomusicology) can have an impact among various cultures. Finn<sup>131</sup> and Moon<sup>132</sup> have noted the importance of ritual in oral cultures. Steffen has also demonstrated the power of symbols among oral peoples.<sup>133</sup> And Tapiwa Mucherera has shown the contribution that the use of narrative can make in counseling.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>Steffen, "Tracking Orality Movement," 17. ION mentions this award on their website, <http://www.oralbible.net/about/history> (accessed March 27, 2013).

<sup>129</sup>W. Jay Moon, *African Proverbs Reveal Christianity in Culture: A Narrative Portrayal of Builsa Proverbs Contextualizing Christianity in Ghana*, American Society of Missiology Monograph Series 5 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009).

<sup>130</sup>Brian Schrag and Robin Harris, "Ethnodoxology's Time is Here: How Engaging Local Artists Can Expand God's Kingdom," *Lausanne Global Analysis* 3 (January 2014); James R. Krabill, Frank Fortunato, Robin P. Harris, and Brian Schrag, eds. *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013); Robin P. Harris, "Sitting "Under the Mouth": Decline and Revitalization in the Sakha Epic Tradition Olonkho" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 2012); "The Crescendo of Local Arts in Orality," in *Orality Breakouts: Using Heart Language to Transform Hearts*, eds. Samuel Chiang and Avery T. Willis. Hong Kong: International Orality Network and LCWE, 2010.

<sup>131</sup>Thomas M. Finn, "Ritual Process and the Survival of Early Christianity: A Study of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus," *JRS* 3 (N.d.): 69-85; idem., "It Happened One Saturday Night: Ritual and Conversion in Augustine's North Africa," *JAAR* 58 (1990): 589-616.

<sup>132</sup>W. Jay Moon, "Using Rituals to Disciple Oral Learners, Part 1" *OJ* 2 (2013): 43-64.

<sup>133</sup>Tom Steffen, "Pedagogical Conversions: From Propositions to Story and Symbol," *MIR* 38, 2 (2010): 141-60.

<sup>134</sup>Tapiwa N. Mucherera, *Glimmers of Hope: Toward the Healing of Painful Life Experiences*

## **Conclusions from Orality Studies in Ministry**

Several conclusions follow from the above survey. These observations support the second half of the first warrant stated in this chapter that *the presence of orality is evident in both Scripture and missions as evidenced in the fields of biblical studies and in practical ministry, specifically evangelism and missions*. This warrant by analogy is an inference supporting the claim that Kevin Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle is a suitable paradigm for the use of orality in practical ministry and missiology.

1. Oral, narrative methods of communicating Christian teaching have a firm historical basis, originating in the Scriptures themselves, and used throughout the history of the church. The contemporary advocacy of oral strategies is, therefore, actually a recovery of age-old Christian practices.
2. The modern discovery of orality for ministry proclamation is not really new in the manner of proclaiming the message of the gospel and in teaching others. In fact, missionaries have found great success in evangelism and Christian discipleship by the use of oral methods of communication with non-literate peoples.
3. The use of orality for ministry proclamation has applications that extend well beyond missionary outreach to non-literate people groups given their relevance for urban outreach and hypertext societies that are developing secondary orality. Orality studies, consequently, have great contemporary significance for applied ministry.

### **Conclusion**

In the third chapter, I have attempted two broad goals. First, I have laid out the first warrant of my Toulmin-model argument from practical reason: *the presence of orality is evident in both Scripture and Christian missions as evidenced in the fields of biblical studies and in practical ministry, specifically teaching and preaching*. I provided backing for this warrant through the identification of orality in the composition of both Scripture and Christian proclamation as attested in the fields of biblical studies and in missiological research. Backing from each discipline helped to justify the first warrant.

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*through Narrative Counseling* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

The second goal was to trace the development of orality as a science and its ramifications within the fields of biblical studies and missiological research and practice. I endeavored to accomplish this objective first, by summarizing the investigation of oral traditions, including the use of orality research, in the field of biblical studies; and second, by chronicling the use of oral narratives throughout the history of the church, including the use of orality research within the last thirty years in missiology. Moreover, the last two chapters have surveyed the breadth of orality research across the gamut of disciplines. Chapter 2 provided a general survey of orality research in a wide assortment of fields, including literary studies, developmental psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and media ecology. Chapter 3 had a narrower focus on two disciplines—biblical studies and missiology—within the broader field of Christian theological studies. The next chapter establishes the argument's second warrant.

CHAPTER 4  
*VIVA VOX DEI:*  
THEODRAMA AND ORALITY

**Introduction**

Chapter 4 will examine the second warrant in the argument. The previous chapter identified the oral-aural dynamics used in and for the formation of Scripture and in applied Christian ministry, particularly in missions and evangelism, as the first warrant. The second warrant, however, is based on the divine communicative action itself, across the broad panoply of redemptive history, through the disciplines of systematic theology and philosophy of religion.<sup>1</sup> The second warrant is: *There is an analogical oral dynamic within the theodramatic communicative action as evidenced in the Trinitarian relations, cosmology, redemption, and in Scripture.* Like the first warrant, the second is a warrant from analogy, because it uses analogical language with reference to the Godhead's communicative action to his people.<sup>2</sup> I begin with an

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<sup>1</sup>By noting philosophy of religion, I am not stepping outside of what we know of God via the divine self-disclosure of Scripture. Rather, I hope to follow Vanhoozer's example of using philosophical categories in order to explicate what we know from the divine self-communication of Scripture. Vanhoozer writes, "The biblical *mythos* absorbs the metaphysics, as it were, rather than metaphysics the biblical *mythos*. . . . The goal is to deploy—or rather to co-opt—metaphysical categories for the sake of understanding God's being in the light of God's communicative action in word and deed" (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 217). I define what Vanhoozer means by the expression "biblical *mythos*" later in this chap.

<sup>2</sup>Millard Erickson identifies three types of theological language: univocal, in which the language employed is a one-to-one correspondence with the theological reality under discussion; analogical, which means "qualitatively the same" and that "the difference is one of degree rather than of kind or genus"; and equivocal, which cannot make reliable statements about any theological realities because of the nature of the language employed is obscure, equivocal. See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 205-06. Vanhoozer identifies the theological language of God speaking and acting as both "literal and analogical," referencing Merold Westphal: "Applied to divine discourse, the theist should say that 'God speaks' is a literal but analogical claim. It is analogical because

examination of the analogical oral dynamic that may be found in the Trinitarian economy.

### **The Trinity as Communicative Agency and Theo-Ontology**

#### **Teachings on the Trinity and the Oral Dimension**

The verbal dimension of God's self-communicative activity is sometimes overlooked by a casual reading of Scripture: the Father has spoken (not written!) his Word, Jesus Christ, to us via the breath of the Spirit.<sup>3</sup> John 1:1 reads, "In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*). And the Word was with God and the Word was God." Carson argues that John employed the term *Logos* in a double sense in this passage—making references both to the Old Testament and Greek philosophy.<sup>4</sup> While it is true that the term, "*Logos*" had great significance in Greek philosophy, particularly in the thought of such philosophers as Heraclitus,<sup>5</sup> the Stoics and the Jewish writer Philo,<sup>6</sup> it also referred

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divine discourse is both like and unlike human discourse; but this is not metaphor, because the performance of illocutionary acts belongs properly and primarily to God and only derivatively . . . to human creatures" (Merold Westphal, "On Reading God the Author," *Religious Studies* 37 [2001]: 273, cited in Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 211).

<sup>3</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster, 2005), 63; Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New Accents, ed. Terence Hawkes (Padstow, UK: T. J., 1991), 179. Ong writes, "God the Father utters or speaks His Word, His Son. He does not inscribe Him. The very essence of the Son is the Word of the Father" (*ibid.*).

<sup>4</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>Heraclitus writes, "Of this Word's (*Logos*) being forever do men prove to be uncomprehending, both before they hear and once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Word they are like the unexperienced experiencing words and deeds such as I explain when I distinguish each thing according to its nature and declare how it is. Other men are unaware of what they do when they are awake just as they are forgetful of what they do when they are asleep" (DK<sub>22</sub>B<sub>1</sub>, *Fragments of the Writings of Heraclitus of Ephesus*, trans. G. T. W. Patrick [Baltimore: N. Murray, 1889], <https://archive.org/details/thefragmentsofth00herauoft> (accessed January 20, 2014). This passage from Heraclitus parallels John's Gospel when he writes, "The light (the *Logos*) shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:5).

to the “word of the LORD” mentioned in the Old Testament. As mentioned in the third chapter, the phrase “word of the LORD,” occurs two hundred and forty-one times in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> The “word of the LORD” also came through the inspiration (*theopneustos*, “God-breathed”) of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). John continues by mentioning the descent of Jesus Christ into the world from heaven: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The second Person of the Trinity, therefore, is the Word or *Logos* of the Father in the Old Testament and more poignantly in the New.

Scripture elsewhere affirms that the Father spoke the Son when Jesus Christ descended from heaven. Hebrews 1:1-3 reads, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.” Furthermore, Luke 1:35 describes the nature of Jesus Christ’s miraculous conception when the angel Gabriel tells Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” Within the economic Trinity, therefore, Jesus Christ is the Word spoken by the Father in the breath of the Holy Spirit as attested in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament with his incarnation.

Traditionally, orthodox Christianity has understood the Trinity as “unsubstantia, tres personas,” (one substance, three persons).<sup>8</sup> The revelation of Jesus Christ

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<sup>6</sup>Philo, *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Cain*, in *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus*, trans. C. B. Yonge (London: George Bell and Sons, 1800), 1:8; idem, *De Somniis*, in *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, 1:182; idem, *De Opificio Mundi*, in *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, 1:13.

<sup>7</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 2:87-88.

<sup>8</sup>Tertullian, *De pudicitia*, in *The Writings of Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus*, trans. John Kaye et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868-69), 21.16; idem, *Adversus Praxean*, 8, in *The Writings of Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus*. Also, the First Council of Constantinople (381) makes the same declaration concerning the Trinity, when it reads, “And [we believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds . . . begotten not made . . . And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost . . . who proceedeth from the Father,” in *NPNF* 14:352.

by the Father in the power of the Spirit is a reflection of the eternal relationship between the Trinitarian Persons. As the Nicene Creed explained, the Son as the second Person of the Trinity is eternally begotten of the Father; the Spirit, as the third Person, is spirated (breathed) from the Father and the Son.<sup>9</sup> As Gregory of Nyssa understood, within the Trinity all things are by the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.<sup>10</sup> The revelation of Jesus Christ as the only-begotten Son of the Father exemplifies the Trinitarian relationships: The Father spoke the Son in the power of the Spirit. This divine self-disclosure reflects God's very being as a communicative agent—*not just within the economic but also the immanent Trinity*.<sup>11</sup>

### **Contribution of Vanhoozer**

As mentioned in the first chapter, Vanhoozer uses speech-act theory as an analogy for the Trinitarian relations, demonstrating how the Triune God is eternal communicative action. Proponents of speech-act theory (Austin, Searle, Grice) argue that words are more than abstractions but actually *do* things. To understand discourse primarily as action, then, requires identifying the distinct acts in communication.

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<sup>9</sup>“The Council of Nicea,” in *NPNF* 4:75. There are five references to Jesus Christ as the only-begotten Son of the Father: John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9. BAGD, however, indicates that *monogenes* is better translated as “unique” rather than “only-begotten.” While the exact meaning is debatable, these five passages are not the only Scripture references that teach the eternal generation of the Son. John 5:26 reads, “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.” Carson believes that this passage is a reference to eternal generation: “[I]t is this eternal impartation of life-in-himself to the Son that grounds his authority and power to call the dead to life by his powerful word” (Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 257). Furthermore, Heb 1:3 reads, “And he is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature,” suggesting an eternal procession.

<sup>10</sup>Gregory of Nyssa, “On Not Three Gods,” *NPNF* 5:334. This relationship is exemplified in revelation and creation: just as the Father reveals his will through the Son in the power of the Spirit, he also created the world through the Son and maintains it through the agency of the Spirit.

<sup>11</sup>Vanhoozer invokes Rahner's Rule in his discussion of the economic and the immanent Trinity, namely: “The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity” (Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1970], 21, cited in Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 70). While I do not accept Rahner's Rule, I do affirm the notion that there is greater continuity between the immanent and the economic Trinity than is sometimes given by contemporary theologians.

Communicative action, though a unified event, is distinguished by the locutionary act (the act of speaking words in language), the illocutionary act (the communicative *intent* of the locutioner), and the perlocutionary act (the intended or unintended consequences of the communicative event). Rather than being primarily abstractions, then, proponents of speech-act theory argue that language is performative.

Similarly, in the Trinity the relationship among each of the three hypostases represents a unified speech-act in its three distinctions: the Father locutes; the Son is the illocutionary intent; and the Spirit is the perlocutionary effect in an eternal communicative act. Vanhoozer uses a dramatic analogy for this interaction of eternal divine communion, which he describes as *theodrama*. While God's revelation of himself to us through his Son, Jesus Christ, is most certainly an example of theodramatic action, it also reflects who God is from all eternity. The Son as the illocutionary intent of the Father's locutionary act in redemption is also descriptive of his eternal generation.<sup>12</sup> God's being, according to Vanhoozer, is as eternal communicative act. As Vanhoozer writes, "*God's being in eternal communicative act is the basis for his self-presentation to creatures, his historical 'speaking out' . . . The life of the incarnate Christ 'expresses the very action or movement of his eternal procession'*" (emphasis added).<sup>13</sup> God's being,

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<sup>12</sup>Many evangelical theologians reject the doctrine of eternal generation, including John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 492; William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 594; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 324-30; Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 71-74, 131-35; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1233-34. Similarly, other prominent evangelical writers defend the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, including Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 244; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 257. For a summary of the debate and a refutation of the principal arguments against eternal generation, see Brandon C. Jones, "The Unbegotten Son? A Defense of the Eternal Generation of the Son against the Arguments of Evangelicals Like John S. Feinberg" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 21, 2008).

<sup>13</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 244.

then, is eternal communion in three subsistent relations.<sup>14</sup> And speech-act theory in a dramatic analogy (theodrama) is Vanhoozer's description of this reality.

Therefore, I shall refer to the divine dramatic discourse in its entirety, analogously as the "Spoken Word."<sup>15</sup> By Spoken Word, however, I am alluding to a Trinitarian understanding of God's being as communicative action, rather than referring exclusively to Jesus Christ as the Word of God. Within the Trinity's self-communication, the Father speaks, the Son is the Word vocalized by the Father, and the Spirit is the divine breath.<sup>16</sup> It is hoped, therefore, that the expression, the "Spoken Word" aptly captures the discursive nature of the activity of the triune God in its entirety.

Many theologians in the past (with the exception of Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, and Karl Barth) have not reflected on the sonority of the Trinitarian relationships. Christian theology throughout history has often used visiospatial language to elucidate the Trinity (e.g., *perichoresis*). Yet the triune God's revelation of his "oral" nature points in another analogical direction.<sup>17</sup> The dominance of chirographic,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 70-72. Vanhoozer argues that the economic Trinity reflects the immanent Trinity on the basis that one's being is determined by one's actions. Since what we know about God is by his actions as three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), it is reasonable to conclude that "one substance, three persons" is a proper theo-ontological statement.

<sup>15</sup>The expression "Spoken Word" as a description of God's being as communicative action is a deliberate effort to make a connection with the use of orality in theological statements. Theology cannot go any higher than the *principia*. Therefore, the theodramatically-revised Scripture principle is the correct starting point for developing a paradigm for the use of orality in ministry practice. Just as the Trinity is understood through the analogy of oral communicative activity that is *theodramatic*, ministry practitioners participate in the theodrama by their performance of the Script (Scripture) that tells the story of the *mythos* (plot) of creation, fall, and redemption and makes God known and comprehensible to others.

<sup>16</sup>The analogy of the Spirit as the divine breath bringing forth the Word of the Father does not preclude the traditional Western understanding of the *filioque*. Traditionally in Western Christian theology, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, in the economic sense the Bible is *God-breathed* (2 Tim 3:16), and the Spirit participated in bringing forth the incarnation of the Son by "coming upon" Mary (Luke 1:35). The relationship between Word and Spirit is complex.

<sup>17</sup>Ong, *Presence of the Word*, 180-81. Ong writes, "An oral-aural theology of the Trinity would explicate the 'inter-subjectivity' of the Three Persons in terms of communication conceived analogously in a world of sound rather than in a world of space and light" (ibid.).

typographic and hypertext communication in Western civilization since the Middle Ages likely makes it predisposed to understand the world primarily through visual means, given how common the practice of *reading* printed texts gradually became instead of *hearing* spoken language. This cultural habit makes it difficult to appreciate the “oral” analogy for the theodramatic action among the persons of the Trinity. To summarize, Scripture narrates that the Godhead exists as three hypostases in one *ousia* (essence) whose being is expressed through his communicative acts in creation and redemption.

### **Why One Can Trust What Scripture Says about the Trinitarian Economy**

One then may know who God is since the canon of Scripture is an extension of his theodramatic communicative action. Scripture describes who God is by recounting what God does—the communication of himself through his actions establishing covenants with his people. Yet many theologians, among others, doubt the reliability of Scripture as God’s communication to us. Since the linguistic turn in philosophy and the demythologization of biblical higher criticism (i.e., Bultmann), theology tends to talk more about God-talk than actually talk about God. More time is taken up with and attention paid to those doing the talking, rather than the object of the discussions themselves, namely God. While a gaggle of theological voices have clamored to make their hermeneutical histrionics heard, many sadly fail to hear above the din that this type of theologizing may in fact say more about the theologians themselves than it says about God. As Vanhoozer notes, all of us should beware of committing “Feuerbachian slips.”<sup>18</sup> It is no surprise that some writers, prematurely I would say, have presumptuously

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<sup>18</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 18-22. Ludwig Feuerbach argued that religion was nothing more than a projection or “a dream, in which our own conceptions and emotions appear to us as separate existences, beings out of ourselves” (Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot [Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989], 204, cited in Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 19). By referring to Feuerbach, Vanhoozer acknowledges the human propensity to cast God into the mold of its own image, a reality that the Apostle Paul himself acknowledged in Rom 1:17-31.

pronounced a postmodern post-mortem on God while simultaneously making humans themselves the arbiters of religious meaning.<sup>19</sup> Interpretivist approaches to epistemology and hermeneutics have not been the sources for answers which some had come to believe.

Yet, according to Vanhoozer, legitimate God-talk is not beyond us, since God has revealed himself, exiting the epistemological ether and descending from the hermeneutical Himalayas (often of our own design) to make theological discussions possible. So, we can actually talk about God and do more than talking about talk about God, which all too easily can result in becoming tortuously tongue-tied in a torrent of tautologies.<sup>20</sup> Scripture itself, argues Vanhoozer, is the divine self-communication given to us by the Triune God. Because we are able to receive the communication of God concerning himself, and speak God's words after him, we may likewise describe who God really is, even according to metaphysical categories, albeit using philosophical language in service to what the divine self-disclosure of Scripture tells us and not the converse. How we understand this communicative analogy of Vanhoozer is explained further below.

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<sup>19</sup>Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 103-04. Taylor writes, "The main contours of deconstructive a/theology begin to emerge with the realization of the necessary interrelationship between the death of God and radical christology. Radical christology is 'thoroughly' incarnational—the divine 'is' the incarnate word. Furthermore, this embodiment of the divine is the death of God. With the appearance of the divine that is not only but is at the same time other, the God who alone is God disappears. The death of God is the sacrifice of the transcendent Author/Creator/Master who governs from afar. Incarnation 'irrevocably' erases the disembodied logos and inscribes a word that becomes the script enacted in the infinite play of interpretation. . . . A/theology is, in large measure a critique of the notion of a transcendent God who is 'self-closed, all-repelling.' Incarnation is, therefore, not a once-for-all event, restricted to a time and place and limited to a particular individual" (ibid.).

<sup>20</sup>In any epistemological discussion, one inevitably arrives at tautological explanations for how we know anything at all. For example, in religious epistemology one may say that Scripture is a reliable guide for salvific knowledge of God. If pressed to supply evidence for such a claim, one could assert that Scripture itself testifies to its own truthfulness and authority. While true, the tautology is present.

**Remythologization of theology: The next step toward a contemporary understanding of the trinity.** If one is to say anything worthwhile about God, argues Vanhoozer, one's theology must undergo "remythologization." In using this word, Vanhoozer does not intend to convey the idea that the central tenets of Christian belief are mythological.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, Vanhoozer is borrowing coinage from the vault of philosophy, à la Aristotle and Paul Ricoeur, in order to assert the reliability of the sweeping narrative plot (*mythos*)<sup>22</sup> of Scripture as the means of understanding who God is by what he says and does. "[T]he *mythos* of the Bible—the christological content and canonical form—is the written means of God's triune self-presentation. In a word, the *mythos* is the medium (and the message)."<sup>23</sup> Lest anyone doubt that Vanhoozer has the theological collateral to make such withdrawals from the philosophical treasury, remember that he defends some use of philosophy, arguing that theology may use metaphysical language to explicate what it has already derived from the divine self-communication, so that ontological categories serve the divine self-disclosure and not vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Vanhoozer distinguishes myth from *mythos* in two categories: content and form. The content of *mythos*, as opposed to myth, deals with everyday events within this world as opposed to epic events in fantastic locales, e.g., Olympus, Hades, Elysium. With regard to form, the meaning and the truth claims of *mythos* are tied to the action within the plot. Unlike mythologies that contain etiological and gnomic statements within a fictionalized literary account of one or multiple personifications of nature, *mythos* inextricably links the form and content. God in Scripture is not a personification of natural forces nor is he representative of the superlative ideals in human beings. See Vanhoozer, *Remythologization of Theology*, 7.

<sup>22</sup>*Mythos*, Gk. *muthos*, "'speech, conversation,' also of 'narrative' or 'story' without distinction of fact or fiction, then of fictional narrative as opposed to logos, the truth of history) such as *tale, story, legend, myth*" (BDAG, s.v. "*muthos*").

<sup>23</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 11.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 8. Vanhoozer writes, "The problem with 'totalizing' metaphysics is the underlying assumption that there is one set of categories, accessible to unaided human reason, which applies both to the world and to God, created and uncreated reality. This invariably leads to ontotheology, a unified system of thought that employs concepts such as Supreme Being or Unmoved Mover as conceptual

In classical times, Aristotle used the term *mythos* as a “description of dramatic plot: a unified course of action that includes a beginning, middle, and an end.”<sup>25</sup> After identifying the six essential elements of tragedy or drama (plot, characters, diction, thought, spectacle, and melody), Aristotle said that *mythos* was the most important, since it was “the first essential. . . . [T]he life and soul [of drama] . . . is the plot [*mythos*].”<sup>26</sup> *Mythos* is integral to the other five elements of dramatic action, since it is the light by which the audience is able to see everything else. Without the *mythos*, the actions of a play are little more than a haphazard series of events with no meaning.

Furthermore, Aristotle believed character arises within the dramatic action. The *mythos* or plot, according to Aristotle, renders meaningful the actions of the players, which in turn displays their character. Dramatic action, not static being, is what determines the identity of the players: “[Drama] is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions that we are happy or the reverse.”<sup>27</sup> What we know about the character of players on the stage (or on the screen in the cineplex) is revealed through their speech and actions within the plot (*mythos*) of the play or film. To paraphrase an old maxim: sow an intention, reap an action—including speech-acts—sow an action, reap a character; sow a character, reap a plot or *mythos*.

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stopgaps to prevent infinite metaphysical regress. Call it ‘bad’ metaphysics: bad, because it imposes a system of categories on God without attending to God’s own self-communication” (ibid.).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 5. Vanhoozer references Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1:1221.

<sup>26</sup>Aristotle, *Poetics*, 2321.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 2320.

Vanhoozer relies on Ricoeur to extend Aristotle's thought in three ways.<sup>28</sup> First, Ricoeur follows Aristotle in his *Poetics*, where he identified the dynamic interaction between *mythos* and *mimesis* (imitation).<sup>29</sup> Whereas Plato used *mimesis* in a metaphysical sense to designate concrete realities that were mere copies or imitations of their Ideal Forms, Aristotle used *mimesis* to refer to concrete actions performed in the here and now. Within a play *mythos*—the plot of the story—arranges these dramatic actions (*mimetic* interpretations of human life) and gives them “concordance,” signified by “completeness, wholeness, and an appropriate magnitude.”<sup>30</sup> For Ricoeur, *mythos* provides the same sense of wholeness and meaningfulness to human actions within time.<sup>31</sup> Vanhoozer applies this notion to the divine communicative acts in Scripture.<sup>32</sup> The *completeness* of the biblical narrative helps to make it comprehensible to us.

Vanhoozer explains how the biblical *mythos* bestows intelligibility on the divine communicative action. Ricoeur considers *mythos* (also worded as “emplotment”), to be “an operation . . . rather than a literary genre or structure,” a “cognitive instrument,” and a “unique and indispensable means of making sense of . . . human action [and] human freedom—before which scientific explanation can only shrug its shoulders.”<sup>33</sup> Emplotment bestows a rationale on actions inaccessible to the formal logic of analytic philosophy or the empirical verification of the sciences—which Aristotle called

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<sup>28</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 6-7.

<sup>29</sup>BDAG, s.v. “*Mimesis*.”

<sup>30</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 52-90.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>33</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 6.

*phronēsis*, or practical reasoning.<sup>34</sup> So it is *phronēsis* that actually provides the coherence to the *mythos* that renders intelligibility to the dramatic actions. Whereas theory (*theoria*) deals in abstractions and static ideas, practical reason is concerned with action (*praxis*). Ricoeur explains why *phronēsis* is the sort of reasoning in narrative:

If therefore the internal connection of the plot is logical . . . what logic is it? The truth is that the word “logic” never appears . . . If the term “logic” is never used, it is probably because what is at issue is an intelligibility appropriate to the field of *praxis*, not that of *theoria*, and therefore one neighboring on *phronēsis*, which is the intelligent use of action.

In light of Ricoeur’s analysis, Vanhoozer argues that all divine communicative action (*praxis*) is therefore made intelligible to human beings because of the emplotment or *mythos* of the Gospel message, that is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is made comprehensible by the divine *phronēsis* in the extension of the divine communicative action of Scripture. To recap: Aristotle applied *mythos* to the wholeness of a play, which imitated human life; Ricoeur suggested *mythos* (emplotment) also bestows meaningfulness upon human life itself; Vanhoozer, finally, posits that the divine *mythos* makes intelligible the divine dramatic self-disclosure of Jesus Christ who is the exact representation (*tupos*) of God’s nature and character (Heb 1:3).<sup>35</sup> To know the *mythos*, then, is to know who God is.

Third, while Ricoeur applies *mythos* exclusively to the narrative genre, Vanhoozer uses it far more comprehensively, as a label for “all the ways in which diverse forms of biblical literature represent, and render, the divine drama.”<sup>36</sup> Vanhoozer justifies this broadened application of *mythos* by observing that the biblical *mythos* is

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<sup>34</sup>The reader should recall that this dissertation referred to *phronēsis* in the introduction and references it repeatedly in the use of its Toulmin-model argument from practical reason. *Phronēsis* in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Vanhoozer’s “remythologization” of theology demonstrates the coherence of the argument throughout the dissertation.

<sup>35</sup>*Tupos*, Gk. *tupos*, “an archetype serving as a model, *type, pattern, model*” (BDAG, s.v. “*tupos*”).

<sup>36</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 7.

both “one and many.”<sup>37</sup> To be sure, there is an overarching narrative structure found in Scripture that can be summarized as the story of creation, the fall of humanity into sin and rebellion, the redemption through Jesus Christ, and the consummation of all things. Yet the divine self-disclosure of the biblical *mythos* manifests itself in not one literary voice (narrative genre) but in a whole chorus of diverse literary genres (e.g., proverbs, epistles, apocalyptic literature).<sup>38</sup>

Borrowing also from the literary insights of Mikhail Bakhtin, Vanhoozer argues that the multiple genres of Scripture, related dialogically with each other, communicate the unified message of who God is.<sup>39</sup> The genres are important because the form of Scripture is not unrelated to its content. Thus to read Scripture well one must engage its various voices in dialogue with one another in order to grasp the biblical *mythos*. To summarize, the canon of Scripture provides a rule for how to use meaningful language about God. Rather than a monochrome vision of God, Scripture provides a mosaic of genres that must be read in their own right in order to interpret them correctly.

***Analogia dramatis: Being-in-act as a theo-ontology.*** Vanhoozer correctly understands that in order to do speak properly about God, one must begin with the *mythos* of Scripture. Afterwards, one may use metaphysical categories to expound the biblical *mythos*, when greater precision or clarity of expression is required in our God-talk. Since the Kantian revolution, however, metaphysics has been a dirty word, and more recently

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 273-75.

<sup>39</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 7; idem, *Drama of Doctrine*, 273-75. To understand Bakhtin’s ideas about dialogism, see Mikhail Mikhāilovic Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series, no. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). To understand the significance of Bakhtin’s thought about literary genres and its significance for biblical studies, see Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, SBLSemS 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), and Roland Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, SBLSemS 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

even, epistemology and hermeneutics have been unable to compensate us for the loss. Sadly, theology in the past had fallen to the temptation to mold God according to the favored philosophical categories of the day (Uncaused Cause, Being, *Nous*, Becoming—hence part of the reason for metaphysics to fall out of fashion in theological discussions) rather than allowing God’s own self-disclosure to do the molding of our understanding of God. Vanhoozer suggests that theology should avoid these ontotheologies in favor of a Theo-ontology. In order to do so, however, a new terminology about God is required. Vanhoozer has his own recommendations for what that is.

Vanhoozer defends classical theism using an unlikely set of philosophical and theological categories.<sup>40</sup> Referring to the *analogia dramatis*, Vanhoozer moves away from a classical category for describing God’s essence or being, the *analogia entis* (analogy of being).<sup>41</sup> As we have discussed above, when God speaks, God is *acting*. And in the divine communicative action, God is communicating who he is (Lat., *communicatio*: sharing, making common). God *is* as God *says* and *does*. Since God’s words are true (2 Sam 7:28) and his words reveal his character, what God does in his self-communicative activity is to reveal who he is. As Vanhoozer says, “God’s being is in his free, wise, and loving communicating agency.”<sup>42</sup> Contra the *analogia entis*, God is not Being-in-itself in some static, abstract sense. Rather, God is what God *does*, which is to communicate himself by means of the economic Trinitarian dialogue. In the same way, whether in his speech or in his salvific acts across the plain of redemptive history into the eschatological horizon, God *acts* by communicating himself to us. The economic Trinity,

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<sup>40</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 82-92.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 219. Vanhoozer writes, “A special (i.e., remythologized) metaphysics takes God’s being-in-communicative-act rather than the concept of a perfect being as its lodestar. Its watchword is *analogia dramatis*, not *analogia entis*. Better: the *analogia entis* is a function of the *analogia dramatis*” (ibid.).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 216.

therefore, is *essentially* the *analogia dramatis*. As Vanhoozer says, “The economic Trinity is a dramatic analogy (a being-in-temporal-act) of the light, life, and love that God is in himself.”<sup>43</sup>

As art imitates life, so the *mythos* of Scripture imitates the divine life and is witnessed in the divine discourse of Scripture. God reveals himself and his character, therefore, by what he says and does in the plot (*mythos*) of the biblical narrative. According to biblical revelation, God is not a static being or a philosophical abstraction, but the principal character within the greatest story ever enacted. God, like people, communicates his thoughts and actions which reveal his character within the plot of the grand story or *mythos* of redemption. To borrow language from missiological strategists, God “stories” himself to us.

### **Summary of the Trinitarian Economy**

This section has summarized the biblical teachings that support the understanding of an oral communicative being-in-act analogy that characterizes the Trinity. What Scripture identifies within the economic Trinity—that the Father spoke the Son to us—is also transferable to the immanent Trinity (the Trinity as it is, in itself), as well. Once again, the Father locutes, the Son is the illocutionary intent, and the Spirit is the perlocutionary force. God is therefore being-in-act, *analogia dramatis*, and, as divine communicative action, engages in analogically oral covenantal dialogue among the Persons of the Godhead. Furthermore, Scripture is an extension of the divine communicative action.

This divine self-disclosure in Scripture is comprehensible since the theodramatic action is emplotted in the biblical *mythos*. These divine communicative acts do far more than transfer information, but also assert, command, entreat, as well as

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 218.

*share* (communicate) God’s nature and character. To read the biblical *mythos* (dramatic plot) within the pages of Scripture, therefore, is to understand God. We may also say that God “stories” himself to us in his theodramatic action.<sup>44</sup> Thus, we may confidently assert with Vanhoozer, “The Bible is the plumb-line for right Christian speech about God.”<sup>45</sup> We may also say that the definition of the Trinity—God existing as three hypostases in one *ousia* (substance) whose being is predicated upon analogical oral communicative acts in loving communion provides sound backing for the second warrant.

### **Theodrama and Divine Discourse in Cosmology**

#### **The Divine Discourse and Creation**

The relevance of the oral analogy for understanding divine activity is dramatically displayed in how God created the universe. The economic Trinity of the Father uttering the creative Word through the divine breath of the Spirit is one way of thinking about the biblical account of creation. God’s Word and breath were expressed in the creative action: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Ps 33:6).<sup>46</sup>

The word of the Father in creation is, of course, not an articulation of sounds. Rather, the Word is a Person who shares all of the attributes of Deity. Scripture also describes the second person of the Trinity as the instrumental cause of creation (John 1:1,

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<sup>44</sup>The remark, “God ‘stories’ himself” is an allusion to Chronological Bible Storying mentioned in chap. two. The parallel narrative approaches, one divine and the other human, in addition to the oral analogy of the divine communicative action serves to underscore our contention that the theodramatically-revised Scripture principle serves as a paradigm for the use of orality in ministry.

<sup>45</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 8.

<sup>46</sup>Many could argue that Ps 33:6 is an example of synonymous parallelism in Hebrew poetry and therefore cannot serve as a proof text for the Son and Spirit’s roles in creation. However, through the application of a redemptive-historical hermeneutic, such an interpretation is possible and in fact warranted.

3; Heb 1:1, 2).<sup>47</sup> Hebrews 1:3 states that the second Person of the Godhead “upholds all things by the word of his power.” The creative Word spoken by the Father is the Son.

Scripture identifies the Spirit as the divine breath, which is telling since the root words for “spirit” in both Hebrew and Greek, *ruah* and *pneuma*, have a semantic range that includes “spirit, wind, and breath.”<sup>48</sup> The analogy of the Spirit as “breath” is witnessed in the biblical account of creation. Besides hovering over the primordial waters at creation (Gen 1:2), the Spirit is also the agent that confers the breath of life. Genesis 2:7 mentions that “the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” Job gives some clarification regarding the Genesis account: “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). The synonymous parallelism identifies the Spirit with the “breath” of the Almighty, a fact supported in the original Hebrew, since the word for “Spirit” and “breath” is the same. Word and Spirit, therefore, work in tandem in the divine act of creation. In accord with Gregory of Nyssa’s understanding the Trinity’s work (noted above), the divine speech-act of the Father spoke the creation into being through His Word (the Son) in the power of His divine breath (the Spirit).

The mutual work of both Word and Spirit is also shown not only in the act of creation but also in sustaining the created order. Scripture gives many examples of God’s providential governance over creation through the Word of the Father. God’s divine fiat, his express command, exercises providential control over everything that occurs within his created dominion: “Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass unless the LORD

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<sup>47</sup>“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . All things came into being by Him [the Word], and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being,” and “God . . . has spoken to us in His Son . . . through whom he also made the world” (John 1:1, 3; Heb 1:1, 2).

<sup>48</sup>BDB, s.v. “*ruah*”; BDAG, s.v. “*pneuma*.”

has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?” (Job 3:37-38). Lamentations 3:37-38 expresses the same idea.<sup>49</sup> While there has been considerable debate amongst various Christian traditions about the precise interpretation of these passages, the fact that God exercises sovereign control over his creation is undeniable. The oral analogy of divine speech is also evident, then, in God’s sovereignty over creation, causing both good and permitting calamity.

The Spirit is also involved with the Word in the Father’s providential control. “From *the breath of God* ice is made, and the expanse of the waters is frozen...Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. And it changes direction turning around by His guidance, that it may do whatever *He commands it* on the face of the inhabited earth,” (Job 37:10-12); “Then the channels of water appeared, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at *thy rebuke* O LORD, at the blast *of the breath of thy nostrils*” (Ps 18:15, emphasis mine). The Trinity also exercises dominion over the animal kingdom in what “His mouth has commanded and His Spirit has gathered.”<sup>50</sup> The Father’s Word and breath control the natural phenomena within creation. Nothing in nature, therefore, occurs without the Word and Spirit’s direction. The oral analogy of the divine discourse, therefore, is also used to refer to God’s sovereign control of the natural order.

So, an oral analogy for the Trinity’s action is used to refer to the intratrinitarian relations as well as their creative and providential activity. Yet this oral metaphor is not appreciated by everyone, particularly members of the scientific community. A working cosmology may help us understand what the biblical *mythos* says about the God-world

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<sup>49</sup>“Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?”

<sup>50</sup>“Seek from the book of the LORD and read: Not one of these things will be missing; None will lack its mate. For *His mouth has commanded* and *His Spirit* has gathered them” (Isa 34:16, emphasis mine).

relation.<sup>51</sup> In the following section, we turn to the contributions of Frame, Johnson and Vanhoozer in order to describe how practical theological and missiological work can interact with the natural and human sciences in meaningful ways.<sup>52</sup> The necessity of discussing how theology and the other sciences interact will become clearer in the next chapter when we discuss how the theodramatically revised Scripture principle functions as a paradigm for the use of orality in practical ministry.

### **Towards a Christian Linguistic Cosmology**

We just noted the Old Testament teaching that all of God's creation is contingent upon the word of God. In the New Testament we learn that that word of God is the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14). We are told further that Jesus Christ "... is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3) and that "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). Thus it is not ideas (idealism), matter (naturalism), or subjective experience (existentialism) that undergirds the whole of creation. Those aspects of the creation are sustained by and are therefore contingent upon the word of Christ, who is the word of God.

While the above Scripture evidence could support what we may consider to be a linguistic cosmology, there are many unanswered questions. How does the creation

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<sup>51</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 28. Vanhoozer acknowledges that "[r]emythologizing conceives the God-world relation in primarily communicative rather than causal terms" (ibid.). He also states in n. 110 of the same page that "Trinitarian authorship also proves helpful in conceiving divine providence in terms of God's sustaining, cooperating with, and governing the world." I would also add "creating" to the list.

<sup>52</sup>Chris A. M. Hermans and Mary E. Moore, eds., *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology: The Contribution of Empirical Theology by Johannes A. van der Ven*, Empirical Studies in Theology 11 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 3. Hermans and Moore write, "There can be no practical theology without a hermeneutical interpretation of Christian religion . . ." and further argue, "Practical theologians always have had interest in empirical research, either sociological investigation of the life of the Church or psychological investigation of the life of religious people" (ibid.).

itself appear as the result of its linguistic basis? What is the interrelationship between the various elements of the creation? Matter and spirit, as well as the laws that govern them both are all the expressions of his Word. Yet how all these aspects of creation interact with one another and correspond to God's word is quite unclear. In an effort to provide some answers to these questions, we will construct an outline of a Christian cosmology and in the process provide a ground for practical theological concerns.<sup>53</sup>

Providing a tentative Christian cosmology is a necessary part of developing a paradigm for the use of orality in practical ministry. Like the section on the Trinitarian economy, this section uses philosophical categories in order to understand better what God has revealed to us in the canon of Scripture. Furthermore, the discipline of practical theology (including missiology), while primarily concerned with Scripture, is also free to utilize the natural and human sciences. As chapter five will demonstrate, one of the metatheoretical domains of practical theology (methods of justification) includes an explanation of how theology and the other sciences should interact with one another. The following discussion, therefore, will attempt to use philosophical categories in an effort to explain in greater detail, “to deploy”—or rather “co-opt” (to use Vanhoozer’s terminology)—the biblical account of creation *ex nihilo* via divine speech and demonstrate how theology and the natural and human sciences may interrelate with one another.

**John Frame’s tri-perspectivalism.** Frame argues that humans perceive reality according to three perspectives: the normative, the situational, and the

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<sup>53</sup>Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 262-65. Johnson describes a linguistic cosmology in his Christian psychology proposal. While I agree with his conclusions in significant ways, there are some differences between his presentation and my own, particularly at the point of intersection between common grace and Scripture.

existential.<sup>54</sup> These three perspectives are interdependent in that, as Frame described it, they appeal to the same knowledge understood from three different angles or “perspectives.”<sup>55</sup> Human beings perceive all of reality according to these vantage points simultaneously. For example, if I study an object scientifically, the object exists according to certain laws (the normative perspective), within a certain context (the situational perspective), and I interpret it (knowingly or unknowingly) from my own subjective standpoint (the existential perspective).

All knowledge, therefore, involves three interrelated dimensions. Because Christ upholds all things through the word of his power, to study Christ’s law is to study the basis of all knowledge accessible to human beings. Furthermore, to study the world is to study Christ’s law since all knowledge, either of God or of the world, is obtained through a created medium. Finally, acquiring knowledge also involves the one’s own participation, since all knowledge must pass through the grid of our own thoughts, emotional states, and life experiences. Frame writes,

We understand the law by studying its relations to the world and the self—its “applications”—so that its meaning and its applications are ultimately identical. Thus all knowledge is a study of the law. All knowledge also is a knowledge of the world, since all our knowledge (of God or the world) comes through created media. And all knowledge is of self, because we know all things by means of our own experience and thoughts. The three kinds of knowledge, then, are identical but “perspectivally” related; they represent the same knowledge, viewed from three different “angles” or “perspectives.”<sup>56</sup>

Specialists in any discipline can examine the creation along the three perspectives representing the creative word of God, although in actuality each perspective is but one way of viewing the same knowledge. If education researchers choose to evaluate a new educational intervention for religious instruction, for example, they might

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<sup>54</sup>John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 89-90.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

consider the relevant laws of learning involved in communicating information, which constitutes the normative perspective. Focusing on the use of specific pedagogical practices and teaching interventions with students in classroom settings within a particular church, represents the situational perspective. And evaluating the investigator's own presuppositions and worldview assumptions implicit within the intervention itself represents the existential perspective. Each perspective pertains to the entirety of God's created order. What is more, because it is Christ's creative and sustaining word that operates in the normative domain, approaching any facet of life in covenantal dialogue with the Creator, *coram Deo*, affords one the opportunity to perceive reality in a fuller richer sense (a theocentrically *thicker* description) than is possible otherwise.

Frame's tri-perspectivalism is a cogent explanation for how Christ's law intersects with the subject and object in all of creation. Yet we still need a fuller explanation of how Christ's creative and sustaining word is responsible for upholding all of the created order. Vanhoozer's contributions may shed more light on this subject.

**The multiple contributions of Kevin Vanhoozer.** This dissertation has already summarized Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle. However, some particular points deserve repeating. Vanhoozer's understanding of the communicative action of God has implications not only for the Trinitarian economy and Scripture but also for a Christian cosmology. Moreover, Vanhoozer's explanation of the divine self-communication may help us in our development of a linguistic cosmology.

As Vanhoozer has suggested, in a first theology, God and Scripture should not be considered in isolation from each other as the object and the means of the knowledge of God. The triune God himself is communicative action, according to Vanhoozer, and Scripture should be understood as an extension of his communicative action. While there is obviously a profound qualitative difference between the creation and Scripture (general

vs. special revelation),<sup>57</sup> there is at least one characteristic that Scripture and all creation have in common, as we saw earlier in this chapter. *All of creation and all of Scripture are extensions of the communicative action of God.* To be sure, the Godhead's identity as communicative action should not be confused with the creation itself, as in pantheism or panentheism. Yet identifying the creation as an extension of the communicative action of God helps explain how God is immanently related to his creation. Moreover, understanding the creation as the perlocutionary *result* of the Godhead's communicative activity simultaneously underscores God's transcendence and the Creator-creation distinction.

Austin's and Searle's assertion that words *do* things is illustrated maximally in the Genesis 1 account of how God spoke the creation into being. And God's locutions are expressed in Christ as illocutions that provide the form and being of the creation itself, and the creation, therefore, represents their perlocutionary effects. Interacting with Frame, we could also say that Christ's upholding all creation "through the word of his power" (Heb 1:3) refers to the normative perspective, since his word orders the creation, including all situations and subjects.

The creation should be understood as the perlocutionary result of the illocutions of God's creative word that provides form and gives definition to the creation itself. Moreover, I contend that Christ's creative and sustaining word include the generally accepted five types of illocutionary acts (assertives, commissives, expressives, directives, and declaratives), and all of them reflect the normative perspective. Based on these illocutions, the situational and existential perspectives are *applications* (Frame) that constitute their perlocutionary effects. While we cannot grasp all the illocutions involved

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<sup>57</sup>Calvin referred to the *duplex cognitio Dei*, the two-fold knowledge of God. Whereas creation as general revelation could only provide a basic understanding that God exists and the reality of sin, Scripture as special revelation provides more detailed facts about who God is. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.6.2.

in every aspect of creation, they are manifested in creation in ways that can be perceived according to the situational and existential perspectives.

Scripture provides illustrations of these illocutions at work in creation. “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3) is an example of an expressive illocutionary act. As another expressive illocutionary act, Romans 8:22 tells us that “all creation *groans* and suffers the pains of childbirth until now,” in describing its subjection to futility resulting from the curse of sin. For an example of a commissive (a promise or oath to commit a future action) consider the rainbow, which was a covenantal sign of God’s promise to Noah not to destroy the world with another deluge (Gen 9:12-17). Finally, creation is the medium of assertive illocutionary acts that should compel all humanity to reverence God, since his invisible attributes are clearly revealed from what is made, so that we are without excuse (Rom 1:19-20). Divine illocutionary acts, therefore, are found throughout the creation.

The creation is not static but rather represents a dynamic interplay among the illocutions of Christ’s creative word. The complex interactions between the illocutions in Christ’s creative and sustaining word represent complexity within unity and coherence. I liken this complex interaction to the dialogism which Vanhoozer mentions in his description of the multiple genres of Scripture. Vanhoozer borrows the term “dialogism” from the literary theories of Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>58</sup>

Bakhtin illustrated his model of dialogism with an analysis of the works of Dostoevsky, such as *The Brothers Karamazov*. While critics had previously assumed that there was a single literary voice speaking in *Brothers Karamazov*, Bakhtin argued instead that there were four literary voices (representative of each of the brothers) that nevertheless together contributed to the narrative unity of the novel. What Bakhtin

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<sup>58</sup>Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 262-63. See also Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 313, 342, 363n283, 389-90, 421; idem, *First Theology*, 191-92; idem, *Drama of Doctrine*, 214-15, 269-70, 272, 284, 290-91, 345-46, 350-53, 366n9; and idem, *Remythologizing Theology*, 31, 306, 310-12, 318, 319, 324-25, 340, 349, 352, 362, 364, 377.

suggests with reference to a literary interpretation of Dostoevsky's novels, Vanhoozer applies to the study of Scripture.

Vanhoozer reflects on the dialogical interaction, as well as the unity within diversity, among the various genres of Scripture, i. e., narrative, poetry, history, apocalyptic. He also considers the dialogism implicit in the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. However, Vanhoozer labels this dialogical interaction between divine sovereignty and human responsibility *asymmetrical*, since God's providential control over all things makes him preeminent in the dialogical exchange.<sup>59</sup>

Nowhere, however, does Vanhoozer discuss dialogism in the created order beyond the divine-human relationship. It is my contention, however, that various kinds of dialogical relationships exist even within the creation itself. Dialogue, beginning with the Trinity, is found throughout the created order in two kinds of interactions. The first occurs between human subjects and the created order; the second between human subjects and God directly (through Scripture reading and prayer) within the creation.

The first kind of dialogism should be understood as metaphorical, and not literal. When a geologist, for example, studies a rock formation, there is an exchange of information between the specialist and the object of study. The geologist commences the "dialogue" through whatever means of study that is needed. The information that the rock yields is a sort of "response" to the specialist's inquiry. The geologist is simultaneously engaging the normative, situational, and existential perspectives in the study of the rock. But the knowledge obtained from the normative perspective means interacting with the illocutions of Christ's creative and sustaining word on at least some

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<sup>59</sup>One example of a Scripture passage that teaches this seemingly paradoxical but nevertheless true doctrine is Prov 16:9: "The mind of man plans his way but the LORD directs his steps."

level, depending on the presuppositions of the geologist. For example, whether or not the geologist is a believer will impact the conclusions reached about the object of study.

Adding an important depth to the complexity of this dialogism, then, is the degree of dialogical faithfulness to their Creator that the human subjects exhibit in their interactions with the creation. While non-believers may have more knowledge or understanding of the creation (breadth), believers will have a deeper, fuller engagement with the creation as they explore the normative, situational, and existential perspectives at a more profound level, *before God*. This dramatic human-creation interaction also indirectly involves God in the dialogical interaction, since everything that transpires does so through the medium of the divine illocutions, viewed from the standpoint of the normative perspective, not only with respect to the created order in general, but also with the respect to the sensory and interpretive faculties of the human beings themselves.

While all human beings interact with God indirectly in their day-to-day dialogism with creation (either acknowledging him or rejecting him in some form of idolatry), they can also interact with God directly. This direct dialogical relationship can take place through such means as the reading of Scripture, prayer, public worship, and participating in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In all instances, however, creation functions as the medium by which that interaction occurs. Prayer (audible or even mental) requires neurological, thought and language processes. Reading a Bible requires picking up a volume and flipping the pages similarly engages the medium of creation in communion with God. When both kinds of dialogical interaction occur simultaneously, the interactions become even richer and more complex. Our perlocutionary response within the creation, in covenant relation to our Creator, creates a divine-human "synergy," due to an asymmetrical dialogism in which humans together with God create historically new meaning that is nevertheless funded by semantics and bounded by the

grammar and syntax of God's creative word.<sup>60</sup> Knowledge, therefore, is not pure subjectivity since the created individual does not possess absolute autonomy in his or her interactions with creation. And yet knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is not an accumulation of bare facts. Our noetic faculties, themselves the product of illocutions of God's creative self-communication, interact with other illocutions in a metaphorical sort of "dialogue" from Christ's word in various ways, depending upon our orientation to our Creator. In accord with Kuyper, all of life is *coram Deo*.

Both kinds of dialogical interactions in creation express a dynamic interrelationship. Once again, much of this dialogue is analogical, particularly with regard to nonliving aspects of the creation. Nevertheless, there is some sort of interaction. Altogether, the collection of dialogical interactions among the creative and sustaining illocutions of Christ's word form an enormously complex, yet intricate pattern that, I contend, forms the narrative plot, or *mythos*, of human history. It is the Christian *mythos* in creation that, together with Scripture, lends narrative comprehensibility to the creation itself by "telling" the story of creation-fall-redemption.

What I am calling the Christian *mythos* of creation (creation-fall-redemption), borrows from Dooyeweerd's notion of the "religious ground motive" (RGM). Dooyeweerd believed that other ontologies throughout the history of Western thought were inherently idolatrous, since they used an intellectual framework based on features of the creation to elucidate all of reality, constituting a distorted RGM.<sup>61</sup> The problem latent in these philosophies is that they create untenable polarities and exalt one part of the

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<sup>60</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 331-34. Vanhoozer writes, "The God-world relation is similarly dialogical—a *dialogical* (i.e., *covenantal*) unity within an even greater dialogical difference (i.e., *authorial outsidedness*)" (ibid.).

<sup>61</sup>Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, trans. John Kraay, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra (Toronto: Wedge, 1979). Dooyeweerd identified four RGM's in Western European history, namely Form-Matter (Greek philosophy), Nature-Grace (Middle Ages), Nature-Freedom (Enlightenment), and the Christian Creation-Fall-Redemption.

creation, including the Creator of all. Creation-fall-redemption avoided dualistic thinking by its triadic structure and the fact that its narrative architecture is revealed in Scripture makes it preferable to other competing RGMs as the Archimedean point by which everything else within creation is interpreted, especially because the God of Scripture is central to that narrative rather than some form of idolatry.<sup>62</sup> While the three-fold narrative structure of creation-fall-redemption is not identical to the Christian *mythos* as described by Vanhoozer, they refer to what is the same metanarrative revealed in Scripture.

Vanhoozer's understanding of the narrative plot or *mythos* of Scripture can also be discerned with respect to the creation itself. We recall that God spoke the creation into existence and the creation "responds" in obedience. This could be considered a kind of "*asymmetrical dialogism*" between God and the whole creation. Thus, an analogue to dialog constitutes the entire created order, beginning the narrative plot of creation-fall-redemption and providing the stage upon which the rest of the theodrama occurs. In addition, the creation itself is a "player" on that stage, since it speaks (groans) and anticipates its deliverance from futility (Rom 8:22). For this reason, the divine communicative action with regard to the creation is itself also part of the *theodramatic* action. Recall that, not only humans, but the entire creation will experience redemption, resulting in a new heaven and a new earth (Rom 8:20; Rev 21:1). While the message contained in the *asymmetrical dialogism* between God and the whole creation is not as clear or as informative as that which occurs with humans (consider Calvin's *duplex cognitio Dei*), Scripture itself testifies that it does exist, and its message is made manifest when the creation is interpreted in the light of the canon of Scripture.

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 9. Dooyeweerd defines an RGM as "a spiritual force that acts as the absolutely central mainspring of human society. It governs all of life's temporal expressions from the religious centre of life, directing them to the true or supposed origin of existence. It thus not only places an indelible stamp on the culture, science, and social structure of a given period but determines profoundly one's whole worldview" (ibid.).

The Scriptures provide a metanarrative structure of creation-fall-redemption, through which we gaze upon and interpret the creation. We see the creation and are compelled to acknowledge the existence of its Creator (Ps 19:1-2; Rom 1:19-20)—this, we could say, is the creation portion of God’s dialog with humans through the creation. God also speaks with humans when we witness natural and moral evil—this is the Fall portion of God’s dialogue with humans through the creation. When people clean up the environment, build medical clinics or housing for the disadvantaged, or simply enjoy the good things of God's creation (hiking, swimming, or even eating a delicious meal), they witness a foretaste of redemption and anticipate its consummation. Creation also reflects the *mythos* of Scripture and therefore shares the same narrative intelligibility.

We derive the ultimate meaning of creation latent in the illocutions in Christ’s word first from the *mythos* of the divine self-disclosure in Scripture and second in creation itself. This meaning is not a mere compilation of data (positivism), nor is it purely a social construct (contra a relativistic anti-realism). The analogically oral divine discourse which creates and sustains all creation tells a story, that is, a *mythos*, which has meaning and is comprehensible to us in covenantal, dialogical relation with one another and with God. Moreover, when engaging God’s creation while relying on the canon, (the Script in the theodrama), our actions performed in union with Christ are participations in the theodrama so that we contribute to the *mythos* of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

**Conclusion.** The Christian linguistic cosmology presented here helps to justify a model of knowledge that relies fundamentally on Christian commitments to biblical norms--including its *narrative* norms. Both the canon and the creation proceed from the mouth of the same Author and share the same plot (*mythos*) of creation-fall-redemption. While creation acts as the “stage” for the theodrama as it unfolds, creation itself is also a “player” that participates in the narrative of redemption and the

consummation of all things. This shared *mythos* also has implications for practical theology and for a Christian epistemology.

A fully developed model of Christian epistemology, therefore, must not only be shaped primarily by Scripture, and the classical theological disciplines (exegetical theology, biblical theology, historical and practical theology), but is also free to benefit from the natural sciences and the human sciences in order to engage properly with all the perspectives of the created order (normative, situational, and existential). Indeed, theology may learn from the sciences and the sciences in turn may receive wisdom from theology, because of their underlying unity in the one Word of God. To twist a phrase of Irenaeus, the natural and human sciences are the two hands of theology. This engagement with the natural and human sciences, however, must respect the preeminence of theology. Like Bakhtin's theories concerning Dostoevsky, practical theology is dialogical in its execution. This tentative Christian cosmology, then, not only serves as another backing for the second warrant, but also provides a way to think about how theology and the sciences can legitimately engage one another. In the chapter that follows, we will see how it can be used to provide a comprehensive paradigm for practical theology in general and for the use of orality in particular.

## **Theodrama in Redemption**

### **Scriptural Teaching of Theodrama in Redemption**

The oral analogy within the Trinity continues in God's work in redemption. First, the oral dimension is evident in dramatic detail within the Trinitarian counsels of eternity, what classical Protestant theology calls the *pactum salutis* (Eph 1:4, 11). Regardless of the interpretation of this passage, it is enough to say the divine discourse

conspired the working of redemption even before creation began.<sup>63</sup> Most Christian traditions can agree on this fact.

Moreover, the Incarnation is the divine utterance of the Father through the divine breath of the Spirit. The author of Hebrews notes that whereas the Father spoke through the prophets during the Old Covenant, at the advent of the New Covenant God spoke through his Son Jesus Christ.<sup>64</sup> The incarnate Word of the Father is personal and divine, possessing all the attributes of deity.<sup>65</sup> The Holy Spirit was also responsible for Christ's supernatural conception as a human baby.<sup>66</sup> At the fullness of times, the Spirit acted once again as the agent (breath) by which the Father spoke the Son. The Father locutes, the Son is the illocutionary act, and the Spirit is the perlocutionary agent.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ, we now hear what God had established from all eternity both in an external and internal call: the proclamation of the word unto salvation (Rom 10:17) and the inner working of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:14). The word that we hear and the word of faith by which we respond is likewise oral in nature (Rom 10:8-15). At the parousia, announced with the cry of the archangel (1 Thess 4:16), Christ shall pronounce judgment upon the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46). Those that are Christ's shall sing before his throne (Rev 7:9-17) a song that shall be to the praise of the

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<sup>63</sup>I do not uphold the covenantalism of traditional Reformed orthodoxy nor am I advocating it. Instead, I prefer to advance a general doctrinal position that respects the Scripture and is inclusive of the full spectrum of orthodox biblical theological positions concerning the *pactum salutis*.

<sup>64</sup>“God, after He *spoke* long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has *spoken to us in His Son*, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (Heb 1:1-2, italics mine).

<sup>65</sup>“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:1-3); “And He [Christ] is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3).

<sup>66</sup>“The angel answered . . . ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God’ (Luke 1:35). It is implicit that the Spirit was sent by the Father in the act of causing the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ since Jesus refers to the first member of the godhead as his father.

glory of his grace (Eph 1:6, 12, 14) for all eternity. The oral-aural dimension, therefore, echoes beyond the eschaton and into eternity.

Redemption, therefore, is replete with an oral-aural dynamic in theodramatic action. Vanhoozer summarizes this aspect of salvation when he writes the following:

The faith by which the Spirit unites us to Christ comes through the hearing of the word. Perhaps this is why Hebrews 3:15 cites Psalm 95:7, 8: “if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” The voice in view is that of the triune God. Jesus is both spoken (by the Father) and speaks. Jesus engages in communicative action; he converses in public and private. Yet Jesus is also the Word of the Father. The Father utters the Word; the Son is what gets communicated, the content of the Father’s speech; the Spirit is the “channel” (air/wind/breath) that carries the word. This formula preserves the patristic insight that God’s works are indivisible (thus preserving the oneness of the divine nature) yet does justice to the biblical descriptions of the economy of communication (thus preserving the distinctness of the three persons’ work): the Father initiates communicative action; the Son executes it; the Spirit carries it to completion.<sup>67</sup>

Johnson provides some helpful insights on this indivisibility of the work of redemption with the aid of speech-act theory.<sup>68</sup> This section will explore Johnson’s proposal in the following paragraphs. In addition to conceptualizing justification and sanctification in new categories of thought that seem closer to Scripture, we shall also identify the oral/aural analogy implicit within them. This oral analogy shall provide further evidence of an analogical oral/aural theodramatic dynamic in redemption.

### **Johnson’s Alternative to the Justification/Sanctification Relationship**

Johnson proposes an alternative model to the justification-sanctification concept found in the “classical Reformed doctrine (CRD).”<sup>69</sup> The effort is to preserve the essence of the CRD doctrine while responding to the objections of its critics over the

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<sup>67</sup>Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 291.

<sup>68</sup>Eric L. Johnson, “Reworking the Justification/Sanctification Relation with Some Help from Speech Act Theory,” *JETS* 54 (2011): 767-85.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 767.

centuries. Johnson's proposal seeks to unify justification and sanctification into one declarative act with some insights from speech-act theory. The following summary shall list Johnson's insights.

**Redemption is a unified speech-act.** Similar to Vanhoozer's argument above, Johnson contends that the act by which a believer is counted righteous in Jesus Christ is a single, unified speech-act. This declarative theodramatic action is found in 2 Corinthians 1:19-22:

The Son of God, Christ Jesus . . . was not yes and no, but is yes in him. For as many as may be the promises of God, in him they are yes; wherefore also by him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. Now he who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

The "yes" in Jesus Christ is shown to be theodramatic with Jesus as the illocutionary act proceeding from the locution of the Father with the perlocutionary force (seal) of the Holy Spirit. Through our union with Jesus Christ, all of the different applications and statuses conferred upon believers are realized in the declaration of Jesus Christ as the Word of the Father through the channel (air/wind/breath) of the Spirit, this declaration being one among five illocutionary acts identified by John Searle.<sup>70</sup> These different statuses are what Johnson calls "subdeclaratives" which span the entire spectrum of salvific blessings conferred upon believers in union with Christ (Eph. 1:3).<sup>71</sup>

Johnson identifies numerous "subdeclaratives" within the unitary declarative act of salvation. Among these are the following:

election (Matt 24:22; Eph 1:4); union with Christ (Rom 8:1; Eph 1:3; Phil 1:1; 1 Pet 5:14); justification (Rom 5:1-2), including forgiveness of sin (Acts 10:43; 26:18; Col 1:14; 1 John 1:9, 2:2); death to the law/no condemnation (Rom 7:4; 8:1), and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer (Rom 4:3-5; 8:30; Gal 2:16-17; 3:6, 24), so that Christ becomes the believer's righteousness (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor

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<sup>70</sup>John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in a Real World* (New York: Basic, 1998), cited in Johnson, *Rewording*, 771.

<sup>71</sup>Johnson, *Rewording*, 774.

5:21); adoption (John 1:12; Rom 8:16-17, 21); 9:8; Gal 3:26; 4:5-7; Eph 1:4; Phil 2:15; Heb 2:13; 1 John 3:1-2, 10), including the believer's future inheritance (Acts 26:18; Eph 1:11, 14, 18; Col 1:12; 3:24; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:4); redemption, resulting in no longer being under the jurisdiction of the false ruler of this world, Satan (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 12:31; Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14); sainthood (Acts 26:18; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; Phil 1:1); personal reconciliation to the triune God (Rom 5:8-11; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Col 1:20-22); incorporation into God's people (Rom 9:25; 1 Pet 2:10) and membership in the body of Christ (Eph 4:12-16; 1 Cor 12-27; Eph 5:30); heavenly citizenship (Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20; Heb 12:22); belovedness (Rom 1:7; Eph 1:7; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13); and session with Christ in the heavens (Eph 2:6; Col 3:3), so that believers are said to be already 'complete' (*peplērōmenoi*, Col 2:10) and 'perfect' (*teteleiōken*, Heb 10:14).<sup>72</sup>

These "subdeclaratives" that occur simultaneously in the single, unified declarative act of Jesus Christ transpire paradoxically at four different times and places within redemptive history.<sup>73</sup> Johnson identifies four moments and places. The first occurred at the death of Christ (Matt 26:28; 2 Cor 5:21; Isa 53:10-12) and at his resurrection (Rom 1:4; Acts 13:33; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21). The second set of declarations occurs at the moment an individual professes faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 10:43, 13:38; Rom 5:1; 1 John 1:9, 2:2). The third group of declarations, according to Johnson, occurs perpetually in heaven. Since Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and believers through union with Christ are "seated with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6), believers perpetually hear these declarative pronouncements. Finally, at the eschaton believers will hear these same declarative statements uttered as they stand before the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>74</sup> The single declarative act then mysteriously occurs as a unified speech-act in four different occasions.

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 773.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 776-78. Johnson acknowledges, "It is challenging, to say the least, for temporal creatures like us to understand eternal realities. A model of four closely interrelated speech act episodes is simply an attempt to understand something of the 'eternal life' . . . of believers from the perspective of finite temporality" (ibid.).

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 777.

The divine illocutionary declaratives become perlocutions through the agency of the Holy Spirit.<sup>75</sup> Because of the effects of sin, these perlocutions are not visible immediately. Nevertheless, they will manifest themselves at some time if not at the end of the age. Thus, justification and sanctification are not separate but are in actuality part of the same, unitary declarative act of the Father pronounced in the Son and brought into effect through the agency of the Spirit. Many of these perlocutionary effects occur both immediately at the moment of a believer's conversion while others occur in a gradual process that Johnson calls "Christiformity," as opposed to sanctification since this process is one in which believers are conformed to the image of Christ.<sup>76</sup> Believers both receive a quickening of these perlocutionary effects through the Spirit and also may encourage their growth and maturation through the word of God in Scripture.

**Advantages over the CRD.** Johnson's model presents many advantages over the CRD of justification-sanctification. These improvements over the classical expression in the CRD may act as a fitting response to the criticisms leveled against it over the centuries. Johnson himself presents ten advantages which this section lists here:<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 199; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation* (Louisville: Westminster, 2007), chap. 10. Because within the trinitarian metaphysics which describe the triune God as communicative action in which the Father locutes, the Son is the illocutionary act, and the Spirit is the perlocutionary force: "The Spirit renders the word effective by achieving its intended perlocutionary intention" (Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 199, cited in Johnson, *Rewording*, 778).

<sup>76</sup>Johnson, *Rethinking*, 779. Johnson describes the immediate effects upon conversion to include regeneration (Titus 3:5; John 1:13), revivification or being made "alive unto God" (Eph 2:5), the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; 8:11; 1 Cor 3:19); freedom to love and obey God and the death of the old self (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:20), and the birth of the new self (2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:10). The long-term effects include mortification of the old self and fighting against the flesh (Rom 6; 8:13; Gal 5:16-20; Col 3:9-10), greater maturity of the new self (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10, 4:24), greater awareness of one's status as a child of God (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6); greater fellowship with fellow believers (Eph 4), greater capacity to witness to others of Christ; greater concern for the poor and the weak; and greater acceptance of suffering.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 783-84.

1. Johnson's proposal is inherently Trinitarian in that the Father locutes, the Son is the illocutionary act, and the Spirit is the perlocutionary force.
2. Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, Johnson's speech act model connects the analogies between the Godhead's verbal activity in creation (summarized above in the discussion of cosmology) and his verbal activity in the re-creation of believers in the work of redemption. This oral analogy underscores our contention stated within the second warrant of this chapter concerning the theodramatic oral analogy within the Trinitarian metaphysics, creation, now here in redemption and later shall be shown in the process of inscription of the Bible.
3. Both the status and the on-going transformation of believers are linked to the same declarative illocutionary act.
4. Johnson's model assists believers not to focus on their own self-effort or to concentrate exclusively on the activity of the Spirit but rather upon the Trinitarian work of God in redemption.
5. Johnson's proposal is inclusive of all of the statuses in redemption and not exclusively the judicatory, e.g., justification by faith.
6. Johnson believes that the illocutionary acts to perlocutionary effects corresponds with the latest theories of human psychological development. At adulthood, human beings elect to change primarily through interpersonal social discourse which is akin to the speech-act model that Johnson presents. Johnson's model, therefore, comports with our current understanding of human growth and development.
7. Johnson's model directly appeals believers to the goal of their redemption: conformity to the image of Christ.
8. The speech-act model highlights the indicative/imperative model of biblical theologians and augments it by noting the verbal indicatives (declarative acts) as well as the imperative goal that is in Christ.
9. Johnson's model emphasizes the necessity of faith contra Barth's Christocentric model. Barth's proposal unified justification and sanctification in Christ but minimized the necessity of professing faith in Jesus Christ as a necessary prelude to salvation. By contrast, Johnson's speech-act model "requires personal appropriation of the word of God by faith."<sup>78</sup>

**Johnson's Model of Declarative/  
Christiformative Salvation**

Divine Illocutions

Realization of Divine  
Perlocutionary Intent

The Father's Word

Effectual, Substantial  
Change by the Holy Spirit

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 784.

Declarative Salvation Salvation	Christiformative
Union with Christ	Empowered Holy Spirit
Justification: forgiveness	Righteousness
Sainthood	Becoming more holy
Adoption	Rights to inheritance
Reconciliation	Communion with God
Redemption from Satan	Godly choices
Membership in the Body	Capacity to love
Belovedness	Growth in relationships
Seated with Christ	Growth in the new self <sup>79</sup>

Having examined the Scripture evidence for an oral theodramatic emphasis on redemption, this section gives further backing for the second warrant. The chapter now proceeds to the final example as backing for the second *warrant*: examination of the theodramatic communicative action as Scripture.

### **Theodramatic Communicative Action as Scripture**

Having examined the oral-aural nature of Scripture in its composition from the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on its status as analogically oral divine communicative action. First, we will consider the continuity in the divine self-disclosure from the incarnation to the inscripturation of the biblical text. This relationship will pose ramifications concerning what actually constitutes a “Bible.” Specifically, we will be able to determine if an “oral Bible” is of equal status to Scripture as a written text. Next, we will examine the comprehensibility of Scripture as a written text. In both cases, we will witness the analogically oral characteristic of the theodrama.

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 785.

Let us begin with a study of the continuity between the hypostatic union and the composition of the biblical text. The word that is inscripturated expresses the will of the Father. Yet it speaks about the Son. And the Holy Spirit inspired and preserved the divine discourse, combining “spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (1 Cor 2). As acknowledged earlier, Scripture as the word of God is not separate from God and his theodramatic self-communication but is an extension of it. Scripture, therefore, is a concrete manifestation of the Trinitarian dialogue in that the Father locutes, the Son bears the illocutionary acts, and the Spirit acts as the perlocutionary agent. We could even say that there is some sort of parallel relationship between the theodramatic action resulting in the incarnation of the Son and the composition of Scripture, suggesting some sort of continuity in the divine self-disclosure.

At the same time, we must exercise caution, however, in proposing an analogical relationship between the hypostatic union and the inscripturation of the biblical text. Warfield writes, “There is no hypostatic union between the Divine and human in Scripture.”<sup>80</sup> Warfield’s declaration is valid. We should not infer that the relationship between the divine and human authors is a hypostatic union of a nature that is identical to the incarnation. To do so, we could then conclude that some sort of “divinization” of the human authors of Scripture might have occurred during the act of inspiration. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, however, does not suggest some sort of *theosis*. For this reason, we must surmise that any possible correlation between the hypostatic union and the inscripturation of the Bible is strictly analogical and not literal. To say otherwise is to fall into a fundamentalist error of deifying Scripture.

Yet it is not enough to say that an analogue exists between the divine and human natures of Christ and the divine-human authorship of the biblical text. We must

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<sup>80</sup>B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed), 162.

also specify where exactly such an analogical correlation takes place. Dockery and Nelson write, “It is not absolutely clear whether the analogy [between the divine and human in Jesus and in Scripture] can be applied to the human authors through whom God was active in the composition of Scripture or to the actual result of inspiration.”<sup>81</sup> We are wise then, to heed Dockery’s and Nelson’s caution and not make any hasty conclusions regarding any analogy between the incarnation and the composition of the Bible. However, we need not shrug our collective shoulders and consider the problem too difficult to solve.

In his description of divine discourse as theodramatic action, Vanhoozer asserts that Scripture is an extension of the divine communicative action. According to Vanhoozer then, both the inspiration of Holy Spirit upon the human writers and their written composition of Scripture are part of the theodramatic action. As mentioned in chapter one, the Holy Spirit’s role in the divine communicative action is to provide the perlocutionary effect. In the theodrama of the composition of Scripture, then, the Spirit acted as *the* Author who ensured the accuracy and reliability of the written Scripture. The Bible literally contains *God’s words written*, albeit through the conventions of human language and in the unique personalities of the individual human writers. This is why Vanhoozer asserts that the Bible is an extension of the divine communicative action. So then, relying on the theodramatic analogy of Vanhoozer, we can conclude that the analogical relationship between the divine and human natures in both the incarnation and the inscripturation of the biblical text is multi-layered. It includes not only the act of inspiration itself but also the final canonical form of Scripture.

Having concluded then that there is an analogy between the hypostatic union and the inscripturation of the biblical text (theodramatically in both the moment of

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<sup>81</sup>David S. Dockery and David P. Nelson, “Special Revelation,” *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 129.

composition and in the written text itself), we may perhaps use this analogue to assist us in drawing some theological conclusions about an “oral Bible.” This analogue between the divine and human natures of Christ and the divine-human authorship of Scripture may help us to form both descriptive and prescriptive conclusions about the nature of the Bible. Specifically, we may be able to ascertain the extent to which an “oral Bible” corresponds with the definition of what the Bible actually is.

Descriptively, the divine communicative action in both the incarnation and the written text of Scripture displays remarkable similarities. Consider, for example, the hypostatic union. According to Chalcedonian orthodoxy, Jesus Christ possesses both divine and human natures, in equal measure, in a mysterious union.<sup>82</sup> While in eternity, Jesus as the Word spoken by the Father, understood by the revised Scripture principle as the illocutionary act in the divine communicative action, is analogically oral. At the incarnation, however, the Holy Spirit’s power mysteriously caused the conception of Jesus, by which the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus Christ, who is the analogically “oral” utterance of the Father, stepped into time and became the Word, visible.

The formation of the canon of Scripture followed a course that is similar to the incarnation. As we already mentioned in chapter one, Scripture is an extension of the divine communicative action, which is an analogically oral theodramatic performance. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21) the oracles of God

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<sup>82</sup>The Bible defends both the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ. Scripture states that “the Word was God” (John 1:1); Thomas, one of the disciples, declared of Jesus, “my lord and my God” (John 20:28). As the second person of the Trinity, Jesus “possesses the fullness of the Godhead” (Col 2:9), which means that traditional Christian orthodoxy understands that Jesus Christ is fully divine. Scripture also defends the humanity of Jesus, who as the Word “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Hebrews explains that “since the children [human beings] share in flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus Christ] likewise also partook of the same” (Heb 2:14). Jesus Christ’s assumption of human nature is total, which is why the author of Hebrews further explains that “He had to be made like his brethren in all things” (Heb 2:17). Scripture and classical Christian orthodoxy alike affirm the full humanity of Jesus Christ.

(analogically oral divine communicative action) became written texts. In arguably most, though not all cases, much of what we have in Scripture began as oral pronouncements that were later written. Even epistles were dictated aloud to an amanuensis in the New Testament world. Once again the divine discourse transitions from what is heard to what is seen, and in the case of Scripture, read. The pattern of the manifestation of the Son of God, beginning orally and issuing visually, would seem to have an analogy in the temporal sequence of the oral-written nature of Scripture. This parallel also reveals the interdependence between the oral and visible or, in the case of Scripture, the written.

These parallels suggest that the inspiration of Scripture is analogous to the incarnation of Jesus Christ and is in fact an analogical expression of it as well as an extension of God's theodramatic activity. Both Jesus as the second person of the Trinity (the illocutionary act within the godhead's self-communicative activity) and the biblical canon are analogically "oral" communicative expressions of God followed by a visible or written manifestation—either the incarnation of Jesus or the composition of Scripture.

Bavinck writes,

The bearer of the ideal goods of humankind is language, and the *sarx* of language is the written word. . . . The central fact of revelation, i.e., the Incarnation, leads to Scripture. The Logos himself does not merely become a human but a servant, flesh. And the word of revelation similarly assumes the . . . form of Scripture. . . . The purpose is that God will dwell in His creatures and reveal His glory in the cosmos (1 Cor. 15:28). In a sense, this too is an incarnation of God. Scripture, too, is a means and an instrument, not a goal. It is the product of God's Incarnation in Christ and in a sense is its continuation.<sup>83</sup>

Tipton makes a similar point:

Just as Christ's person remains divine in the act of incarnation, so also the Spirit's Word remains divine in the act of inspiration. Just as assuming a human nature in the incarnation in no way compromises the divinity of the incarnate Word, so also using human intermediaries in the act of inspiration in no way compromises the

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<sup>83</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 380-81. This statement should be understood as metaphorical and does not compromise a robust understanding of inerrancy. If nothing else, the fact of an inerrant word within the weakness of finite human language underscores the unique status of God's special revelation.

divinity of the inspired Word. Jesus Christ remains truly divine, even though he assumes a human nature in the incarnation. The Spirit's Word remains truly divine, even though he employs subordinate human authors in the act of inspiration.<sup>84</sup>

Tipton's word is appreciated. However, we must remember that the correlation is analogical and not univocal. Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human. The pages of the Bible, copies of the original autographs written by human authors, are not divine in and of themselves. However, the words themselves are the perlocutionary result of the divine communicative action. Therefore, because of the divine communicative action in the written pages of Scripture, we can say that there is an analogical correlation between the incarnation and the word of God *written*.

Prescriptively, we can now make some conclusions about what a Bible actually *is*. Because the theodramatic action includes the written composition of Scripture and that it makes an analogical correlation to Christ's incarnation, we must therefore conclude that Scripture by definition must be written. God intended for his word to be written not only for "the well being (*ben esse*) of the Church but also for its existence (*esse*)."<sup>85</sup> Without the preservation provided the written text, we could possibly even face a compromise of the gospel message itself. Jensen affirms,

The gospel, therefore, depends for its very life, now as then, on the prior existence of a written word of God, and issues in the preached and then written words of Jesus. Even when Jesus Christ was preached to those without the written word, Gentiles, the activity itself was justified and explained by the promises of the Old Testament (Acts 15:15ff; Gal 3:6-9; Rom 15:7-9), and the new converts were inducted into a congregation that regarded the Scriptures as God's word written.<sup>86</sup>

The presence of the oral dimension within the Trinity, therefore, is backing for the first warrant of the claim in the argument. The understanding of God in

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<sup>84</sup>Lane G. Tipton, "Incarnation, Inspiration, and Pneumatology: A Reformed Incarnational Analogy," [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=109](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=109) (accessed August 8, 2013).

<sup>85</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1.2.2.6.

<sup>86</sup>Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God*, Contours of Christian Theology, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 58.

communicative action supports this warrant. The Trinitarian dialogue in creation, redemption, and the inscription of the word of God provide additional backing as well. Having made the case that God indeed speaks to us in the explication of the first ground, *that God communicates himself to us in loving covenantal dialogue via the (theodramatically revised) Scripture principle*, this chapter now proceeds to a second, equally important concern. This secondary consideration is as follows: can we be assured of accurately interpreting the meaning that God intends in his communication to us in Scripture. Vanhoozer deals with this issue in *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* This section shall summarize the salient aspects of Vanhoozer's argument as an affirmative response in the following sections.

**The death and resurrection of the author.** Vanhoozer acknowledges that the contemporary cultural climate in Western society is not very conducive to appeals to Scripture. Nevertheless, he endeavors "to articulate and defend, in the shadow of Derrida, that readers can legitimately and responsibly attain literary knowledge of the Bible."<sup>87</sup> He begins by describing the death of the author in contemporary hermeneutical non-realism.<sup>88</sup> In doing so, he engages perhaps the most noted proponent of hermeneutical non-realism, Jacques Derrida.

Jacques Derrida and his deconstruction represents nothing less than a full-frontal assault on the very structure of Western thought, philosophy, and art. When

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<sup>87</sup>Vanhoozer, *Is There A Meaning in This Text?*, 24. While I have touched on this issue previously with the notion of *mythos* in the Bible and in the speech-acts of divine discourse, I shall engage more directly with the detractors of a responsible realist hermeneutical approach to Scripture and explain why it is valid.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 48-49. Vanhoozer describes hermeneutical realism as "the metaphysical position which asserts that certain things are mind-independent" (*ibid.*). By contrast, hermeneutical non-realism asserts that "human language and thoughts do not correspond to objective realities or to stable meanings. What we cavalierly call 'reality' is rather a human construction, at least in part" (Timothy Williams, "Realism and Anti-Realism," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 746-48.

Derrida received an invitation to deliver a series of lectures on structuralism (the idea that language itself is structured in binary opposites)<sup>89</sup> at John Hopkins University in 1966, he actually advocated for the complete dismantling of any sense of structure. Instead, Derrida argued for *différance*, a play on words emphasizing freedom of the reader.<sup>90</sup> Concurring with Saussure, since words as signs refer to nothing but other signs, knowability is therefore completely impossible. Whereas Socrates bemoaned the technology of writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*, noting that writing creates distance between the author and the reader, Derrida reveled in writing and celebrated it over and above spoken language. As Vanhoozer notes, "[*Différance*] connotes both how signs *differ* from one another and how signs *defer* presence (e.g., a sign's reference to something other than a sign is endlessly postponed)."<sup>91</sup> Since we cannot know anything for certain about a given text other than the relation of one set of signs and their relation to other

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<sup>89</sup>Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959); originally *Cours de linguistique generale* (Paris: Payot, 1916), 120. As the father of Structuralism, Saussure believed that linguists should distinguish between *langue*, i.e., human language as an abstract system of signs, and *parole*, language as it is used in everyday discourse. The sounds or sign systems were arbitrary in nature, and one could only determine the meaning of a sign by its relation to other signs because binary opposites were the only way of knowing what words actually mean. The term "structuralism" originated in the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1967); idem, *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1967); idem, "The Structural Study of Myth," *JAF* 68 (October-December 1955): 428-44; idem, *The Raw and the Cooked*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); idem, *From Honey to Ashes*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); idem, *The Origin of Table Manners*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); and idem, *The Naked Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). Even in *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss betrays a structuralist binary division of civilization when he distinguishes between the *bricoleur* and the engineer. For a more complete history of Structuralism, see Edith Kurzweil, *The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). For a critique of Structuralism, see Simon Clarke, *The Foundations of Structuralism: A Critique of Lévi-Strauss and the Structuralist Movement* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1981).

<sup>90</sup>*Différance* is a play on the French word, *différence*. The pronunciation of both words is the same but *différance* is a misspelling that one cannot discern apart from reading. *Différance* is Derrida's principal contribution to metaphysics, only it destroys rather than builds since it eliminates the possibility of knowledge since the meaning of texts is an assortment of signs whose meaning is only determined by how they "differ" from one another as well as "defer" the presence of the author.

<sup>91</sup>Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text*, 63.

signs, “there is nothing outside of the text.”<sup>92</sup> Knowledge of reality outside of written language is impossible because “[t]here is no one way to relate language to the world.”<sup>93</sup>

Metaphysics, for Derrida, is a hopeless case of “logocentrism,” meaning that it is the unfounded idea that language and meaning have direct access to the world through the authoritative use of reason. Because “logocentric” thinking attempts to restrict *différance* as the play of meanings in order to assert its own meaning, it becomes rigid and oppressive. Any so-called orthodoxy marginalizes other points of view because it forbids the play on words. Appealing to authorial intent, even, is an oppressive act in that it promotes one possible interpretation amidst the myriad possibilities over and against all others. Derrida would, then, object to any appeal to an orthodox interpretation of Scripture according to his understanding on writing and language.

In response, Vanhoozer argues for the resurrection of the author by appealing to the writings of J. L. Austin and John Searle on speech-act theory. Since the use of language is communicative action (locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions), that definition extends even to written texts. Vanhoozer moreover argues that a text is “an extension of one’s self into the world, through communicative action.”<sup>94</sup> How much more so does this definition apply to divine discourse since the Triune God is communication in action. And if the text is “communicative action fixed by writing, then human authors are indeed ‘incarnate’ in their texts.”<sup>95</sup> Citing Thiselton, Vanhoozer writes, “[A] hermeneutic of an embodied text reflects an incarnational Christology, in which revelation operates through the interwovenness of word and deed. . . . The text is

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<sup>92</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

<sup>93</sup>Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?*, 65.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*

more than a ‘docetic’ or disembodied system of signifiers.”<sup>96</sup> Contra Derrida, there is a “presence” within the text, particularly the written text of Scripture, because the Spirit acting as the perlocutionary agent of its composition makes the Author’s presence felt even more powerfully.

Walter Ong also comes to the aid of Vanhoozer by offering a critique of deconstruction through orality research. Ong notes Derrida’s priority of writing to spoken language but objects that orality studies argue for the priority of the oral over the written within human discourse. Yet deconstruction is an ideology that critiques texts though it itself is a text-based manner of thinking. “The only way out,” Ong writes, “[is for] a historical understanding of what primary orality was, for primary orality is the only verbal source from which textuality can grow.”<sup>97</sup>

The analogically oral divine communicative action provides a way out for biblical interpretation. The divine discourse, with the Spirit acting as the perlocutionary agent, makes the text personable and even makes God “present” if texts are “embodiments” of their authors. The church may rely upon Scripture as its supreme norm without concern. The divine communicative action extended to Scripture makes it possible.

### **Conclusion**

The presence of an oral dynamic within the theodrama supports the second warrant: *There is an analogical oral dynamic within the divine communicative action as is witnessed within the Trinitarian economy, cosmology, redemption, and in Scripture.* Chapter four provided backing for this second warrant by identifying the oral dynamic at work within the Trinitarian economy, by presenting a linguistic cosmology, discussing

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*, New Accents, ed. Terence Hawkes (Padstow, UK: T. J., 1991), 169.

the use of speech-acts in redemption, and in defending the comprehensibility of Scripture as an extension of the divine communicative action. Together with the first warrant, there is sufficient reason to support the claim of the argument.

The next chapter will explain how Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle may function as a paradigm. As the chapter unfolds, it will refer to many of the conclusions from previous chapters. These occurrences are not unusual as they are evidence of the internal coherence of the argument. The chapter will also summarize the major components of the argument in this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 5

### *ACTA IN VERBA: A PARADIGM FOR ORALITY IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY*

#### **Introduction**

##### **Summary of the Argument for the Theo-Dramatically-Revised Scripture Principle**

The last four chapters have advanced the thesis, a claim from a Toulmin-model argument from practical reason, that *Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle is a suitable paradigm for the use of orality in missions and practical ministry*. This dissertation developed the argument by establishing two grounds. In chapter one, we considered the first ground: *God in divine communicative action is the means by which we know him through human utterances in the canon of Scripture*. Chapter one then proceeded with an explanation of the epistemological and hermeneutical assumptions concerning the knowability of God and the validity of God-talk through Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle.

Vanhoozer suggests several modifications to the classical Protestant understanding of the *principia*. His proposal not only resolves a tension between the object and means of theological inquiry but also answers contemporary epistemological and hermeneutical questions about how knowledge of God and what God says is comprehensible to finite, temporally and socially conditioned human beings. Among his changes to the classical understanding of the *principia*, Vanhoozer uses speech-act theory to describe God's divine self-disclosure, which includes the object of theological inquiry, God (*principium essendi*), with the means by which he is known, Scripture (*principium cognoscendi externum*), and adds the *missio Dei* as the hermeneutical matrix by which we

understand the divine communicative action. Since Vanhoozer understands divine communicative action as performative language, the analogy used to describe the divine self-disclosure is that of drama. Therefore, God's actions throughout redemptive history should be considered *theodramatic*.

Chapter 2 stated the second ground: *the dominant medium by which we send and receive communication (visual, auditory, etc.) impacts our noetic faculties as well as the manner in which we interpret the message as demonstrated by studies in orality*. The explanation of the second ground focused primarily on hermeneutical and psychological issues related to the medium by which communication occurs by summarizing the historical development of orality studies and the effects of various media of communication on human consciousness. While the first ground describes the manner of God's self-communication and its human reception, the second articulates how the medium of that self-communication is relevant to the human comprehension of it. After developing the two grounds in the first two chapters, the dissertation proceeded to delineate the two warrants.

The two warrants advanced the argument by stating the inferences made from the previously mentioned grounds. In chapter 3 the first warrant was discussed: *Orality is evident in both Scripture and Christian proclamation as indicated in the fields of biblical studies and in practical ministry, specifically in proclamation, missions, and evangelism*. Chapter 4 advanced the second warrant: *There is an analogical oral dynamic within the divine communicative action within the Trinitarian economy, cosmology, redemption, and in Scripture*. In chapter 3, we demonstrated how the divine communicative action has a pronounced oral dynamic in a variety of contexts, including the origins of Scripture as well as the nature of Christian proclamation in evangelism and missions. In chapter 4, we identified an oral analogy in the divine communicative action itself, starting with the Trinity and continuing through the acts of creation, redemption, and the inspiration of Scripture.

Of course, critics of the proposed paradigm may argue (according to the rebuttal cited in the outline of the argument in the first chapter) that the revised Scripture principle cannot account for every aspect of ministry. While that may be true, given that we cannot account for every conceivable ministry situation, the fact that we have selected a paradigm from theological prolegomena helps to ensure a wide range of applicability. Taken together, these warrants advance the claim that Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle may serve as a theologically-informed paradigm to guide the use of orality in missions and in practical ministry.

The remaining task and the burden of chapter five is to explain how the revised Scripture principle functions as a paradigm. First, we will consider Richard Osmer’s two-tiered description of the field of practical theology—(1) four metatheoretical domains which include the assumptions underlying practical ministry and (2) the four-fold methodological task of reflected practice—which provides a template that may assist in this chapter’s objective. Finally, we will examine how well Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle satisfies Osmer’s standards for practical theology, in order to demonstrate how it functions paradigmatically in missiological and practical theological concerns.<sup>1</sup>

### **Reflective Practice and Metatheoretical Domains of Practical Theology**

According to Osmer, practical theology is a discipline characterized by reflective practice.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that practical theology is concerned primarily with

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<sup>1</sup>Missiologists do provide their own paradigms for practice. I have deliberately selected Osmer’s conceptualization for practical theology for two reasons. First, orality strategies are not exclusively in international missions work but also in urban evangelism in Western countries. Practical theology, then, is inclusive of all aspects of ministry including international missions. Second, Van Rhee’s missional helix resembles Osmer’s four tasks of reflected practice but does not account for the metatheoretical assumptions like Osmer. A paradigm should begin with the metatheoretical domains before it influences reflected practice. See Gailyn Van Rhee’s “missional helix” in “Missiological Reflection #26: Missional Helix,” <http://www.missiology.org/?p=157> (accessed August 13, 2013).

*action*—albeit, action that involves deep reflection and is the result of careful consideration of the latest scholarship in the field. This reflective aspect leads to action that is shaped by wisdom, rather than a mere collection of techniques for the praxis of ministry. Reflective practice is also distinct from a theory-practice model (or even practice-theory-practice) because of the need to tailor its message according to the socio-cultural context. Studying theory and then applying it represents a bifurcated, rationalistic approach to practical theology. Practical theology, then, is both a hermeneutical and an empirical discipline.

Ministry as reflective practice has four essential tasks: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretive, the normative, and the pragmatic. The starting point in any practical theological project is the “descriptive-empirical task,” in which one attempts to describe the ministry setting as well as to identify the specific issue that is the focus of the investigation. Having gathered information on the topic of focus and its setting, it is then necessary to interpret the findings. This, Osmer calls the “interpretive task.” Next is the “normative task,” in which the practical theologian appeals to theological resources in order to provide direction regarding the issue within the ministry setting. Finally, having identified a fitting response to the ministry issue, the practitioner should describe the practical steps necessary to engage the subject in a manner that is sympathetic to the socio-cultural context in which one is located, which is the “pragmatic task.” Even informal practice of ministry follows a trajectory similar to the four-fold ministry task identified by Osmer.

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<sup>2</sup>Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1-30. Reflected practice is by no means the only manner in which to do practical theology. In contrast to a Barthian theory-to-practice model, a fundamentalist Bible-application model, or a traditional mainline Protestant dogmatics-application model, reflective practice involves the act of *doing* theology (arriving at normative conclusions based on Scripture and dogmatics and then performing them in a manner appropriate to a given socio-linguistic context).

Yet these four methodological tasks for practical theology are not the only aspects of the discipline. Necessarily underlying the reflective practice of ministry practitioners are the presuppositions that often unconsciously guide their reflection. Therefore, it is desirable for practical theologians to engage the discipline at the metatheoretical level. In metatheory, practical theologians identify the theological assumptions which shape the reflected practice of ministry. It is at the second tier of metatheory in which practical theologians are not of one accord. Though Osmer suggests there is a broad consensus regarding the four-fold task of reflective practice within the field of practical theology, he acknowledges that there is an enormous diversity and plurality of metatheoretical perspectives in the field.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Richard R. Osmer, "Practical theology: A Current International Perspective," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 67 (2011), <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67.i2.1058> (accessed August 13, 2013). Osmer identifies six different contemporary perspectives with regard to metatheoretical assumptions: (1) a postmodern transforming practice approach: Rebecca Chopp, "Practical theology and Liberation," in *Formation and Reflection*, ed. L. S. Mudge and J. N. Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Mowbray, 1996); (2) an American hermeneutical approach: Don Browning, *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); idem, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); James Fowler, "The Emerging New Shape of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: International Perspectives*, ed. F. Schweitzer and J. van der Ven (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Charles Gerkin, *The Living Human Document* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984); (3) a Dutch South African empirical approach: H. J. C. Pieterse, *Preaching in a Context of Poverty*, trans. Marcelle Manley (Pretoria: Unisa, 2001); (4) A Christo-praxis approach: Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); (5) an American neo-Aristotelian practices approach: Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice," in *Shifting Boundaries*, ed. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster, 1991); (6) an American Barthian approach: Deborah Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); James Loder, "Normativity and Context in Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: International Perspectives*, ed. F. Schweitzer and J. van der Ven (New York: Peter Lang, 1999). To this number I would add two other approaches: (7) pastoral (practical) theology in the classical tradition: Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983); Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster, 2001); (8) a Kuyperian or Dutch Reformed approach: Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007). Heitink identifies "eight different streams [of practical theology] . . . a kerygmatic stream (pastorate as proclamation, Thurneysen), the Calvinist stream (visitation and discipline), the sacramental stream (auricular confession), the hermeneutical stream (the encounter perspective), the pastoral-counseling movement (clinical pastoral training), charismatic pastoral care (ministry of healing, inner healing, K. J. Kraan 1983), evangelical pastoral care (in which the fundamentalist orientation of J.

Osmer identifies four essential categories of metatheoretical assumptions of practical theology: the *theory-praxis domain*, the *sources of justification domain*, the *models of cross-disciplinary work domain*, and the *theological rationale domain*. How practical theologians and missiologists approach orality in missions and practical theology is shaped by their conclusions in each of the four metatheoretical concerns. It is our contention that Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle has implications bearing on all four metatheoretical domains. While not stated explicitly, the current approach towards orality by various evangelical and mission organizations reveals implicit and explicit assumptions by ministry strategists among all of the metatheoretical domains. The direction from a theological paradigm, then, operates at the level of metatheoretical concerns. And orality research echoes into the very soul of Christian ministry since the oral analogy is prominent in Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle.

### **Paradigmatic Implications for Practical Ministry**

#### **Metatheoretical Domains**

**The theory-praxis domain.** This domain is concerned with the nature of practice as well as its complex relationship with theory. This emphasis on practice should come as no surprise since practical theology is concerned with *doing* ministry in a manner that is thoughtful, spiritually inclined, and ultimately wise in its execution. While practical theologians generally agree on the necessity of wise ministry practice, there is no consensus about what represents it. It might, therefore, be helpful to recount the quest of practical theologians for a "comprehensive theory of action" during the past century.

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E. Adams 1970 plays a major role), and the political pastorate (attention to political and social factors)" (Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 269. There is some overlap between Osmer's six perspectives and Heitink's eight streams. For the sake of brevity, this chap. will rely upon Osmer's description of the field of practical theology.

Practical theologians began discussing the necessity for a “theory of action” for the discipline in the mid to late twentieth century. They were certainly not the only intellectuals to do so. The last century witnessed a significant interest in “action theory” across a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, economics, sociology, and psychology.<sup>4</sup> It was only a matter of time before practical theologians engaged in the study of action theory as well. Political theorist Hannah Arendt argued that the 20<sup>th</sup> century focus on action was an example of the influence of modernity and its focus on science and technology.<sup>5</sup> While contemporary practical theologians today may not share the same motivation, many in the field continue to recognize the importance of “action theory.”

The German practical theologian Gerhard Krause was the first to describe practical theology as a “science of action” (*Handlungswissenschaft*) in 1967.<sup>6</sup> The trend continued through the nineties with Dutch practical theologian Gerben Heitink and the American Don Browning.<sup>7</sup> The intention of Krause, Heitink and others was to combine a rigorous scientific approach with their theological method. Since then, a “theory of action” has become prominent in most practical theological literature. The general consensus is that a theory-to-practice model is insufficient. Practical theologians are still working towards a general agreement regarding the philosophical approaches and human sciences upon which to rely in the formulation of a definitive “theory of action.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), s.v. “Action Theories,” by Robert Mager.

<sup>5</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), cited in Mager, s.v. “Action Theories”

<sup>6</sup>Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 127.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 125; Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 5-7, 39-41.

<sup>8</sup>Mager, “Action Theories.”

Beginning in the 1970s, some practical theologians began arguing that “action theory” was too rationalistic or pragmatic and began to suggest alternative models. Rudolf Bohren, for example, criticized action theories for their basis on studies of human action as opposed to God’s action.<sup>9</sup> The German practical theologian Günther Heimbrock has also criticized action research as too narrow, since it failed to take into account “nonactive dimensions of practice,” and suggested that it should concentrate more on “lived experience.”<sup>10</sup> As an alternative to a “theory of action,” some practical theologians (Bohren) have suggested an “aesthetic of action” (aesthetic referring to *vision*), preferring perception over action and favoring divine initiative over human activity.

Both the “theory of action” and the “aesthetics of practice” perspectives, however, have given us truncated views of human action. Most “theories of action” have highlighted the rational side of action, emphasizing active, deliberate intentionality to the neglect of passive states of human activity. In general, advocates for an aesthetic of action have given more attention to the sociological and psychological dimensions of human activity. Some practical theologians have advocated a “comprehensive model of action” that considers both active and passive mental states in addition to bodily state and the physical environment. Such a model, however, should not neglect to combine theological with anthropological insights. Indeed, a compelling *Christian* “theory of action” will have to consider the issue of indwelling sin, the reality of self-deception, as well as the influence of the word and Spirit in the life of the believer.

The above historical description, while not exhaustive, does illustrate the pertinent issues associated with the development of a “theory of action.” It also shows the range of

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<sup>9</sup>Rudolf Bohren, *Dass Gott schön werde: Praktische Theologie als theologische Ästhetik* (Munich: Kaiser, 1975), cited in Mager, “Action Theories.”

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

positions advanced by practical theologians in the past. Ballard and Pritchard list four models of theory-practice proposed by practical theologians over the last forty years:<sup>11</sup>

1. The applied theory model—This model is widely rejected in most academic discussions of practical theology, because it is considered simplistic in its direct line of application from theory.
2. The critical correlation model—A liberal-revisionist corrective to the earlier method of correlation model advocated by Paul Tillich.<sup>12</sup> The critical correlation model relies heavily on the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>13</sup>
3. The praxis model—This model builds from a foundation in critical theory (Paulo Freire) and liberation theology both of which have been influenced by Marxist theory.
4. The habitus/virtue model—This model represents a neo-Aristotelian effort to reclaim the virtue of *phronēsis* as relevant to practical theology and to renew an emphasis on ethics in practical theological method.

Vanhoozer offers a compelling alternative to these competing “theories of action.” Most of the others are fundamentally anthropocentric and reflect poor theological reflection, committing what Vanhoozer calls “Feuerbachian slips,”<sup>14</sup> or efforts at molding God in our image. Relying on a dramatic analogy, Vanhoozer begins with *divine* communicative action.<sup>15</sup> Ministry practice does not actually begin with

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<sup>11</sup>Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), 55.

<sup>12</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:59-65.

<sup>13</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>14</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17-21. Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach, a German anthropologist and philosopher, in *The Essence of Christianity*, argued that the Christian religion was nothing more than an idealized anthropology.

<sup>15</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Science*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984); originally published as *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns, Band I & 2, Handlungsrationality und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981). Habermas provided an interdisciplinary action theory for sociological science that relied on speech-act theory and Karl-Otto Apel’s transcendental pragmatics according to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. While Habermas’ sociological model for a “theory of action” relies on speech-act theory, it begins with anthropology and not theology. Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle, while not as complex as Habermas’s model, is nevertheless preferable, because it rightly begins with theology and not the human sciences. Many practical theologians embraced the model by Habermas, including Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 135-40, and Edmund Arens, *Christopraxis: A*

human agency, according to Vanhoozer's orientation, but with divine illocutions that lead ultimately to perlocutionary results in human responses that accomplish the *missio Dei*—God's mission to the world. Substituting the *theologia entis* with the *theologia dramatis*, Vanhoozer argues that God reveals his character and person through his communicative activity. Scripture, furthermore, is an extension of the divine self-disclosure to us. Finally, it is God's intention that we participate in this divine action by becoming co-actors in the theodrama of redemption. Theology is not a passive reflection on the eternal verities but an active participation in the divine communicative action.

The practice of theology then, according to Vanhoozer, is a dramatic event that expresses lived obedience to the divine imperatives in Scripture in communion with God. Because good theology should be practiced in communion with God, it is an extension of the theodrama and is our own participation in the *missio Dei*. In union with Christ (which is another example of the divine communicative action), ministry practitioners dramatically "perform" theology in relevant contexts.<sup>16</sup> These dramatic "performances" are extensions of the *missio Dei*. In the dramatic analogy, the Protestant canon of Scripture functions as the normative guide (the Script), and Vanhoozer recommends using practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) in the application of theological and ethical principles from Scripture. This practical wisdom considers the relevant social factors and an ethic that is guided by theodramatic virtue that is defined by fidelity to the commandments of the canon as understood by the traditions of the covenant community (company of actors).<sup>17</sup> Theodramatic virtue guides the ministry practitioners (actors) in what may

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*Theology of Action*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); originally published as *Christopraxis: Grundzüge theologischer Handlungstheorie* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1992), 7-36. Besides its rejection by other sociologists for its rationalistic tendencies, I also find Habermas's proposal lacking, in that it is altogether secular and neglects the theological dimension.

<sup>16</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 335-44.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 329, 332.

sometimes be the exigencies of the moment, similar to what occurs in improvisation in acting. Thus, new theodramatic performances of the text are both improvisatory and guided by theological virtue in union with Christ.<sup>18</sup>

While general hermeneutics, as well as the human and social sciences, can certainly assist in the application of practical wisdom, these fields ultimately are dependent upon Scripture concerning their methodological presuppositions and application. Since the practices and traditions of the congregation (company of actors) are subject to the canon, the hermeneutical approach resembles a spiral rather than a circle. The human sciences would likewise be based on the proposed linguistic cosmology (summarized in chapter four).

Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle does not offer a fully-developed "theory of action." However, together with other acceptable models, it can supply the theological norms and guidelines governing the whole. German sociologist Hans Joas has argued for such a comprehensive theory of action. Perhaps, following the recommendations of Joas, Vanhoozer's model could supply the necessary theological guide. Vanhoozer's theodramatic "theory of action" serves not only as a corrective to other competing action theories in practical theology; it also establishes the priority of the sources of justification within the discipline.

**Sources of justification domain.** As we explained earlier, sources of justification is concerned with the manner in which a practical theologian references the norms of Christian theology, be they Scripture, tradition, reason, culture and experience. Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle upholds the classical Protestant position of *sola Scriptura* yet in a way that is attentive to contemporary epistemological, hermeneutical, and socio-linguistic concerns. Vanhoozer takes the other traditional

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 335-44.

sources of justification seriously while at the same time rightly affirming the priority of Scripture.

Vanhoozer argues that Christian theology should seek to develop a covenantal wisdom that is not only interested in right thinking with regard to a presenting issue in ministry, but also with right emotions and right actions. In order for this to happen, however, the canon must have ultimate authority over the life of the believing community. Practical wisdom does not function as an autonomous judge of Scripture, but is a necessary part of the process of interpreting the canon and formulating the proper action in a particular socio-linguistic context, itself subject to correction by Scripture. Whenever one part of Scripture seems indecipherable by practical wisdom, churches—acting as interpretive communities—should examine other relevant passages, to gain additional light on the theological issue in question. This is the hermeneutical principle as known as the *analogia Scriptura*—the analogy of Scripture. Scripture then, is authoritative over reason and not vice versa. Even when the interpreter of the biblical text discovers a more correct interpretation of a passage through the use of reason, the basis of determining the soundness of that interpretation should be other passages of Scripture.

Vanhoozer’s understanding of the role of reason in interpreting Scripture differs from what has been known as traditional evangelicalism. Instead of giving priority to a verbal-propositional understanding, Vanhoozer prefers a theodramatic approach.<sup>19</sup> While he may overstate his case, Vanhoozer is rightly concerned that enlightenment rationalism dominated classical evangelicalism.<sup>20</sup> In their earnestness to

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<sup>19</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*.

<sup>20</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation: Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics,” *JETS* 48 (2005), 108, cited in Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 107. Vanhoozer writes, “It is Scripture that reveals God, not a set of detached propositions. Revealed truths are not abstract but

defend the authority and reliability of Scripture, many classical evangelicals had unwittingly set up a system of norms (*a priori* assumptions of human reasoning) that had *supplanted* Scripture as the norm of norms.

Vanhoozer's version of postfoundationalism is far removed from a relativistic antirealism, but is an earnest attempt to move evangelical theology beyond its recent turn towards a more rationalistic orientation. A proper evangelical theology must not be based on a type of *foundationalism* (Descartes, Leibniz) which ultimately justifies belief on the basis of rational argument. Neither should it embrace *coherentism*, which justifies beliefs by appealing to the inner unity of its teaching (Kant).<sup>21</sup> Following Bloesch's proposal in a modified fashion, I suggest evangelical theology is based on a *fideistic revelationism*.<sup>22</sup> Or perhaps we could label it, a *canonical fideism*.<sup>23</sup>

We need not endorse the somewhat extreme terms that Vanhoozer uses to label his orientation (postfoundationalism, postconservative, postmodern theology) to appreciate his concerns to call evangelicalism to a renewed commitment to the form of Scripture, a goal that other evangelicals such as Carl Henry shared in principle. Whereas Vanhoozer preserves his evangelical commitments, his choice of terminology at times gives him some rather odd theological bedfellows. The *canonical fideism* that I am recommending rightly places priority of Scripture over reason without dismissing the role of reason in interpreting the message of the canon. It is also, in my understanding, a close understanding of Vanhoozer's position without using some of his extreme terms.

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canonically concrete. This is our evangelical birthright—truth in all of its canonical radiance, not a diluted mess of propositionalist pottage” (Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation,” 108).

<sup>21</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority & Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 21.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

I have selected the term *canonical* over Bloesch's *revelationism* for two reasons. First, *canonical* is reflective of Vanhoozer's emphasis on the divine communicative action. Second, I wish to distance this position from identifying revelation with a Barthian encounter with God through His mighty acts, and thereby undermining Scripture's regulative power by suggesting that it *contains* rather than *is* the word of God. As the word of God, and therefore, divine communicative action, Scripture *is* the authoritative communication of God to humanity.

Finally, a *canonical fideism* is also *theodramatic*. Whether we choose to call it effectual calling or prevenient grace, true evangelical belief is impossible apart from God's initiative. It is divine communicative action that is itself part of the theodrama. In union with Christ, the believer shares in the *mythos* of Scripture by identifying with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and thus becomes a participant in the divine drama of redemption. Subsequent acts of obedience following conversion likewise are continuations of the mission of God working in the lives of believers and their participation in the church (company of actors).

The revised Scripture principle also addresses the issue of the proper role of tradition. Contra Lindbeck's post-liberal project that places priority in theological epistemology with one's interpretive communities,<sup>24</sup> theology should not be developed by cultural-linguistic communities whose own "pattern of use" of the text of Scripture is the source of authority.<sup>25</sup> Conceiving of the practice of theology as a dramatic performance of Scripture, Vanhoozer offers a way to help us understand the relationship between Scripture and tradition. For example, actors may study previous performances of the same play and how previous directors interpreted the script, but the script is still

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<sup>24</sup>George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

<sup>25</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 151; Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*, 106.

the authoritative source giving direction for the dramatic production. Citing David Kelsey, Vanhoozer argues that Scripture is what declares the identity of the church and describes its mission. Tradition, on the other hand, is the sum total of all church teachings and practices over the years since its founding that regulates the church's use of Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

According to the revised Scripture principle as a paradigm, Scripture has priority over tradition, though the church's relationship between the two is complex. In terms of theodramatic participation, one congregation's performance of the Script may be a more faithful interpretation than that of another congregation. The reason is that much of the canon itself was a theodramatic performance before it ever became words printed on a page.<sup>27</sup> The theodrama began with the divine communicative action that resulted in the inspired human actions which eventually produced the written canon. The human actors within the biblical narratives likewise performed and were supporting actors in the divine self-disclosure. Since Christ's ascension and the close of the canon, the church now has the responsibility to continue faithful dramatic performances by relying on the canonical Script as its authority. Inevitably, some teachings and practices will become the "tradition" which guides individual congregations in their theodramatic performance of the Script. Canonical virtue will determine if church traditions are "fitting" interpretations of the canonical Script.

These performances are both improvisatory and *mimetic* (Gk. *mimēsis*, imitation). They are improvisatory in that churches perform the Script by improvising according to the exigencies of the ministry need in question within a particular socio-linguistic context. They are *mimetic* in their reflection of the previously-enacted theodramatic performances recorded in the Script. The performances are also *mimetic*

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<sup>26</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 152.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

insofar as they reflect the life and teachings of Christ, who is himself the exact representation of the Father regarding his character. Over time, these performances follow a particular style of interpretation that becomes tradition. A tradition then becomes a guide for future performance, but is not the final authority. Each performance is unique, in that it is not a rote mechanical reproduction of the words and actions in the Script. Instead, each performance represents a dynamic interpretation that considers the modern setting while seeking to be faithful to the divine authorial intent latent in the Script. Therefore, all traditions are subject to revision by returning again and again to the Scripture, which alone is Christianity's norm of norms.

Similarly, human experience cannot be the authoritative guide of church practice. Responding to Schleiermacher, Vanhoozer writes, "Christian experience on its own is too varied and unreliable to serve as the ultimate criterion for our knowledge of God."<sup>28</sup> In his tri-perspectivalism, however, Frame does recognize a legitimate role for human experience. The existential perspective indicates that everything that we perceive is tintured by our own socially-conditioned, time-bound understanding. The world that we perceive, however, is more than a social construct, however, because it is based on the word of Christ and is, furthermore, a concrete reality outside of our own limited powers of perception. With Frame, then, we must acknowledge the rightful place of experience in our own knowledge of reality. Contra Schleiermacher, however, we must not make everything else contingent to our own experience. Vanhoozer's explanation of performing doctrine in various socio-linguistic contexts helps us understand the correct use of our own experience in the light of Scripture.

Concerning human experience, Vanhoozer defends the study of the local congregation's social setting and current historical situation.<sup>29</sup> This allows for empirical

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 317-21.

study (both quantitative and qualitative analysis) that can inform the church (company of actors) what dramatic interpretation best informs its unique performance of the Script. As with the other sources, the human sciences and human experience are still under the authority of the Script, and not the converse. A Christian cosmology, as proposed in chapter four, will hopefully be able to resolve potential conflicts between theological conclusions and those interpretations derived from empirical observation.

**Models of cross-disciplinary work domain.** This domain in practical theology involves the identification of various disciplines used in ministry practice, such as the classical disciplines of theology and the human sciences, and the interrelationship between these different fields. In this domain, practical theologians also consider the question of what fields or disciplines *should* be involved in the practical theological discussion.

An examination of the various facets of Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic theology reveals how he employs all of the theological disciplines (practical, philosophical, systematic, biblical, exegetical theology, and hermeneutics). The use of speech-act theory to explain the divine self-communication suggests that philosophical hermeneutics and an analytic philosophy of language are relevant to the theological task. A reliance on the theological interpretation of the Bible merges biblical and systematic theology. The dramatic emphasis on practice also invokes the contribution of a "theory of action" to the practical theological side of the discipline. Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic theology, therefore, combines hermeneutics, biblical, systematic, philosophical and practical theology. While his methods are different, the end result is similar to the objectives in Browning's fundamental practical theology.<sup>30</sup> Yet there are other disciplines relevant to practical theology besides the different fields of theology.

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<sup>30</sup>Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 7-8. Browning believed that all theology is practical and that all of the other theological disciplines (hermeneutics, biblical exegesis, biblical theology,

Using the theodramatically-revised-Scripture principle as a paradigm for practical theology would also seem to entail the addition of orality studies into its interdisciplinary matrix. Orality, in fact, serves, along with speech-act theory and a theological interpretation of Scripture, as links to the other disciplines in this proposed paradigm for practical theology. Starting with the theological disciplines, performative research in biblical studies draws heavily from the insights of orality research while also using discourse analysis, narrative criticism and speech-act theory.<sup>31</sup> The insights of this discipline and its related sub-disciplines could enhance our understanding of the biblical text.<sup>32</sup> But orality research relates to more than biblical studies, since it, along with speech-act theory, binds all of the other disciplines together. Likewise, in light of the oral analogy in the divine self-communication, orality is even relevant to systematic theology. The insights of orality research also are relevant for philosophy of language, so that

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historical theology, systematic theology, and strategic practical theology) contribute to the discipline of practical theology. Each discipline is important and plays a contribution to the overarching goal of theological *praxis* exercised in wisdom. Browning divides theology into four broad categories: *descriptive theology*, *historical theology*, *systematic theology*, and *strategic practical theology*.

<sup>31</sup>Performance criticism is defined as a field of biblical studies that “Embraces many methods, including Historical Criticism, Narrative Criticism, Form and Genre Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Rhetorical Criticism, Textual Criticism, Orality Criticism, Speech Act Theory, Social-Science Criticism, Linguistic Criticism, The Art of Translation, Ideological Criticism, Theater Studies, and Oral Interpretation Studies. [It] Reframes the biblical materials in the context of oral/scribal cultures of the early church, aspects of which include the performance event, performer, audience, context, and text; [c]onstructs scenarios of ancient performances; [l]earns from contemporary performances of these materials through the translation, preparation, and performance of a text for group discussion of the performance event; [r]einterprets biblical materials accordingly” (David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Temple Studies—Part I,” *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 36 [2006]: 118-33, <http://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org/index.php/component/content/article?id=12:what-is-performance-criticism&catid=3> [accessed May 30, 2013]).

<sup>32</sup>Holly Hearon, “The Implications of Orality for Studies of the Biblical Text,” in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark: Essays Dedicated to Werner Kelber*, ed. Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 5. Hearon writes, “[T]he internal structure of the Sermon [on the Mount] is not thematic but sequential. Sections and ideas are linked together on the basis of sound rather than themes, [suggesting] . . . that sound was an integral component of rhetoric: how a text was received depended not only on what was said but also on the sounds employed to say it” (ibid.).

orality research also has a bearing on philosophical theology. Given its reliance upon the text of Scripture, orality research can also enrich dogmatics.

Though Scripture is the ultimate authority on all matters pertaining to daily living for evangelicals, biblical studies and theology may benefit from an asymmetrical dialogue<sup>33</sup> with the natural and human sciences as suggested in chapter four. Whereas Scripture should shape the Christian's interpretation and use of the sciences, they in turn can inform our reading of Scripture and our theological conclusions. This interactive process goes ever on in a hermeneutical spiral. Though there is a broad qualitative distinction between Scripture and creation, there is nevertheless the common link<sup>34</sup> that both are forms of divine discourse.

Since creation and canon are forms of divine discourse, our interaction with them creates a synergy. As Vanhoozer understood that there was a dialogical relationship between the various genres of Scripture, so we might take this a step further and consider the various sciences as dialogically-related subgenres. So, perhaps canon and creation can be construed as macro-genres since each has its own subgenres. This is clearly the case with regard to the canon which has different genres such as epistle, narrative, prophecy, and so on.<sup>35</sup> Genre is metaphorical with regard to the creation, but perhaps we could consider each of the natural and human sciences and liberal arts as a different genre. The relationship between canonical genres and creational genres is asymmetrical, since the canon contains the divine discourse that is primarily *sapiential* and hermeneutic,

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<sup>33</sup>*DTIB*, s.v. "Dialogism," by Susan M. Felch.

<sup>34</sup>Calvin referred to the *duplex cognitio Dei* or "the two-fold knowledge of God," in which creation speaks only of God as creator and as judge of sin while Scripture as special revelation provides greater detail of information. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. MacNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.6.2.

<sup>35</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Mikhail Mikhāilovic Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, Slavic Series, no. 1, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

providing the “lenses”<sup>36</sup> necessary for the proper interpretation of itself and everything else, while creation is constituted by the divine discourse that results in *scientia* and is ancillary to the canonical message. The differences within the canon and the creation, as well as between themselves, constitute a unified message in that they are both “poetic” compositions (as recounted in chapter 4). Coming from the “mouth” of the same Author, both of these “poetic” compositions of creation and canon reflect the same *mythos* or religious ground motive of creation-fall-redemption that bestows a coherent narrative intelligibility to the divine discourse found in each.<sup>37</sup>

The disciplines of theology and the natural and human sciences (both quantitative and qualitative) are therefore fundamentally compatible with one another. While canon is the Script which provides the wisdom and knowledge essential to the dramatic performance, empirical research has an important role to play. Even informal ministry practices (by laity or informally trained pastors) include a general survey of the ministry surroundings, though they may lack the sophistication of statistics or qualitative research methods. So, academic practical theology will benefit from direct engagement with the natural and human sciences so long as the canon of Scripture provides the ultimate interpretive guidance along the way.

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<sup>36</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.vi.1. Calvin writes, “For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but, when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly” (ibid.).

<sup>37</sup>The linguistic cosmology which chap. 4 explained in greater detail combines elements of both analytic and continental philosophy. While both canon and creation are both narrational in their “poetic” composition they are also intelligible in that both contain divine illocutions. Thus, to reference Nietzsche, theodrama acts as a bridge which spans the Apollonian and Dionysian divide of Mt. Parnassus and also demonstrates why all disciplines and fields of study should still consider theology to be the queen of the sciences and its practice to be the art of arts. See Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster, 2002), 20-45.

**Theological rationale domain.** This metatheoretical domain consists of the core theological assumptions governing how the practical theologian operates as well as guiding the utilization of the other metatheoretical domains. Decisions made within this domain, therefore, have ramifications for the commitments made in the other three. The two grounds of the main argument developed in this dissertation in chapters one and two form the underlying theological rationale and affirm *Sola Scriptura* as an extension of the divine communicative action.<sup>38</sup> In this section we will summarize the arguments from those chapters to see how they form the substance of this domain for the sake of this project.

The first ground reads as follows: *God in divine communicative action is the means by which we know him through human utterances in the canon of Scripture.* Because the Trinity is communicative action and Scripture is an extension of the communicative action of God (as seen in chapter 4), Scripture is not simply a collection of abstract knowledge but in reality creates an opportunity to interact with God himself.<sup>39</sup> Since Scripture is an extension of God’s character and purpose, God and Scripture must be understood in relation to each other.

The second ground reads: *the medium by which we use language to send and receive communication (visual, auditory, etc.) impacts our noetic faculties as well as the manner in which we interpret the message as demonstrated by studies in orality.* In

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<sup>38</sup>I am well aware that using the same arguments simultaneously as the two grounds of the argument as well as one of the resulting metatheoretical domains is vulnerable to the charge of using circular reasoning or committing a tautological argument. In both instances, I had to argue beginning from the core assumptions of the theological position. Any kind of first theology or first philosophy for that matter is inherently tautological in that it is compelled to refer back to its core assumptions in order to validate what it is saying. The arguments in support of Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle are no different.

<sup>39</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 35. Vanhoozer writes, “[O]ne can neither discuss God apart from Scripture nor do justice to Scripture in abstraction from its relation to God. For if the Bible is a species of divine communicative action . . . we are not dealing merely with information about God; we are rather engaging with God himself—with God in communicative action. The notion of divine communicative action forms an indissoluble bond between God and Scripture” (ibid.).

chapter two we examined two competing philosophies of orality studies, the unilinear evolutionary model and the contextual or ideological approach, and found elements from both of them to be compelling. The medium of language *does* have a noetic effect on human consciousness but does not act independently of other considerations. Sociological factors including economic, social, and power relations will also have a profound influence on the use of media and how media shapes the individual members of a population as well as the culture as a whole. However, sociological theories and concerns cannot provide the Christian's ultimate norms, governing all other considerations. On the contrary, any presuppositions from sociology are subject to the critique of Scripture. Orality studies, like speech-act theory, intersect all other disciplines within the cross-disciplinary matrix of our paradigm (as was noted in chapters 3 and 4). Beginning with an analogical oral dynamic within the divine communicative action, proceeding to the oral traditions and composition of Scripture, and culminating in all ministries of proclamation (preaching, teaching, counseling, evangelism and missions), we have seen that orality is basic to every facet of the practice of Christianity. Orality is also involved in every aspect of the creation (as was found in chapter 4). Consequently, orality studies can legitimately, though subordinately, contribute to the theological rationale for the proposed paradigm.

In conclusion, Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle can be articulated in a way that corresponds to each of Osmer's four metatheoretical domains in the discipline of practical theology. Therefore, it would seem to succeed as a paradigm for the use of orality in practical ministry. We turn now to consider how practical theologians might *use* the revised Scripture principle with respect to a relevant ministry question. We will examine the principle with respect to the second tier of Osmer's practical theology, the four tasks of reflective practice.

### **The Four Tasks of Reflected Practice**

As noted above, Osmer contends that most practical theologians have reached a general consensus concerning the actual performance of practical theology as a “reflective practice,”<sup>40</sup> which consists of four tasks: the descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic.<sup>41</sup> Each is important in the performance of practical ministry. The assumptions of the four metatheoretical domains that issue from one’s adopted paradigm will determine the methodological trajectory along which practical theologians will undertake these tasks.

While many hermeneutical, philosophical and theological issues have been addressed in the course of this dissertation, it would be erroneous to believe that its conclusions have no practical relevance for ministry practitioners who use oral strategies in various socio-linguistic contexts. Practical wisdom recognizes the need to balance rigorous academic study with technical skill and ethical/spiritual depth. In order to demonstrate the practical application of the proposed theological paradigm for orality, however, we will consider how the proposed paradigm influences the execution of the four tasks of practical theology. This will be done by evaluating an important issue in the orality movement among missiological circles, which is the viability of an “oral Bible” in missions and evangelism. This discussion will serve as a case study for the proposed paradigm by demonstrating how it works along each of the four tasks of reflective practice.

#### **The Descriptive-Empirical Task**

Since practical theology is a ‘theory of action,’<sup>42</sup> it is only commenced within a ministry context. Furthermore, if thoughtful reflection is to occur in the practice of

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<sup>40</sup>Osmer, “Practical Theology,” 3.

<sup>41</sup>Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 1-30.

<sup>42</sup>Mager, s.v. “Action Theories.”

ministry, the first task is to describe the ministry setting and the conditions therein.<sup>43</sup> Many practical theologians perform this task with fieldwork using quantitative or qualitative research. However, because the scope of the practical theological question is global, a brief history referencing the term “oral Bible” is in order, since a comprehensive qualitative or quantitative analysis is impractical for this dissertation. This case study will include a definition of an “oral Bible,” detail how the conception of an “oral Bible” developed, as well as chronicle the biblical and practical justification for it. This section will conclude with a description of the ministry strategy preferred by most proponents of an “oral Bible.”

First, we must consider the definition of an “oral Bible.” One important definition was given in chapter 1, where an “oral Bible” was defined as

the Bible portions that a person can recall from memory and retell with reasonable accuracy. An Oral Bible is one which the possessors know as ‘oral tradition,’ that is, a Bible known by stories, passages, proverbs and memory verses that have been heard and remembered and can be told to others. An Oral Bible exists only orally. It is not written down. It is not *The Oral Bible* as it is neither a fixed Bible nor a complete Bible as it depends upon how much is learned and how much is remembered. But to those who remember the words of the Bible it is to them just as much a Bible as written Bibles are to the literate. . . . Not everyone is in agreement about what an Oral Bible consists of, nor do they agree on how an Oral Bible should be acquired, or even if it is truly “Bible.”<sup>44</sup>

Slack, Lovejoy, and Terry provide their own definition of an “oral Bible” that includes at least one concept that the previous definition does not. For this reason, hereafter I will refer to their understanding of an “oral Bible” as the “oral Bible sufficiency” position, or OBS. They write,

An “oral” Bible is one which people know as “oral culture”, that is, a Bible known by stories, passages, proverbs and memory verses the people have heard and remembered so they can recall them and retell them to others. The “oral” Bible exists only *orally*. It is not written down. *It is God’s Word to oral culture people*

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<sup>43</sup>Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 31-78.

<sup>44</sup>“The Oral Bible Concept,” <http://www.davidsills.org/downloads/OralBibleConcepts.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2013).

*just as much as God's Word in written form is to literate people.*<sup>45</sup>

In an IMB website dedicated to orality methods in ministry, Robin Green's MA thesis in applied linguistics states the following:

[T]ranslators do not need to fear employing oral style in order to produce an acceptable translation for oral communicators. . . . Furthermore, in order to be effective, an oral translation must not be considered a stopgap measure by translators. Malmstrom wrote, "In most situations where SIL [Summer Institute of Linguistics] teams work, non-print media are used to promote the use of written materials. They are not viewed as a substitute, but as a supplement" . . . I suggest that they are neither substitute (implying inferiority) nor supplement (implying insufficiency), but a more appropriate alternative (implying equality). If the translator's attitude is that the oral translation is stopgap, how can the people accept it as a real translation? It is not a means; it is an end—as much as any other translation is an end. . . . [T]he original oral translation should not be viewed as a bridge to the "real" (written) translation that will come later when the people are "smart" (literate) enough to understand it.<sup>46</sup>

Essentially, Green suggests that an "oral Bible" translation for oral communicators is equal in status and importance to a written translation. Linguists should not consider an "oral Bible" translation as somehow inferior to a written translation. So long as the oral translation faithfully conveys the content of Scripture in the receptor language, according to Green, Bible translators have performed their task. The "oral Bible" may, in fact, be more appropriate than a written copy.

OBS advocates do not discourage Bible translation efforts that seek to produce a written translation of Scripture. They do indicate, however, that a significant number of people in oral cultures would prefer an "oral Bible" over a written copy. Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry write,

**With an "oral" Bible is a written Bible still needed?** An "oral" Bible in most cases will simply be a precursor to a people's receiving the written Word which they can read and study for themselves. Usually some literacy strategy will follow the teaching of the "oral" Bible after believers are established and a church planted. For

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<sup>45</sup>Italics mine. Grant I. Lovejoy, James B. Slack, and J. O. Terry, eds., *Chronological Bible Storying: A Methodology for Presenting the Gospel to Oral Communicators* (Ft. Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), Part VII of X, 2, <https://www.oraltystrategies.org/resources.cfm?id=459&Search=grant%20lovejoy> (accessed January 6, 2014).

<sup>46</sup>Robin Green, "An Orality Strategy: Translating the Bible for Oral Communicators," <https://oraltystrategies.org/resources.cfm?id=673&t=5> (accessed January 6, 2014).

those older members of a society with impaired vision or mentally beyond literacy the “oral” Bible is the only Bible. For younger members of a society there will likely be a strong interest in learning to read the Bible for themselves. Often it is practical only to provide a New Testament in the heart language of a people. The Old Testament can still be given orally. It is needed for a complete understanding of the New Testament message.<sup>47</sup>

Missiologists and missions strategists indicate that an “oral Bible” is not arranged exactly like a written copy of Scripture. The memory capacity of an individual simply cannot retain all of Scripture. Instead, an “oral Bible” should represent the overarching narrative encompassing the Old and New Testaments. Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry further describe the format of an “oral Bible”:

The best structure would be to follow the historical timeline of the Bible story itself. This organization of the Old Testament material allows for easy expansion of already known stories about characters by simply referring to where the new stories fit into the narrative. The strict historical structure is not so evident after the Gospels and the book of Acts. The timeline of Paul’s missionary work can give a structure for the material in the Epistles. Conversely, the historical timeline may be temporarily paused in order to cover selected material in the Epistles according to discipling needs of the people. The story from pre-Creation (creation of spirit world) to the Ascension will be the (?) panorama of God’s work and revelation of His characteristics.<sup>48</sup>

The proponents of the OBS position believe that the size of any given “oral Bible” varies from mission context to mission context. The ministry issues and worldview assumptions of the target people group will determine the selection and number of stories by the ministry practitioner. Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry write,

Ideally, all of the Bible would be best. However, a practical “oral” Bible would consist of enough of the Bible story to give an overview or panorama of the story of God’s affair with man beginning with Creation, including selected stories of the patriarchs, stories of God’s people, the prophets with their warnings and promises of what God was going to do, the story of Jesus and His death, resurrection and ascension, the young church and spread of the Gospel, enough of the Epistles to admonish new believers in their daily life, and the end times when Jesus returns for the faithful, judges the faithless, and punishes the evil ones. This can be done in about 100 stories typically taught over a two year period.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry, *Chronological Bible Storying*, Part VII of X, 2-3.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 2.

Having provided different definitions and descriptions of an “oral Bible,” we turn now to consider a brief history of the development of the “oral Bible” concept. It originated when missiologists considered the problem of advancing the proclamation of the gospel to unreached people groups (UPGs) with the limited resources of Bible translation societies. As stated in chapter 3, Green writes that currently there are over two thousand, two hundred fifty-two people groups (representing three hundred fifty million people) without any Scripture in their own language.<sup>50</sup> Green further adds that there are hundreds more languages with only a few chapters of translated Scripture. As a result, current need clearly outstrips the capacity of translation agencies such as Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT) and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Bible translation agencies, it seemed, lacked the time, resources, and personnel necessary to reach the current generation with Scripture in their own language.

The other concern revolved around the issue of literacy. Slack notes that many governments are quick to broaden their definition of “literate” in the hope of securing international loans.<sup>51</sup> This practice leads to inflated numbers of supposedly literate people. In some cases, Slack notes, merely attending one year of grade school or the ability to read a voting ballot qualifies an individual as being “literate.”<sup>52</sup> The implication is that illiteracy or non-literacy is more pervasive than is commonly reported, with some estimates of illiteracy being as high as seventy percent.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ron Green, “The Oral Story Bible: A Breakthrough Strategy in Rapid Engagement Among Unreached; Lausanne Conference at Capetown 2010 Advance Paper,” [http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10760#article\\_page\\_2](http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10760#article_page_2) (accessed August 5, 2013).

<sup>51</sup>Jim Slack, “Oral and Literate—Communicating Across the Worldview Formats,” Power Point presentation, [http://strategyleader.org/powerpoint/oral\\_and\\_literate.pps](http://strategyleader.org/powerpoint/oral_and_literate.pps) (August 5, 2013).

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>Hayward Armstrong, ed. *Tell the Story: A Primer on Chronological Bible Storying*. (Rockville, VA: International Center for Excellence in Leadership, 2003), 12.

As a result, some missiologists and missionary leaders decided that taking the Bible to people orally was a welcome alternative to waiting for Bible translation agencies to reach the remaining people groups who were largely non-literate. In their thinking, an “oral Bible” addressed both problems simultaneously: people who either did not know how to read or did not want to read and possibly even lacked a written copy of the Bible in their own language could still have access to Scripture through an “oral Bible.”

Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry write,

**Why have an “oral” Bible strategy?** The primary reason is that of literacy competency among those receiving the Bible. An “oral” Bible is *immediately available to those who are still pre-literate or who presently live in an oral culture* where oral culture is the preferred medium of learning and instructing others. An “oral” Bible is *immediately available in the heart language* of a people. The written Bible may only be available in the prevailing market language used in an area. An “oral” Bible is available to a wide spectrum of hearers. Children are quick learners and will easily recall what they hear. Adults will appreciate the stories and proverbs as oral culture like they use for sharing other information. Older adults will be able to hear and understand the oral presentations even though they no longer are able to recall all they hear. An “oral” Bible is able to *immediately travel along village paths* from group to group.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, the oral-Bible-sufficiency advocates think that among people groups that shared the most cherished part of their heritage through the use of oral narratives, the use of an “oral Bible” might actually be the best possible method of communicating the Scriptures. For many, the “oral Bible” came to be seen as the solution to winning the “Oral Majority” to Jesus Christ.<sup>55</sup> Based on these conclusions, a group of missiologists introduced the term “oral Bible” in the book, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*. The authors wrote, “The ‘oral Bible’ is the singular key to unlocking church planting movements among unreached people groups.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry, *Chronological Bible Storying*, Part VII of X, 2.

<sup>55</sup>Dawn Herzog Jewell, “Winning the Oral Majority: Mission Agencies Rethink Outreach to the World’s Non-Literate Masses,” *Christianity Today*, March 2006, 56.

<sup>56</sup>David Claydon, ed., *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Lima, NY: Elim, 2005), 70.

Various mission agencies solidified the term “oral Bible” in missiological parlance when they jointly committed to the promotion of oral methods in their work. As mentioned in chapter 3, in 2001 Avery Willis and Paul Eshlemann formed the Oral Bible Network, comprised of multiple mission agencies, including Campus Crusade for Christ International (CCCI), the International Mission Board (IMB), Scriptures in Use (SIU), and Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT).<sup>57</sup> In 2005, Avery Willis and Bill Sunderland renamed this confederation the International Orality Network (ION).<sup>58</sup> As a result, the expression “oral Bible” is a frequently used term among mission strategists and practitioners who use orality in their evangelistic methods.

We now turn to the biblical and practical support given by advocates to the concept of an “oral Bible.” Some justification for the practice was given in the brief history described above. The following portion of the descriptive-empirical task, however, seeks to provide a careful summary of the biblical and practical evidence advocates have used thus far. Supporters base their defense of the use of an “oral Bible” on Scripture and by noting the social realities of the Ancient Near East and Greco-Roman worlds during the composition of the Old and New Testament. With regard to Scripture, these strategists note that while God commanded Moses to write down all which he had received from God, he also commanded that the people should hide his words “in their hearts.”<sup>59</sup> Slack mentions that in ancient times, a man could not become a rabbi until he was able to recite the entire Torah seven times without error.<sup>60</sup> He further mentions that

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<sup>57</sup>Tom Steffen, “Tracking Orality Movement: Chronological Communication of the Gospel Goes from Country to City,” unpublished paper, received via e-mail correspondence, March 26, 2013, 15.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>59</sup>“Oral Bible Concepts,” 2.

<sup>60</sup>Slack, “Oral and Literate,” 6.

at the time of Jesus, literacy in Palestine, as well as throughout the Roman Empire, was around three to five percent, at the maximum.<sup>61</sup>

According to Slack, the ancient world relied upon an “oral Bible” more than the written text. Because the majority of the population was non-literate, the portions of Scripture that the general populace knew were what it had retained through an oral recitation of the text. As a result, proponents argue that the strategy for using an “oral Bible” is nothing novel. Rather, they contend that they are returning to the manner in which the majority of people shared and retained information during most of human history.

The writers of *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* also reference the teaching methods of Jesus as supporting evidence. As mentioned in the first chapter, the authors of *Making Disciples* reference one passage from the Gospel of Mark in support of orality: “The answer comes from Jesus’ own model: ‘...with many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, *as much as they could understand*’ (Mk. 4:33 NIV, emphasis added). In fact, the passage goes on to say: ‘He did not say anything to them without using a parable’ (Mk. 4:34a NIV). Jesus chose his teaching style to match his listeners’ capacities. So should we. Jesus used familiar oral means that they understood. So can we.”<sup>62</sup> Just as Jesus Christ used oral methods in his ministry, “oral Bible” advocates argue that modern-day missionaries and indigenous church planters should rely on a similar strategy.

In her biblical support for an “oral Bible,” Green invokes Charles Kraft’s incarnational approach to communication. After listing the three elements which Kraft identified in the act of communication (communicator, message, receptor), Green acknowledges how Kraft believed that God emphasizes the receptor above all else:

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Claydon, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 70.

[God] chose relevant topics, appealing methods of presentation and a “maximally intelligible” language for His receptors. “They do not have to go somewhere else, learn someone else’s language, or become something other than they already are” in order to understand the message (Kraft 1980:6-9). The final criterion could easily be applied to literacy strategy in ministry; if Kraft is right, a nonliterate receptor would not have to become literate in order to receive God’s message, but God could communicate that message in a relevant, appealing and maximally intelligible, albeit, nonliterate, way. . . . After reading so many studies regarding the nature of communication in Biblical times and the variety of methods employed in getting the message across, I am convinced that it is unbiblical *not* to use the mode and media that work best in communicating God’s truth. There is nothing inherently sacred about the printed word, and, in fact, such thinking binds God’s Word to one solitary format. As Klem pointed out, using books to communicate the Gospel is not a Biblical mandate but a cultural choice (Klem 1995:59).<sup>63</sup>

Being sensitive to the receptor culture is a hallmark of “oral Bible” advocates from various perspectives. Cultural awareness will influence the manner in which ministry practitioners present an “oral Bible.” Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry write,

One consideration is that of teaching the Bible to those who revere a book (like Muslims) and who might be offended if anything other than a verbatim rendering of the Scriptures is attempted. In this case it may be necessary to read the stories rather than to tell them. This way a literal account will always be exactly the same word for word. When possible, certain bridging stories and passages should be read to give proper introduction to the main story.

With some oral culture peoples it may be necessary to tell a story exactly word for word the same each time. In this case it is necessary to memorize the story so it can be told “orally.” Of course, a literate person can read/tell the story from a written account. Oral culture practitioners will be able to learn the stories and retell them accurately as they do their other stories. Use of pictures may aid recall.

With still others it will be possible to “shape’ [sic] the stories to give them greater memorability. This is done by leaving out some redundant material and simplifying details to tighten up the story or by adding short bridging stories. Be careful not to leave out significant items which speak to that culture and world view. For pre-literate peoples remember that in time they will be able to read the Bible for themselves. They will want to find and read the stories they have come to know and love during their oral culture days. The tension is that between telling an oral story and telling a literate story orally. Be sensitive to what happens to a written account when it is told orally. Remember to honor an “oral” Bible by sharing it in a culturally appropriate place and manner by an appropriate person at the appropriate time for sacred teachings.<sup>64</sup>

Next, let us examine which perspective of orality that the majority of “oral Bible” proponents uphold. As chapter 2 explained, linguists distinguish two different

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<sup>63</sup>Robin Green, *An Oral Strategy*, 106-07.

<sup>64</sup>Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry, *Chronological Bible Storying*, Part VII of X, 3.

interpretations of orality: the unilinear evolutionary perspective and the contextual or ideological position. While “oral Bible” advocates do not explicitly state their approach to orality, there are indications of a dominant perspective. Some proponents of an “oral Bible” describe their general interpretation of orality in their orality presentations and training manuals. Slack’s Powerpoint presentation, “Oral and Literate,” describes the differences between oral and literate learners as a binary polarity.<sup>65</sup> Slack’s Powerpoint slides depicts two columns for “Oral” and “Literate” communicators, listing the characteristics of each category. After declaring earlier that fifty to sixty-five percent of the world’s population is comprised of “oral communicators,” (slide ten) one of the first traits of oral communicators that is listed is that they, “have never ever *seen* a word.”<sup>66</sup>

Slack differentiates varying levels of literacy in his presentation. Slack notes the differences between those individuals who are “highly literate,” “literate,” “semi-literate,” “functionally illiterate,” and “illiterate.”<sup>67</sup> Slack defines “highly literate” individuals as “college level literate attainment such as lawyer, teacher, author, grammarian, etc.”<sup>68</sup> A “literate” person is a “high school graduate who can acceptably perform all of the basic literate functions.”<sup>69</sup> A “semi-literate” individual is a “person who has successfully attained reading, writing and analytical skills of the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade. [This] person is [in a] transition between oral and literate.”<sup>70</sup> A “functional illiterate” is “an individual who did not go beyond 8 years of schooling and who did not

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<sup>65</sup>Slack, “Oral and Literate,” 16-21.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

continue to daily read and write.”<sup>71</sup> An “illiterate” person is “an individual who cannot read and write and who is known as a primary oral communicator.”<sup>72</sup>

Yet an individual’s or society’s literacy level is different from the stage that writing has impacted a society’s collective sensorium (the dominant medium by which one’s culture communicates information) along the primary oral to hypertext culture continuum. A society could potentially have a sizeable literate population (following Slack’s definitions above) that still retains a high “oral residue.” Slack’s presentation does examine the impact of literacy but makes no mention of the continuum between primary oral to highly literate and hypertext societies.

Like Slack, the *Tell the Story Primer* makes a similar distinction between “oral communicators” and “print communicators.”<sup>73</sup> This oral-literate categorization may be evidence of a “great divide” understanding of the relationship between oral and literate communities, instead of viewing orality as a continuum from primary oral learners (people who have never encountered any form of a written language), to cultural groups with varying levels of residual orality (exposure at some level to written language), and further, to chirographic, typographic, and hypertext societies.<sup>74</sup>

Green compiles a table derived from Ong that compares oral and literate peoples.<sup>75</sup> In an appendix to her MA thesis, Green arranges two columns: one for oral and one for literate peoples. She also cites where Ong makes these distinctions throughout his work, *Orality and Literacy*. The table and the reliance on Ong once again suggests a bipolarity between oral and literate societies.

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Armstrong, *Tell the Story*, 15.

<sup>74</sup>Slack, “Oral and Literate,” 16.

<sup>75</sup>Robin Green, *An Orality Strategy*, Appendix A, 111.

This brief account of how mission strategists and practitioners came to promote the practice of an “oral Bible” serves as an example of the descriptive-empirical task of practical theology. This case study began the descriptive-empirical section with different definitions of an “oral Bible.” It then proceeded to give a brief history of how mission strategists had developed the concept. Next, it gave the biblical and practical reasons given for why ministry practitioners and mission agencies should consider the use of an “oral Bible.” Next, we shall continue the case study with an example of the interpretive task of reflective practice.

### **The Interpretive Task**

Once practitioners have acquired their data in the descriptive-empirical task, they must interpret it.<sup>76</sup> This section will demonstrate the interpretive task reflecting on the data presented above. Also, we will examine orality strategists’ reasoning and attempt to identify the assumptions that influence their strategy decisions. In doing so, we will reference the thoughts of others on this topic.

First, the proponents and strategists who developed the idea of an “oral Bible” acted from a desire to proclaim the gospel to all peoples. The “oral Bible” is their way to ensure that nothing, whether illiteracy or a preference for oral information transfer, becomes a barrier to hearing the Good News. These strategists sought a means to help encourage mass conversions. They also wanted a method by which the Bible would be accessible to everyone.

At the same time, it must be pointed out that Slack’s presentation and Armstrong’s CBS primer do not appear to reflect the latest orality scholarship.<sup>77</sup> Slack,

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<sup>76</sup>Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 79-128.

<sup>77</sup>Slack is the head of the Office of Global Research at the International Mission Board headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. *Tell the Story* cites the Global Research Department of the IMB as its source in listing the different characteristics between oral and print communicators in Armstrong, *Tell the Story*, 15.

Terry, and Lovejoy, perhaps understandably, relied on the writings of Ong and others which were relatively recent when they began teaching oral methods on the field and later at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas during the 1990s.<sup>78</sup> However, as we saw in chapter 2, Ong’s approach to orality, which is representative of the evolutionary unilinear perspective, is no longer the accepted position. Thirty years since the publication of *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, most orality researchers outside of Christian ministry have embraced a form of the contextual or ideological position.

Next, I look at the missional objective of those who favor the “oral Bible” agenda. Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry acknowledge that the “oral Bible” strategy is used specifically for the purpose of evangelism and church planting. They write,

The “oral” Bible strategy operates alongside the strategy of evangelizing a people and planting a New Testament church. The evangelism and church planting strategy also best follows the Bible timeline in its organization. So there is a perfect correlation of purpose and content. After the initial strategy to plant a church the “oral” Bible strategy can continue as new stories are added for maturing believers and to train new leaders.

Where a people are already literate or are becoming literate the “oral” Bible concept still has great validity in helping the people to “hide God’s Word in their hearts” so they have a Bible that goes with them everywhere. Memory verses in addition to the Bible stories should be a part of the strategy. The verses may be taken from the current stories or selected to relate in some way to the current stories and teachings.

The “oral” Bible passages are chosen according to the same criteria as those used to select teaching stories for evangelizing and church planting. These criteria reflect the foundational Bible truths needed by a people and are world view-sensitive reflecting issues that may be barriers or bridges to understanding God’s Word.<sup>79</sup>

Armstrong would seem to be endorsing a particular evangelistic strategy with the use of oral methods. This becomes clearer when he says, “The important thing is that if you are working with oral learners, Chronological Bible Storying and stimulating a

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<sup>78</sup>Chap. 3 recounted how Slack, Terry, and Lovejoy began teaching courses on orality at Southwestern Seminary in the late 1990s.

<sup>79</sup>Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry, *Chronological Bible Storying*, Part VII of X, 3.

Church Planting Movement must be integrated.”<sup>80</sup> Church Planting Movements (CPM) is an evangelistic strategy that was developed by missionary David Garrison which seeks the rapid, exponential multiplication of converts. Garrison defines a “church planting movement” as “rapid and multiplicative increases of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.”<sup>81</sup> By using Bible storying, the missionary practices evangelism by recounting a collection of oral narratives from the Bible to the targeted people group. Once a Bible storying group is formed and the missionary wins converts, the expectation is for its members to start storying groups of their own which is hoped will result in a significant growth of evangelism and discipleship in the targeted group. By the third generation of Bible storying groups multiplying and starting other Bible storying groups, the missionary should spend time in another location. This practice is called the “MAWL cycle” (model, assist, watch, and leave).

Garrison identifies nine universal elements in a church planting movement. Among these characteristics are prayer and “abundant gospel sowing.”<sup>82</sup> By “abundant gospel sowing,” Garrison is referring to evangelistic efforts through mass media (television, radio, flyers or tracts) that promotes the message of the gospel to potentially large numbers of people. Other characteristics include intentional church planting, scriptural authority, and local leadership as opposed to leadership from the missionary.<sup>83</sup>

In fact, from among the local leadership, Garrison encourages lay leaders (people without any formal theological education) to assume the mantle as leaders in the

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<sup>80</sup>Armstrong, *Tell the Story*, 101.

<sup>81</sup>David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Richmond, VA: Wigtake, 2003), 7.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

new churches as the sixth characteristic. Garrison recommends that these lay leaders be representative of the people: “In other words, if the people group is primarily non-literate, then the leadership shares this characteristic. If the people are primarily fishermen, so too are the lay leaders.”<sup>84</sup> Regarding their training, Garrison recommends formal teaching in the format of eight two-week training modules (approximately four months) that can be expanded over a two-year cycle.<sup>85</sup> The seventh characteristic is that church planting movements occur in either cell or house churches. Garrison defines a cell church as “10-30 members meeting in homes or store fronts” that “are linked to one another in some type of structured network.”<sup>86</sup> House churches, by contrast, lack the structured, hierarchical network found in cell churches. Instead, there is greater independence by house churches.

The last three characteristics are churches planting churches, rapid reproduction, and healthy churches.<sup>87</sup> The church planting movement cannot be multiplicative if the indigenous churches are not reproducing themselves. Not only must they reproduce themselves, but the process must be characterized by rapidity: “Some have challenged the necessity of rapid reproduction for the life of the Church Planting Movement, but no one has questioned its evidence in *every* CPM.”<sup>88</sup> Garrison defends his assertion that rapid growth must be a universal characteristic by appealing to the testimony of church planters on the field. He writes, “Most church planters involved in

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 38-40.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 39.

these movements contend that rapid reproduction is vital to the movement itself. . . .  
When reproduction rates slow down, the Church Planting Movement falters.”<sup>89</sup>

Garrison’s CPM model is the dominant strategy used by some of the advocates of an “oral Bible.” It is the official evangelistic strategy of the International Mission Board, the international missionary sending agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. Ministry practitioners seeking a substantial increase in converts use the “oral Bible” as the means by which they can make Scripture accessible to their converts. Waiting for a suitable translation of the Bible will hinder a rapid, multiplicative strategy of evangelism. While the advocates of an “oral Bible” are not opposed to Bible translation agencies, they sense the urgency of making the gospel known to every people, tribe, and language on the earth.

This section has been an example of the interpretive task of practical theology as a reflective practice. In this case study, we interpreted some of the information previously shared in the descriptive-empirical task. First, we noted the expressed desire from many proponents of an “oral Bible” for rapid evangelism. Next, we identified the perspective on orality research shared by a large percentage of “oral Bible” advocates. Finally, we noted the evangelistic strategy shared by a significant number of those who promote an “oral Bible,” which is the Church Planting Movements model. We turn now to the normative task of reflective practice.

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

## The Normative Task

After completing the descriptive-empirical and interpretive tasks of practical theology, ministry practitioners must determine what should be done to address the presenting issue within their own ministry context.<sup>90</sup> At this stage in reflected practice, practical theologians should critique issues regarding the ministry topic. If necessary, they may also present a preferable normative model for the ministry practice in question. For this case study, we shall attempt to illustrate how the proposed paradigm can provide theological insight that will permit us to see the positive contributions by advocates of an “oral Bible” and correct any perceived weaknesses. To do this, we shall begin with critiques by “oral Bible” advocates and others as well as summarize aspects of Vanhoozer’s theological model that provide theological justification for the use of orality in practical ministry.

We begin with critiques and questions that have been raised by some of the advocates of an “oral Bible.” Some have questioned the interpretation of orality used by a number of “oral-Bible-sufficiency” advocates. For example, reflecting a more current approach to orality, Green queries whether the differences between oral and literate societies are “culture-specific, rather than universal.” She writes,

Rather than universal differences between oral and written style, is there a science to the method that speakers of a language use to differentiate between their oral and written styles? This could benefit translators in that, while they would not be able to enter a project with a list of universal characteristics of speech versus print, they would have certain tools to help them identify and understand the differences between the oral and written language of their respective receptor audiences.<sup>91</sup>

Interestingly, Lovejoy himself has recognized the need to rely less on Ong’s interpretation of orality. Lovejoy notes, “Those of us who relied heavily on Ong have come to understand that at times he attributed to literacy certain habits of thought and

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<sup>90</sup>Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 129-74.

<sup>91</sup>Robin Green, *An Orality Strategy*, 110.

speech that are produced by a western educational approach rather than literacy itself.”<sup>92</sup> Later, he acknowledges, “We have been reminded of the dangers of simplistic either/or distinctions between oral learners and literate learners. We have also learned to steer away from universalizing claims about orality and oral cultures. ‘All oral cultures . . .’ is a dangerous way to begin a sentence.”<sup>93</sup> He also acknowledged that orality ministry strategists should recognize the presence of *multiple* oralities in contrast to a static, universal understanding of orality, the characteristics of which apply to all cultures and all geographic regions.<sup>94</sup>

However, Lovejoy’s more nuanced description of orality (in a conference of linguists and Bible translators) is not found in the earlier literature from Slack or Armstrong. Neither is it mentioned in Lovejoy, Slack, and Terry’s *Chronological Bible Storying*. While new materials may be forthcoming, there is still no evidence of these conclusions being incorporated into current training manuals and methodology books. The information in presentations on orality to general audiences and missionaries-in-training still reflects the binary polarity between oral and literate communicators.

By Lovejoy’s own admission, orality strategists in the past have demonstrated a strong reliance on Ong’s writings. As Lovejoy acknowledges, Ong attributed certain characteristics to all literate cultures that did not reflect literacy so much as the effects of a Western educational system. Lovejoy also agrees that an “either/or” distinction between oral and literate people was not helpful. He also states that universalizing claims with respect to oral peoples in general were not helpful. All of the characteristics that

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<sup>92</sup>Grant Lovejoy, “Orality, Bible Translation, and Scripture Engagement” (a lecture presented at the Bible Translation Conference at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics and SIL, Dallas, 2009, [http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/comments/files/12668/Lovejoy--Orality,\\_BibleTransl,\\_and\\_Scrip\\_Engagement.pdf](http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/comments/files/12668/Lovejoy--Orality,_BibleTransl,_and_Scrip_Engagement.pdf) (accessed November 1, 2013).

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

Lovejoy rejects, in fact, are representative of current training manuals and presentations by the International Mission Board.

As referenced in the descriptive-empirical section, Slack and Armstrong both make a strong distinction between oral and literate peoples. Slack's observation that the majority of oral peoples have never seen a word is also inaccurate. Primary oral cultures, cultures that have had no exposure to writing of any kind, are a rarity today. Most oral cultures, in fact, prefer oral methods even though they have at least had exposure to literacy and written materials.

Besides their approach to orality, others have not agreed with the interpretation of the biblical evidence in support of orality. As mentioned in the first chapter and again in the descriptive-empirical section, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* cites Jesus teaching in parables in Mark 4:33-34 as evidence of his endorsement of oral methods. Yet New Testament scholar William L. Lane does not accept the view that Jesus' use of parables in this chapter is an example of his clarity in teaching. In fact, Jesus used parables in this passage not in order to help the people understand but in order to hinder their comprehension. As mentioned in chapter 1, later in this pericope, Jesus explained to his disciples: "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand lest they return and be forgiven." Lane comments, "Jesus' adoption of the indirect address of the parable was accordingly an expression both of grace and of judgment. It was an expression of grace which allowed time for reflection on his appeal to penetrate beneath his words to 'the word.' It was an expression of judgment upon their lack of preparation to receive directly the word of the Kingdom of God."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 172-73.

Furthermore, recent biblical scholarship has revealed a complex interdependence between orality and literacy within the text of Scripture and the historical-cultural context in which the human authors composed it. The scribal or chirographic cultures in Palestine and the Greco-Roman world reveal a dynamic interplay between oral and literary forms of communication (as noted in chapter 3).<sup>96</sup> As the reader may recall in chapter 3, the fact is that scribes and literate people depended on written manuscripts for their oral recitation of texts. Similarly, their memorization and oral recitation depended on a written manuscript to ensure accuracy. This complex interdependence between oral and written media runs counter to the idea of a sharp binary distinction between orality and literacy in biblical times. It is simply a mistake to describe the culture of Palestine and the Greco-Roman world in strictly oral terms. Carr concurs when he writes,

[T]he role of *memory* in the formation of *written* texts involves overcoming a dichotomy, all too common in studies of the ancient world, between orality/memorization and writing/literacy. Though scholars decades ago deconstructed the idea that there was a “great divide” between orality and literacy, a remarkable number of high-quality publications still work with a strong distinction between the two . . . Scholars of antiquity are just at the beginning of exploring the interface between writing, performance, memorization, and the aural dimension of literary texts.<sup>97</sup>

Other writers have expressed concern over the concept of an “oral Bible.”

Pastor and writer John Piper writes,

Will we Westerners who have had the Bible in our languages for five centuries and who have access to Greek and Hebrew in which the Bible was verbally inspired keep this privileged position for ourselves? Or will we humble ourselves and labor with all our might to help other peoples and cultures have the same access we have to a full and right understanding of the Scriptures. Will we tell pre-literate and less-literate peoples and cultures that all authoritative religious truth comes from God

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<sup>96</sup>David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5. See also Richard A. Horsley, “Introduction,” in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark*, ed. Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), x. In New Testament studies, Horsley likewise acknowledges the “close relationship between written text and oral performance” (ibid.).

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

through a single inspired book, and that all oral communication about God and his ways, no matter where it happens anywhere in the world, depends for its final reliability on this book, the Bible?<sup>98</sup>

In another blog post, Piper expresses further concerns about the “oral Bible” strategy:

Now, when I was sitting with these guys a few years ago, talking about this [“oral Bible”], I asked, “You're not saying we can just dispense with Bible translation then, right?” Because it seemed like some of them were leaning that way, and I was on the side of the Wycliffe folks who were saying, “They really do need the Bible!” And the reason they need the Bible, of course—and why we shouldn't praise orality excessively, as a substitute for literacy—is that, to the degree that they don't become literate, they're going to always be secondhanders. And I think it's paternalistic to make a person a permanent secondhand. Because if the stories are all in this book, and we're teaching them that they can learn it from us orally, then they're going to be constantly dependent upon us and not just the book. It may take a generation or two to get the book translated and to produce literacy, but what an arrogant thing it would be—wouldn't it?—to say that orality is just as good as literacy. We'll give them the stories they need, and now they can, for the next 100 or 300 years, or until Jesus comes, do everything in their way, not your Western literacy way. I think that is incredibly paternalistic.<sup>99</sup>

Others have responded to the evangelistic strategy for sharing an “oral Bible,” known as Church Planting Movements. David Sills, in his book *Reaching and Teaching*, writes, “Jesus makes clear that we are to go, make disciples, and teach them. When we permit the need for speed or clever missiological strategies to reduce the Great Commission to simply ‘going and reaching and leaving,’ we fail to obey the words of Christ in His last command to His church.”<sup>100</sup> Referring specifically to the CPM model of church planting (a dominant strategy for oral methods), Sills criticizes the practice of rapid evangelism, appointing leaders, and then moving on to the next field. The danger in such a rapid departure from one field in search of another fertile area of evangelism is

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<sup>98</sup>John Piper, “Missions, Orality, and the Bible,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/missions-orality-and-the-bible> (accessed August 12, 2013).

<sup>99</sup>John Piper, “How Would You Study the Bible with People Who Can’t Read?” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-would-you-study-the-bible-with-people-who-cant-read> (accessed August 12, 2013).

<sup>100</sup>M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 120.

that the new converts lack the training they so desperately need to avoid theological error as well as immaturity in Christian practice. Sills writes, “Appointing elders in every church and utilizing local leadership is biblical and wise. However, they must be biblically qualified, God-called, and trained leaders if the missionaries are faithful to the Scriptures.”<sup>101</sup>

Hoyt Lovelace also critiques CPM strategies for not adequately equipping national leaders as pastors or elders in their congregations.<sup>102</sup> The goal of rapid multiplication may compel missionary strategists and practitioners who use orality in a CPM model to leave a mission setting for a new area—often prematurely. The departing missionary risks leaving behind national leaders and new converts who are susceptible to heresy, syncretism, and general immaturity in their daily practice of Christian belief. Nothing can substitute the necessity of loving patience and time needed to train indigenous leadership. Lovelace suggests the need for a slower approach in training and discipleship that will produce more solid, capable local church leadership.

Pastor and writer Greg Gilbert expresses similar concerns in his review of Garrison’s *Church Planting Movements*. First, Gilbert questions the emphasis on rapid results and the logic behind it. Referencing Garrison’s comment that while some critics have questioned the necessity of rapid reproduction to sustain a CPM but that no one has questioned its evidence in *every* CPM, Gilbert writes, “The logic there is slightly tortured—the reason no one has questioned the existence of rapid reproduction in *every*

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>102</sup>Hoyt Lovelace, “Is Church Planting Movement Methodology Viable? An Examination of Selected Controversies Associated with the CPM Strategy” (a paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Spring Southeast Regional Conference, 2006, 20), cited in Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 142. Lovelace writes, “A key defining point of CPM methodology rests in the description of leadership within the movement. Local leadership is of primary importance as it has been observed that the strongest CPMs tend to be those with the least amount of foreign involvement. For this reason, CPM practitioners develop local leaders and entrust to them the future of the movement as quickly as possible” (ibid.).

CPM is that you have *defined* a CPM by rapid reproduction.”<sup>103</sup> Gilbert further notes that the emphasis on speed has placed Garrison, “into a defensive posture against institutional theological training, or to be less euphemistic, against seminaries.”<sup>104</sup> While Gilbert does not believe that a seminary degree is essential to pastoral effectiveness, he does express concern for effective leadership preparation in a strategy that makes such an emphasis on speed and efficiency.

It is at this point that we turn to the proposed paradigm. It is our desire to validate the use of orality in ministry (such as Chronological Bible Storying), as well as offer some corrective feedback regarding an overextension of the “oral Bible” concept. Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle, as we described in the first chapter, has an analogical oral dynamic. God, according to Vanhoozer, is a communicative agent and the analogy used to describe God’s communicative activity in Scripture is oral. Indeed, each of the three levels of theodrama described by Vanhoozer: (1) in the economic Trinity, the Father speaks the Son; (2) throughout redemptive history, Scripture frequently describes God’s acts using an oral analogy (the “word of the LORD,” “God spoke to us in these latter days through his Son,” “and the Word became flesh”); and (3) our own participation in the theodrama as the church has an oral element, particularly in the act of proclaiming the gospel but also including teaching and discipleship. The analogically oral dramatic action of God’s self-disclosure extends throughout redemptive history and is descriptive of the Trinitarian economy itself.

Vanhoozer, however, does not rely exclusively on a dramatic analogy to describe the divine communicative action but also uses narrative. As we recounted in chapter 4, Vanhoozer refers to the thought of Ricoeur and Aristotle when he says that

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<sup>103</sup>Greg Gilbert, “Book Review: *Church Planting Movements* by David Garrison,” <http://new.9marks.org/books/book-review-church-planting-movements-david-garrison> (accessed December 19, 2013).

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

Scripture has a *mythos* or narrative plot within the dramatic action. The narrative plot of Scripture, described as creation-fall-redemption, is what bestows a comprehensibility of who God is by his actions in redemptive history. Similarly, Jesus Christ not only makes God comprehensible to us but also renders intelligibility to the gospel through his life, death, burial, and resurrection. These narratives also bestow meaningfulness to the Christian life in that it is a *mimetic* depiction or imitation of Jesus Christ's victory over sin and death and is illustrative of the grand drama of redemption. When we wage battle against sin, become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and progress in the Christian life, we identify with the narrative of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection and dramatically proclaim the gospel. Narrative plot, or *mythos*, works in tandem with the dramatic analogy to make the divine communicative action comprehensible to us. God, therefore, "stories" himself to us in the history of redemption, particularly through Jesus Christ.

We have revisited much of Vanhoozer's contributions described in previous chapters in order to show how his theodramatically-revised Scripture principle would support the use of orality in Christian ministry, particularly in evangelism. Both the dramatic and narrative analogies in Vanhoozer's model appear to provide a sound theological basis for Chronological Bible Storying (CBS), the evangelism strategy used by many mission agencies, including the International Mission Board (IMB). Using a dramatic analogy, evangelism using CBS is a theodramatic participation through union in Christ with the divine communicative action. Furthermore, converts to the story sessions dramatically identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their growth and maturity as believers as they hear additional biblical narratives is a further participation in the theodrama. Storytellers using CBS are also dramatic in a more concrete sense as well. Many times, missionaries and evangelists become very animated if not dramatic in their recounting of biblical narratives. Sometimes, storytellers literally perform the biblical narratives. To perform CBS, therefore, is to become a participant in

a play (CBS story) within a play (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ) within yet another play (the Father speaking the Son). Thus, Vanhoozer's dramatic analogy helps lend theological justification for the use of CBS in particular and orality in general.

The narrative analogy in Vanhoozer's model also provides a theological basis for orality. Storytellers who use an evangelistic strategy like CBS follow a narrative thread that generally begins with creation and ends with the Great Commission and the ascension of Jesus Christ. In doing so, the storytellers using CBS recount the biblical *mythos* of creation-fall-redemption. The hearers who respond to the stories in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ are also participants in the narrative of creation-fall-redemption in that, as fallen created beings, they participate in redemption when they respond to the gospel message. Furthermore, they also identify in the gospel narrative of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Continued growth and conformity to character of Jesus is also a participation in the gospel narrative when they identify with Jesus' death by renouncing sin, with his burial as they seek to mortify it, and with his resurrection when they replace their sinful past with obedience to the Scripture. Participating in evangelism, particularly through storytelling, is yet another example of the participation in the gospel narrative. Like theodrama, the narrative analogy in Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle supports the use of orality for ministry.

But Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle may lend further theological guidance regarding the use of orality in ministry. Telling biblical stories in international contexts requires an understanding of the indigenous language and an awareness of the culture. By relying on the proposed paradigm, the storytellers then should demonstrate theodramatic virtue (described in chapter 4) in their respective socio-linguistic contexts. In order to exhibit theodramatic "fittingness" in these improvisatory performances of biblical narratives, the storytellers should rely upon wisdom (*phronēsis*). This reliance on practical wisdom would then justify reflected practice that begins with the descriptive-

empirical and interpretive tasks in order to understand the indigenous people, their language, and the culture. From there, the storytellers can form normative conclusions concerning what stories from Scripture are most appropriate for their ministry context and then make the practical steps necessary in the pragmatic task. Theodramatic virtue and a reliance on *phronēsis*, then, assists the storytellers as they select their assortment of biblical narratives and determine the best way to tell (“perform”) them as “actors” in the grand narrative of redemption. Scripture (the “Script”) is the normative guide for these theodramatic performances.

We turn next to consider how the proposed paradigm can shed greater theological light on our understanding of orality and help us to arrive at a sound (“fitting”) definition of what a “Bible” actually is, thereby raising questions about some of the ways that the “oral Bible” has been understood and used. First, Vanhoozer’s revised Scripture principle can assist us in how we understand orality itself. As mentioned in chapter 2 and elsewhere, linguists have identified two dominant approaches to orality: the evolutionary unilinear position and the contextual or ideological perspective. Both have relied on a different philosophy of language. Supporters of the evolutionary unilinear approach generally follow a structuralist view of language. In contrast, advocates for the contextual or ideological position follow a post-structuralist philosophy of language. The differences in philosophies of language have resulted in differing interpretations of orality as well. Vanhoozer’s revised Scripture principle may help us see the positive contributions from both.

By describing the divine self-disclosure as communicative action that conveys a *mythos* or narrative plot, Vanhoozer shows a reliance on both the analytic and continental schools of thought about language. As described in chapter 1, Vanhoozer describes God’s communication of himself to us through speech-act theory. Proponents of speech-act theory view language as performative action rather than as the differentiation of signs as described by continental thought. Yet Vanhoozer also borrows

from a continental approach when he adopts Ricoeur's use of narrative plot to describe the overarching message of Scripture as described in chapter 4. *Mythos*, Vanhoozer argues, gives us a narrative intelligibility of who God is by revealing his character in the biblical narrative of creation-fall-redemption. Continental thought, then, has also influenced Vanhoozer's theology.

We can bypass the division created by members of the evolutionary unilinear perspective and the contextual or ideological position by adopting an approach to the philosophy of language that is similar to Vanhoozer's. For example, we can avoid an interpretation of orality that creates a binary polarity between oral and literate cultures by agreeing with some of the observations by proponents of the contextual or ideological position. Yet Vanhoozer's hermeneutical realism would prevent us from accepting all the conclusions of the contextual position's adherents. For instance, we should understand that reality is more than a social construct but is something that is outside of ourselves and that we can make meaningful statements about it, even if they are conditioned by our own "situatedness." And we can also accept the observation by proponents of the evolutionary unilinear approach that the medium of language (oral or written) *does* affect human consciousness. However, in agreement with the contextual or ideological approach, various factors including sociological, economic, and political considerations, will influence how the dominant medium of language affects different cultures. By accepting Vanhoozer's approach to the philosophy of language in his revised Scripture principle, we can eliminate an "either/or" perspective with regard to orality studies.

Finally, we must examine our definition of what a Bible actually is. Can we speak legitimately of an "oral Bible"? As was discussed in chapter 4, Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle underscores the complex and *inseparable* interaction between orality and literacy in the Bible as foundational to all Christian ministry, because of the close relation between the theodramatic explication of the divine

self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ *which is the central story of the Bible* and the inscripturation of God's revelation in that Bible. This is particularly relevant if we interpret the revised Scripture principle in light of there being an analogical relationship between the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ and the inscripturation of the canon, both understood as divine communicative action. This analogue between the divine and human natures of Christ and the divine-human authorship of Scripture raises questions concerning the wisdom of promoting the concept of an "oral *Bible*."

We have described how Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle can help us make theological judgments about ministry issues. The revised-Scripture principle provides theological insight not only for our understanding of orality but also for our definition of a Bible. But reflected practice does not stop at the normative task. We now turn to the pragmatic task in practical theology.

### **The Pragmatic Task**

The final task in reflective practical theology is the pragmatic. Having drawn specific theological conclusions in the normative task, we should at last determine what practical steps follow. Based on what we have determined in the normative task using Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle as our paradigm, several recommendations will be made regarding the use of orality in ministry.

To begin with, orality research can be a useful tool for the practice of ministry. Indeed, missiologists and academic practical theologians have yet to realize the full potential of orality and its application in ministry. Academicians and ministry strategists, however, must be conversant with the latest scholarship on orality. We simply cannot rely on research that is outdated or that has been discredited by the latest scholarship. At the same time, we must wisely evaluate the claims by scholars in orality research. For example, as noted in chapter 3, many contemporary scholars of orality uphold a post-structuralist philosophy of language. While we may gain some insights from their

philosophy of language, we would not be consistent with a Christian worldview if we endorsed all of their conclusions.

Christian scholars of orality should strive to expand the application of orality studies in ministry. For example, the use of orality research in ministry should not stop at evangelism and missions but include the entire spectrum of practical ministry including preaching, education (including higher education), and pastoral counseling. Indeed, orality could be a bridge for more interdisciplinary work between biblical and systematic theology, between homiletics and biblical studies, and between the so-called “classical disciplines” and the “applied” seminary courses.

In preaching, for example, homileticians should investigate the rhetorical practices of the target culture and incorporate them as much as is advisable into sermon preparation. In Africa, the use of traditional proverbs in sermons and other forms of Christian proclamation is an excellent example of applying insights from orality research. In general, much preaching for dominantly oral cultures will also be narrative in form.

Similarly, orality research has tremendous potential to assist our understanding of Christian education, including higher education. Education researchers might develop an educational psychology specifically for oral learners. Additionally, they could also perform research in learning theory for oral peoples. From the insights gained, Christian educators can more competently organize a curriculum that takes the specific educational needs of oral learners into consideration. The same is true for higher education in dominantly oral contexts. Christian institutions of higher learning, including colleges and seminaries, cannot simply import Western models of instruction to international contexts and expect the same results. Rather, educators and curriculum developers might consider hybridization or a synthesis of Western educational philosophy with the specific educational needs of oral learners. Doing so may result in a curriculum and pedagogical practices that are a better reflection of the learning style of the student body.

Christian counseling could also benefit from the insights of orality research. Christian counselors would gain better insight into the psychological make-up of their counsees if they were acquainted with the particular traits or characteristics of the oral counsees they are seeing. Furthermore, greater awareness of the communication practices of the oral people in their setting would be a tremendous advantage for Christian counselors with regard to the counseling interventions that they provide. Further research at the intersection of orality studies and Christian counseling is very much needed and promises fruitful discoveries.

Yet orality ministry methods ought not to be confined to international settings. Missionaries and evangelists should continue using methods that rely on orality research for missions and evangelism in North American and Western European contexts among secondary oral learners (people such as the millennial generation who generally do not prefer sustained reading—besides texting or social media). Globalization and immigration have resulted in predominantly oral peoples migrating to major urban centers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, among other Western nations. Church planters and ministry strategists in urban contexts should consider greater use of oral/visual methods in their evangelism and outreach to these diverse ethnic communities. Secondary orality is much different from primary orality, however. Christian discipleship and training in these Western contexts should exhibit a more obvious interdependence between orality and literacy. Converts should see the benefits of reading and study while also hearing the truths of the Christian faith.

Yet missiologists and practical theologians should think critically regarding the influence of orality research on Christian ministry. Researchers and practitioners should reflect carefully on current practices using orality studies in light of the paradigm developed in this dissertation, and in their reflection, affirm those elements that are theologically and methodologically sound. They should also provide correction for those

ministry practices that lack theological rigor. Nor should mission administrators rely on practices that are more pragmatically inclined and less theologically informed.

Oral strategists should evaluate evangelism methods such as Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) through the lens of Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle. The theological insight that the proposed paradigm may provide strategists and practitioners could help them in making sound decisions regarding the use of orality-based methods in ministry. The theological paradigm affirms the best features of CBS and helps lend biblical and theological justification for this method of evangelism in oral contexts. Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle may also provide a necessary critique to some of the methodological conclusions advanced by some proponents of orality in ministry.

Because of the analogical oral dynamic highlighted by the revised Scripture principle, ministry practitioners have a more solid theological justification for the use of oral methods such as CBS. The proposed paradigm could also offer insights that could further refine CBS. For example, Vanhoozer's reliance on philosophy of language from both the analytic and continental schools can influence our understanding of orality. For example, by relying on the revised Scripture principle and accepting the best from both analytic and continental philosophies of language, we would not endorse the conclusions made by some academics of orality who state that there are universal effects of literacy in all cultures and in all places (the evolutionary unilinear view based on a structuralist philosophy of language). We should instead accept that there are multiple *oralities* across various cultures throughout the world (influenced by the contextual or ideological position based on a post-structuralist philosophy of language). At the same time, being faithful to the conclusions made in Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle, we should also be careful to uphold a hermeneutical realism in all of our interactions with philosophy of language. It is possible to discern authorial intent because language is more than the interaction of signs with other signs. Meaning is more than a social

construct. This awareness of multiple oralities could give practitioners the impetus to perform not only a worldview analysis of their people group but also ethnographic study concerning the target population's communication practices. The knowledge gained from this research could assist in crafting oral Bible narratives that reflect the oral communication preferences of the people group as opposed to using a universal strategy for all peoples in all places.

The proposed paradigm could also serve as a corrective for the use of CBS by some orality strategists. In particular, Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle raises questions about ministry strategies such as an "oral Bible." The complex interrelationship between orality and literacy in Scripture, discussed in chapters 3 and 4, would suggest that a strong bifurcation between an "oral" and a "written" Bible does not reflect the phenomena of Scripture itself. Moreover, the theodramatic continuity of the divine communicative action extending from the incarnation of Jesus Christ to the inspiration of the Bible, mentioned in chapter 4, suggests that there may be an analogical relation between the hypostatic union and the inscripturation of Scripture. These conclusions should lead oral strategists to reconsider the concept of an "oral Bible." While it is certainly a noble goal to make Scripture accessible to nonliterate and dominantly oral peoples through methods such as CBS, we must reevaluate the claim that a compilation of selected oral narratives from Scripture actually comprises the *Bible*, indeed discourse that is treated as equal to a written Bible. Doing so regrettably confuses the ministry of proclamation with the authoritative text upon which that proclamation is established.

With a reaffirmation of the essential nature of the written Bible for all peoples, including oral cultures, ministry strategists would find that the implications garnered from the revised-Scripture principle warrant intensified efforts at Bible translation. But the interdependence between orality and literacy in Scripture, as noted above, should also be taken as a call for cooperation and collaboration between Bible

translators and mission practitioners who use orality research-based methods among primarily oral cultures. Indeed, as suggested by Green, Bible translators could incorporate the same manner and style of the oral narratives recounted by mission practitioners. This sort of collaboration suggests how Bible translators and missionaries using methods based on orality research can benefit and learn from one another.

If an authentic Bible in the primary language of every language group must eventually be written and the importance of Bible translation is properly understood, missionaries and evangelists will encourage literacy whenever and wherever they can. Moreover, as much as possible, church leadership should ideally be literate people. Granted, as was cited in chapter 3, people from some cultures and societies are either incapable or simply refuse to learn how to read. Nevertheless, mission practitioners should always be seeking to develop a core group of people who are interested in acquiring literacy. Such individuals could become trained as future leaders for the oral people. In time, hopefully more members within that community will become interested in becoming literate. Oral and literate methods could be used in conjunction with one another. The oral methods would ensure breadth of transmission to all of the people. The literate methods would encourage biblical and doctrinal fidelity and help serve as a safeguard for accuracy in the oral narratives that the community shares. Moreover, when people share oral Bible narratives, they should recognize that these narratives are based on and came from a written Bible.

### **Conclusion**

Orality studies have had a profound impact on Christian ministry, particularly evangelism and missions, over the last thirty years. Practical theologians and missiologists owe a debt of gratitude to the pioneering work of so many who desired to make the gospel of Jesus Christ accessible to everyone regardless of their language or education level. Out of their sincere desire to reach the multitudes, these fellow laborers

have advanced the gospel using orality. I wish to affirm the labors of these pioneers in the “Orality Movement.” If possible, I also endeavor to grow in wisdom concerning the use of orality in ministry.

One of the slogans of the Protestant Reformation was *reformatata semper reformanda* which means, “Reformed, always reforming.” In ministry practice, practitioners as well as theologians should follow Paul’s example of “forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead” (Phil 3:13). As the church of Jesus Christ understands ministry, its members should continue to refine the practice of ministry and make it more centered upon Christ in its reflection and application. The same is true for the use of orality in ministry.

This dissertation has analyzed the Orality Movement in missionary circles. We have attempted to offer a theological corrective to the contemporary practice of orality in evangelism and missions by proposing a theological basis for the use of orality in ministry, perhaps what could be called a paradigm or its “central operating principle.” The goal has been to take a fresh look at orality practices in evangelism and missions and provide them with greater theological ballast so that the ship of ministry practice may sail more assuredly guided by the light of Scripture.

Out of the desire for greater theological fidelity with the use of orality research in ministry, in this dissertation we proposed that Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle is a suitable paradigm for the use of orality in ministry practice. After summarizing the argument in its totality, chapter 5 demonstrated how the revised Scripture principle could function as a paradigm. Chapter 5 summarized the four metatheoretical domains of practical theology (theory-praxis, method of justification, cross-disciplinary model, and theological rationale) and then proceeded to explain how Vanhoozer’s revised Scripture principle would reply to all four domains. In order to demonstrate the practical applicability of the proposed paradigm, chapter 5 critiqued a specific ministry practice using orality, the ministry model of an “oral Bible,” through the

four tasks of practical theology: descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic. Our final conclusion was that the concept of an “oral Bible” is in fact a collection of oral Scripture narratives. To say that orally recounted Scripture narratives constitute a bible is to make an unfortunate misidentification of the proclamation of Scripture with the sacred text which its proponents seek to uphold.

Of course, promoting a theological paradigm is only the beginning. A fully developed practical theology of orality would be the next logical step after this project. A more accessible version of this dissertation for the average ministry practitioner would also be helpful, in order to have a wider scope of influence on those who engage in proclamation, evangelism, and missions and therefore who would benefit from understanding orality better and hopefully more biblically. Additional resources that rely on this paradigm would also be useful, including workbooks, primers and manuals at a level appropriate for practitioners.

Orality research remains a mostly untapped resource for ministry. Practical theologians should investigate the potential that the field of orality studies has for other fields within the discipline, besides evangelism and missions. Indeed, doxology (liturgics, including ethnodoxology), homiletics, education (catechetics), counseling (poimenics) and good ecclesial practice (oikodomics) could all benefit from the insights of orality research, particularly in cross-cultural settings. The proposed paradigms’ emphasis on improvisatory performances for socio-linguistic contexts means that it is particularly suited to guide strategists and practitioners for the task at hand. The work of Harris in ethnodoxology, Moon in proverbs and symbols, and Mucherera in counseling mentioned in chapter 3 are welcome contributions in their respective disciplines. Others should continue where their labors have begun.

Finally, practical theologians, missiologists, oral strategists, missionaries, evangelists, among others, should be careful not to use a truncated version of orality. Vanhoozer laments the division that takes place between theory and practice in theology,

but also between biblical and systematic theology. The theodramatically revised Scripture principle is his proposed solution to avoid dichotomous distortions of God's salvific agenda. The proposed paradigm includes hermeneutics, biblical and systematic theology, as well as practical theology, which thereby helps to bridge the divisions that sometimes takes place between these disciplines. By using a dramatic paradigm, Vanhoozer's theodramatically-revised Scripture principle realizes what actors have known for centuries: "*D'être, c'est d'agir.*"

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## ABSTRACT

### THE SPOKEN WORD: GOD, SCRIPTURE, AND ORALITY IN MISSIONS

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This dissertation contends that the “Orality Movement” in missionary circles has a dearth of theological development and is therefore susceptible to doctrinal error leading to ministry practices that are potentially harmful to the spiritual health of newly planted churches. As a corrective, this dissertation presents Kevin J. Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle as a paradigm for the use of orality in ministry. Through the use of a Toulmin-model argument from practical reason, each chapter develops the argument supporting the thesis or claim of the dissertation.

Chapter 1 establishes the first ground of the argument by establishing the legitimacy of Vanhoozer’s theodramatically-revised Scripture principle. First, the chapter recognizes the improvement Vanhoozer makes to the classical orthodox position on the Scripture principle. Next, the chapter indicates how Vanhoozer responds to contemporary epistemological and hermeneutical concerns.

Chapter 2 states the second ground of the argument by demonstrating how the dominant medium of communication has an impact on human cognition. The chapter defines orality and details the origins and subsequent history of research in orality. The chapter concludes with a description of the two dominant schools of thought in orality research.

Chapter 3 develops the first warrant of the dissertation’s thesis by chronicling the influence of orality research in both biblical studies and in missionary outreach.

Chapter 4 states the second warrant of the argument by identifying an analogical oral dynamic in various aspects of the theodrama including the Trinitarian economy, creation, redemption, and the inspiration of Scripture.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how Vanhoozer's revised Scripture principle can function as a paradigm by showing how it responds to Richard Osmer's four metatheoretical questions for practical theology as well as the four tasks of the discipline as a reflected practice. The reflected practice section includes a case study of how the use of the revised Scripture principle would allow one to respond to the use of an "oral Bible" by some mission practitioners.

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