

## Orality and Christian Discipleship

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” (Mat. 28:19 NIV).*

### Introduction

The vast majority of oral communicators of the unreached nations have caused an increasing number of mission leaders today to raise the following critical question that pertains to the task of discipleship: Do you have to become literate to become a mature disciple of Jesus? (Hill 2010:215).

This article attempts to present the reality of, and to bring forward the case for the "oral majority." It also presents the role and implications of orality regarding the ministry of evangelism and discipleship, especially among the oral cultures.

The article will deal with the following main topics:

- Profile of the Orality Movement
- Overview of Orality Theory
- Evaluation of the Orality Movement

### 1. Profile of the Orality Movement

Greer (2011:7) affirms that, “To reach Oral Learners for Christ we have got to become learners of orality.”

#### 1.1 What is Orality?

According to Greer (2011:9), orality has existed since the beginning of the human race up to the present, while Lovejoy (2010) explains that before writing was introduced, all societies lived by the spoken word, or by orality. Lovejoy (2008:121-22) prefers to define orality as “a reliance on spoken, rather than written, language for communication” and puts emphasis on “reliance on”, because most people use the spoken word but do not rely on it as much as oral learners do. Chiang (2010b:128) defines orality as “those who can’t, won’t or don’t communicate through the written word and those who are literate but prefer to communicate in an oral manner.”

#### 1.2 Orality versus Illiteracy

To show how dominant literacy is in the English speaking world and other European countries, Lovejoy (2008:122) points out the fact that they do not even have a familiar word to describe oral societies. He says that “orality” is an “awkward” term used to refer to “profound, sophisticated, and beautiful ways oral cultures use language.” He also explains that ‘we try to minimize references to oral communicators in terms of what they are not - “non-literate,” “illiterate,” “pre-literate,” “non-readers” - as if such terms adequately described resourceful, complex, intelligent people’ (2009:7). Therefore, he critiques those

defining orality by lack of literacy, making literacy “the norm” and thus seeing orality as something negative, which needs to be eradicated by literacy campaigns (2008:122). Therefore,

Focusing on orality rather than illiteracy highlights the fact that people who live by orality are capable of using beautiful, sophisticated, and moving speech. They are responsible for some of the world’s great verbal artistry, expressed in songs, stories, poetry, and proverbs. Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, widely recognized as the greatest examples of epic poetry in western civilization, are oral compositions. Parts of the Bible were also composed orally before being written. So, orality should never be equated with backwardness, ignorance, or lack of intelligence (Lovejoy 2008:122).

### 1.3 Learning in Oral Cultures

Oral communicators learn by listening and speaking. Since they do not read and write, they must store all information in memory, therefore they put information in forms that are easy to memorise like story, song, poetry and proverb. The literate style, using lists and categories, exposition and analysis, are rejected by oral learners, because they are not easy to remember. If oral people cannot remember lists of principles, outlines and abstract propositions, they cannot also reproduce or pass them on to others (Lovejoy 2000:5).

They learn by talking with people, listening to the radio, watching television, and by watching someone performing, and then imitating or working together (Lovejoy 2010). People in oral cultures learn a lot and have great wisdom, which they acquire not by study but by apprenticeship (Wilson 1999:18).

Oral communicators learn from events in real life or those that are imagined, events that are people-oriented. “They need stories that show sin, righteousness, prayer, faith, love, etc., more than exhortations about them.” They understand better about God’s qualities by telling stories which illustrate them, than by giving statements about them. They like genealogies and biographies. A series of stories about people in the Bible that “present the Biblical themes through the events that” happened in their lives, would be more effective with oral learners. They can watch movies that challenge their culture as it happens with many Muslims who are ready to watch “The Passion of the Christ” even though the Quran denies the crucifixion of Jesus (Brown 2004:124).

Oral people learn by interactions. “They cannot think about something for very long without discussing it with others.” They are usually found in groups discussing events. If one monopolises a conversation, people will start conversing with each other, and many can even talk at the same time. Therefore they highly value drama and dialogue, but not long speeches (Brown 2004:125).

Ponraj and Sah (2003:28) give four categories “of storing information by oral and non-literate societies”:

*“Memory: the use of poetry, songs, riddles and proverbs.”*

*“Symbols: the use of color, art, paintings, carvings, symbols.”*

*“Stories: the use of stories, dramas, and narrative dances.”*

*“Rituals: rituals are the enactments of their fundamental beliefs and speak of their ideas through actions.”*

#### 1.4 Orality Statistics

Samuel Chiang (2010b:128), “the Global Coordinator of the International Orality Network” (ION) presents some of their dataset figures, which show that approximately 70% or 4.35 billion of “the world’s population are oral learners”. He breaks down this figure as follows:

This includes 3 billion adults, 900 million very young children, and 450 million children between the ages of eight and fifteen. All of these have basic or below basic literacy skills. They are oral learners because of their limited literacy skills ... Out of the 4.35 billion people, there are 2.7 billion who are counted as the world’s unreached peoples resulting in approximately 3,500 unengaged unreached people groups ... Furthermore, there are 2,252 unengaged unreached people groups, composed of 350 million people without a single verse of Scripture! These people are known as ‘primary oral learners’ (Chiang 2010b:128-129).

Lovejoy (2009:1) also explains that some of these people are oral learners, because they have no other choice; their languages are not yet written. For others, even though their languages are written and have literacy programmes, orality is a preference. Many others who are not included in these figures are literate but do not enjoy reading. They switch to oral communication any time there is the possibility to do so. They like talking about their experiences, telling folk cultural stories, using proverbs to comment on various events, and singing and dancing with friends. When they finish school, some go back to their oral communities and their traditional oral style of communication, and lose their reading skills (Lovejoy 2010). Even highly literate people, who live in traditional oral cultures, often prefer the oral approach to learning. This can be explained by the fact that orality influences people’s “thought processes and decision-making” (Lovejoy 2005:6).

Studies done by NALS, IALS and NAAL in North America and Western Europe show that almost 50% of adults “have limited literacy skills” (Lovejoy 2008:130). Also, the role of reading is declining in these countries to such a degree that “less than half of the adult population now reads literature, and these trends reflect a larger decline in other sorts of reading.” The situation is worse among the youth in America where literary reading “is not only declining rapidly among all groups, but the rate of decline has accelerated” in the last years. This shows that secondary orality is growing even among the students. So, if 50% adults have limited literacy skills in the most developed countries in the world, imagine the real situation, beneath the official literacy statistics, in the rest of the world. Their situation is worse “given their less-developed educational systems and weaker traditions of literacy” (pp. 131-32).

## 1.5 Towards a Post-Literate Era

As stated earlier, orality exists since creation, but things changed drastically in the West when in the fifteen century Gutenberg invented the printing press which made possible printing en mass. This was followed by the Reformation when “the Church enthusiastically declared that all should be able to read.” As a result, reading took precedence over listening, privacy over community, and book over memory. The time from the fifteenth to the twentieth century is called the “Gutenberg Parentheses”, an era of science, invention, and philosophy development, which came at the expense of creativity and community. In the twenty-first century we entered an electronic and digital era, where the use of audio-visual through internet, video and television has increased much, thus recovering creativity, collaboration and community. The social networking like Facebook made way to communal experiences, reinforcing “the F-Factor—fans, friends, and followers.” Therefore, the electronic and digital era brings the Gutenberg era to a hard close (Chiang 2012:7-8).

Unfortunately, in spite of the reality of the oral majority and its statistics, about 90% of all Christians working among the two thirds oral learners of world’s population, use highly literate styles of teaching like “the printed page or expository, analytical and logical presentations.” These methods are unfamiliar, difficult to understand, to learn and to reproduce by the oral people. Even though the Gospel is now taken to more people groups than ever before, many of them do not really hear it. “To effectively communicate with them ... our presentations must match their oral learning styles and preferences” (Lovejoy 2005:3-4). Taking orality seriously, the church in her efforts to make disciples of oral learners, must rethink her strategies to match the preferences of oral cultures, and use familiar approaches of communication to increase effectiveness (p. 6).

## 2. **Overview of Orality Theory**

### 2.1 Missions in Africa Mishandling Oral Cultures

According to Tucker, the protestant mission in Africa made literacy and education a condition for effective evangelism (Klem 1982:27). On the assumption that African cultures are so evil that they can never be used to properly express Christian truth, children were taken out of their cultures to be educated in "godly or western environment" (p. 33). Beaver instructs that,

It is an essential feature of the plan, that the pupils be taken young, board in the mission, be kept separate from heathenism, under Christian superintendency night and day (Klem 1982:28).

On the basis of another assumption, that vital Christian information "is to be learned from books by reading," literacy became a condition for Christian maturity. Therefore, converts who could not read well were denied, not only leadership positions in the church but even membership, baptism and Lord's Supper (Klem 1982:32-33). According to the policy of the Methodist missions in Ghana, converts had to be able to:

[R]ead and to know for themselves the word of God ... Part of the test for membership shall be a test of their ability to read (Klem 1982:31).

In consequence, the vast majority who preferred their oral cultures were denied access to God's word, because the missions decided to teach through the written word (p. 35). People associated Christianity with western education often rejecting Jesus because they were not ready to become literate (p. 37). The elderly and traditional leaders were humiliated "by being refused baptism and church membership." Non-literate older members in churches often had to pretend singing from the hymn books, even though they were on the wrong page or sometimes holding the book upside down! (p. 38)! (Klem 1982:35, 37, 38). Klem affirms that,

Such men and women have all the potential for genuine Bible knowledge and Christian maturity if literacy were not considered the only gateway to it (p. 39).

As a result, the loss of literacy also meant the loss of Christianity (Klem 1982:39).

## 2.2 Understanding Oral Cultures

The identity of traditional communities is sustained by "the language and the oral literature of songs, proverbs, wise sayings, stories, epics and rituals." When literacy is seen as a threat to the traditional culture, wisdom and leadership, the community can reject it together with the western Christianity (Klem 1995:61). Klem observes that, "It is possible, therefore, that we are actually not dealing with an inability to read, *so much as a resistance to literacy and education out of loyalty to the group ...*" Many communities feel that "sending their children off to school, is to risk sending them off into another world—a different world which is guided by different values" (p. 62). Thus many old people have said "they were too old to become Christians," others said Christianity is the "white man's religion" that does not belong to Africa, and yet others thought Christianity does not "suit their people" (p. 63).

Writers like Ajayi, Ayandele, Okot p'Bitek, and Klem lament the division that missions produced in African societies through literacy. Klem says that two groups were formed, the middle class and the non-literates. The two groups,

[D]id not know the same things, nor did they think the same way even when they had the same information. Each developed very different value systems. The "educated" youth, including some of the High School students I taught, did not even know how to communicate with their parents who had sacrificed to send them to school (Klem 1995:60).

Therefore, traditional leaders are often justified to oppose literacy and western Christianity when these changes threaten to divide their communities (Klem 1995:62). Missions were also frustrated to see that only a minority became literate, and the young who embraced education were more interested to "advance their careers and personal wealth than to spread the Gospel" (p. 60). Another great loss that the missions faced, because of their preference for the young and educated, were the community leaders who could have given stability and growth to the church (p. 63). Klem (1982:xviii) asserts that,

There was and is an indigenous communication system perfectly capable of being used to communicate the gospel effectively to the majority of the people. They do not have to learn a new method of communicating.

## 2.3 Foundations of Orality Theory

### 2.3.1 Orality and Literacy

McLuhan identifies four epochs of history that undermine each other: hand-writing undermined oral communication, printing undermined hand-writing, and the electronic age undermined printing. McLuhan indicates that people "did not just have to learn to use the new inventions but actually had to 're-invent' themselves and their thought processes as well" (Greer 2011:18). Ong further asserts that "literacy dramatically changes the way humans think" (Bingham 2012).

According to Wilson, the oral means of communication works effectively in oral cultures, which are "face-to-face societies where the immediacy and warmth of speech and the social and participatory characteristics of oral communications are both understood and esteemed." Their model of communication is also appropriate for retention. The speech is dynamic, because they consider words to have great power since they come "from the very heart and being of a person, expressed by the vital breath of life itself" (Wilson 1999:23-24).

Rosenberg (1987:75) affirms that even in literate cultures the most important information is transmitted orally. Oral communication is "more specific and less ambiguous" using "gesture, expression, intonation, and so on, and various self-correcting mechanisms of which fixed print is incapable" (p. 76).

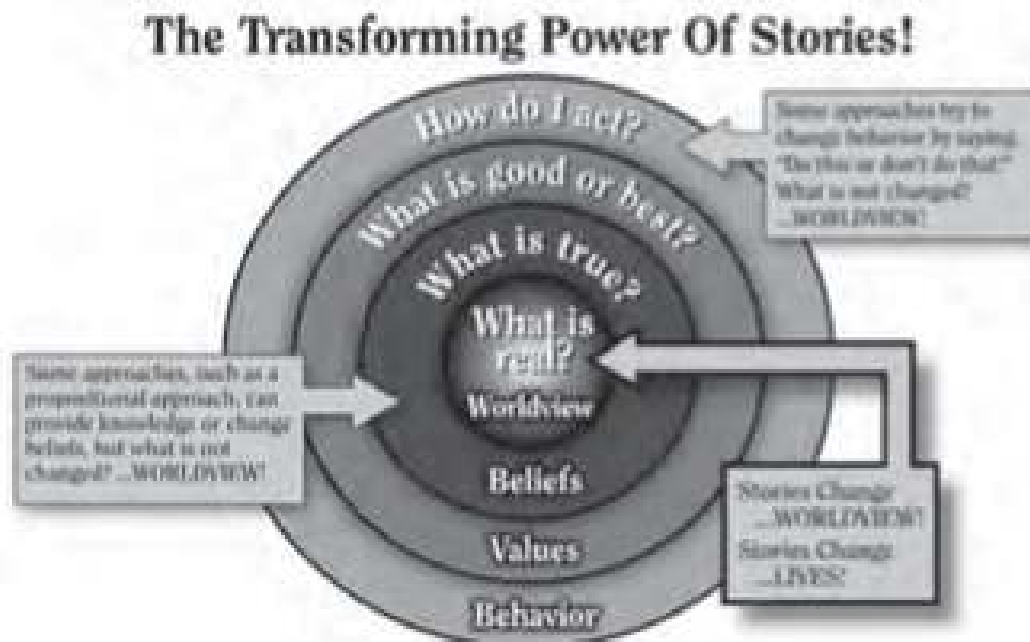
According to Paul Dyer, a definition for literacy from the Christian discipleship perspective would be the ability to read and understand an advanced book like the Bible (Greer 2011:14). Thus Lovejoy (2000:7) indicates that "it takes at least ten to twelve years of effective, western-style education" to turn a non-literate into a fully literate person. Furthermore, research by IMB shows that "a community moving from illiteracy to a literacy rate of only 30% has generally taken 125 years" (Greer 2011:25). Literacy experts on their side also warn us that despite all the efforts to promote literacy since 2000, there is not much progress, and literacy can even reverse due to rising poverty in the world. Therefore, Lovejoy advises that, "embracing oral strategies now is wiser than hoping the world will soon become literate enough to benefit from existing print-based strategies" (Lovejoy 2010). Peterson also affirms that,

All the literacy trainers can relax with this [orality] development. People will move from storying groups into the text and learn to read. This is not an orality versus literacy conflict. It is a movement where both strategies flourish, but sequencing with orality first is essential (Chiang 2010a:Testimonials).

### 2.3.2 Orality and Worldview

The Great Commission makes studies of worldview compulsory because, "Making disciples among the *panta ta ethne* (each and every ethnolinguistic people group) is at the heart of Christ's Commission." A worldview is the way people view the world, their core values, beliefs, practices and habits (Slack 2010:73-74). The Great Commission is about life transformation, which can only come by firstly changing the heart. But the heart can only be changed if the worldview of the person is changed (Evans 2010:186). According to N.T. Wright, stories are the key element that forms our worldview (Slack 2010:77-78). He goes on to say that the worldview can be changed by hearing a better story. And there is no better story than the Word of God (Evans 2010:196).

According to Lovejoy (2005:34), there are four areas that affect people, and they are represented in the image below:



Wright explains that "worldviews and the stories which characterize them represent the realities of one's life," therefore stories have the potential of changing worldviews and lives (Lovejoy 2005:34-35).

Curtis and Eldredge state that,

The heart does not respond to principles and programs, it seeks not efficiency, but passion ... Art, poetry, beauty, mystery, ecstasy. These are what rouse the heart ... It is why Jesus so often taught and related to people by telling stories and asking questions. His desire was not just to engage their intellects but to capture their hearts ... We have lived for so long in a 'propositional' approach to Christianity we have nearly lost its true meaning ... Life is not a list of propositions; it is a series of dramatic scenes. Story is the language of the heart (Evans 2010:193).

Wright warns that if we "do not present biblical stories to challenge existing worldview stories, we run risk of syncretism" (Evans 2010:197). Kraft explains that syncretism occurs when missionaries "fail to separate the evangelizers' own culture adequately from the biblical message" and impose their culture upon the target group (Lovejoy 2005:32). So, Lovejoy (2005:30-37) gives four key elements that can help disciple oral learners with the minimum risk of syncretism:

- Communicate with people in their mother tongue.
- Develop resources that are "worldview specific instead of generic ones."
- Use "Biblical stories extensively" for worldview transformation.
- Provide a recorded "oral Bible" in the mother-tongue to ensure reliability of Biblical truth.

Slack (2010:75) affirms that it is the failure to consider the worldview of the oral ethnic groups and to communicate with them in their own language that caused them to be unreached for centuries. So the use of orality goes beyond communication; it also contributes to the "contextualization and indigenization of Christianity within the culture" (Wilson 1999:23-24).

### 2.3.3 Orality and Discipleship

As stated earlier, "two-thirds of all people in the world are oral communicators." Making disciples of them means using communicational approaches familiar to the culture: "stories, proverbs, drama, songs, chants, and poetry." The literate approaches are not effective in making them Jesus' disciples (Lovejoy 2005:69).

The last project of Dr. Avery Willis was a vision God gave him in 2009 which he called *DNA21: A Discipleship Revolution*. His vision was "to see 21st-century churches and disciples making disciples the way Jesus did in the first century, enhanced with all the tools and technology of our era." This would result in a "rapid revitalization and multiplication of churches." According to his vision, discipleship is built on "the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit" and "built from four basic components:"

- "small group transparency,"
- "intentional discipling,"
- "Bible storytelling, and"
- "multiplication" (Sells 2011:6).

Willis tested his model on a very successful church in the USA called Real Life Ministries (RLM). "He told Putman [the senior pastor] that the American culture was becoming more oral in learning style and that he was afraid the American church was going to be left behind." So, RLM "decided to try Bible Storytelling in a few small groups. The experiment was so successful that they trained all their pastors," in the use of this tool (Sells 2011:9). They found out that Bible Storytelling...

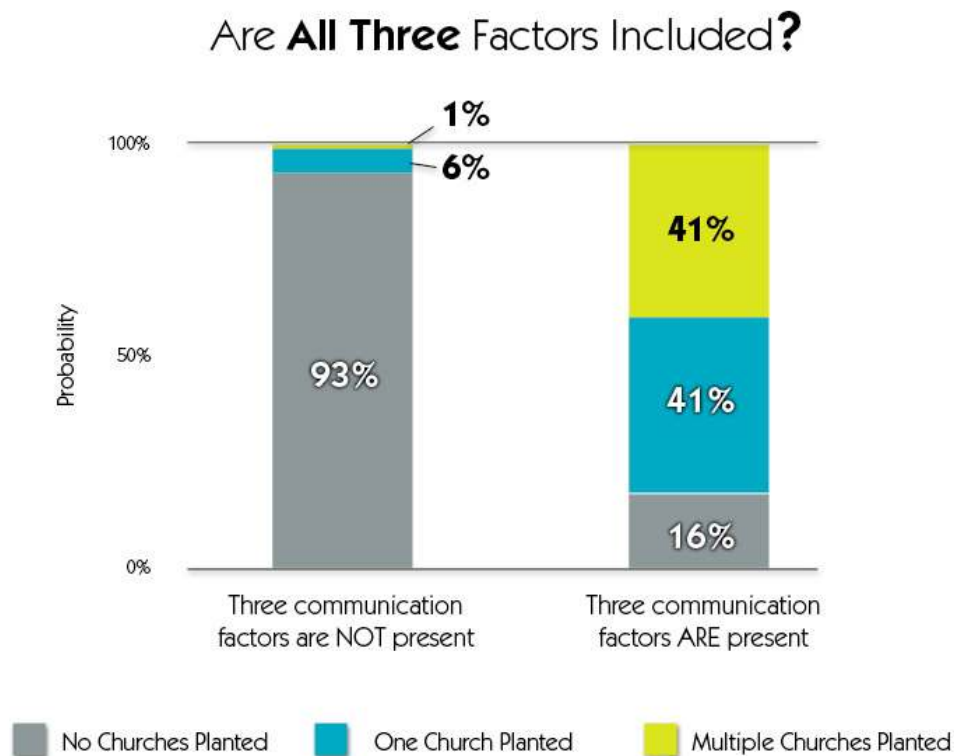
- "helps people learn the Bible,"



- "makes it easier to recruit small group leaders,"
- "facilitates real learning,"
- "equips members for ministry,"
- "empowers parents to disciple their kids, "
- "helps small group leaders understand the spiritual needs of those they are discipling,"
- "keeps small groups from becoming boring, and"
- "encourages transparency and real relationships" (Sells 2011:9).

Research *"From Seed to Fruit,"* has identified "Three Communication Keys" that lead to successful church planting (Lovejoy 2012: slides 35-36):

- "Use of local rather than regional language,"
- "At least one team member fluent in the local language," and
- "Appropriate communications strategy (oral or literate) that matches the communications preference of the people group."



When the three communication factors are not present, 93% of the projects are not likely to plant even one church. When the three factors are present there is the probability that 82% of the projects, plant at least one church (Lovejoy 2012:slide 52).

#### 2.3.4 Orality and the Bible

The Bible came to us as a book, therefore most Evangelical Christians believe that "the Bible is the divinely inspired 'Word of God'" (Greer 2011:31). However, Beckwith notes that

revelation was given in oral form and in Jesus Christ, "but for the sake of permanence" it was later put in written form (Greer 2011:33).

Greer points out that God's ideal form of communication with man is face to face conversation because "God is a God of relationship" and he intends to have a personal relationship with man, as he had with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Unfortunately, sin has interrupted this personal relationship, but God took the initiative to restore it through the incarnation when "he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1-2) (Greer 2011:35).

Lovejoy (2005:10) emphasises that "the hope of reaching the four billion persons who are oral learners" and "getting God's word to the speakers of the four thousand languages still without His word," is to follow Jesus' model who used "familiar oral means" that people understood (Mark 4:33-34). Some indicate that Peter was not literate but was a good memorizer. "Paul was literate, but he seems to have orally dictated many of his letters. They were intended to be read aloud in the churches (Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27)." John did the same with the book of Revelation (Lovejoy 2000:9).

Moreover, "Tom Steffen points out that that the Bible is 75% narrative, 15% poetry, and only 10% 'thought-organised.'" Therefore, the Bible gives us the appropriate material to use with the oral learners (Greer 2011:38). The New Testament was composed in a predominantly oral setting, and it was the oral presentation of the Scripture that was instrumental in transforming the lives of the hearers in the early church (Maxey 2010:179-80).

Unfortunately, Bible Translation ministry "has historically set its goal as a literary conversion of the population" (Maxey 2010:182). Maxey (2009:2) indicates that Bible translation must rethink its methods and goals to reflect the Bible's oral roots and to be relevant to today's communication styles. Lovejoy (2009:9-10) shares an interesting idea about the printed Bible from Swanson:

Richard Swanson compares a printed Bible to a printed musical score. He argues that the written musical notation is a means to the recovery of the performed music. We do not sit in front of a piece of sheet music and silently enjoy the music that the notes recall ... Simply as an expression of faithfulness to what the Bible is, we need to think long about the implications of translating Scripture with a view to the oral performance of it and the aural encounter with it.

Lovejoy says that developing oral strategies does not stand in the way of Bible translation, actually the opposite is true. The projects that begin with an oral Bible and continue with Bible translation and literacy have got "the most comprehensive strategy for communicating the word of God" (Lovejoy 2005:11-12).

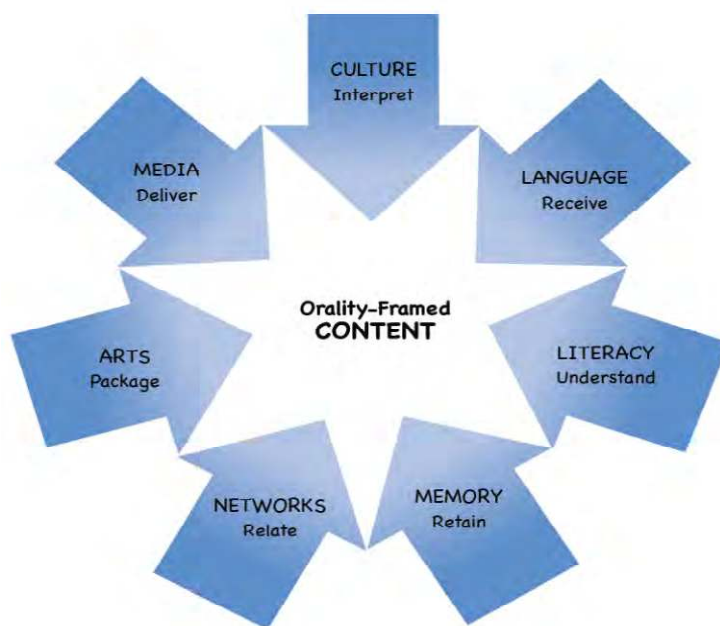
### 2.3.5 A Holistic Model of Orality

I conclude this section by briefly presenting Charles Madinger's (2010) holistic approach to orality, which he defines as "a complex whereby oral learners receive, remember, and

replicate news, information, and truths" (p. 201). This complex consists of seven disciplines which, according to Madinger, "as they are more fully incorporated, can proportionately increase the transformative power of a message" (p. 201). Here are his seven disciplines and their meaning (See also the diagram below) (p. 201):

1. Culture (interpreting the message)
2. Language (receiving the message)
3. Literacy (understanding the message)
4. Social Networks (relating the message)
5. Memory (retaining the message)
6. The Arts (packaging the message)
7. Media (delivering the message)

**SEVEN DISCIPLINES OF ORALITY:  
A Holistic Model**



### **3. Evaluation of the Orality Movement**

Lakoff brings out the different functions and values of orality and literacy:

It is generally acknowledged that written and oral communication involve very different kinds of strategies: what works orally does not work in print, and vice versa ... oral communication works through the assumption of immediacy, or spontaneity; writing on the other hand, is planned, organized and non-spontaneous ... many commentators are not so much interested in the different values, the different advantages of each medium, as in perceiving the two as locked in deadly combat (Wilson 1999:22).

### 3.1 Strengths of the Orality Movement

A major strength of the orality movement comes from the fact that it addresses the needs of the majority of the world's population, approximately two thirds or 70%, who are oral communicators. Besides, it has the potential to provide an oral Bible to the 4,000 Bibleless groups much earlier than Bible translation will reach them (Lovejoy 2005:10). As a result, using appropriate oral means of communicating Scripture, "Christians have the opportunity to keep 1.5 billion unreached peoples of the world from a Christless eternity in our generation" (Lovejoy 2005:75).

A second strength of the orality movement within oral cultures is related to effectiveness. Oral forms of communication match the learning preference of oral cultures, and are familiar to them, which make them effective in discipling oral learners (Lovejoy 2005:69). Jesus, our Master communicator, chose to use familiar oral means that matched people's style of communication, which made His teaching effective (p. 10). Therefore, an oral Bible enables oral learners to hear, understand, respond, accurately memorize and retell God's message, which will spread freely and rapidly. Lovejoy (p. 70) claims that,

The "oral Bible" is the singular key to unlocking Church Planting Movements among unreached people groups ... The only Bible that will be effective during the lifetime of the vast majority of unreached people is an "oral Bible," probably best presented in narrative form. It is important for the church to understand that a written version of Scripture does not even exist for the majority of languages. Even if literacy were achieved, the Bible would still not exist in some 4,000 languages..."

A third strength of orality is its emphasis on reproducibility and sustainability in oral cultures. It provides the most effective training models, which will produce new leaders among oral people, who in turn "will facilitate church-planting movements to rapidly disciple and equip leaders for the new churches as leaders are raised up by the Holy Spirit" (Lovejoy 2005:70). After learning the Bible storying method, a literate gentleman in Uganda said, "I am not an educated person and I never thought of myself as someone who can teach. Now I am learning and I am able to teach others who are also able to teach" (Wafler 2006:6). Lovejoy (2005:14, 16) points out that, oral strategies have succeeded, where literate ones have failed, and stories were able to go where the printed Bible could not.

Klem (1982:xxii) says that "oral methods have the potential of effectively reaching the vast majority of Africans living today." Using local media reduces people's resistance to both literacy and Christianity. It enables people to use their own skills to memorize the message and to become teachers in a short time. It produces Christian leaders in an indigenous pattern. This would even facilitate the use of the written Bible because the Christian knowledge and growth produces desire to read the Bible for oneself. People will also find it "easier to learn to read a familiar message than to read completely foreign materials" (p. xxiii).

A fourth strength of orality is its emphasis on storytelling for worldview transformation which reduces syncretism. Wright argues that since "stories lie at the core of a worldview,"

Bible stories have the power to transform cultural worldviews and therefore avoid syncretism (Lovejoy 2005:35). Oral Bible stories help oral cultures see the story of God in a cultural relevant way, which is not possible through the printed Bible. At the end of a Bible storytelling workshop a Bible translator testified that even though he had translated all these passages, he has now learned, through discussing the stories orally, so many things he never knew about the Bible (Wafler 2006:6). Furthermore, Lovejoy explains that the Bible storytelling method is *chronological* which offers a "powerful alternative worldview" that can "replace or refine" our cultural worldview (p. 33). He also points out that this method keeps the story *pure*, free from the missionary's cultural interpretation, theology and philosophy, which promotes syncretism, and allows the local people to have a Biblical theology that is relevant to their own situation (p. 37). Oral communication of the Gospel in the mother tongue that is relevant to the worldview of the target group, avoids syncretism in churches of oral cultures. Accuracy and standardization of the oral message can be secured by audio and video recordings (pp. 70-71).

Fifthly, oral strategies are also effective in reaching the secondary oral communicators, who receive information "through radio, television, film, internet and other electronic means" (Lovejoy 2005:71).

### 3.2 Weaknesses of the Orality Movement

Firstly, oral cultures cannot develop much without literacy. According to Ong, even though orality produces beautiful oral performances, it needs to be supported by literacy in order to develop. Therefore, orality must produce writing, which is vital for the development of science, history, philosophy, literature, and language, including oral speech. There is also a "vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy." Often the motivation for writing comes from associating with literate cultures; meanwhile oral cultures do not come much in contact with other cultures. Therefore, literacy is needed for cross-cultural partnerships, which facilitates development (Wilson 1999:23). Though, note that Ong does not talk about the spiritual development here.

Secondly, according to Rosenberg (1987:78), oral traditions are not as accurate as the written records. "Useless data are forgotten in an oral tradition, while remembered phenomena are updated—made consistent with current beliefs and attitudes" (p. 78). This may be prevented by a recorded "oral Bible" to ensure reliability of Biblical truth (Lovejoy 2005:37).

Thirdly, Wafler points out the simplistic view of orality practitioners regarding the cross-cultural communication. Many do not know that orality involves translation and are ignorant of the checking procedures for accuracy developed in translation. This may result in oral material which is "non-communicative or erroneous." Therefore, he advises oral practitioners to learn and employ translation principles and procedures for accuracy and relevance (Wafler 2006:8-9).

Fourthly, an oral Bible does not provide the "whole council of God," or the entire Bible, but it can prepare the way for it and fasten the process (Lovejoy 2005:11-12).

Therefore, instead of seeing orality and literacy in conflict, or one above the other, Christian literate communicators must appreciate the strength of oral communication "as different, not lesser, quality" (Wilson 1999:22). When literate Christian communicators overvalue literate strategies and do not appreciate the potential of orality, they, the receptor culture, and the propagation of God's message will suffer (p. 23). Wafler (2006:6) affirms that,

Neither Bible translation nor orality alone can accomplish the job of providing access to the Scriptures for all the people of the world in their heart language. However, there are ways that Bible translators and proponents of orality can assist one another in accomplishing this shared goal of providing access to the Word of God for all.

### 3.3 Barriers to the Orality Movement

Greer (2011:65-66) points out six causes why the Christian community might be reluctant to embrace oral strategies:

1. There is "a lack of biblical scholarship which includes a genuine appreciation of orality studies."
2. Many "practitioners do not come from oral communities." They have been trained "to think in 'literary, linear, and visual terms.'"
3. There is a "*lack of awareness*." Many do not even know what orality is. In spite of the recent focus on orality by ION, Lausanne and other organizations, Christians do not realize that so many people do not access the Scriptures because they cannot read.
4. There is a "*lack of understanding*." "For some in missions work 'orality' means 'Bible storying' and that is all. There is a need to highlight the range of methods that are available to reach oral communicators."
5. There is a "*fear of doctrinal error*." Some think that Biblical truth cannot be communicated adequately through oral means. There is also a concern for the lack of a reference point and an adequate check in oral cultures. This can be solved through current technology and available training.
6. There can be a "*natural reluctance to change*. This is especially so when there is no perceived need." "If progress in making disciples is slow then this may be excused by suggesting that it is all part of the spiritual warfare. Logical, expository ministry can also seem to be more Biblical than 'telling stories' which are associated with Children's ministry."

## **Conclusion**

This article has shown that the majority of the world's population is oral in ways of communicating and learning. Therefore, for a successful fulfilment of the Great Commission, the Church must learn about the complex communication styles of the oral cultures, and disciple the oral learners using their own learning styles.

It was also demonstrated that literacy is not a prerequisite for evangelism and discipleship. Actually, oral strategies are vital for a successful discipleship among oral cultures.

This article has also shown that the Bible is mostly narration in genre giving a model of communicating God's message, following the approach of Jesus and of the early church.

Furthermore, orality has the potential of reaching the majority of people all over the world, not only the primary oral cultures but also the secondary oral cultures. Orality becomes even more relevant since secondary orality is a growing phenomenon in both the developed and developing countries.

Also, orality does not come in conflict with literacy or Bible translation; rather it prepares the way for more effective and acceptable print approaches that complement and support the oral ministry in oral cultures.

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