



Lausanne World Pulse

Providing Evangelism & Missions News, Information and Analysis

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PUBLISHER'S MEMO

The Verbal Proclamation of the Gospel

By Doug Birdsall

From Genesis to Revelation, God has revealed himself to his people by his presence and in his word. As we see in Genesis, his word has creative power to bring order out of chaos, matter out of the void, and life out of mere matter. We, being made in the very image of God, also have great creative power in our words, especially as we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ into the lives of those around us who are in chaos, darkness, and death.

Jesus Christ himself is the very incarnation of the word. During his life, he dedicated himself to the verbal teaching and demonstration of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God among us. He taught from the scriptures, with parables and teachable moments. His words are the very words of life, not just to be read, but to be spoken and communicated from person to person, just as he came in the flesh to embody and communicate his message.

Verbal proclamation was not only a distinctive mark of Jesus' ministry, but also of the early Church. Indeed, the early Church is a great example of how the proclamation of the gospel must always be accompanied by lives lived out as full testimonies to the gospel. However, the early Church also made it a priority not to neglect the preaching and teaching of the word.

Verbal proclamation must also continue to be the hallmark of a healthy Christian community today. From the very beginning, the Lord intended for the message to be communicated through individuals who are part of a community of faith to others—in *word* and in deed. In this twenty-first century with high technology, industry, and increasing busyness of life, there are many creative ways in which the gospel can be communicated—through internet evangelism, YouTube, testimonial blogs, podcasts, etc. However, the need to highlight the importance of the verbal communication of the gospel message, of person-to-person communication in real time, cannot be reiterated enough.

This past May, the Lausanne Strategy Working Group met in Southern California to focus on issues to be highlighted for [Cape Town 2010: The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization](#). In this meeting, the importance of both Christian social responsibility and evangelism was stressed as participants reviewed sections five and six in the [Lausanne Covenant](#). In recent years, many such as Michael Jaffarian have critiqued the West as being too focused on evangelism and discipleship to the neglect of relief and development. There are also voices of caution, such as Stan Guthrie, who ask if there is “a hole in our holism,” and state that in our day of social action, we must not neglect the critical importance of evangelism.

In this issue of LWP, I am delighted to present to you several perspectives on evangelism; in particular, the importance of the verbal proclamation of the gospel. It is my prayer that as we engage further in thought and action, we will be inspired and spurred on toward the hope of the gospel for every people, nation, tribe, and tongue.

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NEWS BRIEFS

CHINA: American Christian Group Leaves after Airport Standoff

In August 2008, [Voice of America](#) (VOA) reported [Vision Beyond Borders](#) (VBB) leader Pat Klein and three others spent twenty-six hours at Kunming airport waiting for officials to return more than three hundred confiscated Bibles. VBB representative Dyann Romeijn told VOA the four decided to leave the airport after it was clear the Bibles would not be returned. Klein became concerned that he and his companions, including a 78-year-old man and 15-year-old boy, would be taken by force from the airport. ([Vision Beyond Borders](#))

CHINA: Unprecedented Crackdown Planned against “Unstable Social Elements”

The [China Aid Association](#) (CAA) has been informed that an unprecedented nationwide crackdown of “unstable social elements” is being prepared in China. Those elements were identified as: illegal Christian house church leaders, petitioners, human rights defenders, and political dissidents. The crackdown, set for October 2008, is to coincide with the government’s campaign of “China’s twenty more years of political and social stability.” CAA also learned that the Beijing Municipal State Security Bureau has released a “citizen informant initiative,” which requires ordinary citizens to report individuals and groups who are deemed a threat to national security through the use of media and religion. ([China Aid Association](#))

GEORGIA/RUSSIA: World Council of Churches Finally Reaches South Ossetia

Barred from making a half-hour drive from within Georgia to Tskhinvali in South Ossetia, a pastoral delegation sent by the [World Council of Churches](#) (WCC) took a four-thousand kilometer detour to reach people caught in the Georgia-Russia conflict. The original route designated for humanitarian access by a ceasefire agreement in August was not being honored as such, and armed groups are accused of violence in the area. Government and aid officials in Georgia told the WCC group that up to seven thousand ethnic Georgians are still in South Ossetia under uncertain conditions. ([Overcoming Violence](#))

GUATEMALA: YMCA Worldwide Urges Investigation of Killings

Three young volunteers with the Guatemalan [Young Men's Christian Association](#) who were shot dead in August are being remembered by YMCAs worldwide, which are also calling for urgent action to investigate the deaths. The bodies of the three volunteers—Eliazar Bernabe Hernadez Rhodes, Mario Rene Gamez Moon, and Juan Luis Navarro—were found on 11 August 2008, the World Alliance of YMCAs said in a 1 September statement. The Geneva-based world alliance said the three volunteers, well-known for their work with children and youth in Amatitlán, south of Guatemala City, had been brutally beaten and then killed. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

HAITI: Nazarenes Report Hurricanes’ Heavy Toll

In the hurricane-damaged Caribbean, Haiti remains among the hardest hit, with Gustav leaving eight thousand homeless and Hanna causing further destruction with flooding and mudslides. According to Nazarene French field coordinator Bill Dawson, conditions are so bad that no relief can be flown in, and major roads are impossible to drive in areas outside the capital. All eleven Nazarene districts in Haiti report major losses of homes as well as crops and livestock. Haiti’s population is over eight million, of which 108,000 are Nazarenes. ([Nazarene Communications Network](#))

INDIA: Karnataka Christians Protest Violence, Face Possible Consequences

Christian groups have expressed dismay at attempts by the government of India's southern Karnataka state to take action against hundreds of church educational institutions after they closed for a day to protest at ongoing violence against Christians in eastern Orissa state. In an appeal to India's National Human Rights Commission

on 2 September 2008, the Global Council of Indian Christians urged it "to take steps to see that the Christian institutions [in Karnataka] are not penalized for this action of solidarity and peaceful prayer for the victims of violence in Orissa [state]." ([Ecumenical News International](#))

INDIA: International Community Expresses Concern over Recent Violence

Seven United States members of the House of Representatives sent a letter on 4 September 2008 to India's Ambassador to the U.S. expressing concern about recent attacks on Christians in Orissa state. Violence against Christians erupted after the murder of controversial Hindu swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati by unknown assailants. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or World Hindu Council (VHP), publicly blamed Christians for the murder, leading to mob attacks on Christians in several Orissa districts. International condemnation of the violence has been voiced by the Italian government, the Vatican, [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and [Dalit Freedom Network](#). Civil society Hindu leaders have also condemned the attacks. According to Christian leaders, the breakdown of law and order in Orissa has led to over four thousand homes destroyed and an estimated fifty thousand people displaced. ([Assist News](#))

INDIA: Christians in Orissa Forced to Convert to Hinduism

Facing threats of ostracism or property destruction, Christians in Orissa returning to their villages are being coerced into signing papers renouncing their faith and converting to Hinduism. Anti-Christian attacks continue to be reported in several area districts, sending at least fifteen thousand people into relief camps. Calling for protection of Christians and prosecution of attackers in Orissa, civil society organizations and Christians began a hunger strike in New Delhi on 3 September 2008. [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) (CSW) advocacy director Alexa Papadouris said true peace in Orissa would not likely be seen unless attackers are brought to justice. She urged world leaders to voice their concern about the violence. ([Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#))

INDONESIA: Muslim Mob Storms Church and Calls for Ban

While celebrating Indonesia's Independence Day, approximately twenty church members were stormed by a mob in the village of Pondok Rangon in Cipayung. The attack, which took place at the Pentecostal Church of Indonesia, was perpetrated by a Muslim group who later erected banners in the street declaring a ban on "churches and religious services." Although erecting such banners requires prior district approval, authorities made no attempts to intervene or remove them. Church members were chased into the streets and warned not to return again for future services. ([International Christian Concern](#))

IRAN: House Churches Growing Despite Persecution

With the rapid spread of Christianity in Iran, a major crackdown has been launched with President Mamoud Ahmadinejad declaring, "I will stop Christianity in this country." Although Christianity dates back before Islam in Iran, currently less than one half of one percent of the Iranian population is Christian. There are seventy-three registered churches in Iran, but it is the rapid growth of unregistered house churches that concerns the government. The crackdown on these churches has had a surprising effect in that house churches are spreading out into smaller groups and therefore reaching out farther into various parts of the country. ([Assist News](#))

MALAYSIA: Malaysian Christians Urge Leaders to Heed Religious Unity

The chairperson of the Christian Federation of Malaysia, Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing, has urged the country's national leaders to ensure the religious and racial diversity of the South East Asian nation, and has pledged his organization's support to achieve it. "Our country needs to re-examine her priorities and policies, and reassert the Merdeka (freedom) spirit that shaped the nation that we have become," said Ing. "Race and religion have reared their ugly sides; unscrupulous people are making use of such issues for political gain." ([Ecumenical News International](#))

MALDIVES: New Constitution Severely Restricts Non-Muslim Rights

Condemning the recent ratification of a new constitution in the Maldives, the [Institute for Religion and Policy](#) reported that the new document fails to provide basic guarantees of rights and freedoms in the country for non-Muslims and violates internationally-accepted human rights standards. The constitution denies citizenship to

non-Muslims and goes so far as to favor Sunni Islam over other forms of Islam, establishing aspects of Sharia law in the Maldives. ([Institute for Religion and Policy](#))

MALI: Bible Society Launches Three Key Projects

In a Muslim country where spreading the gospel is not easy, the [Bible Society](#) of Mali is focused on three particular projects serving great needs: the *Listening to the Word* project; a literacy project called *Alpha*; and a collaborative venture with Malian Union for the Blind. *Listening to the Word* will help communicate the Bible through speaking, singing, and dancing, while *Alpha* will raise awareness among parents of the value of education and literacy for children, only a minority of which attend school. The third project, which addresses the significant number of visually-impaired people in the country, will teach Braille and organize Bible reading sessions. ([United Bible Society](#))

MIDDLE EAST: SAT-7 KIDS Introduces Colors

In August 2008, SAT-7 KIDS began a new program entitled *Colors*, focusing on pre-school-aged children. Launched in 2007, SAT-7 KIDS is the first and only Arabic Christian channel exclusively for children. The new show has no physical sets, but instead utilizes green screen technology which creates various backdrop locations complete with colorful animated cartoons. As children also appear on the screen, *Colors* teaches basic concepts and Bible lessons through songs. ([SAT-7 KIDS](#))

MYANMAR: Government Does Not See Christians as a Threat

The United Nations estimates that only one quarter of those in need of shelter since Cyclone Nargis killed thousands in May 2008 have received it so far. While there continue to be reports of government interference with assistance efforts, one native missionary with [World Hope International](#) (WHI) said Myanmar's government is not as opposed to Christianity as the world might think. WHI has been delivering aid to twenty-two villages in the Irrawaddy Delta, and with many children orphaned by the cyclone, WHI has also established an orphanage ministry. According to the WHI missionary, there is an opening for Christians in Myanmar. ([Mission Network News](#))

PAKISTAN: Christians Hopeful about New President

The September election of Asif Ali Zardari, widower of Benazir Bhutto, raised hopes among Pakistan's Christians, who are reeling from recent murders and attacks. Officially Muslim, Zardari attended missionary schools and a top boarding school near Hyderabad. The late Prime Minister Bhutto had told journalists shortly before her assassination that she wanted to reach out to all Pakistanis, regardless of religion. Pakistani Christians hope Zardari's election will help bring violent anti-Christian attackers to justice. ([BosNews Life](#))

RWANDA: Bible Society Pushes Forward Amidst Challenges

Without a general secretary for several months in 2007, the [Bible Society](#) of Rwanda (BSR) struggled, but now with a new leader, Norbert Rutebuka, the society has fresh energy to face the challenges of a "big harvest with few laborers." Getting scripture into the landlocked country is challenging, forcing Rutebuka to be creative when adversity increases, such as during the recent violence in Kenya, from where BSR transports its Bibles into Rwanda. Another challenge, according to Rutebuka, is the literacy rate in Rwanda, which is only fifty-two percent; because of this, BSR is also concentrating efforts on non-print scriptures and literacy materials with the help of [Faith Comes By Hearing](#). ([United Bible Societies](#))

UNITED STATES: Spreading God's Word with Sports Fans

Ready with player testimony cards and a strong desire to spread the gospel, [Sports Fan Outreach International](#) (SFOI) geared up for the college football season. According to founder Bill Adams, "We are going to communicate...the gospel with sports fans as they tailgate and mill around stadiums before they go in." Player testimony cards have a picture of a Christian player on one side and their faith story on the other. The cards also refer people to SFOI's website. Adams encouraged other Christian sports fans to start a ministry with their favorite sport; however, he stressed patience and consistency as a means of building relationships and engaging in deeper conversations. ([Mission Network News](#))

UNITED STATES: Convoy of Hope and Assemblies of God Respond to Hurricane

More than one million residents in the Gulf Coast were without power in the aftermath of Hurricane Gustav in early September 2008. A Category Two hurricane, Gustav made landfall in Cocodrie, Louisiana, on 2 September, causing significant flooding and wind damage in that state as well as neighboring states. **Convoy of Hope** (COH) president Hal Donaldson said COH is prepared to empty its warehouse if needed to help people impacted. Along with the **Assemblies of God**, COH has personnel working throughout the region during what looks to be an active hurricane season. COH has been a relief presence in the Gulf Coast since Hurricane Katrina. (**Convoy of Hope**)

THEMED ARTICLES: The Verbal Proclamation of the Gospel

The Verbal Proclamation of the Gospel

By Rev. Dr. Nii Amoo Darku

“I am under obligation both to the Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:14-16)

The gospel indeed is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. The power of the blood of Jesus to deal with sin is demonstrated in the preaching of the gospel. The power of the death of Jesus to save lost humanity so as to live victoriously in him (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) is clearly manifested in the gospel. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ the power to live triumphantly is made obvious and desired by all (Philippians 3:10).

Need to Hear the Gospel

God could have chosen to save lost humanity by any means; however, he chose to save us by the power of the gospel preached to the sinner. However, those who would benefit from the gospel and be affected by its power must first hear the message.

By his mercy and lovingkindness, God decided to save the inhabitants of Nineveh who deserved to perish in their iniquities. God appointed a preacher to share his word; however, Jonah believed Nineveh did not deserve mercy, but punishment. Who can blame Jonah for thinking that way when other prophets had spoken ill of Nineveh and its moral corruption (see Nahum 3:1 and Zephaniah 2:15)? Jonah was to go to Nineveh “and cry against it,” a phrase which biblical scholars understand as preaching or proclaiming the intentions of God. Indeed, Jonah receives a direct command: “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you” (Jonah 3:1-2).

Ezekiel seems to suggest there is a consequence for not verbalizing God’s word to warn the wicked to turn from their ways. As an appointed watchman of God, just like any preacher today, Ezekiel was instructed, “Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, warn them for me. When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked ways that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand” (Ezekiel 3:17-18).

As if to illustrate the need to verbally proclaim the gospel for it to have an effect on its hearers, Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37:1-10) finds himself in the Spirit of the Lord and brought down to a valley of dry bones. To Ezekiel’s amusement and great surprise, God asks him if he thinks the dry bones could live, to which he replied, “O Lord God, you know.” God uses this opportunity to emphasize the importance of verbalizing the good news to hopeless situations to make them come alive. God tells Ezekiel to “prophesy over these bones, and say to them, ‘O bones, hear the word of the Lord.’”

As Ezekiel prophesizes, amusement gives way to amazement as rattling bones come together, sinews become attached, and flesh and skin grow. In God's great sense of humor, he leaves the dry bones-turned-corpses without breath. Then, the Lord calls Ezekiel to prophesy for the breath to come from the four winds and breathe on the slain so that they come to life. We can almost picture the prophet now girding his loins and, with great expectation and confidence, prophesying to the breath resulting in the once dry bones becoming an exceedingly great army.

Likewise the Church, having been given the ministry and word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19), is given a charge throughout the New Testament to preach the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21-23; 2 Timothy 4:1-5) so that spiritually dead people come alive (Ephesians 2:1-8).

Hear, Believe, Call upon the Lord

Romans 10:9-15 emphasizes that the gospel is the power of salvation to all who believe and must not only be preached for people to hear but also for them to believe and confess it. According to the passage, a person believes with his or her heart, which results in righteousness, and then with his or her mouth he or she confesses, resulting in salvation. Sending a preacher to go and proclaim the gospel to those who need to hear, believe, and call upon the name of the Lord leads to a series of questions: "How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

When Peter and John were ordered not to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus by the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:17), they rebuffed the order, knowing that without hearing the gospel no one stood the chance of being saved. Verbal proclamation of the gospel is not optional; it is a necessary act for followers of Jesus to carry on our heavenly command, in defiance to any authority.

Contextualizing the Gospel

The gospel needs to be communicated verbally in an understandable and compelling way. By virtue of that, preachers and proclaimers of the gospel should adjust their message to new contexts and people. In order to do a good job of contextualizing the gospel without syncretizing it, David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen state, "Acceptable contextualization is a direct result of ascertaining the meaning of the biblical text, consciously submitting to its authority and applying or appropriating that meaning to a given situation."¹ Without contextualization, preachers may deliver the gospel appropriately without actually communicating its truths.

Verbalising the Gospel in Power

In Jeremiah 23:29 we read, "'Is not my word like fire?' declares the Lord, 'and like hammer which shatters a rock?'" Isaiah 55:11 declares that the word of God, which goes forth from his mouth (as he speaks through prophets and preachers), won't return empty without accomplishing what he desires and without succeeding in the matter for which he sent it. Why then, when the gospel is preached by some (in this context referred to as prophets), nothing positive seem to come from it?

There are two reasons for the word to not have its intended impact:

1. God says his prophets do not get their messages from him directly, but instead steal it from each other (Jeremiah 23:30).
2. God says those preachers who steal the word of God from others have impotency in their message because they do not wait and listen to his word (Jeremiah 23:18).

For the verbal proclamation of the word of God to have its desired impact, *preachers must learn to wait on God for a message meant for a particular audience at a particular time.* An effective message preached in a particular context may not necessarily be effective in a different context. It is God who best knows the condition of his people. Our Lord Jesus Christ never preached the same message in two different contexts. Nicodemus was

reached with a message for one already exposed to scripture while the Samaritan woman was ministered to given her own background (John 3-4).

The other key issue that gives potency to the word of God is *the anointing of the Holy Spirit*. Our Lord makes reference (Luke 4:18-21) to Isaiah 61:1 in relation to his ministry, saying that scripture had been fulfilled in him: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.” This empowerment is supposed to be the norm for all who intend to preach with positive results. This most likely explains Jesus’ insistence that the apostles remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit had come upon them in order to clothe them with power from on high (Luke 24:49) before venturing to preach as his witnesses.

To the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:5) Paul said, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” We have no business pretending to be witnesses of the Lord and proclaiming his gospel when we have not been “clothed with the power from on high,” for it is only when the Holy Spirit comes upon us that we receive power to be Jesus’ witnesses (Acts 1:8).

The gospel must also be preached with power because the gospel message is spirit and life (John 6:63). Paul emphasizes that the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. With these weapons, we destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Paul further argues that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). These forces sometimes prevent people from hearing the gospel in their state of sinfulness. Paul therefore concludes that “if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) so they may be saved. The gospel therefore must be proclaimed bearing these realities in mind and preached in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Since God is well-pleased through the foolishness of the message of the cross preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:18-25), we have no option but to proclaim the gospel. The fate of many may depend upon us. I have always shuddered and sometimes been baffled by Acts 13:48: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

Although God knows those who are his (2 Timothy 2:19), I sometimes ask myself, “Is it possible that someone could miss heaven because of my negligence? Is it possible for people to slip through my fingers to hell? What does it mean for God to require the blood of someone who missed heaven because of my disobedience?”

For these and many such questions which I cannot fathom, it is my prayer that I and the entire Body of Christ will work the works of God, not shying away from verbally proclaiming the gospel of the Lord as duty demands so that many people may come to hear and know Jesus Christ.

Endnote

1. 2003. *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*. Pasadena, California, USA: William Carey Library, 20.

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Evangelism as Story Telling

By Michael Cassidy

There are, as we all know, many different types of evangelism. There is the straight *didactic and kerygmatic proclamation* of the gospel content with no frills of any sort added. There is *issue evangelism*, when we package the gospel around the addressing of an issue or use an issue as a pretext, once addressed, for bringing in the gospel. There is *evangelism as apologetics*, when we do the necessary intellectual jungle-clearing so that difficulties and obstacles are faced and dealt with, thereby paving the way for the simple proclamation of the *kerygma*. Evangelism can also be done as part of an *expository exegesis* of a biblical text or passage. There is also *need evangelism*, when we address a particular need such as guilt, emptiness, loneliness, or meaninglessness, and after or while doing so, we bring in the gospel and its relevance to that need.

While these and other methods of conveying the gospel and doing evangelism exist, there is one on which I want to focus here because I believe it has particular relevance in these post-modern times. It is a method I call *story telling* with the didactics of the gospel attached, included, or embedded in the story.

This is very powerful because most post-modernists, especially young ones, while they do not want argument, are nevertheless ready for demonstration. If we can tell them about something that actually *works* and makes a meaningful difference in life, people are interested. Thundering at them with the didactics of the gospel sometimes simply produces resistance. But if they hear a compelling story about what Jesus Christ has done in our lives, they not only find it hard to argue against, but are in fact positively interested in finding out more about how Jesus can work and make a difference in their lives as well. Their inner, even secret, question is: “Can you tell me about something which really works and makes a difference?”

My Story—His Story

In a mission I did some years ago at Michaelhouse, my old high school, I made the theme of the mission “My Story Meeting His (Story).” I invited a wide range of participants, including a businessman, an actor, a pop singer, a scientist, a farmer, an actuarial professor from a university, a couple of sportsmen, and so on. I told each of them to simply speak on that one subject on which each was a world expert, namely themselves! In other words, “Just tell your story and weave in the gospel as you are led and able.”

The whole exercise worked like a charm. As the boys heard story after story, with each life testifying to being changed and transformed as it connected to Jesus’ story (his-story), the lads found themselves astonished at the way “the dice seemed to roll six all the time,” and that all these lives were changed and transformed as the individual story of each person intersected with the story of Jesus Christ.

Since that time, I have conducted several university missions using that same technique, a technique very different from earlier university missions, which were more strongly focussed on historical or philosophical apologetics.

It is also instructive to register how Paul used his own personal story first of all in Acts 24 when he was before Felix and then in Acts 25 and 26 when he was before Festus and Agrippa.

In Leighton Ford's fine volume *The Power of Story (Rediscovering the Oldest and Most Natural Way to Reach People for Christ)*,¹ he writes:

Our goal is to uncover the crystalline simplicity of God's Story (with a capital S). Once we see how we have become a part of that Story we will better understand how to tell and model our own story (with a small s) to others....Conversion, in a true sense, is a collision of narratives. God's Story touches my story and your story, and a collision takes place. As people encounter stories they call their own stories into question, and they are forced to consider: *What if my story isn't the whole story? How should I respond?* In the process of reconsidering their own lives, they become caught up in the Story of Jesus, and they are changed.

Leighton goes on to say that his book is not one of

...grand strategies for converting the world. This is a book with a very simple theme, a very basic strategy. It is written to encourage the average lay person to tell his or her story, and in the process, to help spread the Story of God. This is a book for the person who says, "I want to be a more effective witness"; and it's also for the person who objects, "but I can't be an evangelist! I don't know how!....If you have become a part of the Story of God, then you have a story to share with the people around you. They are eager to hear it. They are dying to hear it. Any Christian can be a witness, an evangelist. And every Christian should. My friend, you have a Story to tell."²

People Love Stories

A number of factors point to the need to recover this story in preaching.

1. People love stories, whether in movies, on television, or at the theatre. Everyone loves a story. Even little children endlessly say, "Tell me a story."
2. One finds the scriptures endlessly laced with stories, whether in the Old Testament or the New. Embedded in them are profound theological truths and lessons and very often directly the evangelistic content of the gospel.
3. The story has appeal because it is like real life. Most people do not experience life as a set of ideas or abstractions, but live out the lives they have to, having experiences, and then thinking about them. Our listeners will identify with such stories and say, "Yes, that's just like me."
4. Story in preaching is important because our communication theories demand new ways of breaking through to the minds of moderns who are over-stuffed and glutted with mere information.
5. People in our times have become accustomed through the media to a world of story rather than didactic teaching. Whether a soap opera is on video, television, film, movie, or radio drama, they all come to us through story and their messages are brought through story.

All this reminds us that we have to look at our communication methodologies to ensure that we are not dull, predictable, or plain irrelevant.

Jesus—The Master Storyteller

All that I have said above highlights the importance of the kinds of illustrations we use to bring home abstract ideas or truths which are part of our preaching and teaching. The moment we say midstream in our sermon: "I remember when ...," the attention of the audience picks up. Thus, when preaching on tragedy and suffering, one can inject the line: "Let me tell you the story of my friends, Jack and Mary, who had a deformed child ...". Immediately, attention is riveted.

At this point it is instructive to register afresh Jesus as the master storyteller. Apart from the fact that each of the four Gospels is a story or biography of Jesus himself, within each of the Gospels we see our Lord constantly using stories located in the worlds of his listeners.

Talking about having the right spiritual foundations in life, Jesus tells a story of two men, one who built his house on sand, and the other on rock. Neither the story nor the point of the story can ever be forgotten. Showing how people have different responses to the preaching of the word, he tells the story of "a sower who went forth to sow ..." and whose seed fell on four different types of soil. This story is really more about the seeds and the soils than the sower, but the import of the parable, only a few words in length, has ricocheted profoundly down the corridors of time.

Then, when he had lots of lost people around him, he spoke one parable/story in Luke 15 on the subject of lostness. The sub-story is focussed into three subplots about a sheep lost by *nature*, a coin lost by *circumstances*, and a son lost by choice. Charles Dickens, in fact, said that the story of the Prodigal Son was probably the greatest short story in the history of the English language.

In Matthew 13, while explicating the very theological content of the Kingdom of God, Jesus told stories about the sower, the grain of a mustard seed, the leaven in the bread, the treasure in the field, the merchant in search of fine pearls, and the fishing net which gathers in fish of every kind, some of which are thrown out as bad and others kept as good. All his listeners would have gone home and discussed those stories that night and over the next few days or weeks.

So it is in our context that we can preach Jesus' stories and make application of them to modern times. Or we can combine the exposition of scripture with real stories out of our own lives or the lives of friends or colleagues.

Simple, Direct, Personal

We must also mention the *plain, simple, and direct personal testimony*. Africa—the continent where I was born, live, and have exercised my ministry for nearly fifty years—is, of course, a continent of story. The elders sitting around the fire, the *ndaba* (or consultation) of the chief and his elders, and the oral traditions relating to the lives of tribesmen are all embedded into the way Africa thinks about itself. Not surprisingly then, the testimony form of preaching is very powerful and common here.

So whoever or wherever you are, do not minimise the power of sharing your personal testimony, regardless of how intellectually or theologically sophisticated you understand yourself to be! Don't be nervous or fearful of bringing in what Jesus has done for you personally. It will often be the most powerful thing you say, even in the course of a powerful theological exposition. When we can say, "One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see," we have our audience's rapt attention and often powerful reception.

I remember many years ago seeing one of the early Billy Graham films called "Souls in Conflict." Some of you fellow old-timers will remember it. The story told of a British Airways pilot who had been converted at the Harringay Crusade in the USA. He had all sorts of sceptical colleagues around him. But I will never forget the final punch line of the film as the pilot questioned the sceptics around him asking, "What argument have you got for a changed life?"

The central idea of this article could hardly be simpler. It is simply reintroducing the notion of story, a testimony and biography into your preaching, teaching, writing, and personal witness. In these post-modern times, when people are less interested in argumentation than demonstration, and when they resist the dogmatic but are open to the personal, we must reinvestigate the place of story in our ministries generally and in our evangelism specifically.

Endnotes

1. 1994. Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA: NavPress.

2. Ibid, 14-15.

Michael Cassidy is the founder of African Enterprise. Author of a number of books, he has also played a key role as a Christian leader involved in reconciliation in South Africa.

Verbal Communication of the Gospel: "More than Words Can Say"

By Charles Madinger

Everyone has a story. It is where your people came from and why you are who you are. Mine is a story of nineteenth-century German immigrants who laid hold of the American dream to have our own land and get our children a good education so that they could live at a higher standard than generations who preceded us. It drives much of who I am and what I believe, value, and do.

God also has a story. It is about him, his kingdom, and his king. It is the story of why and how he created the world, allowed us to abdicate our position by rebelling against his authority, and how he restored the opportunity for all to choose living under that authority forever.

Every people and culture has a story that must be confronted with the story of the kingdom. Our challenge is to translate the story of the transforming power of the king. We call our story “the good news” for a reason. It can transform a person, a family, and a community.

Do we tell his story in terms and expressions that others do not relate to because of where they live? Do we put it in forms that we understand but they cannot? How can we best deliver the gospel message to those who cannot, do not, or will not read? How can oral learners come face to face with God’s kingdom and God’s king?

Russell West¹ articulated well our greater need for communicating the gospel orally. He explained:

Picture this: God comes to earth, takes on human clothing—cultural clothing the way that Jesus did. And then takes the message and puts it in mathematical forms—numbers, division, algebra, trigonometry, calculus—and he says that in order to enter his kingdom you need to enter through a mathematical world, a mathematical logic. Now there are many folks who from their birth get that. But there is a whole sector of the world who would say, “I guess this is not meant for me.” They would feel marginalized. They would feel humiliated every time they heard about it. They would want the message of God, but because it was in a form that alienated them, they would conclude that “this message is not for me.”

Those who recognize there is an oral majority in the world—as much as seventy percent of the earth’s population—do not prefer to get their message through literate-based strategies. Everyone has the right and deserves to hear the gospel at least once so that they can repent. No one should be left out simply because the forms we use marginalized them, and thus marginalize the message.

Now *think* of the story in “their” terms. Consider those who cannot, or do not, read in order to receive, remember, and replicate important information. The majority of our mission strategies are written by literates for a literate audience. We marginalize whole people groups simply because we have not learned how to understand, process, and position the gospel within oral cultures.

We must wrestle with the following questions: “What makes the good news good news to the people of the land, and how can we deliver it? Why would they think that the good news is good news? How can we put it in forms that they will receive, remember, and replicate?” Consider the case studies below.²

- Every year, **the Kulung Rai of Nepal** live under the shadow of Mt. Everest and helplessly watch their mothers or sons die from ailments that would be an outrage anywhere in the “civilized” world. Diarrhea, pneumonia, and tuberculosis kill more people in Nepal than any other causes. The folk remedy for diarrhea? “Stop drinking water.” Often within forty-eight to seventy-two hours someone you love is gone. Pneumonia and tuberculosis are dealt with in equally fruitless ways (herbal potions) that cannot stop these diseases from running their course. What does the Kingdom of God have to say to their situation?
- **The Kambari of West Africa** are at the bottom of the food chain. This has been so for two hundred years. Since the days of the Hausa Jihad in 1803, the Kambari have been a subjugated people serving the needs of the Muslim overlords. Nothing has changed. Today, their lives consist solely for providing

food to the local and district leaders. They are intentionally denied the education and training that could take away some of their daily burden. They drink water from a polluted river, work naked in the fields, cannot read, believe the measles vaccination is a Western plot to sterilize their children, and have no clue that the mosquito transmits malaria. What does the Kingdom of God have to say to their situation?

- **The Bari of Southern Sudan** know nothing but civil war. HIV/AIDS has been a weapon of genocide by ruthless usurpers to clear the land for others to reclaim. They face the constant threat of renewed conflict and feel the need to vindicate the loss of their loved ones by retaliation. They know little or nothing of reconciliation and the need for extending forgiveness. There are no paved roads. More than five thousand people share only one bore-hole. Southern Sudan offers little by way of gainful employment, but much when it comes to cholera, typhoid, malaria, and dysentery. A woman in southern Sudan is four times more likely to die in childbirth than to learn to read. What does the Kingdom of God have to say to their situation?
- **The Samburu of Northern Kenya** are semi-nomadic herdspeople. Goats, cattle, and camels represent currency and define their culture. Generations of poor breeding practices yield little meat, milk, or income. Drought overtakes the land and the cattle die without being taken to market. Unscrupulous middlemen who buy these gaunt animals at a fraction of their value, thus promoting a cycle of poverty, handle the livestock that are sold. What does the Kingdom of God have to say to their situation?

Designing Strategies that Connect at the Most Foundational Levels

Communicating the message of good news must first account for the worldview of a culture. Without this navigational guide, even the best content will steer past the heart of transformation. Most Western mission strategies reflect our guilt/innocence worldview. We focus on making things “right” or being “righteous” before God. The people we attempt to reach often see the world through a shame/honor perspective. Honor is everything. Shame is to be avoided at all costs.

Take the Kambari people again. They practice a form of honor unthinkable in the West: wife-snatching. If you see a woman who is married to someone else, you can steal her and keep her as your own. You simply go to the Hausa chief and pay him the wife price. The wife snatcher is greatly honored in their culture because he has the means to do this. The woman is highly esteemed because someone else wanted her. The offended husband is shamed if he cannot buy her back by paying a greater amount than did the wife snatcher. If a woman is never snatched, she may feel shame because no one else esteemed her worthy of stealing. Telling a Kambari man that it is not “righteous” makes no sense. Showing him real honor does.

Delivering the Message that Will Be Heard, Understood, and Applied

Our message is best delivered through known and trusted leaders. Oral cultures receive and process new information by relational means. To these people who has the information is as much or more important than the information itself.

A respected leader in southern Sudan worked with **T4Global** (an organization which facilitates transformational training for oral culture people) to determine how to reach the masses with messages of hope and transformation. His choice was a series of three outreach programs consisting of civics, health, and discipleship.

The content design utilized interviews, testimonies, drama, and music—oral communication forms. But most importantly, he asked nationally recognized people to take part. He himself endorsed the program and asked village chiefs and other leaders to join in the program. They did, and the results he described claimed one of the most successful communication programs in the history of southern Sudan, reaching over one million villagers in less than six months.

The message may be delivered best through small media technologies that can be listened to repeatedly anywhere and promote discussion and action on any given message. The Samburu of Kenya began reaching out

with a mobile school network (they call it the “redio”) two months ago and now reach nearly four thousand people per week. Listen to what a local pastor has to say:

The redio has no gender and therefore ministers to both men and women. In normal cases, it’s hard for a man to witness to a female and vice versa. The redio can travel with the Samburus as they graze their animals. They have a lot of time to listen to it as they graze....A pastor’s wife carries the device to the market and people surround the device to be taught. There is such a great thirst for the teachings.

The message is delivered best when the message is discussed and shared with peers. Then people decide for themselves what to do about the truth that has been communicated. It is a bottom-up rather than top-down strategy.

In Nepal, Professor Bipin Acharya, with the department of sociology/anthropology at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, conducted an independent evaluation on the mobile school program and oral strategy. Below are some of his observations after a series of health messages were delivered:

They called relatives to treat worms...cared about TB, AIDS, took their children for check ups in time, cleaned toilets, controlled diarrhea, cured common colds, cut nails, took regular baths....cared about nutritious food to pregnant women, etc. Respondents said that they started cleaning toilets, keeping school-going children clean, sharing information about AIDS, and caring for diarrhea. Similarly, they became sensitive about the common cold, sanitation, and nutrition.

The stories mentioned here reshaped families and communities. Transformation began as they heard a new story and it changed their old story. This is not just the transfer of information, for information does not change people. Oral learners hear God’s story in their own language. The needs of whole people are addressed. People are changed with truth that confronts the kingdoms of this world with the Kingdom of God.

Endnotes

1. A T4Global interview with Dr. Russell West, professor of leadership education at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.
2. The case descriptions are taken from programs aided by T4Global. The implementing partners learn to design oral sensitive training, record it, and deliver it through a mobile school. The mobile school placed in the hands of a facilitator consists of low-cost, easy-to-use, solar-powered technology components for group listening and discussion.

Dr. Charles Madinger is co-founder and executive vice president of T⁴ Global. For seven years, he served as the mission pastor of one of the fifteen largest churches in America. He has been on the ground with Food for the Hungry as a consultant in advance preparation for relief and development in Kosovo and Iraq. As a mission strategist, Madinger worked with Lausanne and coordinated and taught the Perspectives course. He serves as an adjunct professor in intercultural studies in several schools, including Jos ECWA Theological Seminary in Nigeria, and develops networks around the world. Prior to co-founding T4 Global, Madinger worked for Voice For Humanity, leading orality projects in Nigeria and East Africa.

A God-ordained Appointment with a Listening Group in Nicaragua: Audio Bibles and Salvation By Jerri Stetler

Here, no one has a first name. Here, obtaining a meal is a matter of fighting off rats and buzzards for scraps of rotten produce. Here, employment means chasing garbage trucks, hoping for first dibs on the prized cargo they bring. Here, children die from eating disease-filled scraps. Here, the only aspiration is survival.

This is the worst part of the largest dump in Managua, Nicaragua, infamous for its acres of filth and the suffocating smoke of countless spontaneously-erupting fires. *La Chureca*, as this area is locally known, is home to nearly one thousand of some of the most desperate people on earth.

This has been his home for the past six years. Like so many of the others, he is a slave to the short-lived euphoria of a hit of crack. He lives for one reason—to somehow get another dose. It's been months since he has bathed, and he has no recollection of ever having had a full stomach. He has been in jail more times than he can count; there, at least, he is guaranteed something to eat.

He hates this place, of course, but admits that a dump accurately describes what his life has become. Although his childhood was difficult, he does have fragments of happy memories—the smell of his mother's tamales cooking, the warmth of her embrace, playing soccer in the dusty street in front of his home. But even the best of those memories are now tinged with pain and regret. He knew from the moment he inhaled that first joint at age eleven that he was hooked. He had never known anything like it before: a magical (though short-lived) sense of calm.

As he graduated to stronger, more expensive drugs, he learned to steal and market whatever he could to fund the addiction. He had reached an all-time low, he knew, when he figured out how to take his mother's tamales and sell them to her regular customers at a lower price. This way, he not only stole her merchandise, but her customers as well. He was almost relieved the day she kicked him out of the house; after all, he would no longer have to deal with the shame of hurting her.

Now, as the afternoon sun scorches everything within its reach, he staggers out of the dump and into the surrounding barrio. He has a "business" deal to attend in an unfamiliar section of town. His attention is suddenly drawn to an unimpressive church building. If it were larger he might wait until the collection is received, then look for a chance to help himself. But this is a small church on a poor street. It wouldn't be worth the effort.

A God-ordained Appointment

It's the sounds flowing from the building's open doors and windows that capture his interest. There is some kind of a show going on inside. Intrigued by the voices, music, and vivid sound effects, he slowly approaches the humble structure and notices a crowd of people intently listening to a simple tape player.

He freezes, instantly captured by the story they are listening to—that of a man healing the sick, raising the dead, and setting folks free from addiction.

Then he hears what he will never forget: God loves everyone in the world equally—even someone in his state. He is even more surprised when he is approached by a clean-cut man with a soft smile. Instead of telling him to get lost, the man actually invites him to join them, gesturing to an open bench near the back door. It has been years since he has been inside a church and he's suddenly aware of his offensive appearance and stench. Still, he is mesmerized by the possibility that even *he* is loved by God.

When the show ends, no one leaves. They stay and discuss what they've heard. He is impressed by the sincerity of those gathered. At the close of the meeting, the same kind man invites him to come and listen with them again.

He has no choice but to return to La Chureca, but the next day he has an odd excitement within him. Better than the expectation of a hot meal, or even another hit of crack, is his anticipation of returning to the small church and again hearing the drama. All day long, his thoughts are occupied with the idea of the love of God.

That next night, he arrives on time and recognizes several of the same people as before. More of them smile at him now, accepting him even with his foul odor. He soon becomes a regular at the meetings, and often finds himself in tears, yearning to know this God of love—to have the burden of addiction and self-hatred lifted. So

when an invitation is given, he jumps at the opportunity to give his life to Christ. Repeating a simple prayer for forgiveness and a new life, he senses a peace and joy which he has never known. Although he doesn't know it at the time, his craving for drugs is being broken—never to return. He is soon invited to the home of a new friend for a hot meal, bath, and haircut. Some of the men from the church pool their meager resources and provide him with some clean clothes.

A New Life—A New Name

Eager to repair his relationship with his family, he returns to his mother's home. He is greeted there by the snarling and barking of the family dog, who doesn't know him in his clean and odor-free state. It is not until he speaks that the dog approaches him. His mother is equally skeptical; although she knows with certainty it is her son, she mistrusts his motives and refuses to allow him to return.

As he starts to get his life in order, he regains his birth name—Rogerio. Previously, he had been known only as *the witch*—befitting his frightening appearance. It takes time, but he eventually proves to his mother that his transformation is genuine. She forgives him and allows him to move back into her home. Instead of stealing from her, he finds a steady job and helps provide for the family.

Today, Rogerio is totally free of addiction. He remains employed, and has shared Christ with many of his former drug associates. When asked about his life, he replies, "I've changed. No, God had changed me." He adds that he now finds real satisfaction in his job, in contrast to slaving just to feed an addiction.

Audio Bibles and Listening Groups

What Rogerio came upon that glorious day in Managua was something known as a *listening group*. Such groups gather all over the globe to take time to listen to recordings of the word of God in their heart language. After listening for a specified amount of time, they are free to make comments or ask clarifying questions. While it is mainly Christians attending these sessions, curiosity often attracts others as well.

An example is in Ghana, where groups of believers often gather under trees to listen to the audio New Testament. It is not uncommon to see other groups sitting under nearby trees, within earshot of the Audio Bible. These are groups of non-believers, not wanting to associate with the Christians, but sitting close enough to eavesdrop. Over time, a few brave souls will migrate from the second tree to the first. This simple act of faith is their way of identifying with Christ and acknowledging his Lordship.

Over half of the world's population is functionally illiterate. In some places, churches are even being led by pastors who cannot read God's word. In this type of setting, it is easy to see the importance of being able to hear scripture in a recorded form. And as Rogerio's testimony shows, it is not just believers who are benefiting from Audio Bibles—it is also a powerful tool for evangelism.

Faith Comes By Hearing

Jerry Jackson, founder and president of **Faith Comes By Hearing** (FCBH), the world's largest Audio Bible ministry, says,

Rogerio is just one example of what occurs when people listen to the pure word of God in their heart language. I am normally a very reserved person, but when I read the hundreds of testimonies like this from all over the world I want to shout, "Hallelujah!" God's word in the mother tongue is so powerful that not only does it change the individual's life, it impacts their entire community as well.

According to Jackson, this aspect of FCBH's ministry was not originally expected:

The mandate that the Lord gave us was to "bring his Church together and make disciples." We saw the Audio Bible as a means of spiritually strengthening believers who for whatever reason—often illiteracy—had limited

access to scripture. It came as something of a surprise to us when people began to come to salvation and quickly grow in discipleship—and then very quickly establish churches built entirely on God’s recorded word!

While Jackson does not advocate abandoning preaching or traditional means of evangelism, he adds, “It has been refreshing to prove that God’s word is as powerful as a two-edged sword cutting to the spirit and soul and does not return empty.”

Currently, FCBH has recordings available in over three hundred languages, with dozens of others in the recording process. The ministry’s goal is to record an Audio Bible in two thousand languages by the year 2016, which would reach ninety-seven percent of the world’s population.

With thirty-two trained recording teams in twenty-one locations around the world, FCBH is able to use native speakers for every one of the languages they produce. The Audio Bibles are then made available in a number of ways, including free internet downloads, miniature Mp3 players called Biblesticks, and a dedicated playback device known as a Proclaimer. In the past 2 ½ years alone, some eighty-seven thousand Proclaimers have been shipped—and FCBH recordings are now being used in over ninety-five countries.

It is not only the illiterate who benefit from Audio Bibles. Some two-thirds of the world’s population lives in oral cultures, where historical, moral, and religious lessons are passed on via stories, dramas, and other non-written means. Some forget that a great portion of the Bible is told in story form—making it a natural fit for oral cultures.

Just ask Rogerio.

Jerrid Stelter’s nineteen years in vocational ministry include extensive travels in the Muslim world, as well as a variety of teaching, writing, and consulting on missions. He currently lives in New Mexico, USA, with his wife and two children.

A Talking Bible for Those Who Need to Hear

By Paul Hoekstra and Ed Compean

To hand the new non-reading Christian a book on the basics of the faith and send him or her home to study is not only ineffective, it is inappropriate. For example, imagine how frustrating it would be to have possession of an office or home safe, with complete and adequate resources locked inside, yet not be in possession of the combination necessary to unlock the door. So it is for the non-reading Christian who desires to grow in his or her faith.

Everything that is taught to a non-reading person must be presented in oral form. One-on-one discipleship requires great investments of both time and effort by a missionary or teacher, as well as by the new believer. When a missionary has to use precious time teaching basic reading skills, time is lost, thus hindering the spread of the gospel and inhibiting critical discipleship and personal spiritual growth.

The Talking Bible in Mozambique

Sitting on a mat under a shade tree in Pembra village, Laura Alberto Massingi speaks softly of the things of God with the group of ladies gathered around her. Questions are asked, gentle answers are given. It would seem Laura has few worries. In actuality, Laura has a love for God’s word and a burden to carry on the work her husband, Alberto, had begun as a pastor in the small Mozambique village before he suddenly died from a ruptured appendix in 2004. Even in her initial grief Laura said she was confident the church Alberto was the pastor of was important; however, she was worried how the work could carry on: “I found myself needing to continue spreading the gospel and teaching the Bible, but I was not sure how.”

According to the government of Mozambique, there are approximately 1.5 million Matswa people who speak Xitshwa in Laura's mostly rural area of Mozambique. It is estimated that less than thirty percent of those people are literate, and that is why Laura feels a distribution of Talking Bibles in 2006 has been critical in helping her continue the work her husband began and the resulting transformation of many lives in Pembra.

Talking Bibles International produces and preserves single-voice audio recordings of translated scriptures in hundreds of languages and makes these recordings available throughout the world as Talking Bibles—compact, solid-state, digital audio Bible players.

Laura has witnessed God using the Talking Bible to bring his word to Matswa people in a special way. She oversees Bible listening studies where there is almost no reading of the Bible among the mostly illiterate group. "It is so hard to read," she explains. "The energy is spent reading, not putting the word into their hearts. The Talking Bible is the only way the people of Pembra are hearing God's word." Laura's desire was to get more Talking Bibles for the purpose of beginning additional studies and taking the gospel to remote areas. According to Laura, because of the illiteracy and aural traditions of the Matswa people, "men and women will sit and hear God's word, but they'll never read it." It is almost unthinkable, she says, to read whole books of the Bible for herself or other Xitshwa speakers. Within her village, more than two hundred identified Christians, but only a few written Bibles.

Uninterrupted access to audio scriptures enables new converts to begin building a solid foundation for their faith while receiving essential encouragement and support.

When her husband died, Laura could read only a few verses at a time; however, she knew she loved God and wanted more of his word. Laura was concerned about her lack of Bible knowledge, but when the Talking Bibles came to Pembra she began listening for at least an hour every day. Within weeks, Laura found she was growing in knowledge. "I discovered Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and now see the connections between the Gospels." She also began memorizing scripture; she found the Bible was speaking to her and increasing her burden for the people of Pembra.

Illiteracy has an immense negative impact on reaching the world for Christ. For example, in many places in the world, as soon as new converts have made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, significant personal, social, and political changes take place in their lives. Many experience alienation or physical threats from their families, as well as loss of possessions and status. Without access to scripture enabling them to grow in their faith, these significant changes are compounded by discouragement.

With her personal growth in the Bible, Laura has continued her husband's work to make disciples and spread the gospel in Pembra. Laura's desire may more accurately be called a passion that invades all she does. While currently overseeing fifty Talking Bibles in Pembra and the listening groups for each one, she also teaches several women's Bible studies and has a vision for using the audio scriptures in a school she hopes to build in the village. She also plans to begin new studies specifically for women in more remote areas among the Matswa people. "Some people will hear God's words for the first time," she shares excitedly.

Learning and Understanding Scripture Orally

Like most rural African church leaders, evangelist Ishmael Elish Mahsava has no formal theological or ministry training. Being a church evangelist two hundred kilometers from the nearest tarmac road in the village of Jofane, he serves in an area that has yet to receive schools. Like elsewhere in Mozambique, the vast majority of the Xitshwa-speaking Matswa people in the village are illiterate. There are no written Bibles in Jofane, and Ishmael does not know of any in the surrounding villages.

Yet the people are learning God's word and are gaining an understanding of scripture. Ishmael helped distribute one hundred Talking Bibles into other nearby villages in southern Mozambique in 2006. In the last year, Ishmael reports change in the people and churches of the villages. In some cases, people could go to church for

years, but only hear a few words of the Bible since they and the pastors are illiterate and without access to the printed or oral word of God. According to Ishmael, many times they heard the same few passages they had heard numerous times before and few could differentiate between the words of the pastor and actual Bible passages.

Ishmael says his own knowledge of the Bible has grown extensively since taking on the Talking Bible project. In the year he has been regularly listening to the Talking Bible, he says it has become simple to study scripture and learn about God: “It’s much easier for me to turn on the Talking Bible and listen than to read.”

The evangelist says he particularly liked hearing about Philip in the Book of Acts, which he says is fitting, considering his call to evangelize and help plant churches in the villages around Jofane. Sometimes, after walking for days with the Talking Bible and a small solar panel to power it, a crowd of people will immediately gather when he enters a village. Soon, people are calling to neighbors and family to gather around; it is not uncommon to have fifty or more people gather around the little black box as it plays scripture.

“I just take the machine to a new area, let the people listen, and then preach. That is how a church is started,” he adds. Because of this, Ishmael is confident there will be new churches in all the villages surrounding Jofane. He says more Talking Bibles are needed for the work, “I’m not really the evangelist; the Talking Bible is the evangelist that does all the work.”

For more information, go to www.Talkingbibles.org.

Paul Hoekstra lives in Escondido, California, with his family and serves as vice president of Talking Bibles International. **Ed Compean** lives in Nairobi with his family as a church planter and lecturer at Disciple Support Ministries Bible Institute in Kibera and Mathare Slums.

Faith Comes by Hearing: Lessons from a Filipino Church

By Martin Johnson

A Church like No Other

It looked like an old-fashioned Bakelite radio as it sat on a table in the middle of the church. Sitting around the table in a circle of chairs were a range of people from the local community. We were in Manila, home to twelve million people. While the room we were sitting in was a church called “Our Beloved Christ Christian Church,” the church and the local community it served was like no church or community I had seen before.

It was in Matandang Balara, Quezon City—one of the many cities that together make up greater Manila. To get there, we stopped our 15-seater van by the side of a busy road around dusk. We walked single file down a maze of narrow paths and steps lined by dwellings, shops, and restaurants. It reminded me of York (in England), with its narrow lanes and the eaves of the buildings almost touching across the path. In some parts it was like Jerusalem, with its smells and aromas. We crossed an ornate stone arched bridge; however, the water underneath was dirty and full of rubbish.

We passed a woman cooking kebabs on a small brazier, the glow of the coals reflected off the walls and her face as she leaned over the grill.

People passed us going the other way. It was a Sunday night and we could see families sitting together inside their houses, eating dinner and watching television.

The church met in a building at the intersection of three lanes. A barred shop with a large Acacia tree trunk growing through the roof stood on one side of the church. The room in which the church met looked like many

we had seen—there was a concrete floor, painted brick walls with posters, and the church sign above the door. In the corner sat a drum kit, guitars, and a public address system that seemed way too large for the room.

The pastor met us and invited us to sit with the other members of the Faith Comes by Hearing listening group that started to gather. We were to meet some unusual members of his congregation.

Faith Comes by Hearing

Faith Comes by Hearing (FCBH) was developed by Hosanna Ministries headquartered in the USA. FCBH records the New Testament in a local language and then distributes audio players to *listening groups*. In oral cultures, such as those in remote villages, the Faith Comes by Hearing colporteur has played a major role in enabling people to hear God speak in their heart language. At first, you wouldn't think this method of communicating God's Word would be relevant in a country like the Philippines; however, pastors testify that the dramatized recording of the New Testament enables people to listen and to hear God speak directly to them.

The Our Beloved Christ Christian Church has a special ministry to a group of young teenage boys who dress and present themselves as girls. This is a far more common activity in south-east Asian countries than Australia; indeed, it is difficult to know how to categorise these young men who want to be seen as girls. Some of them joined us for the listening group, and although their hair and makeup made them obviously different from the others at the meeting, they listened as the first two chapters of the Gospel of Mark were played.

What looked like an old-fashioned radio was in fact a very durable solid-state audio player called "The Proclaimer" that used a ROM (read only memory) chip which had been programmed with the audio files for the whole New Testament. The audio is accessible by book, chapter and verse, just like a printed Bible; plus, the inbuilt speaker can fill a small room without additional amplification.

The FCBH program encourages churches to set up listening groups who commit to meeting together for at least thirty minutes a week to listen to the Bible. The listening is followed by a question-and-answer session. This model has proven to be most effective with over 3,500 listening groups now running in the Philippines alone.

We left the group as they continued to discuss the passage they had just listened to. It was an unusual meeting, but one that sought to reach out to the local community, which is literally on the doorstep of the churches. Earlier that weekend we had listened as Filipino pastors had shared how the FCBH program was working in their church. I was convinced as I left of the truth of the words of Romans 10:17, that faith really does "comes from hearing" the Word of God.

Martin Johnson is manager of communications for Bible Society NSW.

PERSPECTIVES

Evangelism as a Whole: A Passion for Souls with Compassion for People

By Jon Jeffrey (Jeff) Palmer

"One of them, an expert in the Law, tested him with this question, 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.'" (Matthew 22:36-40)

Introduction

The Church today lives with a dualistic outlook on life. Mainly through Western culture and the influence of

modernism brought about by the Age of Reason and Enlightenment, we have all but accepted the separation of the physical and spiritual.

Subconsciously or consciously, science governs our natural world—the things we can see, hear, taste, and smell. Conversely, God and religion are relegated and best understood in relationship to the supernatural world, the cosmos, and heaven. We are living in a time of the “Great Divorce,” where we have logically separated the spiritual and physical realms.¹ This idea, although mainly Western in its origins, has spread throughout the Christian world, as well as world cultures, largely on the coattails of modernity.

This “Great Divorce” has profoundly impacted how the Church views and participates in evangelism. Evangelism is seen as a spiritual discipline and is thus relegated to the spiritual world. Moreover, evangelism is reduced to the core of proclamation and more pointedly what we call the “evangel” or the “good news,” which is God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, living a sinless life, taking our place in the death-price of sin, becoming a sacrifice on the cross, resurrected on the third day by the power of the Father God, and offering salvation to those who believe and receive.

While this evangel message is precious and central to the core of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ, we have done great injustice to the Kingdom of God by seeing it affecting only the spiritual standing of a person or community.

Consequently, the Church develops tools and methods for evangelism which focus solely on telling the story, but not on the rest of the story. We are keen on people hearing and responding to the gospel, but less interested in the impact that the gospel has on their lives, families, and communities. Furthermore, our evangelistic approaches become focused on a “once and done” strategy of proclaiming and quickly moving on to our next targets.

I propose that a better way is evangelism to the whole person. It is the biblical way. We best make Jesus known by word *and* by deed. Our proclamation is the evangel story. However, our demonstration of God’s love and concern for people and their struggles in life is a validation of our proclamation.

Consequently, our passion for seeing people come to a saving faith in Christ Jesus is entwined and inseparable with our compassion for them as people and their situations. In taking this view, God’s redemptive work through Christ on the cross then has something to say and impacts all areas of our lives.

The Social Gospel

There may be a rising fear that I am advocating a social gospel. However, let me put that to rest by stating the gospel is social and we have nothing to fear. Jesus came “preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23). He also “went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

“Social” refers to human society and organization, both individually and collectively. Jesus had no problem entering into our “social” world, demonstrating God’s love and proclaiming the kingdom. It is only our distorted duality that desires to separate the gospel from the social. In short, the gospel is concerned with the social as well as the physical, spiritual, and emotional.

The term “social gospel” stems from late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Protestant Christianity that wanted to address the perceived increase of social issues (i.e., poverty, alcoholism, slums) in the developing world. It was an attempt to take the Body of Christ outside the walls of the church building and into the streets, communities, and even government to address the social problems of the day. It is often characterized in the USA by men like Charles Sheldon (*In His Steps*, 1897) and Walter Rauschenbusch (*Christianity and the Social Crises*, 1907).

From a theological perspective, social gospel advocates were largely post-millennialists who believed the second coming of Christ could not come until the world rid itself of most of its social evils by the Church's efforts and participation in reform. In the USA, they helped push for mandatory education, enactment of child labor laws, and public health measures. They became set against pre-millennialists and the more conservative elements of Christianity residing mainly in the rural southern United States and became identified more liberal both politically and religiously.²

In twentieth-century missions the struggle for and against the social gospel became a topic of concern as well. How was the Church to respond to social problems and evils of the world while at the same time holding forth the evangel? Early on, missionary theologians such as Roland Allen (*Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* 1912) promoted a strong emphasis on the gospel with non-hierarchical local church and leadership development. His writings continued to grow in influence even after his death in the mid-century and are held in high esteem today.

Wrong Questions

The tone was set for the continuation of the struggle for evangelism and missions early on and has thus continued throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and now into the new millennium. On the one hand was pure evangelism where the gospel is proclaimed, people respond or reject, and then those who believe are gathered into groups to form a church. This has been classified as the conservative, "evangelical" method.

On the other hand is the action-oriented evangelism and missions whereby demonstration is given priority over proclamation, and the gospel is measured more by the effect that it has upon society more so than individual conversion. This approach has led to differing interpretations of basic Christian tenets such as salvation and is expressed in movements such as liberation theology. This has been generally classified as the liberal method.

I surmise that the majority of evangelical and mission-minded believers, as well as practitioners, are somewhere between these two stereotype extremes. I also propose that the true biblical models of evangelism and missions are not an "either/or" of these two, but rather a "both/and." However, due to our mainly Western dualistic worldview, it is difficult for us not to take sides on an issue like this.

This point is reflected even in the common questions we ask about evangelism and missions in regards to proclamation and demonstration:

1. *Does holistic missions lead to evangelism?* The answer is simple: it cannot be holistic missions if it does not lead to evangelism. Evangelism and missions to the whole person is to the physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual. If we have to ask this question, we are already approaching our answer from a dualistic mindset and will have trouble grasping evangelism to the whole person.
2. *How do we maintain a balance between word and deed?* Our dualism leads us to attempt to measure things such as time spent in compartmentalized sections such as deeds and proclamation. However, if we look at the biblical model, we do not find the same questions being asked. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus wake up and say to his disciples, "Guys, today we are just going out to heal people with no preaching." Conversely, neither does he say, "Guys, today we are just going out to preach and not heal." His whole ministry, words and deed, was one message: the Kingdom of God is at hand.
3. *How can "human needs" ministries such as disaster relief and community development lead to the main thing (evangelism)?* All followers of Jesus Christ, no matter what their gifts or vocations, are to be about the Father's business of making his name known among the nations. No matter what our jobs, no matter where we are, and no matter who we encounter or how, we are witnesses to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus. Our witness is everything about us inclusive of our words and our deeds. There is no time of the day when we are not witnesses. Our dualistic culture and mindset errantly strive to get us to separate

these functions. In God's economy, who we are and what we do is to be his design and seamlessly integrated into his overall plan of bringing the nations to himself.

Life Experiences and Examples

My family and I have been involved in community development and disaster relief ministries for over twenty years. We have seen and testify to the simple method of making Christ known in word and deed. We have helped establish agriculture projects that have addressed food security and income generation among some of the poorest of the poor in Asia. Each of these agriculture ministries have led to life-on-life relationships (individual and community) and faith-sharing with ensuing discipleship encounters. All of these encounters have been out of the "as you go" context, and in a few cases, have led to church multiplication.

We have also worked with healthcare and water concerns. In the course of helping communities achieve health goals, literacy, better access to safe drinking, and usable household water, our witness in word and deed have led to kingdom encounters with individuals and even whole communities at times.

Needless to say, not every human needs ministry project that we implemented has led to a church being established or a single conversion. However, every human needs ministry project has led to a witness, in word and deed, for the kingdom.

A Better Way

As the Body of Christ enters into the twenty-first century, my hope is that we find a better way, a more biblical way, in regard to evangelism and missions. I pray that we learn to take off the blinders of modern dualism and see the world through the eyes of Jesus, having a passion for souls inseparable from a compassion for people.

We need not adhere to or promote the social gospel, Paul's gospel, or the gospel as we understand it from our dualistic worldview; rather, we need to promote the whole gospel as found in the Bible and in the heart of God. Evangelism (and missions) that reaches out in word and deed, without having to seek a balance, but with the understanding that all we say and do is for the growth of the kingdom, is truly evangelism as an integrated whole.

Endnotes

1. Myers, Bryant L. 1999. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 5.
2. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2008. Chicago, Illinois, USA: Encyclopedia Britannica Incorporated.

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God in a Box

By Iva May

"If he isn't going to drink that, I will," I thought, as Karen, a Vietnamese manicurist, poured Buddha a portion of her morning latte. Karen lights incense and presents fruit, flowers, and something to drink to a statue of Buddha every morning. My mind raced with questions for this lady with whom I am seeking to build an evangelistic relationship. "Has he ever acknowledged your gifts?" I asked her. "Has he ever eaten your fruit offering, expressed enjoyment of the flowers, or interacted with you at all?" Followers of Christ formulate questions such as these as they observe and interact with adherents of Buddhism and other religions. How do we reach people like Karen?

Hoping for good luck, or maybe even winning the lottery, energizes Karen's daily ritual. She sincerely offers gifts to a statue that has ears but cannot hear, eyes that cannot see, and a mouth that cannot speak. All the while, God, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, cares not for a caffeine-charged Espresso Macchiato, but for an intimate relationship with her and all those whom he has created.

Personal theology evolves as people, both individually and collectively, seek answers to the worldview questions:

- *What is real?*
- *Who am I?*
- *Where am I?*
- *What is wrong with where I am?*
- *What is good and what is bad?*
- *Who gets to determine or define the good and the bad?*
- *How do I act?*

Buddhism, for Karen and millions like her, attempts to answer the questions all people ask. All world religions develop a system of beliefs as humanity attempts to answer these questions. Even those who have no "set" religion create god-less belief systems that answer the same questions.

What is real to you about God shapes your thoughts, values, and behavior, and even determines your eternal destiny. Thus, what shapes your view of God demands an investigation. What if that view of God is incorrect or warped? Is God simply a god of humanity's own creation, one with hands—frozen at his side; a mouth—a stiff upper lip in wordless repose; and ears—without stirrup or anvil, unable to communicate at all? Is he just merely human-made, a "god-in-a-box"? Long ago, the prophet Isaiah said,

No one considers in his heart, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire, yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten it, and shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" (Isaiah 44:19)

The Story of Abraham and Worldview Issues

Many rote evangelistic methods do not even begin to address the worldview issues of a Buddhist like Karen. How about using the story of Abraham? His story takes just minutes to tell, holds interest, and is worldview-relevant:

For the first seventy-five years of his life, Abram lived among idol worshipers, including his own family (Joshua 24:2-3). His worldview was shaped by idolatry; like all idols, the gods of his father were human-made and local. Even some of his later actions demonstrated that Abraham had to move from the idea of a local god who couldn't protect him (Genesis 20:11) to an unimaginably great creator who took a personal interest in his life, family, future, and even the destiny of the nations.

Genesis 12 reveals a startling change in the life of Abram—a change so significant that he leaves family, land, and familiarity as he hears the unmistakable call of Yahweh, the living God. He comes to know him as God-outside-the-box, the uncontainable God, the invisible God whose hands cannot be seen but move in infinite power, whose unseen ears hear, and whose invisible eyes penetrate darkness. He is the one who sees and knows every hidden thing. God, who made the mouths of humans, appears to Abram and speaks the words: "Follow me....I will make you a great nation....I will bless you and make your name great" (Genesis 12:1-3). Something only God-outside-of-the-box can do.

One only has to follow Abraham's life to see the living God in action. He speaks and audaciously promises Sarai, Abraham's barren wife, a child, and then performs the impossible twenty-five years later in the womb of

this elderly woman. Consider also how the living God intervenes on the couple's behalf as he plagues the powerful Pharaoh until he releases Sarah into the hands of Abraham and then deports the couple.

What about the time when God confronts the pleasant dreams of Abimelech in Gerar with a nightmare as he grabs him by the throat and threatens death if he does not release Sarah? Or, when God appears to Abraham and communicates his plans to judge and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? Or, when God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah by fire as a watching Abraham stands at a distance? Or, when God provides a substitute ram on the crude mountain-side altar in place of his boy?

In faith, Abraham turns from his god made by human hands to the living God.

The Impact of the Story

It takes only a few minutes to tell Abraham's story to Karen. She is riveted; she can relate to such a story.

Like a well-made documentary, the Old Testament frames the story of the living God as he relates to flawed people like us. No other religious book tells such a story. Only the Bible reveals the living God and divulges God's story—the story about the God who “declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done” (Isaiah 46:10). He dares to proclaim in verse nine, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.”

The living God cannot be ritually served by offering him fresh flowers, fruits, and cookies. He is intimate, personal, and real. The stories of the Bible reveal God's intimacy with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Hagar, Rebekah, Deborah, Huldah, and many others. He is knowable.

Stories convey embedded ideologies. Walt Ulmer, former commandant at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, was asked what he and his staff were doing to build values into future leaders. He stated,

The most effective transmitter of values is the use of value stories or parables. Written codes of ethics or standards are important, but the institutions that best set the tone do it by telling stories which embody their shared values...Stories will be a far more powerful influence than a code in a manual or a set of maxims hanging on the wall.¹

We underutilize the story in evangelism. We teach people to follow certain steps, adhere to specific rules or principles, and sometimes lose God-engagement in the process. Evangelism takes place as the hearer becomes engrossed in the story much greater than his or her own—the story of walking with God in a world filled with sin, trouble, and moments of goodness.

God meticulously weaves together this multitude of individual stories into the greater story of his redemption of his people. Scholars agree that the Bible is at least fifty percent narrative. Colin Harbinson observes that

approximately seventy-five percent of scripture consists of narrative, fifteen percent is expressed in poetic forms, and only ten percent is propositional and overtly instructional in nature. In our retelling of the same story, we have reversed this biblical pattern. Today, an estimated ten percent of our communication is designed to capture the imagination of the listener, while ninety percent is purely instructive.²

Revealing Truths through Story

So what does the living God intend that we glean from his stories?

First, the stories reveal truths about God:

- God establishes boundaries (in the solar system, in reproduction, Garden of Eden rules, in marriage).

- God evaluates what he has created. (“It is good.” “It is not good that man should be alone.” “Cursed is the serpent.”)
- God judges sin. (God curses the ground and the serpent and evicts man from the garden.)
- God makes reconciliation with humanity possible through the shedding of the blood of the innocent on behalf of the guilty.
- God often gives illogical instructions which require great faith.
- God uses the difficulties of life to develop godly character and faith in the lives of his children.

Second, the stories reveal truths about humanity:

- All of humanity has a bent toward evil.
- Humans, by nature, walk by sight and not by faith.
- Humans either covers their sin or blame others for their sin.
- Women have great influence (both positive and negative) over men.
- A person’s view of God determines his or her response to God (obedience and submission).
- Faith comes by hearing the words of God.

Third, the stories reveal truths about life:

- Suffering happens.
- Things are never as they appear in the natural realm.
- What one generation does or doesn’t do affects succeeding generations.
- Life is short and death is unavoidable.

Fourth, the stories address issues with which we can all identify, for instance:

- Pretty women and their counterparts
- Power-hungry men
- Sexual immorality
- Marriage infidelity
- Scheming, lying, and deception
- Disobedience
- Barrenness
- Warfare
- Rebellion
- Faith
- Judgment
- Redemption
- Relationship dysfunction
- Purpose

Biblical narratives introduce a God who is outside-of-the-box, loving, genuine, freeing. Tell the stories. Evangelize, preach, and disciple others through stories. After all, the Bible is HiStory.

(Energized by the discovery that many women living in America are secondary oral learners, Iva May developed story-based discipleship materials. This article draws from her resource, W3: Women, Worldview, and the Word: Serious Discipleship in a Secular Culture.)

Endnotes

1. Ford, Leighton. 1991. *Transforming Leadership*. Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press, 82.
2. Harbinson, Colin. 2006. "Restoring the Arts to the Church: The Role of Creativity in the Expression of Truth," in *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others for Christ*, ed. Scott Dawson, 163. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books.

Iva May disciples women through W3: Women, Worldview, and the Word, a narrative discipleship method she has developed. Through this material she also trains women to disciple others. She and her husband served as missionaries in Zimbabwe.

Praying for the Victims of a Fourth Hurricane in Haïti

By Glenn Smith

This cyclone season in the Caribbean has been particularly hard on the nation of Haïti. Four severe storms have devastated the island that had barely recovered after three thousand people lost their lives in Gonaïves in 2004 after hurricane Jeanne. This season, tropical storm Fay killed forty people; Gustav killed seventy-seven; Hanna paralyzed Gonaïves once again, leaving sixty people dead; and Ike left 123 people without life. It is estimated that 300,000 people are homeless, relocated to temporary shelters for now. The central plateau and the region around Gonaïves (fondly called the Artibonite) are disaster zones now.

News from the regions most affected is at best piecemeal. **World Vision** is already on the ground working with local authorities and congregations to serve the neediest. It would be particularly imperative to pray for the Church in this part of Haiti, as it has not fully recovered from the events of 2004.

The dean of the seminary in Limbé, Jules Casseus, recounted how the whole north of the country was now cut off because of excessive flooding. Classes at the seminary have been delayed. The main road connecting the north is now submerged in two meters of water in eight different locations between Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien. In an interview, one professor from the *Université chrétienne du nord d'Haïti* (UCNH) in Limbé said,

We do not get any electricity from the city power grid these days. Our generators are the only source of power. So when our stock of fuel is used up we will be without power and we will have to use electricity to pump water for the campus. We are switching to a new schedule and will only have power in our houses and the dorms in the evening for a few hours. In the morning, we will pump water for ourselves and the community with a small portable generator which is more economical.

Immediate priorities based upon the seven interviews for the victims of these four hurricanes include:

- **Financial resources for College Élim** in Gonaïves that has been severely hurt by the events. This is a fine evangelical school, providing excellent education for children in the region.
- **Resources for churches in Cap-Haïtien and Port-au-Prince** that are settling internally displaced peoples coming to the two largest cities because of the hurricanes.

- **Immediate help to rebuild the agricultural base of the region**, which is Haïti's bread-basket (if there is one). One friend, a professor of agriculture wrote me, *"People's gardens are all gone and they don't know where income will come from. Even if they replant now, it will take months for something to ripen for harvest. Bananas take a year or more; cassava is a minimum of six months. Beans are their quickest crop, and this is the season we are entering; however, their entire bean fields are along the river which is still flowing water and all their fields have been moved around. Some don't even exist anymore."*
- **Financial resources for World Vision Haïti**. They are very present on the ground with two very specific responsibilities. First, they help relocate families and rebuild houses. Second, they learned after Jeanne that many families need psycho-spiritual help to get through the trauma. Imagine some 300,000 people having lost their Bibles in a country where this is often the only book people own.
- **Scholarships for theology students**. The vice rector of finances at UCNH told me, *"We are going to give priority to the people affected by flooding in the distribution of scholarship monies. But the families affected are way more than the money we have. We would like to make an appeal for help for the young men and women who will have to drop out of school if they don't receive help with their school. The typical cost for our students is \$500USD a semester, \$1000USD per year, but the students from Gonaïves are on meal plan and in a dorm, which raises the cost higher—closer to \$800USD per semester."*

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URBAN COMMUNITIES

Gathering Manna in the City: Ministry in Lima, Peru

By Brian Langley

On one of the darkest nights that I can remember, a young friend of ours who grew up on the streets came to our meeting in hysterics. This was our weekly Friday night street gathering in one of the most notorious red light areas of Lima, Peru. Assembled on the cold street corner was our usual ministry team, a motley group of young men and women from different national origins, conservative and liberal, clean-cut and sloppy, outgoing and timid.

Love in the Midst of Pain

Our young friend's loud shouts and frantic body movements called immediate attention to himself. To a point, our meetings can tolerate what in most social settings would be considered disruptive and/or destructive behaviors. We believe our theological reading of the stories of Jesus Christ embracing the outcasts of society should translate into our strategies for ministry. Our community seeks out authentic love relationships with young people who live on the streets. Period. We do not ask them to first get off the streets or change their lives around in order to be loved and touched by us. We want them to get close enough to be cleansed by God's touch.

The culture of the street is rough, anxious, and belligerent; people who live in this environment internalize these characteristics and then slowly forget how to act any other way. At our meetings on the street there are always a few drunk people, many more who have been inhaling shoe glue, and a handful who are very upset and ready to fight. But this was more than we could tolerate; this young man was shouting wild accusations against us and pushing people around. After this, he threw the cup of hot chocolate he had just received to the ground in front of everyone.

What made this more difficult was that our community had been in relationship with him for many years; in addition, he had quite a reputation on the street. When he stormed off around the corner, a handful of people followed him, which seems to be the case wherever he goes. I thought I had seen this kind of exit before, only to be confronted shortly after with an angry person holding out a broken glass bottle or a freshly stolen kitchen knife intent on threatening someone. So I also followed him.

After abruptly brushing my hand off his shoulder as we walked the length of the dark street, him telling me “where I could go,” and how much he hated me, he finally broke: standing completely still, he looked at me through streaming tears and said he was afraid that if he got lost no one would come to find him. But this was practically his neighborhood—the streets, corners, and stores that he had been navigating for seventeen years. “Well, I am here right now with you and I love you,” I told him. He came toward me and we embraced, experiencing God’s loving and reconciling presence in each other’s arms for a few moments, and forever marking both our lives.

The fear he expressed that night and the circumstances surrounding how we heard need to define the presence and work of the Church in this world. Underneath the violence in our hearts and the ways we abuse others is a fundamental desire to belong and have purpose. We all need real people to speak of God’s loving embrace to us and then to actually have someone put their arms around us as a very real sign of that love.

Sadly, much too often in church congregations, which are called to be the Body of Christ in the world, we practice an exclusive and judgmental way of life that doesn’t intentionally embrace those people who live on the margins of society. When Jesus says, “Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that lasts for eternal life” (John 6:27), what is at stake theologically, eternally, is our ability to recognize God among us. Like the ancient story of manna from Exodus 16, we are given bread from heaven to gather and eat, but we fail to recognize and appreciate it. We grumble and long for what had nourished us before. Can we see the bread we are given, which is God’s presence among us in the poor?

Choosing to See God

While riding in a bus through the crowded Lima traffic, I often pass a certain corner church building that never lacks for that freshly painted look. It catches my eye every time, because all the other buildings in the surrounding blocks are full of graffiti, caked-on black sludge, and stick-up posters for concerts that happened three years ago.

On this wall, every few meters is the message, “Don’t stick papers here, respect God’s house.” The message appears to be working. Maybe it’s because people are afraid that something bad might happen to them if they “mess” with God’s property. Maybe it is the latent, shared desire to respect the sacred that the message awakens. The country of Peru, while being more than three-fourths professing Catholic with one official language, is by no means homogenous.

There is actually a great variety of religious expression, as evidenced by the multiple and diverse regions and hundreds of spoken languages in addition to the official Spanish. And yet, regardless of creed, language, or region, the majority of Peruvians maintain a marked theological and practical separation between sacred and profane, not unlike most places in the world throughout human history. Religious systems have always purported to communicate the divine rules and norms that govern a good society, and so we have the message painted on this Peruvian church warning us not to mess with God’s house (one might wonder if we could inquire inside as to the divine punishment for transgressors).

Almost daily at this same street corner stands a man with an old cardboard sign. On it he has written in simple letters, “Hunger.” The walls of the church building within a stone’s throw of this man remain pristine, and everyone notices how nice it looks. In passing, they say a prayer of thanks that people finally respect God and all that which is sacred. Many would call it scandalous if someone were to paint and thus mar the wall of God’s house.

But few name and act on the greater scandal that one of God's children goes hungry right in front of this wall. "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat" (Matthew 25:42), Jesus said, referring to people just like this man standing below the wall of the pristine church and to the young people who live and work on the streets with no one to love and embrace them. Inasmuch as we fail to see God in them, we fail to recognize God's presence among us and so nourish our lives, and theirs, with the true bread from heaven that God gives.

Our ministry center has a fig tree which last year produced buckets and buckets full of nutritious figs. We had more figs from this one tree than we could possibly eat, so one of our industrious volunteers began to prepare fig jam, which, in addition to the raw fruit, we gave away as gifts.

Many times, while working at the center, we gathered some of the fruit for a quick pick-me-up. This was a very old, gnarled fig tree, whose branches were growing weary and needed support beams under them. And yet this old tree was true to its variety and produced abundant fruit in season with scant care or water. After listening to a Peruvian friend explain the wonders of fig trees, Jesus' curse on the fig tree in the Passover season shortly before his death on the cross (Matthew 21:18-20) became clearer.

The cursed fig tree was a visible sign of judgment for not recognizing God's presence among us. In the desert coastal regions of Peru, mature fig trees are very hardy and easy to care for; with little rain they produce buckets of fruit every week. Similarly, a Palestinian fig tree with leaves in April, the Passover season, should have some fruit on it. A tree that is not showing any fruit at this point in the growing season is a dead tree.

Jesus called attention to something vitally wrong in the very essence of God's people by cursing the fig tree—that which was supposed to be showing signs of life, the recognition of God's presence among them, was not. There is a common Peruvian superstition that dwarfs live under old fig trees, and so some who come into our center are immediately filled with fear after eyeing our tree, afraid they might see a dwarf.

Many times, the Body of Christ practices a similar theological superstition by failing to recognize God's presence among us in the poor. A young person living on the street is a child of God, a sacred object of infinite worth, just as much as the well-respected local pastor. And yet, instead of seeing the life-giving potential in a person from the street, what is seen is a macabre figure. Many of us then choose to look away in fear. In faith, we choose to see God in even the most difficult people and places. This is, in Stanley Hauerwas' words, our "happy task." Hauerwas writes, "As the Church, we have no right to determine the boundaries of God's kingdom, for it is our happy task to acknowledge God's power to make his kingdom present in the most surprising places and ways."¹ That's why we bring donuts to the "casona."

Eating Donuts in the Casona: Finding Our Way Together

I saw a small red dot bouncing around on my chest and thought for a second that some clandestine sniper was actually targeting me. It was getting late in the afternoon, and standing precariously on top of the main wall of this aptly named abandoned building, "the big, old house," was frightening enough. Then there were the odd stares of passersby whose faces were unable to fathom why a group of decently dressed, seemingly normal people would be climbing into this building known to shelter drug addicts who walk around asking for food and steal hats or watches every now and again.

Earlier that morning, we had spent considerable time preparing homemade donuts from a family recipe. Between the mixing, dipping into hot oil, and then coating with powdered sugar, we all had done about a half day's work to produce the fifty or so donuts that we carried in plastic bags. Over top of trash and excrement piles we carried this simple breakfast as a small gesture of love. In addition to the vivid smells and images that I have carried with me to this day from those visits to the casona, what is of more value is that the young people remember when the donuts were brought to them during a period of great struggle and suffering in their life. If we were to simply calculate the human hours and economic cost of bringing donuts to the casona, it would be hard to justify this activity as effective ministry.

Further, many of those young people are either still struggling with their addiction or in jail. A scant few have left the streets altogether. Yet if anyone were to ask them personally what it meant to them to have donuts brought to the casona, all would say that they experienced the love of God as we sat together and got our faces messy with powdered sugar.

Our fundamental ministry strategy cannot be reduced to helping youth get off the street, nor is it to merely lift people out of poverty. Rather, we organize activities and implement strategies as a fruit of our devotion to the call of being living testimonies of God's love for humankind among the marginalized.

This does not exclude strategy and evaluation; we no longer bring donuts to the casona because that population is no longer together. But we go visit them in jail, and work with the families of those who have gone home. God has also led us to different abandoned buildings where we are doing much the same thing. The manna that was given to the Hebrew people could not be preserved from one day to the next, save for the Sabbath provision. In the same way, the Body of Christ in the world must be continually gathering the portion that God gives, trusting that it will nourish. Since the rendering of the temple curtain at the death of Jesus, the Holy Spirit of God is released in a new way. The spirit of adoption spoken about in Romans 8 is inciting the Body of Christ to recognize God's presence among the poor, thus extending the borders of God's family. If the Church does not choose to see God in the poorest and most unsightly in our societies, our testimony will not only fail to bear fruit, but will wither and die.

This is our message to the Body of Christ: that we might together in Christian community kneel down in joyful submission and daily gather the true bread of God's presence among us. In history, there will never be a lack of this bread, for there will always be "poor among us" (John 12:8). Let us pray that we would gather the manna God has given, and give thanks.

Endnote

1. 1991. *The Peaceable Kingdom*. South Bend, Indiana, USA: University of Notre Dame Press, 161.

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LAUSANNE REPORTS

The Rising Mission Force in French-speaking Africa

By Daniel K. Bourdagné

Several years ago I met with John Stott, one of the founders of the Lausanne Movement. I shared with him my concerns about French-speaking Africa in the following terms: "Please, do not forget French-speaking Africa." He remembers this statement each time we meet.

The Challenge

Because of its colonial past characterized by a low vitality of Protestantism in France and Belgium (the colonizing countries), French-speaking Africa was often regarded as the poor man of the evangelical world. Missiologically, because this part of the world is culturally difficult and little known by the evangelical world which is dominated by the American and Anglo-Saxon culture, French-speaking Africa has often been neglected.

French-speaking Africa during these last decades has been through times of unprecedented violence. Almost every French-speaking country in the sub-Sahara has experienced a political and/or military crisis causing

displacement of populations and deaths amounting sometimes to thousands, as in Rwanda and in D.R. Congo. There has also been a great expansion of Islam as well as a resurgence of the African traditional religions.

But God

But God, in his sovereignty, and in spite of these crises, is doing great things in this part of Africa. God in his sovereignty has often used war to facilitate the propagation of the gospel through refugees and migrants and to accelerate the missionary movement. French-speaking Africa gradually became a provider of missionaries to other parts of the continent and to the rest of the world.

Today, the future of the Church in the French-speaking world depends mainly upon the French-speaking churches of Africa, which are becoming strong and expressing a remarkable vitality. These churches must resolutely take on the challenge of the evangelization of the French-speaking countries in the rest of the world which are often very secularized and difficult to evangelize. They must continue to be aware of their missionary responsibility both toward other French-speaking countries in the world and also the francophone culture which is often not understood by non French-speaking people.

Moving Together in Unity

To fulfill this mission, the French-speaking Church of Africa must be put in battle order. It should move together in unity. It is important for its Christian leaders to regularly consult on issues related to the life of the Church, to evangelism, and to mission. It is also vital to prepare the new generation of leaders by cultivating in them a spirit of unity and sacrifice for the gospel, and a true missionary spirit.

The Lausanne Movement gives us an unequalled opportunity to be well connected to the evangelical world in order to share the infinite richness of the gospel. We must rejoice and celebrate the organization of [Cape Town 2010: The 3rd Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization](#) coming for the first time to Africa. We must prepare ourselves in prayer and mobilize resources and people from Francophone Africa to attend the 2010 Congress in Cape Town in order to give and also to receive from God's people the blessings the Lord has already prepared for us.

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