

## **AN INDIGENOUS LITERATE LEADERSHIP FOR AN ORAL LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Tiffany Lillard

Tiffany Lillard has a B.A. in English from NC State University and an M.A. in Intercultural Studies concentrating in Orality from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. She currently lives in Greensboro and hopes to work in a cross-cultural setting either in the states or overseas.

Published in Global Missiology, Contemporary Practice, July 2012, [www.globalmissiology.net](http://www.globalmissiology.net)

Pastor Dinanath of India converted from Hinduism to Christianity through the witness of a foreign missionary in 1995. A year later, he was sent to a Bible college by the missionary to study for two years. Dinanath returned and tried teaching his people what he had learned while in school, but very few accepted Christ. In 1999, Dinanath went to a seminar where he learned how to teach using oral methods instead of through lectures and books as he had been doing. By telling stories to the people and using indigenous forms of songs about the gospel, Dinanath saw a greater response to Christ and many people were baptized. In a period of five years, 74 more churches were started with 1350 baptized believers.<sup>1</sup>

This story of Pastor Dinanath is not an isolated event. Scripture makes clear that God desires to have worshipers from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people (Rev 7:9) and it is the mission of the church to engage these peoples with the Word of God. Various tools have emerged to help missionaries teach this truth and effectively disciple people in cross-cultural contexts, but as Pastor Dinanath found, many of these are designed using literate methods. In recent decades, the concept of orality and Bible storying has been developed to address the needs

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<sup>1</sup> International Orality Network, "Making Disciples of Oral Learners" (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Pattaya, Thailand, 2004), 2-3.

of oral learners.<sup>2</sup> Orality provides a biblically-based and theologically-sound means of engaging oral learners with Scripture that is incarnational and reproducible for the people. While there is no biblical basis for necessitating literacy among the entire population, precedent suggests that these people groups should have at least some form of an indigenous, literate leadership that is capable of addressing the entire written Word of God to teach it to the community in a way that is both biblically faithful and meaningful.

According to literacy studies, approximately two-thirds of the world's population are oral learners. These individuals either cannot read and must obtain information orally, known as primary oral learners, or they can read but prefer to learn by word of mouth or other aural media, known as secondary oral learners. Despite this, a paper presented by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization cites that 90% of Christians are presenting the gospel with "highly literate communication styles," including printed material and "expositional, analytical and logical" teaching methods.<sup>3</sup> These literate modes of teaching will not necessarily make sense to oral learners because their communication methods are more relational and oral.<sup>4</sup> One obvious suggestion would be to read Scripture out loud to people who cannot read it for themselves. While this might appear easy enough, this does not suffice as an oral method, because the written text "may have literate stylistic features that confuse oral learners."<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the syntax and vocabulary will most likely be difficult to remember and therefore not reproducible for the hearers of the Word. Long sentences, such as Ephesians 1:15–21, contain various subordinate

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<sup>2</sup> The term "oral learners" will be used instead of "illiterates," or "non-literates" to refrain from portraying these peoples as deficient in some manner.

<sup>3</sup> ION, 3. The distinction between primary and secondary oral learners is made in Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

clauses that are difficult for people listening to the content to remember. These can be broken down into smaller sentences and sections so that the oral learners can not only grasp the content but remember it so they can pass it on to others.

In light of this discrepancy, Bible storying has been used in these oral contexts to faithfully engage oral learners with Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Taking a portion of Scripture and putting it into a story format that is biblically accurate allows an oral learner to grasp the content of Scripture in a biblically-faithful and reproducible manner. One missiologist notes the universal nature of storytelling, as all major religions teach through stories.<sup>7</sup> This includes the Judeo-Christian tradition, as over half of the Bible is narrative in form.<sup>8</sup> However, in the attempt to properly contextualize biblical teaching, the integrity and authority of Scripture must be maintained so as not to give a poor image of the gospel.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is necessary to search for a biblical basis for the practice of Bible storying and perhaps understand why literacy may aid this process.

While the Word is now written down, there was a long span of time when the transmission of this information was passed on orally. Ancient Israelite families passed the

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<sup>6</sup> This term was coined in 1990 by J. O. Terry. J. O. Terry, "Chronological Bible Storying to Tribal and Nomadic Peoples," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 14, no. 4 (October-December 1997): 168.

<sup>7</sup> Tom A. Steffen, "Why Communicate the Gospel Through Stories?," in *Perspectives: On the World Christian Movement, A Reader*, 3rd ed. ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 405.

<sup>8</sup> There are differing opinions as to how much of the Bible is narrative depending on which genres are included; anywhere from one-half to three-fourths. This paper opts for a more conservative view for the sake of argument. See, Steffen, 406; Avery T. Willis Jr. and Mark Snowden, *Truth That Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in a Teflon World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 27; Grant Lovejoy, "But I Did Such Good Exposition" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, New Orleans, LA, October 18-20, 2001), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce R. Ashford, "A Theologically Driven Missiology for a Great Commission Resurgence," in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 192-193.

*Shema* down to children through stories of God's faithfulness to his people.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the gospel stories were told for decades before they were ever written down.<sup>11</sup> It was out of this oral tradition that the Bible as it exists today emerged. Even the process of putting Scripture into writing sometimes involved oral means. Mark's gospel has been shown to have oral characteristics, given that it was second-hand information from Peter,<sup>12</sup> and many of Paul's letters were dictated to a scribe.<sup>13</sup> But even when the Scripture did finally exist in written form, only a very small portion of the population could read it. Conservative estimates put the literacy rate of the early church at 5%.<sup>14</sup> The Pharisees contemptuously referred to the other 95% of the population who had not learned to read the Law or keep the Pharisaic traditions as the "Am-ha-ares." But just because this demographic was not literate did not mean that they were without knowledge of Israelite traditions.<sup>15</sup> These people were dependent upon the oral teachings of religious leaders.

Here it is important to note the benefit of having at least some form of literate leadership. Up until the point when Scripture took a written form, oral transmission was the only means of communicating the truths of God. However, the fact that God has entrusted his people with his

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<sup>10</sup> Margie Reitsma, "Storytelling and the Church," in *The Art of Storytelling*, ed. John Walsh (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), Google e-book, 144.

<sup>11</sup> James Bowman, "Communicating Christ through Oral Tradition," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 25.

<sup>12</sup> Rick Brown, "Communicating Effectively to Non-Readers: How to Make Oral Communication More Effective," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 176.

<sup>13</sup> Grant Lovejoy, "Orality, Bible Translation, and Scripture Engagement" (Beekman lecture, Bible Translation Conference, Dallax, TX, October 18, 2009) 9.

<sup>14</sup> Viggo Sjøggard, "The Emergence of Audio-Scriptures in Church and Mission," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, no. 2 (April-June 1995): 72. Other sources cite that up to 20% of the Judean population was literate. See, Lovejoy, "Orality, Bible Translation, and Scripture Engagement," 9.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert V. Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1982), 55-56.

very words requires that some people are able to read it and teach it to those under their leadership. In order for a church community to be self-sustaining, it is important for them to have some form of leadership that is capable of teaching the church and the community in their own learning methods. It is essential to note that literacy should not be a requirement for those in positions of leadership, as this would place an unrealistic constraint on certain cultures. Thus we should seek to encourage literacy given the benefit it would provide for the church's spiritual development.

Additional biblical basis for orality is found in an incarnational approach from Jesus' own teaching methods. Mark 4:33 notes that Jesus spoke to them in parables, "as much as they could understand."<sup>16</sup> Jesus' incarnation was not merely his taking the form of a human. He took a specific cultural identity, race, class, gender, and language. He spoke to the people in their own heart language and used oral methods that related to this community's culture to teach theology.<sup>17</sup> Given this emphasis on orality in Jesus' own teaching, modern methods of cross-cultural evangelism and discipleship will benefit from similar endeavors. These practices must take into account the learning preferences of the target group, even though such methods may not come naturally to missionaries.<sup>18</sup> Failing to do so will convey to the target group that they must change in order to engage in a relationship or learn from the foreigner.<sup>19</sup> Instead, an incarnational approach that takes Jesus as a model supports using orality as a biblically-faithful means of teaching Scripture.

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<sup>16</sup> Terry, 169.

<sup>17</sup> Klem, 85; ION, 32; Steffen, 406.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, "Communicating Effectively to Non-Readers: How to Make Oral Communication More Effective," 177.

<sup>19</sup> Duane H. Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Connections* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 67.

However, one must also consider how literacy played a role in Jesus' teaching. For example, Luke 4 reveals that Jesus was literate, as he opened the scroll of Isaiah and read what is now cited as Isaiah 61:1–2. Jesus was considered a rabbi, as he was well-learned in Scripture and spent time teaching those who would listen. So if one is to argue for orality on the basis of incarnational ministry, then literacy must be taken into account as well. As Donald E. Chapman explains, “God revealed himself to us not only through the person of Jesus Christ, but through the written page.”<sup>20</sup> Jesus himself read Scripture and also quoted it when being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, saying, “It is written” three times.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is not only important to take seriously the preferences of the culture being ministered to, but also to cultivate a leadership that can engage the whole of Scripture and present its message to the people in a manner that they can grasp.

One preference of Western Christians is a tendency toward expositional teaching. There are certain concerns that proponents of this method have with Bible storying. Exposition begins with the written Scripture and uncovers the meaning of the text.<sup>22</sup> Bible storying gives the people an oral rendition of the Scripture in a biblically-faithful and reproducible format. Because it is a form of paraphrasing the text, there exists an amount of interpretation<sup>23</sup> to make the information comprehensible to the people. However, a literate person working with the Scripture is able to strive for the best possible diction and seek an interpretation that is faithful to the rest of the

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<sup>20</sup> Donald E. Chapman, *Is Hearing Enough? Literacy and the Great Commandments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Mission India, 2007), 41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Lovejoy, “Bur I Did Such *Good* Exposition,” 1.

<sup>23</sup> James D. Price, *Complete Equivalence in Bible Translation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), 15.

Word. Here lies yet another benefit of training an indigenous literate leadership within each community. The leaders will be able to engage the whole of Scripture and determine through their own reading how to pass it on to their people. This element of self-theologizing is crucial for self-sustaining churches so that it can take root and grow in the home culture.

Additionally, one cannot rule out the expositional nature of Bible storying altogether. In crafting stories, certain words are explained by substituting relatable terminology. Exposition is often marked by its laying out of definitions, but this is not always relatable to oral cultures.<sup>24</sup> Instead, it would make sense to substitute “non-descendants of Abraham” for the word “Gentiles,” until discussing such a word comes up organically in the storytelling process. In order to capture this “voice” of Jesus and maintain a faithful translation within a story format, it is necessary to make these alterations; not to do so would actually fail to remain faithful to the meaning of the text.<sup>25</sup>

Exposition also favors going verse by verse in a portion of Scripture, but with Bible storying the question arises as to how to treat non-narrative passages. Some suggest placing these other genres within the context of narratives, such as Psalm 51 in the story of David’s sin with Bathsheba and the loss of their child.<sup>26</sup> This provides a richer understanding of the psalm as opposed to hearing it by itself, and also gives a greater emotional dimension to the story as a whole. However, not all of the psalms or even epistles have a known historical context within the narratives of Scripture. As will be discussed later, it is possible to teach these passages through other oral forms such as song. While this is certainly a weakness of Bible storying, having an

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<sup>24</sup> Lovejoy, “But I Did Such *Good* Exposition,” 5.

<sup>25</sup> I am indebted to Don Barger for making this point in a class on Bible storying in October, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Rick Brown, “Communicating Effectively to Non-Readers: Communicating God’s Message in an Oral Culture,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2004):125.

indigenous literate leadership in place will provide the community access to these parts of Scripture through their leaders.

An important question to consider is whether or not Bible storying as a method is capable of effectively teaching sound theology as expositional preaching is considered to be for Westerners. With the advancement of culture, much theology has been worked out on paper by theologians of every generation since the early church. However, academia must once again consider if there is room for oral theology. Even the ancient Israelites maintained an oral theology to some degree in upholding the *Shema* and other similar forms,<sup>27</sup> teaching their children the stories of God's faithfulness to his people.<sup>28</sup> Randall Prior argues for the importance and validity of oral theology, that people trained by these methods "take their oral theology seriously."<sup>29</sup> It is not that the truth of Scripture is being diluted, but rather reformed in a memorable and reproducible way.<sup>30</sup> One pastor in Nigeria led a congregation that had a syncretized understanding of angel worship due to their inability to relate to his literate teaching style. When he realized the problem, he was able to correct his people's aberrant theology by teaching with oral methods.<sup>31</sup> This literate pastor was able to take the written Word and convey its truths to his people in a way they could comprehend.

Another example of this kind comes from the work in Africa with the Yoruba people. The workers took the book of Hebrews and set it to music after they "carefully translated and

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<sup>27</sup> Additional theological forms, referenced by Grant Lovejoy in private correspondence, manifest themselves in Psalms 78, 104-105 and in the speech given by Stephen in Acts 7.

<sup>28</sup> Reitsma, 144.

<sup>29</sup> Randall Prior, "Orality: The Not-So-Silent Issue in Mission Theology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 3 (July 2011): 144-145.

<sup>30</sup> Willis, 106.

<sup>31</sup> ION, 43.



tested [it] for theological accuracy, comprehension, and ease of reading.”<sup>32</sup> Using various groups, the test results showed that the comprehension level of those who had the music in addition to the written text understood it better.<sup>33</sup> Klem saw no significant statistical difference between those who used the written text in addition to the music as opposed to who just used the music, but the overall significance of the experiment is that the level of comprehension was highest with the method most enjoyed by the people and that this oral method was effective in teaching theology.<sup>34</sup> However, it is important to note once again that these oral methods were successful with literate workers as a backdrop. If missionaries can train a literate leadership within each community then those leaders will have the ability to take the written Word and transfer it into a manner that is faithful to Scripture and comprehensible for their people. While some in the West may perceive expository preaching as the “best approach for maintaining a God-centered focus in preaching,”<sup>35</sup> it may very well be that there are other forms of teaching that are just as honoring to God and effective in other cultures.

Another theological concern of those who favor exposition is that narrative teaching “does more to fascinate than to change.”<sup>36</sup> However, if oral learners can understand and grasp the theology better when it is presented in oral means, then perhaps one should consider the possibility that because storying does “fascinate” is part of why the method has the potential to change its listeners. Stories have a way of subtly speaking to a culture’s worldview and turning it

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<sup>32</sup> Klem, 168.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>35</sup> Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 14.

on its head.<sup>37</sup> If one teaches in a way that is irrelevant to his listeners, then the message itself may be perceived as irrelevant to them as well.<sup>38</sup> There is a difference in the learning styles of oral and literate communicators, and exposition has been shown to be difficult and not reproducible for oral cultures.<sup>39</sup>

While it is possible to effectively teach theology through Bible storying, another concern is the theological soundness of restructuring Scripture passages to form a memorable and reproducible story. One concept that should be discussed in relation to the idea of representing Scripture is the *ipsissima vox* (the exact voice) versus the *ipsissima verba* (the exact words) of Scripture. This issue has not been raised in any significance related to the concept of Bible storying, yet it has pertinent implications. In his article “The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex,” Darrell L. Bock explores the gospel writers’ use of *ipsissima vox* of Jesus over the *ipsissima verba* to account for how readers should understand certain variations in the gospel accounts. Bock has three main arguments for the use of *ipsissima vox* in particular situations.<sup>40</sup> First, Jesus most likely taught in the heart language of the people, which was Aramaic, but the gospels were written in Greek. Thus, he argues, the gospels do not contain exact words of Jesus. Secondly, the gospel writers put what took Jesus hours to say (Mk 6:34–36) into a few sentences, and this summarization negates a verbatim representation of Jesus’ teaching. Finally, Bock notes that New Testament citations of Old Testament passages are not always exact, even when allowing for the translation from Hebrew to Greek. He argues, “If

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<sup>37</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 40.

<sup>38</sup> Klem, 85.

<sup>39</sup> Lovejoy, “But I Did Such *Good* Exposition,” 1.

<sup>40</sup> Darrell L. Bock, “The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?,” in *Jesus Under Fire*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 77-78.

the Bible can summarize a citation of itself in this way, then to see the same technique in its handling the words of Jesus should come as no surprise.”<sup>41</sup> If present-day missionaries can take good conscience in portraying the *ipsissima vox* of Scripture with particular passages, then orality has sound theological basis for teaching Scripture.

However, Donald E. Green pushes back on the work done by Bock and others who hold to such a high view of *ipsissima vox* in Scripture. Green believes that evangelicals in particular are giving too much credit to this concept. He begins by addressing the history of *ipsissima vox* in the work of Thucydides, who reported that because he could not remember speeches word for word, he wrote “as closely as possible to the general sense” of what was originally spoken.<sup>42</sup> Many assume that this created a model for historical writings, and was the standard even four hundred years later at the time when the gospels were written.<sup>43</sup> However, Green argues that no support exists for the assumption that the gospel writers knew of Thucydides.<sup>44</sup> But in response to Green, for the sake of argument, it is possible to work within a tradition’s standards without knowing that tradition’s catalyst. Thought processes are products of a culture and a worldview, regardless of whether one knows the sources of that method or not.

Green argues that a better way to understand the variations within the gospel traditions is through harmonization. In short, each of the writers chose to record one of the various ways a phrase was spoken.<sup>45</sup> Instead of assuming that only one of the variations is the original phrasing,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>42</sup> Donald E. Green, “Evangelicals and Ipsissima Vox,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 52.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Green, 56.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

Green opts for a view that assumes the possibility that they were all spoken.<sup>46</sup> However, his most significant complaint theologically speaking addresses the fact that those who hold to the *ipsissima vox* ideology deny the influence of the Holy Spirit in the writing process. Thucydides explained that he wrote what best fit the general sense of the speaker because he was unable to remember what was said verbatim, but the gospel writers had the Spirit of God himself to guide them in their recordings. Green supports this with John 16:13–14 which states, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (NASB).<sup>47</sup>

This opens up concern for how Scripture is memorized. Various studies have shown that the memorization performed by oral cultures focuses more on getting the “gist” of something rather than remembering something word-for-word.<sup>48</sup> Verbatim memory has been argued to only be possible in literate cultures.<sup>49</sup> If this is true, then one has to wrestle with whether or not remembering the “gist” of Scripture is sufficient enough for discipleship. As shown above, orality is capable of effectively teaching sound theology, but not always in the exact wording given in Scripture. Willis notes from his own work in orality among Americans, “They may not be able to quote verses, but they can tell a story to witness or talk to an unbeliever.”<sup>50</sup> However, even Jesus quoted Scripture as he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness,<sup>51</sup> so is it sufficient to

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>48</sup> Ong, 60-61.

<sup>49</sup> Chapman, 20, 50, 56; Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (New York: Cambridge, 1993), 88.

<sup>50</sup> Willis, 190.

<sup>51</sup> Chapman, 41.

know what is written even if one does not know the exact wording? Given the model of oral-based Israelites, perhaps it is sufficient to understand the concepts and theology of a given portion of Scripture so long as there is a literate leadership in place to serve as an authority on passing the Bible onto his people.

In light of this dialogue, an *ipsissima vox* understanding of Scripture may not be the most appropriate means of providing a theological rationale for orality, depending on where one lies with the issue. But given the discussions above, oral communication of Scripture has good biblical basis and allows for effective theological teaching, given that there is a literate leadership in place to present Scripture to the people in a culturally-appropriate manner. The next concern to address is the missiological effectiveness of Bible storying and how literacy ties in with that. This section will attempt to provide an argument for trans-cultural relevance and practical applications for Bible storying.

Again, as noted above, orality is a methodologically-effective means of teaching theology to oral learners. But here it is important to emphasize the universality of Bible storying in both literate and oral cultures. Within every culture there is an element of oral communication which is the foundation for literacy.<sup>52</sup> If two-thirds of the world learns orally, whether by preference or not,<sup>53</sup> then there is a strong indication of a need for orality around the world; teaching and engaging people through stories is a “universal form of communication.”<sup>54</sup> Whether someone is telling another person about an intimidating interview or the loss of a loved one, stories engage people’s emotions and convey information in a memorable way. When trying to dialogue with a person’s belief system, stories have the ability to subvert worldviews in a subtle manner. While

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<sup>52</sup> ION. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>54</sup> Steffen, 405.

someone may not listen to a list of propositions as to why one belief system holds more truth than another, he will consider a story and what meaning it is trying to convey.<sup>55</sup>

Even in literate countries, statistics show a decreased interest in reading either for pleasure or to obtain information. For example, in the Netherlands over half of all adults “hardly ever read a book,” and similar statistics exist elsewhere in the Western world.<sup>56</sup> Teaching orally through stories is not just for children and not just for those who cannot read, but for people of various ages and reading abilities. However, without a literate population to disseminate the content of the Scripture orally, then these individuals who never read will not have access to the whole counsel of God. It is certainly a hope that as people come to know Christ and the goodness of his Word, they will have a desire to access the text themselves. Willis notes that teaching through stories actually made people read their Bibles more because they wanted to check the content of the stories and find the information for themselves.<sup>57</sup> This will not yet be a reality in primary oral cultures, but with a literate leadership in place, the possibility of having a more literate population increases.

Given this global relevance of orality under the leadership of indigenous literates, the next point of discussion involves practical applications of this method within these cultures. Since the matter of effectiveness has already been addressed, the emphasis here will be on practical matters and issues that will arise in working with orality and forming a biblically-literate leadership. A vital concern of methodology is whether or not it is reproducible. Given that orality is founded in an attempt to reach people in culturally relevant means, in theory Bible

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<sup>55</sup> Wright, 40.

<sup>56</sup> ION, 55.

<sup>57</sup> Willis, 109.

storying would fit in organically with oral cultures. Some have argued for the use of audio recordings of the Bible and Bible stories to give the people an authoritative source that they can access.<sup>58</sup> However, similar instances show that these programs are hard to sustain due to the fiscal burden of providing cassette players and batteries.<sup>59</sup> But in areas where the focus has been on passing stories from person to person, there has been success. J. O. Terry recounts a cross-cultural experience when he overheard a man telling someone a Bible story, and when Terry asked him about it, the man explained he had learned the story from his pastor who had attended Terry's training session on Bible storying. This provided great encouragement that the stories were being taught to other people in the community,<sup>60</sup> stories which will even be passed on by people who have not yet converted to Christianity.<sup>61</sup>

Secondly, Bible storying is not just effective in evangelism. A paper written by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization notes the success of using orality as a reproducible method and its "sustainability in an emerging, indigenous-led church."<sup>62</sup> There is evidence to support that orality is effective not only in evangelism, but also in "discipling, church planting, and developing leaders."<sup>63</sup> Thus, their conclusion is that

Strategies using oral methods, then, are not unproven theories. They have a proven track record, beginning with biblical times and continuing to the present. Under a wide array of situations, among diverse people groups on virtually every continent, oral strategies have demonstrated their effectiveness in evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and leader development.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Søggaard, 71.

<sup>59</sup> Paul D. Dyer, "Was Jesus a Zairian?," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, no. 2 (April-June 1995): 84.

<sup>60</sup> Terry, 170.

<sup>61</sup> Steffen, 406.

<sup>62</sup> ION, 41.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

This point of leadership development is the next matter to discuss in the practical application of orality with a literate leadership. Oral cultures often have leaders in place that are respected for their age and “retentive memories” of the culture’s lore.<sup>65</sup> These elders are not always reached by literacy through government programs or schooling, and may not even have an interest in literacy.<sup>66</sup> Literacy training then targets the youth or a demographic capable of learning these methods, creating a “new elite.”<sup>67</sup> This causes a reversal in the power dynamic that can be an embarrassment to the elders of the community and cast negative light on evangelization and discipleship. While some argue that teaching literacy “elevates people to become leaders in their communities,”<sup>68</sup> missionary efforts must be conscious of the consequences this can have for the leadership paradigm already in place. One can hope that over time interest in Scripture will prompt people to desire literacy in their culture so as to engage the whole counsel of God.<sup>69</sup> Thus, a partnership can exist between orality and literacy training to bring communities worldwide to faith in Christ.

Oral communicators around the globe require methods of evangelism and discipleship that will address their needs in manner that is biblically faithful and theologically sound. Bible storying along with an indigenous literate leadership, as in Pastor Dinanath’s example, has a good biblical basis and provides a good model for incarnational ministry. While literacy efforts

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>65</sup> Klem, 39-40.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, “Communicating effectively to non-readers: How to make oral communication more effective,” 176.

<sup>67</sup> Klem, 34-35.

<sup>68</sup> Chapman, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Lovejoy, “Orality, Bible Translation, and Scripture Engagement,” 11.



are positive and important for spreading the Word of God, orality allows oral learners to understand the truths of Scripture without having to first spend time learning to read and write. However, further work must be done to explore the implications of the Holy Spirit's role in the writing of Scripture. This will be important in how it influences a story crafter's thinking in adapting a passage's wording to make it memorable, reproducible, and still remain faithful to Scripture. While Bible storying does not solve every problem or answer every question,<sup>70</sup> it provides missionaries and indigenous leadership in oral cultures with a biblically-faithful and theologically-sound means of teaching Scripture.

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<sup>70</sup> This assessment was made by Don Barger during a Bible Storying class in October, 2011.

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