Contextualization, Biblical Inerrancy, and the Orality Movement

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Introduction

Since its inception, the Church has always struggled to find the most effective evangelistic strategies to engage its cultural context; strategies both consistent with the gospel message and culturally appropriate.[1] Navigating this ministerial fine line is no simple task, since any overemphasis on either side can cause devastatingly harmful results to the church in that context. This concept is what missiologists call "contextualization" – ministry based on rigorous biblical fidelity wrapped in culturally relevant forms. Church leaders are called to critically

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analyze again and again the ministry models they are
currently using or are considering for the future so that their
cultural accommodation will not undermine biblical
fidelity.[2] Contextualization in missions constantly pushes
us back to the Scriptures, examining our methods by using
the biblical text as our standard.

How, then, might international missionaries think
contextually about the lostness that surrounds them? First,
they must ascertain a proper perspective of just how dire is
the situation. According to the evangelical[3] research group
known as The Joshua Project, we live in a world where
2.90 billion of the world's 7.13 billion people (40.7 %)

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[2]Probably the most straightforward and helpful resource in
explaining contextualization is missiologist Paul Hiebert's essay,
entitled "Critical Contextualization." Paul Hiebert, "Critical
Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11,
no. 3 (1987): 104-112.
　　　[3]David W. Bebbington has outlined four definitive
characteristics of evangelical Christians: Conversionism, Activism,
Biblicism, and Crucicentrism. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in
Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London:
Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2.

remain unreached with the gospel message.[4] Most of these men, women, and children live in lands with scarce availability of education, so their literacy levels are low at best.

Forty percent of the world population is a breathtaking statistic, but even that does not tell the whole truth. Embedded within the remaining 60% of the world population are people who are counted as "reached," but still cannot understand the biblical gospel because their learning styles for deep, worldview-altering information is not based on the printed word. They are people modern missions scholars are beginning to term "oral learners."[5] Instead of picking up a book or a newspaper, oral-

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[4]The Joshua Project, "The Joshua Project," http://www.joshuaproject.net/ (accessed October 14, 2013). The Joshua Project is a research device relating the numbers of the world's peoples unreached by evangelical missionaries. The term "unreached" is used by evangelical mission agencies to refer to cultural groups that are less than 2% evangelical.

[5]Most of the leading authors of the Orality Movement trace this new line of scholarship to the writings of literacy scholar Walter J. Ong, especially his findings from *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982).

preference learners glean their information from a story they heard, a song sung to them, or a video they watched. By some estimates, the world population of those who prefer to learn orally may be as high as 80%.[6] The study of orality – reliance on the spoken rather than the written word – has exposed, for missiologists, a logistical and experiential gap between the way missions has been conducted in the past and the learning preferences of the world's peoples. The way forward in contextualized world evangelization, these writers say, is by taking orality seriously. Their arguments are compelling.

Contextualization requires a constant re-examining of our missionary methods based on biblical revelation. For conservative evangelicals, specifically those who maintain the standard that the Bible is the *inerrant* Word of God, every step taken in gospel proclamation agendas must

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[6]Grant Lovejoy, "The Extent of Orality: 2012 Update," *Orality Journal* 1, no. 1 (2012): 29.

display strict adherence to the biblical text. For

confessional evangelicals, any oral adaptation in the

wording of a biblical story, though reworked in culturally

appropriate terms, must take inerrancy seriously. There are

some Christian groups, however, who have become so

excited about the potential of the orality movement that,

according to time-tested evaluations of biblical inerrancy,

namely the Chicago Statement (1978), lead to the

conclusion that proper contextualization is not being done.[7]

As such, one may logically question their views concerning

the authority of the biblical text.

Contextualization is the key in navigating world

missions strategies such as the orality movement,

upholding biblical fidelity while still maintaining that, as

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[7]Although I will address this in greater detail below, consider specifically some of the routes taken by the Network of Biblical Storytellers, often going beyond the telling of a biblical story to the relating assumptions and expansions about how the biblical events might have looked or sounded based on the perspective of minor characters. See especially Dennis Dewey, "Biblical Storytelling as Spiritual Discipline Grounded in Scholarship," (2011), Link for

long as unsaved men, women, and children still walk our streets, our missional task is not yet complete. Orality strategists firmly believe an oral-based approach to missions is the way forward. On the other hand, conservative theologians rightly caution anchoring everything in the inerrant text of the Bible. In what follows, therefore, I will attempt to explain the key assertions of the orality movement, issues raised by the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, and where proponents of both might notice potentially sensitive touch-points. Finally, I will suggest a way forward that takes orality, inerrancy, and contextualization seriously.

The Orality Movement

In the early 1900s, classical literature scholars Milman Parry and Albert Lord suggests the ancient poet Homer was

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footnote 7: http://www.nbsint.org/assets/1408/8-22-

in fact an illiterate "master-poet" who compiled several traditionally oral legends together in a highly memorable fashion to form his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[8] Comparing their findings to how tales are passed down by an oral people group called the Southern Slavs of former Yugoslavia, Parry and Lord suggests that oral poets do not concern themselves with verbatim memorization of traditional legends, but rather artistically and musically craft such pieces in order to preserve the fundamental content of their culture's stories. In this way, the indigenous Southern Slavic listeners understood these "culturally crafted" legends to be virtually identical. Parry and Lord's theory has been called the "oral-formulaic theory."

Literacy scholar Walter J. Ong expands the oral-formulaic theory with his research on the cognitive differences between learners who prefer oral to print-based

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2011_biblicalstorytellingspiritualityscholarship.pdf.
      [8]Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

information.[9] Most prominently, Ong categorizes oral-preference learners into two categories: primary and secondary oral learners. Primary oral learners, according to Ong, are those peoples who have never seen a printed word. In contrast, secondary oral learners can read but prefer televised broadcasts, radio, or video to reading.[10] Also significant, Ong notes that words are not objectively frozen in time for oral peoples, but their traditions are constantly being passed on through performative, memorable stories, songs, and proverbs. Ong writes,

> Textual, visual representation of a word is not a real word, but a 'secondary modeling system.' Thought is nested in speech, not in texts . . . Chirographic and typographic folk find it convincing to think of the word, essentially a sound, as a 'sign' because 'sign' refers primarily to something visually apprehended . . . Our complacency in thinking of words as signs is due to the tendency, perhaps incipient in oral cultures but clearly marked in chirographic cultures and far more marked in typographic and

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[9]Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982).
[10]Ong, 11.

electronic cultures, to reduce all sensation
and indeed all human experience to visual
analogues.[11]

One of the first documented ways this oral and literate

divide was put into practice on the mission field is a short

analysis from 1957. In *Communicating the Gospel to

Illiterates*, Hans Rudi Weber discusses his missionary work

among primarily oral Indonesians, whom he terms

"illiterate." Weber challenged literate-based mission

sending agencies to rethink their prejudice against working

with oral-based approaches. Whenever he would ask a

question that assumed a rehearsed, point-by-point

definition, Weber was surprised to find that these oral

groups would often respond by embedding their answers

within a story or proverb. Weber concludes his findings

both by challenging foreign missionaries among oral

[11]Ibid., 75-76.

cultures to proclaim the Christian message dramatically and picturesquely, not merely intellectually.[12]

Weber's challenge is still warranted today. In the groundbreaking *Making Disciples of Oral Learners,* originally published as a Lausanne Paper in 2005, the authors expose the fact that 90% of the world's evangelical missionary force presents the gospel using highly literate means.[13] This indicates that, for example, an indigenous person who prefers oral-based learning is almost certainly evangelized and later discipled *via* books and fill-in-the-blank worksheets.[14]

Since the early 1980s, oral-based mission strategies have grown from localized phenomena among a small

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[12]H. R. Weber, *The Communication of the Gospel to Illiterates* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1957), 79.

[13]International Orality Network and Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Lima, NY: Elim Publishing, 2005), 3.

[14]One such evangelistic tool that is used the world over is *The Four Spiritual Laws,* wherein each of the four laws are thoroughly explained (often by using a word-filled, 16-page tract), and before progressing to the next law, one must first apprehend the previous one.

group of international missionaries to a rising discussion
confronting contextualization and missiology. Roughly two
decades following the publication of Weber's study, New
Tribes missionary Trevor McIlwain began to develop a
method for orally and chronologically teaching through the
Bible among the primarily oral people group he was
working with in the Philippines. McIlwain's model, called
Chronological Bible Teaching, moves in an expository
manner through the stories from Genesis to Revelation.
Southern Baptist missionaries Jim Slack and J.O. Terry,
also working in the Philippines, later adapted McIlwain's
idea to form the oral strategy that is now most-widely used
in conservative evangelical missionary circles,
Chronological Bible Storying (CBS).[15]

The tract can be found in pdf form at http://www.campuscrusade. com
/downloads/ 4laws.pdf.
　　　　[15]For a more detailed understanding of how CBS developed
out of McIlwain's writings, see Tom Steffen and J. O. Terry, "The
Sweeping Story of Scripture Taught through Time," *Missiology* 35
(July 2007): 315-335.

At the heart of CBS is the idea that, as much as possible, biblical stories should be allowed to speak for themselves. The great temptation for Western-trained Bible teachers is to leap from simply relating the biblical story to delineating points of interest and application that should be gleaned from the teaching. But such is not necessarily the point of CBS, through which storytellers work hard to select biblical stories that specifically target the audience's worldview and then put in great effort to tell the story as closely as possible to the biblical text, while still remembering to encase their verbal and non-verbal presentation in properly contextualized forms.

True CBS "storying sessions" often progress as follows: (1) the leader will tell the biblical story, (2) retell it, (3) ask the group for their input in retelling it, (4) divide everyone into partners to retell the story, and (5) finally ask the group discussion questions. In this way, the biblical story is often heard four or five times by everyone present

before discussion begins. As an example, the present researcher has on several occasions told the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32) in CBS fashion. After moving through the story session steps, it is amazing to see the biblical story become an internalized and easily reproducible tool that often garners very helpful responses and fruitful discussion. Though the present researcher has never participated in a CBS session among primary oral learners; only secondary oral learners who have admitted afterward that studying the Bible in this way drives them to pick up the Bible they have not read in a while to see if the "exciting story" they learned is "really in the Bible."[16]

The orality movement in modern missions has begun to truly steam forward in the last decade. In 2005, several evangelical missionary agencies that noticed the effects of orality strategies in missions formed the

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[16]Interestingly, both Christian believers and unbelievers have responded in this way.

International Orality Network (ION) as a coalition that is
committed to communicating the need for oral-based
discipleship needs to the world's evangelical churches.[17]
ION is now in their second year of producing a biannual
Orality Journal.[18] In 2012, ION and its partners hosted a
conference at Wheaton College concerning oral-based
theological education, which led to the publication of the
fascinating book, *Beyond Literate Western Models:
Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*
(2013).[19] Finally, one of the most helpful resources
chronicling the forward march of oral-based missionary
methods is missiologist and orality studies pioneer Tom
Steffen's new article, "Chronological Practices and

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[17]See specifically the International Orality Network's page,
"How We Began," at http://orality.net/ how_we_began.

[18]The *Orality Journal* may also be accessed at
http://orality.net/.

[19]Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy, eds., *Beyond Literate
Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral
Contexts* (Hong Kong: Capstone Enterprises Ltd., 2013).

Possibilities in the Urban World."[20] According to these recently published materials, oral-based ministry models are quickly finding a home in the United States, making the awareness of orality and its theological implications a movement with which even American theologians will soon have to deal.[21]

Biblical Inerrancy

In a word, biblical inerrancy is the confession that, since God cannot err, and the Bible is the Word of God, the Bible cannot err. The concept of inerrancy is at its heart a statement concerning the nature of God. Maintaining the conviction that biblical inerrancy is a powerful and

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[20]Tom Steffen, "Chronological Practices in the Urban World," *Global Missiology* 4, no. 10 (2013). The article from this online journal can be accessed at http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/viewFile/1215/2796.

[21]For example, see the newly-released *The Lost World of Scripture* by John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), which claims that new studies in orality should cause theologians to rethink their traditional commitments to inerrancy.

necessary anchor for the flourishing of the Christian missionary enterprise. On the contrary, the idea that God has erred in His written Word inevitably chips away at believers' passion for sharing God's Word with others. In other words, a robust belief that critics will not find "errors" in the Bible solidifies the Christian missionary enterprise as a work of God, and as such cannot fail. To date, the most thorough convictional statement of inerrancy among conservative evangelicals, moreover, is found in the Chicago Statement (1978).[22]

Yet before understanding why this is the case, it is important to understand the theological milieu that led up to the publication of the 1978 Chicago Statement. Although debates centering on the nature of Scripture have occurred since the time of the Church Fathers, most evangelical scholars siding with the ICBI contend that the first modern

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[22]The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) can be found in myriad books, journals, and websites. See, for example, the

inerrancy crisis occurred nearly a hundred years before the council met.[23] Princeton theologians Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield participated in lively written and oral exchanges about the nature of inspired Scripture with inclusivistic Union Theological Seminary professor Charles Briggs. Hodge and Warfield insisted that, if the entirety of Scripture is inspired by God, and God does not inspire error, then God's word cannot contain errors: "[God] presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters he designed them to communicate."[24]

The second issue leading up to the inerrancy debates is that Social Darwinism crept into the halls of

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PDF version from the Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society here: http://www.etsjets. org/ files/documents/Chicago_Statement.pdf.
[23]See John D. Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984) and Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 99-119.

higher education after the First World War also took a toll on theological education, as one by one, denominations began following their seminaries' higher critical theologians into a denial of the biblically miraculous. Multiple books came out in defense of biblical inerrancy during the middle decades of the twentieth century, but especially noteworthy are Southern Baptist pastor W. A. Criswell's *Why I Preach the Bible is Literally True* (1973) and former Fuller Seminary faculty member Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* (1976).[25] Lindsell's work blew the lid off the boiling kettle by relaying the fallout from inerrancy crises within seminaries such as Fuller and denominations such as the Lutheran Missouri Synod and the Southern Baptist Convention. Lindsell challenges his readers to consider that, while a denial of

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[24]Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 17-18. This short work was originally printed in *The Presbyterian Review* (April 1881).

biblical inerrancy is not salvific, such a denial would start church members on the slippery slope to outright disregard for historic Christianity. Conviction in the doctrine of inerrancy, Lindsell writes, ". . . makes possible the unsullied continuance of the group that holds it, whereas the surrender of this principle virtually guarantees that such a possibility does not exist."[26]

Beginning in the early 1970s, meetings began to be held by key theologians to formulate an evangelical statement responding to the growing controversy. Philosopher and theologian Norman L. Geisler recalls that the initial leaders of such discussions, including Geisler, J. I. Packer, and R. C. Sproul, came together to respond to the gathering storm of evangelical institutions turning away

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[25]W. A. Criswell, *Why I Preach the Bible is Literally True* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973); Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).
[26]Lindsell, 143.

from the historic teaching of inerrancy.[27] According to the Chicago Statement's preamble, the document is based on the declaration that the "recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority." An unhindered belief that God does not contradict himself through false testimony and uninhibited clarity is central to the teaching of inerrancy. The nineteen articles of the confession affirm several basic tenets of evangelicalism and deny many charges against evangelicalism, such as the affirmation that the written Bible in its entirety is revelation (Article III) and the denial that normative revelation has been given since the New Testament writings (Article V). Yet some of the essential elements of the Chicago Statement's definition of inerrancy may be found in Articles X and following, such as that inerrancy applies only to the original

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[27]Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 22.

manuscripts (Article X) and the affirmation that Scripture should interpret Scripture using grammatical-historical exegetical methods (Article XVIII). In the following section of this paper, the present researcher will interact with these final two articles in particular (X and XVIII) to discuss how their proper application will aid inerrantists considering oral missions strategies.

Before moving to this next element, however, a word about inerrancy-based hermeneutics is in order. There are pastors, scholars, and missionaries who may verbally assent to biblical inerrancy as defined by the Chicago Statement but deny it in practice.[28] Chicago Statement framer J. I. Packer draws the line in the sand when he pens the following, "Preachers whose belief about biblical

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[28]The example of biblical scholar Robert Gundry comes to mind. Although signing a statement affirming biblical inerrancy in order to remain in the Evangelical Theological Society, Gundry declared that unilateral acceptance of literal inerrancy was not possible. The following year, Gundry was proved by several ETS members to have moved outside the inerrantist position and was subsequently voted

interpretation and inerrancy vacillate can hardly avoid

trying from time to time to guard against supposedly

unworthy thoughts which the Bible, if believed as it stands,

might engender."[29] Christians, charged with unashamedly

taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, will always

minister out of their deepest convictions concerning the

authenticity of their message. It will not take long for

skeptics to see through doubt-riddled views.

The need is great for missionaries to remain

confident that their convictional anchor will outlast the

storms of uncertainty that will inevitably arise. Lindsell is

again helpful in showing that biblical inerrancy is a

watershed issue for mission practitioners:

> I will contend that embracing a doctrine of
> an errant Scripture will lead to disaster down
> the road. It will result in the loss of
> missionary outreach; it will quench

out of the organization. See Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy,* 53.

[29]J. I. Packer, "Preaching as Biblical Interpretation," in Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels,eds., *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 203.

missionary passion; it will lull congregations to sleep and undermine their belief in the full-orbed truth of the Bible; it will produce spiritual sloth and decay; and it will finally lead to apostasy.[30]

The downfall of one's faith begins, Lindsell is saying, occurs when Christians relinquish their belief that the Bible is inerrant. It is therefore imperative that any and all "new missions movements" be evaluated in light of the deeply significant commitment to biblical inerrancy.

Orality and Inerrancy Touch-Points

At first glance, orality and inerrancy may seem categorically untouchable, since orality emphasizes the spoken word and inerrancy majors on God's written word. This is not necessarily so. As mentioned above, there are at least two specific articles from the historic Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that must be examined in

[30]Lindsell, 25.

light of recent discussions generated by the leaders shaping the orality movement. These two critical articles are X and XVIII. Each will be analyzed briefly.

First, Article X of the Chicago Statement declares that the term "inerrancy" only applies to the original manuscripts. The common objection often goes, however, that we do not possess the original manuscripts and therefore should not use the term "inerrancy." Christian theologian Greg L. Bahnsen helpfully distinguishes between the original *text* of the autographs, meaning the actual words, and the original *codex*, meaning the document. Bahnsen writes, "Some may still ask, 'If God took the trouble and deemed it crucial to secure the entire accuracy of the original text of Scripture, why did He not take greater care to preserve the copies errorless? . . . In so saying, however, they make the same mistake made by many critics . . . namely, of confusing the autographic text

with the autographic codex."[31] This means, then, that the confession of inerrancy refers to the accuracy of the *words* themselves.

Concentration on the *words* themselves is significant for orality strategists, especially those that wrongly take greater care to preserve the tone, or voice, of the biblical story than the original wording. Inerrantists claim, however, that it is through the preaching of the unchanging *words* of the Bible that Almighty God saves, blesses, and protects his people throughout all generations. For missionaries utilizing oral-based methods, then, it is incumbent upon them to remain as close as possible to the Bible in all their oral-style ministries in order to stay true to

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[31]Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 182. Also see Daniel Wallace's similar argument in Daniel Wallace, "Inerrancy and the Text of the Autographa: Assessing the Logic of the Agnostic View," in *Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Science,* eds. William A. Dembski and Michael R. Licona (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010): 211-219.

their confession of biblical inerrancy. Proper contextualization demands no less.

In the world of oral storytelling, the Network of Biblical Storytellers (NOBS) is a large organization that pours forth voluminous books, articles, and conferences. NOBS was founded in 1977, growing out of founder Tom Boomershine's PhD dissertation about reading the Gospel of Mark with the view that it was written in order to be read aloud in story form.[32] This organization by no means professes biblical inerrancy, and from its inception has advocated using biblical stories as a launching point to new revelation and experiencing the presence of Jesus. Boomershine writes,

> When our/my story is connected appropriately with the story of God, there is revelation. It is a sacramental moment when ordinary human reality discloses the presence of God. Through the words of the story, the Word of God becomes present. In

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[32]A short online biography of Tom Boomershine and his journey toward the creation of NOBS can be found here: http://www.tomboomershine.org/ pages/abouttom.html.

> that moment, it becomes a sacred story through which God speaks . . . And when these moments of authentic connection take place, Jesus is really there. Thus, telling the stories of the Gospels is one of the forms of the real presence of Christ.[33]

For the confessor of biblical inerrancy, Boomershine's thoughts here are deeply troubling. Labeling *revelation* the interweaving of the personal story of the storyteller with a Gospel narrative should raise multiple red flags for even the more moderate Christian. Yet since Boomershine began his "story journey," the NOBS organization has grown to include several international mission points, national and regional conferences, a "Storytelling Academy," and currently Boomershine has begun offering a Doctor of Ministry program in "Biblical Storytelling in Digital Culture."[34] NOBS storyteller and Presbyterian Church (USA) reverend Dennis Dewey states the following about

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[33]Thomas A. Boomershine, *Story Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 21.
[34]Network of Biblical Storytellers, International, "About Us," http://www.nbsint.org/aboutus (accessed October 25, 2013).

NOBS' philosophy concerning the biblical text: "The Network of Biblical Storytellers affirms that biblical storytelling takes many forms: from paraphrase to first-person monologue, to midrashic expansion, to contemporization."[35] Such a statement clearly distances NOBS storytellers from the more biblically conservative practitioners of CBS, yet the danger to expand, paraphrase, or "contemporize" a biblical story is real and accepted in some circles within the orality movement.

Second, Article XVIII of the Chicago Statement is significant for discussions with the orality movement use of grammatico-historical exegesis and that Scripture should interpret Scripture. Preachers that maintain biblical inerrancy must give accurate attention to both the immediate and broad context of the passage they are teaching in order to truly comprehend the meaning of their

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[35]Dennis Dewey, "Biblical Storytelling as Spiritual Discipline Grounded in Scholarship," (2011),

text. Grammatical usage that identifies the type of biblical genre instructs the studious preacher, as well as noting the historical context of the biblical author, but never should exegetical methods or genre criticism be placed hierarchically above other biblical passages in illuminating the meaning of a text. Apologists Norman Geisler and William Roach correctly warn, "*Look for meaning in the text, not beyond it.* The meaning is not found *beyond* the text (in God's mind), *beneath* the text (in the mystic's mind), or *behind* the text (in the author's unexpressed intention); it is found *in* the text (in the author's expressed meaning)."[36] If such context-based hermeneutics are applied rightly, a biblical story's meaning will not be hidden from an audience of either hearers or readers.

This is not to say that extra-biblical resources cannot inform one's understanding and interpretation of a

http://www.nbsint.org/assets/1408/8-22-
2011_biblicalstorytellingspiritualityscholarship.pdf, page 1.
[36]Geisler and Roach, 292. (Emphasis theirs.)

biblical text. Missionaries using oral-based methods like CBS should be quick on their feet with exegetical instruments, but they must also remember that it is God's Word, not their own word, that is inspired and gives correct meaning. In the same vein, skeptics of the orality movement would do well to remember it is God's Word rightly administered that changes hearts. God's Word told in a foreign form is not effective, for either the oral or literate learner. The learning curve goes both ways.

Unfortunately, NOBS orality strategists have also moved "beyond , beneath, and behind the text" in this arena, as well. Commenting on the great lengths storytellers may take to interpret their text, Dennis Dewey says:

> The Network embraces the scholarship of the historical-critical method, including form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, narrative criticism and performance criticism. It welcomes the insights of socio-political analysis, feminist theology, liberation theology and other approaches to the texts that attempt to

understand them in their fullness and not as mere historical or scientific truth.[37]

Again, this is a grave problem for storytellers who maintain biblical inerrancy. The interpretive practices that NOBS promotes, according to Dewey's quote above, force the biblical text to submit to modernist and presuppositions that will always lead to the interpreter's preconceived conclusions.

The Chicago Statements declaration that grammatical-historical methods, as opposed to those used by NOBS, is helpful in maintaining a solid belief in the sufficiency of Scripture. For example, reading up on the historical background of the Roman occupation of first century Palestine better equips the "storying" of passages that deal with the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion. In all things, historical and literary research must be rightly regarded as an aid to finding textual meaning.

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[37]Dewey, page 2.

Charting a Way Forward

As a practitioner of the oral-based strategy known as CBS,
the present researcher has found it is possible to peacefully
strive for the goals of the orality movement and still
hermeneutically maintain the conviction of biblical
inerrancy. Highly literate theologians who hold firmly to
the doctrine of biblical inerrancy need not be frightened by
the contextualized "storying" strategy known as CBS,
which attempts to tell God's stories in ways that are
appropriate to the target culture's worldview. Both
theologians and cultural exegetes note that every
worldview (biblical, Muslim, postmodern, etc.) is itself a
story that unites and shapes communities.[38]

The bringing together of orality and inerrancy is,
academically, a discussion in largely uncharted waters.
Therefore, this paper will now move to first answering

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[38]See Micheal W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living
at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand
Rapids: Baker, 2008), 6.

seven objections commonly raised against CBS, and

afterward I will briefly suggest how a path forward might

take shape if CBS as a methodology can be said to

faithfully partner with the evangelical standard of

inerrancy.[39]

Objection One: "Preliterates." First, the objection

that CBS fails to assist "preliterate" people groups in

learning to read the Bible for themselves is untenable and

betrays an inherently "colonial-type" mentality.

Noteworthy evangelical pastor John Piper composed a blog

post dated November 16, 2005, that asks nine questions

concerning missionary practitioners of oral methods and

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[39]These objections have been identified by the author. I have already dealt with three of these objections in my article, "The Efficiency of Storying," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2013): 322-326. Also consider veteran missionary Larry Dinkins' superb article exposing and countering objections to oral methods in general in Larry Dinkins, "Objections and Benefits to an Oral Strategy for Bible Study and Teaching," *William Carey International Development Journal* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 11-17.

their adherence to Scripture.[40] Throughout his post, Piper

consistently refers to oral cultures as "preliterate."

Although an unflagging mission advocate, Piper's words

confuse the missionary mandate by labeling primary oral

groups as deficient and calling for literacy education in

addition to making disciples. Most of the frontier regions

using CBS do not possess a Bible in their language, and

many of these languages are not written at all. When push

comes to shove, missionaries must consider what would be

the most effective use of their limited time: evangelism or

literacy training. Wycliffe Bible Translators, the most

prominent of the Bible translation agencies, estimates that

over 2,000 languages have currently been identified as

needing a missionary to begin translation work.[41] Most

translation agencies, including Wycliffe, acknowledge that

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[40]John Piper, "Missions, Orality, and the Bible," http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/missions-orality-and-the-bible (accessed January 31, 2012).

translation of the New Testament alone can take upwards

of ten or twenty years. And even then these cultural groups

must be convinced that reading is a desirable task. Waiting

until such "preliterate" people become "literate" with their

own Bible could mean withholding saving truth from

thousands of souls in the process.

Also, the cost of resources needed to train young,

oral-preference Christians to pastor their churches filled

with oral-preference members may be unproductive.

Indeed, if time prohibits such men from learning to read

and attending years of seminary classes taught by

foreigners, one wonders why any indigenous Christian

would aspire to become a pastor. The goal of missions as

spreading the glory of God by producing passionate

disciples who gather into reproducing churches is impeded

when mission leaders place unbiblical requirements on

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[41]Wycliffe Bible Translators, "The Worldwide Status of Bible Translation (2011)," http://www.wycliffe.org /About/Statistics.aspx (accessed June 5, 2012).

upcoming indigenous pastors. Inerrancy is not
compromised when pastors who are oral learners continue
to teach in manners that consistently judge biblical truth as
supreme authority.

Objection Two: Original Language Proficiency.
The second objection follows in the same vein with the
first, that healthy churches need pastors adept in the
original biblical languages in order to access the full and
inerrant counsel of God. On the contrary, plenty of
evangelical pastors who championed inerrancy throughout
the centuries were not Hebrew and Greek scholars.[42] In the
blog post cited above, Piper twice states that incompetency
in the original biblical languages will cause "dependency
on outsiders." Again, one must ask whether or not
obtaining a seminary degree in biblical language
proficiency is necessary to produce obedient disciples. For

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[42]For example, see the remarkable history of Baptist pastors
who have held firmly to the doctrine of inerrancy who were not Greek

missionaries to declare, as Piper challenges them, "that this Bible was first written in Greek and Hebrew, the languages that God used centuries ago," it is at least possible that pastors in oral communities will become discouraged because it seems God speaks only to the educated.[43] Long-range goals of higher education will be useless if lay believers become convinced that God only communes with literate professionals.[44]

Exegesis, the act of drawing out from the words of Scripture what is meant, does not necessarily entail literacy. Returning to the fact that, according to the framers of the Chicago Statement, meaning is found in the text itself and not anywhere else, story crafters must make sure that the words they have labored over retain the proper textual meaning. One example is replacing the phrase "kill the

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or Hebrew scholars in L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, revised edition, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999).
    [43]John Piper, "Missions, Orality, and the Bible."

fatted calf" with "prepare a great feast" from the story of
the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Although there exists a
great deal of cultural baggage surrounding cows among
Hindu listeners, the full force of the verse may be lost if the
phrase is left out or reworded. Story crafters must explain
their reasoning behind word substitutes and ensure their
listeners are not precisely equating their compilation of oral
stories with divine Scripture. Indeed, the original biblical
text does state "fatted calf," but the cultural significance is
not lost when replaced in the story with "great feast."
Inerrancy is concerned with the words themselves, and
therefore claiming culturally altered stories as inerrant
Scripture cannot be said to pass the inerrancy test.

Objection Three: Word Variation. The objection
against the variation of wording in biblical stories stems
from the fact that no orally told story is ever truly relayed

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[44]In addition, one of the core tenants of the Reformation, the
priesthood of all believers, is denied if biblical language competency is
required for church leadership.

verbatim. That inerrancy cannot accept such variation is unwarranted at best. Under Article XIII of the Chicago Statement, inerrantists deny, among several other things, that "variant selections of material in parallel accounts" undermine biblical inerrancy. R. C. Sproul, in the official commentary to the Chicago Statement entitled *Explaining Inerrancy*, writes,

> Though biblical writers may have arranged their material differently, they do not affirm that Jesus said on one occasion what he never said on that occasion. Neither are they claiming that another parallel account is wrong for not including what they themselves include. As an itinerant preacher, Jesus no doubt said many similar things on different occasions.[45]

One of the more significant examples of variation within the Bible is the slightly differing accounts of the temptations of Christ in the wilderness. For sake of brevity, only a few brief observations will be offered. Matthew 4:1-

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[45]R.C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary* (Oakland, CA: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1980), 43.

11 notes that Jesus was tempted first to turn the stones into loaves of bread (4:3-4), next to jump off the pinnacle of the temple in the "holy city" (4:5-6), and finally to bow down to Satan after being shown the world's kingdoms atop a high mountain (4:7-10). Mark allots only two verses to the biblical story (1:12-13), simply stating that Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. In Luke 4:1-13, a fuller picture similar to the one in Matthew is given, though the chronology of the temptations is not precisely the same. Luke says that Jesus was first tempted to turn the stones into bread (4:3), shown the world's kingdoms and asked to bow down to Satan (4:5-6), and last admonished to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple in "Jerusalem" (4:9). Also, only Matthew and Mark mention the attendance of angels after the ordeal (Matt. 4:11, Mk. 1:13). Clearly, specific audiences were in the authors' minds as they wrote these inspired texts: Matthew writing to Jews who would understand that the term "holy city" meant Jerusalem and

Luke knowing that the non-Jews he wrote to would require a more specific rendering. The variation does not negate the claims of biblical inerrancy, however, because such variation is allowed within the definition laid out by the Chicago Statement framers. The concept of the full inspiration of the Bible judges the whole of Scripture as equally inspired in the same manner.

This idea plays out in numerous ways on the mission field when using oral strategies such as CBS. Practitioners may wonder which of the different variations to choose from as their source. Returning to the temptations of Jesus story, the question will arise to tell the story based on the accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or some sort of combination of all three. Also, storytellers must deal with questions that develop concerning the amount of embellishment, individual commentary, and ordering of the events. This is why CBS has for many become the preferred model, clasping tightly to the story itself, and

reinforcing the "story and only the story" through several rounds of culturally appropriate repetition. Fidelity within variety is acceptable and does not threaten inerrancy.

Objection Four: Equating Stories with Scripture. The objection that stories told using CBS cannot be equated with inerrant Scripture, which has already been alluded to above, is affirmed by conservative CBS strategists. CBS as a methodology is best described as a form of preaching.[46] In the New Testament, the differing forms for the word *euangelizo* connote (in the active and middle tenses) "bring the good news; preach the good news; proclaim".[47] Storying as a method of evangelism and preaching is authoritative in the same way a pastor's sermon concerning a biblical text is authoritative. While this judgment may

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[46]To be sure, this designation will not satisfy either extreme, whether unflagging advocates of traditional preaching models (expository, topical, etc.) or determined Bible storyers who consider theirs as the only method that works.

[47]Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, et. al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Societies-Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), 74-75.

seem fair enough, there are at least three major implications of this fact that are worth mentioning.

The first implication of viewing CBS as a form of preaching necessitates healthy hermeneutical standards in line with good preaching that views God's revealed word as chiefly authoritative. Preachers who consistently preach out of the conviction that the words God has provided are inerrant will demonstrate humility in their handling of it. Second, CBS equips storytellers to "preach" the good news in a memorable fashion that is easy both to recall and reproduce. People love to hear and tell stories, and CBS affords practitioners to tell the world's greatest stories. CBS offers Christians yet another tool to preach the good news in a non-threatening manner that penetrates deeply the hearts of the masses that will listen to stories but never enter a church building. In his superbly-written *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry*, missiologist Tom Steffen quotes an old Hasidic proverb: "Tell people a fact

and you touch their minds. Tell people a story and you touch their souls."[48] Third, labeling CBS as preaching should not be discounted by preachers of more traditional models such as expository or topical preaching. If storytelling causes obedience to the truths of God's Word, preachers who use traditional models and have previously seen a lack of obedience in church members would do well to reconsider their biases against CBS. Temporary discomfort for the sake of obedience is a worthy exchange of which many in the worldwide evangelical mission community have already begun to take note. Even the recently published "Cape Town Commitment" from the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (2010) boldly exhorts, "As we recognize and take action on issues

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[48]Tom A. Steffen, *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry: Cross-Cultural Storytelling at Home and Abroad*, revised edition, (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 56.

of orality, let us make greater use of oral methodologies in discipling programmes, even among literate believers."[49]

Objection Five: Absence of Systematic Theology. Systematic theology is almost always laid out in linear, bullet-point form, and, as has already been shown, oral communicators do not prefer to learn this way.[50] Nestled within a wonderful collection of essays authored by missionaries serving in Buddhist countries, former missionary Miriam Adeney recognizes that, at the end of the day, it is the uniquely human stories of biblical characters that people remember. Adeney comments, "The

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[49]Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, "The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 2 (April 2011): 74. The Lausanne Covenant (1974), widely recognized by the worldwide evangelical missionary community, also affirms that the Bible is "without error in all that it affirms." The Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, "The Lausanne Covenant," Lausanne.org, http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html (accessed June 8, 2012).

[50]Wayne Grudem notes that systematic theology seeks to "collect" and "summarize" the biblical passages that speak to a particular subject. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 23.

Bible is not primarily doctrines. It is primarily the stories of people who have known God."[51] Systematic theology often replaces biblical narratives that retell the exquisite dealings of God and his people with lists describing what principles can be gleaned from these stories. Though not always the case, systematic texts simply reference individual verses within these beautiful stories. CBS does not pit itself against systematic theology, but instead takes a different path.

By moving through the Bible chronologically, CBS designs story sets in such a way that oral-preference Christians begin to construct a formidable "biblical theology." In the helpful study entitled *The Promise-Plan of God*, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. defines "biblical theology" as theology that views the entire 66 books of the Bible as

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[51]Miriam Adeney, "Feeding Giraffes, Counting Cows, and Missing True Learners: The Challenge of Buddhist Oral Communicators," in Paul De Neui, ed., *Communicating Christ Through Story and Song: Orality in Buddhist Contexts,* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 88.

consisting of one overarching story with a distinct introduction, plot, climax, and conclusion. Kaiser traces the historical development of the biblical concept of the fulfilled promises of God, displayed in the Bible from beginning to end.[52] Viewing theology from this perspective allows Christians the opportunity to see the "big picture" of the Bible, to step back and distinguish "the forest from the trees."

In the book *Making Disciples of Oral Learners,* the authors recount how seventeen young evangelists from North Africa were trained for two years to tell 135 biblical stories chronologically, moving from Genesis through Revelation. The focus of the story set considered both their people group's worldview and the stories within the grand biblical narrative that are foundational to Christianity (creation, Adam and Eve's sin, the giving of the Law, the

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[52]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). See also

crucifixion, etc.). Each story also included one or more songs that the evangelists themselves developed in order to easily teach others. After the learning phase, a North American seminary professor then administered to the students a six-hour oral exam, asking questions about both facts within the stories and systematic theology. Even when asked to describe doctrines such as the nature of God and salvation, the students referred to the stories they had learned and passed with flying colors.[53] Drawing upon the stories they had told and sung many times over, the North African evangelists were faithfully equipped to perform the work God had set them apart to do.

Objection Six: Cross-Cultural Reproducibility. Such an objection stems from the concept the CBS must only be used in cross-cultural contexts as a "first step" in outreach. Only non-readers, it is thought, would truly

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Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1975).

benefit from something like CBS; those who actively read their Bibles need not apply. Since this objection has already been touched on above, there is no need to go into great detail here. However, there are at least three elements to recall concerning CBS as an evangelistic methodology.

First, CBS is designed to be reproduced. From the worldview analysis pondered at the start of the process to the ongoing repetition of the biblical narratives, reproducibility in order to produce more effective and obedient evangelists is the heart cry of CBS trainers. Second, there is not a culture in the world whose members are not daily retelling generational stories. Storyteller Marti Steussy suggests that stories are not only important for cultural remembrance but also for ongoing health. Steussy writes, "Contemporary studies in neurobiology and psychology suggest story is not only common among

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[53]International Orality Network, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 46-47.

humans, but necessary: the left brain's compulsion to create a coherent story out of events is so strong that when it does not have access to a plausible story it will fabricate one."[54] Third, CBS as a methodology for producing healthy disciple-making churches has been found possible in the United States as well as abroad. The expressed purpose of Avery Willis' and Mark Snowden's *Truth That Sticks* is to show the effectiveness of CBS among oral-preference learners in North America. Paralleling their information about CBS is the story of the exponential growth of a church in Idaho called Real Life Ministries, which grew from a small congregation to a megachurch with multiple small groups simply because they readjusted their teaching at every level to the use of CBS methods.[55] In an oral-

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[54]Marti J. Steussy, "Life, Story, and the Bible," in Hearon, Holly E. and Philip Ruge-Jones, eds, *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 114.
[55]Avery T. Willis, Jr. and Mark Snowden, *Truth That Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in a Teflon World* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010).

preference context, more Christians will likely step forward
as leaders when they have been taught simple and
reproducible models of sharing their faith.

Objection Seven: "Passing Fad" Missiology. If
Christ's return is to be delayed, the skeptics argue, only
giving Bible stories does not do justice to teaching them to
obey all of Christ's commands.[56] Such reasoning is again
flawed because it overlooks the fact that Christ himself, as
well as many other biblical personalities, often taught using
stories and oral-based strategies. Consider briefly the cases
of Moses' instruction in Deuteronomy and the Pauline
epistles.

After leading the Israelites out of Egypt, they stood
at the banks of the Jordan River and Moses preached three
sermons that charged the Israelites to remember the mighty

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[56]John Piper asks, "Will we labor for the long-term strength of
the church among all unreached and less-reached peoples, by
empowering them with the ability to read and study the Bible in the
original languages, in the desire that the Lord may come very soon, but

deeds of their Redeemer and lovingly obey all their God had commanded them. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 instructs the Israelites to "teach their children" all of God's commands, talking about them as they "sit at home and walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (6:7 NCV). Then Moses says, "Write them down" as a reminder (6:8). Clearly, then, there is both an oral and a written aspect to the Israelite parents' teaching. Old Testament scholar Susan Niditch argues convincingly from these and other corresponding verses that orality and literacy always existed simultaneously, although she believes that, with the majority of the ancient Israelites being oral-preference learners, written teaching was probably considered more of an "iconic" teaching tool.[57] Verbalized teaching through the

in the sober possibility that he may delay his return for centuries?" John Piper, "Missions, Orality, and the Bible."

[57]Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 70. Niditch is probably right, since ancient literacy historian William Harris has shown that, even in the educational center of classical Athens, the literacy rates of the ancient Mediterranean world were never higher than 15%. See

use of traditional stories recounting the God of Israel

defeating the Egyptian pretender gods would serve to

inspire awe and faith for future generations in the Promised

Land. Niditch further says that oral forms can be deduced

throughout the entire Old Testament, declaring that "an oral

aesthetic infuses Hebrew Scripture as it now stands."[58]

The question will then be raised as to how passages

such as Romans may be taught using oral methods such as

CBS. For non-narrative passages based on propositional

logic, where one principle builds off its preceding principle,

two possibilities may be offered. Using the example of

Romans, the story surrounding the founding of the church

at Rome might first be told and the specific teaching

encased within the narrative. A second option may be to

William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard
University Press, 1991).
        [58]Niditch, 24. New Testament theologian John Harvey agrees:
"The fact that vowel pointing was not added to the Hebrew Scriptures
until the time of the Massoretes attests to the heavy reliance on oral
tradition in Jewish culture well after the first century." John D. Harvey,

incorporate other types of oral forms, such as song, drama, or chants. Missionary and biblical storyteller Dale Jones calls this second option "layering" because it uses several oral strategies on top of CBS. Jones admits, "We must recognize the limitations of oral approaches and seek to find ways to incorporate the wealth of the written Word among [oral learners]. We must also seek to utilize other oral communication methods besides storying."[59] Honest ministers must recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach does not exist.

In sum, a critically contextualized proposal that does justice hermeneutically to the doctrine of inerrancy while still maintaining the oral framework of CBS will obviously differ according to cultural context but should retain the three following characteristics. First, CBS-type

Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 50.
    [59]Dale Jones, "Moving Towards Oral Communication of the Gospel: Experiences from Cambodia," in Paul De Neui, ed.,

methodology should be balanced dialogically, taking into account both the learning preferences of the sending and host culture in textual study. CBS practitioners hailing from literate Western institutions should not be discouraged from studying before their storying session in ways they are comfortable (consulting commentaries, listening to sermon podcasts, etc.). More oral communicators, especially those from the target culture, must be involved in every area of the studying process - from helping to select biblical story sets to assisting the missionary in finding culturally informed words and phrases that move as close as possible to the words of a biblical text. Comfortable dialogue between the oral and literate is the key.

Second, CBS trainers should not be ashamed to tell the members of their storying sessions that the Source of the biblical stories exists in written form. Even among the

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Communicating Christ Through Story and Song: Orality in Buddhist Contexts (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 197.

small minority of primary oral groups who have never seen

a written word, storytellers taking biblical inerrancy

seriously must declare that the standard they uphold is

outside themselves. Pushing for literacy is not what is being

done here; pushing for the listeners to look beyond the

storyteller to the Source of his or her stories is. Missionary

Larry Dinkins writes, "Our experience is that when an oral

person becomes excited about Bible narratives, they often

show a hunger for more stories. At that point they realize

that literacy is a means to gain access to more of God's

Word and their interest in reading and education is

heightened."[60]

Third, although it seems that God is indeed blessing

the orality movement, missionaries using oral-based

strategies such as CBS go too far if they outrightly dismiss

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[60]Dinkins, 13. I have also had this happen to me. Two years ago, when I was first introduced to CBS, I employed this oral strategy in the counseling ministry I was involved in at the time. The guy I was counseling, a high school dropout who did not own a Bible, grabbed

other ministry models. For example, prominent CBS

authors Mark Snowden and Avery Willis write,

> The reality is that Christians and non-Christians are just not responding. Churches increasingly reduce or even stop their disciplemaking efforts and focus instead on the worship "experience," with the full intention of using twenty minutes of preaching on different verses scattered throughout the Bible to impact disciple-making. All this does is make churches and their ministries further out of touch with society.[61]

Such broad brush statements indict many Christians in

churches committed to expository or topical preaching

styles, and to say these churches are not at all sending out

obedient believers is simply untrue. CBS is a tool that

should be applied if change is needed. If it is not needed in

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my Bible after our storying session to see if the story of Adam and Eve's sin was "really in the Bible."

[61]Mark Snowden and Avery Willis, "What God Hath Wrought," in *Orality Breakouts: Using the Heart Language to Transform Hearts*, Samuel Chiang, et. al., eds. (Hong Kong: Capstone Enterprises, Ltd. and International Orality Network, 2010), 21.

a particular context, there should be no pressure to fix what is not broken.

Conclusion

In light of what has been stated above, the present researcher would like to make the following points:

- Contextualization may be defined as the balancing act of utilizing culturally appropriate ministry models that remain tightly tethered to the Scriptures.

- Orality as a missions movement is growing every day and in nearly every corner of the globe, albeit largely unnoticed by the Western ecclesiastical establishment. Researchers predict that over two-thirds of the global population consists of primary and secondary oral learners, and as such, ministry among the oral majority will continue to open new

discussions for missionaries, pastors, and theologians.

- The Chicago Statement (1978) provides a sure anchor for defining biblical inerrancy and can therefore be trusted to serve as an evangelical confession, even as mission practitioners wrestle with the task of taking the gospel to oral communicators.

- The confession of biblical inerrancy protects pastors and missionaries utilizing oral methods by reminding them not to equate their orally-told stories with Scripture. Oral-based tools such as Chronological Bible Storying should be considered a form of preaching; they should not be considered a form of special revelation.

- The new Orality movement should be given a proper seat at the theological table, since it has much to offer in discussions concerning the

furthering of God's Kingdom. Yet orality is not a silver bullet, and therefore needs constant, contextualized dialogue with the other theological disciplines.

In a world where new research exposes an unreached oral majority amidst a highly literate ministerial minority, it is not heretical to call for the rethinking of our missionary methods. The old saying that insanity means doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results holds more truth than is often admitted. What is heretical is to push away from our core convictions concerning the veracity of the Bible in order to elicit in our audience a response that points them to our own ingenuity instead of to the Lord. The confession of biblical inerrancy continues to fuel missionary passion.[62] Can orality and inerrancy be reconciled? Without a doubt, they must.

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[62]Philip Jenkins, professor of religious history at Baylor University and author of the groundbreaking book *The Next Christendom*, notes: "Through the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, Western Christians who ventured into the mission fields were more commonly drawn from conservative churches . . . Less fervent believers, or the more broad-minded, tended to stay at home." Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 19.