

Orality Talks

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Journal



Next-Gen: Orality 2.0

Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)



The **OralityTalks Journal (OTJ)** is a collaborative project of the **Institutes for Orality Strategies (I-OS)**. <https://i-os.org>

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Next issue: Vol. 1 No. 2 (2024) will focus on, but is not limited to, language/translation and orality. Check out our [submission guide-lines](#) and contribute to OTJ.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- The OralityTalks Journal: Next-Gen: Orality 2.0.....1**
Charles Madinger

EDITORIAL

- Guest Editor’s Introduction: Leading from the Margins..... 4**
Joseph Handley

ARTICLES

- Orality Missiology of Disciple Multiplication Movements: The
Philippine Tentmaker Missions Story 5**
David Lim

- Unleashing the Power of Orality19**
Charles Madinger, Rocelyn Anog-Madinger & Daniel Ponraj

- Using Oral Pedagogies to Improve Training Efficacy 28**
Daniel Baker

CASE STUDIES

- My Journey Towards an Effective Orality Journey 36**
Ruth Hidalgo de Robinson

- Orality and its Impact on the Development of Servant
Leaders in Southern Mexico 38**
Esau Aguilar

- Nepal: Equipping Leaders in Remote Villages41**
Chittry

INTERVIEWS

- Developing Leaders During a Crisis44**
Joseph Handley & Meng Aun Hour

- Leadership at the Margins in West Africa51**
OralityTalks Journal Staff

BOOK REVIEW

- Connected Learning: How Adults with Limited Formal Education
Learn..... 56**
Danyal Qalb

INTRODUCTION

The OralityTalks Journal: Next-Gen: Orality 2.0

Charles Madinger

Welcome to the *OralityTalks Journal* (OTJ). We offer a peer-reviewed journal that brings fresh insight for addressing strategic challenges to 21st-century missions. This Digi-journal is not just for the world of schools, seminaries, and mission thought leaders. It weaves the best of mission scholarship with the best of grassroots practices. It springs out of a bi-monthly discussion – [OralityTalks Webinar](#).

Each open-access webinar features a recognized leader presenting cutting-edge orality principles and methods. Participants then move into breakout rooms for discussion and comments and then return to share their insights with the whole group. A panel of grassroots leaders then brings clarity through case studies and local wisdom, and we conclude with a call to action, partnership, and publications. The OTJ will publish the articles, responses, case studies, artistic expressions, and recordings as the [OralityTalks Webinar](#). Jay Moon led off the series on [Oral Discipleship](#) (November 2023), followed by Durk Meijer with [Orality and Scripture Engagement](#) (January 2024). The publication of the first issue of the OTJ coincides with another webinar on March 13 on the series discussing current trends, challenges, and future opportunities.

An Interactive Journal

The featured presenter condenses their message as a video-introduced journal article. The panelists similarly contribute to the issue, and all participants may submit a complimentary article for publication. Contributors in the breakout sessions can bring even more suggestions from their discussions. Still more could come from proposed action

plans. Other regular journal features include book and article reviews, related research, artistic expressions, and promotion of exemplary mission organizations that put the principles into practice. Artistic submissions may include drawings/paintings, songs, poetry, related proverbs and folktales, and videos.

Interactively, each article begs your response, which may also be published as a supplement to any article or recording. The OTJ means to be an ***organic rather than static publication***, and even the comments submitted by readers get linked to each issue in a blog format. After every article or submission, you find a “comments” box to share your confirmation and constructive criticism and point to further resources.

You will also notice that hyperlinks will lead you directly to the sources used by the authors whenever available.

A New Generation of Orality Leaders

[The editors](#) of the OTJ represent some of the best-emerging mission leaders in the world. First, they are practitioners of ministry among high orality-reliant peoples. Second, they are from or work among the Excluded Majority of the world living in high orality reliance. Third, they are advanced researchers and scholars completing their [Ph.D. in Orality Studies](#). Angelica's role in the Asia Theological Association led her to ensure future generations of theological educators bridge the orality gap between their education and the people of the land. Danyal works among

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unreached people in the Philippines and teaches in a local seminary. Jay has worked in some of the most challenging contexts in the world and put his life on the line more than once. Daniel is proficient in using narrative among restricted access people. Emma works from his experience in the bush, and a few others who work among the Excluded Majority will join us later this year. From time to time (like this issue), we even ask guest editors to solicit significant contributions from around the world. They all bring new wine in this new wineskin.

Why a Peer-reviewed Journal?

The OTJ helps establish orality as an official field of study – a discipline. We will move forward as did evangelism, missions, pastoral counseling, and other now-recognized modern fields of study. You will be part of creating this newly acknowledged discipline. What does it take to become a discipline/field of study?

- **Addresses a knowledge gap:** Our Enlightenment-Centric education devalues most non-textual communication and learning. A shift to Orality-Centric education not only values advancement through literate ways and means but simultaneously advocates the communication principles and methods of Jesus. Emerging orality studies curricula bridge those gaps.
- **A body of research:** from the early work of James Slack and Lynn Abney to the more recent [Global Orality Mapping Project](#), missions are gaining more evidence-based tools. Master's and doctoral theses grow in number every year. You will find some of those in forthcoming issues of OralityTalks.

Theory and conceptual frameworks: Walter Ong (2002) remains the most quoted academic on orality. However, many other fields of study promote theories that make the case for what we call orality. Some of the most notable second-generation research include narrative learning (Bruner, 2004), Transportation Imagery Model (Green, 2021), Participatory Communication,

Constructivism, and Persuasion Theories – [Theory of Planned Behavior](#) (Ajzen, 1991), Elaboration Likelihood Model (Slater & Rouner, 2002), and [Diffusion of Innovations](#) (Rogers, 1995). All of this adds to our argument that orality is a field of study.

- **Specific terminology:** Oral learners, the Dominant Minority and the Global Majority, bible storying, ethnomusicology/ethno-doxology/ethno-arts, primary and secondary orality, high and low orality reliances, the Orality Gap, and exacting definitions (traditional, conceptual, operational, and missiological).
- **Institutions with the specialty:** Schools and seminaries adding orality to their curricula, Scripture engagement, oral Bible translations, and mulita-modal presentations of a message (audio, visual, 3-D, AI-generated, etc.).
- **Advanced degree programs:** The Asia Graduate School of Theology and the Asia Theological Seminary now offer a Th.M. to Ph.D. in orality studies, and numerous schools in Africa, India, and the South Americas are moving forward with new degree M.A. programs.

In This Issue

Our first OTJ issue precedes the first official webinar. It comes from conversations around the world about Leadership at the Margins. Contrary to popular opinion, since COVID-19, most unreached people have been further marginalized from access to the Gospel, teaching, fellowship, and resources compared to the technologically elite. They cannot easily access information and instruction as you do. Yes, they have cell phones and “internet access,” but not the way we assume. The virtual world is expensive, and they need the resources to access it. It requires downloading data from multinational neo-colonialists raking billions off the needs of the technologically impoverished as contrasted with the techno-affluent.

Then there are the *newly marginalized* people. They often had access to teaching and training, but quarantines and inflated

travel costs became prohibitive. Even people who lived in cities needed help to maintain the bandwidth required to stay connected to the new normal of Zoom calls, webinars, or conferences. In a recent African orality event, we could see nearly 100 participants, but many lost their connection when attempting to speak. Others were cut off and unable to return. Did they have access? Technically, yes. Practically, not as much as we hoped for.

The OTJ thanks the guest editor of this first issue, Joseph Handley. Joe served on the [International Orality Network](#) Leadership Team for several years and regularly contributed to its Orality Journal. More importantly, Joe dedicates his life and ministry to reaching the Oral Majority through [A3](#) (formerly Asian Access). He also published his work on [Polycentric Mission Leadership](#)

and applied it to bring the Good News to restricted regions.

A Call for Submissions

Register and attend an upcoming [OralityTalks Webinar](#). Engage in the discussion and contribute your thoughts, research, and ideas on the topic posed by the facilitating “expert.” Afterward, write an article, produce a recording, or submit an artistic expression for the topic. If you know a great resource (book, article, recording, etc.), review it for others to glean what you found already.

Our audience also dictates future issues to address relevant topics. Send suggestions to journal@oralitytalks.net. You may also submit any article you deem worthy of publication by following our [submission guidelines](#). It will be peer-reviewed and may be published as it demonstrates a practical need.

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Charles B. Madinger, Ph.D., a pastor given a second call building global communication strategies throughout the Global South. He leads the Institutes for Orality Strategies (I-OS) team from Manila, specializing in orality training, research, and collaboration. Chuck studied at Fuller Theological Seminary (D.Min.) and the University of Kentucky (Ph.D.) teaching in schools, churches, and conferences. Roce and Chuck share two daughters and four grandchildren.

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EDITORIAL

Guest Editor's Introduction: Leading from the Margins

Joseph Handley

Our world has faced extraordinary challenges in recent years, reshaping the global landscape in unforeseen ways. While the immediate context of these trials is not the focus of this issue, it is important to acknowledge the significant impact felt across societies worldwide. Amidst these complexities, OTJ remains steadfast in its commitment to shed light on crucial areas often overlooked, emphasizing the empowerment of marginalized communities.


This edition of the OTJ is a testament to our dedication to amplifying the voices of those on the periphery of societal structures. We have dedicated these pages to exploring leadership development strategies focusing on serving oral learners within the Lord's Church. This endeavor is not merely theoretical; it stands as a call to action, a means to equip the broader Christian community to uplift those unable to access traditional literacy methods or prefer oral learning.

Within these pages, you will find a compendium of case studies and narratives showcasing exemplary models of leader development. These stories, drawn from esteemed organizations and practitioners at grassroots levels, serve as sources of

inspiration and educational tools. They highlight the tireless efforts of the Global Church to extend its support to 'the least of these' amidst challenging circumstances.

The crux of this issue revolves around listening, learning, and collaboration. We invite you to engage deeply through these diverse models and principles rooted in Orality methodology. Each narrative presented here offers a unique opportunity to glean insights and foster dialogue within the mission community and global Church. I encourage you to immerse yourself in these stories and connect with the authors, fostering a collaborative space to further our collective understanding and support for those at society's margins.

As we navigate these pages together, I hope these stories will enrich your understanding and inspire action. Let us collectively embrace this opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the empowerment of marginalized communities within our world today.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Joseph W. Handley Jr., Ph.D. (@jwhandley), is the president/CEO of [A3](#). Previously, he was the founding Director of Azusa Pacific University's Office of World Mission and lead mission Pastor at Rolling Hills Covenant Church. He co-led one of the first multi-national high school mission congresses in Mexico City in 1996 and is a contributing blogger for the Billy Graham Center's Gospel-Life Blog. Joe serves as co-catalyst for the Lausanne Movement in Leader Development and on the advisory teams for the Nozomi Project, BiblicalTraining.org, DualReach, and the board for ReIgnite Hope. Joe strives to accelerate leaders for mission movements. Learn more about Joe at <https://www.asianaccess.org/senior-leaders/bio-joe-handley>. [✉ jhandley@asianaccess.org](mailto:jhandley@asianaccess.org)

ARTICLES

Orality Missiology of Disciple Multiplication Movements: The Philippine Tentmaker Missions Story

David Lim

Abstract: Developing a robust orality missiology for the Filipino church involves a SWOT analysis after two decades of tentmaker mobilization. Strengths lie in leveraging Overseas Filipino Workers as orality missionaries, emphasizing total mobilization and disciple multiplication movements (DMM). Weaknesses include clarifying the goal of societal transformation over Christianization and exploring ecclesiological implications of House Church Networks (HCN). Opportunities arise in Insider Movements with a multicultural approach. Threats involve literate Christendom dominance. Orality missions focus on contextualized spirituality, promoting self-theologizing and seizing opportunities in Asia's HCNs, global Kingdom Movements, post-modernity, and social media. The goal is a Company 3 strategy for effective DMMs.

Keywords: *DMM, house church, OFW, orality, Philippines*

Orality reliance level: *Very low orality reliance* ■□□□□

What missiology should the Filipino church have developed after twenty years of mobilizing tentmakers (mostly migrant laborers and immigrants) to use the orality approach to help fulfill the Great Commission for kingdom movements (KMs) in the world? The Philippine Missions Association's (PMA) flagship program has aimed to raise the largest and perhaps the most effective Evangelical mission force among the nations since 2001. This article is a critical reflection on what a consistent orality missiology should look like so that we can be more effective after having tried to equip a million tentmakers – Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) by 2020 to catalyze disciple multiplication movements (DMMs) among the unreached people groups (UPGs).

I write as a participant-observer and reflective practitioner, having been a mission mobilizer for China since 1995 and the Buddhist world since 1999. I served as PMA's Board member from 1997-2011 and 2015-2017 and its National Director from 2011-2014. From 2013-2016, the Asian School of Development and Cross-cultural Studies

(ASDECS), where I presently serve as President and professor since 2002, was involved in training the staff and community leaders of the Translators Association of the Philippines (TAP) in our joint Master of Language and Community Development. Moreover, as Board chair of Lausanne-Philippines, we launched "Mission 2025" in February 2020 to use PMA's DMM/oral strategy in our "Co-operatives as Mission" flagship program to make "every Filipino a blessing disciplinarian" and "every Filipino church an Acts 1:8 church."

PMA will continue to use our present orality missiology to reach Asia, which has the greatest number of unreached peoples living in regions dominated by major religious faiths and political ideologies with almost negligible Christian influence. Can we partner with the Christ-following minorities of Asia to reach our Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Communist, and secular neighbors effectively so that the Great Commission can finally be fulfilled among them? In this work, I will apply "SWOT analysis" to evaluate our

orality missiology's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Our Strengths

PMA has shown strongly that our missiology is founded on a commitment to reach all peoples through oral means. Thus, our mission mobilization has focused on sending tentmakers (lay missionaries) trained to do disciple multiplication movements where they live and work, with a transformational impact.

Our Orality Missionaries: OFWs as Tentmakers

Our missiology assumes that God has a simple world evangelization and transformation plan. The Bible clearly says that God desires all people to be saved (2 Pet. 3:8-9) and know the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4). To achieve this, the all-loving and all-wise God has devised a master plan to get this good news out to the whole world (of fallen humanity) as soon as possible. He did it by sending His Son Jesus Christ not just to provide the way of redemption in 33 years (cf. Gal. 4:4) but also to get him to model this strategic plan (Lk.7:20-23, cf. 4:18-19) and train his disciples how to implement this plan (Lk. 9:1-6; 10:1-20) by the power of the Holy Spirit across the Roman Empire and the world (Ac.1:8; 8:4; 11:19-21; 19:1-10; Rom. 15:18-20).

Thus, we have taught that God can use ordinary believers as His heavenly ambassadors. God's kingdom is a royal priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9-10, cf. Ex. 19:5-6; Rev. 5:10), not the prevailing Christendom practice that only ordained clergy are "holy people" who can baptize and administer the sacraments. The New Testament church was a lay movement. There is no need for "ordained ministers." The task of Spirit-gifted leaders is to equip "all the saints" to do the ministry of disciple-making or "spiritual reproduction/fruitfulness" (Eph. 4:11-13). Our tentmakers can disciple a "person of peace" (Lk. 10:5-7) in each place, and each Christ-follower can be discipled to become a "disciple-maker" who can be used by God to "teach

others also" (2 Tim. 2:2), to bless and transform their families, neighborhoods, and workplaces where Jesus can rule as King. God's kingdom is realized on earth, where Jesus reigns.

From an orality point of view, this "total mobilization" concept is very important for effective kingdom expansion. "Discipling the nations" can be actualized through simply mobilizing individuals and families through "zero-budget missions" (Lk. 10:4a; Ac. 3:6). All humans are oral, so it is easy to share the gospel just by word of mouth. Tentmakers are self-supporting and self-propagating – without the need for fund-raising and much training). Any Christ-follower can develop a simple (yet mature) faith that they can have direct access to God and represent Him as ambassadors of His kingdom to whichever community, profession, and situation God puts them in the world.

As lay missionaries, our tentmakers can naturally enter any culture (which are all basically oral) to form Christ-centered communities in any place, mainly in residences (neighborhoods) and places of work or study (schools, factories, government offices, banks, stores, etc.). Moreover, where God's word is prayerfully discussed, applied, and lived out relevantly in their daily life (1 Cor. 10:31), there is the church (the people of the Kingdom) gathered to scatter as His witnesses! Any section or sector of creation can be sanctified and transformed into "holy ground" when the people (led by their owners or leaders) consciously and constantly live for His glory (1 Tim. 4:4-5). The long-held Westernized dichotomies between sacred and secular and supernatural and natural are hereby integrated, like in all oral cultures!

Hopefully, the lockdowns of the recent pandemic have finally taught us all that to be human is essentially and behaviorally to be oral (until we are "educated" to function as literates), like in pre-literate times – especially as we anticipate that social media and cyber-technology promise a future of the

most exciting innovations like artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology, and biotechnology. “In all the wonderful worlds that writing opens, the spoken word still resides and lives” (Ong, 2002, p. 8). To be human is to be oral, and faith will always come from hearing of the Word of God, often seen first (concretely in good works if not dramatically in “signs and wonders,” but usually with the need for explanation), and shared naturally by word of mouth. Any believer, any time, any place!

Our Orality Strategy: Disciple Multiplication

We rightly chose the DMM strategy in the form of Company 3 (Co3) (see Appendix) as our flagship program. Like what Jesus did in equipping and sending his disciples into their world of oral cultures as “apostles” (Mk. 3:13-15), disciple multiplication (DM) is God’s simple strategy to “disciple all nations.” Every Christ-follower can be mobilized and equipped to multiply disciples where they live and work! Anything less – or more – is a diversion from God’s simple plan to evangelize and transform the world speedily.

Disciple-making groups (DMG) may also be called house churches (HC), which are intentionally small (not more than 15 adults), preferably “two or three” (as in Co3) for intimate sharing. These HCs covenant to meet regularly and are willing to love (and be held accountable for their Christ-centered lives to) one another.

In Co3, to disciple means to equip Christ-followers with just three relational habits: (a) hearing God through prayerful meditation (*lectio divina*) to turn His word (*logos*) into a personal word (*rhema*) to be obeyed (2 Tim. 3:16-17); (b) making disciples through facilitating an HC in Bible sharing, thereby each one learns how to do personal devotions with fellow believers (Heb. 10:24; 1 Cor. 14:26); and (c) doing friendship evangelism to share what they learn of God and

His will with their non-believing networks, as the fourth question explicitly asks in Co3.

In Co3, disciples naturally grow into disciple-makers empowered (given authority) to lead their Co3s as soon as possible. (Fresh converts are the best evangelists and disciple-makers!) We also teach that disciple-making should have an exit plan, to be finished normally in less than a year, so that the discipler can make more disciples and start more Co3s elsewhere as soon as possible. At the start of each Co3 (say, the first month), they should meet as often as possible (if possible, daily). After a few months, Co3s can meet less regularly, say, monthly, then quarterly, and later annually or through letters, emails, and social media.

Our tentmakers have been taught to use oral methods only and to avoid using literate materials as much as possible. Any material or tool other than biblical texts should be avoided, for disciples must learn to regard and use only the Bible as the word of God, preferably put to memory rather than in written form (Ps. 119:11). Even Bible translations should be used cautiously, for most of them use archaic or classic language that makes God look distant if not incommunicable; so it is best to have bi-lingual locals to translate scripture texts afresh so that even children and illiterates can understand.

Our Orality Outcome: Transformational Impact

Thirdly, many of our tentmakers have DMMs that were holistic and fulfilled Jesus’ KM to realize “Jubilee every day.” They have helped their societies to have a simple yet profound spirituality marked by “loving one another” as members of one big family as Christ loves us (Jn. 13:34-35), like the earliest church’s “caring and sharing economy” (Ac. 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-7; cf. Lk. 8:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:11-15), and the mobile apostolic teams of Jesus and Paul modeled such sharing of common funds, too, for both their needs and ministry to the poor (Jn. 13:29; Ac. 20:33-35). Our DMMs have produced disciples who do acts

of kindness and justice locally and globally, called “transformational development” or “integral mission” nowadays. For social impact, we need to win local leaders who can influence their constituents to transform their society.

Gladly most of our tentmakers serve in already well-to-do contexts that have good community services, so their disciples simply need to join and befriend the local leaders (esp. their bosses) and introduce King Jesus and devotions (prayer and the Word) to the people in the existing structures. Furthermore, those who have gone into less developed contexts and hence worked with development agencies or business as mission (BAM) outfits have served informally as volunteers and later helped set up people’s organizations to address particular needs with the blessing of the local leaders.

Our tentmakers partnered with local organizations in their contexts and contributed to transforming the global economic system. We are already leading in building the third (other than capitalism and socialism) alternative economic order called the Solidarity Economy, which equips and empowers the poor through social entrepreneurship, cooperative development, and fair trade so that each person can have their land (Lev. 25) and their own “vine and fig tree” (Mic. 4:4), passed on to the next generations (Is. 65:21-23).

During this pandemic, God has shown Filipinos (and the world) that ordinary people can initiate social movements that can transform society. God raised a millennial, Patricia, not just to start a community pantry to address hunger in her neighborhood. Within a month, 3,000+ pantries with 200+ hubs were set up nationwide (and in Cambodia and Indonesia). Many of our house (oikos) church networks HCNs (and a few local churches) were among those who joined this movement, which also showed good governance when they gave a financial report publicly during their monthsary. If done

according to orality principles, holistic DMMs can have this speed and impact for higher Gross National Happiness indices.

Our Weaknesses

Nevertheless, we failed to realize that orality missiology has many theological (esp. ecclesiological) implications, particularly concerning the goal, structure, mission, and approach for kingdom movements to happen and flourish.

Our Orality Goal: Kingdomization (not Christianization)

First, we have not been able to clarify and convince our tentmakers that our ultimate goal is to transform the existing structures in the world to become God-glorifying (kingdomization) and not to fill the world with church structures (Christianization). Most of us still have not changed our “kingdom mindset” from the historical “Christianization” vision, particularly in conceiving missions as a religious undertaking and its goal as a religious institution building (in short, to extend Christendom). Rather than incarnating, immersing, and infiltrating into the institutions and cultures, many of us still follow the Christian mainstream in building our institutions, thus maintaining subcultures separate from the pagan, religio-cultural, and social orders in the world, thereby perpetuating the sacred-secular dichotomy, which hardly exists at all in oral cultures.

God’s desired goal is simply “kingdomization” or “societal transformation,” by which existing individuals, families, communities, and institutions are “converted” (or better, “subverted”) to relate with each other and with other communities with biblical norms and values. This means transforming existing communities and institutions into Christ-centeredness, growing towards righteousness marked by self-giving love (agape), where every family will be blessed (cf. Gen. 12:1-3). Righteousness refers to just/right relationships (usually using one word: “love” or peace/ shalom) with God, with self, with all people (esp. those already in the

Kingdom, Gal. 6:10), and with creation, particularly depicted in Is. 65:17-25 and Rev. 21:22-27 – not perfectly, but substantially and significantly.

Such conversion is through faith (“worship”) expressed in “loving God and loving (our) neighbors” (Mt. 7:12; 22:37-39), instead of doing religious rituals and ceremonies (Mt. 15:1-20; cf. Is. 58:1-12; Am. 5:21-24; Hos. 6:6; Col. 2:16-23) in religious places (Ac. 7:48; 17:24). The proof of faith is “love and good works” (Heb. 10:24; Eph. 2:8-10; Js. 2:14-26), living the Mic. 6:8 lifestyle: “act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.” In his inaugural address, Jesus taught that his mission was “to preach good news to the poor... and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor [= Jubilee]” (Lk. 4:18-19), so he had come to realize this mission so that people could experience “Jubilee every day” (Lk. 4:20) and showed such good works as proof of his messianic identity to John the Baptist and his disciples (Lk. 7:20-23) and the people (Ac. 7:38).

Hence, the visible expression of God’s kingdom is simply “loving one another” “as I love you” (self-sacrificially) (Jn. 13:34-35), in the form of social services rather than religious services (1 Jn. 3:16-18). In Mt. 25:31-46, Jesus taught that in the Final Judgment, God’s only standard for sheep to get eternal life is whether their faith worked out in love (Gal. 5:6), particularly to the least of His family (the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, prisoners). His is a “bottom-up” kingdom, where His blessings are generously shared and enjoyed, so no one is left behind poor (Mt. 6:19-33; 19:21; Lk. 6:20-26; cf. Ac. 2:44-45; 4:34-37; 2 Cor. 8:11-15) – and we do not have to be literate to learn and achieve these.

Moreover, our tentmakers need to fully understand that all secular things – including all natural (God-created) places, assets and talents, and cultural (human-made) ideas, artifacts, gadgets, traditions, customs, worldviews, etc. – can be redeemed and sanctified through faith expressed in prayer

to God in Jesus’ name and obedience to His word (1 Tim. 4:4-5). There is no need to build religious facilities, for all properties of Christ-followers belong to (and can be used for) His kingdom (Jn. 4:21-24; Ac. 7:48; 17:24-28), for true worship can be done anytime and anywhere (cf. Rom. 12:1-8), even in Communist classrooms and Muslim mosques!

Therefore, we should teach a biblical spirituality requiring lesser religious practices. Following Christ does not require public displays of religiosity. In fact, Jesus discouraged such (Mt. 6:1-18), including almsgiving, praying, and fasting, which are to be done privately. As each Christ-follower walks humbly and simply for God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31; Mic. 6:8), their community will experience shalom and enjoy life with love and justice (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Their spirituality does not need to develop elaborate theologies, ethics, liturgies, and hierarchies (cf. Am. 5:21-24; Ps. 131). It will become “more generosity, less religiosity.”

Our Orality Structure: HCNs

We must also clarify our view of the final form of God’s kingdom when it is realized in any segment of the world. To transform the world, Jesus just trained his disciples to evangelize the villages of Galilee (eventually to all nations) by sending them two by two without bringing outside resources into the community (Lk. 10:4a) to build any new structure there. They just had to find a “person of peace/shalom” (Lk. 10:5-6) and disciple that person to disciple their kin, friends, and neighbors (Lk. 10:4b-9), transforming them from “wolves” into “lambs” (cf. Lk. 10:3) from house to house. If there is no such person in a community, they can leave and go to another one (Lk. 10:10-16), as simple as that. Their DMM was all done orally, for no one carried a single scroll of the Torah.

That is how the apostles and the early church extended the kingdom orally by forming HCNs in each place across the Roman Empire and beyond. The formation of HCs was the practical outcome of the

“priesthood of all believers,” as each Christ-follower was empowered to use their homes to serve and bless their neighbors where they lived and worked. It is simply discipling every believer to become “mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28-29), with the confidence to serve as God’s priest (minister) in and through their oikos.

How can the Kingdom be organized globally when it is implanted as small groups (oikos-size) in society? Jesus did not form a formal structure but introduced a cellular system that subsists in the constant reproduction of “new wineskins” (Mk. 2:22) in the structures of society. The early church had a cellular structure. Where the church existed, a small group (even as small as two or three) gathered for mutual edification (cf. 1 Cor.14:26) in order to scatter to share Christ’s love through good works in the world (cf. Heb. 10:24; Mt. 5:13-16). Each cell forms a part of an HCN, which is similar to the decentralized system of (zero-budget) volunteer leaders that veteran (ex-pagan) priest Jethro advised Moses to form (Ex. 18:21), where authority rests on the lowest units (“leaders of tens”) which are consulted and assisted (but not supervised nor controlled) by the “higher” coordinating units. In the NT, these local leaders were called “elders.” It differs from the denominational hierarchies of local churches with episcopal, presbyterian, or congregationalist structures.

The kingdom’s oral structure is decentralized through networks of friendships among the disciples and servant leaders. No hierarchy gives permission or controls the church, for only Jesus is the Head and Foundation of his church through the Holy Spirit. All leaders in HCNs see themselves as “servants of God” whose only job description is to “equip all the saints to do the ministry” of disciple-making (Eph. 4:11-13; 2 Tim. 2:2), each according to the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes to build up the one Body (1 Cor.12:1-13), one Temple (1 Pet. 4:10-11), one Kingdom. It is a flat structure where leaders view themselves as

“first among equals” and empower others to become better than themselves (Phil. 2:3-4).

What about accountability? Each one is personally and corporately accountable directly to our King Jesus, who commissioned his followers to make disciples among the nations. Each believer’s oikos is a “house of prayer for the nations,” used to love, serve, bless, and improve the homes of others. Each one is also accountable to their disciplers and disciples in mutual accountability, including confessing sins to one another and forgiving the sins of one another.

As seen above, HCNs are lay movements. Their leaders serve in various sectors of society – not in the clergy-led structures of Christendom. Each Christ-follower is disciplined to be self-supporting through a means of livelihood (Eph. 4:28). HCN leaders in Christendom (and Buddhist) contexts will have to gradually phase out the need for the clerical (and monastic) order as they apply the “priesthood of all believers.” Though they may continue to be supported by “tithes and offerings” at the start, they will each transition to a livelihood or trade (to serve as models, 2 Th. 3:6-12), most probably for many as teachers of philosophy, ethics, religion, and social sciences. Those with leadership qualities will naturally rise into management and governance positions in the community and the marketplace.

Orality is about relationships. As we grow from childhood, we learn to relate by communicating orally throughout life. Even for those with the privilege of “higher education,” only those with above-average academic grades become readers and writers. Furthermore, even they do not cease being oral communicators who appreciate oratory poetry, music, and all other forms of oral communication. Life is relationships; the rest are just details. Thus, our DMMs focus on relating and discipling in high-touch (turning friends into best friends, which is the essence of HCNs) – with or without high-tech, not even low-tech.

Our Orality Mission: Insider Movements

Thirdly, we must also clarify what kind of mission each HCN should do in a world with multi-cultural and multi-religious contexts, especially among UPGs. Jesus trained his disciples to do his simple missions contextually (Lk. 9:1-6; 10:1-17), which he also illustrated cross-culturally among the Samaritans (Jn. 4) and in Gentile Decapolis (Mk. 5:1-20; 7:31-8:10). When entering other cultures, Paul practiced “becoming all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:20-23), in fact, “making himself a slave [doulos] among them” (1 Cor. 9:19). As for the local converts, his straightforward mission – now called Insider Movements (IM) – included three dimensions: incarnational (1 Cor. 7:17, 20, 24), contextual (1 Cor. 7:18-20) and transformational (1 Cor. 7:21-24).

Through the “person of peace” in each community, people begin their faith journey by contextually remaining in the majority religion (or non-religion) of their family and community (esp. vv. 18-20). They developed their faith with a simple spirituality, each learning to live a “love God and love everyone” lifestyle (Mt. 22:37-39; Rom. 12:1-2) in their society. Jesus did not (nor trained his disciples to) set up any structure separate from the homes and communities where they lived and worked.

Kingdomization is an occupation plan, not an evacuation plan (1 Cor. 15:24-25; Phil. 2:9-11) because Christ is the ruler over everything (Col. 1:16-17). Christ-followers sanctify the non-believers (1 Cor. 7:14) and food offered to idols (1 Cor. 10:20-26) because all things can be purified (Tit. 1:15) by prayer and the Word (1 Tim. 4:4-5). Jesus entered European pagan cosmologies and transformed them Christward. New Christ-followers can continue to join in the activities and festivities of their community with a clear conscience. When asked about their motivation, they can explain and witness to Christ, even if it may result in persecution.

Meanwhile, they shall have been “multiplying disciples” before such conflict arises.

KMs may thus be called “incarnational missions,” which contrasts with the disastrous effects of Christendom’s “imperial missions” that have made Jesus look very bad (aggressive, foreign, and irrelevant), esp. in Asia. Perhaps worst is the heavy burden that has been imposed on new believers and churches (especially those among the poor) as they need to invest their minimal resources in supporting the salaries and theological studies of their clergy, buying property, constructing cathedrals, financing their religious activities – all of which make them look insensitively rich (and irrelevant) compared to the houses and facilities in their poor(er) neighborhoods. Most of these projects have been highly subsidized from abroad, especially by their denominational partners, up to this day. Almost all of them cannot pay their pastors properly and do not even have small budgets for community services unless they partner with some Christian development organizations.

In contrast, the rich harvest Jesus expected from his disciples is being reaped nowadays through the simple incarnational approach by HCNs. By following Jesus in his oral “zero-budget missions,” every disciple leads someone (usually a relative or new friend) to trust and obey King Jesus in love and good works. As they serve one another, the people (esp. community leaders) around them will take notice of “how they love one another” (and their neighbors) and will soon also ask for their help. They then naturally rise to become leaders in the community.

Our Orality Approach: Contextualized Spirituality

Then, what about the cultural forms, esp. religious rituals and festivals of their families and communities? New Christ-followers should be allowed to develop contextualized religious practices, retaining most of them and redefining them as Christ-centered and Christward customs, while finding

“functional substitutes” for those beliefs and values that are idolatrous and occultic. For instance, the most popular practices in karmic cultures, including ancestral and merit-making practices, will be simplified. Some may eventually phase out as they live out the logic of non-samsaric and post-animistic worldviews as they reflect on the Word (Lim, 2019; Fukuda, 2012, pp. 183-192).

They may even become more biblical and Christ-centered than the tradition-laden and liturgy-oriented denominations in today’s uncontextualized and Westernized Christendom. They will gradually learn to eliminate anything sinful: idolatry, individualism, immorality, and injustice. Not all at once, as all of us have not been rid of every sin ourselves, and as Elisha permitted Naaman to accompany the King in ceremonial worship to pagan gods (2 Ki. 5:17-19), and Paul permitted the Corinthians to eat foods offered to idols (1 Cor. 8-10). Almost all our present Christian practices (in liturgies, weddings, Christmas, Easter, etc.) were adapted from pagan customs of pre-Christian European tribes (cf. Walls, 1996, pp. 15-54).

Self-theologizing means completely trusting everyone to receive God’s word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and concretely develop their unique spirituality based on their real-life experiences and local resources. Effective communicators try to represent new ideas using real-life examples. Even literates learn best as they can retain relevant data much better than information that is unimportant in their everyday lives. So “why define, when a real-life setting is infinitely more satisfactory than a definition” (Ong, 2002, p. 53)? We can all remember, think, imagine, and communicate concretely rather than abstractly as oral beings.

Co3 uses the oral “Bible sharing” format to learn from 30 Chronological Bible stories. However, contextuality should also mark our HC meetings, with the free mixture of activities according to the needs and gifts of the participants, as set by the discipler in close consultation with their disciples. Following

the 1 Cor. 14:26-40 pattern of meeting, all members should come prepared to “provoke one another to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24) in their body- life together. In literate cultures, they can go through any biblical text according to the needs and interests of those present. However, they must curb their tendency to study and discuss them in abstract lessons rather than share experiences that lead to concrete actions. In oral cultures, they have the advantage of learning about Jesus and his teachings through storytelling, singing, and drama, which leads to worldview change (Evans, 2008). Nowadays, they can download the Jesus movie and film clips from www.jesusfilminternational.org, with translations available in over 1,400 languages, and discuss the clip’s relevance to their daily lives.

Our Opportunities

By God’s grace, today’s circumstances cause many headwinds in our orality missions. May I mention four of them?

Asian House Church Networks

Thankfully, we have many local partners who share our paradigm of “kingdomization” in the HCNs in almost all Asian countries. Since the 1970s, there has been a growing awareness among Asian church leaders to call for contextualization and search for new ways of doing more effective missions among their people. Those few who have chosen the HCN path may be among the most desperate (and courageous) searchers who dared to step out and launch these initiatives, often against the plans and wishes of their denominations.

Some of Asia’s HCNs have been “forced” by governmental persecution in some countries (like China, Vietnam, and Iran). However, most HCNs in Asia (like India, Japan, Thailand, Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, etc.), including many in China, have chosen this “new way of doing missions” today because of theological conviction based on the “priesthood of all believers.” Many have been inspired and enlightened from the

experience of China's churches as they learned that saturation evangelism and discipleship could be done more effectively through "simple Christianity" that can be led by ordinary believers sharing their faith "from house to house" orally – without the elaborate plans, liturgies, theologies, buildings, organizations, and budgets of denominational Christianity (After the recent pandemic, many more have joined our ranks.).

Some of these HCNs have the advantage of gifted leaders who have the intellectual and moral integrity to use their theological education and practical administrative skills to develop simple "systems" (actually "networks") that can accelerate "people movements" through "underground evangelism" in their respective nations. So, the Asian HCNs have learned to do effective outreach to win their neighbors who belong to other (usually majority) faiths. It has been done simply by empowering every Christ-follower to share their faith orally at any time and place.

Historically, Asia's HCNs grew from the "gospel explosion" in China in the 1980s, when many mission leaders, especially those who were part of the Discipling a Whole Nation (DAWN) movement, found a better way to catalyze "saturation evangelism" beyond just planting new churches in every village. By the 1990s, HCNs had started forming, especially in India, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines. As some national HCN leaders found each other, they began to meet at continental leaders' summits in 2006 to reflect the unity of the HCNs and to nurture personal relationships, especially between the older and younger leaders in the various HCNs in Asia – across their vast ethnic, cultural, generational and linguistic differences. Some of them are also regular participants in the annual meetings of the Asian Society of Frontier Missions (ASFM) since 2009. If Asia's HCNs were considered as one denomination (which they pray they will never become), they would be at least as numerous (estimated 260 million) as all the denominational churches in Asia combined (approx.

250 million), most probably as of December 2017.

Like PMA, many HCNs in China have been sending multitudes of disciple-makers as "ants, bees and (earth) worms" who are ordinary people using ordinary/oral ways to bless (develop, enrich) the lives of others. HCNs in the Philippines are spreading the Gospel of "eternal life (in heaven) and abundant life (on earth) for all" in Christ simply – through "nameless, faceless and (apparently) powerless" servants of the highest God (Lim, 2013b). In India, they go from village to village to enrich farmers with organic farming technology. In Japan, businessmen are leading fellow-businessmen and their employees to follow Jesus through "business coaching;" the top leader is now getting a Ph.D. in Urban Engineering to position himself to catalyze a DMM among the Parliament (Diet) members in his district.

Global Kingdom Movements

In the past 25 years, most HCNs in all continents, esp. Asia, North America, and Australia have been promoting kingdomization missiology, too. The better-known writers are Wolfgang Simson, Neil Cole, Tony and Felicity Dale, Frank Viola, George Barna, and Rad Zdero.

All along, we have also the encouragement from some Western mission leaders who propagated church planting movements (CPMs) or "Kingdom movements" (KMs), like David Garrison, David Watson, Kent Parks, Stan Parks, Steve Hill, Tom & Elizabeth Adleta, etc. Most significant in promoting KMs are Frontier Ventures (formerly the U.S. Center for World Mission), its organ Mission Frontiers and its publishing arm William Carey Library, as well as the International Society of Frontier Missions (ISFM) and its organ International Journal of Frontier Missions (IJFM).

Moreover, we have also found like-minded partners in many campus ministries, marketplace ministry, community transformation, BAM, and tentmaker movements,

particularly in the Lausanne Movement and the International Orality Network.

Post-modernity

Another opportunity is the global threat to all traditional institutions and social movements, which is the accelerating prevalence and influence of post-modern thinking (deconstruction of all absolutes and all institutional authorities) and the dominant use of digital media (almost anything goes on the internet and smartphones). Who will win in capturing the millennial and future generations? One thing is sure: globally, all the traditional religious institutions (including Christendom) are struggling and will struggle to retain their people, which accelerated during the present pandemic.

Certainly, we can take advantage of the deconstruction of absolutism and institutionalism that will overwhelm our world and the future, even with the help of automated and augmented technology. I believe HCNs and KMs are best positioned to win in this spiritual and moral “war for the minds and hearts” of people in our post-modern world. We need to be clear of two absolutes: our Creator God, who cares for all His creation and every human being (Heb. 11:6), and His clear revelation in Jesus of Nazareth, who came to provide His redemption to restore and transform fallen creation and humanity to His Kingdom, so that His will (commandments) will be obeyed on earth as it is in heaven, as revealed in the Bible. Our mission is to share these two absolutes in the oral/relational/friendly way – incarnationally, contextually, servantly – in every oikos and context wherever we live and work, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Social Media

As our world modernizes and globalizes further, science and technology advance rapidly, and as we form Co3s organically, the socio-religious traditions in our pluralistic world will lose relevance and be reduced or transformed into simpler forms. Through high-tech and social media, people, even in

still entirely oral cultures, will become more and more secularized (and materialistic and hedonistic). They will overcome their fears and guilt, which have been the roots of superstitious practices, lucky charms, and elaborate religious rituals.

We have to focus on promoting “more Jesus, less religion.” “More Jesus” means simply practicing the simple spirituality (three habits of holiness/discipleship) orally, in silence and low-key ways, amidst the busyness and noise of urban and cyberspace made by the literate elites. It also applies to the over-supply of online Christian programming that adds to the multiplicity of chats and services on Facebook and YouTube. We need to remember that historically, all “gospel explosions” and spiritual revivals were high-touch and hardly high-tech. We need to focus on “gossiping” the essentials (prayer and the Word) relationally/orally and not be diverted by the (Christendom) non-essentials (print, radio, TV, and internet) for spiritual formation and transformation. Online ministry will work only when friendship and trust have been established first. Can high-touch “friendship” (for DMM) happen on Facebook or any social media? Perhaps only with lots of time (man-hours) invested in personal chats.

Suppose anyone wants to upload videos on YouTube and TikTok. In that case, they are welcome to produce creative contemporary applications of Bible stories and personal testimonies of transformed individuals and communities that show the love and power of God in Jesus’ name. Let us be aware not to repeat the same mistake as we almost exclusively uploaded videos for in-house/internal use rather than inviting and attracting the unreached to Christ.

Our Threat: Literate Christendom

The only threat to our orality missiology will remain the dominance of ostentatious Christian institutions worldwide. Due to its wealth and power, Christendom, with its elaborate structures like cathedrals, seminaries, universities, and medical facilities,

will continue to prevail for some time. However, it will be overwhelmed by nominal religiosity, as has happened to all human organizations. Their demand for huge budgets will keep them in maintenance mode (usually apathetic or inward-looking, and thus hard to mobilize for missions) and cause not a few scandals. Chris Wright (2012) said in Cape Town 2010, “The greatest problem of God in his redemptive mission for the world is his own people” (p. 150).

Yet, in the final analysis, it is not a real threat. It will just maintain Christianity as 33% of the world’s population at best and become irrelevant in the secularization trends of our globalized, urbanizing, and digitalized world at worst. It will serve as a temptation for those who are content with “comfort zones” and do not want the demands of the discipleship and disciple-making ethos of KMs and HCNs, but that is expected of any institutionalized movement anyhow. We need to focus on actualizing the zero-budget missions of our orality missiology among the 81% of the unreached who do not know a Christian, and the old wineskins will fade away.

Conclusion

We have shown what an orality “kingdomization” missiology should look like and how it can improve the mobilization impact of PMA (Philippine Missions Association) and the global missions community. We should all aim to form HCNs to multiply Christ-followers who can multiply disciple-makers incarnationally to infiltratively transform societies into Christ-following communities and workplaces – with contextualized, holistic and transformational “indigenous oikos churches” that are genuinely replicable: self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating and self-theologizing. We will be “planting churches” that will be copied by future generations of Christ-followers, so we should

avoid transplanting denominational churches (= complex Christianity), which are often decontextualized (= foreign-looking, if not foreign), hence have almost always produced marginalized Christ-followers who are separated from their communities – despised and rejected by their family and friends, not because of the Gospel but because of their extra-biblical (and literate) forms.

So, PMA and “Mission 2025” need to focus on making disciples and multiplying HCNs through our oral Co3 strategy among all people groups in our country and beyond. We will encourage all Christ-followers to “gossip Jesus” and multiply small “disciple-making groups” among their friends and kin in their neighborhoods and workplaces. We have to only do this spiritual “network marketing” of the Gospel from village to village and city to city – till every home and workplace knows and obeys Jesus as King.

Across the world today, most HCNs and many KMs are forming Christ-centered communities led by local Christ-followers who have not been extracted religio-culturally from their communities. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will continue to catalyze DMMs in Asia and beyond by oral means, for we believe that the harvest has always been ripe for reaping (Jn. 4:35). Our King Jesus is indeed building His kingdom and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt. 16:18-19). May God find PMA and our fellow mission partners faithful in working together to multiply DMMs (even through migrant laborers) to actualize the kingdom of God effectively (not perfectly, yet substantially) among all peoples and all sectors of the world!



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Appendix

Company 3

Sharing Our Lives

Share with each other:

1. What are you thankful for?
2. What are your concerns, struggles and challenges?

Be honest, vulnerable and keep all that is shared confidential.

Hearing from God

Learn by heart one of the passages listed on the back of the bookmark, then answer these questions together:

1. What does this story tell us about God?
2. What does this story tell us about people?
3. What does it tell us we ought to do?
4. Who am I going to tell what I've learned?

Conversation with God

1. Pray for each other's needs.
2. Pray for others who need to know Jesus and for opportunities to bring them one-step-closer to Him; that we can start a Company-3 group with them.

Pray short simple prayers. Take turns praying "sentence prayers." Depending on the setting, you can pray with your eyes open. Just talk honestly and lovingly to God.

1. Gen. 1:1-25
2. Gen. 2:4-24
3. Gen. 3:1-24
4. Gen. 6:1-19, 17
5. Gen. 12:1-8, 15:1-6
6. Gen. 22:1-19
7. Ex. 12:1-28
8. Ex. 20:1-21
9. Lev. 4:1-35
10. Ps. 23:1-6
11. Is. 53
12. Lk. 1:26-38, 2:1-20
13. Mt. 3, Jn. 1:29-34
14. Mt. 4:1-11
15. Mk. 4:35-41
16. Mk. 5:1-20
17. Jn. 6:1-37
18. Lk. 5:17-26
19. Jn. 4:1-26, 39-42
20. Lk. 10:25-37, 15:11-32
21. Lk. 18:9-14, Jn. 16:24
22. Mt. 6:1-34
23. Jn. 11: -44
24. Mt. 20:20-28
25. Mt. 26:26-30
26. Jn. 18:1-19:16
27. Lk. 23:32-56
28. Lk. 24:1-35
29. Lk. 24:36-53
30. Jn. 3:1-21, Mt. 7:13-14



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Unleashing the Power of Orality

Charles Madinger, Rocelyn Anog-Madinger & Daniel Ponraj

Abstract: The article explores the transformative power of orality in communication, focusing on its impact in addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Northern Nigeria. It defines orality conceptually, emphasizing its role in conveying shared meaning and information. The text introduces High Orality Reliance (HOR) and Low Orality Reliance (LOR) frameworks, illustrating how missionary efforts often impose LOR methods on oral cultures. It advocates for a more holistic approach, urging the integration of disciplines modeled by Jesus. The conclusion emphasizes the need for HOR training paradigms, especially in educational settings. The article calls for a culturally sensitive, orality-informed approach to communication and mission work.

Keywords: *HIV/AIDS, Nigeria, orality, training, transformation*

Orality reliance level: *Very low orality reliance* ■□□□□

The HIV/AIDS epidemic was ravaging Northern Nigeria's largest metropolitan area. It seemed like all the well-intentioned attempts to arrest it fell on deaf ears. People were not connecting the urgency of the crisis to their part of the continent since the "AIDS deaths" of almost every adult from age 25 to 50 in Malawi "was their problem, not ours." How could an intervention message sink in? AIDS was on the same destructive path in Nigeria's cities and villages as it was in Malawi.

The Hausa people own a rich tradition of music, proverbs, and folktales, and a 'Show Love & Care' program drew upon that tradition to compose a song to communicate the dangers of this disease. Attention was also drawn to a key Hausa proverb that resonated with everyone and turned the tide. The song simply changed the words to a famous Hausa "tune." The proverb? "Don't wait till the grass sticks you in the eye to cut it." Connection made. If you wait until the grass is tall in this part of the world, you'll end up dead from the bite of a cobra. A six-hour interactive audio series reached every household in one of the Local Government Areas (LGA), and the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region was drastically reduced!

The arts of myth and folklore serve as tools of communication that enhance the engagement of the hearts and minds of hearers. When the arts are appropriately utilized, the

impact of a message grows exponentially. First, we move from the oral expressions themselves - myth, folklore, narrative, etc., described in the other chapters in this book, to utilizing the power that drives them to higher and broader impact. The question may now be raised, "Do we fully engage that power or continue in the modern status quo?" Nearly all mission training has historically been deeply rooted in Western literate principles and methods - even for people intending to live and work in contexts of very low print-text literacies.

A lexical definition of orality is simply a preference for and reliance on oral communication. Note, however, it is about communication. A conceptual definition of orality is how we come to shared meaning through receiving, processing, remembering, and passing on information. An operational definition of orality is a complex of descriptive disciplines practiced by Jesus from the Father and by the power of His Spirit. Anthropologists speak of orality in terms of oral tradition, cultures, and literature. Many educators speak in terms of "oral learners" versus print/text or literate learners and how each remembers truth and information. Linguists and Bible translators mainly focus on literacy and ever-changing languages. Sociologists relate orality to how communities and societies receive and pass on their values. Artists focus on creative expressional forms,

while communications and media professionals find the appropriate channels for the diffusion of messages through mass media. Finally, some missionaries and churches promote their preferred methodologies of Bible storytelling as orality, but what I wish to call Kingdom missiologists, evangelists, pastors, and trainers can rethink orality and discover more holistic perspectives for broader applications and deeper impact.

Orality and Communication

The first 40 years of the modern discussion of orality came through the insights of Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan (1982) as they conceived orality as simply a preference for and reliance on oral communication rather than print-text. Communication, however, does not begin with sound and speech. It begins in the mind and involves the whole person.

Orality is all about communication.

It concerns how we prefer to receive, process, remember, and pass on information and truth. As communication, orality necessarily helps us convey meanings from one to another using mutually understood signs and symbols. Some prefer a high dependence on oral communication, and some lower – and this on a sliding scale. But first, a discussion on communication in general is necessary.

From the beginning, orality is one piece of what sets us apart from the rest of creation. The Triune God lived in an intimate community, communicating together before anything was, and then chose to create us in His image. He spoke the world into existence. He himself spoke directly with our first parents as they walked together in the Garden (Gen. 3:8ff), visited the Patriarchs in the forms of men (Gen. 18), appeared in visions (Gen. 15:1), dreams (Dan. 2), wrote on tablets (Ex. 31:18) and with a finger appearing on a wall

(Dan. 5), spoke in riddles (Ez. 17), parables (Ez. 16) and laments (Ez. 19). He commissioned songs (Deut. 31:22; Zeph. 3:17) and finally spoke with all elements of human communication through his incarnated Son (Heb. 1:1-2). God “spoke” creatively so there would be no question about His love and message.

Conceptual Definition

Orality is our “in-the-image-of-God” shared characteristic of communication. He designed our brains to express ourselves in multiple ways and means. We see an image in our mind, and it cries out to be named from our earliest years of development. We finally express that “inner speech” by verbalizing or signing that image, like seeing our mother: Ma, Momma, Nanay, Maji, Mor – or whatever language we develop to express ourselves as infants. Eventually, some learned to express that image in a picture or drawing, or telling a story about her, creating a poem, then a song, instrumental music, sign language, and the list grows on. Cultures shape how that inner speech finds expression.

So then, in the sharpening of our conceptual definition of orality, we conclude that orality is “our learned expressions of God-designed inner-speech. It involves the whole person and can use all five senses.

Everyone is an Oral Learner

Everyone functions out of their orality, even if that person cannot hear, audibly speak, or visually see. Inner speech must find expression, of which written text functions as only one of many mediums. My daughter communicates volumes without a word spoken or written. She just rolls her eyes! We also learn to express ourselves through multiple literacies. Every act of literacy begins with inner speech, and finds its expression through print/text, graphic arts, sign language, braille, and even mathematics. Literacies flow from our capacity for orality. Reading and writing are just one expression of

orality – not something different from orality.

So, we all come into this world 100% reliant on that orality, and the issue then becomes how we developmentally learn to express our inner speech to form a framework. From the “eye-rolling” child to literacies of music, math, or computer programming. What is a framework? They serve as ways of viewing and organizing the world and interpreting it. In cultural jargon, we speak of worldviews. In educational circles, we call them schemas, or in leadership terminology – a paradigm. It helps us gain knowledge and differentiate our beliefs from other opinions (an epistemology). It is how we make sense of our environment and the movements of our lives. Frames are windows to the world and lenses that bring the world into focus. At the same time, they filter out the things we either do not need or want.

The Innsbruck Goggle Experiments by Theodor Erisman (1883-1961) and Ivo Kohler (1915- 1985) developed a set of goggles that inverted the field of human vision. The goal was to determine how a person might function when everything was “upside down.” After about a day of wearing the goggles, Kohler could begin pouring water, determine right from left, and even ride a bicycle. The key was to continuously wear the goggles to re-orient the brain to see the world in a new way. Taking them off after adjusting to this inverted world also produced a re-disorientation of what the rest of the world sees as normal. The frameworks of orality are much the same as the perspective of the goggles. We went to university or seminary and learned how to see the world and mission strategies with greater focus - with new lenses most of our audiences will never wear. We dug deeper and mined amazing gems that could not be seen with the naked eye. The goggles are good – especially when seeing things that go unnoticed without them and when we can apply what we see with those who do not share our equipment, orientation, and skills.

High Orality Reliance (HOR) Framework

Over their first few years, many children learn and develop a High Orality Reliance (HOR) framework or a high reliance on all that goes into communication. It is a socio-cultural phenomenon shaped by those around us from whom we learn what is “normal.” These children tend to prefer or value processing things together, a Kairos perspective of time, archiving important things in proverbs, stories, songs, and other local arts, using a line of reasoning that might be considered random, and repeating a type of processing, following a narrative or story most easily, deeply respecting elders, the past and traditions, listening for the familiar word as they hear, “becoming the music” in spontaneous song and dance and organizing their world in concrete tangible ways.

Low Orality Reliance (LOR) Framework.

Other children learn and develop a framework of Low Orality Reliance (LOR), or a low reliance on all that goes into communication in their sociocultural context. They tend to prefer or value processing of things individually, a Chronos perspective of time, archiving important things in writing or documents, organizing thought in outline form rather than narrative, following a line of reasoning that might be considered a linear progression of processing, rewarding innovation and youth, clearly defining words and phrases, and organizing their world in principles and abstractions.

Those who finished formal education, especially those who completed seminary training, lost their original high orality reliance over time and even changed brain functions from reading skills. We began moving away from a high dependence on oral communication and progressed naturally toward low orality. We increasingly learned to express our inner speech through multiple oralities and literacies. Some learned the literacies of sign language and braille, while others mastered the literacies of math,

accounting, computer software, musical notation, etc. We functioned well and learned by reading and studying individually, deciphering complex words and abstract puzzles. We sat in lectures with limited interaction with others and withdrew into our own world, listening to music. We viewed time in measured increments, taught, made disciples, and archived almost everything for print-text accessibility.

Both frameworks remain with us for life like all other culturally acquired parts of us. The food we eat and drink, the clothes we wear, the language we speak, the music that touches our deepest feelings, and even how we learn and relate to others. We learn and adapt to other preferences and even appear to have made a shift. Yet, the one we adopt early on stays our dominant framework. But make no mistake, these do not function as an either/or, oral/literate, or any other dichotomy. These characteristics and preferences exist on a continuum from HOR to LOR and change over time along that continuum.

Dr. Bauta Motty grew up with a very High Orality Reliance in a small village in Kaduna State, Nigeria. He was the first of his family to graduate from secondary school, then went on to a Bible school and seminary. Eventually, Bauta became General Secretary of his denomination and then enrolled in a top American seminary where he earned a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies. It sounds like he made a polar shift. However, for many of his courses and qualifying exams, he pleaded to take them orally. He says he always reverts to his roots when talking something through, and speaking it holds much higher value because you are what you say, not what you write. "It's who I am."

LOR Framework Domination

Some things need a LOR medium. Moses gave the books of the Law that included God Himself writing on tablets of stone, giving permanence to His spoken Word for all generations. That written word, however, was first in the mind of God, then spoken. After recording it in text, God expected it to be

spoken, listened to, and even sung (Deu. 32:44). Over time, this gift of God of a text-print extension of inner speech somehow began to bear more weight than the message itself. Jewish rabbis and elders made meaning out of each letter of a word. They invented meaning and applications by their own design to keep the law. The text became more important than the One who spoke and the message He wanted conveyed.

The later expansion of the Kingdom into what we now call Europe further elevated those who could read, write, and explain the Word in abstractions and principles. At the same time, leaders recognized that the overwhelming majority of humanity did not read or reason that way, as witnessed, for example, by things like the Eastern Orthodox icons, the Roman Catholic use of the rosary, and stained glass in cathedrals and churches which functioned as memory tools.

Enter Gutenberg and the era of the Enlightenment, which created a deeper value for those with "letters" and the universities that would emerge to graduate the elite, the respected, and the new powerful. Colonialism spread those values worldwide, suppressing the oral cultures and their frameworks to make them more civilized. "The Great Century" of Protestant missions witnessed waves of passionate, self-sacrificing missionaries taking the Message to the peoples in Africa and Asia, teaching them how to read and write, often in the languages of the colonialists.

The converts were quick learners, mastering the languages, ways and means of communication, educational systems, and commerce. Western schools, Bible colleges, and universities emerged, granting degrees and the prestige accompanying these new titles. The colonial missionaries freely gave what they had to those needing new tools, but they came with unintentional consequences. Teaching, preaching, evangelism, and leadership development came through LOR lenses. Western missions overrode the new disciples' preference for everything of high

orality reliance and forced them into another framework, which they passed on to their own cultures. The dominant voices drowned out the voices of those they came to serve.

This perpetuated the LOR paradigm that now permeates ALL modern Christian missions regardless of what they may look like on the outside. There are some notable exceptions to the rule. Some may have been training semi-literate tribal church planters in the interior of India. However, conference leaders were often imported (or plagiarized) from the West, delivering propositional bullet-pointed sermons and lessons to audiences not given a way of processing the Word collectively. Missions and denominations offer leadership training, evangelism presentations, bible school, and seminary courses organized around principles and outlines just like previous generations, and the cycle goes on unbroken.

Further, the overwhelming majority of Christian curricula originate from very LOR designers (just the use of these terms should sound an alarm). Even our Bible storying methods that most would consider HOR are rooted in LOR principles and methods. Radio and other media are often simply LOR messages recorded and broadcast with the assumption that we bridged the orality gap.

Why? People from "lettered" cultures become so oriented to our newly fitted LOR goggles that they do not see the world like the Oral Majority. To work among this Oral Majority is not merely using a few oral methods, even great methods like song, drama, proverbs, parables, stories, media, etc. It is about removing our LOR goggles so that we can experience their world and co-design all programs, training, and preaching for the HOR's hearts and senses.

An Operational Definition: The Incarnated Model

Jesus confronted the Jewish elite about the message His Father commanded Him to speak, and how to say it (Jn. 12:48-49 NLT).

Our point is that communications exponentially impact an audience to the degree that we follow the example set by Christ.

Using the principles of orality does not guarantee transformation, but neglecting those principles absolutely inhibits more thorough transformation. Suppose God, in Christ, intentionally framed His communication in ways and means that bring the highest impact. In that case, we must rethink how we communicate.

As we noted earlier, God exists in three persons communicating with one another, speaking the world into existence, and then communicating multi-modally with His human children throughout history. His inner speech designed the universe and resulted in our being. His expressions of that divine inner speech shouted out in creation (the heavens declare the glory of God), and His interactions throughout human history poured out that inner speech in revelation after revelation. How does that relate to myth, folklore, and other arts? It is part of His model. Luke passed on an account of how Jesus operationalized orality in the scene of a dinner in the home of Simon the Pharisee (Lk. 7:36-50).

Jesus lived in the region as a Galilean Jew and knew all the nuances of that culture, so when He ate at Simon's dinner party, he did it in a "reclining position" (Lk. 7:36), leaning on one arm, He recognized the impropriety of allowing a woman to touch him as she did – especially one known as an adulteress (Lk. 7:37). He spoke and listened in the language(s) common to the region as the scene unfolded – Hebrew, Aramaic, and probably some Greek thrown in since Israel had been earlier "Hellenized." He used the terms everyone around the table understood and even expected. When finally confronting Simon

the Pharisee, He used specific terms they all understood that struck at the heart of every Jew – their jargon (Lk. 7:44-46). Luke calls the woman “a sinner,” the greeting (kiss) withheld, the “water for my feet” insultingly not offered, and His controversial declaration of how sins could be forgiven.

Note that Jesus practiced all this in the home of a Pharisee. No accident. The medium was a fairly small group. He saved this kind of message for this place and with the right number of people so as not to lose the impact. He could have proclaimed it in the temple courts with hundreds present (mass media) or in the synagogue with 50-75 onlookers (collective media). But He chose a small group (micro-media), often at other times in people’s homes (Peter’s, Matthew’s, Mary and Martha’s, Lazarus’s, Zacchaeus’, etc.).

The wealthy Pharisee maybe had twenty or thirty dinner guests in his house for a debate with a rabbi. Jesus penetrated the religious network here in Simon’s circle of friends and at other times in temple discussions (Lk. 2:46), private meetings (Jh. 3) and dinners like this one, and by doing so, Jesus ensured that His Kingdom message would go viral throughout their ranks. As He eventually confronted Simon about the forgiveness God wanted to grant, it would be based on love, not law. Nestled in the story is the tenderness and all-out commitment of this “sinful woman” who spared no expense to honor Jesus as her Savior and King. She brought with her one of the specialized arts of her day – perfuming (Lk 7:37) - which bombarded the senses with a fragrance reserved only for the wealthy. Some entrepreneurs concocted an exotic mixture of expensive spices, blended the oils, and sealed it in alabaster. The translucent vase was an artwork in itself. It all impacted the guests in such a way that they could not help but repeat the story over and over. To make it memorable, Jesus made up a proverb for Simon on the spot: “He who loves much is forgiven much. He who loves little is forgiven little” (Lk. 7:47).

We contend that the use of the arts discussed in this book (myth and folklore in this context) reflects the communication patterns of God, as reflected in the mission He commanded His Son to fulfill. Therefore, when we, as His children, use them, they increase the possibility for transformational impact through the power of visual images. Roman Catholicism taught people how to pray with rosaries and presented the Gospel message visually in oral cultures through stained glass windows and murals. The Protestant Reformers produced new music and liturgies. In our educational experiences, from sophisticated urban seminaries to the “under a tree” grassroots training, who taught us or modeled the principles of orality? Who used the principles in the classrooms we sat in? How we learn (the discipline of “memory”) can go beyond telling us what we need to know. It can lead students to discover “new knowledge” through adult learning models using the power of narrative.

The difference becomes INforming versus TRANSforming.

Dedicating more effort toward transmitting the message on the wavelengths people prefer to hear and learn is as important as what we attempt to communicate. Learning to go beyond our acquired ways and means of communication poses a steep learning curve, so some never consider it, while others deem it too overwhelming.

Integrate the descriptive disciplines modeled by Jesus as a synergistic whole. Remember, orality is a framework – a schema, a total system that works together. Neglecting any one aspect decreases impact. Using the whole system multiplies impact. These disciplines also relate to professional or academic practices: culture (anthropology and especially worldview), language (linguistics), literacies (reading/writing/comprehension,

numeracies, sign, etc.), networks (the path a message takes to go farthest the fastest), memory (appropriate mnemonic devices, learning theories, long or short term memory), the arts (packaging the message to touch the heart using all senses), and media (mass, collective, small, social, digital) all leading to the highest form of communication. - interpersonal with The Living Word. Jesus deemed it necessary to use them all so that we might know Him. How can we not follow his example?

Present-day formal and non-formal education struggles to teach and model higher orality reliance principles and methods.

From the bible schools in rural Kenya to the house churches of China, our teaching models remain strongly LOR. The Enlightenment idealization of textuality, literacy, and reading in higher education still dominates communication and education models and devalues all we associate with orality. This means building HOR training paradigms like oral bible schools and training organizations capitalizing on the arts. Some churches work among the emerging digit-oral generations, but more are needed. How about oral Bible schools that teach a narrative theology delivered through Bible narratives and grounded


texts, songs, and regional wisdom, “oral literature.”

We can discover the path back to the power of orality. The discussions of myth and folktales that comprise the bulk of this book will demonstrate the crucial importance of these forms of communication in Northeast India and will help build stronger foundations of communicating truth so that others can multiply their work. God will bless the works of our hands when the work is called into existence through fervent prayer, using His design, completed by His power through His servants, for His glory. He preserved His thoughts and expressions for all time (until time shall be no more) through the art of textual expression SO THAT it could be HEARD and sensorial experienced throughout all generations as a witness to His great and glorious deeds.

I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants, we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. (Ps. 78:2-7, NIV)

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Using Oral Pedagogies to Improve Training Efficacy

Daniel Baker

Abstract: In this article, I detail my journey using ethnoscopic research to critique and improve the pedagogies typically employed in cross-cultural missions training. I use oral-based tools to present a highly efficacious discipleship strategy blueprint. These oral pedagogies are strong contenders for use among any global audience, not only those from the global south. This study focuses on the From the Nations to the Nations conference held in September of 2023 as the basis for improving cross-cultural training content and strategy. The study findings hold significance for reshaping training conferences and other teaching contexts.

Keywords: *contextualization, discipleship, ethnoscopia, pedagogy, training*

Orality reliance level: *Very low orality reliance* ■□□□□

This case study examines the efficacy of a missions training conference, *From the Nations to the Nations* (FNTN), held in Atlanta, Georgia, in September 2023. My aim here is to analyze the training and suggest how oral pedagogies might improve the efficacy of the conference in terms of its desired outcomes and outputs. The conference is unlikely to repeat with an identical pattern. However, the theoretical remodeling suggestions here might pave the way to shape future conferences and training content.

The Unused Lens

Recent findings regarding orality reliance show that virtually any audience we gather consists mainly of oral learners (Lovejoy, 2012). The term oral learners historically contrasted people who preferred oral communication to those with print-text orientation. This limitation of the field of orality is now changing. I will refer to oral and print learners as *high orality reliant* (HOR) and *low orality reliant* (LOR), respectively. HOR and LOR describe a continuum. The Global Orality Mapping Project (<https://gomap.pro>) is a tool created for cross-cultural workers to see where people fall between those two poles more clearly and to help them develop better strategies for effective communication. Research estimates the overall percentage of HOR people worldwide now and over the last 400 as 80% (Lovejoy, 2012, p. 21),

including North American audiences (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000, pp. 17–18). Despite these apparent preferences for oral tools and strategies, training methods within many Western Christian communities continue to be LOR. This tendency also permeates the pedagogies of the FNTN conference. What does this imply if most of those gathered as our global audience are HOR? How can we reboot our teaching and communication considering their needs over our learned LOR teaching principles and methods? What will make it more suitable and effective?

In this article, we address questions that demand our focus by utilizing the four lenses of ethnoscopic analysis (cultural, scriptural, missiological, and educational) proposed by Lynn Thigpen (2023a). We look at those who attended the conference since they are a microcosm of many other Christian training and teaching efforts. The seven subjects addressed over the weekend conference serve as the educational content to improve through the findings of our ethnoscopic research.

Cultural Lens

When thinking about the FNTN audience and how we can best equip them for cross-cultural ministry, an important cultural fact is that most people are HOR. Lovejoy (2012)

confirmed the previous estimates of orality researchers, saying,

If there are four billion adults, 950 million children birth to 7 years of age, and 760 million children ages 8 to 14 with basic or below basic literacy, then 5.7 billion people in the world are oral communicators because either they are illiterate or their reading comprehension is inadequate. That is over 80% of the world's total population (pp. 28-29).

This staggering figure is difficult for us to wrap our minds around. Suppose Lovejoy's well-researched estimate is to be trusted. In that case, four out of five people we encounter will be HOR in their communication and learning.

We also must consider how the leadership of the FNTN conference and the churches constituting those in attendance typically handle teaching and communication. The training pedagogies of Western churches are well known for being LOR (Madinger, 2023). Some churches use Bible studies, which can take on more communal and oral forms. However, many of these studies still depend on textuality and are strictly guided or informed by an individual leader. The point remains - if a person enters any church in the United States on a Sunday, you will almost certainly find teaching that is didactic, propositional, abstract, and delivered in lecture form.

This trend is also true of the FNTN conference, and the pedagogy of lecture made up 62.5% of the delivery of training content (an additional 12.5% was a narrative preaching hybrid). Leaders made allowance for questions and answers at the end of each session. A specific time was set aside for an extended discussion in small groups. However, abstract informative lectures from the expert remained the dominant training method. There was one outlier that I was privileged to include in the program for FNTN this year - one introductory session on Biblical storytelling. We did not use any notes or written material. Although everyone found this

novel experience quite nerve-racking, they all learned the story. They could accurately retell it within the allotted hour!

Considering these two cultural data points, the audience's oral needs, and the typically employed pedagogies in the FNTN conference setting, we must ask, are we training our audiences using the most effective tools and strategies? To help us answer this question further, we now explore the Scriptural lens.

Scriptural Lens

In Matthew 28:18-20 (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001), we read the following famous words of Jesus,

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

This passage works as a helpful job description for missional communities. Jesus calls us to go out and make disciples of all nations. If we do that, we must ask two essential questions about our target audiences: (1) how can we communicate with them most effectively? and (2) how can we teach them most effectively?

As we look to the Scriptures, we have a magnificent example of a communicator and teacher who worked among HOR audiences - Jesus! The best question is, "How did Jesus teach, communicate, and ultimately make disciples?" Here are just a few examples:

- Jesus often taught using stories and parables (Luke 15).
- He constantly used questions as teaching tools (Luke 10:25-28, Matthew 16:15).
- Jesus collected people and taught in an interactive community (Matthew 10:1-15).
- He combined demonstration with his teachings (Mark 2:1-12).

- Jesus employed close mentorship and disciplined disciples who would go and make disciples (Matthew 26:36-46).
- He taught using memorable word pictures and poetically framed teaching (Matthew 7).

Jesus accomplished all of this teaching and discipleship without using notes or text! He did this because he wanted to train his audience using the effective medium and mode for their learning and to equip them to reproduce that process among many others after them.

It is worth looking at an example of the teaching of Jesus more closely to drive home what we are learning about the model he has set for us to follow. In Matthew chapter five, we find a great example of the tools Jesus applied in his teaching. Matthew 5:1-6 (*New International Version*, 2011) says,

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

In his teaching, Jesus utilizes oral teaching methods. He uses repetition and mnemonic devices because he intended his teaching to be easily remembered by his primarily oral audience. Additionally, we see Jesus teaching specifically to their real-life world and felt needs. We could echo his teaching by saying, “Blessed are the disenfranchised.” Even the concepts he teaches about appear shaped comprehensibly and easily applicable to the lives of his hearers.

Missiological Lens

Moving from a cultural and scriptural perspective, we now look through the missiological lens (Thigpen, 2023a). Here we remember the objective of the FNTN

conference: equip audiences for cross-cultural mission. Considering this, we must ask, “Are we being as effective and reproducible in our model as possible? If not, what can we do differently?”

When people catch the significance of orality, they naturally think, “This is all about communication!” Thus, they make changes in the medium of their communications. Instead of being text-based, they might begin to record teachings in audio format and distribute them in place of written materials. It represents a step in the right direction; however, the challenge persists because the logic set and cultural foundation shaping the development of the audibly communicated teaching still rely heavily on textuality, influencing its structure, thought progression, and form.

Orality is much broader than just communication. At the very least, our teaching and discipleship must address three Cs of orality: conceptualization, culture, and communication. We must ask, “What does a conceptual shift toward orality look like?” and “What does a culture shift toward orality resemble?” in addition to questions of communication. We need a total shift in our conceptualization and, in many ways, our discipleship culture to understand orality and effectively equip HOR people for missions. We must address several key socio-cognitive differences between orality and textuality. I can provide only brief examples here.

First, textuality tends to favor individualism, and orality tends to favor collectivism or communality (Ong & Hartley, 2012). Due to the development of mass textuality, books became readily available, leading to their use primarily in an individualistic way, especially when consumed for learning. It impacts the way we think and act. In contrast, HOR nearly always requires communal interaction. HOR audiences will not respond well to teaching when we structure learning as an individual activity.

Second, textuality gives as much information as possible, while orality tends to redundancy (Ong & Hartley, 2012). A book can contain a significant amount of data; once information is conveyed, repetition is unnecessary. However, orality is redundant because people only know what they can remember. Therefore, what is most important gets repeated many times.

Third, textuality tends toward abstractions, and orality tends toward being situational (Ong & Hartley, 2012). Textuality trains its users to handle large combinations of ideas. Textual thinking and behavior tend to function like a book – we move quickly from subject to subject to subject. This orientation towards abstract allows individuals to pull pieces of data or information from many different reservoirs to compose propositional thoughts, which can then be structured, developed, and stored using textual tools. On the other hand, oral thinking is very situational. Oral learning and communication happen in the real-world context of the audience. The necessary knowledge is related to immediate and practical needs. Information that cannot be applied is lost, as it will be ignored or forgotten.

This description of the socio-cognitive differences between orality and textuality is incomplete. However, these three characteristics should help us understand the need for our missiological thinking to consider

communication and socio-cognitive differences in conceptualization and culture that influence the pedagogies used in our training strategies.

Educational Lens and Proposed Training Program for FNTN

So far in this paper, we have described the audience of the FNTN conference, whom we have determined to be HOR. We have sought to understand them as an audience using the cultural, scriptural, and missional lenses of ethnoscapy (Thigpen, 2023a). We explored what we understand of their learning and communication styles and have seen that the pedagogies and philosophy of training for FNTN do not align with them as well as we would hope. Reflecting on what the scriptures teach us regarding the pattern of how Jesus taught and discipled, I believe we should be firmly convinced of the need to transform our teaching and communication to be more suitable and effective in the light of the needs of our audience. We have further supported this conclusion through our missiological exploration of the three Cs and their implications for developing and utilizing a new training strategy.

Let us use our discovery and develop a new potential training program to help think through how we can utilize oral pedagogies (Thigpen, 2023b). The seven subjects at the 2023 conference, as listed in Table 1, will be the basis for improving educational content.

#	Session Title	Pedagogies Utilized
1	The Big Story and Mission of God Through the Bible	Narrative preaching
2	Worldview and Cultural Diversity	Lecture
3	The Priority of the Unreached (UPGs)	Lecture
4	Harnessing Orality	Lecture
5	Biblical Storytelling Workshop	Storytelling, modeling, group discussion
6	Where do we go from here?	Lecture, group discussion
7	Jesus the Great Apostle	Lecture

Table 1: FNTN 2023 Session Titles and Selected Pedagogies

The table reveals that over two-thirds of the training for the FNTN conference utilized lecture as the pedagogy of choice. In Table 2 below, I will suggest a new program outline utilizing oral pedagogies in response to the study results.

The Big Story and the Mission of God Through the Bible

The first conference session utilized narrative preaching and helped our audience grasp our missional calling by telling the Big Story of the Scriptures. However, it was still demonstrative of a didactic philosophy because information flowed unilaterally without feedback or interaction. How can we improve the session to be more effective with the audience?

Once we tell the story, we could utilize the pedagogy of “communal dialogue” (Thigpen, 2023b) pedagogy by breaking into groups for discussion. Once the discussion has taken place, we can utilize the pedagogy of “ethnodoxology” (Thigpen, 2023b). Each small group could work together to compose a song based on the primary themes from the story and discussion that were particularly impactful to them.

Worldview and Cultural Diversity

The second session aimed to answer four primary questions: (1) “What is culture?”, (2) “What is worldview?”, (3) “How do the stories we hear and tell impact our worldview?” and (4) “How does our worldview in turn impact our cultures?” Instead of solely communicating through lecture-based, we could divide this session into four segments anchored around these questions. We can begin with a micro-lecture introducing the question and key information. After this, we can have a pre-selected individual share their story/testimony related to the question (i.e., What is my culture like? What are the major stories I grew up believing?). After the sharing, we will move directly into discussion groups to answer our four questions further using communal dialogue.

Once they finish this discussion, we can utilize the pedagogy of “aesthetics” (Thigpen, 2023b) to further solidify the learning for participants by allowing them to use what they have learned. Each discussion group will work together to complete a banner that illustrates pictorially the key lessons from the session. Once they complete the banner, they will work as a group to provide an interpretation of what they have produced to the other conference attendees.

The Priority of the Unreached

Our third session focused on the missionary heart of Paul, as seen in Romans 15. In this passage, Paul makes several astonishing claims that have massive implications for a biblical understanding of mission. He claims that he has fully preached the gospel “from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Romans 15:19) and that it is his “ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known” (*New International Version*, 2011, Romans 15:20), and that “there is no more place for [him] to work” (*New International Version*, 2011, Romans 15:23) in the regions he had been ministering. This passage represents an important message for the church – that there is a priority taught in the scriptures to reach the unreached with the gospel. Paul seemed satisfied with the churches he had helped plant and foster, and he was convinced that they would continue propagating the gospel in his absence.

We could teach this topic effectively by publicly reading and reflecting on Romans 15:23-33 before moving to a short lecture. Once the teacher helped draw out the theme, we could split into groups and work on memorizing the key verses in this passage. After a time dedicated to memorization and reflection, the groups could work together to prepare a short “missionary creed” (Thigpen, 2023b) or statement about our commitments to this missionary calling to the unreached. To cap off the time, we could finish with a prayer time for specific unreached people groups.

Harnessing Orality

For our fourth session, I explored the topic of orality and how we can learn to harness its power to make disciples. I began by sharing a story about a teacher who had come to teach in a rural area in Oman but unfortunately learned Arabic instead of Jebali, which was the spoken language of that remote area. My lesson was that we need to step back and relearn our teaching and communication methods to be effective with our oral audiences.

After sharing my initial story, I lectured about how we define orality, its examples around us in the world, how the church has primarily disregarded orality and has instead preferred textual strategies and tools, and how if we want to teach like Jesus and be effective with our audiences, we need to begin using an oral approach.

Instead of teaching purely through lectures, groups could work together to develop a definition of orality. Then, the group could discuss and provide their examples of orality in combination with those examples provided by the teacher. Once participants firmly grasped the idea of orality, we could listen to several stories about Jesus and his disciples, which demonstrated oral pedagogies and philosophies. After discussing these stories, groups can do an “aesthetics” (Thigpen, 2023b) activity. Each group could work together to compose a drama of a story Jesus told that helped them understand an oral teaching approach.

Biblical Storytelling Workshop

Our fifth session taught us the story of Jesus healing the Gadarene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). First, a storyteller shared the story. After the first telling, the group was led through several questions about the story to help solidify the scenes of the story in their minds. Once finished with these initial questions, the story was told a second time by the storyteller. After this second hearing, the audience broke into groups of three to each practice telling the story from beginning to

finish the best they could. The two who listened in the group would give feedback at the end of each telling. Once the groups had learned the story, they discussed preformulated questions to help them think about what the story teaches.

We would likely teach this session similarly as it is an excellent way of utilizing the pedagogy of “modeling” (Thigpen, 2023b); however, we could employ a few additional pedagogies. First, this session is an excellent opportunity to coach and mentor participants in their storytelling. After completing each performance in the groups, a mentor could be present to provide more experienced feedback. In addition to this coaching, we could again utilize aesthetics (Thigpen, 2023b). When done with their storytelling activities, the groups could work together to develop a dance or a drama that reinforces their learning.

Where do we go from here?

In the sixth session, we spent around thirty minutes recapping learning from the weekend before explaining potential ways the audience could take the following steps in their training and engagement with missions. After this, we had a time of questions and answers for the whole group to discuss details about our available programs and the practical steps involved in preparing to go to other nations. We ended the session by breaking into groups of five and sharing what God had been speaking to us throughout the conference, including any resolutions made.

We designed this session for the training, and it does not require significant changes. However, it might help to shorten the lecture time, even though it was practical, and potentially to combine the question-and-answer time as we moved through the lecture’s subjects. Additionally, make mentors or coaches available at each table during the breakout discussions. They then facilitate the practical aspects of the next steps for people to take.

Jesus the Great Apostle

Our last session was a lecture on Jesus as the Great Apostle. The lesson aimed to help us see Jesus as the ultimate model of an apostle or a “sent one.” We are all called to imitate Christ in his obedience to be sent to people who need salvation. Our aim must be to let Christ shape our lives, and part of this means going to those who have not yet heard the gospel.

This session was delivered as a narrative-preaching hybrid, and I think it was appropriate for the conference’s aim. In addition to this teaching time, we must think about

pulling the conference attendees into a more profound experience of the lesson we aim to communicate. I believe one way of doing this would be to conclude the whole conference with a time utilizing “ethnodoxology” (Thigpen, 2023b). The audience could break into groups and work together to develop songs embodying this message (of Jesus as the Great Apostle) and communicate other key missional themes throughout the conference. Once these songs have been created, the entire group can perform them.

#	Session Title	Pedagogies Utilized & Allotted Time
1	The Big Story and Mission of God Through the Bible	Narrative preaching (30 min), communal dialogue (45 min), ethnodoxology (45 min)
2	Worldview and Cultural Diversity	Micro-lecture (5 min), testimony (5 min), communal dialogue (5 min) X4 - aesthetics (30 min)
3	The Priority of the Unreached (UPGs)	Public reading of Scripture (5 min), lecture (15 min), memorization (25 min), creed (25 min), prayer (20 min)
4	Harnessing Orality	Storytelling (20 min), communal dialogue (30), drama (40 min)
5	Biblical Storytelling Workshop	Storytelling and modeling (30 min), group discussion and coaching (30 min), drama/dance (30 min)
6	Where do we go from here?	Micro-lecture and Q&A (30 min), group discussion and coaching (60 min)
7	Jesus the Great Apostle	Narrative-preaching (30 min), ethnodoxology (45 minutes), thanksgiving and prayer (15 min)

Table 2: Session Titles and Utilization of Signature Pedagogies

Conclusion

Our aim has been to utilize the findings produced through the four lenses of ethnosopic analysis to inform potential pedagogical changes for delivering our training content at the FNTN conference. Table 2 summarizes the discussion of the seven training sessions above with the suggested activity and delivery changes necessary to act on what we

have learned about our audience’s need for oral-based approaches to communication and teaching. Now is the time to begin making disciples based on the needs of the audiences we are discipling and the unreached people to whom they will be sent, rather than relying on the preferences of text-based trained leaders.

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CASE STUDIES

My Journey Towards an Effective Orality Journey

Ruth Hidalgo de Robinson

Abstract: This report by Ruth Hidalgo de Robinson, a teacher turned missionary, chronicles her challenges and successes in teaching indigenous peoples along the Ucayali River in the Amazon of Peru. Facing initial setbacks, Ruth sought training in orality methods from organizations like New Tribes Mission and Scriptures In Use. Partnering with Development Associates International, she adapted discipleship materials for the Shipibo culture, transforming indigenous communities with organized churches and empowered servant leaders.

Keywords: *discipleship, indigenous, Peru, training*

Orality reliance level: *Low orality reliance* ■■■□□

I am Ruth Hidalgo de Robinson, a teacher by profession. When God called me to work with the indigenous peoples along the Ucayali River in the Amazon of Peru, I thought I was ready to teach because I was a professional educator, knew the Bible, and knew the teaching techniques very well. I thought it was a good opportunity to share my Bible knowledge and experience making disciples with people in the jungle.

The First Attempt

My first attempt was a mess. The indigenous students initially seemed interested, but as I was teaching, I saw them looking confused; when I asked them to review what I had taught, they did not remember, and I was very

disappointed. I realized that I needed help. I asked many missionaries around my city in the jungle, knowing there were missionaries from organizations like Wycliffe who had worked for many years in the jungle; others – like the Swiss mission – were doing discipleship. I knocked at their doors, asking, “Please, how do you do this work with the indigenous so I can be more effective?” I attended many meetings, where I learned about a missionary named Pedro Hocking, who explained orality and the materials used by New Tribes Mission with indigenous living in remote communities. He told me about the theological and chronological teaching of the Bible.

Working Among Others

Pedro had grown up as the son of missionaries among the people group I was trying to teach, the Shipibo, who are not 100% oral; they can read and write. I knew I needed to receive this training. However, New Tribes was using the material to train indigenous people, not mestizos like me. By God’s mercy, I found another organization, Scriptures In Use. I received Orality training from SIU. They followed my ministry and helped me as I began to use their method for discipleship. I quickly learned I could not do the work alone; I invited others to learn how to work with the indigenous. We learned and worked



together to use the material among the Shipibo people. The experience using SIU's Bridges material was phenomenal. While teaching the Bible through its stories connected to their way of thinking and learning, they began to grow in their understanding of the gospel.

Wycliffe had learned the Shipibo language, and they created an alphabet. They taught the speakers how to read and write so they could have a written New Testament in their own language. When I began working with the Shipibo, they had already been reached with the gospel for sixty years. However, their outreach and discipleship were not growing. When missionaries arrived, they

understanding, and living what they had come to accept as good news. We began by teaching the forty stories from the Old Testament as the historical background to the New Testament. As they learned and matured in their Bible knowledge, we realized they needed spiritually healthy leadership.

Partnership with DAI

At this time, we discovered Development Associates International (DAI). We began to partner with DAI and their Servant Leader program. We quickly learned that the material, although very good, was designed more for city people. However, the principles were very important for the Shipibo churches. We decided there was a need to translate and adapt it for an oral Shipibo culture. We used pictures, music, and drama to help the students learn the stories and principles. We chose two Shipibo students who knew Spanish and Shipibo very well. We sent them to Lima, Peru's capital, to study translation. They studied for two years, and we began producing materials to train indigenous students.

I am excited to see significant changes from our first visits to their village. The churches are organized, have their own servant leaders, and send their missionaries to other Shipibo villages and other indigenous cultures, training and teaching what they have received for the glory of God.

were excited; when missionaries left the village, the people would return to their cultural beliefs and lifestyles.

When we began working in their villages, we came with the assumption that they were believers. We did not need to preach salvation; we focused on discipleship,



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Ruth Hidalgo de Robinson is from Pucallpa, a port city serving along the Ucayali River in the Amazon Basin of Peru. She is currently CEO of RiverWind Inc. (<https://riverwind.org>), a Christian nonprofit serving people groups in remote locations in the jungle. Ruth also serves with her husband, Dick Robinson, as Perú Country Director for DAI and President of Asociación RiverWind Perú. An educator by profession and passion, committed to the Kingdom of God and his New Creation, Ruth excels in teaching the gospel through the stories of Scripture, culturally adapted to indigenous peoples. She leads a bi-lingual, bi-cultural Peruvian mission team. based in her home city. ✉ rrrobinson@daintl.org

Orality and its Impact on the Development of Servant Leaders in Southern Mexico

Esau Aguilar

Abstract: Exploring the oral influence on Christ’s teachings reveals effective and creative orality methods for training servant leaders. Jesus used narrative stories, parables, and rural illustrations, embracing the tradition of orality in Jewish culture. Inspired by this, we implemented semi-oral methods in leadership workshops with the Mayan community in Quintana Roo, Mexico. Strategies included storytelling, indigenous context-based activities, visual images, and music. The success of this semi-oral approach underscores orality as a tool for developing servant leaders in indigenous and rural contexts, aligning with Christ’s transformative ministry.

Keywords: Mexico, orality, servant leadership

Orality reliance level: Low orality reliance ■■■□□

How was the oral influence on the teachings of Christ? Is orality effective and creative for training and developing servant leaders?

The primary reference to orality is found in the Word of God, since throughout the Old and New Testaments, the revelation of God was delivered to man, among others, through narrative stories, letters, and poetry containing great eternal truths. We can also see in the Bible that the Lord Jesus Christ used orality to carry out his earthly ministry,

including training, discipleship, and people development. The Lord Jesus, constantly surrounded by all kinds of people, knew his audience very well. Therefore, he used rural illustrations of social events such as a wedding, some family stories, and parables in his teachings. Sometimes, he did these illustrations orally, and other times, he referred to the scriptures.

“That day Jesus left the house and sat by the sea. And he was joined by many people; and when he got into the boat, he sat down, and all the people were on the beach. And he spoke many things to them in parables” (Mt. 13:1-3, NASB). In the passage, we can observe that our Lord Jesus based his way of teaching on the tradition of orality that was already present in Jewish culture for the formation of His disciples. As Bailey (1991) mentioned, “It is inevitable that the person interpreting the New Testament presupposes one or another the understanding of oral tradition. The pedagogy of rabbinical schools was a well-known, formal method of transmitting tradition” (p. 1). This fact is worth learning since, as facilitators, we must know our participants well, know and explore the context in which we develop our workshops, and be creative in including diverse learning elements.



Inspired by the oral model of Jesus, we want to present some methods of semi-orality that we have implemented in some leadership workshops that we have carried out with the Mayan community in Quintana Roo, Mexico.

Building Creative and Effective Oral Communication Bridges

The first time I visited the Mayan community was in 2017. I went there in the company of a colleague and friend. At the end of this visit, we both talked and felt we had not communicated effectively with the participants. It



concerned me, and when I returned home, I continued thinking, and I said, “Lord, there must be a way to train these leaders in their style and not ours.”

I believed that this work for the Mayan community had just begun. Many times, I wished to return to the Mayan community. But in my heart, I thought I could not teach without material produced for an urban culture. It had to be a workshop designed with key learning elements so that they could make a communication bridge within the sphere of indigenous and rural culture.

In September 2020, we returned to the Mayan community. We began testing two

sessions from the course Servant Leadership in a semi-oral format. Ruth Robinson and her team at Development Associates International (DAI) Peru had adapted this to facilitate rural and indigenous culture. It was exciting since it was the first time we would test this material in Mexico. We had to relearn our way of facilitating, which we were very willing to do, and be able to enter a culture and train others according to its methods and not according to ours.

As DAI ministry, we value and practice teamwork, and the first thing we developed was a local team with whom I could support. I also had the intention of developing them as facilitators. At the same time, they would prove that God can use their lives to serve their indigenous community.

The team members were: Pastor José Manuel Santiago, facilitator and visual aids coordinator, and Fernando Poot, who was a translator from Spanish to Mayan and from Mayan to Spanish and was also a small-group adviser during the workshops. It required us to have meetings before, during, and after each workshop for coordination and evaluation.

The oral methods we included in the workshop sessions were stories (case studies) for the participants’ dramatization. We also included icebreaker dynamics with objects or crafts carried out in the indigenous context (for example, hunter, guardian, fisherman, artisan). With these elements, the participants could associate learning with trades, objects, and situations that only happen in their indigenous context.

One of the things that the participants from indigenous cultures enjoy the most is teamwork. It is a reflection of their social interaction within their communities. They are always interacting with each other and have constantly mentioned that learning is better as a community than individually. So, during our workshops, we carried out various activities in small groups, from discussing and finding biblical applications together


to performing dramas applying what we learned.



Another effective communication bridge in the indigenous context is visual images. They help to reinforce the part that has been explained orally; there is a relationship between what was learned and what is graphically faced. One participant said: "I remember the image of the log submerged in the water, and that this represents what we cannot see: everything that a person is, there is a part of him that is hidden and another part that we can see."

Music is an important piece that cannot be missed in a workshop or training. Indigenous and oral cultures must start with praise and adoration before each activity. Not doing this would offend them, but we did not want to impose our worship on the Spanish. So I asked our brother Marcelino to help us sing praises in the Mayan language, which he happily did, and this brought a lot of joy and connection between the participants and the presence of God before starting each training session.

Orality is a tool and an art at the same time. Moreover, we are sure that the Holy Spirit can use this to continue edifying and developing servant leaders who can give glory to God in their indigenous and rural contexts. Our vision and understanding became quite open. As facilitators, we must be humble enough to detach ourselves from the teaching methods we usually use in urban contexts. It is because we cannot impose our way of teaching. However, we must discover an appropriate method to train each culture, each group, and each person. In this way, we are reflecting Christ, who used oral and written methods to minister to his audience and was always interested in reaching the hearts of all his listeners for an integral transformation.

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Nepal: Equipping Leaders in Remote Villages

Chittry

Abstract: Dr. Chittry, a prominent leader in Nepal, employs innovative approaches to train pastors in remote regions, addressing issues of poverty and low self-worth. Drawing from his life journey, he emphasizes the value individuals hold in God's sight. Utilizing activities, role-playing, and sustainable practices like farming, Chittry imparts leadership lessons. Creative methods such as football, singing heart language songs, and the "Handful of Rice" approach enhance adult learning and contribute to building resilient communities.

Keywords: leadership, Nepal, sustainable practices, community empowerment

Orality reliance level: Low orality reliance ■■■□□□

Dr. Chittry is a leader, the Pastor of one of the largest church networks in Nepal (over 400 churches). He and his wife co-lead a church leadership development network that has trained 100 of the top denominational and church network leaders in the country.

When I asked him how he trains those serving in the remote regions of Nepal, he shared various critical aspects of their approach. In many of their encounters in their training in most of the places they go, food is scarce, and when it comes time to eat, his wife will say to everyone:

Don't be greedy... We understand why you fill the plate. But you will get enough to eat.

You can go 3 or 4 times. Eat as much as you can. We want to feed you.

When you face this type of poverty and malnourishment, often there can be a scarcity mindset. Dr. Chittry comes alongside, coaching and equipping them as they go. Sharing further, he says:

Most of them are dominated by the high castes, so they feel undervalued and uncared for.

We bring the issue of how valuable we are in the sight of God and why God choose us in this time. God will use you and bring glory and honor in His Name.



The Story of Dr. Chittry

Dr. Chittry was abandoned as a child and left malnourished because of a curse placed on his life. His older brother had become a Christian and rescued him, taking him to a missionary who raised him. On the road to the missionary orphanage, his brother stopped and prayed to God:

“My brother is dying, Lord. If you revive him, I will commit his life to you.”

The Lord answered the prayer and allowed Dr. Chittry to live. He committed himself to serving the Lord, who saved him from the curse of his life.



Allow people to understand concepts through activities that might normally occur in society, and it is through role-playing and other simulations that these ideas sync into our systems and

have a longer-lasting impact. This picture illustrates how even children’s play and programming impact the lives of adult learners.

Today, Dr. Chittry has learned sustainability and lives from an abundance mindset. He takes what God has given him and multiplies it by training others to practice ministry through sustainable systems: farming, raising chickens and pigs, etc. On the left is a picture of Dr. Chittry with his poultry farm. He is training local pastors on how to raise and keep chickens as a means of sustainable livelihood. These practical techniques allow those in challenging socioeconomic locations around the country to thrive in the midst of their ministries.

Leadership Training

In taking these leadership lessons to the remote tribes, they often start by playing football. The untrained pastors will often say,

“This is a waste of time or this is a sin.” But, it is through play, that pastors learn to go deep together and learn in a richer fashion. These adult learning techniques

Part of the leadership training process includes singing songs. Heart language songs grab the attention of the trainees (pastors/ church leaders) and sustain them over many years. Dr. Chittry and his wife share how those they have equipped remember the songs long after they have left the villages. These songs have spiritual meaning embedded into them and strengthen the teachings being offered in ways that are also reproducible because of how memorable they are.

For years, Dr. Chittry’s network served throughout the country, serving the poorest of the poor. This network, extending to some 400 churches across the country was prepared, as well as could be, to come in and serve the community during their darkest modern hour like when the earthquake that devastated the Nepal that occurred in 2015.

In that tragic time, Dr. Chittry’s teams, along with nearly 100 graduates of A3 beyond his network, served in some of the toughest hit villages. They developed makeshift learning venues like the one pictured on the right to equip those most impoverished with basic needs and spiritual relief.

Handful of Rice

As they train up leaders in these remote regions, Dr. Chittry and his wife use “The Handful of Rice” approach to equip them in generosity.

Buhfai tham (‘handful of rice’) was started in the state of Mizoram in northeast India in 1910. It is a practice where each family, mainly from the Mizo ethnic group, puts aside a handful of rice every time they cook a meal. Later, they gather it and offer it to the church. The church in turn sells the rice and generates income to support its work.

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This form of leadership training has proven enormously successful. They encourage leaders to bring a handful of their rice to pay forward and help others in ministry. To get a glimpse of what they do, see this video produced by Generosity Path: <https://vimeo.com/163251947>.

These practical approaches to leader development are enormously helpful to the illiterate and uneducated, according to Dr. Chittry. They are key to reaching these regions for Christ and equipping the community leaders to build sustainable lives and ministries.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Chittry leads one of Nepal's largest church planting networks and is a faculty member for A3, formerly Asian Access. He and his wife are trainers of trainers who have influenced most of the church networks and denominations in the country. They engage in social enterprises, rescue centers, and orphanages nationwide. In addition, they are active in community development and government relations, trying to be a bridge to the various faiths and the secular and religious state enterprises. To enable much of this work, he runs a successful company that operates in several business ventures: real estate, rental property, and land and agricultural development. A3 is a movement seeking to Change the Few who Change the Many. We are a network of learning communities building the capacity of servant leaders to accelerate their mission influence. Learn more at <https://a3leaders.org/about-a3/>.

INTERVIEWS

Developing Leaders During a Crisis

Joseph Handley & Meng Aun Hour

Abstract: In this insightful interview, Meng Aun Hour from Cambodia shares his country's challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly its economic impact. He discusses the struggles of churches, pastors, and communities, emphasizing the vital role of creative orality methods, like storytelling, in leadership training. Despite setbacks, the School of Discipleship has grown remarkably, planting around 75 churches. Meng highlights the lessons learned, emphasizing God's faithfulness, the importance of patience, and the certainty of His ultimate plan for Cambodia's future.

Keywords: Cambodia, leadership training, orality methods

Orality reliance level: Low orality reliance ■■■□□

My name is Joe Handley (JH) and I have the privilege of serving with Asian Access. Today I have the honor of talking with my friend Meng Aun Hour (MAH) who is from Cambodia and we're going to hear what God is doing in the midst of this pandemic in that country. And how he's working, especially to develop leaders, because this is a really challenging season for all of us worldwide, particularly right now for those who live in Asia.

JH: Wonderful! Let me just start with a question about the pandemic, this has been a very hard year. Tell us about how Cambodia has gone through this pandemic year as a country.

MAH: Yes, our country's situation from February 20 this year was not good. COVID-19 spread around the Community so badly and many people got affected. The whole country was placed under lockdown and institutions like the churches, the schools and the markets were closed and the government did not allow the people to come out of their houses. It is hard to even go out to buy food. We were not told ahead of time, the whole area was totally locked down right away. So we were stuck in the province and cannot go back to the city of Phnom Penh for about two weeks.

JH: And the economy has hit the country very hard, is that right?

MAH: Oh that's right! COVID-19 hit hard our economy. One example is a factory worker, who is from the countryside, needed to rent a room in order to stay close to his work. Then when the pandemic came, the factory closed down and the factory worker had no money to pay for his rent and for food. The workers have no more work, they cannot even send money to their families back in the countryside. Tourism was hardly hit too. In Cambodia, tourism is a big source of income for the locals. But when the pandemic came there were no more tourists coming from Guam and the locals lost their sources of income.

We have what we call weaving factories in the area. The factories make clothes to sell in the markets, but the markets closed down too as well as the factories. So there are no income for the factory workers.

The government cannot help us. They cannot bring the tourists, they cannot sell the clothes and they cannot even help the farmers to provide market for their produce. Our produce was usually sold to nearby countries like Thailand and Vietnam. Because the markets are closed, the farmers just threw away their produce because no one is buying

them and every- one became hungry without anything to hope for.

JH: How have churches and pastors been affected by the pandemic? Has anyone died as a lot of people faced the COVID-19 pandemic themselves as the economy hit the churches?

MAH: Economically everybody was really hit by the pandemic, most of all, the Church and pastors like me, you know.

We run an orphanage and we ran a teacher school for street children and the funds to operate them are not coming. We needed the money to pay for the school salary of the staff, and the funds come from the offerings of older churches. But when they closed the Church, the church cannot take offerings. We call people to worship, when the lockdown eased, but not many came to worship onsite

Many people say that in Cambodia, Christianity is only for the poor family. Because the rich family may not need help from God they do not need help from anyone, because they are rich.

But we know that all people need help and it's basically the path to our Lord Jesus. That is why they say Christianity is just only for the poor. But we know that the help we need is not only financial or physical. We need more than that! We need the saving grace of the Lord.

In the school, we have street children who go out to the streets collecting recyclable materials from the garbage and selling them to earn money to buy their food just for a day or, worse, for a meal. They have to work daily for their daily bread. And so when people are not going out and stores and factories are closed, there will be no garbage. And

therefore the street dwellers will not have anything to eat, will go hungry and die.

There was a man who used to be our church member. He was very much affected by COVID-19 in his workplace. Because of the pandemic their company had to cut his salary up to 70%. This was unacceptable to him. His ego said I do not want this to happen



to me!" So he decided to resign and wait for another opportunity to get a job from another company. In the course of waiting he was infected with COVID-19 and had to be confined in the hospital.

Thank God his family were tested negative from COVID-19 and he was the only one who stayed in the hospital, alone without his family. However, after another test, all his family members were found out to be COVID-19 positive and eventually all of them found themselves confined in the hospital.

They are members of our community and of our church and Bible Study groups. So our church sent them some financial help and assistance to help in their hospitalization. Families like them received help from our church and I lead them as their pastor. We raised funds and gave away almost \$1,000.00. We

praise God because in our small way, we were able to help pastors and their families, some neighbors and some school alumnae.

Our church members, Bible Study members and neighbors have suffered tremendously in this pandemic. Lives became risky from the virus, people are stressed and worried due to loss of employment and sources of income, most people are hungry and afraid. But praise God! Our church was very helpful to many and we are doing our best to help both physically by providing food packs and spiritually thru prayers and encouragement and through learning God's Words

JH: Well that's awesome, thank you for setting the pace for that meeting to tell us you're very involved in helping the neediest and developing leaders in your area.

You know you work with Asian Access, you work with the United Pastors Fellowship and you lead something called the school of discipleship how did those programs run during the pandemic? How do you keep the momentum going?

MAH: Right now, everything is not the same because of COVID-19. People cannot go to other places because of the lockdown. We can only go to some places with low number of COVID-19 cases.

In order to continue the ministry and the leadership trainings, we keep and maintain our relationships. This is what we realized. A



good connection with one another, a good relationship with one another keeps us growing in the Lord, in our faith, and in our fellowship.

If we are together connected like in a string we can do many things. So every time we meet we always encourage one another and like I told you, we meet every Saturday

night from 7pm to 9pm encouraging those who attend and tell them the purpose of our meeting, we want to encourage everyone, teach about the Words of God and enjoy the sweet fellowship of being together despite the pandemic. We want to bring Cambodia for Christ. We want people to put their trust and hope in Christ. But how can we do that? How can we achieve that?

Yes, we need to be united to do our purpose. We want to see that we do it together, as an organization and as individuals. We need to realize that we can work together!

We had Ray and many other people in this collaboration. We are encouraging them to plant the church in every village within our region by the year 2030, like in 10 years we want to see a Church in every village.

But right now we are still encouraging them through prayers and words of counsel, because we cannot go and meet them personally. We meet via zoom encouraging one another and worshipping God together on zoom meetings regularly. We also pray for

one another sharing burdens with one another.

We also created a prayer line wherein we encourage our members to have their prayer partners. For those who are close as friends,



relatives, we encourage them to form accountability partners, to be transparent to one another in sharing burdens, hopes and actions. With these activities, we divide our difficulties and help each other in this time of pandemic.

JH: Well, tell me about the school of discipleship was a creative venture for next level leaders. Sometimes leaders that are not as well off maybe as senior pastors or leaders that might struggle more, how do you reach them during COVID-19 or is it even possible to reach them?

MAH: About the school for discipleship, we still do the same method that we used with the alumni, we are encouraging them wherever they are.

We continue to share the Gospel, continue to do mentoring and meeting people if they can do some of them we meet in the town, some in provinces. But some are mobile and

still traveling around, and it is difficult to meet them personally.

Every time we meet God's people, we pray for the people in their community. We also call them over the phone or use even zoom in order to encourage our hearts together. But we still believe that meeting face to face is more effective. But there was no way for us to meet face to face, and we did not know how long shall we call each other. Maybe when COVID-19 ends. And so we just have to wait. Until then we know that we have to be creative in meeting and talking with people. We try to be strategic and intentional to use our time and our resources.

JH: Speaking of creative ways, a few years ago, you may remember, I think, in Singapore, we met with a lady named Marlene and she talked about creative ways to be teaching in the school of discipleship or a to use any creative means. Like I don't know dancing or drama, or do you know what types of things are used to do training.

MAH: Yes, I think we used to do that. I recall storytelling as one of those creative ways and that I think we really used a lot to reach people who aren't educated, those who cannot read and write. People in our country were late in going to school because of our civil war. Those who experienced the civil war and the killing fields grew up without going to school. They got married and started with their own families without education. Just like them, I cannot read and write also.

A lot of people who are living along the borders of Cambodia and Vietnam or Cambodia and Thailand are illiterates who cannot write and cannot read.

I think the best way to train them is by telling them the stories about the Lord Jesus through storytelling. And hoping those stories we told them will be transferred from one person to another.

We have some alumni who are very active. I think one pastor, Pastor Pedro, he goes around together with his team and they use this storytelling to train others. They preach using storytelling, they teach the children using storytelling and they make disciples using storytelling.

Yeah, they used what Paul and his team in the New Testament to teach a lot of children. Children and people in the community come and hear their storytelling. And then they explain what does the stories mean. And this is one training strategy we do in the school or discipleship.

JH: When you use that in the school of discipleship, how do leaders respond to puppets or acting? Do they like it? Or do they just fall asleep or how did they respond?

MAH: I think normally when we tell a story, or when we present the new show drama or puppetry they are really open to listen and to be trained. They are very interested. But when we do the lecture type or we call monologue teaching, they feel sleepy. But when we use all types of teaching, it was the storytelling that they laugh loudly and interact actively. So I think that is great.

JH: And, have you seen this grow? Like a lot of reproductions? You told me that school of discipleship started with one group, how many groups do you have now, is it five?

MAH: Yes, now we have five groups, before we started only with one group in Phnom Penh, the capital city. We have five groups: one at the Cambodian border with Thailand and one at the Cambodian border with Laos and another one in the Cambodian Graduation in the Discipleship School before the pandemic, border with Vietnam and then the fifth one in the center of Cambodia.

JH: And in these groups have you heard of stories of the participants becoming better leaders? Are they stronger in their churches or in their communities? How did your training influenced their leadership?

MAH: Oh yes, nine days ago I really heard an encouraging report from them, you know. Even in this pandemic I saw and heard their leadership have grown. They are now doing water baptism and they go around and preach the Gospel to plant churches.

I know of a small house church with membership numbering between 20-30 members. Her members are mostly not educated from schools. Some cannot read or write. They live along the borders.

But they are not afraid to talk about Jesus Christ. They are always excited to do storytelling to others about the passages in the Bible. They pray for the sick and they share the Words of God with confidence. Many became believers, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ because they see the salvation, grace and goodness of God taking place in the lives of these people.

JH: That is amazing! Do you have any idea how many churches may have been planted during COVID-19 or how many communities like that whole Community came to Christ?

MAH: Or at least I think around 70 churches planted. My friend recorded the number. He knows exactly, but I think around 75 churches that were planted.

JH: Well, praise the Lord that is awesome to hear that story, thank you for sharing them to us! I really appreciate you sharing those stories that happened during this pandemic. I have one last question for you.

You know, we serve within the Asian Access community, and I think our other brothers and sisters may want to hear what you're sharing about what have you learned most during the COVID-19 pandemic? What have you as a leader learned this past year, what has God taught you?

MAH: Oh, yes what I learned the most right now I think even we are going through many difficult times many things are happening too.

An unexpected virus like COVID-19 came and no one knows why it came this year. Nobody expected this to happen. But praise God amidst this pandemic, God is doing many things among us!

We learned from what happened to us in the past: the civil war, the killing fields were all part of our growth in the faith and as a person. We learned faith amidst the difficulties around us. And these experiences made us stronger. And the God who brought us out of the war and the killing fields will be the same God who will bring us out of the pandemic. God will be in our present and in our

future and He will bring us to the place where He planned for us.

So for me, it's the learning experience. I am learning that God is faithful and then he will do the impossible, possible. Philippians 1:6 says, "being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. And I really believe in His promise.

And God also taught me another thing not only about God's faithfulness but also about how to wait for Him and to be patient. Many times I want to go around and visit people. As you know, my nature is I want to see the people, talk with people, laugh with them like that. But now I cannot do those things so I had to learn to adjust myself to the situation. Being patient and waiting for God to handle everything going on, we really



An illustration of using puppetry for leadership training from Cambodia by Quan Chu.

believe that God is in control. He has always the perfect time and plan for us.

JH: That is awesome! Thank you so much for sharing! May I pray for you and Cambodia!

MAH: Please do it! Thank you, thank you.

JH: Father what a joy it is to be with my friends, today I pray your favor upon Meng and Roddy and Woodley his daughter. I pray you will continue to use him powerfully for your namesake we do pray for Sophie and his family who have faced and fought COVID-19 closely.

Lord, I pray you would bring healing to their family and take care of them we pray for the Church of Cambodia that's been so devastatingly hit by this pandemic. May you provide for each and every one. May you protect them all! And Lord we're inspired today by what you're doing even though there's a pandemic in the midst of the school of discipleship alone we've heard of 75 churches being planted you are doing amazing things, thank you for this!

Father I pray you continue to bless the United Pastors Fellowship and the work of

Asian Access every evening every Saturday evening when they meet. May you encouragement be with the participants and school of discipleship. Bless them and we pray Jesus for your favor on Cambodia's COVID-19 cases that spike up. May you protect the nation. May you be with the government and the healthcare workers and please revive the economy. Thank you for man's wisdom that you are the one who will carry us through. You saw Cambodia through the killing fields, you have seen them through difficult seasons and you will see us through this pandemic as well, we can count on you, we can trust in you.

So guide this nation and the world in this promise because we desperately need this hope that lies within us that only you can bring. And we believe you will complete your task to bless my friend today in Jesus' name. Amen amen amen. Thank you, man!

MAH: Oh you're welcome, thank you very much!

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Leadership at the Margins in West Africa

OralityTalks Journal Staff

Abstract: In the face of unprecedented challenges in West Africa, the Orality Talks Journal interviews West African leaders (KBM) to understand the church's struggles amid economic hardships, security threats, and educational disruptions. Despite adversity, some urban churches thrive, but rural areas face security risks and declining literacy. KBM advocates for orality-based theological education, emphasizing narrative teaching, arts, and culturally relevant methods. The interview explores post-COVID possibilities, envisioning a transformative, faith-driven movement to train the next generation of West African leaders.

Keywords: church challenges, oral learners, West Africa

Orality reliance level: Low orality reliance ■■■□□□

Anyone who knows Africa knows the compounding pressures of the past two years brought unprecedented challenges and hardship on the church. An OralityTalks Journal (OTJ) staff member sat down with West African leaders (KBM) to help us understand the new era leaders' face. The church is suffering. Schools and seminaries struggle to keep faculty and attract new students. Church members buckle under the weight of economic inflation, loss of jobs, government corruption, and ethnic violence exacerbated by the pandemic.

Yet in the face of all this we are still the church of Jesus, Messiah, the Prince of Peace, and the One who reigns at the right hand of the Father. How do we reconcile the current devastations and work challenges from a position of power and authority (Eph 1:3-4) rather than from fear, weakness, and defeat? What are the issues that many Africans see and deal with – not through the eyes of outsiders who think we define the issues for everyone else and bring our solutions to their problems.

OTJ: So, KBM, describe the situation for us.

KBM: Most West Africans were marginalized long before the pandemic. We lived at the margins economically with staggering unemployment especially among those under 35 years old. Attending a university? Out

of the question for most people of the land, and if they could get in their professors often went on strike because of no pay or low pay. It could take 7-10 years to graduate only to find there were no jobs available.

We hear many in the Global North say that technology can connect us with church virtually. We can download messages to our phones. We can get in touch with people who need attention. But the people that make those claims usually don't live where we do. Technology only works when there is a signal (cell phone – no fiber optic cables!) in our region. To download teaching means you have the money to top up your card, and that's a luxury. Even if you had the cable our electricity is not stable or even available from day to day. Zoom calls and Google Meet? I normally can only keep my connection (without video) for 10 to 15 minutes before it drops.

Once the full force of the global reaction to COVID-19 hit us pessimism set in. We need to find our way through this as Africans and leaders of the Global South.

OTJ: So where and how is the church thriving and why?

KBM: There are indeed places where the church is thriving and ministries are having great impact, but those are now mostly in the

big cities. Generally, members of the church have more employment and can financially support their pastors. They do outreach to the poor with feeding and clothes. I know of one church with a ministry to widows in another state. They helped set up a cooperative to give the women work making things and baking bread for a living. But those are wonderful exceptions to the rule.

Fuel is still hard to come by even if you have the funds. Armed robbers still target anyone who appears to have money or good clothing – they’ll steal it right off you and leave you beaten and bloody. Life is hard now everywhere. Once it would be unheard of to know a Christian family who did nothing to punish a child who was into thieving. Now Christians admit to being a thief and justify it because times are hard. They have lost the traditions of our proverb that says, “One is better to beg than to be a thief.” Thieving brings a family shame and disgrace.

Pastors in larger cities can also meet together where in the village they do not have the transport to get with others of their own church. In the city we have much more access to the internet and even hardwired connections. They don’t always work, but at least they have them.

OTJ: What are some of the other challenges that people at the margins face?

KBM: Most definitely our greatest challenges are related to security, or more precisely having NO security. Leaders in the rural areas are the prime targets for destruction of property, kidnapping, or tribally motivated murder. It used to be something that happened in the bigger cities – the rich would be targeted for theft or ransom. Now that has dramatically changed.

One pastor in an outlying suburb was kidnapped? Targeted and threatened if the church did not pay a ransom (about \$20,000 USD) that they would kill him. His wife raised the money from the church, family, and friends then delivered it to the kidnappers. They forced her to stay with them for two

weeks. Then they killed the pastor and demanded more ransom for the wife. These are already the poor, yet they are being targeted making the whole region insecure (read more [here](#)).

Once terrorists come into murder or kidnap, the victims property is also taken over. The residents flee to other areas and their property taken over by the aggressors – most often radical Muslim herdsmen. The goal is to displace all the residents not just some. The goal of a terrorist is not simply to kill people, but to terrorize them into leaving.

Another alarming challenge is our decline in literacy: illiteracy grows now because the educational systems are virtually shut down. Teachers do not get paid, there are no teaching supplies, electricity, technologies. The next generation is being lost and left behind because they will not be able to read, compute, or keep up with others at home let alone around the world. We even see men and woman wanting to become pastors but cannot read their Bible. They cannot read their own language or the national trade language in which you must be fluent to attend a good technical school, college or university. The UN might have a Millennial Challenge goal of eradicating illiteracy, but we are going backwards not forward.

OTJ: If that’s the case, how then do we train leaders who relate to the grassroots church members?

KBM: Training relevant leaders has always been hard for us. Our school system historically taught us to value reading and writing, and even thinking that way, and we learned to preach and teach the way our “colonial masters”. We go to a seminary and will not have one course on things like how to use our proverbs, songs, dance and even folktales to drive home the message of the Bible. We seem to be ashamed of those kinds of things. They make us sound “less educated” and therefore inferior so we ignore

them in class but use them in our conversations and at home.

That model of training leaders also includes seminaries and centers around the country where we have facilities – but common people cannot get there. People cannot pay the tuition or other fees even if they could afford the transport. This new generation of students struggle to read, and the old models of Bible school and seminaries require high literacy skills.

We also have a few very innovative bishops who see the need to train more leaders in non-traditional ways. One brings his selected recruits, and takes them through four modules over two years. Targets everyday people from the churches and even politicians to study with him.

Another pastor targets youth and is starting a primary African grade school and a secondary school.

OTJ: What schools, seminary, or training ministries currently use orality-based methodologies?

KBM: None that I know of in terms of actual schools. Some good programs are out there that teach people how to use Bible stories to share the Gospel, and that's great. We hear stories of a growing numbers of Muslims coming to faith and the primary method of reaching them is sharing stories like Abraham, the Prophets, and the teachings of Jesus. They love Him. They want to follow Him.

Our Bible translation ministries are also producing more oral bibles in the minor languages. They also are taking audio Scriptures to some of our most resistant tribes, and finding good success. But as far as giving a complete formal education using orality, I do not know of any in the country. A few schools have begun introducing the concept and a Baptist seminary is offering a course in orality and preaching. Yet, I believe we must go much further with our pastor training, but I don't know of any who intentionally put

orality in their curriculum or use it in their classroom experiences.

OTJ: How do you begin that kind of an approach to teaching? That is using the principles and methods that we promote as orality.

KBM: Maybe we should look at what is working, like the use of teaching the message of the Bible without making people read it. Then give them a copy even if they cannot read because someone they know probably can. They can talk about those same stories together.

Our people love music, and we have a lot of new music in our own languages and forms. Yes, we also have the missionary songs and all the contemporary global Christian music, but they do not connect like the sound of our people. We also love to create poems and recite them, and often our better schools even have contests for addressing some of our greatest challenges – even COVID-19.

OTJ: Let's be more specific about what that means for formal theological education.

KBM: One important step would be teaching by narrative and the arts without a need for depending on textbooks. It might look like what Paul did from Ephesus at his rented hall – the School of Tyranius. These “students” did not have textbooks. In fact, they did not have a single book that we know of. They learned the message of the Kingdom and went out to preach everywhere, and we know that ALL ASIA heard the Word of the Lord.,

Seminaries are no less important but are less relevant due to their physical campus strategy and depending on high literacy skills. Even when they offer virtual courses, we have major problems unless the students can connect. When we do start new training centers away from our traditional campuses, they are still doing what they've always done in Western literate ways. Even this is NOT working.

OTJ: Give us an example of what you mean.

KBM: Western seminaries continue using the same literate ways. We are told the church of the Global South is growing, and we need to take it to the next level in spiritual formation. But then students do not even read books by anyone from the Global South. The authors may have visited the GS, and some may even have worked there for a time but they are not from the Global South. They do not publish their work as GS leaders and scholars. When our leaders return from Western schools they sound like and approach things the way they were taught in the US or the UK. They perpetuate the same things that are failing us now.

Students often report feeling unequipped for ministry back home. In class a professor rarely respects or honors GS students for their understanding about our own context. But when a Westerner in the class or a required author who learned something in 6 months or a year makes a point, they are listened to and affirmed. Most often our teachers go to the Western seminaries after very successful ministries in Africa. They came to learn more, and to be granted teaching credentials that put them on the same academic level as others. It's the game we have to play.

OTJ: Then how do we raise up the next generation of West African leaders?

KBM: Our churches and schools are locked into traditions and structures that may never work again. We followed the West. We built expensive campuses that are hard to maintain for schools and seminaries. We taught the same courses that Global North academics teach, often using the same textbooks, resources, and only slightly modified syllabi, and use the same lecture-discussion methods. Then we depended on outsiders to give us the funds to keep doing what we were doing and they in some way control what we teach and how we teach it. Our proverb says, "Sugar can spoil even a good dish."

How do now train the next generation of leaders? Quite frankly, I don't know! Train up leaders in post-COVID-19? COVID-19 is not even the issue. The lockdowns and intensified corruption that came with the lockdowns and made politicians wealthier, some even looted their own warehouses. While others guarded, protected, and distributed the resources to those in need. They are exceptions. We need to lift them up and raise up more leaders like them. Before COVID-19 all these things were present, but now they have grown exponentially worse and more intense. Youth have no foundation for conviction of biblical values

The world was disrupted, but others took advantage. Now how do we train the new generation under the shadow of corrupt leaders like Buhari. Vocal church leaders and those doing positive things in their villages are being oppressed, they may be in hiding; where they cannot be accessed for training or access it where they might have to travel to. They have no money on their part.

OTJ: So what would you do if money and church politics would not be a factor.

KBM: That would demand radical change. A lot of things would be affected. What comes to mind – what about the fellow who would do a training. It would require a radical way to move from traditional way to where any profession would understand their calling to transform the world through the Word. Police, lawyers, or anyone would simply lead as a disciple of Jesus.

We think it takes so much money to be the church and reach the lost, but maybe we've just strayed too far from the original plan. Maybe it's not just the best plan, it may also be the cheapest way of making disciples. Doing it the way Jesus did it. Maybe we have not been following the Kingdom model like the Pharisees, scribes and others. Maybe we're more like them than the disciples He trained to grow His church.

OTJ: How many people did it take to change the Jewish system that educated the

people? How many in the beginning – ONE. Jesus! How many people did it take to begin God’s mission to the Gentiles? Peter on a rooftop praying. Saul receiving his sight and getting a vision in Damascus. Jerusalem disciples went out. Antioch sent out more. They joined forces and the Kingdom grew exponentially.

KBM: What you are asking about with orality strategies, this is what the church of N. Nigeria is already doing even before COVID-19. They had regional church meeting points where they came together for worship, the Word, and fellowship. They were part of church denominations on one level, but completely being the church on another. When COVID-19 brought restrictions on the economy and social interactions, they simply meet in their fellowship groups. Main concern of the denominations? What about the offering? Where will it go? How would we support the main church? The local pastors?

The response of the bi-vocational pastors? Let us pastors worry about where our funds will come from. Rather, let us look at empowering the local body to function properly and reach out to its neighbors without worrying about buildings and offerings.

OTJ: Is what you are saying is “Because of the pandemic the church started functioning more as a body than a service to come to. What now will happen since COVID-19 is ending?”

KBM: The predictable pattern would be for things to return to what they were before.

Come together seeing yourself as part of a denomination, but the people are now used to worshipping in fellowship groups. They do not have to travel so far. The denominational leaders that once traveled long distances to check up on churches will return, but we are not sure how it will look. The newfound autonomy of these groups may spur them on to keep going in the same direction. Sharing their faith more. Ministering to one another more rather than depending on the denominationally ordained pastors.

Hopefully, the difference now is that they may be able to access more.

OTJ: What will it take them to keep growing as they had during COVID-19.

KBM: They still need good solid teaching. We have to figure out new ways of making that happen. Maybe it’s going to their regions with training of trainers (TOT). Maybe it’s using new media solutions that contain the teaching they need and ensuring it’s done in what you call “high orality reliant methods.” That would include music, drama, proverbs, discussions and a whole lot of things that stimulate learning.

It also will take even more faith to depart from the old ways. Courage to step out in faith. Change will come trusting that God transform when we teach and preach the way Jesus did it. We have to take the best of what we did in the recent past, learn from it, and move on to even more powerful ways. We need to find the way to be that kind of a radical movement. We’ve seen what it will do.



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BOOK REVIEW

Connected Learning: How Adults with Limited Formal Education Learn

Danyal Qalb

Thigpen, L. L. (2020). *Connected learning: How adults with limited formal education learn* (American Society of Missiology Monograph Book 44). Pickwick Publications. ISBN 978-1-53267-937-7.

Keywords: ALFE, Cambodia, connected learning, oral learners

Orality reliance level: Very low orality reliance ■□□□□

In 1999, Thigpen and her family arrived in Cambodia, where they worked for two decades among oral communities. With a background in Biblical studies, healthcare, and education, she recognized the inadequacy of her Western teaching approach for Cambodian adults with limited formal education (ALFE). This realization prompted Thigpen's research into the world of oral learners and a quest to understand their learning needs, leading her to author a dissertation under the guidance of Tom Steffen. This book is the published version of the dissertation she finished in 2016. Thigpen is currently an adjunct professor at Liberty University and an emeritus missionary of the International Mission Board.

The entire book is Thigpen's (2020) quest to answer the question, "How do oral Cambodian adults with limited formal education (ALFE) learn or acquire new knowledge, beliefs/values, and skills?" (p. 23). Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the research. The literature review in chapter 2 is a deep dive into the theoretical grounding of Cambodian ALFE. Thigpen explores the context of Cambodian oral learners and provides an excellent historical background of the current situation. She also delivers good anthropological knowledge and orality as she explores how ALFE learn best. Chapter 3 describes the methods of Thigpen's ethnographic grounded theory study. After identifying the target group, participant observation, living

a week as an oral learner, and interviews are chosen as her primary methods. Instead of just presenting dry facts, Thigpen elegantly presents the gathered data in chapter 4 as a series of vignettes (short stories) representing the participants in their situations.

In chapters 5 and 6, Thigpen connects her findings with the initial literature review. As standout themes, I saw how shame affects learning (p. 162), that the lack of technology and ability to use it can help or hinder learning (p. 176), how spirituality was a motivating factor to learn (p. 171), and that the community is the most essential factor that aids learning (p. 126). Thigpen introduces the learning quadrants (p. 138) to understand oral people on a continuum better since there is no neat dichotomy between oral and print text learners. On one axis of the quadrant, the means of learning range from print to people, and on the other axis, the trust in knowledge ranges from relationships to print/credentials.

Thigpen's conclusions and recommendations are in this book's last two chapters, 7 and 8. She shows that Cambodian ALFE prefer to learn from people they trust, relationships, connections, and observation rather than from print. Her recommendations are directed primarily at educators, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. Some points to consider when working among oral people are understanding how they learn from one another, how shame and fear of

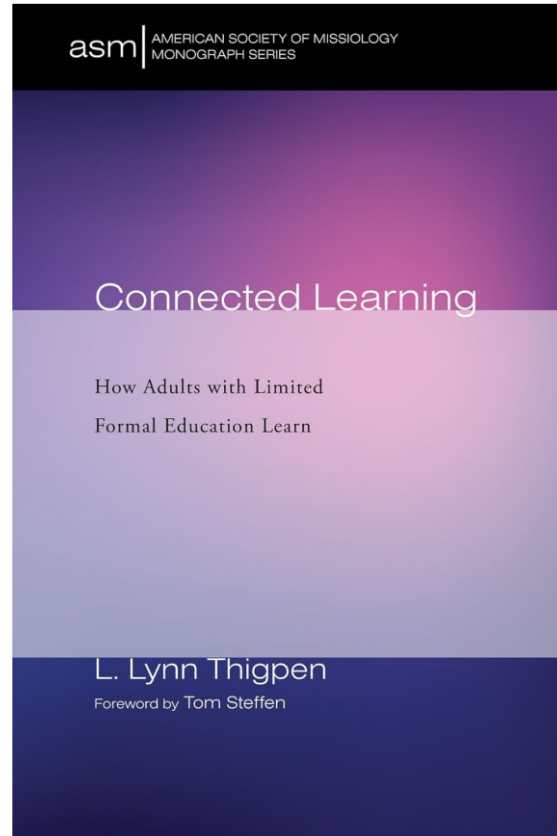
failing can affect learning, and knowing their accessibility to materials, people, non-print resources, and technology.

Because this book is a published version of Thigpen's (2016) similar titled dissertation, it is very academic and strictly follows the outline of a dissertation. Therefore, it is very technical and has much depth. A myriad of citations and an extensive bibliography can overwhelm the average reader. Still, it also shows the depth and rigor of Thigpen's study. It serves as a good resource for orality and learning in general. Despite the creative constraints inherent in a dissertation, Thigpen successfully incorporated segments that cater

to oral learners. An illustrative instance of this is Chapter 4. Here, she skillfully presents her findings through concise vignettes that transport the reader's imagination to Cambodia, enabling them to connect with the people in that region. Overall, this is a significant and excellent contribution to the field of orality from a learning perspective for Christian workers among oral people.

Thigpen briefly addressed the subject of digital learning resources. Yet, there is room for expansion due to the substantial opportunities they can offer for ALFE. Due to the intricate and elusive definitions of "illiterate" and "orality," using these terms for ALFE can be challenging. Readers need to keep the definitions given in Chapter 1 in the back of their minds while reading. One underrepresented area is the challenge of

accommodating oral learners within a contemporary context where a lack of reading and writing skills puts individuals at a considerable disadvantage in the job market. The aspects I highlighted could serve as potential topics for future research.



I highly recommend this book to cross-cultural ministry practitioners, especially those involved in teaching, training, and education, as well as cross-cultural workers and community development workers, to name a few. The findings have broader applicability beyond Cambodia, with notable parallels evident in the Philippines, where I am stationed, as well as in other regions. Even pastors and educators in developed nations will benefit from reading this because we live in an increasingly non-reading world, and the global diaspora move-

ment is bringing people from all sorts of places and education levels to us. On a larger scale, policymakers and NGOs might use this research as a stepping stone for further research and implementation in their curricula. I would also encourage mission leaders to take note of this resource when developing strategies for their organizations.

Thigpen (2020) says governments and organizations "fight for literacy" (p. 204) but often neglect oral people's learning preferences. This book provides a pathway for Christian workers and organizations to engage with oral people meaningfully. Oral learners are wired to learn from others in their community. What an excellent opportunity for the community of Christ, the church!

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Danyal Qalb graduated with an MA in Intercultural Studies in 2006 from Columbia International University (CIU). Starting in 2007, he has been a cross-cultural witness among unreached people in the Philippines. 2018, Danyal also began to teach at a local Philippine seminary. Since 2020, he has studied for a Ph.D. in Orality Studies at the Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST). In 2022, Danyal joined I-OS, where he teaches orality, edits the OTJ, and oversees the [Global Orality Mapping Project](#).

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