TECHNOLOGY-BASED ORAL MINISTRY STRATEGIES: THE BRIDGE BETWEEN WESTERN LITERATE AND MAJORITY WORLD ORAL CONTEXTS

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Abstract

Modern technology has ushered in a third era of communication—secondary orality. The literate West and oral Majority World represent two polarized societies. As awareness of orality grows, technology must be part of the developing approaches to ensure continued effective ministry. Technology-based oral ministry strategies are the best way to bridge the gap between the Western literate and Majority World oral contexts. This paper will discuss characteristics of the third communication era, including inadequacies of current ministry approaches, the biblical basis for technology-based oral strategies, and implications of secondary orality in alternative ministry strategies' development and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Between the Western and Majority World contexts, a barrier exists as fundamental as language or culture—that of a society's communication mode. A person's mode of communication affects his or her epistemology, cognition, and values in tremendous yet subconscious ways. However, the gap which exists is seldom acknowledged and thus, is ignored in most current ministry approaches. The advent of technology such as television, radio, and

the Internet has ushered in a third era of communication, commonly referenced as post-literacy or secondary orality.[1] This new 'massage'[2] or mode of communication does not eclipse the other two, namely orality and literacy; however, it can provide significant tools to bridge the gap created by two drastically different communication modes. Orality and literacy are characteristics of two polarized societies in the Majority World and Western contexts respectively. Because modern technology has ushered in a third communication era of secondary orality, technology-based oral ministry strategies, such as oral Bible storying, are some of the most effective means of bridging the communication gap between Western literate and Majority World oral contexts.

THE COMMUNICATION GAP

According to most communications experts, the world is currently in a third era of communication. Primary orality, the first communication era, was superseded by the era of literacy in the Western context with the advent of writing, then the printing press. Orality is still the dominant communication mode in the Majority World context. Literacy is deeply entrenched in the West and is rapidly spreading in the Majority World. Recently, the world has transitioned to an era of post-literacy or secondary orality. Since only two major shifts in communication style have happened throughout history, an understanding of the characteristics of post-literacy is vital for continuing effective ministry. Postman posits the idea that culture "is recreated anew by every medium of communication—from painting to hieroglyphs to the alphabet to television. Each medium … [provides] a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility."[3] Christian theologian Terje Stordalen asserts that "media do not transport messages neutrally from sender to receiver; they provide shape, sensational activation, social setting, etc., to

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[1] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

[2] 'Massage' is used to refer to the way the senses, aural or visual, are stimulated by the medium through which a message is communicated. cf. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1962). "Oral-aural communication massaged the ear. Writing and print communication massaged the ear. Electronic communication and particularly television, stimulates and massages many of our senses simultaneously. We live in an age of the polymorphic massages of our senses." Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age* (Lima, OH: C.S.S. Pub., 1993), 47.

[3] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 2nd ed (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), 10.

that message by virtue of their technological, social, and aesthetic properties and propensities, through specific formats and forms."[4]

Characteristics of Primary Orality

For an understanding of post-literacy, one must also explore the attributes of pre-literate orality and literacy. This paper will utilize Ong's definition of "primary orality" as "the orality of culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or printing. … It is 'primary' by contrast with the 'secondary orality' of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print."[5] Although primarily oral societies in the strictest definition of the term rarely exist now because of globalization and urbanization, primary orality will be used to refer to societies whose dominant mode of communication is orality without the use of print or technological media.[6]

One of the most fundamental differences between oral and literate societies is that primarily oral societies think in stories. Abstract or universal concepts are illustrated through stories, such as the use of folktales to convey a society's moral values to children or Jesus' prolific use of parables during his earthly ministry. Although universal concepts are grounded in particulars through stories, it should be acknowledged that there are "ways in which speakers of non-written languages use oral media quite specifically to deal with abstract concepts."[7] An additional attribute of oral forms of communication is "the 'performative' function of speaking— the way in which speech is used to actually perform an action," such as verbally making a contract.[8] Primary orality is also cyclical, using alliteration, repetition, and other mnemonic devices to communicate a memorable message.[9] Another characteristic of oral cultures is that the speaker and audience are both present and engaged in a speech act, requiring some kind of response from the audience. Finally, primary orality uses simultaneous massage of the senses,

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[4] Terje Stordalen, "Media of Ancient Hebrew Religion," in *Religion Across Media: From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2013), 23.

[5] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 11.

[6] By "technological media," I am referring to mass media, which utilizes modern technology, such as television, radio, the Internet, and social media platforms.

[7] Ruth H. Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 57. Finnegan's work was a response to the argument that non-literate individuals cannot grasp abstract concepts, cf. Marshall McLuhan's discussion of Africans and film in *Gutenberg Galaxy.*

[8] Ibid., 57.

[9] Ong, *Orality & Literacy*, 34, 39.

engaging visual and auditory senses of the audience because of the physical presence of both the speaker and hearer. However, the dominant sense engaged is the hearer's auditory sense.

Characteristics of a Primarily Oral Society

In conjunction with its preferred communication mode, a primarily oral society also tends to be event oriented, group oriented, and honor and shame based. Because members of primarily oral societies by necessity must be present in order to communicate, they tend to focus on community. A correlation between a focus on honor and shame and deeply relational societies is prevalent in many cultures worldwide.[10] Particularly in relational cultures, stories and experiences are the primary means of developing one's belief system and thus best means of facilitating "a shift to a biblical worldview … developed over time and through story."[11] Most primarily oral societies are in Majority World contexts, and approximately 5.7 billion people are primarily oral communicators.[12] A clarification should be made that not all oral preference communicators are non-literate. In her Orality Assessment Tool, Lynne L. Abney includes a short summary and examples of five different levels of literacy. For illiterate, functional illiterate, and semi-literate people, stories are the dominant mode of communication. A person may be functionally illiterate or semi-literate and prefer to communicate through oral means. In many African contexts, "even among those who are educated, there is a preference for hearing their language rather than reading it."[13] Many cultural pressures influence a person's communication preferences.

Characteristics of Literacy

In literate societies, abstract concepts are communicated through ideas, not stories. In juxtaposition to primary orality's cognitive processes through stories, literate thought is characterized by ideas or concepts. The first radical communication shift from orality to literacy brought incredible changes to people's cognition and epistemology. Along with literacy's linear massage, or way the senses are stimulated by the medium, literacy also disambiguates

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[10] Steve Evens, "Naked and Ashamed: A Case Study of Shame and Honor in Central Ethiopia," in *Beyond Western Literate Contexts: Honor & Shame and Assessment of Orality Preference,* ed. Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 36.

[11] Ibid., 43.

[12] "Statistics and Facts," International Orality Network, accessed October 22, 2015, www.orality.net/statistics_and_facts.

[13] Margaret Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together: The Intersection of Heart and Mind," *Orality Journal* 2, no. 1 (2015): 64.

meaning through a logical, linear presentation of information. While "the auditory field is simultaneous, the visual mode is successive."[14] By nature, written literature also makes the reader more detached from the author in contrast with communication through oral literature, which "depends on personal performance, on audience response and on the *direct* personal interaction between author and public[;] *written* literature … facilitates the opportunity for the independent and withdrawn author, and for abstract meditation divorced from the pressures of an immediate audience or from the immediate need for action."[15] Literate media draws a correlation between the modern idea of objective truth and the permanence of written communication. "The past can become something objective and analyzable, rather than a transmutation or reflection just of the present."[16]

Characteristics of a Literate Society

In contrast with primarily oral societies, literate societies are characterized by a time orientation, are individualistic, and focus on guilt and innocence rather than honor and shame. In the West, print learners generally prefer to communicate one-on-one and learn mostly alone, "view matters abstractly and analytically," and "value brevity and being concise."[17] Additionally, literate cultures prefer an institutional rather than communal lifestyle, deferred gratification, and linear life perspective.[18]

The Communication Gap Between Non-Literate and Literate Societies

Because those who are primarily oral communicators think differently from those who are highly literate, the communication gap between the two must

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[14] McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 111.

[15] Finnegan, *Literacy & Orality*, 18. It is important to note that Finnegan was speaking primarily about television, radio, and other passive forms of media. Social media actually "encourage[s] 'conversations,' whether on blogs or Facebook pages…. It is so easy to respond to the new media, to create, to modify, and to transform, that passivity is discouraged." [cf. John Mark Reynolds, "The New Media: First Thoughts," in *The New Media Frontier,* ed. John Mark Reynolds and Roger Overton (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Ann Watts Pailliotet and Peter Mosenthal, *Reconceptualizing Literacy in the Media Age* (Stamford, CT: Jai Press, 2000), 34–36.]

[16] Ibid., 20–21.

[17] W. Jay Moon, "Teaching Oral Learners in Institutional Settings," in *Beyond Western Literate Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*, ed. Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2013), 146.

[18] Charles Madinger, "Will Our Message 'Stick?' Assessing a Dominant Preference for Orality for Education and Training," in *Beyond Western Literate Contexts* (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 129.

be addressed in order to minister effectively. Although orality and literacy are the respective attributes of two polarized societies, emphasis of the group versus individual and other more immediately obvious differences can obfuscate the subconscious but vital cognitive differences between oral and literate preference communicators. As Westerners, honor and shame are "experience-distant. We are very often oblivious to these fundamental honor-shame dynamics in our world and in the Bible simply because we do not have our social radars tuned to receive those signals."[19] In the same way, Westerners often misunderstand the oral communication style preferred by those in the Majority World.

Many missions organizations are currently using technology superficially, providing literate materials via the Internet or other modern technology, rather than modifying the presentation of the message for a more oral communication method. For example, books are distributed electronically, and sermons from thousands of churches are made available through podcasts or live streaming through their websites. However, if an oral communicator listens to a podcast of a sermon given by a typical American pastor, it is likely that the oral communicator will receive minimal benefit from the sermon. Although she or he has more access to literate resources through modern technology, the message is still fundamentally literate. Because of the assertions of propositional truths and the expository preaching style of Western preachers, the message is still unclear. In order to allow deeper comprehension of a message, the presentation of the message must change fundamentally to become more suitable for an oral communicator.

Characteristics of Secondary Orality

With the second major shift to a post-literate society, one must understand that the literacy era "has encountered today the new organic and biological modes of the electronic world. … And it is this reversal of character which makes our age 'connatural,' as it were, with non-literate cultures."[20] Communication through electronic media recaptures primarily oral societies' parallel, rather than serial, processing of information because technology like television simultaneously stimulates the visual and auditory senses like oral storytelling does.

Although primary and secondary orality share many common features, because of its unique massage, secondary orality also has some distinct attributes. Post-literacy is uniquely marked by high volume access to information,

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[19] Christopher L. Flanders, "Honor and Shame: A Review of the Process and Articles," in *Beyond Western Literate Contexts: Honor & Shame and Assessment of Orality Preference*, ed. Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 80.

[20] McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 46.

virtual community, and shifted ideals. This era is known as the "Information Age." "The visual and aural space of our own physical and social context today is voluminously occupied by ads, images, and sound bytes. Our term for this is 'media saturation.'"[21] Postman discusses the dramatic alteration of what he calls the "information-action ratio," asserting that access to such a vast amount of information made "the relationship between information and action both abstract and remote."[22] While information is more readily accessible, people are losing the ability to identify relevant, important information.

One of the hallmarks of new media is the ability to connect virtually. "Virtual reality is embedded in physical reality to an ever-growing extent in the lives of most Westerners, Asians, and significant populations in the developing world. Internet access goes with most of us everywhere we go, connecting us to friends and family."[23] This phenomenon is transforming a traditionally individualistic Western society into a more communal, group-oriented culture. A transition from guilt/innocence to honor/shame has been noted by shame researcher Dr. Brené Brown.[24] Western shame has a different nuance than other kinds of shame, but social media is increasingly focusing on the aspect of community scorn, as seen in the rise in cyberbullying.[25]

Values Held by Post-Literate Societies

A distinctive of secondary orality is shifted cultural values and ideals. One of four types of technologies, "intellectual technologies," "include all the tools we use to extend or support our mental powers."[26] Every intellectual technology embodies "an intellectual ethic, a set of assumptions about how the human mind works or should work."[27] According to Heidebrecht, technology, especially the Internet, has given modern Western society the values of efficiency, invisibility, and novelty. Technology has also transformed information into a commodity, through decentralization of power in media

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[21] Andrew J. Byers, *TheoMedia: The Media of God and the Digital Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 10.

[22] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 68.

[23] Elizabeth Drescher, *Tweet If You [Love] Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2011), 5.

[24] c.f. Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2015).

[25] http://honorshame.com/types-honor-shame-cultures/, updated April 22, 2015, accessed December 17, 2015. cf. http://honorshame.com/geography-shame-east-vrs-west/, updated July 2, 2014, accessed December 17, 2015.

[26] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 44.

[27] Ibid., 45.

distribution.[28] Similar to Heidebrecht, Tapscott discusses eight attributes of Millennials which set them apart from their predecessors. They desire freedom and choice, personalization, transparency, integrity and openness, entertainment in every sphere of life, collaboration and genuine relationships, speed, and innovation.[29]

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BRIDGING THE GAP THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

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A gap between the communication modes of primary orality and literacy is evident. However, there is not a strict dichotomy of literacy and orality. "Even in the same culture and in the same historical period there are different uses and different media interacting together. Thus people … can switch from one form of discourse to another as appropriate, whether these discourses are distinguished by different linguistic registers, differences between prose and verse, emphases on oral or written media, or a mixture of all these."[30] The three eras of communication exist simultaneously. The key is to utilize this third era of communication to bridge the gap between the previous two. Never before has such a unified, globalized community existed; it is made possible through technology like the Internet. Because the advent of technology has come so rapidly, it has not been utilized to the fullest potential. The use of literate evangelism, discipleship, and training alone are ultimately unhelpful for sustainable ministry among an oral preference culture because the message of the leaders and pastors trained using Western literate methods becomes inaccessible to the majority of their language community.[31]

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR TECHNOLOGY-BASED ORAL

MINISTRY STRATEGIES

Throughout history, many different types of media have been used to express language, culture, and religion. For centuries, Christianity has utilized predominately oral and written media to disseminate its good news; however, it has also used various other media. In its broadest sense, "a medium would be any device that facilitates communication between human beings including … technological or social structures and traditions needed to perform

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[28] Heidebrecht, *Beyond the Cutting Edge*, 105–113.

[29] Don Tapscott, *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 34–36.

[30] Finnegan, *Literacy & Orality*, 167. Cf. John McWhorter's TED talk on texting, accessed March 28, 2016, www.npr.org/2013/12/13/248191096/is-texting-actually-advancing-language.

[31] Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 65.

communication."[32] Although in the first section of this paper, media is primarily used to refer to current technology, many of those who discuss religion and media use the term in the broad sense.

From Genesis 1, it is clear that "God is the Creator, and therefore the first and ultimate source of media. The original and most fundamental purpose of media was to communicate and reveal the wonder and beauty of God."[33] Throughout the Old Testament, various forms of media were used to communicate, both God with humans and humans with one another, such as direct divine communication through speech, dreams, the Torah, and scrolls.[34] Because the ancient Hebrews were primarily an oral society, they used a variety of media to remember in the collective consciousness the things that God told them were important. Many of today's primarily oral societies share characteristics with the ancient Hebrew culture, such as repetition, seen in frequent restatement or repetition of clauses in Psalms and Proverbs, and their honor/shame focus.

During Jesus's earthly ministry in the Ancient Near East, the Jews upheld a rich oral tradition. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus engaged many people with parables and illustrative stories. "In the New Testament we see clearly what a master communicator Jesus was, tailoring his communication methods to fit his audience. He communicated in a way that reached all who were willing to listen."[35] Through his incarnation, Jesus as the Logos (ὁ λογος), or the Word, most radically adapted his communication mode for his audience to understand him.[36]

From the beginning, Christianity has been both an oral and literate movement.[37] However, until the Protestant Reformation, the Christian population had been largely composed of oral communicators with a small minority of educated, literate people.[38] The Protestant Reformation marked a huge change in the way the church used media. With the exception of the scribal tradition of the monks in the Middle Ages, the oral communication mode had dominated the church. However, the leaders of the Protestant Reformation primarily used print media produced by Gutenberg's printing press to disseminate their ideas. Another hallmark of the Protestant

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32 Stordalen, "Media of Ancient Hebrew Religion," 22.

33 Byers, *TheoMedia*, 221.

34 cf. Ex 3, Nu 22, Ge 37–41, Eze 3, Da 5, 2 Ki 22, Jer 36.

35 Ibid., 66–67.

36 Jason S. Sturdevant, *The Adaptable Jesus of the Fourth Gospel: The Pedagogy of the Logos* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 72.

37 Peter Horsfield, "The Ecology of Writing and the Shaping of Early Christianity," in *Religion Across Media: From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2013), 38.

38 Ibid., 46.

Reformation is the translation and distribution of the Bible in the vernacular languages so that for the first time, it was available to the masses. Through the Reformation, literacy among Western Christians gained much prestige, becoming associated with spiritual maturity. Now, that same correlation of literacy with spiritual maturity subconsciously affects Westerners' evangelism and theological education approaches and is transferred to converts.[39]

With a literate emphasis on linear thought, Western Christians favor systematic theology, which presents attributes of God and the major tenets of the Christian faith topically. Often, they present the gospel in ways that appeal to a literate person and focus on propositional truths, such as the "Four Spiritual Laws."[40] Even in a non-Western context, "typical pastor training methods are usually based on a literate worldview at the expense of the oral worldview of the people among whom they are called to minister."[41]

In response to the ineffectiveness of a literate ministry approach among the Majority World, a narrative theology has emerged, primarily driven by Asian theologians. Because the Bible is composed primarily of stories, a story ought to "play a critical role in our life. In essence, story has to do with life, a real life, a life you and I live in this world. Your life and mine consist of stories from the moment we were born to the moment we die."[42] While systematic theology appeals to and addresses many of the questions held by Western Christians, it is essential to acknowledge that differing modes of communication and cognition exist. Part of the process of contextualizing the gospel and ministry approaches is to evaluate a society's preferred methods of communication.

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Media Saturation:
The Biblical Basis for Using Technology-Based Ministry Strategies

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Since Creation, God has used various forms of media to engage with humans. However, since the fall, media has been used in corrupt ways. Media saturation, the term used to refer to the reality that people are constantly bombarded by media, is perhaps more noticeable now. The concept of media saturation has always existed. In fact, "the context of the Shema—the words Jesus designated the most binding command on our lives—is a call to media saturation. It is a call to be saturated with the TheoMedia of God's words."[43] Andrew Byers defines TheoMedia as the media God uses to engage his peo-

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[39] Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 64.

[40] A evangelism method developed by Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru), http://crustore.org/four-laws-english/. This evangelism strategy also assumes a guilt/innocence worldview and a basic understanding of Christianity.

[41] "Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 65.

[42] Song, *In the Beginning*, 48.

[43] Byers, *TheoMedia*, 11.

ple, presenting a parallel but distinct way of living righteously. Christians have been called to live in the world but not to embrace it wholeheartedly, instead carefully evaluating whether the culture aligns with biblical truths. To be responsible stewards of the gospel in light of current technological advances, "the church has to reflect on its own role as object or subject in media perception, on its role in canvassing for people's attention so that they turn their attention to God."[44]

The role of the church has not changed in this third era of communication. However, the ways in which it may engage non-Christians must change. To reach both primarily and secondarily oral preference communicators, Christians must "conceptualize and articulate Christian beliefs—the gospel—in a manner that contemporary people can understand."[45] This can be done through "the cognitive tools, concepts, images, symbols, and thought forms—by means of which people today discover meaning, construct the world they inhabit, and form personal identity."[46]

Using Stories for TheoMedia Saturation

One of the best ways to provide an alternative to media saturation is to use stories for TheoMedia saturation.[47] This can happen in both Western and Majority World Contexts, especially since Western Christians are affected by secondary orality and the desire for experiential rather than propositional truth. Stories are inherently more relatable to one's life than abstract concepts. Doll asserts that one can "replace a person's core heritage story with what God's word says about origins, value, relevancy, and you can change their worldview."[48]

The Least Reached Are Oral Communicators

Because there are currently 5.7 billion people in the world who are oral communicators, it should not be a surprise that "75% of the remaining languages that still need scripture are spoken by oral communicators."[49] The sociolinguistic people groups which are almost completely unengaged are primarily oral societies. Since Jesus called his followers to make disciples of all people groups, "orality methods and strategies are foundational to communicating the good news of Jesus to everyone and making disciples among all people groups."[50] Even "after 100 years of literacy oriented mis-

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[44] Haberer, "Media Ethics," 114.

[45] Byers, *TheoMedia*, 3.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 69.

[48] Ibid., 65–66.

[49] Ibid., 63.

[50] Jerry Wiles, foreword to *Beyond Literate Western Contexts* (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 17.

sions, more than 75% of Africa does not read well enough to manage basic Bible passages, and many more who can read, simply do not enjoy the process. Even among those who are educated, there is a preference for hearing their language rather than reading it."[51] If Western Christians truly want to minister effectively among those in Majority World contexts, "there needs to be more emphasis on making scripture available in an aural media so that its power might be released in a familiar communication context. Even for many who have become literate, it is hearing the word aloud that moves their heart."[52] After engaging with an individual or community in their preferred mode of communication, a Western Christian can slowly transition to other modes of communication. "God's word has been listened to by many more people throughout history than it has been read. Our first priority should be to communicate his word in a culturally acceptable method."[53] Because of the ways which technology is affecting cognition and community, using technology-based oral ministry strategies in this increasingly globalized era is one of the most effective ways to communicate the gospel.

APPLICATION

Defining Technology-Based Oral Ministry Strategies

Technology-based oral ministry strategies are approaches to ministry designed for oral communicators, utilizing the distribution methods provided by modern technology, such as smartphone applications, or "apps," and the Internet. Ministry can range from evangelism and discipleship in local contexts to cross-cultural missions. Because of their implied rather than explicated meaning or truth by analogy, stories can help change a worldview more effectively than the presentation of obviously differing ideas.[54] "Stories can effectively illustrate ideas but they best serve to reroute paths to honor and shame amidst Christian witness and theological education. Effective Christian narratives align human attributions of worth (i.e., what and who is honorable and shameful) with God's eternal code of honor."[55] Technology-based oral ministry strategies also make use of modern technology, making possible the simultaneous stimulus of the aural and visual senses. Though similar to the primarily oral communication method, technology-based oral communication has the advantage of greater perma-

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[51] Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 64.

[52] Ibid., 68.

[53] Ibid., 71.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Jayson George, "Reconstructing Central Asian Honor Codes via Orality," in *Beyond Western Literate Contexts* (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 27.

nence and dissemination to a larger audience than the physical audience of primary orality.

<div style="text-align:center">Contexts for Technology-Based Oral Ministry Strategies</div>

Because of the fundamental shift in cognition and epistemology which the advent of modern technology has caused, technology-based oral ministry strategies are helpful in a variety of contexts. In Western contexts, it is especially useful for ministry to those with a non-Western mindset, such as refugees and immigrants, and with Millennials. In Majority World contexts, it is a useful ministry strategy for both short-term mission trips and missions organizations and non-government organizations engaged in long-term cross-cultural work.

Opportunities in Western Contexts

In Western contexts, many refugees and immigrants from non-Western contexts, such as Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and even East Asia, have an oral preference in communication style. Although they may be functionally literate, they still prefer an oral communication style, which encompasses the relational aspect of communication, simultaneous massage of the senses, and thinking in stories, rather than in ideas.

In juxtaposition, many Millennials were born into a Western context; however, because of a variety of factors, their exposure to modern technology has transformed the way they think. They are also focused on relationships and community, whether in person or virtual, and are shifting to an honor/shame culture. Because of postmodernism, many Millennials are attracted to experiential learning and the variety of interpretations available in a story, rather than the propositional truths presented in most Western sermons.[56] They thrive on collaboration and interaction. Rather than only listening to a sermon full of exposition and propositional truths, they prefer an interactive format.[57] Ministry strategies can gain much from current research in the field of education concerning experiential learning and new media literacy.[58]

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[56] Jon Huckins, *Teaching Through the Art of Storytelling: Creating Fictional Stories That Illuminate the Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 56–57.

[57] cf. Touch Press, accessed December 18, 2015, touchpress.com. Touch Press is a software and app developer focused on multimedia, interactive content, such as T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Wasteland," with additional interactive content and commentary (thewasteland.touchpress.com/?tpnav=1).

[58] cf. Diana Oblinger and James L. Oblinger, *Educating the Net Generation* (Boulder, CO: Educause, 2005); Dennis Adams and Mary Hamm, *Literacy in a Multimedia Age* (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2001); Gunther R. Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Spoken Word is a popular way to engage in ministry and spiritual conversations with Millennials. Spoken Word poetry is a form of self-expression stemming from hip hop and rap. Although many people participate in Spoken Word poetry slams, videos of Spoken Word are highly accessible through websites like youtube.com and vimeo.com. David Bowden is a professional Spoken Word artist, author, and speaker who uses Spoken Word as an avenue to share the gospel and advocate for issues like ending Bible poverty and international development.[59] Several videos of his Spoken Word poetry have over 100,000 views on YouTube.[60]

The Bible Project is another creative use of multimedia to engage with the secondarily oral society.[61] The goal of the Bible Project is to provide animated videos which give an overview of each book of the Bible and how that book fits into the metanarrative of the Bible. They are also producing another set of videos that discuss major themes of the Bible, such as holiness, Messiah, or the Law. The collaborative aspect of the project is even highlighted by a dialogue narration, rather than just one narrator. A true hybrid between literate and secondarily oral communication modes, the Bible Project provides a free study guide which can be downloaded to stimulate further discussion about the video's topic, with the suggestion that the study guide be completed with friends.

In both Western and Majority World contexts, the deaf community can access the Bible and other resources through technology-based strategies that would otherwise be completely unavailable. Because there has been so much difficulty developing an orthography for signed languages, which typically use one or both hands and facial features and rely heavily on spatial elements, video is the best way to distribute Biblical resources. "Tools like the Deaf Bible app, bring hope to the Deaf on a global level. Digital access brings Truth to anyone with a mobile phone, computer, tablet, or satellite dish—all at no cost to them."[62]

Opportunities in Majority World Contexts

Technology-Based Orality in Short-Term Missions

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[59] dbpoetry.com/welcome, accessed November 19, 2015.

[60] cf. "I Am" (https://youtu.be/bYTypUb_Jc4), "I Believe in Scripture" (https://youtu.be/EZdzjf5uuv4), "No Excuse" (https://youtu.be/QKCMbbeMaxM), "Death: His Sting and Defeat" (https://youtu.be/8rhwbcRqUgY).

[61] The Bible Project, accessed December 17, 2015, jointhebibleproject.com/.

[62] Deaf Bible Society, accessed December 16, 2015, www.deafbiblesociety.com/mission/bible-translation.

[63] "Orality," Living Water International, accessed November 18, 2015, www.water.cc/orality.

[64] EveryVillage, accessed November 18, 2015, everyvillage.org.

Rather than try to communicate the gospel through a Western, literate method, organizations such as Living Water[63] and Every Village[64] use technology-based oral ministry strategies for short-term missions. Every Village is a missions organization that works in South Sudan; their goal is to provide each village in South Sudan with clean water, a church, and a radio. Because of South Sudan's low literacy rate, Every Village utilizes contextualized oral Bible stories, presented by short-term and long-term missionaries and broadcast through solar-powered radios. Technology like radio allows the number of listeners who have access to each Bible story to grow exponentially. Living Water's primary goal is also sustainable change through meeting both physical and spiritual needs. Although they are best known for their work drilling wells internationally, Living Water is also concerned about the need for an oral communication method. They provide periodic Orality Training Workshops which are designed to train people to craft contextualized oral Bible stories for a multiplicity of situations.

Technology-Based Orality in Long-Term Missions

A number of missions organizations are also utilizing technology-based oral ministry strategies for long-term ministry. OneStory is a partnership among "C&MA, Cru, Pioneers, TWR, Wycliffe, YWAM, and other Great Commission agencies, churches and individuals."[65] Their goal is to engage over 5,000 unreached people groups by 2020, and they are mobilizing Christians in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, who will work in their own countries and go out to other nations as well.[66]

Other examples of technology-based, oral ministry strategies include the Jesus Film, the Scripture App Builder, and storying apps. Since 1979, the Jesus Film has been translated into more than 1,300 languages and shown to billions of people across the world.[67] The Jesus Film is designed to communicate the gospel through the meta-narrative of the Bible, and it uses portions of the book of Luke as the script. Through the bible.is app, the Jesus Film is instantly accessible to millions of people throughout the world.

The Scripture App Builder is a software program designed to work in conjunction with Paratext, a Scripture translation and publishing software used by many Bible translators. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) developed the Scripture App Builder to create applications for smartphones that use the texts in Paratext and audio files. These Scripture apps can use audio files synchronized with each book of the Bible, and each verse or por-

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[65] OneStory, accessed November 18, 2015, onestory.org/about.

[66] Ibid.

[67] "Statistics," Jesus Film, accessed November 17, 2015, http://jesusfilm.org/film-and-media/statistics/statistics.

tion can be marked in the audio file so that the verse is highlighted while the audio of that verse plays. The Scripture apps can also be distributed quickly, easily, and inexpensively. While printing and publishing a book or portion of the Bible usually requires many resources and funds, the Scripture app can be distributed wirelessly through Bluetooth, micro SD cards, the Google Play Store, and more.[68] The same software behind the Scripture App Builder can be applied to storying apps. Once a story has been crafted and recorded, it can be distributed instantly through a phone app. The app developer can even set an expiration date for the app so that a rough draft can be distributed for community testing, then six months later, the final draft of the story can be redistributed through an updated version.[69] The storying app can use pictures depicting scenes from the Bible along with the text, which provides an inexpensive primer for a literacy program. For many language communities, literacy is more highly valued than an oral mode of communication; therefore, a storying app, which serves as a literacy primer, helps bridge the gap between orality and literacy.

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has developed Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) and is utilizing technology distributed online.[70] For example, thirty stories from both the Old and New Testament have been recorded by native speakers of Hassaniyya, a dialect of Arabic spoken in Mauritania, and are available for anyone who has access to the Internet.[71]

<div align="center">Methods of Implementation</div>

Although some organizations are using technology-based oral ministry strategies, it is not yet widespread. However, important techniques can be gleaned from these organizations in the areas of development, distribution, and use of these strategies.

Development of Technology-Based, Oral Strategies

When developing a technology-based oral ministry strategy, one should utilize participatory methods and ensure cultural contextualization. Participatory methods are "a range of activities with a common thread: enabling

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[68] "Scripture App Builder Features," SIL, accessed November 17, 2015, http://software. sil.org/scriptureappbuilder/features/#audiosynchronization.

[69] Personal communication with Sam Smucker on June 17, 2015.

[70] "Orality," International Mission Board, accessed November 19, 2015, orality.imb.org.

[71] "Hassaniyya," International Mission Board, accessed November 19, 2015, https:// orality.imb.org/resources/?id=3.

[72] Susan Keller, "Deciding and Planning Together: Engaging Oral-Preference Communicators Using a Participatory Approach," *Orality Journal* 4, no. 2 (2015): 11–12.

ordinary people to play an active and influential part of decisions which affect their lives."[72] A participatory approach involves a participatory mindset, focusing "on doing with others, rather than doing things *to* or *for* others," participatory techniques, "a wide variety of ways of doing things which help people participate maximally," and participatory tools, each of which "helps a group to address a certain type of issue."[73] A participatory approach is particularly appealing for a predominantly oral culture because it engages their preference for orality, community, individualized groups, immediate gratification, circular life perspective, and group orientation.[74]

By utilizing participatory methods, the facilitator involves members of the target audience. When a facilitator partners with members of the target audience, he or she can ensure that the result is culturally appropriate. An issue encountered by the Jesus Film producers is that not all body language and gestures are appropriate or convey the same meaning in every culture. The facilitator also creates a more sustainable project by training nationals to continue the ministry.

Ernst Wendland proposes seven suggestions concerning the development of oral ministry strategies, especially as it pertains to Bible translation and Scripture engagement and use, in the areas of analysis, testing, publishing, research, scripting, training, and networking.[75] Those facilitating the development of oral ministry strategies should be trained in analysis. Careful exegesis with orality in mind, especially on the discourse level, should lead to finding similar "oral-aural cues" in the target language, perhaps "employing appropriate and natural language *correspondents* (e.g., rhythmic utterances, rhymes, etc.)."[76] In testing a translation or message, they ought to be "thoroughly 'tested' (and revised) with the ultimate *performance dimension* in mind—that is, orally, aurally, individually, and communally."[77] Oral interpretation should even influence publishing decisions, such as page layout, font size and clarity, or meaningful paragraphing.[78] In the area of research, producers and researchers should meet regularly to discuss ways to transform "specific audience needs/desires and current media resources into Scripture products that more successfully serve the particular socio-religious constituency for whom they are intended."[79] Careful script-

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[73] Ibid., 12.

[74] Ibid., 32.

[75] Ernst R. Wendland, *Orality and the Scriptures: Composition, Translation, and Transmission,* ed. George Huttar (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2013), 336–349.

[76] Ibid., 338.

[77] Ibid., 339.

[78] Ibid., 341.

[79] Ibid., 343–344.

ing involves ensuring that the appropriate cultural and biblical background information is communicated in some way, whether through "performance-related *background* notes and *production* guidelines" or other supplementary aids.[80] Training must be provided for both facilitators and the "prospective audience-consumer groups" on how to use the diverse resources available to develop "an *integrated* program of teaching, learning, (re)telling (or *singing!*), and living the messages of Scripture."[81] Finally, networking must take place among "mutual interest sections within translation agencies."[82] Inter-agency cooperation and communication is vital.

Distribution of Technology-Based, Oral Bible Stories

Current technology allows for widespread access in ways that primary orality cannot. While the Internet is an incredibly powerful resource that is continually becoming more accessible, applications for smartphones, micro SD cards, and solar powered radios are also increasingly prevalent. In some sensitive areas of the world, SIL is piloting animated video projects. Rather than use and potentially endanger national Christians as actors, missionaries are creating animated videos of contextualized Bible stories.[83]

Value of Technology-Based, Oral Ministry Strategies

Technology-based, oral ministry strategies are a highly effective way to engage in ministry because it ensures accuracy and reaches a broader audience than traditional oral approaches. These strategies also allow for progressive engagement, building a bridge through orality with the possibility to transition to literate forms of communication in conjunction with orality.

Accuracy and Accessibility

With spoken word, the speaker and his or her audience are both present and interacting, but this interaction is not permanent. With literacy, words become much more permanent and can be accessed later. The accessibility and permanence of literacy is maintained with the use of technology to record oral communication. Video and audio can be recorded, manipulated, and copied onto micro SD cards or formatted for smartphone applications

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[80] Ibid., 344.

[81] Ibid., 345–346.

[82] Ibid., 346. cf. Biblical Performance Criticism, accessed December 18, 2015, www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org.

[83] Personal communication with Michael in March 2014. For security purposes, Michael's full name cannot be disclosed.

[84] "Audio Players Use," Form of Biblical Agencies International, accessed November 19, 2015, http://www.scripture-engagement.org/content/audio-players-use.

to be distributed. The Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) describes several ways audio players can be used in ministry.[84] Recorded audio can be checked and edited in ways that a story told to a live audience cannot.[85] Recorded oral communication can ensure more accuracy in the retelling of Bible stories and minimize the danger of syncretism.

These forms of communication through technology also provide a much wider audience for stories. Primary orality is characterized by direct communication between a speaker and his or her audience in the same physical space. However, space limits the number of people who are able to hear a message at one time. Additionally, lack of access to transportation on the part of the intended audience members or difficulty in obtaining access to a sensitive area of the world are pitfalls to primary orality. In contrast, technology-based, oral strategies take the message to their audiences. Oral Bible stories in a database online are also accessible to people of that ethnicity who have migrated. "The Persian Oral Bible project consists of 130 biblical stories and combines biblical stories with testimonies from Persians who have decided to follow Jesus."[86] These stories are accessible to Persians wherever they live around the globe.

Progressive Engagement

Currently, Sam Smucker, an SIL missionary, is leading the Sepik Partnership Engagement Strategy (SPES) program in the East Sepik province of Papua New Guinea. The SPES Program's goal is to engage with the hundred language groups in the East Sepik which are not currently viable candidates for a traditional Bible translation project. The region is undergoing tremendous culture change because of factors like globalization and urbanization; thus, many of the languages are endangered and dying. The SPES program intends to build relationships between SIL and these language groups, offering the opportunity for a two year oral Bible storying (OBS) program and more education on increasing the vitality of their languages. The hope is that after a two year OBS program, some of the language communities will have enough community support and desire to maintain the vitality of their language so that a deeper relationship with SIL may result, including a traditional Bible translation project in some of these languages.

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[85] cf. Render, a software developed by Faith Comes By Hearing that facilitates oral Bible translation, accessed March 12, 2016, http://www.renderpartners.com/. HearThis is a software program that allows communities to record audio for their already translated Scriptures through a simple UI, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.sil.org/resources/software_fonts/hearthis.

[86] "Persian Oral Bible," International Mission Board, accessed December 18, 2015, https://orality.imb.org/resources/?id=81.

This is an example of progressive engagement. In the same way that missionaries are taught to contextualize the gospel to the culture and translate it into the target language, starting with an oral communication method is vital to engaging a culture initially. However, because of a variety of sociolinguistic factors, such as language prestige and the indigenous view of literacy and orality, the language group may also desire literate materials.[87] Technology-based oral ministry strategies are not meant to replace literacy completely. However, the gospel ought to be presented first in the way that is most easily understood for the hearers.

CONCLUSION

The area of orality is increasingly gaining more awareness. As Christians concerned with the expedient accomplishment of the task of world evangelization or the "ministry of reconciliation" which God has entrusted to us, we must evaluate and effectively use all of the tools at our disposal. Current technology is irrevocably changing cognition and culture, and we must utilize approaches like technology-based oral ministry strategies to convey the good news of Christ and his kingdom for his glory.

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[87] cf. Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together."

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