ORALITY AND CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

Developing a 'Living' Word

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Phil Booth.

In 1989, with his wife Meg, Phil started a ministry called *Oral Communicators Worldwide.* He set up this small ministry in Bawtry Hall in South Yorkshire and challenged my thinking in many ways. Phil's passion and his ability think 'outside the box' and encourage others to do so was the start of this process.

I also wish to acknowledge the help and inspiration of many people in Cambodia who are working to transmit the written word so that it becomes the 'living word' in the lives of Cambodians today. In particular, the infectious enthusiasm of Rachel Hurley of SIL has been a real encouragement.

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Abstract

In the twenty-first century as the evangelical church continues the task of taking the good news to 'every tribe and nation', over 2,100 languages have yet to have any part of scripture available. How can these 340 million people be reached[1]? There is an additional, estimated, 4 billion people who are 'oral learners' who either can't or won't learn through reading[2]. Together this makes up at least 60% of the world's population.

Perhaps the evangelical Christian community has become too focussed on reading Scripture and books about the Bible rather than 'living' the Christian life. This dissertation explores the development of 'oral studies' and the relationship between orality and the printed word. How has this greater understanding impacted the transmission of God's word to oral learners?

I will explore the Bible as 'God's word' and how God spoke. The dissertation considers issues confronting Bible translation both generally and for oral cultures. I examine whether there is an under-lying assumption that the ability to read is necessary for believers to become mature and develop into church leaders. I look at the biblical pattern for communication and how we can learn from that today.

I explore the indicators of Christian maturity other than academic study and qualifications which can help to measure the effectiveness of discipleship. I examine the role of preaching for oral communicators and the use of song.

The dissertation outlines some of the programmes which have been established to take the truths of God's word to 'oral communicators' who live either in a 'primary oral' or a 'post-print' culture.[3]

Why, when there is so much need, is there resistance among many mission and church leaders to take up the tools that have been developed for reaching the oral communicators? What can be done to bring about the changes needed?

[1] Figures from http://www.wycliffe.org/About/Statistics.aspx [accessed March 2011]
[2] G Lovejoy, *That All May Hear*, Lausanne Movement Global Conversation, Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper, http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10363, [Accessed March 2011]
[3] For definitions of these terms see pp.11-12 below

Introduction

Oral Communicators Worldwide (OCW) part of the WEC International 'family' was started by Phil Booth in 1989 and was based at Bawtry Hall[4]. Booth had worked in Christian Radio ministry for many years. In 1971, he was involved in setting up Radio Worldwide (the on-going Radio training ministry of WEC[5]). He had also been an early Board member of the British branch of Back to the Bible, Good News Broadcasting Association, which was also based at Bawtry Hall.[6]

Using his background in Christian radio work, Booth developed an interest in 'orality' and realised that there were many people groups around the world who were 'non-literate'. He decided to put his skills and experience to work and established OCW to begin to challenge African pastors to recognise the need to communicate using oral means. Through OCW, Booth also began to train them to prepare material and scripts and to produce good quality cassettes.

In many ways, Booth's vision for Oral Communicators Worldwide was ahead of its time. The term 'oral communicators' was rarely heard in the missions' world and, certainly, it was not seen as a special category of the unreached people. Up to the early 1990s, most missionaries had seen radio and other aural (hearing) means simply as a useful addition to the 'real' work of Bible translation and literacy.

But by the mid 1990's there was an increasing number of missiologists and practitioners who were beginning to encourage the main-stream of the world of Christian mission to give more time and focus to the size and unique nature of the challenge of orality. The April-June 1995 issue of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* (IJFM) was a special issue in which every article and each author concentrated on different aspects of orality. In it, editor Hans Weerstra writes about reaching the 'close to two billion' non-literate peoples of the world (which was the estimate at that time)[7] with the message of Christ:

[4] See www.bawtryhall.org [accessed March 2011]
[5] See www.radioworldwide.org [accessed March 2011]
[6] I first met Phil Booth and became aware of the work of OCW when I began working at Bawtry Hall in 1990.
[7] For current estimates see p.27 below

> What will it take for the Gospel to be available to all the peoples of the earth—including the thousands of nonreading peoples?
>
> … the task [is]—basic Gospel communication to lost people clustered in ethnolinguistic groups who *cannot read*, They are lost because the Gospel still hasn't been brought to them *in their own languages*, nor has it seriously been presented to them *in terms of their own cultural situations and values*.[8]

The ministry of OCW, along with others, as I will show later, had begun to make mission workers think about the massive hurdle (or even barrier) that the 'literate west' was putting in the way of non-literate communities hearing and understanding the gospel. The 'standard' practice in mission work among 'unreached people groups' was first to prepare them to learn to read and write in their own heart language. Often this was a language which had not even been written down and the whole process took years of painstaking research.[9]

Writing in this special 1995 edition of the IJFM, Doris Porter of SIL said, 'We used to think of non-print media as an "add-on" to the language program—something extra you might do if you had the time.'[10] But, as we shall see later[11] practitioners began to appreciate that this could be an essential means of reaching the unreached. Slowly, oral means of communicating God's word was coming into more prominence in the work of worldwide mission.

In 1995, writing in the same issue of the IJFM, Viggo Søgaard, a consultant for the United Bible Societies, pointed to a reluctance among decision makers in Mission to embrace audio techniques:

> The development of the audiocassette gave us a fantastic tool for bringing the Scriptures to all people. One would expect that Bible people and mission executives would jump for joy and scramble to be on the front line with audio-Scriptures, but unfortunately, to a large extent, it had to be developed against the wind.[12]

Søgaard urged the development of cost-effective audio recordings using materials that were prepared for oral use rather than simply using written translations of scripture.

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[8] International Journal of Frontier Mission (IJFM), Vol 12:2, Apr-Jun 1995, Editorial
[9] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.115 ; and see p.21
[10] D. Porter, Article on '*Using the Vernacular Non-Print Media*' in IJFM Vol 12:2, 1995, p.106
[11] See p.24
[12] Viggo Søgaard in IJFM, Vol 12:2, 1995, p.69

After defining 'orality' and I will look at the extent and uncovering of orality through the work of both secular and Christian research. I will explore the need for evangelism and discipleship to be seen as an ongoing process and the impact of the Bible in changing lives. The dissertation will explore the nature of God's word in the Bible and whether there can be confidence in the reliability of translations which can become increasingly remote from the word as originally given. Jews and Christians are known as 'people of the Book' and I will examine the place of the spoken word. I will look, briefly, at the impact of an awareness of 'oral learners' on both preaching and Bible translation

The paper will set out some of the 'orality' initiatives which have developed in recent years and the co-operation between agencies demonstrated through the creation of the International Orality Network (ION).[13] It will explore whether there is a tension between orality and literacy initiatives. Can the gospel and teaching on discipleship be communicated effectively and in a Biblical way when oral means are used?

I will consider barriers to the use of these tools for reaching oral learners and how this 60 percent of the world's population can be better served. The dissertation will consider how to ensure that the transmission of God's word by oral means with remain faithful to the gospel. Changes are needed to reach those still in need in a way that they can understand.

To reach Oral Learners for Christ we have got to become learners of orality.

[13] See www.ion.org [Accessed March 2011]

Section I – The Spoken Word: Orality defined and uncovered

Chapter 1: Orality Defined

What is Orality?

The adjective 'aural' is defined as 'of or relating to the sense or organs of hearing'[14]. In everyday usage, 'oral' is a more familiar term than 'aural'. The same dictionary, which has just one definition for 'aural' has seven definitions of 'oral' as an adjective (including referring to the mouth and to speaking) and one as a noun. The noun refers to an oral test or examination.[15] We use our mouths for speaking, tasting and eating. In addition, we can speak of taking things (for example medicines) 'orally' – that is through the mouth. The word 'aural' is used less frequently because listening is a more passive experience and the ear has primarily one function – hearing.

The noun 'orality' refers to the practice of relying on the spoken, rather than the written, word for communication.[16] Orality is a practice which dates from the beginning of time right up to the present. Before writing systems were developed, communities transferred their cultural traditions, including their history, identity, and religion, from one generation to the next through their stories and proverbs, poems and songs, drawings and drama, riddles and games. The oral art forms – that is words or sounds spoken, sung or chanted – were (and often still are) woven together with visual art into ceremonies, dramas and rites of passage. Both historically and today, primary oral societies pass down significant information without putting anything into writing.

Some writers use the expression 'oral literature' for this range of the means of transmitting information. Others see this as an oxymoron or contradiction in terms.[17] As a result there have been attempts to find an alternative word or expression. For example the Kenyan novelist and critic Ngugi wa Thiong'o

[14] Dictionary.com, 'oral' and 'aural' in *Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition*. Source location: HarperCollins Publishers. Available: http://dictionary.reference.com. [Accessed: April, 2011].
[15] I has occurred to me more than once that an 'oral' would be a less incongruous test on the subject of 'orality than preparing a lengthy *written* dissertation!
[16] See http://www.oralitystrategies.org [accessed 2 March 2011]
[17] See quote from Harry Levin on p.18

refers to 'African "*oralture*"'; while Wikipedia claims that the Ugandan scholar Pio Zirimu introduced the term *'orature'.*[18]

Following work on the impact of the spoken word on writing by scholars such as Milman Parry and Marshall McLuhan,[19] it is increasingly recognised by the mission world that when people live by this reliance on the spoken word – orality – it affects many things about their culture. Such people are referred to as 'oral communicators' and because they cannot and do not write anything down, they have to work more on remembering things than do those from literate cultures. They often repeat well-known, treasured sayings and stories. Oral communicators prefer familiar things and they may be slow to accept new information, particularly if it does not come in a way that they can easily memorise.[20]

In fact everyone, whether literate or oral, tends to enjoy a good story and both categories will have better recall of information if it is presented in a narrative format. But memory and recall is even more essential in oral cultures. As a result, much effort goes into developing easily-remembered forms for every important truth or piece of information. Proverbs, poems and songs are all often easier to remember than simple lists of truths or facts. One of the outcomes of research by Lord and others[21] has been to discover that oral cultures develop standard ways of structuring proverbs, poems, and stories. Those patterns of organizing spoken language for easy recall and presentation are also part of 'orality'.

The issue of oral communication and its relationship with the printed word was also taken up by Walter Ong, then Professor of Humanities in Psychiatry at Saint Louis University and a Jesuit scholar. He makes a distinction between 'primary orality' (when people have had no contact with, or appreciation of, writing) and 'secondary orality' (referring to those who may often depend on the literate world but prefer oral communication which is made easier by the

[18] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_literature [Accessed April 2011]
[19] See section on 'Relationship between Orality and Literacy' starting on p.17
[20] See W Ong, *Orality-Literacy Studies and the Unity of the Human Race* (in Oral Tradition, 2/1 1987),
[21] See Chapter 2 on p.17

use of electronic media such as phones, radio, television, computers and digital devices of many kinds).[22]

Primary oral communities are a focus for the linguistic work of SIL International. This is an educational organisation of Christian volunteers which specialises 'in the application of linguistic research to the literacy and translation needs' of the lesser-known language communities.[23] SIL has more than 4,700 personnel working on 2,000 language projects impacting about 1.2 billion people.[24] The main focus of its partner organisation, Wycliffe Bible Translators, is the provision of the Bible to every people group in their own 'heart language'. Over 2,100 groups[25] who are living in primary oral communities remain without any access to the Bible.

If linguists and other Christian workers want those who live in an oral culture to understand a message, it is going to be much more helpful to present it in familiar and memorable formats. By studying orality they can get a better understanding of how oral cultures operate. It is that understanding that will help those reaching out to such peoples to find the best way to present the Bible's message so that oral communicators can understand it, retain it, benefit from it, and pass it on to others in a reliable way.

As the understanding of orality has increased through the work of Parry, McLuhan, and Ong and others[26] it has been recognised that it may not be enough just to take written material and re-produce it in an audio format. Making something audible does not necessarily make it into an 'oral' style of communication. The same thing is true of other media products created for literate audiences. For example the Jesus film,[27] and even, as I will show later, new Scripture translations may need to be adapted into a more aural style for primary oral communities. Care must be taken that material does not have 'literate' stylistic features that could confuse oral learners.

[22] Ong, *Orality and the Human Race,* p.372
[23] See http://www.sil.org/sil/faq.htm [accessed March 2011]
[24] See *2010 SIL Update* on www.sil.org [accessed March 2011]
[25] Figures from http://www.wycliffe.org/About/Statistics.aspx [accessed March 2011]
[26] See section on 'Relationship between Orality and Literacy' starting on p.17
[27] Personal email dated 1 April 2011 from WEC Missionary working in Guinea-Bissau

Such an understanding will have an impact on the work of evangelists and church planters working with unreached people groups as well as on the work of linguists in surveying languages yet to be written down, in teaching literacy and in approaching the ongoing task of Bible translation.

Clarifying other terms used

In Figure 1 on page 26, Jim Slack uses the term 'Oral Communicator' for those who either cannot or prefer not to communicate by written means. In this study, I shall use the terms 'Oral Communicator' (where the subject is passing on information) or 'Oral Learner' (where the subject is receiving information) as the context determines but, by and large, they can be regarded as interchangeable.

As stated above on page 11, Ong draws a distinction between 'primary oral cultures' and 'secondary oral cultures'. Some of the characteristics found in primary oral learners are also found in secondary oral learners as I will show later,[28] There are many secondary oral communicators who live in what could be called a 'post-literate' electronic age.

Slack also follows Ong (and others) in using the terms 'illiterate' and 'literate' for his further categorisation. I wish to avoid using the word 'illiterate' as much as possible. It carries a pejorative connotation which Ong refers to as 'subtly downgrading'[29] especially if applied to whole cultures. He suggests it would be better to use the term 'oral' in these instances. In highly literate cultures, however, it could be appropriate to use the term 'illiterate' as there may be some basis for the perception that it does implies a lack of education (or application).

However, except where direct quotations are warranted, I will use the more neutral term 'non-literate' in place of 'illiterate'. While this is still focuses on what people cannot do in a predominantly literate culture, it is a less 'loaded' term.

[28] See pp.19-20 below
[29] Ong, *Orality and the Human Race*, p. 372

Ong comments that the spectrum from literacy to orality includes those at either end who often '*represent the haves and the have-nots in our present world*'[30]. Generally in a significantly literate society the inability to read is a handicap which has such a stigma attached that those who cannot read often go to considerable lengths to cover up.

There may sometimes be exceptions to this generalisation. In primary oral cultures (and sometimes in non-oral cultures too), those lacking the ability to read will not have had opportunities to learn. Such people can be very intelligent and are likely to be very capable in other ways. In highly literate cultures the barriers may be economic pressures including the cost of education and the need to bring in much needed earnings for the family. In such cases it is understandable that education is not the main priority for many households. But in primary oral cultures, where literacy skills are not felt to be something to aspire to, people will not perceive their lack of literacy to be a handicap. Often their barrier will be because their language is not written. These communities operate orally and their societies value other skills.

How is literacy measured?

It used to be that those working in western society to raise literacy levels among adults judged competency quite narrowly as 'the ability to read and write a simple sentence'[31]. Now literacy specialists are including oral skills within the definition and looking at '*the capacity to read, write, speak, and listen effectively*'.[32] This more recent development recognises the need to use language in all its manifestations – whether written or oral – for effective communication.

Different countries and agencies have their own definitions of 'literacy' which makes it difficult to collect reliable global statistics. In some places, it is the ability to read government documents or to answer questions about them that is measured, whereas other countries base their definitions on the completion of some stage of formal education. Accordingly, the literacy rate will vary

[30] Ong, *Orality and the Human Race*, p.374
[31] See Appendix A (UNESCO Definitions) p.77
[32] See www.caliteracy.org [accessed 2 March 2011]

according to the standards used.[33] However, Paul Dyer suggests that, 'for the purpose of Christian discipleship, literacy would have to mean the ability to read and comprehend a fairly advanced and complicated book (the Bible)'[34].

In the United Kingdom, the Government adopted a 'Skills for Life Strategy' in March 2009, to make better progress towards a target set some years earlier of 95% of adults having at least functional levels of literacy by 2020. In order to achieve this it identified priority learner groups as those who are unemployed, employed but with low skills, offenders in custody and under supervision and other groups at risk of social exclusion. [35] In carrying out research into the effectiveness of literacy strategies researchers from Sheffield University examined three aspects – reading comprehension (both phonics and reading fluency 'strands'); spelling (phonics); and writing (sentence combining).[36]

The report explains 'oral reading fluency' as the ability to '*read aloud to one or more people in a rapid, accurate and expressive way, with the momentum unbroken by the need to decode*'.[37] The inclusion of this strand arose from research carried out in the US and picked up by J Kruidenier in his work on reading instruction for adults.[38]

Under the reading fluency strand of the UK study, when reading aloud to one or more of the class was introduced the adult learners (and the teachers) found that there was a significant increase in comprehension. It was used with learners of all ages and at all levels and there was an improvement in self-confidence and ability in other oral skills. There was also the creation of a class ethos and enjoyment in having peer support and the 'gelling' of the class.[39] This is very similar to the group and community preferences and

[33] See discussion about the 'Size of the Task' starting on p.27
[34] Paul D. Dyer, Was Jesus a Zairian? Article in *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 12.2 (1995, IJFM)
[35] Maxine Burton, et al., *Progress for Adult Literacy Learners*, (research report for National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy, 2010) [Retrieved online from http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_list.asp April 2011], p.6
[36] Burton, (2010), Summary p.7
[37] Burton, (2010), Summary p.11
[38] J. Kruidenier, *Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*. (Portsmouth, NH: National Institute for Literacy. 2002)
[39] Burton, (2010), Summary p.51

bonding which Ong identified in his research into primary oral communities.[40] The UK report concluded that using a strategy which involved reading out loud to a group benefited nearly all learners by speeding up comprehension and increasing confidence and that it should be more widely used.[41]

[40] See Ong's comparisons in Appendix B, pp.78-79
[41] Burton, (2010), Summary p.52

Chapter 2: Orality Uncovered

Oral communication has existed from the beginning of time. Yet it is only in relatively recent years[42] that the term 'orality' has become more of a focus of mission workers. Perhaps a fore-runner of this was when, as a missionary working in Indonesia in the 1950s, Hans Rudi Weber discovered, as he tried to disciple the young 'illiterate' Christians that he needed to teach about the Christian faith 'picturesquely and dramatically rather than intellectually and verbally'. He published a book about his work[43] which was to become an inspiration for the later development of Chronological Bible Storying.[44]

In this chapter, I will examine some of the studies which have contributed to this uncovering of the needs of oral learners.

Relationship between Orality and Literacy

The American classicist and folklorist Milman Parry (1902-1935) [45] is sometimes credited with being the founder of the discipline of 'Oral Tradition'. By using textual criticism, he was able to determine that the classical poems attributed to Homer, *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*, had been composed using extensive fixed expressions or formulae. This pointed to their roots being in an oral tradition rather than having been the work of one author – Homer – who had previously been regarded as a literary genius.

This theory was later confirmed from fieldwork which he undertook in Bosnia (former Yugoslavia) where literacy was very limited and the oral tradition was 'purist'[46] – to use Parry's expression. His work was continued after his sudden death by his assistant, Albert Lord, who later became a Harvard professor. Lord's best known work is 'The Singer of Tales'[47] which picks up the oral tradition of poems being sung, repeated and remembered as the means of communication.

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[42] See http://oralbible.com/about/history [Accessed Feb 2011]
[43] Hans Rudi Weber, *Communicating the Gospel to Illiterates*, (London: SCM Press, 1957)
[44] See 'Chronological Storying' p.59
[45] Adam Parry, ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971)
[46] By this he meant affected as little as possible by reading and writing
[47] A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1960).

The developing discipline of Oral Tradition by scholars such as Parry and Lord in the second half of the twentieth century has uncovered an elitism which had emerged in the book-obsessed culture of the literate west. This is touched on by Harry Levin (Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard). In the preface to Lord's book, 'The Singer of Tales', Levin wrote:

> The term 'literature', presupposing the use of letters, assumes that verbal works of imagination are transmitted by means of writing and reading. The expression 'oral literature' is obviously a contradiction in terms. … The Word as spoken or sung, together with a visual image of the speaker or singer, has meanwhile been regaining its hold through electrical engineering. *A culture based on the printed book … has bequeathed to us – along with its immeasurable riches – snobberies which ought to be cast aside.* We ought to take a fresh look at tradition … as an organic habit of re-creating what has been received and is handed on.[48]

Later I will examine whether one of the 'snobberies which ought to be cast aside' could be an underlying assumption of many discipleship programmes in evangelical churches that written courses and tests will make better disciples and church leaders.

Just a couple of years after Lord's book, Marshall McLuhan published a book which he said in the prologue was 'complementary' to 'The Singer of Tales'. This was *'The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographical Man',*[49] the first of several works by McLuhan on the impact of printing on communication. In 'The Gutenberg Galaxy',[50] McLuhan explores the impact of the invention of moveable type for printing and then the emergence of the medium of television. This new electronic inter-dependence, McLuhan contends, 'recreates the world in the image of a global village.'[51]

McLuhan's book reflects his analysis of four epochs of history: oral tribe culture; manuscript (writing) culture; Gutenberg galaxy (printing culture); and the electric (electronic) age. At each stage, the emergence of a new 'process' is responsible for the discontinuity between one time period and the next.

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[48] Lord, Preface p. xiii *(My italics).*
[49] Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographical Man* (1962), prologue. For an assessment of the origins of the term 'global village' see article by Eric McLuhan at http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/mcluhan-studies/v1_iss2/1_2art2.htm [accessed March 2011]
[50] 'Gutenberg' is a reference to the fifteenth century German printer who invented moveable type and the printing process.
[51] McLuhan, p [Gloss 31]

Hand-writing undermined the oral phase; printing the writing culture; and electric devices (by which he meant radio, telephone, and television) the printing phase. McLuhan saw the last transition as more complex and McLuhan, predicted some of the effects of the World Wide Web 30 years before it became a reality.[52]

Instead of all our senses performing common functions in communication, these developments highlighted the dominance of the visual. Now the 'printed word' could be reproduced accurately and swiftly as could the electronically recorded 'spoken word'. This was in stark contrast to the earlier oral culture of what McLuhan calls *'the resonating diversity of spoken words.'*[53] This resulted in what he calls 'Gutenberg Man'. Human beings did not just have to learn to use the new inventions but actually had to 're-invent' themselves and their thought processes as well.

The impact of printing hastened the demise of speech as the primary means of communication because of the massive boost given to literacy. But it also, in what McLuhan calls 'the electric age', gave the spoken word an opportunity to reassert itself through electronics and recordings. When Ong (who had earlier studied under McLuhan), published his book on '*Orality and Literacy*' in 1983 it soon became a seminal work on the subject.[54] Writing from the perspective of twenty years later, Ong underlined the differences between these two categories identified by McLuhan by using the terms 'primary' and 'secondary' oral cultures.[55]

Ong further explored the emergence of this 'secondary' orality and addressed some of the issues that led McLuhan to talk about Gutenberg Man. He used the term 'typographic' to mean 'print orientated'.[56] He describes how Europe, as a 'literate' culture, moved on from having a significant residue of primary orality. He contends that this was when irregularities and illegibility of writing was replaced by consistency and readability of the printed page.

[52] Such as the use of the term 'global village'.
[53] McLuhan, p.136
[54] Walter J Ong, *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word,* (London, Routledge, 1983)
[55] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.31
[56] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.135

Ong highlights another consequence of the printed page and one which is significant for the present study. For centuries, reading, initially from written text and then from the printed page, was normally done aloud usually to a group of listeners. Ong points out that as printing became more widespread, 'the lingering *hearing-dominance* in the world of thought and expression' was replaced by 'sight-dominance.' 'Words became symbols of meaning apart from sound, and reading became silent.'[57] It quickly became the exception to have people reading aloud to groups. This brought changes to the way that people thought and communicated and, as a result, primary orality largely disappeared.[58]

Many of the differences which Ong identifies between oral and print communicators are listed in Appendix B.[59] The main theme of his book could be summed up as:

> Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness.[60]

Some orality scholars and practitioners are reassessing or even questioning Ong's conclusions.[61] There is a concern that he saw cultures too much as either 'oral' or 'literate'. Although Ong did recognise that there was a continuum, he saw that as a transition phase from one to the other. One of his critics is James Gee[62] who points out that Ong took specific work by Lord and others on the powerful rhythm of an epic poem (such as by Homer)[63] and transformed this into 'a sweeping statement about orality and literacy as a great divide in human culture.' [64]

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[57] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.131
[58] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.119,122
[59] See pp.78-79
[60] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.78
[61] eg in a personal email dated 21 March 2011, Wayne Dye commented '*the Walter Ong theories about the nature of oral people don't hold up … In particular oral people frequently employ syllogistic logic, languages that are all oral may or may not prefer poetry and repetition'*
[62] J. P. Gee, *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*, revised and updated. (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
[63] J. P. Gee, Orality and literacy: From, The Savage Mind to Ways with Words, in *Language and Literacy in Social Practice*. Clevedon, Philadelphia, (Adelaide, Multilingual Matters/The Open University, 1990) p.172
[64] Gee, Orality and literacy, p.173

Gee, on the other hand, sees both 'literacy' and 'orality' as sub-categories of the use of language. He argues that it is 'language use' that is taught in schools and it is necessary to use a broader definition of 'literacy' than primarily reading and writing.[65] Gee points out, for example, that there are many visual images and symbols that can have a specific and unique significance without 'words'. Language is by no means the only system of communication. Gee talks of 'visual literacy' and gives examples of 'reading' visual advertising; interior home designs; and videos on MTV.[66] The idea of this mix of 'multimodal literacy', with a combination of words and images are all part of Gee's concept of 'new literacies.'[67] Gee points out that we never just read or write; rather, we always read or write 'something in some way'. In other words, according to which type of text we read there are different ways in which we read depending on the 'rules' of how to read such a text.

Another critic of Ong's conclusions is Ruth Finnegan. She has written from the perspective of her experience of oral cultures in Africa.[68] While Ong focussed on the differences, she has identified similarities and connections in the use of language in both its written and oral forms. She talks of oral art and performances as 'oral literature'.[69] Using this term advisedly, she comments that she has 'long held the view that there is nothing strange or unusual in the interaction of oral and written forms.'[70] Finnegan goes on to challenge some of Ong's views by stating that these interactions should not be regarded as purely 'transitional' for the time when an individual or community is moving from an oral to a literate culture.

In his writing, Ong pays little regard to the fact that even in the most literate cultures, many people appreciate (and often prefer) communicating orally. In spite of these shortcomings and the rather sweeping nature of Ong's conclusions, there is no doubt that he has shone a spotlight on the subject of 'orality' and drew attention of both academics and practitioners to the needs of

[65] Gee, *What video games*, p.13
[66] Gee, *What video games*, p.13
[67] Gee, *What video games*, p.14
[68] Ruth Finnegan, *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa*. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007)
[69] For a discussion of alternatives to the use of the term 'oral literature', see pp.10-11 above.
[70] Finnegan, p.147

oral communities. The publication of his book in 1982 was very influential in the development of oral studies.

Writing in 1981 in *'The Oral and the Written Gospel'*, Werner Kelber notes that work done by scholars such as Lord, Parry and Ong (in America) as well as Finnegan and Goody (from Britain) has significantly advanced the understanding of oral cultures. But he goes on to say that biblical scholarship in Europe and America has largely neglected the significance of these studies in their work. Kelber suggests that the main reason for this is that biblical scholars tend to think '*in literary, linear, and visual terms*.'[71] Part of the reason for writing his book was to develop a '*new model of … processes of oral transmission based on the Anglo-American studies in orality.*'[72]

UNESCO in its EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006 entitled '*Literacy for Life*',[73] picks up the change in thought processes that Ong identified as being involved in moving from an oral to a literate culture. It says that writing produces linear thought patterns that encourage analytical thinking.[74]

In the field of education over recent years there has been an on-going debate about how best to teach literacy and reading skills. A common understanding of literacy is the acquisition of skills of reading and writing. Gee and other scholars have challenged such a narrow definition.[75] Some specialists promote a concentration on 'phonetics' while others favour 'reading for meaning.' Brian Street has a fuller discussion of this issue in his paper written in 2004 for the UNESCO Education for All programme.[76]

The acquisition of literacy skills can take decades. Literacy practitioners have observed that oral societies have not taken literacy on board as quickly as once thought. [77] This observation parallels Ong's claim that, historically,

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[71] Werner H. Kelber, *The oral and the written Gospel*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1983), p.2
[72] Kelber, p.2
[73] UNESCO Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2006, *Literacy for Life*, (Paris, UNESCO, 2005)
[74] *Literacy for Life*, (Paris, UNESCO, 2005), p.149
[75] Gee, *What Video Games*, p.13
[76] B. Street, 2004. *Understanding and defining literacy*. Background paper for *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006*.
[77] eg D. Porter in IJFM, (1995), p.105

societal transition of a predominantly 'oral' culture to literacy has been a slow process.[78]

In reality, some people never become literate for various reasons. [79] Among the barriers to achieving functional literacy are poverty (when many people need to spend most of their time in meeting their basic needs) and ambition and hard work (with people working long hours and not having the time or stamina for literacy classes). But some groups in society, for example the nomadic, make life-style a choice to ignore, or just pay lip-service to, formal education; while for others the obstacle may be old age, a physical consideration such as blindness or being crippled and educational impairment.[80]

There is increasing recognition among anthropologists and missiologists that orality has an important (and ongoing) place to play in the lives of many people. As a result it is very important for literate educators in both mainstream education and the church (who, almost by definition, come from a highly literate perspective) to learn to communicate more effectively to oral learners. This is in contrast to the previously accepted focus on literacy and of insisting that oral communicators should first have to learn to read.

UNESCO 'Literacy for Life' report recognises this significant change in approach when it comments that '… rational consciousness … [which] derives from a classical epistemology … *may be less appropriate for societies founded on different patterns of thought and interaction*.'[81]

The 'Literacy for Life' report concludes 'that an understanding of literacy that maintains some focus on oral skills is desirable.'[82]

Herbert Klem, a missionary who taught in seminaries in Kenya and Nigeria for many years, wrote that a preference for oral communication can produce a resistance to literacy in communities, and that this can lead to a rejection of Christianity which is so often associated with it. He said that '*it is neither*

[78] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.115
[79] Richard D. Brown, Designing programs for oral cultures. Notes on Literature in Use and Language Programs 46, 1995, p. 16
[80] Marilyn Malmstrom, *My tongue is the pen,* (Dallas, SIL, 1991), p.12-13
[81] *Literacy for Life*, (Paris, UNESCO, 2005), p.149 (*my italics*)
[82] *Literacy for Life*, (Paris, UNESCO, 2005), p.149

loving, respectful, nor constructive to view indigenous resistance' to literacy as '*a disease to be cured*.' Rather, Klem said, '*It is far wiser and more fruitful to attempt to empathize with the positive reasons people may have for preferring indigenous oral communications*.'[83]

From the perspective of Bible translators, Doris Porter of SIL acknowledged, that often, at least up to when she was writing in 1995, the scheduling of portions of Scripture and the production of audio material had not taken the needs of the eventual users into account. But, she said, as translators began to recognise the effectiveness of non-print media in achieving long-term goals, the 'use and evaluation of these elements are planned into the strategy.'[84]

However, writing fifteen years later on the Lausanne Conversation blog for Cape Town 2010, a missionary working in a rural area in the south of Taiwan said that she still struggled to get the tools she needs from the translators with whom she is in contact:

> Several times in recent years I have begged Bible translators not to start with the New Testament but … the parts of the Bible first which contribute to bringing a group to salvation. No one has yet taken any notice![85]

This is a plea for initially providing translated portions of scripture which tell stories and which will resonate with oral communicators. Appendix B[86] shows that they tend to learn by hearing, observing, imitating, listening, repeating, and memorizing proverbs, traditional sayings, stories, songs, and expressions. Print communicators, on the other hand, tend to learn by seeing, reading, studying, examining, classifying, comparing, and analyzing. So oral communicators have their own set of skills, and these have developed into a very appropriate and functional pattern of communication.

The contrast goes deeper. Oral communicators often think and talk about events, not words, and the usage of information is embedded in the flow of time and usually within a storyline. They store this knowledge in their memories. On the other hand, print communicators think and talk about

[83] H. Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scriptures*, (Passadena, CA, William Carey Library, 1982), p.98-99
[84] Porter in IJFM, (1995), pp.105-106
[85] See http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10363 [accessed March 2011]
[86] Appendix B, pp.78-79

words, concepts, and principles and manage knowledge in scientifically abstracted categories and then store this knowledge in print or digital formats rather than stories. In the aspect of tradition and values retention, the approaches are also different. Where oral communicators tend to value tradition, group communication, and interaction with others, print communicators look for new things, enjoy reading as an individual experience and learn mostly on their own.[87]

The work that Ong and others have done has identified many characteristics which those working in the field have been able to use as they seek to communicate in primary oral cultures. But Ong may have drawn the contrasts between oral and literate learners too starkly and scholars such as Gee and Finnegan have sounded a note of caution.

In working on the development of Chronological Bible Storying, practitioners have identified a range of different learning styles as people and societies move from being oral or 'illiterate' through various stages to become highly literate. At each stage, some skills which may have been very significant become redundant and are often lost. But at each stage as well, new skills are learnt which are appropriate to that progression.

Spectrum of Oral Communicators

James Slack, of the International Missions Board (IBM) has developed a spectrum for oral communicators. In this he identifies five categories as follows:

1. Illiterate
2. Functional Illiterate
3. Semi-illiterate
4. Literate (sometimes called 'functionally literate')
5. Highly literate

The first three of these he describes as 'Oral Communicators' who learn best from information presented in non-literate ways – as stories, or in discussions

[87] See listing based on Ong's work in Appendix B, pp.78-79

– with no (or little) exposition.[88] The last two are 'Literate Communicators' who can learn orally from stories or dialogue with exposition but are often more comfortable in learning from reading and a more literate presentation of facts and information. This is represented graphically in the Learning Grid (below).

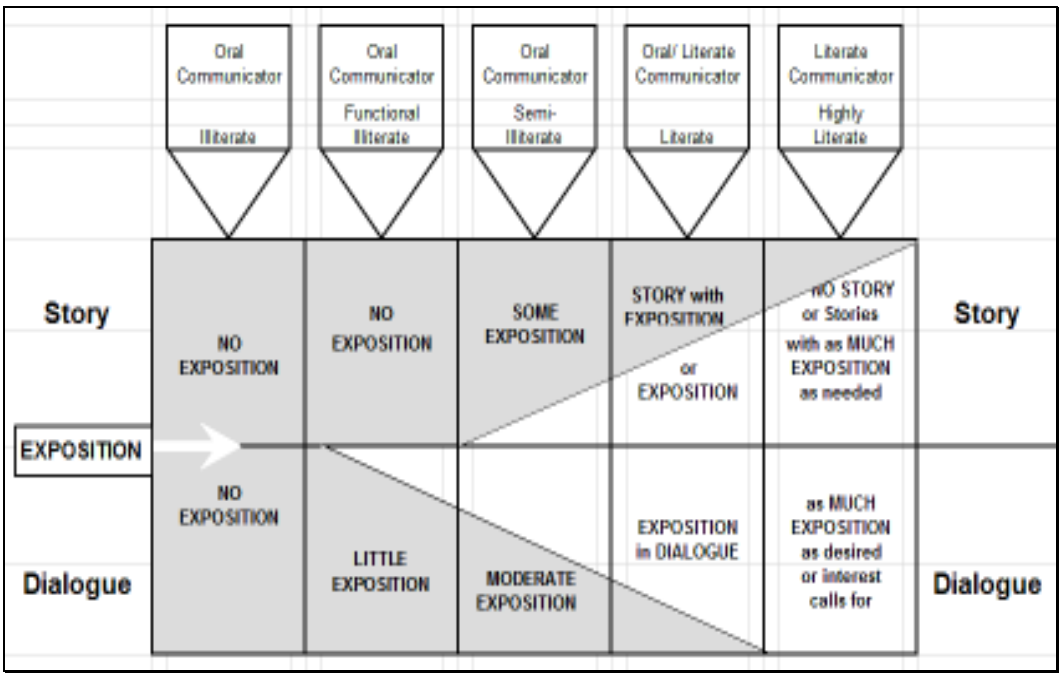

Figure 1 – The Learning Grid[89]

As well as highlighting stages along this continuum, the shaded areas of the diagram indicate where there is no need for exposition or explanation. This decreases for both the 'story' and the subsequent discussion and dialogue as the hearers become increasingly literate. Slack recognises that from 'illiterate' to 'highly literate' those with all learning styles appreciate hearing a good (and well told) story.[90]

According to Slack, internal research carried out by IMB has shown that a community moving from illiteracy to a literacy rate of only 30% has generally taken 125 years.[91]

[88] For a discussion on the role of 'Expository Preaching' see p.48 below
[89] From http://www.storyrunners.com/orality/how-oral-learners-communicate using diagram adapted from Jim Slack, IMB [Accessed April 2011]
[90] This point is not expressly acknowledged by Ong, see p.20
[91] Slack

The size of the task

Much work has been done on estimating the numbers of oral communicators. Grant Lovejoy gave the following global figures at Lausanne Consultation in 2010 at Cape Town[92]:

0-8 year olds	900,000,000	(children)
8-15 years	450,000,000	(learners in school)
(from UN stats) 15 plus	3,000,000,000	
TOTAL	4,350,000,000	

This total of 4.35 billion is about 63% of the world's population and includes an estimated 1 billion people who are oral communicators out of necessity and use only the spoken word. Of these, 340 million are among the 2,100 language groups that Wycliffe Bible Translators estimate have no portions of the Bible in their mother tongue.[93]

This 4.3 billion is a significant increase on the 'almost two billion' mentioned by Weerstra in his editorial for the special orality issue of the IJFM in 1995.[94] As the world population grows as an increasing rate so the number of oral communicators is likely also to grow exponentially. Some may challenge the current estimates and those involved with literacy programmes may be inclined to exclude the children and learners still at school. But even if the remaining 3 billion are taken as the 'core' this is a very substantial proportion of the world's population.

As part of its Education for All (EFA) programme, UNESCO has been seeking to research and highlight the issues of orality and literacy. Appendix A[95] lists definitions of some of the terms used by UNESCO in its EFA 'Literacy for Life' Report.[96] This report sought to bring together global figures using national statistics.

[92] G Lovejoy, *That All May Hear*, Lausanne Movement Global Conversation, Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper, http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10363, [Accessed March 2011]
[93] Figures from http://www.wycliffe.org/About/Statistics.aspx [accessed March 2011]
[94] See p.6
[95] Appendix A, p.77
[96] *Literacy for Life*, (Paris, UNESCO, 2005)

Many countries do not have a proper definition of literacy but still claim to have a literacy rate of over 90% so some experts give a word of warning about 'official' statistics on national literacy rates. Daniel Wagner says:

> UNESCO has relied almost entirely on data provided by its member countries . . . These countries … typically rely on national census information, which most often determines literacy ability by the proxy variable of self-stated years of primary schooling …. Many specialists would agree that such measures are likely to be unreliable indicators of literacy ability.[97]

The UNESCO Literacy for Life report came to the following assessment:

> The vast majority of the world's 771 million adult illiterates live in three regions: South and West Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and sub-Saharan Africa. Women [are] a majority of the world's illiterates: 64%, unchanged from 1990. Progress … is especially marked in the 15-24 age group, where expanded access to formal schooling helped raise the global literacy rate from 75% to 88% between 1970 and 2000–2004; the corresponding rates for developing countries were 66% and 85%.[98]

I have not been able to find meaningful literacy statistics for the UK as a whole as the education system links literacy and numeracy skills together.[99] However, the National Literacy Trust estimates that around 16 per cent, or 5.2 million adults in England, can be described as 'functionally illiterate.' This they define as having literacy levels at or below those expected of an eleven year old.[100]

In the USA, however, in 2003 a study was initiated by the National Centre for Education Statistics to examine the skill levels of American adults has produced an ongoing National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL).[101] As a result of working with 19,000 adults across the USA, the assessment concluded that only thirteen percent are 'proficiently literate' while a very significant forty-three percent have either 'basic or below basic skills' with an estimated 20% of adults being described as 'functionally illiterate'.

Internationally, the USA is ranked 27th out of 205 countries. Some orality experts estimate that over 50% of the population of the US are 'oral communicators.' While in Europe, on 1 February 2011 a press release from

[97] Daniel A. Wagner, Literacy and Development: Rationales, Myths, Innovations, and Future Directions, in *Papers from the 2nd Asia Regional Literacy Forum* (1993), 2. Document online: www.literacyonline.org/products/ili/webdocs/wagner.html.
[98] *Literacy for Life*, (Paris, UNESCO, 2005)
[99] See research on literacy work with UK adult learners is described on pp.14-15 above
[100] http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/about/faqs/s1#q284 [Accessed April 2011]
[101] See www.caliteracy.org [accessed 2 March 2011]

the European Commission suggested that 20% of European 15 year olds have 'inadequate reading skills' while over 80 million adults (one third of the workforce of the EU) have 'low or basic reading skills.'[102]

The task is immense. If the mainstream Christian mission community does not come to terms with this need, there is a real risk that a huge number of those alive today will never be able to engage with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The comments in the following paragraphs from Gilbert Ansre and Herbert Klem, each with significant experience in Africa, are instructive.

Ansre, a linguist from Ghana, who has served as a translation consultant with the United Bible Societies, extrapolates from 1993 literacy figures for African countries to conclude that only about eleven percent of the officially recognised 'literate' population of almost every African country read Scriptures regularly.[103] So, in spite of years of teaching literacy in many parts of Africa, there are still few readers. Ansre notes that the population is increasing in some areas faster than literacy. As a result, literacy rates are declining in those areas.[104]

Ansre notes that the church has never taught that literacy should be a prerequisite to becoming a Christian. Yet there has been a strong recognition within the church that 'the ideal Christian should be able to read and diligently study the Scriptures by reading regularly.'[105]

From the nature of Christian leadership training programmes in many countries it would seem that Ansre comment has considerable merit. It appears that the majority of believers and church leaders from the 'literate' west have concluded that Christians cannot become spiritually mature – and are not able to reach a standard to become church leaders – unless they can read and study the printed Word of God. I want to examine whether such a view is supported by Scripture and the experience of the early church. If the church of today is to fulfil the mandate of making disciples of all nations and producing the 'living' word then I believe that view needs to be challenged.

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[102] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bO8m9kjT_s [Accessed February 2011]
[103] Ansre, IJFM, p. 66
[104] Ansre, IJFM, p. 65
[105] Ansre, IJFM, p. 66

Even more there needs to be a massive re-education process to encourage all churches to adopt discipling strategies which will produce mature oral believers and church leaders.

In 1995 Klem wrote an article on '*Dependence on Literacy Strategy Taking a Hard Second Look.*' In this he points out that Jesus did not regard oral learners as first needing to read. '*Although He could read, He did not write any of His teachings, but taught His disciples to recite from memory*.'[106] Klem goes on to say that the extent to which we use books to teach about the Bible '*is a cultural choice not a biblical requirement.*' He suggested that we could not afford to rely on a strategy that so many cannot or do not use and which has caused some problems in Bible translation.[107] The assumption on the part of those who are literate that all people should be able to read may be well intentioned but is self-centred when nearly two thirds of the world's population prefers to communicate orally rather than via print. By concentrating on written translations we are actually preventing oral communicators from having easy access to God's Word.

[106] Klem, IJFM p. 59
[107] Klem, IJFM p. 59

Section II – God's Word: Unchanging yet Living

Chapter 3: The Unchanging Word of God

One of the distinctive features of Evangelical Christians is their belief that the Bible is the divinely inspired 'Word of God'. The non-denominational Evangelical Alliance in the UK puts it this way in its basis of faith as it was revised in 2005:

> The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God—fully trustworthy for faith and conduct.[108]

For specific denominations there are variations on this wording. For example:

> *Assemblies of God:* We believe that the Bible (i.e. the Old and New Testaments excluding the Apocrypha), is the inspired Word of God, the infallible, all sufficient rule for faith and practice.[109]
>
> *Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches:* God has revealed himself in the Bible, …. Every word was inspired by God through human authors, so that *the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the Word of God*, without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine. The Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice.[110]

The phrase '*the Bible as originally given*' is not wording which is unique to the FIEC. But it leaves us with a problem. Does it mean that only the original Hebrew or Greek text is God's word? Or, going back even further is it the words actually spoken by God?[111] This issue of inspiration has occupied the attention of Bible translators since the earliest days.

In a note to the updated (2011) version of the New International Version[112] of the Bible the Translation Committee commented that, when first written down, the original documents had 'a unique fusion' between what God wanted to say and the language of ordinary people. Today this is no longer the case and the Hebrew and Greek of Bible times have become historical rather than living languages that most people cannot understand.

The NIV committee points out that this continued to be the case with English translations. The 1611 King James Version was in the idiom of the people of that time but in many instances the wording used then has become archaic.

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[108] See http://www.eauk.org/about/basis-of-faith.cfm [Accessed March 2011]
[109] See http://www.aog.org.uk/pages/17-statement-of-faith/content [Accessed March 2011]
[110] See http://www.fiec.org.uk/AboutUs/Beliefs/tabid/509/Default.aspx [Accessed March 2011] (*My Italics*)
[111] See p.36 below
[112] See http://www.biblegateway.com/niv/translators-notes/, [Accessed April 2011]

The same thing has happened over a shorter time span to the NIV originally published in 1978. In the 2011 version, the translators have taken account of changes in English usage, progress in scholarship and concern for clarity.

The Bible as 'God's Word'

The Qur'an refers to both Jews and Christians as 'people of the Book.'[113] It is certainly true that the Old Testament (the Law and the Prophets) and the Christian Bible are extremely important and significant texts for followers of both faiths.

In the western world, the phrase 'The Word of God' is often taken as a synonym for a printed book often bound in black leather! Yet within the Bible the expression 'the Word' is usually a reference to life. This is brought out most effectively in the opening verses of John's gospel where it refers specifically to Jesus Christ:

> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us …[114]

In his article on 'Scripture' in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, E J Schnabel says that Jews use the term 'holy Scripture' to refer to writings of 'divine origin possessing authority for the people of God as well as for the individual'.[115] He points out that both the Jewish and the early Christian traditions agreed that 'what scripture says, God says.' While some interpretations may have differed between the two faiths, there was agreement on both 'the divine origin and normative nature of Scripture.'[116] The early Church then extended the concept of the 'word of God' to apply to the apostolic accounts of the person and ministry of Jesus (see 1 Thess 2:13) and then later to the letters from the apostles (see 2 Peter 3:16).

In another article in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology,* R. T. Beckwith deals with 'the canon of Scripture' (that is which books were to be included) and the debates which surrounded the emergence of the Bible as we know it

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[113] eg see Qur'an 3:199: *And there are, certainly, among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), those who believe in God and in that which has been revealed to you, and in that which has been revealed to them, humbling themselves before God. '*
[114] John 1:14
[115] E. J. Schnabel, Article on 'Scripture' in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (IVP, Leicester, 2000), p.34-43
[116] Schnabel, p.34

today.[117] The canon dates from the time that the first revelation was given in written form, but Beckwith notes that

> … revelation was initially given through spoken words and outward signs, and … through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ ,,, but for the sake of permanence it soon started to be put into written form.[118]

In the introductory chapter of '*A History of Bible Translation'*,[119] Manuel Jinbachian points out that the Bible is not a single book, written in one language, but an entire library, written over a period of many centuries.[120] He considers four periods of Bible Translation from 532 BCE up to the early twenty-first century and divides early Bible translations into three categories: primary (from the original languages); secondary (mainly from the Septuagint); and Tertiary (from a secondary translation). Jinbachian summarises the history of Bible translation as moving from '*word-for-word translation to sense-for-sense rendering, what has commonly been called "meaning-based translation."*'[121]

In the next chapter of *'A History'*, David Burke of the American Bible Society explores the first versions of the Bible. These include the Septuagint,[122] the Targumim (extemporaneous *oral* paraphrases), and the Latin text which became the dominant Bible text of the Western church.[123] Burke points out that over many centuries the Bible has been publicly read in translation. In the synagogue it was read in Hebrew but then followed (in a softer voice to keep the distinction clear) by a translation into a language that the people could understand – such as Greek or Aramaic.[124]

In his NDBT article, Beckwith also makes comment on texts and versions which are helpful in the consideration of the written word and that provide a permanent record of oral revelation.

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[117] R. T. Beckwith, Article on 'The Canon of Scripture' in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (IVP, Leicester, 2000), p.27-34
[118] Beckwith, p.28
[119] Philip A. Noss, ed., *A History of Bible Translation* (Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007)
[120] Noss, p.34
[121] Noss, p.35
[122] See Beckwith's comments on the use of the Septuagint by New Testament writers below.
[123] Noss, p.85
[124] Noss, p.60

The Old Testament was translated into Greek long before the New Testament was written and this Septuagint translation has often been quoted by New Testament writers. Beckwith asserts that this '*shows the feasibility and legitimacy of translating the Scriptures into other languages.'* Furthermore, the New Testament writers attribute 'final authority' to such 'transmitted' quotations which used the Old Testament as it was when they were alive. Beckwith concludes that '*the transmission of the text is firmly controlled by the providence of God*.' As a result we can that have confidence any changes will not undermine God's purpose to guide his people through Scripture.[125]

There have been changes to the Septuagint and transcription errors have been uncovered following archaeological finds (such as the Dead Sea scrolls[126]). Advances in Biblical scholarship and changes in language, meanings, and usage of words show the on-going need to revise Bible translations.[127]

If Beckwith's assertion is true for revisions to the printed text of the Bible, then this raises serious issues if we adopt different standards for oral learners rather than continue to trust in this 'providence of God'. What lessons are there when the written text of Scripture (as it is within our Biblical canon) is taken and reworked as narrative 'story sets' for working with primary oral communicators?[128]

One of the foundational assertions in Scripture is that God speaks and we see this throughout the Bible. Indeed the Bible has many more references to God 'speaking' rather than God 'writing'. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance[129] has twelve three-columned pages for 'said' and 'spoke' but only one page for 'wrote', 'write' etc.

In his NDBT article Schnabel looks at the 'factors involved in the complex process of communication.'[130] These include the use of language (with symbols) to convey meaning; 'speech-acts' (choice of language and choice of

[125] Beckwith, p.33
[126] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint#Dead_Sea_Scrolls [Accessed April 2011]
[127] See comments from NIV 2011, Translators notes on p.32 above.
[128] See discussion below under '*Can Oral Transmission of God's Word be Trusted?'*
[129] James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2009)
[130] Schnabel, p.36

words; performing actions – including informing, rebuking, directing); feedback from the receiver; references to objects using language (code); the channel of communication – speech, writing, movement or other non-verbal methods; and distortions (noise).

In the creation account contained in Genesis 1 we read repeatedly 'And God said'[131] and the result of this communication was the 'speech-acts' of creation. In the next chapter we read of God communicating an instruction and warning to the man (Genesis 2:16-17). In Genesis 3 we find God 'walking in the garden in the cool of the day' and having a face to face conversation with Adam and Eve.[132] The act of rebellion and sin had the consequence of removing the opportunity for these 'natural' encounters by placing a barrier between man and God. As a result, subsequent 'face to face' encounters between God and particular individuals recorded in Scripture are recognised as awesome and exceptional.[133]

God is a God of relationship and, in spite of the fall (Genesis 3), he continues to communicate as Creator to his created beings. God's character not only as creator but also as King, Lord, and Father, is reflected in his communication. This includes his purity and hatred of sin, his love and his mercy, his holiness and his faithfulness. God spoke directly through verbal means but also through visions and dreams. This is a pattern throughout Scripture. God spoke to individuals (including prophets, priests and kings) and to communities (both directly and through intermediaries). Supremely, of course he has spoken through Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way:

> In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son…[134]

So God communicated orally. But there are many instances when he instructed those to whom he spoke to write down the words so that they could be passed on, and passed on accurately, to others or to future generations.

[131] eg Gen 1: 3; 6; 9; 14; 20; 24;
[132] Gen 3:8-19
[133] For example, Jacob (Genesis 32:30); Moses (see Numbers 12: 6-8; Deut 34:10)
[134] Heb 1:1-2

In Exodus, the Lord gave the Ten Commandments to Moses orally (Ex 20:1), but later God wrote them on the tablets of stone,[135] and he also instructed Moses to write down the words of the covenant he had made with him and with Israel.[136] Ezekiel was told to write down the design of and regulations for the Temple so that the instructions would be followed faithfully by those doing the work.[137] Habakkuk was directed to *'write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.'*[138]

God also spoke through sacred texts such as the book of the covenant in which Moses had written 'everything the Lord had said'[139] or the letters of the apostles.

The example of God 'speaking' and then performing what Schnabel calls 'speech-acts'[140] was also followed by several of the prophets. Some of the prophets came from rural backgrounds and may have been, at most, only semi-literate. Living in largely oral communities, they used dramatic enactments to telling effect. Ezekiel was instructed to eat the scroll and then speak.[141] In chapter 4, he acted out the siege of Jerusalem before shaving with a sharp sword and using his hair as a visual aid.[142]

The Bible shows clearly that God communicates in various ways – visually, orally, and through the written word. All of these methods are significant. It is important to remember that the written record was, itself, normally read publicly to the people. I have shown earlier[143] that both McLuhan and Ong have demonstrated that the coming of the printed word made a significant change to reading practice. In Europe reading became largely a silent activity and, as a result, something for the individual rather than the community.

[135] Ex 24:12; 32:15-16 and then again, as a replacement, in Ex 34:1
[136] Ex 34:27
[137] Ezekiel 43:10-11
[138] Hab 2:1
[139] Ex 24:4,7
[140] Schnabel, p.36
[141] Ezekiel 3:1-4
[142] Ezekiel 5:1-17
[143] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.31,119,122 and p.20 above

One of the most significant and dramatic events of the public reading of God's word in Old Testament history was when Ezra publicly read from the Book of the Law.

> They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.[144]

There are some Church traditions where this is an annual practice today[145] and perhaps others could learn from it. We see, too, from by Luke's account,[146] that in Jesus' time, the public reading of God's Word without comment was a normal practice. Paul commanded Timothy to publicly read Scripture as well as to preach and to teach.[147]

Bible Translation issues for Oral Cultures

Given that over 2,100 of the 6,900 languages[148] in the world have yet to have any portions of the Bible there is a massive task remaining for Bible translators. How should they approach the task of translation for an unreached people group which is from an oral culture? I have already pointed out shown that oral communicators learn best from narratives, proverbs, and poetry and do not learn as well from expositions, directives, recipes, and other procedural genres.[149]

In 1991, Slack referred to research by New Tribes Missionaries in the Philippines among oral communicators and peoples from both the city and the countryside who had strong roots in rural areas. This research found that when information was shared with such people using logical and systemised means, retention was rarely higher than 29%. But when a storying or chronological teaching method was used, retention rose to at least 75%.[150]

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[144] Neh 8:1-8 – verse 8 quoted
[145] I have been told by some Korean colleagues that it is not uncommon for churches in Korea to set aside a time each year when the Bible is read aloud publicly in its entirety.
[146] Luke 4:16-21
[147] 1 Tim 4:13
[148] Figures from http://www.wycliffe.org/About/Statistics.aspx [accessed March 2011]
[149] See p.48 below for a discussion of expositional preaching
[150] J. B. Slack, *Evangelism among peoples who learn best by oral tradition*, (Richmond, VA, IMB, 1991), p 9-10

Oral communicators learn quite readily from Old Testament narratives and from the Psalms and Proverbs, whereas the Epistles are less effective. The Gospels stand in between, Mark being mostly narrative and John mostly exposition, while Matthew and Luke include both and have many narrative parables within the exposition. Tom Steffen points out that that the Bible is 75% narrative, 15% poetry, and only 10% 'thought-organised.'[151] It gives us a model of how to teach biblical truth.

Oral communicators easily memorize the narrative and poetic parts and grasp the meanings and implications of these texts, but they usually have less interest in the expositional parts and retain less of the information from them. It is not surprising that missiologists have found that the most effective way to present the message is to use narrative sections of the Bible, beginning with the account of creation and proceeding in a chronological order, with the addition of some psalms and proverbs:

> Oral communicators, most of whom have great difficulty in understanding literate, expositionally-formatted Gospel presentations, and almost all of whom cannot remember and recall expositionally-formatted presentations, can, as a result of a narrative presentation, understand, apply, remember and recall the entire scope of the Biblical story.[152]

The Gospel of Mark has been found to be very effective with many unreached people groups as an evangelistic tool. One reason for this is that it makes so *few* statements about Jesus. Rather, Mark presents a steady flow of questions that force those who hear it to consider for themselves who Jesus really is on the basis of the evidence presented in his Gospel.

Oral communicators have difficulty focusing on and retaining information delivered in expository ways unless it is embedded in a narrative to which it relates. For example, oral communicators can usually process the sayings of Jesus in Luke more effectively than those in Matthew, because Luke has included the narrative accounts which gave rise to the sayings. In the same way, they can receive the teaching of one of Paul's letters more effectively if it is placed in the context of the narratives in Acts and know how the letter relates to the people, places, and issues mentioned there. Those who use

[151] Tom A. Steffen, *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry,* quoted by Brown in IJFM, 2004, p.126
[152] Lovejoy

Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) will often include selections from the letters at appropriate places in telling the story of Acts. Small Scripture portions have been produced that do the same thing, especially in a series of 'biographical portions' such as *The Lives of the Prophets* and *The Lives of the Apostles*.

Eric Miller[153] has spent several decades training Christian workers in various parts of east Africa while based in Kenya with Intervarsity Christian Fellowship. Initially he used a traditional expository approach, setting out principles supported by texts and passages from Scripture. He always tried to give follow-up courses to his students and was very concerned when he found that after five years his trainees retained almost nothing of what he had taught. He then began to use a more 'inductive' approach, using only the Bible in manuscript format which guides the trainees as they read and discuss whole portions of Scripture in a chronological order. He found that the trainees took a much greater interest in the Word, and five years later their retention level was still high. Even the name of the course which they call the 'Berean Safari'[154] – a 'journey of discovery' – picks up this more narrative mode. The same approach has been used by some Bible translation teams as they prepare to translate the text.

In the previous section I looked at issues which Bible Translators have to take into account in producing a reliable translation which will have credibility in the context of a developing modern language.[155] In the book '*Communicating Christ Through Story and Song*' Dale Jones has written a chapter on 'Moving towards Oral Communication of the Gospel: Experiences from Cambodia'.[156] In this he highlights a dimension of this problem which is specific to the Khmer language and has relevance to the oral use of Scripture.

In Cambodia there is a 'high Khmer' language for speaking to royalty and a common vernacular for everyday use. There are various ways of saying, 'to

[153] See http://www.bereansafari.org/about-2/frequently-asked-questions/ [Accessed April 2011]
[154] Based on the response of the Bereans in Acts 17:11 and the Swahili word for journey, 'safari'
[155] See p.32
[156] Dale Jones chapter on 'Moving towards Oral Communication of the Gospel: Experiences from Cambodia', in De Neui, pp.174-202

go', for example, depending on the status of the person. This has given rise to a debate and division in the Khmer church about which is more appropriate language for the Bible. Some believe that to give God the respect and honour that is due to him the royal language should be used. Others are convinced that the common language would be more in keeping with the language of the New Testament in common, everyday Greek. Jones favours the use of the vernacular and 'whatever language best communicates the message'. He goes on 'a language which is understandable and easily recalled and retold is much more effective among oral learners.'[157]

In one country of Asia a large people movement began when the Scriptures were translated in a contextualized fashion (i.e. using the natural idiom of the language rather than imported expressions). One of the keys to this movement was the way that the translation was used. The evangelists and trainers would guide people through the discussion of whole portions, with lots of time to backtrack and look again at the evidence.

Jesus did the same thing on the road to Emmaus where his disciples were already familiar with the Old Testament. This meant that Jesus was able to remind them of all that Moses and the prophets had said concerning him (Luke 24:25–27). He had said earlier that seeing someone rise from the dead was not necessarily enough to produce faith; Jesus said, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead' (Luke 16:31). Therefore on the road to Emmaus, instead of revealing himself right away as risen from the dead, Jesus led them through the Old Testament.

Don Pederson writes,

> In searching for effective means of communicating the Gospel, we find in the narrative structure of the Bible God's choice for communicating with mankind. As missionaries from countries all over the world have used the biblical narrative to lay a foundation for the Gospel, they have given testimony to the power of scripture to bring new understanding to those they teach.[158]

In considering these examples, I believe that there are good reasons to begin Bible translation in the Old Testament, especially in the narrative portions,

[157] De Neui, p.189
[158] D. Pederson,

because they impart to the audience the concepts, worldview, and historical background that provide the context essential for understanding the Gospels. The goal of all translation is to transmit information. It is usually an effective strategy of communication to begin at the beginning and help those 'hearing' to develop progressively the key concepts in an increasingly familiar context.

With our current level of knowledge about orality and the benefits of good quality audio technology which does not cost a lot, it should be possible to provide oral material for the estimated four billion oral communicators. When the majority of a population or people group cannot read, and doubtfully ever will, the church needs to consider and embrace more widely an alternative to literacy strategy.

Christine Kilham commented in 1987 that translators who studied cultures where there was no written tradition (or only a very recent one) observed that speakers within these cultures have an innate understanding for the need to use different styles of translations for oral and written language. Written texts usually remove oral 'redundancy', and include grammatical and phonological corrections which are perfectly acceptable in the cut and thrust of speech.[159]

Kilham said that literacy must not be seen to be in competition with an oral approach. She highlighted the advantage of early implementation of literacy and creative writing programs so that an appropriate written style can develop from the start of the project. But she accepted that Christian maturity is possible without literacy. Oral approaches and methods should not be seen simply as a transition to literacy. God's Word is needed in a variety of media to provide access to all different kinds of people.[160] It seems that a single translation of the Bible may not prove satisfactory for two or more distinct audiences—such as one who prefers an oral version and one who prefers written text.

One of the pointers to the memorisation and learning of Scripture is from Psalm 119 v.11 when David says '*I have hidden your word in my heart that I*

[159] Christine A. Kilham, A written style for oral communicators (*Notes on Translation*, Special Edition, No.123:12, SIL, 1987), p.37
[160] Kilham, A written style, pp.45-46

might not sin against you.' Jones[161] quotes a Singaporean missionary referring to imprisoned Christians in China who have memorised entire books of the Bible. It was this that sustained them while they were held in solitary confinement.

In his 2007 MA Dissertation '*An Orality Strategy: Translating the Bible for Oral Communication*', Robin Green points out the current options for Bible translators working with languages of primary oral communicators. Often the heart language of such communities will not have been written down.

> The two generally recognized options for introducing Scriptures into oral cultures are the production of a *print translation* with accompanying literacy programs and the translation of *Bible stories in oral form* as a bridge to a later print translation.[162]

Green proposes a 'third way' to bring God's word to such people – an oral Bible translation. This would be different from other 'Oral Bible' projects. From the start of the translation project it would be planned as a permanent Scripture source for oral communicators. He identifies four factors as necessary for such a project. It should be a '*meaning-based translation'* prepared in an *'oral communication style' with 'sensitivity to both media and genre'.* Finally, these factors should be *'weighed against generally accepted goals for any translation'*.[163]

Such a 'dual' translation project could be a big step for many pioneer translators to take. It will require a change in mindset and it may not be appropriate in every instance. But the goal of translation is to communicate the gospel in a relevant and effective way. An oral translation developed as a permanent resource rather than as a transition to a written Bible would provide an important source document for assuring the accuracy and reliability of other oral techniques. It would contribute to producing the 'living' word in mature believers.

[161] De Neui, p.188
[162] Robin Green, *An Orality Strategy: Translating the Bible for Oral Communicators*, (Dissertation for MA, Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, 2007) [My emphasis]
[163] Green, *An Orality Strategy*

Chapter 4: Changing Lives

Missions and churches are involved in the task of proclaiming the gospel so that people will find Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to change them.[164]

The essential message of the Christian church is that God made man in his own image;[165] that sin distorted that image and created a barrier between man and God;[166] that God provided salvation and reconciliation through Jesus' death;[167] and that men can be transformed through the work of the Holy Spirit.[168] It is the journey to faith and changed lives that can be described as 'discipleship.'

Making Disciples

There are many ministries involved in evangelism and reaching the lost with the message of the gospel; and many Christian workers who dedicate their lives to this task. There are those who target the 'unreached people groups' around the world. This includes those involved in Bible translation and, as I have said, there are many languages still to be tackled.[169]

But increasingly both missions and churches are recognising that conversion to Christ is only the beginning. We are all on a journey of transformation by the work of the Holy Spirit and of growing in maturity to become the 'living word'. This need for nurturing and discipling young believers has not always been addressed in missions and churches. Yet it is part of the charge that Jesus gave his disciples when he left them to continue to task that he had begun. The need for 'making disciples' is central to the words of Jesus – known as the Great Commission – as recorded by Matthew:

> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore *go and make disciples of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and

[164] See 2 Cor 3:18 for Paul's affirmation of the transformation work of the Trinity
[165] Genesis 1: 27
[166] Genesis 3:23-24
[167] Romans 5:10
[168] 2 Corinthians 3:18
[169] http://www.wycliffe.org/About/Statistics.aspx

> teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."[170]

It is this command from Jesus to the first disciples to '*go and make disciples of all nations*' that is at the heart to the need for Christian discipleship. We should baptise new believers and teach them to obey Jesus commands. Paul put it this way in writing to the Colossians:

> We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.[171]

Making disciples is the task for the church and Christian missions who are motivated to take this world-wide mandate seriously. The 'Great Commission Missions'[172] which have been formed over the last 200 years or so of the Modern Missions movement are taking the good news of the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world. In 2004, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (LCWE) affirmed a commitment to create self sustaining churches 'within 6,000 remaining unreached people groups.'[173] At The Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town in 2010, it was recognised that there remained over 2,100 people groups (representing some 340 million people) who were 'unengaged or unreached' This was defined as those who have no access to even a portion of the Bible in their own 'heart' language.

There is still some way to go to fulfil the Great Commission and Christ's instruction, recorded by Luke in Acts, to be witnesses 'to the ends of the earth':

> … But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[174]

Many churches and mission agencies are now reviewing their work and its effectiveness. This process has sought to grapple with the evidence that the

[170] Matthew 28:18-20 *(my italics)*
[171] Colossians 1:9-12
[172] For example see www.sbc.net/missionvision – Southern Baptist Convention
[173] Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) No.54, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, (LCWE, 2005)
[174] Acts 1:8

response to the Gospel has been poor or at best patchy in many areas. Often the reasons for this are attributed to factors over which the evangelist has no control, such as past history or characteristics of the people group or the locality. In justification, some missionaries refer to the lessons from the parable of the sower and especially about the seed falling on stony ground.[175] But others are examining whether the problem might be failure to address the context the inappropriate way the word of God has been transmitted. Perhaps a different approach would allow the good news to be communicated more effectively. There have been (and sadly still are) times when evangelists or groups have concentrated on adding up numbers of those who have made 'decisions' or have been 'baptised' without paying attention to the need for follow up to nurture and disciple young believers to become mature Christians who will, in turn, pass on the gospel.[176] Thankfully this is becoming more of an exception.

There are also churches in the west which have begun to minister to and focus on reaching 'unengaged and unreached' groups within cities.[177] There are sub cultures in the west, often with significant numbers of secondary oral learners, who have not been touched by the established churches. Together with those who have never had the gospel in their own heart language they can be seen as 'unreached people groups.'

But the question remains about how to measure the effectiveness of making disciples. In the context of the present study how can the effective discipling in oral communities be measured? In the Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP No.54), '*Making Disciples of Oral Learners*' the vision is stated as:

> God's word for every 'tribe, tongue, people and nation'; addressing the issue of orality; resulting in church planting movements; providing resources for oral, chronological, narrative presentations of God's word, *in order to disciple and equip leaders*.[178]

[175] See Matthew 13:1-9
[176] This is Paul's principle which he spells out to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:2 (see below)
[177] One example is the Mosaic Church in downtown Los Angeles (see http://mosaic.org/about/). It meets in a nightclub and describes itself as '*a community of followers of Jesus Christ, committed to live by faith, to be known by love, and to be a voice of hope*' welcoming those '*from all walks of life, regardless of where they are in their spiritual journey*'.
[178] LOP No.54, p. 7 [My italics]

One of the characteristics of oral learners that I have already shown is that they observe and copy others. The Lausanne Paper suggests that the best discipling resource in an oral community is an obedient Christian rather than a printed text.[179] This is also true in many literate communities. Indeed it is very much in line with Paul's teaching. To the Philippian Church he writes:

> *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice* (Phil. 4:9).

And to his prodigy, Timothy, when he says:

> *. . . the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others* (2 Tim 2:2)

Some Christian workers believe that storying[180] may be appropriate for evangelism, but question whether such an approach is viable for a sustained, indigenous-led church which will reproduce.[181] Is it going to be able to produce believers who will grasp the doctrines and Biblical grounding necessary for ongoing discipleship among successive generations of believers and for leadership development in the church?

Practitioners working with oral communities in relational societies claim that it is not only viable but it is the preferred approach.[182] There is a need to use methods that oral learners can easily reproduce to ensure sustainability for an emerging, indigenous-led church.

For too long we have sought to produce programmes and methods and 'discipleship classes' within our churches. The challenge of orality (both for primarily oral communities but also for secondary oral communities in the increasingly post-literate 'west') is that people will 'read' other people rather than books and manuals! We need to continually review whether we are modelling the 'living word' in a way that we want others to follow. If those taking the gospel to unreached groups are demonstrating in their lives that they listen to God and are prepared to obey Him then this is the most powerful form of discipling. Oral communicators learn best when they copy the

[179] LOP No.54, p 32
[180] For a description of 'storying' see section starting on p.59 below
[181] See section on 'Why is there a reluctance …' p.66 below
[182] These include Weber, Steffen and Slack

characteristics of those who led them to Christ. As a result, the discipling of new believers starts even before their conversion.

In his book on church growth called *The Multiplying Church*, Bob Roberts, uses the term 'glocal' for the paradigm shift that the church – especially in North America – has to make. That is it must operate both locally and globally. In each of these spheres, he has identified 'the disciple' as the change agent. But this is a disciple who is able to *hear and obey* God rather than one who has been trained and gone through a discipleship programme. The disciple who will be used by God to transform society (whether literate, post-literate or oral) will be one who has first been transformed by God. Roberts of a disciple having 'a personal relationship with Christ [which] engulfs his or her life, family, and vocation and they way he or she relates to society.'[183]

The objective of effective evangelism and discipleship is to produce new, healthy churches. According to J.D. Payne, church planting 'is evangelism that results in churches. It is a means of seeing people come to faith, being baptized, and being taught. It is a means of fulfilling the Great Commission.'[184]

Preaching for oral learners – is exposition possible?

There is no doubt, as the following references show, that Scripture anticipates the Gospel will be proclaimed by preaching. In Luke 4 in the synagogue, Jesus takes the scroll and reads from Isaiah 61:

> 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
> because he has anointed me
> to preach good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
> and recovery of sight for the blind,
> to release the oppressed,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'[185]

Paul gives this instruction to Timothy with a focus on the important aspects of preparation ('be prepared' and 'patience') and content ('Word'):

[183] Bob Roberts, Jr., *The Multiplying Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2008), p. 109
[184] J. D. Payne, "Ecclesiology: The Most Critical Issue in Church Planting Today," *Theology for Ministry* 1 (2006), p.105-17
[185] Luke 4:18-19 quoting Isaiah 61:1-2

> Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.[186]

Preaching involves taking and applying God's written word so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the words spoken by the preacher will become the living word changing lives in the congregation. Does this progression from the 'written word' through the 'spoken word' to the 'living word' – which is transforming a 'literate' text and delivering it in an overwhelmingly 'oral' way – meet the needs of both literate and oral learners? Let me explore the evidence.

In the previous chapter, I showed that the Bible is 'God's Word' and has been delivered both orally and in written form.[187] It is important, therefore, that all preaching should be based on the Bible.

A study of homiletics reminds us that preachers must take account of their audience. In his work on the spectrum of oral communicators, Slack suggests that those at the oral end of the scale are more comfortable with little or no 'exposition'.[188] Yet there is an emphasis in much of the west on a return to 'expository preaching'. John Stott contends that Christian preaching should all be 'expository' by which he means based on biblical truth.

> To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor prises open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed.[189]

A standard dictionary definition of the word 'exposit' is 'to set forth one's reasons' or 'to add details to an account or idea; clarify the meaning of'.[190] This is the definition that Stott builds on in his explanation. In a paper on 'Literate Preachers confront Orality', Lovejoy suggests it is possible to prepare sermons that fit this definition (of 'expository') and 'not clash with the realities of orality'.[191] In order to do so, preachers need to understand both the biblical

[186] 2 Tim 4:2-3
[187] Starting on p.33
[188] See Slack's 'Learning Grid' in Figure 1 on p.26
[189] Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, p.126
[190] Dictionary.com, "exposit," in *WordNet® 3.0*. Source location: Princeton University. Available: http://dictionary.reference.com. [Accessed: April 2011].
[191] Grant Lovejoy, 'But I Did Such a Good Exposition: Literate Preachers Confront Orality.' , paper presented to the Evangelical Homiletics Society Conference, 2001

foundation of the message and the context of those to whom they are preaching.

Paul addresses the content of his preaching when he writes to the Corinthians:

> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.[192]

In several of his other letters[193] Paul reinforces this theme of preaching the gospel of Christ with the focus of his sermons on the cross. The content and focus is clear; but the presentation will vary according to those to whom it is preached.

Paul never separates the Christian life from the context in which it is lived. In addition to his letters which are written for particular churches and situations, Paul contextualised the gospel he preaches. As he addressed a Jewish audience in the synagogue in Antioch (Acts 13) Paul spoke about patriarchs, prophets, and prophecies of old fulfilled. His Jewish audience could easily identify with these themes. However, when Paul preached the same gospel in Athens (Acts 17) he changed his language to connect with intellectual Gentiles. He is aware of his context and picks up an inscription he has seen 'to an unknown God' (v. 23) and quotes from one of their poets (v. 27-28) as he calls them to repentance (v. 30) and warns them of the coming judgment (v. 30).

Paul never compromises or dilutes the gospel, but always communicates his message in a way that considers the cultural and religious background of his hearers. He sets out his concern for context when he says: 'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.'[194]

The same principle was applied by Jesus who adapted his teaching to his audience. This can be seen in Mark 4:33-34 when he used parables for the crowds speaking 'as much as they could understand' but later, when alone with his own disciples, 'he explained everything'. In telling his stories

[192] 1 Cor 1:17
[193] e.g. Romans 10; 15:20; 1 Cor 2: 1-5; Gal 3:13-14; Eph 3:8; Phil 1:14-18
[194] 1 Cor 9:22b could be described as setting out Paul's principle of contextualisation

sometimes Jesus was prepared to leave his audience to wrestle with the meanings without further explanation (or exposition). At other times and with different people (here with his disciples) he explained the meanings more fully.

Is there a problem for oral learners in unpacking the gospel message in an 'expository' way as suggested by Stott? Lovejoy cites Harold Bryson[195] who has argued against the tendency by some preachers that the definition of 'expository sermon' should be further refined (perhaps 'narrowed') to require particular forms of delivery. These include the need for detailed outlines with major points and sub-points taken from the text.[196]

Lovejoy also refers to an additional emphasis of expository preaching that has been highlighted by Bryan Chappell and John MacArthur. They both refer to the need for a thorough and exhaustive treatment of the biblical text. Chappell says that, 'exhausting the text is a distinction of expository preaching that obligates the preacher to deal with the entire passage.'[197] And MacArthur comments that preaching expositionally means 'preaching in such a way that the meaning of the Bible passage is presented *entirely* and *exactly* as it was intended by God.'[198]

Lovejoy agrees that thoroughness in dealing with the text is commendable in preaching. But if this is combined with 'the tendency to make the message more analytical and the outline more detailed' then the concern on the part of the preacher to be exhaustive within each sermon can become a real barrier for most oral learners.

So when Slack refers to a preference by primary oral learners for no exposition, I believe it is with detailed and analytical outlines rather than the basic etymological definition of 'unpacking or exposing' that he is concerned. This preference can also be seen in secondary oral cultures in the west. Neil Postman, a communications theorist at New York University, looking at

[195] Harold T. Bryson, Expository Preaching, (Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 1995)
[196] Bryson, p.18-21
[197] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching,* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1994), p.128
[198] John MacArthur, Jr., et al., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition*, (Dallas, Word Publishing, 1992), p.23-24, *MacArthur's emphasis*

broader society (not just in a Christian context) sees a decline in the ability of Americans to cope with exposition and to engage in high-level discourse about important topics. He blames this on modern technology and especially television. He says:

> Exposition is a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression. Almost all of the characteristics we associate with mature discourse were amplified by typography, which has the strongest possible bias toward exposition: a sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively, and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; an abhorrence of contradiction; a large capacity for detachment and objectivity; and a tolerance for delayed response.[199]

Postman asserts that his three-fold definition of exposition – a way of thinking; a method of learning; and means of expression – requires a set of skills that give it a distinctive character. Lovejoy points out that these skills and values are present in much expository preaching as well. Such preaching is …

> … usually conceptual, deductive, and sequential. It values reason and order and seeks to avoid contradiction. … [It] often seeks to communicate an objective (and therefore somewhat detached) approach to the text ... [and] commonly used language such as 'we see in the text' … [implies] that the preacher is viewing the text as an object … external … something to be "opened up" on the homiletical dissection table.[200]

Within the so-called Emergent Church, there has arisen a concern for the marginalised, an encouragement of literary and other readings of the Bible and an openness to critique. Paul Wilson in his book '*Preaching and Homiletic Theory*'[201] suggests that postmodern sermons will often seek to engage the experience of the hearers; attempt to confirm rather than to prove; value concrete experience over abstraction; allow for participation and disagreement; and are often inductive and employ narrative.[202] It seems that that some of these features have developed in an attempt to reach out to western urban society that has developed as a 'secondary oral culture'.

If a preacher is seeking to transmit the biblical truth to oral learners, then the he needs to use methods that make sense to them. Gene Davis puts it this way: '*People need to meet God and hear Him speak to their hearts in order*

[199] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, (New York, Elisabeth Sifton Books/Viking, 1985), p.63
[200] Grant Lovejoy, 'But I Did Such a Good Exposition: Literate Preachers Confront Orality.' , paper presented to the Evangelical Homiletics Society Conference, 2001, p.3
[201] Paul Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletic Theory*, (Atlanta, Chalice Press, 2002)
[202] Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletic Theory*, p.137

to produce Christian character.'[203] Literate-based preaching does not help oral learners to 'meet God and hear Him speak to their hearts.'

Some missionaries have begun working among oral groups with their initial objective to teach literacy to enable the communities to read and then to receive God's word. But this is not 'reaching out' in the way that Christ did and we act counter to the incarnational nature of Jesus work. Lovejoy suggests that if we seek to use preaching to raise literacy levels it is likely to fail to achieve both objectives. Rather, he suggests that if preaching can retain the narrative nature of so much of the Bible and there is 'a commitment to preach the whole counsel of God … half of our sermons [will be] narrative based and narrative in style'.[204]

Accordingly, Lovejoy suggests that preachers who want to reach oral learners should review the Scriptures that they use for preaching. He suggests using passages that are in story form and resisting the temptation to come up with 'an easy outline' from one of Paul's letters. Keep the narrative form as much as possible and the sense of suspense and drama that is often in the biblical text. Finally Lovejoy cautions the preacher to avoid giving long explanations that tend to dull the impact of the story.

Lovejoy's tips for preaching to oral learners as published in *The Baptist Standard* are reproduced in Appendix C.[205]

A 'Note' about Song

Perhaps one of the most effective expressions of orality is through song. Parry and Lord identified the ritual nature of song in the predominantly oral culture of Bosnia.[206] Within Scripture there is a significant emphasis on song. This is seen most notably in the Psalms. David wrote many of the Psalms and some of these had their inspiration during his most difficult trials. They were the basis for meditation and reflection on God's character as well as his

[203] Gene Davis, 'Is That Really God Speaking', *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12:2 (1995), p.98
[204] Lovejoy, 'But I Did Such a Good Exposition', p.8
[205] Appendix C, See p.80
[206] See A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1960) & p.17

wonders, works and words. But they also contain personal responses of David and the other writers as they testified to God's protection and provision or confessed failure or repentance. The human emotion contained in the Psalms speaks clearly to the oral communities of today.

In the New Testament there are examples of spiritual songs. It is thought that Paul quotes an early Christian hymn when he writes to the Philippians about the humility of Christ.[207] Then Paul instructs the Ephesians to, 'be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with *psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit*. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord …'.[208]

During times of spiritual awakening there are often many hymns and songs written to express and emphasise newly discovered truths. It is said that Charles Wesley composed and published over seven thousand hymns during his career.[209] These were sung as he travelled across Britain with his brother John. Not all have stood the test of time (especially beyond the Methodist Church) but there are many which are still very popular and widely sung today. The Salvation Army under William Booth took the tunes from very familiar oral songs which were common in pubs and music halls and 'converted' them into Christian hymns.[210] At the rallies and evangelistic gatherings of the Wesleys and during the early days of the Salvation Army, most of the people attending did not know the hymn tunes or gospel melodies from churches but they were familiar with music hall melodies.

A significant advantage of the singing of well written Biblical truths is that as they grow in popularity, the songs/ hymns are sung over and over again and the words (and therefore the truths on which they are based) which can be more easily memorised. This has been a feature of primary oral societies as demonstrated by Lord. It is also increasingly seen in the post-literate 'secondary orality' of the twenty-first century.

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[207] Philippians 2:6-8
[208] Ephesians 5:18-19 [*My emphasis*]
[209] Edwin F. Hatfield, *The Poets of the Church: A Series of Biographical Sketches of Hymn-Writers,* (New York, A.D.F. Randolph & Company, 1884), pp.647-658
[210] In his 1880 Christmas message William Booth wrote '*Secular music, do you say? Belongs to the devil, does it? Well, if it did, I would plunder him for it. … Every note and every strain and every harmony is divine and belongs to us.*' See http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki_ihc.nsf/ [Accessed May 2011]

John Oswald an ethnomusicologist and missiological practitioner working in Asia, prepared a paper highlighting important features of gospel communication with reference to Tibetan song. This is published as a chapter in '*Communicating Christ Through Story and Song*'.[211] Oswald comments on misunderstandings which can arise between Christian and Buddhist concepts. Sometimes words in a language (be it Tibetan, Thai or Khmer) can be taken by Christians and invested with a new meaning. Christians may understand the difference but need to be aware in conversation with Buddhist enquirers that such an adjustment cannot be made because they will not be aware of what is, to them, a completely novel Christian concept.[212]

Oswald observes that, although verbal communication will be used often to explain such profound differences, '*music and song can … pave a pathway though the complexities of this process.*'[213] He says that music *'preaches; it can express things we cannot say; it is often the first means by which the gospel is heard …'*[214]

J. Nathan Corbitt has also written about the theology of music. He says,

> *'Music was preaching for Martin Luther; was a testimony of grace to John Newton …; and music was the "soul of the Civil Rights Movement" to Martin Luther King Jr."*[215]

In effect, hymnbooks are the repository of theology for the literate church while *'congregational song is the oral theology of the Emerging World church'*. Popular songs contain the belief systems (in Corbitt's words, 'the theological creed') of secular society.[216]

In his paper, Oswald goes on to talk about the emergence of 'heart music' which is the style of music which most fully expresses the emotions of cultural insiders. In 2003 a network called the *International Council of Ethnodoxologists* was formed to develop and promote 'culturally appropriate

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[211] John Oswald, chapter on 'Gospel Communication in Tibetan Song', in Paul De Neui, Ed., *Communicating Christ Through Story and Song*, (Pasadena, CA, William Carey Library, 2008), pp.237-272
[212] Lausanne Occasional Paper No 15, *Christian Witness to Buddhists, Thailand Report*, (LCWE, 1980), p.8
[213] De Neui, p.239
[214] De Neui, p.240
[215] J.Nathan Corbitt, *The Sound of the Harvest: Music's Mission in Church and Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1988), p.173
[216] Corbitt, p.173

Christian worship'.[217] This term has its roots in the Greek words 'ethne' (peoples) and 'doxos' (glory or praise). It was coined by Dave Hall who defines it as

> 'the study of the worship of God among diverse cultures' or, 'the theological and practical study of how and why people of diverse cultures praise and glorify the true and living God as revealed in the Bible.'[218]

Ethnodoxology covers all of the arts (such as dance, drama, video, visuals) as well as how people participate in other aspects of church life such as preaching, the communion, baptism, and the offering. But it goes beyond worship as an event because it studies how worship shapes, or is shaped by, life as lived within a cultural or ethnic group. This echoes Paul's words in Romans, *'I urge you,… to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.'*[219]

Oswald focuses on Tibetan Christian experience with songs but also uses reports and accounts from several Asian countries. He shows that songs written by national believers are more likely to address local cultural norms than those translated from other languages. In relation to Tibet he observes that *'heart music focused on Christ and his gospel is quietly on the increase in these mountain lands.'*[220]

Some of the features of Tibetan Christian songs pick up on the characteristics of oral societies identified by Ong and others. Communities are more important than in the individualistic west. Analysis of songs originating in English and in Tibetan show opposite profiles for the use of the first person singular (I, me, mine) and the first person plural (we, us, ours). English songs had a 60% preference for 'I' while the Tibetan ones a 65% preference for 'We'.

[217] International Council of Ethnodoxologists, see www.worldofworship.org [accessed May 2011]
[218] See www.worldofworship.org/Ethnodoxology.php [Accessed May 2011]
[219] Romans 12:1
[220] De Neui, p.248

Section III – Reaching out with the spoken word

Chapter 5: Tools for the Task

Programmes to reach Oral Communities

Given the enormity of the task of reaching over 60% of the world's population with the Gospel, it is understandable that there are many different plans and programmes in use or being developed today. These are helpful because it is likely that there is no one size that suits all and it is constructive if the individuals and organisations working in this field can share their ideas and learn from each other.

Over the last ten years, co-operative networks have been set up. As a result, research and practical out-working of strategies are being shared. In 2001, following an orality consultation in California, the 'Oral Bible Network' (OBN) was formed by four initial partners. This network grew after two further consultations and provided significant input in 2004, to a forum organised in Thailand by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation. Orality was one of 31 'issue' working groups which had been set up. The results of this work was edited and published as *'Making Disciples of Oral Learners"*.[221] The following year the Lausanne working group merged with the OBN to form the International Orality Network (ION).[222]

Avery Willis, was the first executive director of the ION, which had developed into a partnership of 22 mission agencies including the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board (IMB), Youth With a Mission (YWAM), Trans World Radio, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Wycliffe Bible Translators. In an article called 'Winning the Oral Majority' in the 18th May 2010 issue of *Christianity Today*, he is quoted as saying '*Since the printing of the Gutenberg Bible Western Christianity "has walked on literate feet," indirectly requiring literacy for evangelism and discipleship*.'[223] There are many programmes being developed by 'specialists' (often linked with or motivated by ION) who are catching the vision to reach out to the 'oral majority' with the gospel.

[221] LOP No.54,
[222] From http://oralbible.com/about/history [Accessed Feb 2011]
[223] http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/march/30.56.html

Chronological Storying

In the 1970s Trevor McIlwain was working with New Tribes Mission (NTM) in the Philippines. He tried various teaching methods as he worked with a tribal group who had professed faith in Christ but had reverted later to many former beliefs. Then he began to develop an approach which he later documented in 'Firm Foundations' series.[224] This became widely known and used for teaching and discipleship in many places including Cambodia where it is produced in bi-lingual Khmer-English versions. This approach is often referred to as Chronological Bible Teaching (CBT). [225]

Other techniques, some more related to storytelling were used in the 1980s. One of these, the 'God and Man' series developed in Philippines[226] by Dell and Sue Schultze, has also seen a significant spread around the world. The full CBT approach involves as many as seven Phases of teaching. The first four are for 'New Believers' working through the Old Testament, Gospels, Acts, the Epistles and then Revelation. The last three are for 'Maturing Believers' again working through the whole sweep of scripture. These Phases are set out in the diagram in Appendix D.[227]

McIlwain's CBT approach attracted the interest of Jim Slack (of IMB) and other missionaries from the NTM working in other parts of the Philippines. As they began to use the material they recognised that it was too literate for use by many Filipino church leaders. To meet the needs of oral learners, several missionaries began to work on adaptations which used more narrative material but retaining some expositional teaching. Collectively these became known as Chronological Bible Storying (CBS).

Some practitioners were, and are, hesitant about using stories to teach Biblical truths. But N. T. Wright suggests in his book 'New Testament and the People of God' that a '*story, with its pattern of problem and conflict, of aborted attempts at resolution, and final result, . . . is, if we may infer from the*

[224] T McIlwain, *Firm foundations: Creation to Christ,* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1991)
[225] See the CBT steps developed and used by McIlwain are set out in Appendix D (p.75)
[226] Dell G. Schultze and Rachel Sue Schultze, *God and Man* (Manila: Privately published, 1984; rev. ed., 1987; Manila: Church Strengthening Ministry, 1994)
[227] Appendix D, p.81

common practice of the world, universally perceived as the best way of talking about the way the world actually is.'[228]

As well as working towards the objective of the oral transmission of the stories rather than using a written text, CBS takes account of the bridges and barriers for and to the gospel for each particular group. This may result in needing a different (or adapted) set of stories for each application. Also important in the CBS approach is the need for the stories to be memorable so that they can be easily reproduced with accuracy.

Appendix E[229] includes the ten step process which is included in one of the training programme to help in developing a Bible story set. It is important that the collection of stories is chosen with a clear objective and that there is proper accountability and feedback. Not every organisation using storying has the same approach. As is out in Hurley's work below,[230] some have a concern for as literal a narrative as possible while others encourage the use of a more flowing interpretation.

There are even greater risks inherent in these choices for programmes seeking to reach oral learners than there are for printed translations which I looked at in Chapter 3. A literal translation will be harder for the hearers to understand and remember but it has a much lower risk of not being true to the original. On the other hand, a translation produced to flow in the oral style and form of the hearer's language is likely to be used, remembered and reproduced but has a greater risk of misrepresenting the original. Great care and skill are required to get the balance right. This is one of the reasons why those organisations involved in storying programmes attach great importance to training.

Techniques and procedures are used to ensure that stories and story sets are 'true to the biblical story'. Practitioners are encouraged to differentiate biblical truth from background information (shared before if necessary) and

[228] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p.40
[229] See Appendix E, p.82
[230] See Different approaches to 'Storying' below, p.62

implications, application and elaboration which can be part of a post-story dialogue time. These points are listed in Appendix E as Slack's guidelines on 'Maintaining the integrity of the story'.[231]

The two programmes below essentially follow a standard CBS approach.

- **Scripture in Use (SIU)**

Scriptures In Use specializes in providing resources and training grass roots church planters who communicate the Oral Bible, guiding and mentoring each church planter to develop a grass roots church planting ministry through simple Bible storytelling and other traditional oral communication media.[232] SIU offers a *Communication Bridges to Oral Cultures* training course that instils a love for the Scriptures in the mother tongue through a systematic chronological Bible storytelling approach. This 4-day, intensive training teaches the fundamentals of evangelism and discipleship for local leaders or trainers working among non-literate or traditionally oral people groups

- **Following Jesus Series**

Following Jesus: Making Disciples of Oral Learners, (2002) an orally-based discipleship resource. Following Jesus models the practice of identifying a biblical truth that should be taught, inquiring how the people group would perceive that truth through their worldview, and then selecting biblical stories that could be used to teach that truth in light of that worldview. It consists of seven modules of 53 audio CDs that teach how to communicate to oral learners.

[231] See Appendix E, p.82
[232] See www.siutraining.org/resources.htm [Accessed 20 March 2011]

Different approaches to 'Storying'

Rachel Hurley, an SIL missionary working with International Cooperation Cambodia[233] in Cambodia has studied methods of reaching oral learners in Cambodia. A partial summary of resources available in April 2008 can be found in Appendix E.[234] This summary includes manuals to explain techniques as well as audio and visual materials. Recently Hurley examined[235] different techniques of storying.

Hurley demonstrates that the use of the term 'Bible storying' does not indicate an identical process in different mission organizations. She compared three different oral Bible story methods. The first is a method called 'Bible Telling' which was developed by John Walsh and the Christian Storytelling Network (CSN);[236] the second is from the OneStory partnership[237] which brought together several organisations interested in developing quality stories for Chronological Bible Storying (CBS); and the third is 'Simply the Story' from the God's Story project[238] which seeks to provide a means of doing 'inductive bible study in an oral style'.

The CSN model encourages tellers to learn the story, internalise it and then tell it in as natural a way as possible. This is an informal approach and there is not a concern for a word-perfect reproduction of the story. The OneStory technique undertakes a sociolinguistic survey of the recipient group and the series of stories are crafted and tested with great care (much like a translation would be) over a period of time. Finally, Simply the Story develops what Hurley calls 'a literal paraphrase'[239] taking note of the warning in Revelation not to add or subtract any words.[240] The stories are not 'crafted' and there is a concern that it is the Holy Spirit (rather than those developing or telling the story) who should take and apply the oral Word.

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[233] SIL operates in Cambodia as part of a multi-agency NGO called International Cooperation Cambodia (ICC)
[234] For Appendix E see p.82
[235] Rachel E. Hurley, *Oral Bible Stories: A Brief Comparison of Three Telling Methods*, (paper submitted in partial fulfilment of course on Research Methods for the Performing Arts, Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, 2009)
[236] See www.bibletelling.org
[237] See www.onestory.org
[238] See www.gods-story.org/sts/
[239] Hurley (2009), Section IV
[240] Revelation 22: 18-19

Hurley concludes that each method has value and that they could each learn from the other.[241] As a language researcher she highlights the importance of understanding the culture and storying techniques of the recipient group. She suggests that the success of any technique can be measured by the indigenisation of the local church. This will happen as people are converted and discipled through material in their 'heart language.' Hurley suggests that storying, if done through culturally appropriate means, can 'oxygenise the heart of the local church.'

The OneStory partnership provides a useful model of cooperation to produce worthwhile materials and training in ways that transcend the individual agencies.

- **OneStory**

OneStory, (previously called Epic) is a partnership founded and managed by Campus Crusade, International Missions Board (of the Southern Baptists), Trans World Radio, Wycliffe International and YWAM and partnering with many others. [242] Each partner organization has a particular set of strengths to bring to the task of taking the gospel to the least-reached people groups and those without the Bible. In encouraging storying and other oral strategies, the OneStory objective is to see a response to the gospel which will result in healthy, indigenous and reproducing churches. Training and workshops are available to encourage the establishment of OneStory training centres. These will prepare forty to fifty initial stories in an unreached people's language involving and equipping mother-tongue storyers to tell the stories and multiply churches.

[241] Hurley (2009), Concluding Remarks
[242] See www.onestory.org

Other initiatives (materials & training)

Among other programmes (both individual and collaborative) currently providing materials and training for reaching oral communicators are the following.

- **Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH)**

FCBH has dramatized word-for-word recordings of the entire New Testament in 150 languages, with 50 more in process.[243] They have training on how to use these recordings to disciple oral people through the formation of Faith Comes By Hearing listening groups. There are 25 national recording teams in 12 Recording Service Centres located throughout the world that are trained to do dramatized recordings including music and sound effects with portable digital recording and editing equipment.

- **Radio ministries**

Radio plays an important part in supporting oral approaches. FEBA Radio has partnered with other agencies in Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa in broadcasting stories. TWR has identified orality as one of five top strategic initiatives. In Cambodia, for example, TWR is producing dramatized story sets on an SD card which can be played in a low cost 'sound box' using batteries and can be charged from a car battery or using a phone charger.

- **Global Recordings Network (GRN)[244]**

GRN has produced audio and audio-visual Bible-based evangelism and discipling resources in more than 5500 languages designed specifically for non- and minimally-literate people groups. GRN uses language speakers to record Bible stories and other materials their own 'heart' language[245] in as natural a way as possible. These resources continue to be refined as GRN develops strategic partnerships with other like-minded organizations to reach the unreached oral communicators of the world.

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[243] See www.fcbh.org [Accessed 20 March 2011]
[244] See http://globalrecordings.net/de/1464 [Accessed April 2011]
[245] Nelson Mandela said, *'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.'* http://www.africanvoices.co.za/ [Accessed April 2011]

- **The Radio Bible Project**

The Radio Bible Project is a global partnership between Hosanna/Faith Comes By Hearing, the International Bible Society, Trans World Radio, and the United Bible Societies formed to bring the Word of God to oral societies.[246] The Radio Bible consists of 365 fifteen-minute broadcasts of stories from the Old and New Testaments. These allow both literate and oral communicators the opportunity to hear the Bible in an interesting dramatized format.

[246] See www.theradiobible.org [Accessed March 2011]

Chapter 6: Getting on with the Job

Why is there a reluctance to embrace Oral Methods?

I pointed out earlier that Kelber has identified a lack of biblical scholarship which includes a genuine appreciation of orality studies.[247] It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a similar reluctance to embrace oral methods on the part of literate practitioners (evangelists and church planters) who have been trained also to think 'in literary, linear, and visual terms.'

In addition to the fact that practitioners do not come from oral communities, from discussions and observations in Cambodia I suggest that there are at least four reasons for this reluctance.

Firstly it can be because of *lack of awareness*. In talking to Christian workers and sharing the title of this dissertation I have often been met with the response 'What is orality?' Even, at times, some people have thought that they heard me say 'morality'! So, in spite of the work of the ION and its members and the focus on 'orality' by organisations such as Lausanne, many people have not come to terms with fact that so many people do not have access to God's word because they cannot read.

Secondly it can be from a *lack of understanding*. For some in missions work 'orality' means 'Bible storying' and that is all.[248] There is a need to highlight the range of methods that are available to reach oral communicators. There is also a need for mission workers to understand that there are different degrees of literacy.[249] It would also be helpful for missions who have embraced orality to develop and promote a simple but objective test which would allow those working in specific areas (both urban and rural) to find out the nature and extent of literacy among those with whom they are working. This would help to highlight the blockages to either responding to the gospel for the first time or to showing signs of growth in their Christian discipleship.

[247] Kelber, *The oral and the written Gospel*, p.2; and see comments at p.22 above
[248] In asking whether Christian workers used oral techniques, it has not been uncommon for me to be told that 'those with whom I work are all literate.'
[249] See pp.25-26 above

Thirdly the reluctance can result from *fear of doctrinal error*. There is a concern that doctrines cannot be communicated adequately by storying. N.T, Wright points out the error of assuming that Jesus' parables are simply illustrations of truths that could otherwise have been told in a more abstract way. Rather, he says that Jesus' stories '*like all stories in principle, invited his hearers into a new world, making the implicit suggestion that the new worldview be tried on for size with a view to permanent purchase*.'[250]

Some would argue that Romans, for example, cannot be told in a narrative format. But much concern is about the lack of reference points in an oral culture and there being no checks and balances. Again sometimes this can be a risk because of lack of knowledge or training. A comic illustration about the distortion of messages passed from person to person comes to mind.[251] I seek to address these concerns in the next section on 'Can Oral Transmission of God's Word be Trusted?'[252]

Finally there can be a natural *reluctance to change*. This is especially so when there is no perceived need. In some mission areas, strong indigenous churches have been established and the work is thriving. It is difficult to change if existing methods are to be 'tried and tested' having worked in other places and at other times. In others, if progress in making disciples is slow then this may be excused by suggesting that it is all part of the spiritual warfare. Logical, expositional ministry can also seem to be more Biblical than 'telling stories' which are associated with Children's ministry rather. But perhaps mission worker's own experience of learning (coming from a literate culture) and our cultural baggage is getting in the way.

If the church is to take the task of 'making disciples' seriously then it must be prepared to put itself in the shoes of those it is seeking to reach. All too often Christian workers come from a highly literate background with years of academic learning and we approach the task (as 'transmitters') from that perspective. Instead there is a need to consider those are being taught (the

[250] Wright, p .77
[251] When, after many repetitions, the message '*Send reinforcements, we are going to advance!*' becomes '*Send three and fourpence we are going to a dance!*'
[252] See p.68 below

'receptors'). In considering orality – and, perhaps, in other areas too – there is a constant need to evaluate and reassess methods and approaches.

Can Oral Transmission of God's Word be trusted?

In the 1995 special edition of the IJFM, Ansre wrote about two common modes of speech media – 'orality' and 'graphology.' Orality, has already been defined;[253] Ansre uses the term 'graphology' for all written communication – whether writing or printing.

Ansre wrote that committing messages to print will give permanence to the form and content which has not been possible with oral transmission. This has been highly effective in evangelism and teaching, and is potentially long-lived.[254] With current technology, on the other hand, it seems likely that orality can match or even surpass the effectiveness of the written word among oral communicators.

Many mission leaders of the past also assumed that the written word is necessary for the development of ministry, but again, the facts disprove this. There are godly Christian pastors and evangelists who are not functionally literate, but who have memorized the Word and internalized its message. Oral communicators are often the best ones to reach other non-readers, because they have not lost their oral communication skills.[255]

In the section above on *Preaching for oral learners*[256] I explored the nature and content of preaching and how there is a need to include narrative and other forms of preaching in order to reach oral learners – whether primary or secondary.[257] This dissertation has been about 'orality' and meeting the needs of oral learners but of course preaching is 'oral transmission' of God's word and that usually happens at least once every week in churches throughout the world.

[253] See Chapter 1 on p.10 above
[254] Ansre, IJFM 1995, p. 65
[255] R Brown, Communication God's Word to an Oral Culture, (Paper, 2001)
[256] Starting on p.48
[257] See pp.52-53

However, when preaching to a literate congregation it is not uncommon for the preacher to encourage hearers to read and engage with the text for themselves. In Acts, Luke notes this very behaviour from the Berean Jews in response to the teaching of Paul in the synagogue. He says that '*they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed.*'[258]

Paul gives this warning in one of his letters:

> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse![259]

Indeed, church history from New Testament times onwards has many examples of the gospel being distorted. It is essential to recognise that there is a need to be aware of the spiritual dimension as God builds and protects his church.

In the section above on *The Bible as 'God's Word'*[260] I set out some of the issues with which Bible translators have to grapple. I pointed to the evidence within the Bible itself of the legitimacy of translation – even when the translation may have been produced without the discoveries and scholarship that we have available today. [261] I have noted Beckwith's comment that '*the transmission of the text is firmly controlled by the providence of God.*' As a result we can that have confidence any changes because of archaeological finds or further scholarship and research will not undermine God's purpose to guide his people through Scripture. [262] These issues of changes and revisions of the written word will also apply to the oral word.

Those working to provide materials, whether through storying, oral bibles or resources in other media, as mentioned in Chapter 5[263] have been concerned to have built in checks and balances. In this way, the truths of the Gospel can be checked and monitored and corrections and adjustments made to the material that has been used.

[258] Acts 17:11-12
[259] Gal 1:8
[260] Starting on p.33
[261] See pp.34-35
[262] Beckwith, p.33
[263] Starting on p.58

But ultimately, as with preaching to literate congregations, there is a need to rely on the work of the Holy Spirit to bring the spoken word of God alive in the hearts of those who will hear.

Conclusion

For the Great Commission task to be accomplished we must change. Changes must be made at all levels and in all areas of the Christian church; in the so-called literate west and the emerging power-houses of the east; in cities as well as in the more remote rural areas of the developing world; in mega churches and in small cell churches; and in Bible Colleges and in places of commerce and business.

Fifteen years ago Klem wrote:

> After over 150 years of literacy based mission strategy, we will still miss half the world if we continue believing that people must read in order to receive the Word.[264]

The figures are even greater today both proportionately and in absolute terms.[265] I have touched briefly on the use of song in the Bible and in more recent church history.[266] David Lim has written of the need for the church to rediscover Biblical worship (in its widest sense) as a means of communication the gospel more effectively to those in need. He claims that it is not just tinkering at the edges but a much more radical innovation that is needed to enable Christians and churches to grow to full maturity in Christ. This includes meeting in smaller groups, using Bible storying, serving our neighbours and allowing those of other faiths (and none) to see that Christianity makes a difference in the way we live our lives.[267]

Robin Green sets out a convincing case for an oral 'translation' of Scripture prepared specifically and as a permanent tool for use by oral communicators.[268] He challenges translators to see such an 'oral Bible' in certain situations as

> … neither substitute (implying inferiority) nor supplement (implying insufficiency), but a more appropriate alternative (implying equality).[269]

This should be seen as an additional strategy to be used alongside Bible Storying. It could provide a reliable and trusted source document for primary

[264] Klem in IJFM, 1995, p. 64
[265] See p.27 above
[266] Section beginning on p.53
[267] David Lim, *Biblical Worship Rediscovered*, in De Neui, p. 59
[268] See p.43 above
[269] Green, *Orality and Bible Translation*, pp.105-106

oral communities in the same way as a printed Bible can be for literate communities. This would provide an important means to safeguard to doctrinal integrity in the spirit of Acts 17.[270]

The church and mission community must not allow the literate training and background of church leaders and missionaries to produce another barrier for oral learners which is not justified by scripture.[271] Rather, allow the Holy Spirit to produce the 'living word' as he transforms lives in ways that will leave us amazed. Lim quotes Albert Einstein: *'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.'*[272] Let us not be guilty of such madness.

The task is immense, the technology is available, the tools are being produced, and there are many opportunities to both evangelise and disciple oral communities. Let us not allow ignorance, fear or complacency to prevent the advance of the kingdom of God.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to let Paul have the last word. He said

> 'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.'[273]

[270] See p.69 above
[271] See Klem's comment quoted on p.30 above
[272] De Neui, p.59
[273] 1 Cor 9:22b

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Appendices

Appendix A – UNESCO Definition of Terms

From the Glossary of the EFA Global Monitoring Report for 2006: [274]

Adult literacy rate. Number of literate persons aged 15 and above, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group. Different ways of defining and assessing literacy yield different results regarding the number of persons designated as literate.

Functional literacy/illiteracy. A person is functionally literate/illiterate who can/cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development. (Definition originally approved in 1978 at UNESCO's General Conference, and still in use today.)

Literacy. According to UNESCO's 1958 definition, it is the ability of an individual to read and write with understanding a simple short statement related to his/her everyday life. The concept of literacy has since evolved to embrace multiple skill domains, each conceived on a scale of different mastery levels and serving different purposes. See Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion.

Literacy practices. The actual uses and applications of literacy skills in specific social settings (e.g. households, markets, workplaces, public offices, religious ceremonies, political movements).

Literacy projects/programmes. Limited-duration initiatives designed to impart initial or ongoing basic reading, writing and/or numeracy skills.

Literate/Illiterate. As used in the statistical annex, the term refers to a person who can/cannot read and write with understanding a simple statement related to her/his everyday life. (Based on UNESCO's 1958 definition.)

Multiple literacies. The concept of a multiplicity of skills such as 'information literacy' 'visual literacy', 'media literacy' and 'scientific literacy'.

Oral literacy. Transmission of knowledge by word of mouth from one generation to another. The term is derived from ethnography and anthropology.

Youth literacy rate. Number of literate persons aged 15 to 24, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

[274] *Literacy for Life*, (Paris, UNESCO, 2005), Glossary, p.418-423

Appendix B – Differences between Oral and Print Communicators

From Brown (1995), adapted from Ong (1982). *All pages from Ong 1982*.

Oral Communicators ...	Print Communicators ...	*Page ref in Ong*
…learn by hearing (hearing-dominance).	…learn by seeing (sight-dominance).	121
…learn by observing and imitating, by listening and repeating, by memorizing proverbs, traditional sayings, stories, songs, and expressions.	…learn by reading non-fiction, by studying, examining, classifying, comparing, analyzing.	8-9, 41, 43
…think and talk about events, not words.	…think and talk about words, concepts, principles.	12, 61
…'use stories of human action to store, organize, and communicate much of what they know'; information is 'embedded in the flow of time' usually on a 'story line'.	…manage knowledge "in elaborate, more or less scientifically abstract categories", and store it in print rather than in stories.	140, 141
…memorize information handed down from the past.	…seek to discover new information.	41
…value tradition	…value novelty	41
…view matters in the totality of their context, including everyone involved.	…view matters abstractly and analytically.	175
…learn and retain knowledge in relation to real or imagined events in human life.	…learn and retain knowledge as general principles, with events as examples.	42
…recite genealogies but make few lists.	…make lists but recite few genealogies.	43
…relate closely to the people and events they know about.	…relate more objectively to what they know, because writing comes between them.	46
…reason from experience and association.	…reason logically, with analysis and explanation.	172
…tend to communicate in groups.	…tend to communicate one-to-one.	69, 74
…learn mostly in interaction with other people.	…learn mostly alone.	69
…are deeply affected by the sound of what they hear.	…are affected by the content of what they read.	73
…emphasize clarity and style of speech.	…emphasize clarity and validity of reasoning.	109
…view speech primarily as a way of relating to people, or as a form of entertainment.	…view speech primarily as a means of conveying information.	177
…respond to a speaker while he is speaking and participate in the story-telling.	…generally read or listen quietly, privately.	42
…engage in verbal contests, trying to excel in praise, insults, riddles, jokes, etc.	…engage in few verbal contests, but write letters to the editor, etc.	44
…believe that oral exchange should normally be formal, carefully articulated.	…believe that oral exchange should normally be informal, casual.	136

Oral Communicators ...	Print Communicators ...	*Page ref in Ong*
…can produce, in some cases, beautiful verbal art forms, such as epic poems and ballads.	…can produce, in some cases, interesting literature, but generally not verbal art forms of a high quality.	14
…view a written text as a record of something spoken or an aid to memorization.	…view a written text as a vessel of information.	126
…often imagine the sounds of the words when they read.	…take in the content but not the sound when they read.	121
…prefer to read aloud to groups.	…prefer to read alone.	131
…communicate by joining sentences with conjunctions such as ‘and’, ‘then’.	…communicate by joining sentences with subjunctions such as ‘while’, ‘after’.	37
…frequently use words in set phrases, such as sayings, proverbs, riddles, formulas, or just descriptions such as ‘brave soldier’.	…generally use words independently, with few set phrases.	38
…appreciate repetition, in case something was missed the first time.	…do not like repetition, since material missed can be read again.	39
…like verbosity because speaking is fast.	…like brevity because writing is slow.	40
…use exaggerated praise or scorn.	…use moderate praise or scorn.	45
…prefer heavy characters in their stories.	…prefer realistic characters in stories.	70
…create art forms that emphasize struggle against an enemy.	…create art forms that emphasize struggle to reach a goal or overcome an obstacle.	44
…use symbols and stories to illustrate the message.	…use charts, diagrams, and lists to explain the message.	101, 130
…can organize experiences, episodes, etc.	…can organize long, logical arguments.	57
…construct longer narratives by stringing episodes together; themes may be repeated in several episodes.	…construct narratives with chronologically linear plots that reach a climax and resolution; any themes are validated by the outcome.	142, 144, 147
…use their hands to help express themselves when they tell stories, through gestures or by playing musical instruments.	…use their hands little, since gestures are not written or read.	67, 47
…leave much of the message un-verbalized, depending instead on shared situation, shared culture, intonation, facial gestures, and hand gestures to help communicate the message.	…must, when writing, make the message clear without recourse to situation, gesture, or intonation.	104, 106
…can be imprecise, and clarify as needed, based on the listener’s reaction.	…must, when writing, avoid ambiguities and vagaries.	106
…avoid answering questions directly.	…answer questions directly.	68
…are uninterested in definitions.	…appreciate definitions.	47

Appendix C – Tips for preaching to oral learners

Grant Lovejoy, preaching professor at Southwestern Seminary, suggested seven principles to guide preaching for an audience of oral learners:[275]

1. Preach from biblical stories frequently. 'Highly literate people gravitate to Paul because his writings are easy to outline. Instead, preach from passages that are in story form.'

2. Keep the narrative quality of the passage intact. 'Give the story as a story,' he suggested, rather than imposing a propositional structure and outline.

3. Sprinkle the sermon with proverbial sayings. Oral learners enjoy pointed, pithy, memorable sayings. 'Give them the kind of thing someone will bring back three weeks later as a cross-stitch.'

4. Respect the power of the biblical story. 'Ask yourself, "What is it that you are doing that improves on what God has given?"'

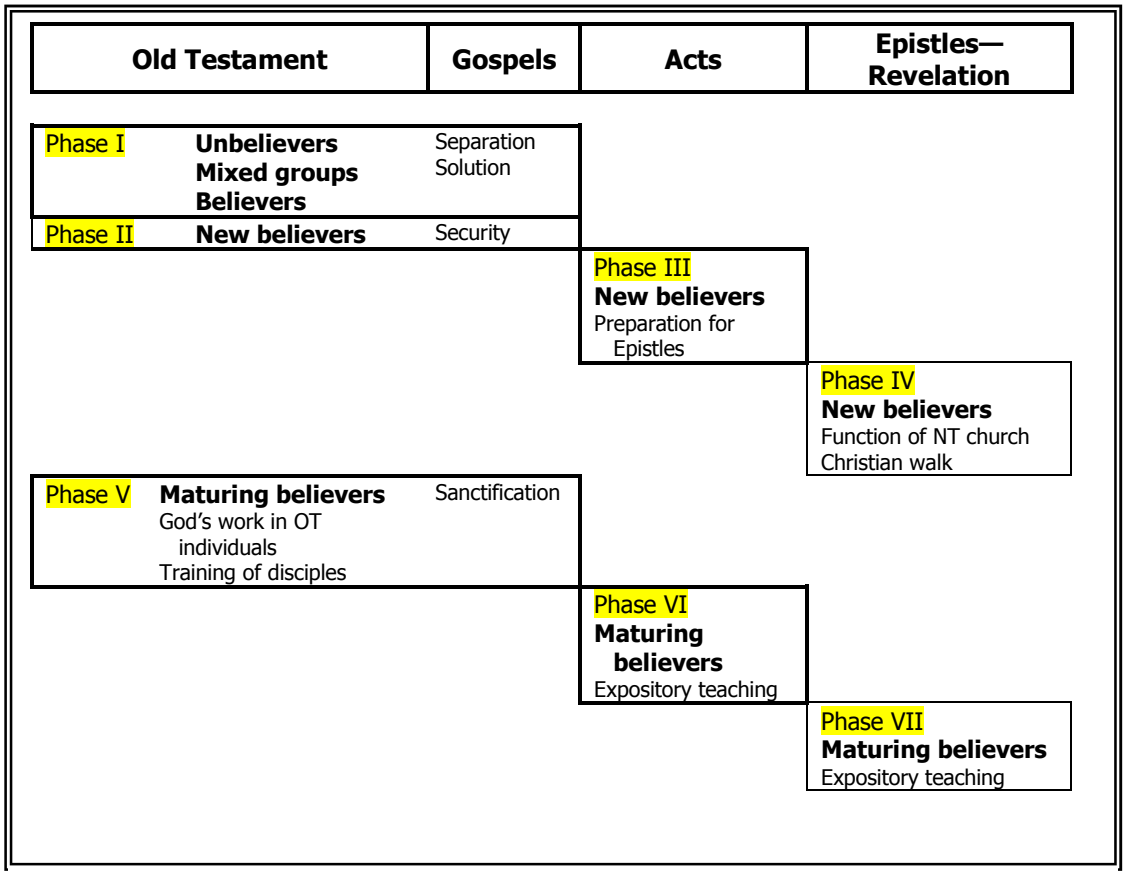
5. Retain the suspense and drama of the biblical story. Allow listeners to experience the story as it first was presented.

6. Help listeners relive the story. 'Don't tell it in Joe Friday fashion--just the facts, ma'am. Surround them with the reality of the story.'

7. Resist the temptation to over-explain. Oral learners neither grasp nor appreciate long explanations that dull the impact of a good story.

[275] From http://www.baptiststandard.com/2001/4_2/print/literacy_tips.html [Accessed April2011]

Appendix D – Phases of Chronological Bible Teaching (CBT)



Phases of Chronological Bible Teaching (CBT)

(Source: Adapted from McIlwain, 1981:12a-12c, 1987:131)[1]

Appendix E – Guidelines in producing Bible Stories

The Ten Step Process to develop a Bible story set)[276]

1. *Identify* the biblical principle or truth you want to communicate; make it clear and simple.
2. *Evaluate* the worldview of the chosen people group.
3. *Consider* and identify the bridges, barriers, and gaps in their worldview.
4. *Select* the appropriate Bible story or stories that will communicate the principle considering the worldview issues of the chosen people.
5. *Craft* the story *and plan* the pre-story and the post-story dialog to emphasize the principle or truth you want to communicate.
6. *Tell* the story in a culturally appropriate way, which will be through narrative and perhaps also through song, dance, drama, or other means.
7. *Facilitate* the dialogue with the group to help them discover the meaning and the application without your having to tell them.
8. Help the group *obey* the biblical principle.
9. Establish group *accountability*.
10. Encourage the group to *reproduce* this by modelling the principles in their own life and then telling the stories and discipling other people.

Maintaining the integrity of the story (per Slack[277])

1. The story should be true to the biblical story
2. Take care not to unduly modernise the story
3. Avoid references to original Hebrew or Greek and meanings
4. Keep in mind the reasons why a story was chosen and shape it to that issue
5. Make sure the story is developed as a *told* story
6. Keep implications and applications that are not part of the story for the pre- and post- story dialogue times
7. Be careful not to summarise a story too much
8. Pay careful attention to word choice for appropriate local meanings
9. Further training in translation methods, key term selection, comprehension testing and reviewing accuracy and naturalness may be necessary.

[276] From *Following Jesus: Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, CD Set, quoted in LOP No 54 p. 49-50

[277] H. Armstrong, *Tell the Story: A primer on Chronological Bible Storying*, (Rockville, Virginia, International Centre for Excellence in Leadership, 2003), p. 77-78 [Slack's comments in the *Following Jesus* project, 11 July 2001]

Appendix F – Orality & Storytelling Resources for use in Cambodia[278]

	Usage/Contents	Name/Title	Supporting organization	Location of Resource	Resource Type
1.	Info about the OneStory model	OneStory	Partnership of WBTI, etc	www.onestory.org	Website
2.	Church Planting model for oral societies	Worldview strategic Church Planting Among Oral Cultures	LIFE International		Book (English & Khmer)
3.	Various; includes chapters about orality in Cambodia	Communicating Christ Through Story and Song: Orality in Buddhist Contexts	SEANET	ICC library	Book
4.	Khmer Audio Bible- Khmer Standard and 1990 Heng Lim Khmer translations	http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/	Khmer Standard-Cambodian Bible Society	Online	Web download
5.	Video using clips from movies and a Khmer narrator	Hope		Khmerhopevideo@yahoo.com	VCD/DVD
6.	IMB resource Audio CDs with Bible stories, accompanying picture charts.	The Oral Bible School		Online Woody Thigpen (IMB)	website IMB materials
7.	6 short VCDs with Khmer actors dramatizing the stories in I-II Samuel	(in production)			VCD Samuel
8.	Audio and picture charts on AIDS prevention/awareness.	Used with Resource #6 – The Oral Bible School		Samaritans' Purse	AIDS and other health issues materials
9.	Orality in discipleship	Making Disciples of Oral Learners	ION (International Orality Network) & LCWE	ICC Language Development team	Book
10.	Film	Jesus Film			Video format
11.	Various orality resources	www.oralbible.com	ION	Online	Website
12.	Various orality resources	www.oralitystrategies.org	IMB	Online	Website

NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list.

The resources listed include those available for the Khmer language in April 2008.

[278] Derived from list prepared in April 2008 by Rachel Hurley, SIL member working in Cambodia with ICC