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Next issue: Vol. 2 No. 1 (2025) will focus on, but is not limited to, theological education and hermeneutics. Check out our [submission guidelines](#) and contribute to OTJ.

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Intro to Orality in Digital Media and Arts

Danyal Qalb

Orality, digital media, and the arts are inseparable. As we are created as communicative beings—in the image of God—the arts have always been part of how we communicate. One cannot read the Bible without realizing how God constantly uses the arts to communicate with his people. Just think of the poetry in the Old Testament literature or the elaborate artistic details of the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple that take multiple chapters of the Bible. The songs, dances, symbols, and rituals surrounding the Jewish celebrations are also full of artistic expressions.

From the New Testament and throughout history, the church has always used the arts, such as storytelling, music, paintings, architecture, or drama, to communicate God's Kingdom.

Since the dawn of digital media, it has also been used to broadcast the Good News through radio, television, and, lately, the internet. For oral-preference communicators, digital media offers unique opportunities as they do not need to be transformed into reading-preference learners to access high-level information and learning content. Digital media is like a bridge for oral-preference

communicators. They no longer need to take the detour or become text-based learners to participate in the discussion.

In this OTJ issue, long-time media expert Bill Snider shares his experience in using digital media in Southeast Asia. Joshua Adesina's article delves into the impact of religious digital media in Africa. Ethnodoxologist Deborah Kim gives us three examples from the field of how the arts can be used to share the Good News in ways locals appreciate it. This issue concludes with two interviews with Jaycel Andong and Ella Saguin, showcasing the transformative power of orality.

Digital media and the arts also play a vital role in education. In our next issue, we will focus on theological education and oral hermeneutics as the central theme. Education in the 21st century can no longer ignore orality. We invite you to join the conversation in our [OralityTalks Webinars](#), where much of this journal's content originates through discussions with experts in the field.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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 the Institutes for Orality Strategies (I-OS), where he teaches orality and oversees the Global Orality Mapping Project (GOMAP). ✉ email@dqalb.de

ARTICLES

Orality and the Impact of Media

William Snider

Abstract: *Orality and media intersect as digital media reshapes oral traditions and communication practices, extending reach and creating new forms of engagement. Drawing from 30 years in Asia and experience in digital ministry, this article highlights how media amplifies the Gospel by addressing orality, particularly among audiences resistant to text-based methods. Using Paul's strategy of cultural adaptation, digital platforms emerge as "common ground" for evangelism. Media allows preservation and contextualization, enhancing storytelling and connecting to cultural practices. Practical approaches, such as local leadership training, empower communities and create lasting digital ministries adaptable to diverse cultural needs.*

Keywords: *digital media, social media, storytelling*

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

Orality is an idea that is captured by the holistic nature of communication. Living in Asia for over 30 years and interacting with dozens of unique people groups, I soon discovered that print alone was insufficient and would not effectively communicate the Gospel message. This became clear when working on a project with a local pastor with a master's degree in church ministry. We were reviewing a study guide for use with video in small groups. I soon realized that he struggled to go through pages of content. Forty pages was too much! He much preferred to talk it through, adding his insights and content suggestions. If he would not engage with a print study guide, how many of the small group of church members would do so?

I have been in media for over 50 years, starting with radio, founding a Christian radio network in the USA, and for the last 36 years, as a missionary to Southeast Asia with Asia Pacific Media, a ministry we founded in Manila in 1988. Over these years, our team produced dialect radio programs for the least reached people, created teaching videos, short family dramas, and full-length movies. As social media became popular, we have

developed an expansive presence on several platforms. A major emphasis has always been placed on training the next generation for digital media ministry. I have seen that the church that embraces using audio and video will speak to more people. We experience that media becomes an extension of orality.

As Christian communicators, Scripture should be foundational in shaping our efforts. In working with church leadership in many nations, they want to see how this digital moment aligns with Bible imperatives. Historically, churches have been slow to adapt to new technologies. I always bring them to the Apostle Paul, who writes for the Corinthian church, where he reveals his ministry strategy.

WE EXPERIENCE THAT
MEDIA BECOMES AN
EXTENSION OF ORALITY.

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the

law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:20-23)

In essence, Paul identified with his audience and found common ground with those he wanted to reach. He adapted his approach to win some. Today, the digital world is common ground thanks to the internet and worldwide acceptance of smartphones.

My premise is that **digital media allows communicators to preserve, create, reshape, and extend our messages to new audiences.** Media well done amplifies the story. If 80% of the world relies heavily on orality (Lovejoy, 2012), we must follow Paul and use all means that some will be saved. Digital media is a priority.

Data is convincing that this is where the 21st-century audience is today. Wearesocial.com is a website that provides basic statistics and detailed country-specific data. It is a great, free resource that introduces the reader to carefully researched data and specific reasons why people use the internet and social media. Here are four big-picture statistics:

- Our global population is now 8 billion.
- Of this, 5.28 billion people, 66%, use the internet.
- Slightly over 5 billion are on social media regularly.
- The typical internet user spends 6 hours, 40 minutes each day online. In some nations, it is over 9 hours per day, while in others, it is about four hours per day.

The digital space is a common ground where people gather each day. Media platforms expand the audience, giving us a global reach.

Professor Walter Ong (2002) wrote about the concept of “secondary orality.” He says secondary orality, like media, is characterized by immediacy, audience participation, and a sense of community, but it is fundamentally shaped by the technologies that

mediate it. My experience with creating media content and observing audience responses validate his statement.

Digital media allows us to engage people and reach oral learners through stories. Much of the Bible is story and narrative. The prophets were often visual illustrations of God’s message. Jesus used parables and stories in his teaching. Only Paul, in his letters, offered theological points with application. Digital media is ideal for storytelling, illustrations, and narrative communication. It can be used to **preserve oral traditions** and a people’s history and provides authenticity to the past through visual and audio connection.

Digital media **creates new ways of sharing information** and speaking to common themes of life. In America, the average adult spends 2 hours and 30 minutes daily on social media. *He Gets Us* is a current USA campaign that uses broadcast media to connect faith with current life issues. *Media for Hope*, a social media page we helped launch in Myanmar, uses free social media platforms to bring messages, stories, and music to Burmese people in Myanmar and worldwide. Some ministry groups use Google AdWords, websites, and social media content as an initial contact point for people groups without church presence. From online views to opportunities to respond, some want personal contact. What attracts online interest is visual and narrative.

Digital media **reshapes how a story can be shared and allows for modeling.** Several years ago, our team worked with a local Khmer creative to produce a contextualized story based on the Prodigal Son. It was called *The Last Letter*. The story showed that families can be healed and powerfully modeled by a loving father, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The connection was made



with a Loving God. In an oral culture, this presentation had a lasting impact on church workers trying to bring the Living God into a Khmer worldview.

Digital media **allows for targeting specific age, language, and interest groups.** Each platform, from Facebook to TikTok, provides a unique audience, even though there is often some overlap. Messaging focuses on specific groups of people and their felt needs.



Digital media **extends our messages beyond local personal connections and creates new communities not bound by distance or time.** A church in Ho Chi Minh City wanted to impact youth across Vietnam. They prepared a live service with youth leading in worship. Creative dance, stories, human drama, and messages were a part of the evening. It was broadcast on Facebook Live and YouTube. Initially, approximately 800 youth came to the meeting, and over 1,000 watched online. However, within a week, online views grew to over 14,000. In collectivist cultures, the need to be part of communities is a strong motivation. In large cities where transportation is challenging, digital platforms offer the possibility of small groups for discipleship and a place where leadership training can happen.

Digital media **offers the opportunity for what some sociologists have called pro-social programming.** In the 1970s, Miguel Sabado initially developed the concept of a telenovela in Mexico. He aimed to model good ethics and appropriate family

relationships and offer guidance and hope to the disadvantaged. Pro-social programming today is television content that aims to teach children positive social behaviors, values, and emotional skills. It does this by depicting characters and situations that model empathy, cooperation, and understanding. Using the idea of modeling, our team in Manila developed a series called *Family Talk*, dramas that illustrate biblical truth amid real family life situations. The series continues to be aired on cable channels in the Philippines and is used by churches as a small group curriculum.

Best Practices for Using Digital Media

In my experience, Christians understand the potential of the digital world, but most do not use the tool effectively. Let me offer some points for using media effectively in communicating with the oral learning culture. What are the best practices for including digital media in a broader communications strategy?

We must begin by understanding the local people. Church workers often want to go straight to the gospel message without providing context. I have seen Western messages taken into Asian contexts using a propositional truth approach, resulting in a poor response. When we discover the felt needs of local people, we must create content that speaks to the aspirations and struggles of life. Local stories or an appropriate biblical story enculturated using a local storyteller or content producer will capture an audience. They identify with the story and learn from the message.

Local leadership must be involved from the beginning and endorse digital media. Church leaders are gatekeepers to new ideas. Without leaders onboard, a church will not adopt digital media as a ministry tool.

Local believers learn media production best hands-on. Then, after an initial training experience, we continue the relationship

through mentoring or assistance as requested.

Develop a distribution plan. Once we know our audience for a message, we must determine how people will see or hear this message. Local believers are the sleeping giant in this area since each person usually has hundreds of connections in their digital footprint. Casting a vision and showing local believers how to use social media appropriately is important in making digital messages accessible.

Let me summarize. As a ministry that wants to enter the world of digital media, take time to understand the people or target group, their cultural leanings, and their communication styles, and pray for a bridge person to help you. Find what aspects of the Gospel story resonate in the local culture.

Several years back, a global worker was trying to reach a large Muslim people group in Indonesia. As she spent time learning the language and interacting with the culture, she realized how important music was to the people. She asked our ministry for help, and we interacted with her ideas and helped fund the project. With some musical ability, Janet wrote songs based on the psalms and the cycle of life. Then, she engaged a professional group of musicians and a singer to record the songs in a local studio. The musicians and singers were all Muslim. The production went well. The singer told Janice how the lyrics gave her heart a sense of peace. The songs were recorded, and the music was sold in local markets in the cities in the region.

In our early days of Christian ministry in Cambodia, we were approached by a local Khmer leader about doing a video to teach church workers how to perform a Christian marriage and a Christian funeral. These two events brought family and community together, and new Christians asked leaders how to honor God in these ceremonies. Our team worked with a local pastor and musician on this project. We re-enacted in detail the marriage ceremony in full costume with

food, music, and all participants present. The producer, a local Khmer leader, removed the Buddhist elements of the ceremony. He substituted Christian symbols, lyrics, and rituals into portions of the ceremony. It was contextualization at its best. The effectiveness of both of these productions was working with local leaders, listening to and supporting their vision for using media in ministry in their context, and helping them bring it to pass.

As a global worker, it is essential to develop partnerships with local people and churches with the goal of empowerment. Digital media is a ministry we launch, share ownership and eventually give away. The measure of success is what happens after we leave.

Partnerships survive in seasons of disruption. COVID and the military coup closed Myanmar in 2020. However, since 2013, our team, invited by church leaders, developed a media ministry for the church. We began by training pastors and church leaders, then local workers in video production, on how to use social media as a ministry. We also helped complete a functioning studio for video and audio production. When we could not return, the local team continued the media ministry. We could encourage and mentor from the outside, but a local team continued this outreach to believers and those seeking answers. The ministry did not stop. It continues to this day through Facebook and YouTube to thousands of followers in Myanmar and outside the country.

I believe it is essential to invest in training the next generation in media communication. No individual ministry or small group can provide the content needed today. In the past few years of workshops, we have discovered that GenZ are creative digital natives. If we provide the why and teach them principles and techniques, local people will develop content to attract their people.

In summary, a message that comes from the people and their context has a

greater chance of being effective. A Western message conveying beliefs and attitudes will not deeply reach a non-Western culture. Ministry that begins in the local church will end with people connected to local believers and the church.

My appeal is to creatively harness the digital world by developing local workers and contextualized messages if we are to impact the majority who will not engage in our message if it is print alone.

AI about Digital Media and Orality

To showcase an example of the power of digital media, the remaining content of this article was generated with the help of AI. However, it was manually reviewed and edited by the author, and it reflects what researchers say about the impact of digital media on orality and vice versa.

Interconnections between Orality and Digital Media

Media as an Extension of Orality: Early media forms, such as radio and television, were seen as extensions of oral traditions, delivering spoken content to wider audiences. These media relied on the principles of orality—such as storytelling, repetition, and communal participation—to engage listeners and viewers.

Transformation of Orality by Media: With new media technologies, oral traditions have been preserved and transformed. Digital media, for example, allows for recording, sharing, and remixing oral performances, extending their reach and longevity.

Orality in Digital Media: Digital platforms, such as podcasts and social media, have revived and recontextualized oral traditions in contemporary society. The emphasis on voice, conversation, and real-time communication in these platforms reflects the enduring importance of orality.

Impact on Literacy and Communication: The intersection of orality and media has influenced literacy practices, with media

often shaping the ways in which oral and written forms of communication coexist. The presence of oral elements in media (e.g., oral histories, interviews, spoken word) challenges the dominance of written text and highlights the multimodal nature of contemporary communication.

Cultural and Social Implications

Cultural Preservation and Change: Media can preserve and alter oral traditions. For example, recording technologies preserve endangered languages and oral histories, but they can also change the context and meaning of these traditions when disseminated through mass media.

Globalization and Orality: Media globalization has facilitated the cross-cultural exchange of oral traditions, enabling them to reach new audiences and raising concerns about cultural homogenization and the loss of local specificity.

Scholarly Perspectives

Scholars in orality studies examine how media technologies impact oral traditions and vice versa. For instance, the work of Walter Ong, who explored the transition from orality to literacy, is foundational in understanding how media influences cognitive and social processes.

The study of orality in the digital age considers how media platforms create new spaces for oral expression and how these spaces reshape traditional forms of communication.

In summary, orality studies and media intersect in exploring how oral and mediated forms of communication influence each other and contribute to the broader understanding of human expression, culture, and technology.

What does Digital Media offer to orality

The relationship between media and orality is complex, with **media transforming and**

preserving aspects of oral culture. Here is how media impacts orality:

Preservation of Oral Traditions

Recording Oral Histories: Media, such as audio and video recording, allows for preserving oral traditions that might otherwise be lost. This fact has been particularly important for indigenous cultures and communities where oral storytelling is a primary means of passing down knowledge.

Archiving: Media can store and archive oral performances, stories, and speeches, ensuring they are accessible for future generations.

Expansion of Audience

Global Reach: Media platforms, especially digital ones, allow oral traditions to reach a global audience. A story, song, or speech shared orally can now be disseminated through podcasts, videos, and social media, extending its reach far beyond its original community.

Cross-Cultural Exchange: The global nature of media facilitates the exchange of oral traditions between cultures, leading to a blending or appreciation of diverse oral practices.

Transformation of Orality

Changes in Delivery: Media often alters the way oral traditions are delivered. For example, a story that might have been told in a communal setting is now delivered through a podcast, which changes the dynamics of the experience—listeners are often isolated, and the interaction between storyteller and audience is diminished.

Hybrid Forms: Media encourages the development of new forms that blend orality with written or visual elements, such as spoken word poetry videos or digital storytelling. These hybrid forms expand the possibilities for oral expression and change its nature.

Influence on Memory and Attention

Reduced Reliance on Memory: Traditionally, oral cultures relied heavily on memory to retain and transmit knowledge. This reliance is reduced with media, as stories and information can be recorded and replayed. While this preserves information, it also changes the cognitive processes involved in orality.

Impact on Attention Spans: The fast-paced nature of modern media, focusing on short, consumable content, may influence how oral traditions are performed and received, potentially leading to shorter, more concise oral narratives.

Commercialization and Commodification

Oral Traditions as Media Content: Oral stories, songs, and speeches can be commodified and marketed through media platforms. While this can benefit creators and communities financially, it can also lead to the commercialization of cultural practices, sometimes distorting their original meaning or purpose.

Media as a Gatekeeper: Media can act as a gatekeeper, deciding which oral traditions gain prominence and which do not. This can affect the diversity of oral practices that are preserved or transmitted.

Alteration of Oral Authority

Changing Authority Structures: In traditional oral cultures, certain individuals, like elders or griots, held authority as the keepers of oral knowledge. Media can democratize orality, allowing more people to share stories and knowledge. However, it can also diminish the role of these traditional authorities.

Authenticity and Ownership: Media dissemination raises questions about the authenticity and ownership of oral traditions. Once an oral tradition is recorded and shared widely, it can be appropriated or altered, potentially leading to conflicts over cultural ownership.

The utilization of digital media in ministry is in a pioneering stage. Ministries need solid foundations for why they want to enter this field and with whom they want to communicate. As ministries are discovering the power of media to **preserve, create, re-shape, and extend our messages to new**

audiences. If eight out of every ten people in the world relies heavily on orality, digital media becomes a priority in our next phases of ministry development.

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Bill and Kim founded and continue to direct Asia Pacific Media, launching the ministry in 1988 in Manila. They also served as Area Directors of Assemblies of God personnel in Southeast Asia from 1998-2017. Asia Pacific Media empowers Christian leaders in Asia and the Pacific Islands to use and produce media for spreading the Gospel. Bill and Kim have two sons, five grandsons, and a granddaughter.
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Orality and Religious Media in the Digital Age

Joshua Adebayo Adesina

Abstract: *This study explores the intersection of orality and religious media in the digital landscape, focusing on how oral traditions adapt to digital platforms, the influence of digital media on religious communities, and the ethical challenges and prospects of this digital transformation. Utilizing a methodology that combines secondary data analysis of existing literature, including books, journals, and magazines, with observational research, this paper provides a comprehensive overview of the current state and trajectory of religious expression in the digital age. It reveals that while digital media offers new avenues for disseminating and preserving oral traditions, it also poses significant challenges to the authenticity and integrity of these practices. The impact on religious communities is profound, with digital media acting both as a tool for enhanced engagement and as a potential source of fragmentation. Ethical considerations arise from the digital divide and the commodification of sacred oral content. The paper identifies key trends that will shape the future of orality in religious media, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that honors tradition while embracing innovation. The findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on digital media's role in cultural preservation and community dynamics, offering insights for scholars, religious leaders, and media practitioners alike.*

Keywords: Christianity, digital media, Nigeria, religion

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

The swift advancement of digital media and technology has significantly influenced how religious communities engage with and practice their faith. This intersection between religion and the digital world has recently become a topic of great interest. The sprouting digital media landscape has brought about new opportunities and challenges for religious groups and communities, leading to the emergence of a sort of “networked religion” (Campbell, 2012, p. 65). Furthermore, the digital world has provided a platform for religious institutions and has given rise to emerging “techno-spiritual practices” as individuals and communities from diverse religious backgrounds increasingly utilize new media for religious purposes (Ahmad & Abdul Razak, 2013, p. 1). As we delve into orality and religious media in the digital age, it is vital to understand the complexities and nuances of how religious communities and individuals engage with digital media and technology and how these interactions shape and redefine the landscape of religious practice in the

contemporary world. However, to begin with, unraveling what orality meant will be the first focus of discussion, followed by the issue of digital media.

There is a prevalent misperception about what orality means. Orality could mean different things to different people. To some, it involves talking or taking medicine through the mouth. Meanwhile, some have never heard of the word before (Adesina, 2022). Before the evolution of writing, people survived only through orality because they depended so much on verbal communication. Consequently, orality became one of the essential features of human speech and communication. Paul Bandia (2015) affirms that speaking distinguishes human beings from every other living species. Speaking involves translating thoughts into audible words or speech. Nevertheless, the survival of such thoughts is made possible through oral transmission, recording, or writing (p. 125). Except for those suffering from one disability or another, which denies them the

opportunity to speak, virtually every human being relies on orality as it reflects how all of us communicate - expressing our mind and heart (our inner speech) through all five senses (Madinger, 2018). Corroborating this, Grant Lovejoy (2010) elucidates that deaf people are a notable exception to people who communicate verbally. However, even deaf people have many of the same cultural characteristics as oral people. For instance, they prefer face-to-face communication, concrete-relational thinking, and strong group identity (2010).

Walter Ong's (2002) work serves as a groundwork for the modern study of orality and a reminder that despite the striking success and subsequent power of written language, a substantial number of languages are unwritten, and the basic orality of language is permanent. Orality means thought and verbal expression in societies where literacy technologies (especially writing and print) are unfamiliar to most of the population (*Orality: Meaning, Definition & Explanation*, 2018). Ivor Calvin Greer also defines orality as a communication pattern through which people rely on the spoken rather than the written word (Greer, 2011, p. 9). Orality describes a situation whereby a spoken word is embraced for interrelation and communication between parties rather than a formal communication medium. It is a practice that dates from the beginning of time right up to the present. This is affirmed in every culture, whereby the children learn to communicate in their local dialect or any other adopted language in an immediate environment right before they understand and know how to read or write (Lovejoy, 2010). In general, orality is synonymously used to mean oral communication or speech (McDowell, 2012, p. 169). It is a channel through which people communicate using verbal expression instead of books. Furthermore, Liz Gunner sees orality as the combination of language with the performativity of the body, thus enacted in both the public and the private space (Gunner, 2000, pp. 1-18).

However, orality goes far beyond the limitations of Ong's polar paradigm on those using print-text and those who do not. Orality is a framework reflecting the image of a triune communicating God who expressed his mind and heart (inner speech) for all five of our human senses (Madinger). A few times, he even expressed himself in print-text. The Scriptures began as God's mind and heart were spoken or displayed to prophets, who eventually archived them in writing so that others could read and hear them collectively (Bible reference/or end note). In this sense, text, print, reading, and writing are all expressions of our orality (Madinger, 2023). In the last forty years, "digitality" added another layer to the orality discussion. William Powers (2010), in his book *Hamlet's BlackBerry*, shows that nothing really changed as humans added more technologies to communication. The basics never change, from cave paintings to ink and papyrus, to the printing press of China, and the latest era of digital communication technologies. We simply learn to use the latest innovations and develop contemporary communication competencies.

Adapting Oral Traditions to Digital Media

Religious oral traditions are forms of communication and expression that rely on spoken or performed words, sounds, gestures, and symbols to convey meaning and transmit knowledge. They are often associated with sacred texts, rituals, stories, myths, and practices passed down from generation to generation. However, oral traditions are dynamic and creative and adapt to changing contexts and audiences. As part of its adaptation to the contemporary world, oral traditions are increasingly being transformed into digital formats, such as podcasts, videos, blogs, social media, and other online platforms. These digital media offer new possibilities for reaching wider and more diverse audiences. It also enhances interactivity and participation, as well as creating new religious expression and identity forms.

However, they also pose challenges and opportunities for preserving the authenticity and effectiveness of orality in the digital context. The transformation and adaptation of religious oral traditions into digital formats involve a complex interplay between technology, religious practice, and community engagement. From this perspective, a new field of academic research has emerged called Digital Theology. It examines the impact of digital technology on religious and spiritual experiences and how it is integrated into society and enmeshed in various vital structures, including religion (Bingaman, 2023, p. 3). The proliferation of digital and information technology has driven fast-paced change throughout every aspect of society and how we engage in acts of worship (p. 3).

Digital media, as a major part of everyday life, has become a common platform for spiritual engagement that religious leaders and communities increasingly use (Bingaman, 2023, p. 3). Its interdisciplinary study highlights unique opportunities for religious settings that allow the creation of spiritual networks, worship spaces, missionary tools, and the affirmation of religious identity (Barreau, 2021, p. 4). Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT) offer particularly effective modern informational assistance to religious practice, enabling renewed religious apologetics, propaganda, and a new form of proselytism (p. 4).

Moreover, the study of digital religion does not merely refer to religion as it is performed online but also points to how digital media and spaces are shaping and are being shaped by religious practices (Vekemans, 2022, p. 190). The digital environment is increasingly interested in grief and closure, with digital religion and its rituals offering personal interpretation and meaning-making, allowing individuals to engage with religious content in self-centered hermeneutics (Barreau, 2021, p. 10). The case of the digital church that has emerged in response to COVID-19 also has brought issues about

whether digitally mediated church practices are unreal, inauthentic, or disembodied. However, it is acknowledged that digital spaces do not replace face-to-face interaction but create new possibilities for meaning-making and identity construction (Chow & Kurlberg, 2020, p. 248). For this, I agree with Lytra (2020) that the relationship between virtual and physical religious spaces is complementary, along with the computer or mobile screen creating new possibilities for religious membership and belonging (p. 132).

While some aspects of religious practice and worship have been successfully adapted to digital formats, the authenticity of certain religious practices remains a barrier to their full transformation into the digital realm (Udin & Hakim, 2020, p. 472). The digital age has become an irreversible process that is changing what it means to be a human being and, by extension, what it means to be a religious or spiritual person in a techno-driven world (Bingaman, 2023, p. 6). The digital media sermon is an evolving concept that seeks to understand the place of the sermon on the digital frontier, with digital homiletics emerging as a field that captures the intersection of preaching, digital rhetoric, and technology (O'Lynn, 2023, p. 11).

In addition, digitalizing oral religious communication through podcasts, live streaming, and online sermons has revolutionized traditional practices. Podcasts have become popular for disseminating religious teachings, fostering accessibility, and reaching a global audience (Rachna & Mishra, 2023, p. 109). Podcasts are "digital media with audio-based content such as radio" (Utari et al., 2023, p. 231). However, podcasts are different from radio in that one must tune in to the radio's frequency before listening to it, while podcasts are always available online to be accessed. The transition from oral traditions to digital podcasts allows religious leaders to preserve and share cultural heritage, overcoming geographical barriers effectively. In the same vein, Live streaming (real-time broadcasting of live video using the internet)

of religious services provides a real-time connection, enabling virtual participation for individuals who cannot physically attend. However, some challenges could include maintaining the sacredness of rituals in a digital space and addressing potential distractions during online services. Digital formats enhance community engagement, fostering a sense of inclusivity and connectivity among dispersed members. Increased interactivity through comment sections and virtual forums allows congregants to share thoughts and discuss religious teachings, enriching the communal experience.

The Impact of Digital Media on Religious Communities

Digital media have revolutionized how religious communities engage with their followers and reach a global audience. The Internet and social media platforms have become vital tools for religious organizations to disseminate their messages, connect with believers, and even conduct virtual religious services (Tsuria, 2021). Digital media allows the creation of online religious communities where individuals can participate in discussions, share religious content, and access religious texts and teachings from anywhere in the world (Barreau, 2021). The digital environment offers unique opportunities for religious settings, enabling them to extend their reach beyond traditional geographical boundaries.

For instance, the concept of a “spiritual network” situates religion “outside” the digital continent, considering digital media as an extension of religious practice. At the same time, the “worship space” paradigm places religion “inside” the digital continent, transforming it into a sacramental space (Barreau, 2021, p. 4). Furthermore, digital media can be used as a “missionary tool” for promoting religious beliefs and as a technology for affirming religious identity (p. 4).

The use of digital media in religious contexts is not just limited to the dissemination of information; it also involves the

communication and transmission of dogmatic and ritualistic elements that suggest the presence of the divine. DICT offers effective modern info-communicational assistance to religious practice, enabling renewed religious “apologetics” and “propaganda” as tools for a new form of proselytism (p. 4). Religious digital media communities reach a global audience by providing platforms that extend religious practices, create virtual worship spaces, promote religious beliefs, and affirm religious identities. These technologies have become indispensable in the modern religious landscape, allowing more significant interaction, dissemination, and engagement with followers worldwide.

Online forums, social media, and virtual communities play a significant role in fostering connections among believers by providing spaces for religious interaction across media platforms. These platforms allow participants to practice solely in the virtual dimension or across both virtual and actual dimensions (Murchison & Coats, n.d.). These platforms enable users to develop meaningful relationships in online settings, including religious communities, and facilitate the interaction of users around religious issues, which can be moderated and tailored to specific audiences (Pihlaja, 2017).

Furthermore, believers are guided toward understanding that digital reality comprises an integral part of reality, and their presence on social media is seen as a legitimate form of expression of their belief (Joubert & Schoeman, 2016). The boundaries between online and offline spaces are flexible and fluid, resulting in connections across time/space scales as well as across communication media and textual resources. Most online religious groups and communities have a connection with physical religious communities, and the relationship between virtual and physical religious spaces complements rather than displaces one another (Lytra, 2020).

Religious social networks have distinct qualities tied to the beliefs or rituals of these

communities, differentiating them from other types of social networks. These networks provide personal friendship networks that link members with voluntary organizations to form a close-knit community (Hastings & Roeser, 2020). The voluntary nature of the relationship between volunteer and recipient in religious communities is vital to the benefits for both parties, distinguishing this relationship from professional help and help from family and relatives (Przygoda, 2023). Online forums, social media, and virtual communities are vital platforms for believers to engage in religious activities, share knowledge, and foster connections extending beyond traditional geographical boundaries, enhancing the religious experience and community building in the digital age.

Challenges and Ethical Consideration

Translating religious orality into digital spaces can lead to several challenges, including spreading misinformation and online extremism. Some groups, like the Terrorist groups, have utilized the Internet for various activities, such as communication, fundraising, publicity, propaganda, radicalization, and community building (Palace, M et al., 2018). The accessibility of interactive extremist content online might increase the potential for radicalization, and online extremist instructions are often actualized in real-world terrorist attacks (Scott & Shanahan, 2018). Consequently, The Internet plays a role in providing access to radical information and spreading extremist views (Palace, M et al., 2018). In the same way, the digital environment also allows for the transformation of religious authority and practices, as seen in the context of a pandemic. (Barreau, 2021). The boundaries between online and offline religious spaces are fluid, and online religious groups are often connected to physical communities, complementing rather than displacing one another (Lytra, 2020).

Furthermore, hate speech on social media and other forms of religious prejudice is a

significant concern. Studies show that hate speech travels online at a higher velocity than other forms of speech (Senbel et al., 2022). Joseph Walther (2002) reports from surveys deriving across several countries that “42–67% of young adults observed hateful and degrading writings or speech online, and 21% have been victims themselves”. Evidently, this includes hate speeches from (religious) ideological extremists. The challenge of detecting and countering online extremism is compounded by the adaptability of extremists, who use current events to spread propaganda and recruit individuals (Gaikwad et al., 2022). For this reason, the fluidity between online and offline religious practices can enrich and complicate the religious experience in the digital age (AdmissionSight, 2023).

Another ethical consideration in the digital environment is privacy. These considerations involve respecting individuals' autonomy to make informed decisions about their data, ensuring transparency, and obtaining informed consent. Privacy is an individual right and a public good that underpins democratic processes and societal freedom. It is essential to protect individuals from the pressure to conform to societal expectations, which can threaten human dignity and freedom.

Organizations must develop and implement information privacy policies and programs to protect consumer privacy, addressing the privacy paradox by aligning expressed privacy concerns with actual online behavior (Gotsch & Schögel, 2023, p. 280). The organizational level is crucial for tackling privacy vulnerabilities and requires a holistic approach to the use of consumer data. Ethical considerations in the digital age involve respecting privacy as a public good, ensuring digital accessibility, and the responsibility of religious leaders and organizations to address digital challenges while fostering community and outreach. Organizations play a pivotal role in protecting privacy and must adopt comprehensive strategies to manage consumer data ethically.

Digital accessibility is another critical ethical consideration pertaining to equitable access to digital resources and services. Ensuring that digital technologies are accessible to all, including those with disabilities, is a matter of fairness and equality (Raja, 2016, p. 6). Religious leaders and organizations are responsible for navigating the challenges of the digital age, including addressing misinformation and online extremism, fostering connections among believers through online forums and social media, and reaching a global audience while maintaining the integrity of religious practice.

Future Trends and Prospects

Emerging trends in the intersection of orality and religious media in the digital age include the development of digital and hybrid spaces for preaching and worship, which have become more prominent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need for exploration of consistent wins discovered from preaching in digital and hybrid spaces, as contemporary approaches have continued using old tools in new environments.

The blurring of sacred and profane in digital media is another trend where digital media can invoke religious feelings, suggesting that hypermodern societies have sanctified the profane by replacing the divine with human connectivity through digital media. The digital church's response to COVID-19 has shown that digitally mediated Christian practice is not disembodied or unreal, but rather that corporate worship in digital spaces means that human bodies are not congregated in the same physical spaces (Lois C. Dubin, 2023, p. 482). High usage of digital technology, particularly social media, correlates with religious disaffiliation, as the Internet encourages tinkering with an assortment of spiritual options and rejecting exclusive truth claims of any religious tradition. The digital age is changing how religious communities engage with their followers, with digital media becoming a platform for extending religious practice and creating virtual worship spaces. Nigeria saw a dramatic

digital divide as a result of COVID-19 (Hussain, 2021). Fewer people could afford the connectivity. Literacy rates dropped. Technologies and education were much more difficult to access.

In summary, the intersection of orality and religious media in the digital age is characterized by the adaptation of religious practices to digital environments, the emergence of Digital Theology as a research modality, the blurring of sacred and profane through digital media, and the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital church in response to the pandemic. These trends suggest a shift in religious authority and practices, with a move toward greater inclusivity and diversity in religious expression and engagement.

Conclusion


This study has examined the dynamic intersection between orality and religious media in the digital age, highlighting key trends in how religious communities and traditions are adapting to the digital landscape. The research reveals that while digital media provides new avenues for preserving and disseminating oral traditions, it also poses challenges to their authenticity. Religious communities are increasingly adopting digital platforms such as podcasts, live streaming, and social media to share their teachings and foster engagement. Still, they face ethical issues related to privacy, misinformation, and the commodification of sacred content. Additionally, the study has shown that digital media offers opportunities for greater inclusivity in religious practice and risks of fragmentation, as online interactions cannot fully replace the depth of physical, face-to-face worship.

The practical implications of this research are profound for religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners. Religious leaders must recognize the growing importance of digital platforms as tools for engaging with followers yet remain cautious of the ethical pitfalls and the risk of losing the essence of sacred oral traditions in digital formats. Scholars

studying orality and religious communication should consider the evolving landscape of Digital Theology and its influence on contemporary spiritual practices. Future research should investigate how digital platforms can be optimized to preserve the integrity of oral traditions while embracing innovation. Additionally, further exploration is needed into the ethical frameworks that should guide religious leaders in the digital realm, particularly around privacy, inclusivity, and the responsible use of digital media for religious propagation.

The enduring importance of orality in religious communication cannot be overstated, even in an increasingly dominated digital media era. Orality remains a fundamental

mode of religious expression, deeply rooted in human culture and identity. However, the digital age has introduced a dynamic relationship between oral traditions and digital platforms, which requires careful correspondence between conserving oral practices' authenticity and leveraging technology's benefits for wider dissemination. As religious communities navigate this digital transformation, it could be a challenge to ensure that orality remains a vibrant and essential component of religious life, which adapts it to new media without losing its core significance.

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CASE STUDY

More Local Ways for Praise: Local Arts for Mission & Ministry

Younhee Deborah Kim

Abstract: *The Gospel is a message that must be delivered in ways that resonate with diverse cultural backgrounds. This article explores how local arts provide a powerful and beautiful medium for conveying the Gospel across varied cultures, reaching people's hearts through familiar expressions. It also introduces the role of ethnodoxology, which aids in understanding how Christians engage with God through their own cultural expressions. Ethnodoxologists encourage the use of local arts as a language of worship that aligns with biblical principles and deepens cultural connections. Through case studies from Africa, Asia, and Europe, this article demonstrates how Christians can foster unique local artistic expressions to enrich worship and encourage people to see their cultural heritage as a means of connecting with the gospel message.*

Keywords: *arts, ethnodoxology, France, Philippines, Tanzania, worship*

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

Christians possess the Gospel from Christ, and as followers of Jesus, we bear the responsibility of communicating it to our neighbors. How can we effectively convey the Gospel to people across various regions and cultures? This is where the role of the arts becomes crucial. The Gospel can be expressed through many artistic forms, including storytelling, song, gesture and movement, painting, and more—not solely through the written word. Robin Harris said, “Let’s not forget that **since the gospel is a message, it must be delivered. And how we deliver it connects to the arts**” (Dallas Theological Seminary, 2021).

When discussing arts to convey the Gospel, local arts play a significant role. These are not confined to any specific group; rather, they are familiar to individuals based on the cultures in which they were born, raised, or have lived for extended periods. Therefore, local arts can be a powerful means of connecting to someone’s heart. These local expressions, often called “heart arts,” can be an essential language for worship. This highlights the need for ethnodoxology.

Ethnodoxology

Ethnodoxology combines two key terms: “Ethno,” from the Greek *ethne*, meaning “peoples,” and “doxology,” from *doxos*, meaning “glory” or “praise.” Put together, ethnodoxology refers to **the praise of the people**. According to the Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN), ethnodoxology is “the interdisciplinary study of how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions” (What is Ethnodoxology?, n.d.).

Each culture possesses unique artistic expressions that are integral to its identity. These artistic forms can be utilized to worship God and effectively communicate the gospel message in beautiful and meaningful ways. Ethnodoxology facilitates and encourages this engagement. Ethnodoxologists aspire to see all people worshipping God through their heart arts within their cultural contexts. This underscores the importance of local arts.

In this article, I will present three case studies of the arts in mission—one from Africa, one from Asia, and one from Europe.

Case Study 1: Songwriting and Arts Workshop in Tanzania

I have participated in and conducted several songwriting workshops in Tanzania to encourage local church members to create new praise songs in their native languages and the local music styles they already have. This approach allows participants to compose songs quickly—sometimes within an hour—because they do not need to translate foreign songs or learn Western music scales. The lyrics are rooted in Scripture, as participants use Bible verses as their foundation. Once the songs are created, they can sing them in their churches and continue to compose new songs. Ultimately, they can develop their unique praise songs in their languages and with their local musical styles.



Songwriting groups created lyrics related to the Bible verses that were given to them and composed a song based on their local music style.

One of the songwriting workshops took place in Karagwe. Tanzania is known for its relative absence of tribalism. Many Tanzanians assert, “There is no tribalism in our country,” and this statement holds true. Consequently, our team encouraged participants to write songs in Swahili, the official language of Tanzania, utilizing traditional Tanzanian praise song styles. On the first day, they composed and presented their Swahili praise songs. You can hear one of these songs in the [accompanying video](#).

During the workshop, we realized that the participants spoke Kinyambo, their mother tongue, which is prevalent in the region. Although the Bible had not been translated into Kinyambo, some pastors could translate a few verses into the language. Therefore, the next day, encouraged by our leaders, the participants were invited to write lyrics based on these verses in Kinyambo and to create new songs using Nyambo-style music. The atmosphere changed dramatically when they presented the songs they had composed that day. It transformed into a full worship service, with presenters and other attendees standing up to join in the praise, singing along, and dancing the traditional dances characteristic of their tribe. If you watch [this video](#), you will notice the difference compared to the previous one. Although Swahili is their official language and they are accustomed to it, they sang with greater passion, prayed more spontaneously, and worshiped more deeply when using their native language and musical style.

Another workshop I conducted in Tanzania focused on visual art. When I lead art workshops in any region, I intentionally choose activities that incorporate materials reflective of the local culture. This approach is rooted in **sustainability**. Locally sourced materials enable community members to find and use items without relying on external sources. When locals can easily access supplies in their environment, they are more likely to continue creating. Moreover, this practice **renews perspectives**. It allows locals and outsiders to re-examine the culture, allowing them to discover beauty within it. Additionally, it **fosters creativity**. Ordinary items may seem unremarkable, yet their simplicity encourages us to think creatively.



The same principles apply to local arts in worship and missions. By utilizing local artistic expressions familiar to people within that culture, they can unlock their creativity and gain new insights into their rich cultural heritage, all while ensuring sustainability without external assistance.



A few years ago, I facilitated a workshop for women in Bunda, a small town in Tanzania, using African fabric as the medium. At that time, the participants were accustomed to making only clothes from this fabric, so I encouraged them to explore creating new items beyond clothing. They made bags, hair accessories, necklaces, and other accessories.



After the workshop, during a feedback session, one of the women said, “Frankly, I wondered why you wanted me to make something out of this African fabric. It’s nothing special to me. There are many foreign or Western-style materials available, and I believe it would be better to use those. Why do I have to use this

plain cloth?” However, she continued, “I didn’t understand at first, but as I created new items with it, *I realized that African fabric is beautiful.*”

During the workshop, she experienced a transformation; something familiar in her culture, which she had previously considered unremarkable, suddenly appeared fresh and new. More importantly, she discovered that elements of her own culture could be beautiful. This was a significant opportunity for the participants to renew their perspectives on their cultural heritage.

Case Study 2: Art Exhibition in the Philippines

In 2022, a Community Art Project took place on Cebu Island, Philippines. This eight-week program began with our team spending the first three weeks researching the history, culture, and arts of the Philippines and Cebu. During our research, we discovered the richness of traditional Filipino culture, its diverse artistic expressions, and the considerable talent among the local people. We encountered various ornaments and decorations, traditional festivals and costumes, and their culinary pride. We also noted the remarkable weaving skills that produce beautiful fabrics and the many talented Filipinos who create art on the streets.



However, we also found that many Filipinos are not well-acquainted with their own cultural traditions and arts, with young people being particularly disconnected. Additionally, the original scripts for their language (Cebuano) are fading into obscurity, known only by a few individuals.



A painter who was painting on a wall

Our team decided to organize an exhibition as a community art project involving local artists. The exhibition was titled

“Pagbinayloay,” which means *Exchange of Ideas*. We suggested “Reviving the Spirit of Cebuano Creativity” as the theme and encouraged participants—Filipino artists—to incorporate pre-colonial Cebuano and Philippine traditional arts into their modern artwork. Our goal was to inspire locals, especially young artists, to reflect on and reconnect with their cultural heritage.



During the preparation, we were fortunate to collaborate with local artists - art students, young artists, and a painter with over 40 years of experience. The exhibition

opening featured a performance of traditional dances. Together, our team members and local artists created stunning art pieces



that beautifully blended traditional and modern artistic elements. After the exhibition, some attendees gained a renewed understanding of art, while others were given the opportunity to view their own cultural heritage from a fresh perspective.

Case Study 3: Music Concert in France

In 2019, a Celtic music festival was held in Lorient, in the Brittany region of western France. This event provided an excellent opportunity for many people to gather and enjoy music. Recognizing this, OM France and our team (HSI, now Inspiro Arts Alliance) decided to share the gospel message through music. However, instead of using music that we were familiar with, we aimed to incorporate musical forms that resonated with the local community.



In the first week, our team focused on learning about the history and culture of Brittany while researching the region's musical styles. Our musicians then composed lyrics based on stories about the area and its history, creating songs that reflected the musical styles familiar to the locals.

During the festival, we performed the songs we created in various locations—not only in churches but also in cafes, on the streets, and even in private gardens. This allowed us to connect with a diverse audience and enabled some Christians to invite their

area. We later learned that some attendees expressed curiosity about the songs and inquired about the lyrics, which initiated conversations that allowed Christians to share their faith. This was made possible by utilizing local musical styles and stories that were familiar and meaningful to the people of the region.

The Importance of Local Arts

Local arts are significant because they serve as **heart arts** for the community. They help people worship God with all their hearts and share the Gospel effectively and beautifully. Learning about and utilizing local arts—such as music, dance, visual arts, stories, and drama—in a biblically and culturally appropriate way can enrich worship and foster a deeper understanding of the Gospel in an indigenous context. This encourages local expressions of worship. More local ways for praise!

neighbors to these concerts. As a result, the performances became a valuable bridge between believers and non-believers in the

For more information and resources about ethnodoxology, visit worldofworship.org.

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INTERVIEWS

The Transformative Power of Orality in Campus Ministry

Jaycel Sumayog Andong

Abstract: This interview with Jaycel explores her role and the transformative impact of orality on her ministry. Jaycel highlights her use of orality techniques in Bible studies and retreats, which made sessions more engaging for students, fostering creativity and a deeper connection with the Gospel. She notes that orality principles have encouraged students to be more active and share their thoughts more freely during Bible studies. Jaycel envisions applying orality principles more broadly and recommends the training, which equips ministry leaders to communicate the Word of God creatively.

Keywords: Bible study, Philippines, campus ministry

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

In July 2024, Roce Anog-Madinger, an OralityTalks Journal (OTJ) staff, interviewed Jaycel, a student ministry leader and I-OS [orality certificate](#) graduate, about the impact and change of using principles of orality with students.

Roce: Tell us something about you and what you do.

Jaycel: I am Jaycel. I am part of the Philippine Student Alliance Lay Ministry (PSALM). I serve as District Director or Lead Campus Missionary in General Santos City, Mindanao, Philippines. We are an interdenominational campus ministry working with the youth. We conduct Bible studies on the campuses and train and send students to trainings. We partner with different churches. The focus of PSALM is three-fold: Evangelism, discipleship, and leadership building.

Roce: Who do you usually work with?

Jaycel: When I was a volunteer and campus director, I worked directly with students because we go to campuses. Now that I am a team leader, my work is mostly administrative. I work with and supervise fellow campus missionaries and ministry partners. We plan and decide together. As part of a faith-based ministry, I raise support and

strengthen partnerships with churches and individuals.

Roce: How has learning orality principles impacted your ministry?

Jaycel: It is super impactful. It has a lot of impact! Let me share two examples.

The present generation of students and their parents are more sensitive and inquire more about our teaching content and ministry activities. So when we conducted a retreat among senior high school students, orality principles were helpful because I came up with more creative ways to present the Gospel and make the activities more engaging. It was less hassle for facilitators yet more engaging activities for the participants. We simply facilitate, and the students become more active and creative.

When I lead Bible studies now, I prepare more questions. I am surprised and amazed at the insights my fellow workers have.

Roce: How have the students been impacted?

Jaycel: I have observed that they now have realizations on their own. They hear and sense the Lord's specific word or leading for them. That has also impacted me seeing

these changes. I let them decide on their own how to follow the Lord.

I tried integrating Bible stories with our lessons during our online Bible studies. Some of our students are graduating, and some are pregnant.

Because of the Bible stories and questions, the discussions are more engaging. They understand the lesson better. They can answer the written lessons on their own after the story discussion.

They have drawings and spoken word poetry. I regret not having recorded them!

A teacher testified that students were more open to sharing their problems and did not feel restrained in showing their tears and emotions.

Roce: What have been some of your takeaways from the orality training?

Jaycel: We need to be creative in addressing the emotional needs. We need to be creative when reaching out to the students.

Orality is how the Lord used arts, music, and other means to proclaim His Word, the totality of the Gospel. We can share the Gospel and disciple others in a way that is not just through saying or singing it, but there are many ways to make it more creative because we serve a creative God. The one word for me is creativity. Orality, for me, is how to be creative in sharing the Gospel and discipling others.

Roce: How do you see the principles of orality used beyond your current ministry?

Jaycel: I can see the principles of orality applied at a larger scale in our ministry, cluster group first, then perhaps at the national level. I want to mentor others in using these principles in designing their lessons, events, and activities.

Roce: Would you recommend the training to others?

Jaycel: It is a big yes! It has helped me as a campus missionary, especially as we minister to different students. We minister to soldiers, helping them grow in their walk with the Lord.

As a campus missionary, you cannot go to the battle if you are not ready. We should be ready, and the orality training helped me be ready. Like soldiers, we must be equipped to go to battle, ready to bring and use weapons for whatever situation or experience. Orality has been like a weapon for me as a campus missionary, opening my eyes to other ways and means of ministry. I have been more creative, impacting others and being touched as a person and as a Christian, experiencing how creative our Lord is. Because God is creative, God has given us wisdom in influencing others by using all these creative gifts. I did not think of myself as having many talents. But through orality, I discovered that we are all creative. We have strengths that God can use to lead people to Christ.



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The Transformative Power of Storytelling

Nerimil Ella Saguin

Abstract: Discover how a coach with Spoken Worldwide uses storytelling to share the Bible in a way that engages listeners deeply. Through the “Spoken methodology,” she asks questions that invite people to explore God’s Word themselves, connecting with it personally. “I’m not the ‘teacher’ but a storyteller and facilitator,” she explains, emphasizing that storytelling fosters discovery and transformation. By using questions, images, and role-playing, Ella empowers her audiences to experience and share the Gospel naturally.

Keywords: Bible study, oral preference, storytelling

Orality reliance level: moderate orality reliance ■■■□□

Charles (Chuck) Madinger and Rose Anog-Madinger, both I-OS and OralityTalks staff, sat down with Ella Saguin, a specialist in Bible Story Telling with Spoken Worldwide and Community Bible Studies (CBS) in the US.

Roce: Hello, Ella! We’re glad you could join us today.

Chuck: I-OS exists to help you help other organizations deepen your impact through the use of orality principles and methods orality, which some call holistic or integrated communication. It’s about how we communicate based on the way God made us as communicators in his image to multiply the impact of our thoughts and our hearts so that others might find transformation through the Gospel. Ella, tell us a little bit about yourself, your organization, and how you got into this.

Ella: OK, my name is Ella Saguin, I’m a mother of six children with one husband, of course, and I am a Spoken Worldwide coach in collaboration with CBS. I am a storyteller, not ordinary stories; the stories that I tell are the only stories that last forever. So that’s my job. I tell people stories that transform their lives, and I teach others how to tell stories in their heart language.

Chuck: So, when you say you teach people, are these groups in workshops and seminars? And who exactly are you teaching?

Ella: I teach leaders who want to discover more about oral learners. We prepare oral learners to be confident in sharing the Word of God in their heart language. And we also build their confidence to serve the Lord. Through these Bible studies, they even developed the needed theology as well. They come from diverse backgrounds, often new to faith, yet passionate to serve. By immersing them in this methodology, they realize they can share the Gospel effectively without formal theological education. Youth and young adults are involved, and it becomes a daily thing. It’s for them the natural thing that we all have, and that is telling a story, right? When you use the Spoken methodology, rather than just reading the Bible, I can let them close their eyes and picture the things in the story.

Chuck: Let’s stop right there for just a second and back up because that’s a very important part of who you are and what you do. Tell us about the unique Spoken methodology, and then we’ll get to what’s behind it. Please walk us through what that sounds like.

Ella: OK, the methodology of spoken is really just telling a story and asking questions to let people discover the truth in God’s story.

Chuck: What are those questions then?

Ella: The questions are based on what's inside the story. We don't go outside of the story. "What do you like in the story? What don't you like in the story?" or "What do you find interesting in the story? What do you find difficult or challenging in the story?"

Then we go into the location: "Where are they located? Who are the people in the story? What can we learn from their characters? Is Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit in the story? What do you learn about them?" Sometimes, we look for a central idea or point God is making. Sometimes, they will say, "It's about obedience. It's about faith. It's about seeking Jesus." Sometimes, "It's about seeking God." And that's when I ask the fifth question—the action question. "What will you choose to do now based on what you learned from the things in the story?" We engage people in the story in five ways: story, story, story, story, story. We tell the story first, and we share the story with pictures. And then, we retell or act out the story. We can tell the story to a partner as you remember the story. The fourth way is to tell the story with intentional mistakes and let them correct you. It's fun, right? And then the fifth story is the story application questions.

Chuck: The story questions like, "Who's here? What's going on?" All those kinds of things. OK, so it is a way to work with people who are hungry to learn more about how to share their faith. It sounds to me like this is very much a methodology to help people share their faith in the truths of the Gospel. It allows them to engage others in those stories. They're going through that process and all the questions, so people are participating and not just listening to a story. You're really trying to draw it out with them, but they can make their own discoveries. Is that fair?

Ella: Yes. And at the same time, we teach one another. I am not their *teacher*. I'm the only storyteller and the facilitator. But I get to learn from them, and they learn from each other. I get to learn from everybody. The beauty of this methodology is that even though I only have one story, I tell it in

different ways and get different results all the time. That's just how exciting it is. So even if I encourage them to learn just one story and tell it differently, they get different results and discover a lot of things that they didn't discover in the previous group. So that's just how beautiful this method is because we get to teach one another, we get to learn with each other, and there is interaction. There's no teacher mode. There's no one greater than anyone. We get to learn from one another, and I call it like it's the Holy Spirit speaking to us through each other.

Roce: Have you heard testimonies—or impact stories—from the people? Can you share some of those?

Ella: I would like to share the beautiful story of my daughter. She found purpose when she did the training, and right now, she is studying law. It really helped her a lot, especially discovering for herself that she, too, is an oral learner, although she loves to read books. Because of the Spoken method, she's able to learn far more. It helped her read books. She reads probably eight books in a day. She's able to retain all she studied to teach other people, but she does it now by talking, talking, talking! She helps people. So that's when she realized that she's very oral as well as highly literate. She's also able to see her purpose in telling stories, and it enhances her.

I'm so blessed because, through this method, I equipped my children to share stories and even talk to people from any walks of life. These young people also trained bishops and pastors! And you know what blesses me is they don't back down. When you train them, you'll see that you will be very proud of how they conduct the training and facilitate others in the method. They will teach anyone! "Pastor, I know you're very passionate about the Word of God, but is what you just said really in the story?" Even pastors learn and grow through the experience of intentional Bible storytelling.

Chuck: One of the things that we like to emphasize in OralityTalks is that everyone is an oral learner. As those made in the image of God, we communicate what is in our minds and hearts in multiple ways and means. Speaking and hearing are only one expression. We can write it, sing it, draw it, and much more through all five senses. Newborn babies are 100% reliant on communication through all five senses and, with time and education, learn other literacies—including writing and reading. So, what we like to see is exactly what you’re talking about with oral learners, those people who have much less preference for written information. Those who love to read—we call them *very low in their orality reliance*, and they consume eight books a day, *yet* they still tell stories. And we see the other end of the spectrum with those people who read no books a day, and they all learn according to their preferences.

One consideration is to tell stories in the ways they do to express their mind and their heart to get their message across. Storytelling is one methodology, only one way God expresses his mind and heart. Yet, there are lots of other ways. A story engages the whole person, which makes it so much more powerful than just sharing concepts and principles. This brings us to ask, *How has orality informed your methodology of storytelling?* And, ***What is it about orality that helps you become a better storyteller?***

Ella: Whenever I listen to a story, it brings me to the story itself—the people and the situations they experienced—rather than reading about it. It’s like we’re there! Especially when a *person* tells us that we have gotten into the action. We sense these expressions, and it makes it more alive for me. I become more engaged, and I go inside the story, and all of my senses help my imagination go to every place. Like this: “When evening came, Jesus told his disciples. Let’s cross over to the other side of the lake.” My mind takes me there. I imagine getting into the boat and setting out.

Chuck: That’s a very good principle. When we teach with narratives, one person describes it as being transported into another world where our minds and emotions are willing to go places we might not ordinarily be willing to go. Melanie Green showed that to the degree that we make people feel like they’re a part of the story, it can make a difference in changing their minds and hearts. That is what you do and teach as a good storyteller—especially with stories of the Bible. What else do you see from orality that makes you a better storyteller?

Ella: What else? I think even more understanding because I don’t just tell stories. I only tell stories from the Bible. What draws me even more into it is that stories that I tell are stories that, you know, are true.

Stories have the power to transform lives. Everybody loves stories, but not every story has the power of a true story. When I was younger, I told my children a lot of stories. But now, I am telling THE story—the story that lasts forever. What draws me into telling the stories? Yesterday, I met someone and told her a story. She started sharing about her family with me. The woman’s husband is away. Suddenly, I wanted to share the story of Genesis Chapter 3. As she listened, she put it all together about how our human family got so troubled. It clicked. We left God’s design and will for our lives. It’s just amazing. Everybody loves stories.

Chuck: So, if I may interpret your story here, orality informs your storytelling by listening to someone else’s story and finding the one in the Bible that relates to theirs. That’s golden! We have to recognize an entry to tell a story or engage somebody in God’s way of seeing things. A story must be relevant to someone. Storytelling or creating a song or a poem or anything else that tells a story gives a much better point of connecting with others.

Ella: If there is one thing I know about using Bible storytelling as a means of sharing the Gospel, it’s that we always need to be ready

to share one when God opens the door for me to open my heart and mouth.

Chuck: A lot of wisdom there. Ella, you're so encouraging to hear. This isn't something that we pick up, and we can remain satisfied with where we started. We have to grow in our whole approach to communicating the Good News in many ways. God communicated his mind and heart in many times and many ways throughout redemptive history. So again, how do you want to encourage people in Bible storytelling? Also, how did you get into it, and how can you encourage other people to break into this art?

Ella: Accidentally, but there's no accident when it comes to the plans of God. I was dragged into it. I'm a Sunday school teacher and a trainer for children and youth. And so, I was just invited to this training as a substitution, you know. But it turns out I'm the one who became the coach for that training of 25 people. So, I want to invite people, especially as a mother, and I want to show how it transformed my whole family. We communicate with our children and spouses all the time. It's just natural for us to tell stories. So we have that in us; it's just a matter of opening up and directing us on how we can use it further to expand God's Kingdom.

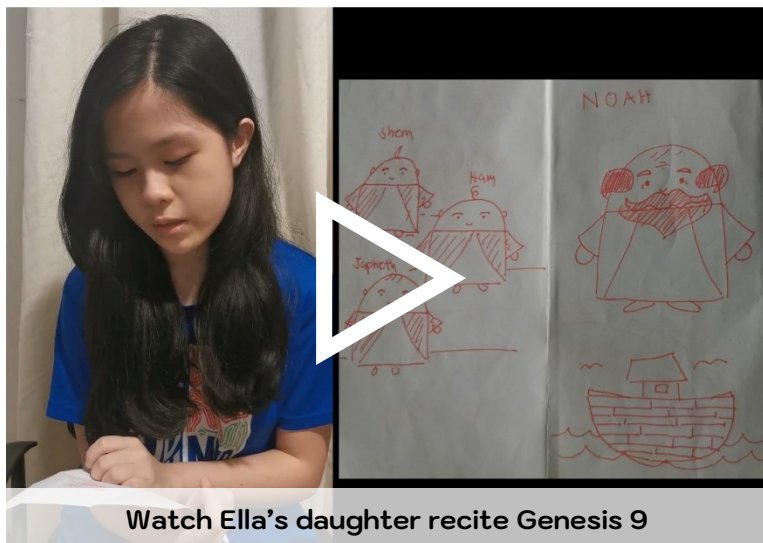
mentioned. We are storytellers. We are all oral learners. Yes, a lot of people may say ohh! People right now are all educated, and no, it's not about education; it's about who we are, and it's about how we are created. We are created to communicate, and this method is about communicating well. In your family, first, you should try to learn about the orality method and how this method can also enhance the way you communicate as a parent or probably as a child when communicating in your family. So that's how it transformed my family's life.

Roce: We often invite experienced practitioners in the space of orality to lead sessions of our professional or academic modules. How would you approach not telling about your method but leading actual sessions so that students can experience the process and impact?

Ella: If I simply demonstrate how they can use the methodology, I sometimes use this in five-minute encounters. You can use this in a 30-minute devotional, or you can use it as a Bible study tool for one hour and 30 minutes. You can even use this to preach as a sermon. I'm a pastor. I'm an ordained pastor. But whenever I am invited to preach, I always use this methodology. It is very interactive.

Roce: I just wanted to say thank you, Ella! You made us excited again about what people can do with the Word of God when they simply return to the Word itself. Thank you for the impact stories of your family. We need more of that. That's the place to begin. It's family. And if it doesn't work in your family, how are you going to go out and influence others? What a great testimony coming from your husband and your children.

Ella: The thing about it also is that it opens up, like my husband said, to a whole lot of things that we didn't discover with our children and our family. But when we did this methodology, it brought us even closer to each other, and God also used this for us as parents to learn from our children and to see the Lord's leading. Stories are so great!



Watch Ella's daughter recite Genesis 9

You know what we already have in us, which is arts, which is storytelling, that is in nature. Each one of us, regardless of culture and religion, is a communicator, as you

Chuck: Ella, we're very grateful again to you for Spoken and your work with CBS.

Ella: Thank you also for adding so much to what I learned. I'm very excited to learn more and learn further. I know there are so many things I need to learn. Thank you. I learned so much from you, even during this

short meeting that we had today. So, thank you.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nerimil Ella Saguin is a Pastor and a leader in children's ministry with over ten years of outreach experience. As a mother of six, she is dedicated to helping marginalized communities and led programs in the Tipolo slums from 2011 to 2019. Her family and faith motivate her work. In 2021, she became a Spoken Trainer, learning about orality and how to support oral-dependent learners. Currently, she serves as an Orality Coach for the East Asia Pacific Region with Community Bible Study and Spoken Worldwide, empowering communities through effective teaching. ✉ ella.saguin@gmail.com

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