The background image shows the interior of a Gothic cathedral. The ceiling is high and vaulted, decorated with intricate painted designs. Large, ornate chandeliers hang from the ceiling, and stained glass windows let in light. The walls are made of light-colored stone, and there are statues and figures on the balconies and pillars.

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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

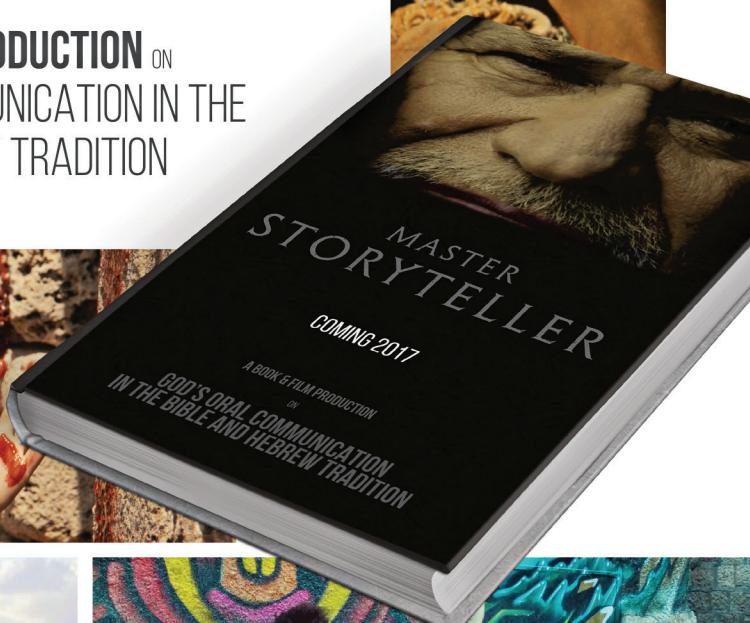
"Reformation: Five Hundred Years of Orality, Media and Memory"

Konstanski • Araujo • Gidoomal • Kroneman • Blackwell •
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HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?

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Orality Journal

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Cover Photo

All Saints' Church, (also called Schlosskirche or Castle Church), Wittenberg, Germany. Photo by Samuel E. Chiang.

It is on the door of this church where Martin Luther nailed his famous ninety-five theses.

¹⁶"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Romans 1:16-17

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Rev 1:3

"On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

¹²I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Revelation 1:10-16

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

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

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Editorial Email: oralityjournal@gmail.com

Website: www.orality.net

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National Christian Foundation
A/C 429666
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Albuquerque, NM
USA 87102

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Co-Editors' Note

Samuel E. Chiang and William Coppedge

Memory and Media in Revelation, the Reformation and Digital Orality

The Church is having a great rummage sale. Phyllis Tickle in her seminal bookⁱ suggests that every 500 years or so, there is a moving out of the old from the attic, decisions as to what to store, and movements towards embracing the new. This edition of the *Orality Journal* seeks to identify the nexus of relationships amongst orality, memory, and media. These articles, exploring topics like filmmaking, Bible translation, and digital orality, expose among other things the issue of integrating different modes of communication, whether oral, print, visual, or digital.

Written late in the same century that Jesus had sojourned, and in a "hearing dominant" culture where textuality was part of orality, the opening chapters of Revelation provide a fascinating example of integrated modes of communication. The Apostle John encounters "One like the Son of Man" (v. 13) and falls to the ground in worship. He is commanded to not fear but instead to write letters to the seven churches of Asia. At one level, this appears to be a straightforward literate method of communication as the Son of Man instructs, "*Write* the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this." Furthermore, the refrain, "to the angel of the church of ... *write...*" appears no less than seven times and not incidentally, in the letter to the church of Sardis, the divine *Book of Life* is referenced (3:5 italics added).

However, the significant oral dimension to these early chapters deserves attention. John's encounter with the Son of Man does not happen via the medium of writing, but through the spoken voice. "Then I turned to see the *voice* that *spoke* with me... and His *voice* [was] as the *sound* of many waters" (1:12,15) Furthermore, after being commanded to write, every letter begins, "These *are the words of Him...*" The words are being written down as remembered, and to be remembered. The written letters

represent words that were originally spoken and to be disseminated to the appropriate audiences, and the entire prophecy is to be "read aloud...and bless are those who hear and obey..." (1:3)

The Apostle John found himself at the nexus of orality, memory, and media, as was the time of the Greco—Roman era, as he encounters the spoken word (orality) and is being entrusted with the task of remembering (memory), and consequently, delivering these sacred messages (media). Central to every culture's unique understanding of memory and media is this central question of reliability—is the memory of this information true (or accurate), and has its delivery, in whatever mode, been faithful to the intention of its originator?

In light of such inquiry, one of the Son of Man's self-designations within his discourse with John stands out in bold relief: "These things says[1] the Amen, *the Faithful and True Witness...*" (Rev. 3:14, italics added). This Son of Man, who is called holy, who has the seven Spirits of God, who calls God Father—He is faithful and He is true.

It is worth considering these familiar words in the context of communication. Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God, through the incarnation not only declares the message of God but also is Himself the message of God. Jesus, who speaks orally with John, is the embodied message of God. Being the faithful and true witness means, among other things, that the information communicated through Jesus is true or reliable and it is faithful or trustworthy according to the intentions of the Father as the original communicator. Therefore, an argument is made that issues of memory and media, far from being peripheral concerns, are actually theological categories as much as practical ones.ⁱⁱ

The history of the Christian Church is in many ways a history of people trying to navigate the theological and also practical issues of communicating God's personal message—Jesus Christ. A timely reminder of one such individual comes this year as 2017 is the 500th year anniversary of Martin Luther's nailing his 95 theses to the Wittenberg church door and thus, the traditional beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

For Luther, the Bible was the written word of God, the gospel was the spoken word of God, and Jesus was the personal word of God.ⁱⁱⁱ For Luther, Christ Himself was present or "re-presented" through scripture. Thus, when a person or persons encounter the Bible, they are encountering the presence of Christ Jesus Himself. However, receiving and understanding the communication of Jesus Christ through scripture is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luther's affirmation of the role of the Holy Spirit in the communication of Jesus Christ through the Bible is no more clearly seen than in the previously discussed early portion of Revelation. John is speaking with the Son of Man, Jesus Himself, but the final exhortation in all seven letters is not, "He who has an ear, let him hear me (Jesus)." Instead, Jesus points to the Spirit: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the *Spirit* says to the churches." To hear Jesus is to hear what the Spirit has to say.

To frame this from a different perspective, the Spirit takes the spoken words of Jesus, heard and then written by John, and translates them from written words into the spoken words of Jesus to be delivered and heard by the seven churches. Thus, the Spirit re-oralizes the written word so that it can be heard as the spoken word of Jesus. Furthermore, the same Spirit who enabled Jesus' words to be heard by the seven churches is the same Spirit who has enabled people down through the centuries (such as Luther) to have ears to hear.

Therefore, if the Holy Spirit is essential for the remembering and delivering of Jesus' spoken words through the written words of scripture, then one can suggest that the Holy Spirit is intimately concerned with our present-day understanding of the role of memory and media for sharing the good news. It is the Spirit who truthfully and faithfully translates the written biblical text, bringing it to life so that people today have the opportunity to choose to have ears to hear Jesus' offer of salvation.

Such integration requires fresh theological consideration regarding the dynamics between the spoken, the written, and the visual word even as pragmatic concerns regarding social media and the digitalized word beg for more attention and resources. In light of this tension, between

theology and practice, a tension at least as old as the Apostle John and experienced by none other than Luther, we offer this edition of the *Orality Journal*.

Sitting in the Wittenberg Cathedral where Luther nailed the 95 theses for the intellectuals and nobles of that time, and listening to the preacher exegeting Romans 1:16, my mind multi-threaded into what might we recover from the Gutenberg Galaxy so that we can live in the Zuckerberg Galaxy? For example, when we quote

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. (Hebrews 4:12)

We use this favorite verse about why people and cultures need the *printed* Bible. But do we think about the original context that when the New Testament writers referred to *the word* — the Greek term is *logos* — they *weren't talking about ink on a page*, nor digital pixels on a screen?

They were talking about a message that was spoken and understood. Even the phrase word of God, which Christians today use interchangeably for the Bible, literally means the orally proclaimed message of God. And, when John used logos to mean Jesus Himself, he was referring to the personification of that message.

As Luther experienced a changing of epochs with the Reformation, so mission communication today has witnessed the changing of epochs with the digitalization of the globe. The relevance of the relationship between orality and digital media is as near as our decision of what to post next on social media: a printed text, an image, or an oral recording. Perhaps in seeking to navigate such a complex communication environment, returning to Jesus' self-designation in Revelation can be a helpful fixed reference point, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True..."

Change happens, and here in the *Orality Journal* I wish to thank Billy Coppedge as co-editor. It has been a wonderful partnership where we both

learned and grew together. I want to extend my deepest appreciation to Billy Coppedge as it has been a deep privilege to put issues together. May the same Spirit who re-oralized Jesus' words for the first-century Christians and for Martin Luther continue to prick our own ears.

“Whoever has ears to hear,
let him or her hear
what the Spirit has to say...”



Samuel E. Chiang
Wittenberg, Germany



William Coppedge
Kampala, Uganda

ⁱPhillis Tickle, "The Great Emergence How Christianity Is Changing and Why," Baker, 2008

ⁱⁱWe tend to forget that even during the manuscript period, prior to the Gutenberg printing press, and especially in First and Second Century AD, the trust of memory was a way of life in the "hearing dominant society." Orality was the way of life, and textuality supplemented communications. In our current era where textuality is dominant, we tend to think orality is accommodated within the text. And we superimpose our frame and worldview of textuality back to First and Second Century AD. We should have a better understanding of the "setting"—which is orality is dominant and textuality is accommodated within the oral culture. See robust and deep research from John Walton and Brent Sandy, "The Lost World of Scripture," IVP Academia 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱDavid W. Lotz, "Sola Scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority," *Union Seminary Review* 35, no. 3 (1981): 262–63. While some may disagree with Luther's theological differentiating of the word of God, one can appreciate his effort in trying to establish the necessity of the word of God for salvation.

How Will We Speak? On Film, Memory, and Mimicking God's Communication Style

Psalm Araujo and Ricki Gidoomal

In this article, film director Psalm Araujo and producer Ricki Gidoomal reflect on the films, memory, and God's manifold ways of communicating His wonders to us.

Scheduled for a 2017 release, *Master Storyteller* is a book and film production on God's oral communication in the Bible and Hebrew tradition, authored by Dr. David Swarr, Ricki Gidoomal, and Psalm Araujo. Three short films—"In the Beginning," "Remembering," and "Through Us"—were created as a complement to the book. The films address key themes in the book, such as orality in the Bible, starting with creation, and the question "How does God speak?" before moving on to how God helped an oral people remember His truth, teaching them to pass these truths on through the generations using oral methods.

Introduction

During the planning process of *Master Storyteller*, our team discussed how we could best share our reflections on God as an oral communicator. Our study of God as a master of communication opened our eyes to the rich ways that God chose to speak to His people, and then to the practical ways that He taught His people to remember.

In the first chapter of the book, David Swarr writes, "The creator of the universe is a God of media!" It was strongly felt that since our subject matter is God's use of multimedia, that we, too, should start the project in this

way. We therefore had the joy of directing three films that glance at communication in biblical tradition and beyond. The three films were designed to visualize and highlight several key themes from the book, and provide points of connection and ways to engage with the stories and aid in memory. We began with the simple question, "How does God speak?" and went on to look at three aspects of how he has communicated across time.

The first film, "*In the Beginning*," is set in the Garden of Eden and highlights the significance of how God shows His character in the world and in nature. In the first words of Genesis, we see creative

communication in action. God speaks creation into being in Genesis 1, and walks and talks in the garden with Adam and Eve. We then see through this story how He teaches about His own nature: He demonstrates relationship, discipleship, creativity, beauty, order, variety, authority, truth, consequence, and power. Even beyond the scope of the garden, creation continues to speak.

The second film, “Remembering,” considers how God reveals Himself through biblical history and symbolism, depicting both ancient and modern rituals of celebration. For example, the portrayal of Hebrew feasts from the Old Testament not only shows how they were practiced, but also provides insight into how such traditions grow into a shared history and collective memory of God’s actions.

The third film, “Through Us,” set in the present day, is about how God shows Himself in culture and creativity—through traditions, song and dance, and expressions of celebration. It is a call to action to use everything that we have been given and in all segments of society to play a part in communicating God’s way.

Even though we began with the question "How does God speak?" as a starting point, as we entered into each of the stories through its various elements, we asked ourselves, "How is God speaking to me?" Now, as we join with the Master Storyteller as co-creators, the question becomes, "How will we speak?"

We know that media is an important aspect of orality, and the power of the medium of film is a synthesis of many different media. Film is a medium that has the ability to create an experience that goes beyond the literal, by combining the story with the individual's triggered experience and memory. Through the *Master Storyteller* production, we hope to emphasize the richness of God's oral communication, and what part film can play in opening a door to the heart and imagination.

IN THE BEGINNING

Memory in the Garden

As a child, before I could read I watched the BBC TV adaptation of C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. I remember I was terrified by the White Witch who made the once beautiful land of Narnia an eternal winter, full of darkness and punishment. I

recall the excitement I had when the children, led on a secret mission by a beaver, saw shoots of green grass and flowers breaking out of the ice. "*Aslan is on the move...*" said the Beaver.

And then the story went on:

...now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don't understand but in the dream it feels as if it had some enormous meaning—either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again.¹

As those who are familiar with the story will know, Aslan is a powerful but humble lion who shows the children their true identity, and through his sacrifice gives them back their reign as royalty in the land of Narnia. Although not told by my parents, I understood

that Aslan was like Jesus, and this shaped my perception of the character of God from an early age. Even now, when the sun shines and the first trees begin to bloom after a cold winter, I feel a sense of awe, hope, and even redemption as I think to myself, "*Aslan is on the move.*"

C.S. Lewis' Narnia is allegorical of the Garden of Eden. When we first began exploring how God communicates orally in preparation for writing the book *Master Storyteller*, David Swarr shared the following meditation about how God communicated through the Garden of Eden.

God took meticulous care in creating the garden and placed in it all forms of life, not only plant life but animals, fish and fowl. And it was beautiful with lush arrays of color, scintillating sound, smells and textures beyond measure, each unique and varied. It was teeming with life. The entire ecosystem was life giving and sustaining. While immensely diverse it was at the same time ordered and balanced. It was completely harmonious with no hint of death or destruction of any sort. It was simultaneously a place of power and of peace.

Through this garden, God communicated his passion for beauty, his endless creativity, his care for order as well as diversity, and so much more. God's creation is not bounded as man's to time and space. No snow flake or human eye is the same as any other. Every sunset changes before our eyes, the next different from the last. The chorus of the birds at sunrise is never repeated exactly, nor the patterns of the waves or clouds.

The garden also communicated his love for humankind in that it was for Adam and Eve to enjoy—the fruit, the living creatures that moved on land, and in the sea and sky, the ever-changing environment, and one another. Like many gardens since, he also designed it as a place of meeting and intimacy. It was a gift home for meeting and fellowship, a place for communication to take place between God and humankind, for their enjoyment of one another.²

As I heard him, a picture of God as the ultimate artist and poet grew in my mind, and my thoughts went to the story of Aslan in Narnia that had enchanted me as a child. I remembered the images of a garden

and forest: first beautiful and then cold and dark; its wonder, awe, and all that had been taught through it now forgotten.

These were a few of the inspirations in creating the first film, “In the Beginning,” in which we evoke images of the Creation story and a sense of memory. The script took the form of the following poem, told from the perspective of Adam and Eve:³

There were trees. They were very old. None of them were the same. One I called Ilan. It moved slowly, and bowed often. All around me the trees stirred in their leaves and called out, “Stay awhile.” The light flowed from their branches, and they called again, “It is simple.” They said, “And you too have come into the world to do this: go easy, be filled with light, and shine.”

I was there when I heard the Maker speak to us, “Come, let's walk together.” I called him friend. I was naked, and I felt no shame. We named the mountains and the small seeds. We stood on the rocks and on the water. Sometimes we would sing.

When the fruit became bitter in my mouth, the blood rose in

my heart and the sand brushed like fire against my skin. He covered me. Oh, my son. When the offering was broken, and blood cried from the ground, I heard him in the wind say—“There is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease.”

Now I have grown old. I move among the trees and listen. Through the branches I hear the Maker say, “Stay awhile.” I know his voice. And like Ilan with its heavy branches, I move slowly, and I bow often.

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is one that evokes memories of discovery, joy, loss, and redemption. The story is familiar to us in many ways, as it is like the cycle of life. We are born into a new world, awed by the delights and amazing beauty around us, excited by new relationships, and in our innocence expecting only good things. Then, we experiment with forbidden things, turning away from the wisdom given to us by those who know more. We are hurt and experience the pain of sorrow and even death. Looking to God, however, we experience hope—wisdom that comes through memories. We hear again His word

and see Him evidenced in new creation: “...the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Memory of the Senses

While working on a media project in the village of Tongwa, Zambia, I sat next to a young woman named Marjorie as she rocked her baby in her arms. Children gathered around to see us, their small faces reflecting their shy wonder. Above us stood a large cliff side vaguely resembling a pig’s head. I was told that this was where humans used to be sacrificed.

“What is your favorite Bible verse?” I asked Marjorie. “God created man and woman in His own image,” she said. “When I heard that I knew that I, too, as a woman, have dignity.”

Marjorie and her husband, Moses, live in a village where women and children are considered mere property, too often discarded. For generations, much of the culture has been built on animistic rituals involving shamans and blood sacrifice. The value of human life can be exchanged for the favor of the gods, if superstitions are followed. But when the word of God came to them spoken in their own language, its transformative power began to work in visible and life giving ways.

Marjorie and Moses had the first Christian marriage in their village. Their love and care for one another, their value of their son, and their home showed a marked difference to those around them. Although ridiculed and harassed to keep the 'standards' of others in their culture, they were brave and secure enough in their redeemer to follow in His ways. A few others in the village also came to faith.

"Was there any particular verse in the Bible that changed you?" we asked the villagers. Over and over again the response was, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The creation story established the authority of God and answered their questions about the foundation of life. It was the bedrock for the rest of the story in which they could now participate.

The creation story is also a story about how God communicates His own nature to us, how He speaks to us. Swarr writes in *Master Storyteller*:

The Garden was the first orality school, and what a school it was! It was God's show and tell class and has had no rival since. God's method of instruction is what

is referred to in educational circles today as the Total Physical Response approach. It involved all the senses. Adam and Eve learned by observation, participation and application. But God did not leave them to learn solely on their own. Daily He came and modeled the way to relate among themselves and to care for creation. Just as in any culture's socialization process today, in the Garden values were caught as much as taught. In it He communicates value for humans by the environment he created for them. By giving them authority over it, he communicates his plan and calling for them. Through involving them in naming the animals, he allows them to take part in the creative process.

We know that children begin to learn through their five senses at conception, and that by age five, 85 percent of their intellect and personality are developed; all 85 percent of this learning falls in the category of "oral learning." Children learn through seeing and modeling others' behavior. They discover the world through the five senses. Most of the memories we have before age five are not in

our conscious memory, and what we think we remember is usually a powerful emotional reaction to something that happened to us—or in today's society, something that is recorded in pictures or video.

Often, when we are older, it is the memories that evoke strong emotion that come back to us. We remember our first impressions of God, the awe with which we viewed the world and the reverence we had for relationships. We often wish to return to the beginning and rediscover the delights and innocence of that pain-free world.

Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:2-4). Perhaps this means humbling ourselves—going back to the beginning, learning again through trust and experience, and using all of our senses.

“What the soul cries out for is the resurrection of the senses,” Lewis writes in *Letters to Malcolm*.⁴ “Even now,” he goes on, “matter means nothing to us apart from our apprehension of it through the senses. And we have already a glimpse of dead sensations being raised from the dead, through memory.”

REMEMBERING

Rituals of remembrance through media and collective memory

I remember as a teenager, arriving into school after the weekend when a new blockbuster film had been released. Every conversation heard was about this film—what was good, what was bad, what was unexpected. The best moments would be relived and reenacted, the worst would be ridiculed. Either way, our peers' reactions would enter into our communal memory as much as the film itself, and for those unfortunate enough to have missed the showing, the suspense had been ruined and the film's secrets revealed.

Unlike a book, where reading is more personal, and handled at the reader's own pace, a film can be an event, engaging a wider audience simultaneously. At the campus of Cru, the JESUS film is documented, including footage of an audience jointly engaging with the joys and sorrows of watching Luke's account of Jesus' life for the first time: the community weeps together at Jesus' death and rejoices together at His resurrection. An individual's memory of the film does not only include the story seen, but also the feelings that this showing evoked, as well as the surrounding atmosphere.

In today's world, film, like many storytelling media, is a communal ritual of storytelling in which we join in the dialog of how events, symbols, and narratives interact and give meaning to our lives. Now in this digital age, film is a medium that allows a mass audience to engage in this ritual.

Cultures are formed by collective memory or history—practices, rituals, and repetition. In the Old Testament, we learn about how God used oral practices to create a culture and teach His ways. The second film, “Remembering”, illustrates how God’s instructions are passed from generation to generation and the deep memories that are created through their repetition.

The film leads with the *Sh'ma*, which talks of continual daily communal interaction with God’s word:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your

house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)

God was very specific in His command to the Hebrew people to “remember.” He also gave them clear instructions as to how to do this, whether with appearances at Jerusalem or specific customs. These commands have been so well kept that the same feasts that commemorate events from several thousand years ago are celebrated almost universally in observant Jewish homes around the world today. According to Swarr and Gidoomal in *Master Storyteller*,

God instructed Israel how to establish numerous ceremonies for daily, weekly, and monthly practice designed to enhance relationship with God and one another. These ritual practices involved experiential and visual depiction of the requirements for healthy personal and community life. The entire system, operating on the solar calendar, had little textual input and where text was used it was shared orally with the public . . .

. . . God invoked times for the community to gather together for corporate celebration and learning. The festivals were communal, commemorative, educational and prophetic. They drew the nation together to celebrate and commemorate as they retold the stories of what God had done in their common history. The observance of the specific festival practices educated the people in understanding sin, judgement, forgiveness, as well as faith and trust in God as provider and deliverer. They were prophetic in that they foreshadowed a future greater fulfillment of all that the feasts themselves symbolized.

One of the greatest successes of these festivals as a communication tool is the inclusion of the family. The young and old are involved in each tradition, whether through the reading of scripture, decorating, playing games in the tabernacles booth, or the youngest in the family being required to ask certain questions in the Passover meal. The children wait with anticipation for the end of the meal when they are to search around the house in hunt for the *Afikomen*. The whole family takes part, and each individual engages with the customs in different ways across his or her lifetime.

In “Remembering”, a modern family comes together to prepare for two feasts, Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Passover. We also see a father and son from “ancient times,” the father teaching his son to paint blood over their doorposts and cut down palm branches for their *sukkah* or booth. These actions, though adapted by culture, have remained across generations. These *interactions* are as much written into our memories, if not more so, than the actions themselves, and it is these community memories that God so clearly wanted His people to engage with.

In the same way, so much symbolism was and continues to be used in the feasts that the preparation process can be as much of a memory experience as the event itself. This was highlighted in the script: “This is not just a meal; the Passover is written into every element.”

Every individual element comes together to tell a story. The bitter herbs are cut that represent the suffering of slavery. Parsley is washed and placed on the table, symbolizing the renewal of life and the hope of redemption. Four cups of wine are poured for the four promises from God: “I will bring you forth,” “I will deliver you,” “I will redeem you,” and “I will take you” (Exod. 6:6-7).

It was out of the Passover meal itself that Jesus instated a new tradition. When He said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” He was handling the Passover elements. These elements, which spoke to the disciples of freedom from slavery and to salvation, were used as *symbols* in the Last Supper when Jesus spoke the words, “This is my body.”

God shows Himself through symbols built into biblical history and passed down to remember and tell the story of what He has done. Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the ultimate symbol. The greatest show on earth has been told from the very beginning, and the Master Storyteller was manifest in the greatest character—*the Word made flesh*.

Arie Bar David, a well-known Israeli tour guide and Bible teacher, describes the physical land of Israel as “the 13th disciple in that it is so integrally part of the understanding of Jesus’ teaching.” He illustrates how even the translation of one word without knowledge of the culture and setting of the story could change or devalue the meaning. Nazareth Village in Israel uses their parable walk tour to demonstrate how Jesus used His visual surroundings to tell His

stories. We are able to gain greater understanding of Jesus parables when we stand in the first-century context in which He taught among the olives trees, in the vineyard, or on the threshing floor.

Imagine Jesus before a crowd, perhaps even there in the middle of Jerusalem, looking around at the trees and stones, using the visuals of his surroundings as the ‘set’ to tell a story. How theatrical He must have been! “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up...” (Luke 8:5).

Jesus used His culture, context, and creation to illustrate Himself and His truths, not only telling the facts of a story, but using a dramatized illustration that people could remember. We are part of this divine theater, and through media, technology, and other tools, we have opportunities that have never existed in any other generation. Using media, we can emphasize and use symbols to teach and pass on stories. As Jesus did, we too can bring together audio and visual elements to illustrate truth in a matter that sticks. In the case of film, a screening in a public setting can also be used to shape a community’s memory of both

the content and each individual's interaction with it.

Restoring God's culture and ways to our society will mean a conscious embrace of all types and means of storytelling with remembrance of God's word for our children, families, and society. Swarr and Gidoomal in *Master Storyteller* remind us:

Too often those most impacted by the last move of God are also those who resist the next fresh thing that God does. We become so comfortable with that which touched our hearts that we hold on to the patterns and symbols that we associate with God's activity among us, and therefore limit God in our midst and don't allow Him to be who he is, the Master Communicator who speaks to the hearts of every generation . . .

Are we going to take back the disciplines of oral communication, ritual, ceremony; Are we going to celebrate God's diverse creativity in our cultures and be those who initiate new expressions of his beauty and glory? Will we be the culture shapers that bring good news of God's wonder and creativity expressed through culture?⁵

God is the Master Storyteller. The breath of God blows into being all that exists. And His word is the story.⁶ Our God is unlimited in time and space. He has been speaking from the beginning through His creation, He has built into our history symbols and rituals that give us ways to remember and speak His story. He has given us Himself and made us in His image with the ability to communicate His truths in all segments of society.

THROUGH US

Beyond Factual Memory

I once had a friend who had grown up believing that Christianity was a religion full of law, hypocrisy, and power, and that grace was a concept used to cheapen the idea of God and to sell its own agenda. We would often talk about faith as it related to art, as he was a musician and filmmaker. Although rejecting religion, he still expressed to me his desire for God. At that time, we were working on the arrangements of a few songs I had written, and we would play them at places in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Although not overtly Christian, most of the songs had themes and stories about my faith—for instance, one was based on God speaking in the desert and throughout time; one was about Elijah waiting on the mountain to hear God's voice.

While practicing the first song: “*Who I am, I am again/ What’s to be, it all has come/ And it will echo in the wind, what’s to win has all been won,*” my friend kept asking me what it was about. “There is something in this song,” he said. “I don’t know what it is exactly, but there is something there I know to be true.”

We began discussing the stories of the Bible, of creation, and of who I knew Jesus to be. I decided to talk to him about the character of God and of Jesus through the lyrics of the songs, and without talking about the religion of Christianity. After many such conversations, he told me that he wanted to “know about this Jesus” and was open to reading the Bible.

In the third film, “Through Us”, a young man who is disenchanted and desensitized through un-truths in the media sits in front of his computer and longs for something more. Suddenly, something seemingly magical happens and draws him outside where he appears to be pulled by an unseen force from the trees and sky as he walks through the city. He stands in the middle of an old amphitheater and looks around. The narration begins: “A storytelling event is happening. Just beyond the borders

of this event are those who hear God’s voice through signs—in the sky and wind and trees, but are still straining to hear the whole story.”⁷

The young man sees various people using their own cultural and artistic expressions—expressions of creativity, history, and symbols of freedom—that draw him into discovery—music, art, dance, and sport. Such things are all written into us by a multimedia Creator: “He has crafted these expressions into who we are. We have been made in His image.”⁸

We chose film to express the themes in *Master Storyteller* because it involves both audio and visual and is therefore the closest medium we have today of how God speaks and creates our memories. In scripture, He speaks in a still small voice, in the thunder, in the heavens, through signs and wonders, through writing on a wall and tablets, and in poetry—all evoking emotions.

Art and media can impress new meaning upon the human spirit by interpreting anew what has been known before. It may be outside our current experience but faintly reminds us of something that we desire to experience or remember fully.

As Samuel Bellow said in his Nobel lecture on science and art:

Only art penetrates what pride, passion, intelligence and habit erect on all sides –the seeming realities of this world. There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality is always sending us hints, which without art, we can't receive. Proust calls these hints our “true impressions.” The true impressions, our persistent intuitions, will, without art, be hidden from us and we will be left with nothing but a ‘terminology for practical ends’ which we falsely call life.⁹

Psalm 42:7 says, “Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.” We hope to go beyond factual memory to create art in which “deep calls to deep,” where deeper truth and emotions invade our memories and “sweep over” and into our souls. C.S. Lewis called this “deeper magic”:

It means that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her

knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards.¹⁰

In Narnia, the Deep Magic is like the laws of the created world and of sin. Deeper Magic is the Word made Flesh, and the reversal of sin, restoring all of creation.

How will we use all that we have been given and be co-creators with God?

“Creatures, I give you yourselves,” said the strong, happy voice of Aslan. “I give to you forever this land of Narnia. I give you the woods, the fruits, the rivers. I give you the stars and I give you myself.”¹¹

How will we speak? Hopefully, with a roar.

¹C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Macmillan, 1950), 35.

²David Swarr and Ricki Gidoomal, *Master Storyteller* (in press, 2017).

³Psalm Swarr Araujo, *In the Beginning* (2016): Some lines taken from Mary Oliver, “When I am among trees,” *Thirst: Poems* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2006); also inspired by Job 14:7.

⁴C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (Harvest Books, 1973), letter 22, par 13.

⁵Swarr, Gidoomal, *Master Storyteller*.

⁶*Through Us* (2016).

⁷*Through Us* (2016).

⁸*Through Us* (2016).

⁹Samuel Below, Nobel lecture (Dec. 12, 1976), transcription: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1976/bellow-lecture.html

¹⁰Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 38.

¹¹Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 118.



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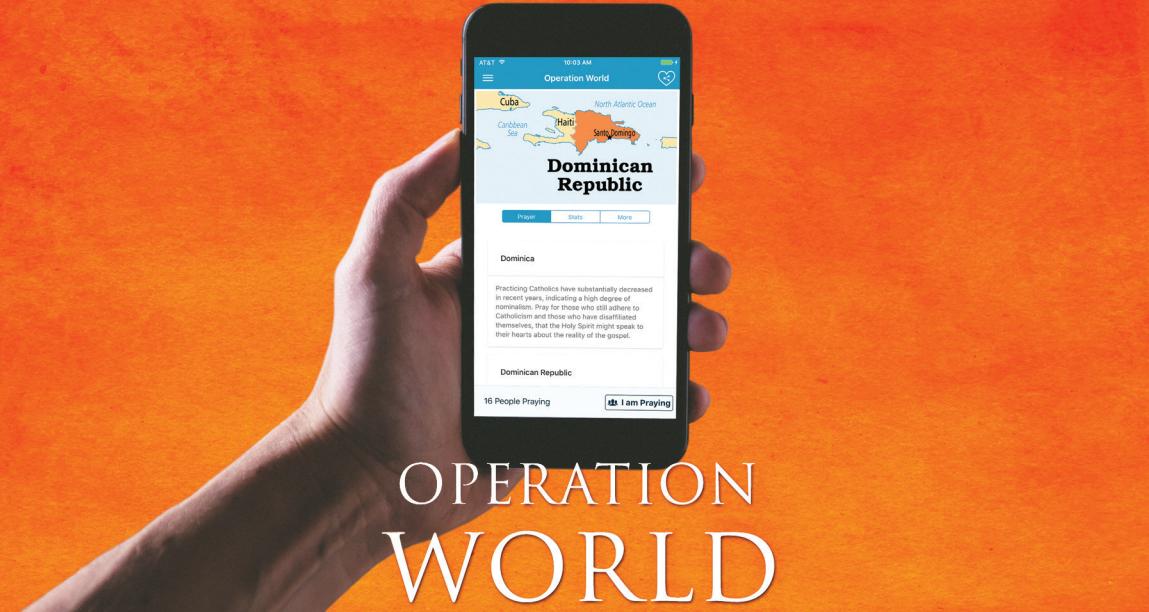


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