

Chronological Bible Storying: Description, Rationale and Implications

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Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) is a method of presentation that tells selected biblical stories in chronological order in the power of the Holy Spirit so as to bring people to genuine faith in Christ, mature discipleship, and fruitful Christian service. Ordinarily CBS includes a time of dialog after the story. In the dialog the storyteller uses questions to guide listeners to discover the meaning and significance of the biblical story. The formulation of this method has been relatively recent, but the basic elements of the method are ancient.

Antecedents of Chronological Bible Storytelling

The act of telling stories is a universal phenomenon. It is the primary way the vast majority of peoples have transmitted their culture. As New Testament scholar N. T. Wright has argued, "A story, with its pattern of problem and conflict, of aborted attempts at resolution, and final result, . . . is, if we may infer from the common practice of the world, universally perceived as the best way of talking about the way the world actually is." The storytelling aspect of CBS is as old as human life. It is not new at all.

The emphasis on chronological organization is not new, either. There are clear precedents in the Psalms (78, 105, 106) and Nehemiah (9:5-37) for rehearsing the story of Israel chronologically. Stephen's sermon also traces God's work chronologically (Acts 7:2-53). In Antioch of Pisidia Paul recounted God's saving work in chronological order in his sermon (Acts 13:16-41). Hebrews 11 alludes to stories about people who exhibited faith—and it names them in chronological order. So chronological presentation is nothing new to God's chosen people.

The newest part of the phrase "Chronological Bible Storying" is the "Bible" part. The word "Bible," derived from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning "books," actually came into use long after storytelling and chronology were part of Israel's life. The books of Moses, for instance, were written no sooner than seven hundred years after God called Abram to leave Ur and go to the place God would show him. Presumably Abraham's descendants preserved those stories and their chronology by oral means until they were finally written in books. Christians eventually gathered the inspired writings into compilations called "Bibles" and the Christian church received them as Scripture. CBS focuses on telling these inspired stories from Scripture, not fictional stories, illustrations, and the like. So it should be clear that the individual components of CBS are ancient. But the way they have been blended in CBS is a much more recent development.

Recent History of Chronological Bible Storying

Historically, some individual missionaries used strategies with similarities to CBS. For example, Hans Rudi Weber's *The Communication of the Gospel to Illiterates* describes his efforts to use stories and chalk drawings to teach illiterates in what is today Indonesia. But the work of Trevor McIlwain in the 1970s is the beginning of what became CBS. McIlwain worked with New Tribes Missions (NTM) in the Philippines. He tried a number of approaches with a tribal group that had previously professed faith in Christ but had reverted to many old

ways and beliefs. Eventually McIlwain chose to teach chronologically through the Bible starting with Genesis. Each session started with a focus on the biblical story, then shifted to expository teaching. This chronological Bible exposition produced a much stronger understanding of God's nature and the Christian faith within the people and transformed their lives. McIlwain named this approach Chronological Bible Teaching.

McIlwain's success attracted the attention of other missionaries working in the Philippines, including Bill Tisdale and Jim Slack of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB--later International Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Slack had read Weber's book on communicating with illiterates in a doctoral seminar at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He recognized the value of what McIlwain was doing. So he invited McIlwain to teach his approach to two large groups of Baptist missionaries and national leaders. But after hearing McIlwain's presentation, Slack and others in both the FMB and NTM concluded that McIlwain's approach was too literate. It was not reproducible among most Filipino church leaders. So New Tribes missionaries Dell and Sue Schultze, Les Plett, Jay Jackson, and Tom Steffen began experimenting with and adapting McIlwain's approach. So did Slack and several SBC missionaries. The five New Tribes missionaries retained the chronological and biblical emphases, but reduced the amount of expository teaching somewhat and emphasized storytelling. Dell and Sue Schultze subsequently produced their own set of stories and teaching approaches, which they published as *God and Man*. Tom Steffen later wrote *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry: Cross-Cultural Storytelling at Home and Abroad* to urge missionaries to recover this lost art. This group of approaches is sometimes called Chronological Bible Storytelling because it is more narrative and less expositional than McIlwain's approach. But they retained varying degrees of expositional teaching in the story and the instruction that followed the story.

By the late 1980s, Jim Slack concluded that existing approaches to chronological Bible presentation were too literate for use with oral communicators. He began working on a form of chronological Bible presentation that utilized storytelling followed by dialog. He carefully avoided including exposition in either the story or the dialog. After becoming a church growth consultant for the SBC International Mission Board (IMB), Slack enlisted J. O. Terry to join him in developing the approach. Terry, a media specialist, had used storying in the Philippines as well. Together they refined the methodology that has now been endorsed by the IMB leadership. In an effort to differentiate it from the approaches of McIlwain and the others, Slack and Terry called their approach "storying." It is that particular approach that this paper is describing.

In the 1990s Slack and Terry continued to revise the approach while introducing it to Southern Baptist missionaries and national partners in numerous workshops around the world. In 1992 the IMB leadership authorized Slack to approach Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for assistance in critiquing, developing, and teaching CBS. Because its leaders believed the issues involved were primarily communicational, the IMB approached the preaching department rather than the missions department at Southwestern. Through this contact they were invited to teach CBS in a course at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1993. In the 1994-95 academic year Southwestern Seminary granted me a sabbatical leave to study CBS and associated academic issues. Beginning in 1995 I joined Slack and Terry in leading some of the storying workshops.

Rationale

In addition to the historical influences already mentioned, three other influences have contributed to the shape that CBS has taken in IMB circles: orality, biblical teaching, and

missiology.

Orality and Literacy

From the brief history set forth above, it should be evident that it was concerns about literacy that caused Slack and later, Terry, to develop storying in the way that they did. When they began to delve into the extensive literature on orality and literacy, it became evident that western missionaries were up against a powerful communicational barrier that was (and still is) invisible to most literate missionaries. That barrier is the major difference between literate or print-oriented communicators and oral communicators. In a presentation of this length it is impossible to do more than sketch out the key distinctions between orality and literacy. Fortunately, Slack has written a detailed and extensively documented paper on this topic: "The International Mission Board, SBC Faces Issues Related to Orality, Literacy, and Oral (Non-Print) Communicators and Oral Communication." Those interested in pursuing this issue further are encouraged to see Slack's paper and the works in its lengthy bibliography.

The majority of people worldwide are oral communicators. In simple terms, that means they learn exclusively or primarily by the spoken word, by listening and speaking. They use language in ways common to people who do not rely on print. Researchers such as Walter Ong have identified several categories of oral communicators.

Primary oral communicators are those who live in contexts in which literacy is not known or practiced. Oral communicators think of words as sounds, not as objects or ink on paper. The fact that literates tend to define words as symbols written with ink on paper reflects how pervasively our experience of literacy has shaped our view of the world. But make no mistake about it: words are sounds before they are written symbols. Humanity devised systems of marks that would enable them to voice again the sounds that had been heard. But to many literates print is the beginning and end of the communication process. To oral communicators, words do not have individual meanings so much as they fit with other sounds to form larger verbal pictures.

Without the technology of reading and writing, primary oral communicators are dependent on their community for all their information. This reinforces a strong relational aspect to oral cultures. Broken relationships cause information flow to be cut off.

Without the technology of reading and writing, primary oral communicators know only what they can remember at any given time. Of necessity they have developed the ability to memorize huge amounts of material, especially if it comes in a memorable form. Illiterate Muslims frequently memorize the entire Koran. Storytellers in Eastern Europe could compose stories consisting of 60,000-100,000 set phrases. Six months later they could repeat the story with high accuracy. But oral communicators must recall everything from memory because they cannot look something up or study. A printed Bible is useless to them as a reference tool.

Without the technology of reading and writing, primary oral communicators must think memorable thoughts. Thus they put all their important information into easily remembered forms such as stories, songs, poetry, and proverbs. Primary oral communicators do not create outlines or lists as memory aids. They cannot afford the luxury of using such ineffective means of recall.

Without the technology of reading and writing, primary oral communicators dare not break what they know into hard-to-remember abstract categories or lists. They resist literate-style analysis because they cannot be sure to get all the pieces back into proper place through the

use of memory alone. Hence they communicate in holistic rather than analytic ways. They are concrete-relational thinkers rather than abstract thinkers.

Analysis, however, is central to western literate culture. The practice of exposition depends on analysis of texts. But it also depends on certain habits of the mind that cannot take place in the absence of literacy. Historian and social critic Neil Postman defines exposition as follows:

"Exposition is a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression. Almost all 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."

"Typography has the strongest possible bias toward exposition," Postman says. Conversely, exposition depends on typography and literacy and the thinking skills they make possible. Most of the critical thinking skills highly educated missionaries take for granted are inseparably tied to literacy. SIL's Rick Brown puts it this way in paper he wrote two years ago: "Unfortunately it often happens that a print-oriented communicator wrongly expects that the oral communicators in his or her audience will understand logical, analytical, and abstract modes of reasoning, or he expects that programmes designed for a print-oriented audience can be translated and used with an oral audience to equal effect. But this is not usually the case."

Without literacy, expository modes of presentation cannot be produced. Without literacy, expository modes of presentation are poorly understood and impossible to reproduce. Research by New Tribes missionaries in the Philippines found that retention among rural and oral people seldom was higher than 29% of the knowledge shared when communicated by means of logical and systematized outlines of the information. However, when a storying or chronological teaching method was used, retention rose to at least 75-80%.

Within a literate culture, exposition is natural, valuable, and reproducible. Exposition is not inherently evil, certainly no more evil than speaking, say, Italian. But if we insist on doing exposition or speaking Italian in a culture unaccustomed to it, we fail to communicate.

In summary, to communicate meaningfully with oral communicators, the message must come in the form of story, song, poetry, and proverb. Presentations made using lists of teachings or principles, outlines (no matter how clear), or abstract propositions are difficult if not impossible for primary oral communicators even to understand, let alone repeat to someone else. Yet almost no literates realize that this is so. This is one of the great tragedies of the modern missionary movement and it continues up to this very moment.

Residual oral communicators are those who have been exposed to literacy, even learned to read in school, but who retain a strong preference for learning by oral rather than literate means. Even though they are able to read and write, residual oral communicators habitually acquire, retain, and transmit information by the habits of mind natural to orality. Literates often make the mistake of assuming that everyone who can vocalize words off a document has passed from oral communication preference to literate communication preference, but that is absolutely not so. People begin as oral communicators and acquisition of literacy only gradually blunts and then overtakes a person's orality. Even then we never completely give up our orality. In fact, it takes at least ten to twelve years of effective, western-style education that emphasizes inquiry and creativity in order to produce a person fully at home with literate

means of communication. If the educational approach employed is one of rote memory, students may remain residual oral communicators no matter how many years of education they complete. Ong suggests that we may estimate the orality of a culture by the demands it places on a person's memory. The less memorization required, the more literacy is present. The more memorization the educational system requires, the higher the residual orality.

Lynne L. Abney, MD, tells of working alongside an Arab cardiologist trained in Cairo. He could quote long passages from the same massive cardiology textbook that she had used in medical school. Yet if the patient displayed symptoms of multiple problems, the cardiologist could not reason deductively to diagnose which was the patient's actual ailment. His rote-memory education enabled him to retain massive amounts of information but did not teach him the logical, analytical thinking processes that are considered essential to western education. In actual practice this physician is a residual oral communicator even though he has completed many years of schooling.

Furthermore, if a person attains a measure of literacy in school but does not continue reading and writing regularly, that person will lapse back into functional illiteracy, and with it, strong oral communications preference. This reality raises the whole question of the reliability of literacy figures released by various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Most "official" statistics are of dubious accuracy for our purposes in assessing the communications preferences of the people with whom we work. Three key factors cause this. First, every country defines for itself what constitutes literacy in that country. There is no agreed-upon definition that is meaningful in making comparisons between countries. The most common definition is "a person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group." People with minimal literacy can be called functionally literate if their culture does not normally use many literacy skills.

Second, major international lenders include national literacy rates in their lending criteria. The higher the reported literacy rate in a country, the more money the IMF and World Bank will lend. They suppose a higher literacy rate supports a stronger economy and better likelihood of repayment of loans. Obviously it is in the interest of government officials to adopt a definition of literacy that enables them to count the maximum number of people as literate. Hence some may count as literate anyone who ever enrolled in school; others may count as literate anyone who completes three or six years of schooling—and this without regard to the quality of instruction in that schooling. This leads to the third reason why official literacy figures cannot be taken at face value: where literacy skills have actually been tested, the actual level of functional literacy is shown to be far less than expected.

In 1992 the United States Department of Education (DOE) released the results of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). When DOE tested the literacy competence of adults in that country, it discovered that 48-51% of them performed at the two lowest levels on the literacy scale: illiterate and functionally illiterate. Nearly a third of American adults were in the next category, semi-literate. They are considered literate for reporting purposes, but are likely to have oral communications preferences just the same. Only 18-21% of adults in the U. S. demonstrated skills sufficient for them to be rated either "literate" or "highly literate." When the Canadian government performed essentially the same kind of study in the mid-1990s, the results were comparable.

In summary, it is grossly inaccurate to assume that everyone a government reports as literate is capable of learning well or best by literate means. Judging from the U. S. and Canadian experience, we might well reduce reported literacy rates by half to get the

approximate functional literacy rate in developing countries. We then need to research how many years of education and what type of education those people received. If they have less than ten to twelve years of education, they are likely to retain an oral communications preference. Even with that many years of education, they may well have an oral communications preference if their education was largely by a rote memory approach that did not require or encourage the critical thinking skills common to western education. And they may have reverted to oral communications preference if they have not continued reading. In Africa south of the Sahara probably 90% of the population has an oral communications preference. Yet probably 90% of the missionaries working there have print communications preference.

Secondary oral communicators are ones who depend on electronic audio and visual communications (see Ong 1982:135). In a secondary oral culture, the elite are functionally literate, and they enable the rest to acquire their information and entertainment from the electronic media. This is certainly the case in the technologized countries of the world. So orality is a growing concern in the U. S., Canada, and other of the industrialized nations. Secondary orality is rapidly becoming an issue in the developing world, too. A 1999 Newsweek profile of Brazilian television suggested that many Brazilians are moving from primary orality to secondary orality without passing through the stage of print orientation that has historically separated the two. Bible societies in developing countries might well consider whether their culture might be one that skips the print phase and goes directly to a secondary orality dependent on multimedia. Orality leaves us no option but to communicate in stories.

Biblical Precedents

This information about literacy and communications preferences can be discouraging, but in fact we have a great source of encouragement for our ministry in such a situation. The early church flourished in a strongly oral culture. Rick Brown summarizes the situation:

"Jesus does not seem to have written any of his messages, but rather committed them to the memory of his disciples. There is little indication that Peter was literate, so we can believe he was a good memorizer of what Jesus said. 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), as was the Revelation of John. In fact, it has been estimated that only 5% of the people in the New Testament churches were literate (Søgaard 1995), certainly no more than 10-15%, and the Word was mediated to most of the believers orally." Brown's estimate of 10-15% is beyond the range set by most scholars.

There are other tell-tale clues of oral transmission in the New Testament era, such as Paul's use of the language of "receiving" and "delivering" with respect to teaching about the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23; cf. 11:2) and about the content of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-5). The Greek words used in these instances are quasi-technical terms for oral transmission of teaching. Note also 2 Tim. 2:2: "And 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." Much of this would have been in story form. In doing this the apostles seem to be following Jesus' own example.

Mark's description of Jesus' approach to teaching (4:1-34) is instructive. "He taught them many things by parables," Mark observes. Later, "when [Jesus] was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables" and he gave them a brief clarification followed by many other parables. Mark concludes his account of the event by writing, "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He

did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything."

This passage affirms that telling a story is teaching, even if it consists of simply telling a story without giving its explanation. Jesus was not afraid to let them wrestle with the meaning of his story. Jesus did sometimes explain the story while in dialog with his followers, but note that his chief way of answering them was with additional stories. It took multiple stories to accomplish his purpose. Furthermore, Mark observes that Jesus carefully adapted his presentation strategy in light of the ability of the listeners to understand. It may be that he chose this strategy to keep potential followers from making a quick superficial response of commitment (see Mt. 13:11-12).

Because of our literate biases, we are sometimes reluctant to admit that telling biblical stories is a powerful form of communication. But Oxford scholar N. T. Wright makes no allowance for such thinking:

". . . it would clearly be quite wrong to see [Jesus'] stories as mere illustrations of truths that could in principle have been articulated in purer, more abstract forms. They were ways of breaking open the worldview of Jesus' hearers, so that it could be remoulded into the worldview which he, Jesus, was commending. His 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." So it is obvious that the example of Jesus and the apostles gives more than enough reason for us to use biblical stories as our means of presentation.

Missiological Considerations

1. We put a priority on people groups who have not yet heard the gospel or who have not heard in a way compatible with their oral learning style. We know that because of the literateness of Southern Baptist missionaries, we have frequently planted 75% of our churches among the 20% of the population that is literate. Those were the people we could best communicate with. If they were oral communicators when we evangelized them, our training processes made literates out of them. We are grateful for this harvest and will continue to work with them. Meanwhile we have neglected the 80% who are oral communicators. We are moving to remedy that neglect.
2. We offer the gospel to people irrespective of the availability of print materials in their language. In the past we have sometimes supposed that Bible translation must precede evangelism, church planting, leadership training, and the like. We will gladly partner with Bible translators because we believe in the value of their work, but we will not let the pace of Bible translation or the pace of literacy training determine with whom we will seek to sow the good seed of the gospel. We will sow it orally in the heart language through chronological Bible storying and seek to encourage those won to Christ to do the same. We support providing literacy training for those who want it but refuse to embrace any ministry approach that is dependent on literacy. In Jan. 2000 Dr. David Ross of SIL reported to a meeting of SBC professors of missions that at the current, recently accelerated pace of Bible translation, SIL will take decades just to initiate work with groups already approved for a translation. Lost people cannot wait that long for the gospel. We cannot wait that long to evangelize when we know oral means are available to present the gospel meaningfully and establish Christ-honoring churches. Moreover, the research of Klem indicates that in Africa south of the Sahara, illiteracy is decreasing by only about 2-3% per decade; moreover, 75% of the illiterate expressed no interest in learning to read. We have anecdotal reports, however, that literacy enrollment tripled in the aftermath of the

- introduction of storying.
3. We select the most appropriate communicational approach available. If our favorite methods of communication are foreign to those we seek to reach, as Christians we bear the burden of changing in order to facilitate communication with them. We cannot justify asking them to adopt our communication preferences. This is doubly so when doing it would make them unable to communicate to their own people what we have taught them. Stories are how oral communicators learn and share, so stories are our primary vehicle. If a group chants or drums its stories instead of telling them, we will seek to chant or drum the biblical stories, too. It so happens that the Christian message is one large story composed of many sub-stories. Stories are powerful communication tools because of their familiarity, simplicity, and memorability. They engage multiple senses as they impact the human imagination. Wright insists that "stories are, actually, peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews. Where head-on attack would certainly fail, the parable hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, gaining entrance and favour which can then be used to change assumptions which the hearer would otherwise keep hidden away for safety." This indirect approach is especially effective among resistant or hostile peoples. Stories are less likely to provoke arguments and premature rejection of the gospel message. If listeners do react against the story, the indirect form probably will allow any animosity to be directed more at the story and less at the storyer, thereby maintaining the relationship between storyer and listener that is so important.
 4. We select stories essential to communicating the enduring truth of Scripture. For evangelizing we identify a core group of stories that are essential to tell God's overarching story of salvation. Typically this list of core stories includes 22-25 stories spanning from creation to the resurrection of Jesus. This group of stories is theologically necessary to set forth the character of God, the reality and seriousness of human sin, the necessity of satisfying God's righteousness, the mercy and grace of God in providing Jesus as the only acceptable substitute for us, the necessity of faith in him alone, and his triumphant resurrection from the dead.
 5. We select stories needed to address the identified bridges and barriers in the worldview of the people we are working with. A careful worldview study needs to be done before storying begins. With the help of SIL and others we have developed a document to assist our personnel in doing worldview studies. Once the initial worldview study has been done, storyers select stories to supplement the core list. These additional stories contain biblical teachings that are needed to speak to the aspects of the prevailing worldview that are inconsistent with a biblical worldview. Dealing with these issues before the call for decision is designed to minimize syncretism. These supplemental stories also are chosen to convey that Christ meets the deep longings of the people in that culture. This process means that every people should be evangelized with a set of biblical stories chosen expressly for their worldview.
 6. We lay a firm foundation for faith by telling the biblical stories sequentially in chronological order. This procedure provides a firm foundation for salvation, Christian living, and church health. It progressively reveals God's attributes. It discloses our need of salvation and how God provided it. This more complete introduction to the Christianity provides a context for interpreting every portion of the Bible.
 7. We seek to initiate a church planting movement that can progress under local leadership and the power of the Spirit without outside subsidy or control. We want to respect the local believers and empower them with training that they can sustain long-term because it does not require printed materials or expensive equipment and because it uses the same communicational approaches by which they have transmitted their heritage and culture for generations. This means our training is

done primarily by modeling and by using their own storytelling style, music, and other performing arts. CBS is designed to give individuals an oral Bible and the competence to share it orally with others. We will recognize biblically qualified pastors and other leaders irrespective of their literacy or lack thereof. We will recognize biblically sound congregations irrespective of their literacy or lack thereof. We seek to develop a strong grassroots ownership of the training processes such that the larger church can survive persecution or economic hardship.

Implications

1. We would welcome collaboration with Bible translators who will use their specialized skills to help us develop reliable worldview documents. We also look to translators for faithful oral translations of an initial set of perhaps 150 stories from the biblical chronology for use in storying while other translation work is done.
2. We welcome collaboration with media specialists who will work with us in preparing culturally appropriate, locally reproducible supplements to the telling of biblical stories. These supplements could include putting biblical stories to music, dance, drama, and the like. They could include preparing radio broadcasts based on storying and audiocassettes that reinforce the storytelling. They could include culturally appropriate and cost-effective teaching pictures or witnessing booklets composed of appropriate Bible pictures at a time when the people are able to decode them.
3. Literate missionaries need to reformulate our presentations to reflect the realities of oral communication. Some representative suggestions include learning to preach narratively instead of expositionally and learning to present the gospel narratively instead of propositionally. We need to develop discipleship approaches based on storytelling and dialog and to develop theological education and leadership training for oral communicators. In this latter instance my own seminary is taking significant strides toward certifying oral communicators who successfully complete a theological education process that requires absolutely no literacy. We have two pilot programs that we have assisted in developing their curriculum and teaching approaches. One is with Deaf Opportunity OutReach International. The other is an evangelist training center run by the Episcopal Church of Sudan. We are in dialog with three seminaries here in East Africa about setting up another training process that would be done exclusively in heart languages; be taught only by oral communications methods; and focus on the competencies of recall, understanding, synthesis, application, and performance of approximately 200 biblical stories. At Southwestern we have taught CBS as a course twice a year on our campus for several years, usually in an intensive, one-week term in August and January, but also during the semester-long terms as well. At least two other Southern Baptist seminaries have made plans to teach CBS as a part of their curriculum.
4. Orality in Africa demands we consider multiple ways of distributing God's word in oral form.
5. We must recognize that print read aloud is received by oral communicators as print communication, not oral communication.
6. Our production and use of visual media must take into consideration the decoding skills of oral communicators.
7. Storying the Old Testament can greatly improve oral communicators' comprehension of the JESUS film and a gospel portion or NT-only translation.
8. Institutions and organizations may find it helpful to encourage or assign individuals to pursue additional education in areas related to orality, literacy, storytelling and related forms of performance. East Tennessee State University, for example, offers a MA in storytelling. LaNette Thompson, SBC missionary in Burkina Faso, wrote a MA thesis at the University of Texas in Arlington on the subject of "The Non-Literate and

the Transfer of Knowledge in West Africa." John Witte is working on a Th.M. at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His thesis deals with teaching oral communicators to interpret narrative texts. IMB missionary Bob Calvert is also at Southwestern Seminary wrapping up coursework for a D.Min. His doctoral project will focus on teaching selected passages from one of Paul's epistles to oral communicators. Southern Baptists have five missionaries working in southern Africa who have obtained or are working on advanced degrees related to storying. These tasks are challenging, so it is important to have personnel devoting serious attention to them.

The missionary task is too important for us to do anything but find the best possible way of sharing the gospel with the oral communicators who make up the majority of the world's population. By God's grace we will seek to find that way and implement it enthusiastically.