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Lausanne World Pulse, P.O. Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60189. E-mail: [info@lausanneworldpulse.com](mailto:info@lausanneworldpulse.com)

A FREE monthly, online magazine that provides you with missions and evangelism news, information and analysis.

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## WORLD NEWS BRIEFS

### AROUND THE WORLD

In light of current objections from Christians to the movie version of Dan Brown's bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*, recent protests from the Muslim community about the Mohammad caricatures and from Jewish groups about anti-Semitism inspired by *The Passion of Christ*, more than twenty-five leading clerics from different faiths signed a statement calling for joint efforts by religious leaders in working to prevent the use of religiously offensive materials in the arts and media. In its statement issued, the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, headquartered in Jerusalem, outlined nine points for collaboration among religious leaders and bodies, including the creation of an advisory council. The statement noted, "Such a council would consist of...religious leaders from all traditions who would be willing to engage artistic creators in ways that are constructive. It would be a conversation partner, raising issues of factual accuracy and sensitivity that could alert artists to potential problems of reception among the public of believers, and exploring ways of addressing such concerns. Such dialogue might prevent future crises, including violent crises, from arising." (Religion News Service)

### BURKINA FASO

From inside a thatch-and-mud house in a remote village, Nango Ouattara spoke legends into a microphone. Weeks later, her stories captivated hundreds of listeners on *The Samogho Program*, a weekly radio broadcast that combines traditional lore and music with biblical stories. The thirty-minute program, a fruit of Donna and Loren Entz's three-decade ministry, celebrated its first year of airtime in June. The Entzes serve with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Church Canada Witness. Radio program producer Ali Traoré prayerfully chooses recorded stories that complement the week's Old Testament story; Christian singers add music to further develop the message. Before *The Samogho Program* is ready to air, Traoré develops a conclusion that brings together the message told through traditional and biblical stories and music. (Mennonite Mission Network)

### GERMANY

Lutheran leaders in Germany say they hope the global assembly of the Lutheran World Federation scheduled to meet in their country in 2010 will boost links with other Protestant denominations. The federation's German National Committee has proposed that governing bodies of other global Church groupings should meet in parallel with the Lutheran assembly taking place in the southern city of Stuttgart. The Lutheran leaders said they hoped for "adequate space for a thematic dialogue with church families that stem from the [Protestant] Reformation." They referred specifically to the Anglican Communion, the World Methodist Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. (Ecumenical News International)

### INDIA

More than 3.6 million people in India have committed their lives to Christ as a result of the six-day Christmas 2005 "My Hope India" project, sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). During the six-day project, nearly 800,000 home groups representing sixty thousand churches in India invited non-Christian friends, family and neighbors into their homes to watch television Crusades that had been translated into fourteen different heart languages. After the programs local believers expanded on the gospel message with those who had come to watch the broadcasts. The BGEA is still receiving word that lives were changed as a result of the "My Hope India" project. (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association)

## **INDIA**

A record 10,250 people recently graduated from Hopegivers International leadership training courses in India. Despite threats of violence from radical anti-Christians in Rajasthan, over 8,100 missionaries went forward to receive diplomas in two of the three scheduled 2006 graduations. One of the three graduations, scheduled for Kota, Rajasthan, was postponed due to terrorist threats; the 2,150 graduates scheduled for this ceremony will receive their diplomas as soon as possible. Graduates will now be deployed to rural villages in India to meet humanitarian needs. (Hopegivers International)

## **KOREA**

Ten thousand Methodists from around the world will assemble in the South Korean capital of Seoul 20-24 July 2006 for the 19th World Methodist Council (WMC) to pray for the peaceful resolution of global conflicts. The theme of this year's gathering is "Reconciling God in Christ." According to Korea Methodist Council chairperson Shin Kyung-Ha, "There will be more than six thousand foreign guests and it will be the biggest international event in 120 years of Korean Church history." About twenty United Methodist Church leaders from the United States are working to have a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jung-Il prior to the event. (Ecumenical News International)

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

The Trainers of Pastors International Coalition (TOPIC) is coordinating a leadership development research project in South Africa to accurately assess the needs of Church leadership and the available formal and informal leadership training in South Africa today. The project will help training organizations better understand their potential students and provide leaders with a broad exposure of existing training opportunities. TOPIC is a network of training organizations committed to seeing every church with equipped pastoral leadership by 2010. (OC Africa)

## **SUDAN**

After nearly twenty years of civil war, Christians in the Sudan Interior Church (a church planted by Serving in Missions years ago) are seeking to bring restoration to the land. They are partnering with missionaries from Nigeria and Ethiopia to develop the country and disciple the Church. The missionaries will teach literacy, train teachers, start schools and disciple believers in the next three years. The vision is to raise the spiritual and educational level of those affected by years of war and to help them rebuild their nation and Church. (Serving in Missions)

## **THAILAND**

One of the most effective ways to share the gospel in South Asian countries where Christians are heavily persecuted is to demonstrate Christian love and to show a new way of living, participants at the annual World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission meeting concluded. The May 2006 conference in Bangkok, Thailand featured a round table discussion on religious liberty in Asia, with attendants from India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia and Indonesia. Reports from these countries revealed that the Church is growing despite a strong resistance to the gospel, and that an effective way of evangelizing is living out the truth. A representative from Bangladesh, for example, indicated that many joined the Christian churches saying, "We see you live a totally new life and it really appeals to us." (World Evangelical Alliance)

## **UNITED STATES**

Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) has announced the results of a study called "Operation Access" that will have a profound impact on the spread of the gospel in hard to access areas. MAF's Ghislaine Benny spearheaded the effort. It focuses on 364 sectors in sixty-four countries areas where people are unreached because of transportation, communication and other barriers. Benny says the results will help ministries around the world. The half-million dollar project is already being used by MAF. "The results are in the hands of all of our program managers, the MAF leadership and all of our operation folks—they are using that information as a basis for prioritizing where MAF will open a program." (Mission Network News)

# WORLD EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS REPORTS

## Christian Comics? It's No Laughing Matter!

By Nate Butler

**D**id you know that people in ancient cultures around the world actually produced and read comics? Don't laugh ... It's true!

"Comics" may be defined as "a series of pictures which tell a story or make a point." They are neither a new phenomenon nor the exclusive invention of any single country or culture. Modern day comics are just one of the latest incarnations of a narrative picture-story tradition that has been in existence for thousands of years.

### Comics Around the World

In Europe stained-glass windows, the Bayeux Tapestry in France and fifteenth century German woodcuts are examples of messages communicated through a series of artistic images. In Asia, Buddhist monks in sixth and seventh century Japan created "picture scrolls" which told epic stories, using symbols such as falling cherry blossoms to indicate the passage of time. Long before the arrival of the Europeans, Australian Aborigines were painting sequential images on bark and rocks to relate their own "dreamtime stories." In Mexico wall murals in Teotihuacan show illustrated stories of jaguars that utilize a form of speech balloons.

The current and rather narrow English term "comics" comes from comical versions that gained tremendous popularity in England and the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. However, this medium is being used now to communicate a variety of messages, often more serious than funny, and usually more bad than good. The international audience on the receiving end of this type of information is enormous.

Throughout Asia, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa billions of people of all ages are avid readers of publications they call manga, manhwa, bande dessinée, historietas, foto novela, fumetti or some other term within their own culture. All of these are versions and variations of the narrative picture-stories referred to as "comics" in the West. In fact, this visual medium is the world's most widely read form of popular literature.

This truth can be difficult to grasp in countries such as America, where the largest selling comic book title moves around 2.5 million copies a year. This truth is more obvious in Japan, where the top title Shonen Jump sells 3.2 million copies every single week, the three top sellers have a total turnover of ten million copies per week and a staggering 2.1 billion comics are sold every year. This translates into 16.6 copies for every man, woman, boy and girl in that country! However, Japan is not alone in its extraordinary love of comics.

In Korea seven thousand new comic book titles appear every year, and twenty-five million volumes are published. About 8,700 comic book rental stores and 7,600 comic book arcades exist nationwide. Teenage boys and girls in Thailand rank comics among their most "popular reads," and the top two comics, Kai Hua Roh and Mahasanook, together sell over eight million copies a month. Graphic novel comics featuring France's popular cartoon character Astérix le Gaulois have sold approximately 200 million volumes. The Donald Duck comic is one of the most successful periodicals in the Nordic countries, selling hundreds of thousands of copies in Norway, Finland and Sweden each month. In the Middle East the successful pan-Arab comic strip magazine Majid has a certified weekly circulation of 150,000 to 175,000 copies and is sold in almost every Arab state. The international examples go on and on.

### Why are Comics so Popular Around the World?

Some of the reasons that comics are globally popular are fairly clear:

- They use exciting visuals to draw the viewer into reading compelling stories.
- They engage the readers emotionally.
- They are completely accessible, portable and reviewable, both by the individual who originally buys them as well as for other members of their household or community.
- When compared with other forms of available "entertainment media," they are relatively inexpensive both to produce and to purchase.

Many governments and international agencies have taken note of the obvious ability of comics to reach the masses. In the last presidential elections in Mexico, both major parties handed out comic books as part of their campaigns. The Brazilian health ministry prepared 1.4 million comic pamphlets to promote the government's views on AIDS and sex education. In Kanpur, India, the citywide asthma awareness program used comic books. The Cambodian government publicized the country's first census in more than thirty years with a media campaign that included comic books. The South African government distributed nearly 100,000 cartoon pamphlets to inform farmers about anthrax. UNICEF Somalia disseminated more than 500,000 anti-cholera cartoon leaflets and another twenty thousand on diarrhea, dysentery, diphtheria and dyslexia, drawn by one of Somalia's top cartoonists.

Perhaps the most significant case to be cited is China, where 1.8 million copies of Mi Laoshu (Mickey Mouse) sell each month. Chinese authorities have made greater use of the medium than any other national government. Chinese comics have been produced to combat Western influence, promote national patriotism, explain Socialism, encourage oral hygiene and discredit religion. Indeed, the modern Chinese have a significant track record of using comics to persuade that dates back to at least World War II, when Chinese cartoonists engaged in "cartoon warfare" resistance. After the war the Communists propagandized Nationalist China with cartoon booklets before their takeover.

## **Comics and Christianity**

Missionaries and Christian nationals have also recognized that comics are excellent communication tools. They see that gospel truth can be represented in an engaging story format, making it more memorable to both children and adults. They realize that comics can teach Christian discipleship to new believers with an understandable directness.

This is where COMIX35 comes in. COMIX35's primary mission is to train ministries and individuals to produce effective Christian comics as part of an evangelism strategy and/or discipleship program for their own people.

The whole purpose is summed up in the "X35," which refers to Exodus 35:30-35, where the Lord calls the artisans whom he will fill with his Spirit. The Lord not only gives them the ability, intelligence, knowledge and craftsmanship to do every sort of work, he also inspires them to teach it. Likewise, those at COMIX35 have been inspired by the Lord to teach others the comics production skills he has given them through years of training and professional experience.

Since 1996 COMIX35 has held over twenty-five Christian comics training workshops for more than seven hundred attendees representing forty-two countries across Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the Americas.

The COMIX35 training is not an introductory "how to draw" class or a seminar designed for artists only. Sessions cover: identifying your audience; plotting and scripting; storyboarding and visual storytelling; editing and art directing; and cultural, communication and evangelism strategy considerations. The seminar is "hands on" for the participants and there are opportunities to create short comic strips and tracts that can go into print when the training has ended. Afterward the staff of COMIX35 continues to consult with and provide follow-up for individuals and ministries working on Christian comics projects which result from each workshop.

COMIX35 has helped launch successful comics such as Dorie the Girl Nobody Loved in Eastern Europe; PowerMark in the US and Southeast Asia; and numerous smaller comic and cartoon tracts worldwide.

Millions of copies of Christian comics are already in circulation reaching children, youth and adults in orphanages, prisons, schools and on the streets in ways that other print literature cannot.

And that is nothing to laugh at!

**Nate Butler** is president/cofounder of COMIX35. He worked for over twenty years as a cartoonist and writer/illustrator for clients such as Jim Henson, King Features and comic publishers DC, Archie and Marvel.

# Grace in the Gospel: Thai Christian Dance

By L. Allan Eubank

**G**raceful beauty, brilliant color, meaningful movement, distinctive music and worshipful poise are all adjectives used to describe Thai Christian dance. However, because of its association with other gods and spirits, Christians have historically resisted the use of dance in worship. Early missionaries and converts fostered this prejudice because of their legitimate fear of compromising the faith.

Thai dance is particularly suitable for worship because of the graceful, non-suggestive movements. There are special movements that refer to deity, love, sorrow and other emotions. Gradually, Christians have accepted Thai dance to express their worship and understanding of Jesus Christ.

In October 2006, in its General Assembly, the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) is holding a night of special celebration for thirty years of conscious effort to present the gospel in ways easily understood in Thai culture. The CCT is the largest Protestant church in Thailand and includes Baptists, Disciples, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Mennonites and others under Thai leadership.

## Christians and Thai Dance

In 1976 the faculty of theology at Payap University (which is owned by the CCT) launched a program to make worship and evangelism more Thai. They began with a Thai dance and dance-drama, called Likay. When the group wanted to present a Thai Christian dance in the First Church of Chiang Mai, they were not allowed on the chancel platform; instead, they had to stay on the main floor. They chose an adaptation of Psalm 150, which specifically calls for praise "with...trumpet...harp and lyre...tambourine and dancing... strings and flute...resounding cymbals," for their first dance. To help the audience accept the dance the group explained its meaning by referring to Miriam's celebration of the Red Sea crossing and King David's dance before the Ark of the Lord. The audience expressed their appreciation for the dance, but it was several years before local congregations presented their own dances in worship.

To use Thai dance, drama and music, it was necessary to redeem this art in order to convey the gospel. By tradition, Thai performers have to pay respect to the spirits of the teachers who had handed down the art. The musical instruments that accompany the dance have a magical aura about them. Before every performance, the dancers, actors and musicians must put their hands together in a prayer-like manner, which the Thai call a wai, to pay respect to the spirit teacher. In their belief, the kru (teacher) includes all teachers, going back to the spirit teacher who originated and still controls the art form. This ceremony is called Wai Kru. When some of the artists were asked about this, they said that they did this to show respect and gratitude; many also believed there could be punishment if they did not follow the custom. Many reported seeing artists actually possessed by spirits when they performed this ceremony.

As Christians, the students and faculty wanted to worship and be protected by the Holy Spirit. Before every performance they lifted their hands in a prayerful wai as they had been trained; however, the prayer was changed to thank God for their teachers and the art. The prayer included requests for the full use of their talents, protection for themselves and their families and success in communicating the message. This continues to be a part of the preparation before every performance.

Although the use of dance is now used nearly everywhere by Christians, it is nonetheless still done only on special occasions. Some of the dances include:

- The Christian dance, "Behold, I Bring You Good Tidings," based on Luke 2:9-14
- A hill tribe dance to Psalm 100
- A blessing dance used to introduce programs, which is adapted from the Thai classical dance, the "Sachatree"
- "On Eagle's Wings" dance, based on Isaiah 40:28-31

The response to the use of Thai dance and Likay was so positive that the university established a full-time troupe at the Christian Communications Institute (CCI). The CCI intends to use every art form possible, both traditional and modern, to communicate the gospel. More than fifty dance-dramas have been produced and taken on tour across the country and abroad. These dance-dramas are helping break down the

prejudice against Christianity as a foreign religion. They also help the audience see that the truths of Jesus Christ fit their own culture. Dance-dramas deal with the themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, racial prejudice, step-children, conflict resolution, grace, AIDS, drugs and prostitution. The following two pictures are presented from the Likay, "A Time for Reaping," which was adapted from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31.

Thai youth culture demands a more modern style. CCI has developed modern Thai dances to express themes such as creation, grace and temptation.

The CCI received a grant from the Thai Government Health Department to produce the modern dance-drama musical about AIDS, "Who'd Have Ever Thought!" The grant paid for the cost of producing a video and taking the musical on tour.

*L. Allan Eubank founded the Christian Communications Institute (CCI) in 1981 and served as director for fourteen years. He and his family have served as missionaries in Thailand for forty-five years. They have worked in rural evangelism and church planting.*

## Using the Arts to Reach Japan for Christ

**Paul Nethercott**

**The results of a survey of Japanese conducted by the Gallup organization in 2001 were recently widely reported by news organizations.** The poll caused a stir in mission circles because it claimed a shocking six percent of the population of Japan is Christian. Even more surprising, the poll indicated that seven percent of the teenage population of Japan is Christian.

In a country where far less than one percent of the population attends a Christian church, what could the results of the Gallup poll mean? For missionaries and others in Japan, this number of six or seven percent is much too high. There is too little evidence in Japan that this many people have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. We would see it on people's faces, it would be apparent as we talk with people, there would be far more Japanese attending church.

Presbyterian Church (USA) missionary Tim Boyle wrote about this seeming disparity in numbers: "What these figures tell us is that Jesus is rather popular in Japan, even though his Church (in the sense of organized, formal churches) is not. There are numerous historical and cultural reasons for this, and so while these statistics are disturbing in one sense (our relative lack of success in "church growth"), they are very encouraging in a different sense as it means there is quite a bit of openness to the gospel message of Jesus Christ."

While large numbers of Japanese are intensely interested in Christianity, overall the Church in Japan is not growing. However, there are "hot spots," missional churches and ministries that are effectively communicating the gospel and gathering significant numbers of Japanese. One of the characteristics of these "hot spots" is a high value placed on the arts. Read Japanese artist Fumie Ando's story here.

### Christmas in Peace

Christmas in Peace (CIP) created a small crack in a huge dam of resistance to the expansion of God's kingdom in Japan. In December 2002 a group of accomplished artists traveled to Tokyo with artist Makoto Fujimura of International Arts Movement (IAM) to take part in CIP. The group included actors, musicians and visual artists. CIP utilized media, concerts, art exhibitions and social gatherings to get the message of Christ into public spaces in Tokyo. In addition, a CD-ROM with a compilation of original songs and Fujimura's testimony was produced. The CD was a remarkable success with more than 200,000 copies distributed in Tokyo alone. Over ten thousand people visited the website and linked to the CD, and over one thousand people left their contact information.

Fujimura reflected on an event that took place at the Sato Museum on Christmas Eve: "IAM was asked by the host organization (all of whom are not Christians) to organize a candlelight party. They insisted that I speak on the true meaning of Christmas; to have music and sing. They were the ones who requested that candles be lit during the party (which seemed more and more like a candlelight service). One of the artists asked a friend, a professional baker, to design a huge cake as well. I am sure it's the first time that a mu-

seum in Japan hosted a candlelight Christmas Eve event."

In a country where the Church tends to be isolated from the broader culture, CIP built community by bringing Christians and not-yet-Christians together and winsomely proclaiming Jesus as the prince of peace.

## **Nakano Baptist Church**

Another "hot spot" is Nakano Baptist Church in Tokyo. When Pastor Kazumi Saito started pastoring this 100-year-old church, nearly every one in attendance was over the age of sixty. Seven years later Nakano Baptist is beginning to look more like a music café than a typical Japanese church. Saito uses video and sound equipment to the fullest. To create a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, he and his wife set up a small café in a back corner. According to Saito, "The café is my favorite area of ministry; I love doing it." Saito is an enthusiastic fan of rock music and follows the latest news in pop culture. Because of this he is able to communicate with youth. Saito often illustrates his messages with scenes from popular movies as well as video clips he self-produces.

Nakano Baptist has a growing group of young adults, a Mom's group and a dynamic Wednesday evening service called "Power House." Saito's vision is large. The church has plans to build a 250-seat multi-purpose hall with state-of-the-art video, sound and lighting. This space will be used for concerts, other artistic events, training and producing music and video.

## **Jesus LifeHouse**

On Easter Sunday 2006 attendance at Jesus LifeHouse (JL) church in Tokyo was 450. JL was established in August 2002 to target the significant number of youth in the area. Since that time, JL has baptized an average of ninety people per year, most of whom have been young people in their late teens and twenties. The arts are important to the leaders of JL. Associate Pastor Ryuta Kimura stated that "art is good, God is an artist...normal people should be able to accept it and relate to it... young people don't really care about the history of art and all that stuff, just that it looks good."

The attractive JL website draws fifty visits a day. Thirty percent of church visitors come because of their contact with the website. According to Kimura, a popular Japanese social networking site called mixi is one important means of connecting with youth. Seventy percent of Japanese youth use mixi to meet and communicate with others. "Our people make connection (via mixi) through their friends and people who they know," Kimura said. "For example, if someone writes comments on a blog, then there is a connection and the person can be invited to church."

The biggest artistic outreach JL held was in the summer of 2005 when it partnered with five other churches to host Hillsong's "United" band in Tokyo. Over 2,500 attended two concerts and fifty decisions to follow Christ were made. Kimura said this even built vision for the church: "The Christians involved realized we can do more of this."

In May 2006 JL hosted award winning DJ Andy Hunter. JL is one of the only churches in Japan with boundaries wide enough to embrace Hunter and his singular approach to leading worship to a dance beat.

## **Black Gospel Music**

Two movies, *Sister Act* and *The Preacher's Wife*, and the musical *Mama: I Want To Sing* launched a Japan-based "black gospel boom." *Sister Act* in particular inspired large numbers of Japanese to join choirs dedicated to singing black gospel. Currently, many hundreds of black gospel choirs exist in Japan. (Read an informative, humorous first-person report.)

One remarkable aspect of black gospel music in Japan is that it has few connections to organized religion; it is a mainstream, pop-culture phenomenon. Even major television stations broadcast black gospel concerts and interviews, some with clear presentations of the gospel. Because it is mainstream and therefore "secular," many in the Christian community dismiss Japanese black gospel as an irrelevant fad that is best ignored.

Some pastors and missionaries have a completely different perspective and view the black gospel boom as something the Holy Spirit is using to gather Japanese who are seeking the love and hope they sense in the music. For these leaders black gospel choirs and concerts are non-threatening "gathering spaces" ideally suited to connecting with the large numbers of Japanese who like black gospel but who will not come to church.



Hallelujah Gospel Family (HGF) is an effective black gospel outreach in Japan. HGF is a network of over twenty local choirs that are led by competent Christian directors. Most of the choirs are also directly connected to a local church and include several Christians. This is significant because choir members who meet Christ are already connected with a community of Christians. Since the content of the music is the gospel, every practice is an opportunity to share Christ with the group.

Twice a year, under the direction of HGF coordinator Ken Taylor, the choirs in HGF gather in Tokyo for a joint concert. More than 250 singers participated in the last concert in December 2005. Because most of the choir members are not Christian, Taylor says, "We are [indeed] preaching to the choir." Since choir members bring their family and friends to the concerts, most audience members are also unchurched.

Quality art with a redemptive message can reach a large audience. One million Japanese saw Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*. The DVD is still available in rental shops. After three weeks in theaters, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* grossed US\$18.7 million. *Narnia's* global total, more than US\$690 million, now surpasses that of the 1994 film *Forrest Gump*.

## **Art and Evangelism**

Both general revelation and special revelation are God's masterpieces; he is the original artist/communicator. When we use the art we have created to communicate eternal truth, we are just copying, on a very small scale, what God has already done.

Japanese generally respond to great art with awe and wonder. Awe and wonder does not necessarily lead to the worship of God, but it can be a stepping stone. Because the culture of Japan has a long history of placing a high value on art, it is one of the best ways to initiate spiritual discussions. If the Church in Japan can utilize the medium of art to engage people in conversations about God in a winsome and non-threatening way, we may see many more "hot spots" that are effectively communicating the gospel.

## **Necessities for Effectively Communicating the Gospel Through Art**

Common characteristics of those who are effective at communicating eternal truths in creative, artistic ways:

1. They have a genuine appreciation for and understanding of art. Most do not simply use art and artists as a tool to gather people.
2. They plan strategically, with an integrated approach to outreach that is holistic, comprehensive and sensitive to the preferences of their target group.
3. They like, accept, respect, honor and value artists. This is critical, as artists will not stick around if they sense they are not a valued part of the community. Budgets reflect values; money to support artists is an essential aspect of honoring them.
4. They understand that one of the most powerful aspects of the creative process is the formation of relationships. People are hungry for positive relationships that result in genuine community and belonging and working on a creative project together is a great way to build relationships.
5. They do not divide the world into "sacred" and "secular" compartments.
6. They empower artists by giving them permission to use their God-given gifts and abilities.
7. They listen carefully to both God's word and to the voices of mainstream society. This is what John Stott calls "double listening."

**Paul Nethercott** is director of *Christians in the Arts Network (CAN)*. He is also a *TEAM* missionary.



# The Use of Dance and Other Creative Arts in Missions and Evangelism

By Karen Liew

**C**hristian Dance Fellowship of Malaysia (CDFM) began in the late 1970s when a Christian woman, Mary Jones, had a vision to start a revolution of taking dance and creative movement and giving it back to God. She and several others were instrumental in pioneering the first Christian dance fellowship, now known as the International Christian Dance Fellowship (ICDF). Today there are Christian dance fellowships on every continent and in more than twenty-five countries; all operate with the same purpose and vision to use dance and the creative arts for the glory of God.

CDFM was established in 1999 after a regional camp. The event drew many participants who desired to use dance expression in worship, ministry and evangelism. The overwhelming response set the tone for the birth of the CDFM; I (Rev. Karen Liew) was then approved as the national coordinator by the ICDF. Since that time, the fellowship has grown into an established and interdenominational organization that links individuals, groups, churches and performing arts organizations involved in dance and related movement arts ministry not only in Malaysia but also internationally.

## Aims and Activities of the Dance Fellowship

CDFM is a charter member of the ICDF and a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia (NECF). The aim of the fellowship is to serve as a consultation center to educate and network and to provide resources, training, encouragement and fellowship. It also provides the vision to use dance and other related arts movement as an expression of the Christian faith and unity. Membership is open to those who accept the principles and beliefs of the Christian faith and support the aims of the fellowship.

CDFM has become one of the key Christian organizations in Malaysia. Although Malaysia is not a Christian nation and the population of believers is only a small fraction of society, the Christians in the country are on fire for God and are continuously serving and working together to build the kingdom of God.

Thus, CDFM wants to cooperate with all the churches in the country, regardless of denomination. Because not all believers are inclined toward dance and the performing arts as suitable for ministry and evangelism, this has not always been an easy task. The majority of believers in Malaysia are of Asian origin; hence, there are many pre-conceived notions, largely arising from cultural norms and beliefs, which question the appropriateness of utilizing movement to worship God.

However, there also exists a large number of believers who fully support the idea of dance and arts to glorify God. Many churches have established dance teams. CDFM has been instrumental in bringing together all the Christian dancers from their respective backgrounds to combine their talents and desire to dance for the Lord. Many dancers have been trained to perform at Christian rallies, concerts, workshops and seminars such as the Emmanuel Celebration 1999, Breakthrough Rally 2000, Redeeming Dance Seminar 2000, Dance in His Beauty 2001, Ad Deum Fest 2004 and Rejoice Dance Week 2005. CDFM, along with other church-based dance fellowships, have been offering concerts that rejuvenate Christian worship and witness in the country.

Dance fellowship members also performed in opening ceremony of the eleventh World Evangelical Christian Fellowship General Assembly. The dance troupe of CDFM formed a major part of the opening night performances. The dance served as a bridge for mission outreach; ministers of the Malaysian government, ambassadors and high commissioners and eight hundred Christian leaders from over eighty nations around the world attended the event.

The use of arts in missions and evangelism is growing and in Malaysia it is impacting more and more people for Christ. With the continuing growth of the CDFM, it is perhaps no surprise that the fellowship has been chosen to host the sixth International Christian Creative Arts Conference in July 2006.

## Hosting the Sixth International Christian Creative Arts Conference

The sixth International Christian Creative Arts Conference is being jointly organized by the CDFM and the ICDF. The conference will be held 10 – 16 July at the Genting Highlands Convention Centre in Genting

Highlands, Malaysia. This conference is held once every three years. Previous conferences have been held in Israel, England, South Africa, Australia and the United States.

The theme for this year's conference is "Into All the World" and is taken from Matthew 28:19. Revelation 7 talks about all nations and tribes around the throne of God. Thus, the vision of the conference is to teach and disciple the nations, and Christian artists and dancers in particular, to utilize their God-given talents, creative skills and arts for world globalization and the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

Delegates at the conference will be given the opportunity to perform at the outreach project "Dance Village," which will feature a collection of representative dance works from around the world. Dance Village is created from a desire to provide an evangelistic platform that pools together professional dance companies, institutions, choreographers and dancers of different genres and cultures.

Nearly five hundred people are expected to come listen to international panel speakers, teachers and delegates from approximately thirty-five countries. Dr. Colin Harbinson, convener of the 2004 Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization on Redeeming the Arts Issue Group at Pattaya, Thailand, will speak on how media, arts, dance, culture and entertainment can be dedicated and redeemed afresh from a biblical framework for world evangelism.

Some of the objectives of the conference are to:

1. present a biblical worldview of the arts relating to worship, ministry and mission and
2. develop a unity of artistic expression by reclaiming the arts for the glory of God and his purpose.

The conference hopes to provide global networking, encouragement, vision and fellowship for the body of Christ involved in the creative arts and dance ministries. We want to celebrate life, hope and beauty through the diversity of multi-genres, cross-cultural evangelism and the international exchange of ideas relevant to a changing world.

There will be a worship session each morning and daily workshops that focus on dance, movement arts, music, drama, mime, clowning and puppetry. There will also be special afternoon sessions for dance exchanges, choreographic clinics, panel discussions, forums, issue groups and video or paper presentations. Concerts will be held every night. In addition, a fine arts and photography exhibition highlighting Malaysian batik, crafts, artworks and paintings will be held. Artwork from other countries will also be displayed.

It is also our sincere prayer that many eyes will be opened to the wonderful opportunity of using the arts to worship God. We also pray that this will lead others to use the arts in evangelism. We would like to extend our invitation to anyone who would like to attend and participate in this long-awaited conference. May we all continue to strive together in reclaiming the arts for the glory of God.

*Rev. Karen Liew is chairperson and host for the Sixth International Christian Creative Arts Conference 2006. She is the national coordinator of the Christian Dance Fellowship of Malaysia, and was a member of the Redeeming the Arts Issue Group at the Lausanne 2004 Forum for World Evangelization in Thailand and a member of the Arts and Sports Issue group for Transform World 2005 in Jakarta, Indonesia.*

## Witnessing Through the Artwork of Malaysian Artist Hanna Varghese

**Editor's note:** Hanna Varghese is a Malaysian artist who uses acrylics and batik-dyeing to share biblical themes with her audience. After being inspired by the artwork of various Asian Christian artists, Varghese began her own journey to use painting and drawing to share her faith. Her pieces have been exhibited in various galleries throughout Asia. Varghese was recently interviewed by LWP editorial coordinator Laurie Fortunak.

**LWP: Describe your faith journey. How and when did you come to trust in Christ?**

**HV:** My faith journey has been a constant one. Certainly there were questions, doubts, study and convic-

tion, and in all these there was the quiet spiritual experience. There was no dramatic defining moment like the Apostle Paul had. I come from a traditional Christian background and was influenced by Bible teachings, faith with prayer and worship.

**LWP: What is it like to be a Christian in Malaysia? Are there any unique challenges you face as a Christian there?**

**HV:** The Constitution of Malaysia says that we have freedom of religion, so there are churches of all denominations. Christians are represented and speak as one voice through the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) and the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM). However, there are difficulties if a Muslim wishes to convert to any other religion. Yet we have inter-religious dialogue for better understanding to live peacefully as friends and as neighbours.

Also, burial grounds are getting limited for the Christian dead and our leaders have to negotiate for such land. Many Christian groups have become innovative when they cannot get land for building churches; they resort to converting shop lots and warehouses into worship centres. It reminds me of the very early churches!

**LWP: How did you come to use art as your way of witnessing?**

**HV:** As a child I loved drawing. We had a Bible storybook at home with vivid illustrations which left a lasting impression on me. Although I could not read at that time, the pictures made sense to me. Image is the tangible form of our thoughts and our spoken and written words. I could read into the pictures and interpret what they were saying. The images I make today are windows for others to look into my interpretation. That is witnessing.

**LWP: When interviewed once, you said, "This is my way of witnessing for Christ with the gift I have been blessed with." How do you use your art to do that?**

**HV:** Some can preach, some teach, some sing, some compose; others write and paint. The imageries that I perceive as I read, meditate and experience, I put into tangible forms for others to see. My hope is that more people will use images as another dimension in scripture education, meditation and inculturation, especially in seminaries, where the deep meaning of theology is taught and understood.

**LWP: Describe your art.**

**HV:** My art expressions for the past several years have centered on my innermost spiritual meditative thoughts. I use more of certain colours like yellow, blue and green to express light and calmness. I like movement and rhythmic patterns in my work. I observe and am aware of peoples' expressions and reactions.

**LWP: How is art effective in sharing the gospel both in Malaysia and around the world?**

**HV:** One Chinese proverb says, "A picture speaks a thousand words." A picture is visual; it draws your attention. With most visuals, we can see, understand the meaning and even "read" into them. Art is universal. It is amazing to see the gospel message in many local forms confirming that the message of salvation is for all people

**LWP: What advice would you give to Christians and the global Church about using art for evangelism?**

**HV:** All creative expression, be it the spoken word, the written word or the sung word are essentials in evangelism. Let us not forget the rightful place of visual images too. Art is the "seeing" word, the tangible word. Remember God "created" and "it was good." Only when we perceive the beautiful can we say, "The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Christian communities should look into the possibilities [of including] art in their praise and worship, education and veneration (as in icon).

Art is the expressive cry of the soul. All of us have that urge in one form or another. Discover it; nurture it.

# Christian Tattoos: Sacred Ink or Unholy Blemish?

By Chuckk Gerwig

**T**attoo is a language of sorts; a language of ink under flesh. Tattoo is an idiom of ancient and emerging generations. If we are to reach people of every tongue, tribe and nation (see Revelation 7:9), it will be necessary to speak the languages of the various emerging tribes. Many people today are subdividing into smaller "tribal" units. For some tribes, tattoo is their visual language. Throughout history, many world languages have used visual symbols to communicate; examples of this are modern Chinese and ancient hieroglyphics. Tattoo has lately also become a modern Western symbol-language and brings fresh opportunities to speak God's word visually.

Sacred Ink is an Internet outreach tool or bridge that exists to speak the language of ink and Jesus. In late 2005 God gathered a team of people to bring glory to himself by reaching less-reached people in a less-used way. Sacred Ink is an Internet faith-art project directed toward individuals who are convinced about tattoo but unconvinced about Jesus. It is a presentation of the "faith stories" of seventeen Christians who bear indelible marks on their bodies that illustrate their indelible connection to God. The separate personalities, images, stories, kinetics and soundscapes of Sacred Ink weave together to form a visual and voice narrative of hope and grace.

## Feedback

As cultures change, new roads must be paved to take us to the market squares of the new emerging tribes and their cultures. The Internet is one of the highways into the midst of many of the new tribal people groups in this digital century.

Sacred Ink uses the Internet superhighway to travel to new tribes, and people have been responding favorably to the presentation. In the few short weeks since Sacred Ink has gone live online, thousands of people have viewed it in over fifty countries around the world.

Both online and real-life relationships can be cultivated though using tech-testimony sites like Sacred Ink. I recently had the opportunity to reconnect with an old acquaintance through Sacred Ink. This woman is not warm toward Christianity; however, she said she enjoyed the site. We emailed back and forth and scheduled a time to meet. After spending the day at an art exhibit with several of Sacred Ink team members, she commented that if she were going to get involved in a formal religion, it would be Christianity. She was amazed at the way we loved one another. The website was a bridge for her to hear the personal stories of believers in a format that was of interest to her. The Sacred Ink website was the door that allowed her to have face-to-face contact with living, breathing Jesus-lovers.

In another email one young man mentioned that he had felt very alone as a tattooed believer but was greatly encouraged to read that there were others who shared both faith and tattoo.

Websites can be wonderful places for storytelling about Jesus and they can make pathways for real life meetings, church invitation, further cyber-discussion, encouragement, evangelism and bridge building in general.

## Controversy

Christians with tattoos is still a controversial issue for many people. For some, there are questions about whether tattoo defaces the creation of God and is, in general, sin. There are helpful articles on Sacred Ink that explore the topic of Christians with tattoos and the Mosaic injunction in Leviticus 19:28 in particular. If tattoo is a biblically allowable expression for believers, but is culturally a problem for Christians, it leads to the loss of a language for modern tribal evangelism. In reaching the new tribes in this digital age it is vital we do good exegesis of the scriptures in order to confront any cultural customs that we may have added to the word of God. Twentieth century Christian traditions must not be added to the unchanging and eternal words of scripture. If we do this, we will lose God-given opportunities for sharing the excellent message of life with those whose cultures and languages vary from our own. Separating what is church culture from what are clear biblical standards and then reaching out, without imposing our subculture on new tribes, is more important today than ever. However, in this reexamination of how our traditions as Christians may have become equal with the teaching of God's word, we must never budge on the clear teaching of the Holy Scripture.

## Beyond the Monitor

A great goal for tech-testimony sites such as these would be to move people beyond the computer monitor into face-to-face, voice-to-ear friendships that will lead people toward the excellent person of Jesus. Some Internet evangelism sites, by not focusing on follow-up and discipleship, seem to be an end game instead of a part of a larger plan. Instead, our hope should be that all Internet evangelism sites will move people from mere facts on a screen into real life relationships, worship gatherings, ongoing discussion and becoming bridges to other spiritual opportunities. We live in an unprecedented time of global communication that allows people, even at great distance, to form friendships online and in person.

Social networking sites like MySpace, Xanga, Tribe and America Online, when used in conjunction with sites like Sacred Ink, allow for ongoing discussion with "not yet believers." Building relationships through social networking sites, especially when connecting to others of a tribal subgroup with similar interests, is a powerful new ministry opportunity.

## Sacred Ink Live

An example of how these new ministry opportunities are happening recently occurred at Renaissance Church in Florence, Italy, which hosted a Sacred Ink Live evening in the coffeehouse where the church meets. Mark Brandes, photographer for the Sacred Ink project, displayed poster-size images of Sacred Ink participants as a visual environment for the meeting. There was video projection of the Sacred Ink flash videos and audio testimonies. This created a multimedia framework for discussion about art, tattoo and several faith-oriented topics in Sacred Ink.

Another Sacred Ink Live application being considered is to take the images and audio to a tattoo convention where they will be used to create an artistic multisensory oasis for faith discussion, prayer ministry and a live art project. These conventions could be used to share faith with non-believers. People we meet prior to the convention through online networks would be invited to come to the convention as a meeting place to further the ongoing relationships and faith discussions. Using Internet social networking, live exhibitions and invitations to faith gatherings are exciting ways to move into the next generation both online and face-to-face.

The hope at Sacred Ink is that many tribes beyond the tattoo tribe will utilize the Internet, art, storytelling, social networking and old fashioned friendships to incarnate the message of Jesus into the lives of those who are still unconvinced about him.

*Chuck Gerwig is creator of Sacred Ink. He is also pastor to youth and their families at Santa Cruz Bible Church in Santa Cruz, California, USA.*

## Mission Possible in Bulgaria

*By Nasko Lazarov*

### The Early Years of Revival

Growing up in Communist Bulgaria was an experience. With all that was going on, it was extraordinary to witness the change of a political regime that we once thought would last forever. Bulgaria was not spared the winds of change that were blowing in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. God showed mercy and goodness to Bulgaria when he didn't allow any major bloodshed to take place. The evangelical churches in Bulgaria soon began enjoying freedoms that were once thought impossible.

Crusades, street evangelism, rallies at stadiums, parks and city squares were becoming the norm of regular evangelistic endeavors. Bibles were supplied, tracts printed and some churches experienced numerical growth that could be matched only with post-Pentecostal numbers from the book of Acts.

Bulgaria was on the edge of even greater revival times when the political season changed. The period of 1993-1997 brought an unsuspected threat from figures in political circles who were not happy with the rapid growth of the Bulgarian evangelicals (who were perceived as posing a certain political threat). Numerous churches were denied public access to media outlets, and restrictions of all kinds followed.

The changes in the society forced the evangelical churches to rethink and reorganize their evangelistic efforts. Churches needed to venture into areas and begin using new evangelistic approaches.

Mission Possible (MP) has been involved in Eastern Europe since 1973, smuggling Bibles and literature in and helping and assisting local pastors in different ways. The heart of Mission Possible's ministry in Bulgaria has always been to serve and assist local churches in their ministries to individuals and society.

### **Leah Magazine**

In 1998 MP launched *Leah*, a new and one of a kind magazine for women in Bulgaria. Existing publications at that time provided a good saturation of books and booklets; however, the evangelical churches and the Bulgarian society needed a publication that would target not only demographically the largest segment of the country, but also the gender group that was most active and most represented in any congregation.

*Leah* was launched as a response to the immediate needs of evangelical women and their church ministries. Soon after the magazine's birth, surveys began to show that readership had grown four to six-fold. The reason for this growth was surprising. Most of its readers openly, enthusiastically and purposefully shared their copies of *Leah* with their non-Christian friends. *Leah* soon became an active tool for evangelism and for spreading the gospel.

In recent years *Leah* has brought a new fascination to the editorial team at Mission Possible. Some time back the office started receiving regular invitations for facilitating and organizing "ladies-night-out" events. These events are co-sponsored by *Leah* and a hosting local church, and include discussion on challenges for women today and hot topics in society. These events serve to build bridges with those who otherwise would not go through a church door.

### **Strengthening the Roots**

In previous years, changes in the Bulgarian society and the growing mass suspicion toward the evangelical churches posed major challenges to active personal evangelism. Personal relationships, already-developed levels of trust, being part of the culture and all the other important elements of accessing neighbors, relatives and coworkers were present. The missing link was the tool.

Mission Possible wanted to provide an evangelistic tool that would effectively assist churches in their outreach efforts. MP was well aware of the growing popularity and effectiveness of the Alpha Course. Having been developed, practiced and proven to work in central London, Alpha was easy to translate and prepare for application in Bulgaria. It was a local church-based approach to evangelism and a perfect match with MP's heart and intention of providing local churches in Bulgaria with the tools they needed to effectively reach out to their communities.

The Alpha Course is currently used by an array of churches. Combining theology and practice, Alpha brings a great blend of knowledge and life together, bridging the gaps that often are created by evangelistic efforts that only target "to tell" but avoids the more intimate levels of sharing the gospel. The results of Alpha are yet to be seen as more and more churches adopt Alpha as a tool for their evangelistic efforts.

### **Remembering the Past**

Because of past media disinformation and representation of evangelical churches in Bulgaria, it was also imperative to provide society with accurate information concerning the history and life of the evangelical Christians in Bulgaria. Mission Possible organized a scientific conference, "The Contribution of Evangelicals to the Political and Spiritual Liberation of Bulgaria," at the University of Sofia. The conference provided long-forgotten and intentionally-blocked data of the major role played by evangelical Christians before, during and after the events of the Russian-Turkish war. Scientists, members of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, a former prime-minister and esteemed members of the academic community were present. The presentations were published and made available for future use by evangelical churches across the country.

### **Crafting a Nationwide Initiative**

After major changes in the political climate in 1997, Bulgaria steered to the right with a strong pro-European, pro-NATO and pro-American agenda. The turn of the new millennium brought further changes that challenged evangelical churches in Bulgaria to think of new ways to present the gospel. The time of sec-

ular, non-evangelical media portraying churches as non-Bulgarian was gone. MP launched nationwide initiatives in the spring of 2002. These local, regional and national initiatives were aimed at the same goal – providing evangelical churches with outlets for a correct and public presentation. Hope for Bulgaria, a national evangelical initiative aimed at providing a positive portrayal of the evangelical churches to the society-at-large, was born.

### **Athletic Approach to Evangelism**

Hope for Bulgaria's program included an eleven-day run across Bulgaria, providing outreach meetings, concerts and press conferences in all major cities along the route. This "Run of Friendship" also set a precedent, allowing Mission Possible and local evangelical churches to hold ten consecutive press conferences along the route which stretched between the Black Sea port city Bourgas to the capital city, Sofia. In all major cities along the 350-mile route, churches across all denominations came together for evangelistic meetings and concerts, presenting a united face to society. The press conferences allowed local churches to provide a direct presentation of their history and current active involvement in respective cities. An additional effect of this initiative was an invitation to one of the top-rated evening television shows, "Slavi's Show." This provided evangelical churches with an opportunity that was nonexistent prior to the initiative.

### **Inviting the Nation to "Come and See"**

The events of Hope for Bulgaria culminated in an unprecedented nationwide initiative called Open Door Days which invited individuals to visit a local evangelical church and to celebrate Palm Sunday among evangelical Christians. The Apostle Philip's simple yet profound invitation to Nathanael to "come and see" (John 1:46) was used as the main slogan for the campaign. Mission Possible prepared the initiative in cooperation with the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance, providing local churches with posters, invitations and opportunities for community projects. This last one proved to be extremely attractive to youth groups and young adults as it provided them with "hands-on" ministry and opened doors for one-on-one evangelism.

### **Conclusion**

Hope for Bulgaria provided many lessons in leadership and management which allowed us to lead better evangelistic programs. Allow me to share three:

First, evangelism works best when combined with meeting a real need. Scripture gives many instances when a real human need was met while the gospel was being preached. Efforts that only preach give results, but the results are much greater when preaching is combined with caring.

Second, evangelistic efforts are best when various churches and organizations unite. The kingdom of God is much bigger than any single church and the need for evangelism and outreach are much greater than any of us can meet alone. Only when we come together in unity, passionately desiring to reach the unreached with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, can we see results that will exceed our boldest expectations.

Third, the more we desire to see souls saved, the more we understand our desires are miniscule in comparison with God's desire to rescue people and redeem them for eternity. We must move out of our comfort zones and do things that we do not feel comfortable doing. God's heart for the lost must move us forward in compassion and passion to do what he has not stopped doing since the days of creation.

We must reach out with his hand to his beloved. It is indeed exciting to be part of such a mission as this!

**Nasko Lazarov** serves as US director for Mission Possible. He has also served as director of administration and development for Mission Possible Bulgaria.



## WORLD PERSPECTIVES

### The Arts and Evangelism in Latin America (Los Artes y el Evangelismo en América Latina)

By *Eliseo Mondragón*

**T**he idea that the arts can be used in evangelism is not a new idea. The Greek theater developed thanks to representations of the goddess Dionis; the Spanish conquerors of Latin America staged dramas to “evangelize” the indigenous peoples. Art has long been used to express religious and spiritual themes.

Art has been promoted by religious leaders who have mobilized great amounts of money and many artists to build beautiful temples, paint colorful murals and produce exquisite music. This is not new, and we must remember that our God gave us the ability for art and guided men through the Holy Spirit to design the Tabernacle, build the Temple and write the songs of the Levites. Art is an excellent medium to transmit messages not just to the mind, but to the heart as well.

I was surprised to learn that over the years God used art to touch the hearts of thousands of people, including my own. I first understood my spiritual need and distance from the Lord through a stage play I witnessed at a Christian youth camp. It was more effective to see the reality of my life reflected through drama than to hear about it from a counselor. God used art to show me my own life and my need for him. From this moment on, I began to use art to share the gospel with others in the same way it had been used with me.

#### **In All Ways—In All Places**

Through the arts we have taken the gospel to places that are not easy to evangelize. We have made presentations in theaters, parks, prisons, schools, universities, bull ring stadiums, government events, private parties, camps, hospitals, retiree homes, malls, churches, meeting rooms, television programs, sports stadiums and dancing halls in cities large and small throughout Latin America. The artistic medium we have used has varied: plays, music concerts, pantomime, cantatas, black theater, puppets, movies, dramas, exhibitions and paintings. We have used all of the artistic resources we have available, and the help of many artists committed to the Lord. The result has been positive, as we have seen thousands of people make the decision to follow Christ through these presentations. I am not exaggerating when I say thousands, as I have seen this happen in thirteen years of promoting art as an evangelistic tool.

There are significant challenges to confront for those who believe that the arts are a wonderful resource that God uses for his glory. The problem is that many churches will not support such efforts and have little interest in this idea. I began thirteen years ago in a church where all we had were six enthusiastic young people and a budget of US\$10 for one year. We did everything possible to obtain additional resources: selling food, yard work, washing cars, painting houses, babysitting and more. We needed to have enough funds to start a quality program for God and for the audience. A ministry with the arts requires training for the artists themselves, good materials, technical assistance and professional production. I am so thankful for many people who donated their time to this ministry. Our last theater production entitled “And After This...the Judgment” involves seventy actors and fifty staff workers, all volunteers. We have presented this play in several Latin American countries and over 1,500 people have made professions of faith through this project alone.

#### **ESCENARIO Ministry**

Today the ministry of ESCENARIO has plans to start a school of arts and evangelism in Guadalajara, Mexico. We have requests for training in the arts from over 150 churches in several Latin American countries, and we have a vision for creating a network of Christian artists in the entire continent to be able to promote quality projects for God that take the gospel to new places in a creative way. We are praying for this project and identifying artists and Christians who believe in this ministry. We want to transmit the concept of using the arts for the glory of God to congregations of Christian churches. Indeed, the fact that you are reading this article is an answer to our prayer.

We invite you to collaborate so that the word of God can be communicated through the arts. You can do this in many ways; maybe God has given you a special talent that you can use for his glory. Think of ways that you can take the artistic resources available in your church to the street, to prisons, to movie houses, to public places where the people have not yet heard about Jesus. And remember to pray for us, and for those who are using their artistic gifts for evangelism.

*(This article was translated into English by David Befus, president of Latin America Mission. See below for the original Spanish text.)*

## Los Artes y el Evangelism en América Latina

**L**a idea de usar las artes para evangelizar no es nueva ya que el teatro griego surge gracias a la representaciones hechas para el dios Dionisio, incluso los conquistadores españoles usaron las representaciones dramáticas para "evangelizar" a los indígenas en los territorios conquistados, es decir el arte ha sido usado para explicar temas religiosos o espirituales desde tiempos antiguos.

El arte incluso ha sido impulsado por líderes religiosos quienes pagaban grandes cantidades de dinero a artistas para que edificaran los templos más hermosos, los murales más bellos y la música más exquisita. Aunque esta idea tampoco era nueva ya que no olvidemos que fue nuestro mismo Dios quien dio la habilidad de el Arte a hombres guiados por su Espíritu Santo para hacer lo mismo con el Tabernáculo, con el Templo y con los coros de los Levitas.

El Arte es un excelente medio para transmitir mensajes que llegaran no solo a la mente sino también al corazón. Es sorprendente lo que he aprendido a lo largo de los años de la manera en que Dios ha utilizado el Arte para poder llegar a tocar el corazón de miles de personas en el mundo.

Empezando conmigo mismo. Yo entendí de mi necesidad espiritual y de lo alejado que yo me encontraba del Señor gracias a una serie de sketches que tuve la oportunidad de ver en un campamento cristiano. Fue más efectivo ver la realidad de mi vida reflejada en estos dramas, que las palabras del consejero que me decían lo mismo. Obviamente Dios utilizo el arte para reflejar como estaba mi propia vida y darme cuenta de mi condición. A partir de ese momento empecé a utilizar las Artes para compartir el evangelio de la misma manera que lo habían hecho conmigo.

A través de las Artes hemos podido llevar el evangelio a lugares donde no es tan fácil entrar a evangelizar. Hemos estado en: teatros, parques, cárceles, escuelas, universidades, plazas de toros, eventos de gobierno, fiestas privadas, campamentos, hospitales, asilos, plazas comerciales, iglesias (no cristianas), salones de eventos, programas de televisión abierta, estadios deportivos y hasta discotecas muy conocidas tanto en comunidades rurales, como pueblos pequeños y grandes ciudades en distintos países de Latinoamérica. En todos estos sitios hemos compartido el evangelio por medio de: obras de teatro, conciertos, pantomimas, cantatas, teatro negro, marionetas, payasos, cortometrajes, películas, dramas, coreografías, exposiciones, pintura y música, es decir hemos utilizado todas las artes que tenemos a nuestra disposición con la ayuda de artistas entregados al Señor siempre con el mismo resultado. Este ha sido que hemos visto como miles de personas han conocido al Señor y han hecho una decisión de salvación en todos los lugares en que hemos estado. Y no exagero cuando digo miles, pues a lo largo de 13 años he podido ver a estas personas rendirse al Señor habiendo utilizado el arte como medio para alcanzarles

Sin embargo aun quedan grandes retos que tenemos que enfrentar aquellos que creemos en las Artes como un medio que Dios puede utilizar para su gloria. Esto es debido a que las iglesias no apoyan mucho o incluso no tienen un ministerio de artes formal. Cuando yo empecé con mi ministerio hace 13 años los únicos recursos con los que contaban era un grupo de 6 entusiastas jóvenes y un presupuesto de 10 dólares para todo el año de parte de la iglesia. Estoy seguro que no he sido el único que ha tenido que enfrentar el reto de conseguir recursos. Nosotros hicimos de todo para conseguirlos, vendimos comida, cortamos césped, buscamos patrocinadores, pedimos ofrendas, vendimos cosas nuestras, lavamos carros, pintamos casas, cuidamos niños, etc. Todo con el fin de conseguir recursos para hacer presentaciones de calidad para nuestro Dios y nuestro publico. Que puedo decir hoy después de trece años las cosas han cambiado sí, pero solo un poco seguimos teniendo problemas con los recursos, pero ya tenemos más experiencia para conseguir fondos. Lo que trato de decir es que el apoyo que requiere un ministerio de Artes

es grande, se necesita capacitar artistas, brindarles materiales, tener equipo técnico y de producción. Agradezco por las personas con las que he trabajado la mayoría han ofrendado su tiempo al Señor porque no se les ha pagado por su servicio. En la última obra de teatro que hicimos llamada "Y Después de esto... El Juicio" participan 70 actores y 50 personas en staff, la hemos podido presentar en varios países de Latinoamérica y tenemos el dato de más de 1500 personas que han aceptado a Cristo como su Salvador.

Hoy el Ministerio ESCENARIO tiene la visión de formar una escuela de Artes y Evangelismo ya que hemos tenido la oportunidad de brindar capacitación a más de 150 iglesias en distintos países de Latinoamérica, y también tenemos la visión de reunir y unificar a los artistas cristianos a lo largo del continente para poder hacer cosas más grandes y de mejor calidad para nuestro Dios, con el propósito de llevar su evangelio de una manera impactante y creativa. Actualmente estamos orando por: encontrar a esos artistas, unirnos, encontrar gente que crea en el Ministerio de la Artes y quiera invertir en él para la gloria de Dios, por llegar a más lugares a los cuales no llegamos aun, por transmitir la visión y que las iglesias cristianas vean los frutos que el ministerio de artes puede traer a sus congregaciones. De hecho el que tú estés leyendo este artículo es una oración contestada el día de hoy. Tú puedes colaborar para que la palabra de Dios se siga difundiendo a través del arte. Lo puedes hacer de distintas maneras: ora por nosotros y todos los que estamos en ministerios de artes, si Dios te ha dado un talento artístico úsalo para su gloria, impulsa las artes en tu iglesia, apoya con tus recursos económicos también. Y lo más importante saca las artes de tu iglesia es decir llévalas a la calle, a las cárceles, a los teatros, a los cines, a los lugares donde esta la gente que no conoce del Señor.

*Eliseo Mondragón is founding director of the ESCENARIO program of Guadalajara, Mexico. He is a graduate of the Central American Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, USA.*

## Restoring the Arts to the Church: The Role of Creativity in the Expression of Truth

By Colin Harbinson

### Introduction

As the biblical story unfolds, it does so in stories and poetry. In fact, 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.

At particular times in history, the arts have played a strategic role in the mission of the Church; at other times—when perceived to be morally and spiritual bankrupt—they were largely abandoned. However, in all probability there has never been a time in which a biblical understanding of the arts by the Church has been more needed than in our current postmodern culture with its visual and experiential orientation.

### A Biblical Perspective

The Bible begins with the majestic pronouncement, "In the beginning, God created..." (Genesis 1:1). Stunning in simplicity, yet profound in implication, we are first introduced to God as the creator, the original artist. He is the creative imagination and personality behind all things; creativity is an essential part of his divine nature. God intended creation to be both functional and beautiful (Genesis 2:9). Into this world he placed the man and woman created in his image. They had the ability to think, feel and create. The cultural mandate affirms that God intended for human beings to develop and steward his world. We were commissioned to be culture formers (Genesis 1:28, 2:15).

The specific call of God for Bezalel to make "artistic designs" (Exodus 31:1-6) opens up the possibility of artistic expression as a spiritual calling. Creativity is a gift from God. The best way to thank him is to develop and use our gifts. Unfortunately, many never give themselves permission to begin to develop their creativity because it has not been encouraged or validated by the Church. Others either abandon their gifts or abandon the Church when told their artistic motivation and their faith are incompatible.

God told Moses to make a sculpture of a snake because he wanted to use this visual representation as a

means to bring forgiveness, healing and restoration to his people (Numbers 21: 4-9). Other Old Testament examples abound that show how God commissioned the use of the arts in worship, to remind the people of their story or to reveal his purposes. The prophets often used stunning visual means to demonstrate God's heart. In the New Testament, Jesus, the master storyteller, ignited the imagination of his listeners through narratives, parables and metaphors that pointed to spiritual reality.

### **The Role and Nature of the Arts**

The beliefs and values of a community are reinforced and passed on through storytelling, poetry, dance, theatre, music and the visual arts. Artistic expressions have the ability to influence individuals and cultures in powerful ways because:

1. The arts give an experience that impacts the whole person. When moved by a story we want to enter into its action and meaning.
2. The arts allow us to experience events and situations we would not normally encounter, through the power of the imagination. They offer windows through which to observe some aspect of life or human experience.
3. In the rush of daily life, we look at many things, but see very little. The arts can make the familiar appear unfamiliar, so that we are invited to see with fresh eyes and receive new insight.

Good art is not passive in nature. It asks something of those who engage it. Artistic expression creates a place where artist and audience meet. Thoughtful reflection is stimulated. Easy answers are avoided.

### **Excellence of Character and Skill**

When God finished his creative work, he declared it to be very good. Our gifts must be developed to reach their fullest potential. Excellence should be the hallmark of our art and our character. Humility, purity, godly accountability and the heart of a worshipper will enable the artist to overcome the distortions of idolatry, pride and sexual impurity that pervade the world of the arts.

### **The Arts as Witness**

Should artists witness through their art? What makes a work of art an authentic witness? The biblical narrative is authentic. It is a true witness of human nature at its best and at its worst; yet it never glorifies the sin and the rebellion that it exposes. Instead, it shows God's broken heart over his creation and points to the possibility of restoration through Christ. For art to be a truthful witness, it must be deeply authentic in its portrayal of life as we experience it, while affirming a biblical worldview.

### **Restoring the Arts**

If God's intention for art has been distorted, would it not be wise for the Church to avoid it altogether? Absolutely not! The arts are God's good gifts to us. We are to be involved with God in the reclamation process. The arts, though distorted by sin and idolatry (see Exodus 32 and 2 Kings 18:4), can be restored. When we fail to understand that the kingdom of God—his rule and reign—extends to every sphere of life, Christians will be discouraged from "worldly" involvement in the arts.

### **Examples of the Arts as Witness**

Given the above understanding of the arts and how art works, the following seven personal examples and observations, while not exhaustive, will help to identify some of the ways in which the arts can express the truths of God's kingdom.

**1. Create Modern Day Parables.** The play "Toymaker & Son" is an allegory of the gospel set within a world of toys. Using a non-verbal fusion of drama, dance, mime and music, this theatrical production has been able to cross national and cultural barriers. Truths creatively expressed in contemporary and meaningful parables will be key in opening the hearts and minds of our communities.

**2. Let the Church Celebrate!** The Church should be a celebrative community that reflects the original artist that we worship and serve. All of the arts should be integrated into the whole life of the Church. They should not be just an "add-on" to the worship service.

**3. Act Out Our Stories.** The arts are a powerful way to move the Church to action. “Dayuma” is a theatrical reenactment of the modern mission classic told in the book *Through Gates of Splendor*. A powerful show in its own right, when performed in partnership with a Bible translation organization, it resulted in the completion of twenty translation projects.

**4. Exchange Creative Gifts.** The concept of cultural exchange in the arts can facilitate significant relationships and transformation to all involved. International Festival of the Arts has used the international language of the arts to hold large-scale, cross-cultural festivals. Over seven hundred Christians involved in the arts have participated in high profile cultural exchanges with Russian, Bulgarian and Chinese artists that enabled relationship building, respect, trust, dialogue and the expression of a biblical worldview.

**5. Promote Creativity in the Christian Academy.** Belhaven College, located in Jackson, Mississippi, USA, sent its dance students to China to live and exchange dance forms with the Chinese minority nationalities. This cultural exchange was reciprocated when the Chinese sent their best scholars to Belhaven, where they were exposed to a biblical worldview in their discipline.

**6. Be Culture Formers, not Culture Escapers.** Believers involved in the arts should seek to establish and lead credible cultural institutions, organizations and performing entities that can contribute to and influence the cultural landscape with artistic expressions that reflect a biblical worldview. A location containing an artist’s café, art studios and an art gallery, established by believer-artists in China, is now considered the place where Chinese artists in the city assemble to paint and dialogue about art, life and spiritual reality.

**7. Be Salt and Light.** Secular artists are “discipling the nations” because the Church has to a significant extent abandoned the marketplace. Christians should be encouraged to pursue their artistic calling within the secular culture—to be salt and light on the stage, in the art gallery or in the film industry.

## Conclusion

Before the arts can take their God-ordained place within the Church and in the culture at large, there must be a recovery of a biblical understanding of the arts to the glory of God that ignites the imagination. When this happens, the calling of the artist will be affirmed, recognized and supported. The definition of evangelism and mission must be broadened from their narrow confines to embrace the full breadth of God’s redemptive purposes. He is seeking to restore all things—every area of human reality—back to his original creational intention.

Art at its best is a shared experience. There is no room for preaching or moralizing; rather, this is a place where potential revelation as truth can be uncovered and shown. The Church must celebrate its own story and creatively show it to a word-weary and biblically illiterate world.

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*Colin Harbinson has been involved in the arts and missions in over sixty nations. He is currently dean of arts at Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi, USA and editor of the *Creative Spirit*, an international journal on the arts and faith. Harbinson is founder and president of the International Festival of the Arts.*

## Christianity, the Creative Arts and the Narrative Play

By Rebecca Jones

**T**True to the nature of this topic, this article is written in the style of a play. After a theatrical production team meeting to discuss the value of using drama to share the gospel, the acting team works through practical examples of using drama in ministry.

### Production Meeting

**Producer:** Welcome to our production meeting. Part of our meeting today is to help educate our fine fellow evangelists to see the value of drama and how important it is to our work and ministries.

**Actor 1:** Drama is a form of communication that combines the visual, verbal and aural. Research tells us that we retain ten percent of what we hear, fifty percent of what we hear and see and eighty to ninety percent of what we hear, see and do.

**Dancer:** Language is the foundation of our society. The ability to communicate with one another through a common voice allows for the function of our world. Language is our greatest asset for communication.

**Sound tech:** The voice of language can therefore be articulated beyond vocal communication and into any realm where beliefs are communicated between individuals. Language can be communicated in books, media, art, architecture, body language, television, theatre, music and beyond.

**Lighting:** Drama and the creative arts are a part of every culture, race, society, tradition and sphere of life. Storytelling which goes hand in hand with drama is very much a part of the world that God made. We are natural storytellers and story lovers. In wanting to discover a common voice to reach into our communities, drama can creatively provide that common voice.

**Costume:** Stories and dramas reach all ages; they are personal, a representation of life and an expression of human thought. They can take simple, complex or abstract ideas and turn them into digestible and entertaining messages.

**Graphic designer:** Theatre holds within its walls a medium that embraces the visual and the verbal essence of language; it invites people into a new world and engages the intellect of the imagination – this is achieved in conjunction with the opportunity to communicate educational, historical and meaningful, even eternal, messages. While a book also contains within its pages a similar achievement, the live, participatory nature of theatre enfolds the observer, capturing the emotive intellect and communicating a message.

**Prop maker:** There is little dispute that drama or storytelling is a powerful tool that pushes all the boundaries of attention and touches hearts as well as heads.

**Conductor:** Thus, the deepest layer and essence of the “why” of theatre embodies itself in the captivating culmination and meeting place of the mind and the heart.

**Actor 2:** Human intelligence and human emotion.

**Prompt:** Cognition and compassion.

**Choreographer:** Cerebral and sentiment.

**Actor 3:** Thought and feeling, the physical encountering the mental, the emotional and the spiritual.

**Musician:** As the stage’s backdrop has layers of paint with colours, perspective and illustrations, theatre too has a layer of entertainment.

**Actor 4:** A layer of communication.

**Actor 5:** And a layer that captures the heart and the mind, providing a platform to provoke thought and provide meaning to reach people and glorify the one true creator.

**Producer:** Thank you, everyone, for your thoughtful contributions to our discussion. We will continue by looking at the biblical basis for drama. As the set designers create the foundations, layers and backdrop of the production, God is the basis and foundation upon which we stand.

## **Biblical Drama**

**Set designer 1:** Why do we want to use drama? First and foremost we are commanded to teach our children God’s laws (Deuteronomy 6). With drama as such a powerful communicator, should we not be using that powerful form of communication to impact children with God’s word?

**Set designer 2:** God wants us to use our gifts for him. I Peter 4:10 says, “Each one should use whatever

gift he or she has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

**Set designer 3:** We are God's storytellers; Jesus was a storyteller. Matthew 13:34 says, "Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using parables." Jesus knew that stories could stick in people's minds. Jesus told parables in ways that were relevant to his listeners. We too need to be creating ways of communicating relevant truths in ways that are attractive and yet challenge people to think. Psalm 78:1-3 says, "Oh my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things from of old—what we have heard and known and what our fathers have told us."

**Set designer 1:** The prophet Nathan used a story to help illustrate to David his sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12. David's emotional reaction to the story helped him to understand the consequences of his own sin.

**Set designer 2:** Music is often used in the Bible and it is used in celebration of God. Matthew 21:14-16 says that children sang praises to Jesus and celebrated God with "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

**Set designer 3:** God deserves our best and deserves our talents for his glory. We need to reach people to share the message and stories from the Bible. We need to engage, challenge, excite and teach biblical truths; drama provides a fantastic platform to achieve this.

**Set designer 2:** God's message is powerful and we need to be humble, faithful messengers. God and the Holy Spirit will do the growing.

**Director:** We will now get our cast moving as we work through each scene and see our dramatic production evolve before us.

### **Act 1 Scene 1: Creativity**

**Narrator:** Let's begin by engaging in a journey that brings to life in a unique way many of the stories in the Bible that you know and love. One of the important components that makes drama unique to a standard verbal communication is the use of creativity. With a twist of creativity or imagination a simple concept can become attention grabbing and attention holding. For example, take two well known stories in the Bible, the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) and the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), add a bit of creativity and they can become dramatic messages. Observe our actors.

*(Still frames: Story of Joseph. As narrator speaks and as each event occurs, the actors turn themselves into a still frame picture. For example, "Joseph dreams about his brothers bowing down to him" and "Joseph is captured by his brothers.")*

*(Turn a story into an interactive group activity: Using the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the leader narrates and the audience gives the appropriate sound effects on cue. For example when the narrator says, "Poor Lazarus," the audience groans.)*

*(What you can do with a piece of chalk: Using your imagination a piece of chalk can become Moses' staff, a piece of fruit, the pen that Paul wrote his letters with or the tent needle of Priscilla and Aquila.)*

### **Act 1 Scene 2: Communication**

**Narrator:** Communication reaches far beyond the vocal and into mime, music or movement.

*(Charades variation: You have been doing the story of Pentecost and want to recap. Place the names of people or significant events into a hat, for example, Peter, fire, wind, Holy Spirit, tongues. Each word is pulled out and the individual has to either act it out or describe it in one sentence or one word for others to guess.)*

### **Act 1 Scene 3: Compassion**

**Narrator:** Becoming a character and entering into another world is an essential part of acting and an excellent tool to foster empathy and consideration of others. Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should



look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others." Perhaps it is in the empathetic and heartfelt emotional context that drama begins to impact people beyond what a sole cognitive communication will achieve.

*(Give case scenarios of real and relevant situations that can have different endings adapted to act out: Scenario: You are playing ball on the playground and someone comes up and takes the ball from you. One group acts in anger, one in compassion.)*

### **Act 2 Scene 1: Characterisation**

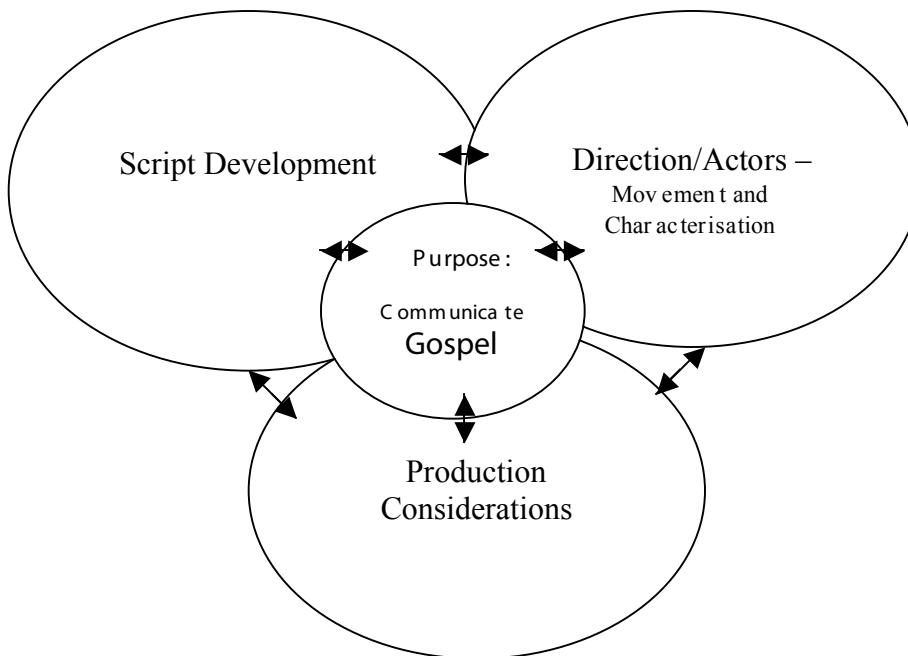
**Narrator:** Drama is an additional source of experience to what life already offers; theatre as an education for the emotions. Drama brings together character's emotions, choices and actions. There are many amazing characters in the Bible and great biblical truths to be taught through these characters.

*(What would they do?: Take characters in the Bible and ask, "What would they do?" You are the women at the well, Ruth, Esther or Peter. You could also take on other Christian personas – Mary Jones, Corrie Ten Boon or famous Christian athletes. Play the game "Guess who I'm interviewing." Encourage empathy and the question of how they feel God's word wants us to respond.)*

### **Act 2 Scene 2: Cooperation**

**Narrator:** As we reach the end, one final element of drama remains: its power as a great unifier and evangelistic tool. As Christians we need to be working on our partnership and cooperation. As the body of Christ it is good to encourage unity. Any dramatic production will help to see this happen as people with different backgrounds, gifts and talents contribute. Musicals and stage shows are a fantastic way to creatively reach a community.

### **Basic Musical Tips:**



**Narrator:** We have reached the end of our creative dramatic journey together, a journey of discovery where the heart and mind meet, a journey that allows the use of every ounce of creativity that in God's grace may help to teach, admonish and encourage one another as we live and glorify our wonderful savior. Thank you to our audience, actors and production team. Enjoy being dramatic. To God be the glory!

**Rebecca Jones** is a childrens and creative minister at St. Swithun's Pymble in Sydney, Australia. She has a primary teaching degree and a masters of education in creative arts degree from the University of Technology in Sydney. Jones has written and directed her own theatre productions.

# Hip-hop, Jazz, Folk, Traditional...Using Dancing of All Styles to Share the Gospel

By Mary Jones

**I**n the 1970s there were only a few churches that had heard about dance as a way of expressing worship or evangelism; in fact, most evangelical churches would have regarded it as quite inappropriate. Dance, although a part of faith expression in the Bible, had virtually been lost in the Church for centuries; people began associating dance with secular entertainment, difficult-to-interpret culture or sexual stimulation. My own parents did not think dance appropriate for Christians so it was somewhat of a surprise when at the age of thirty I felt a strong call to become involved in dance as ministry. While in the United States, I started a small dance group at my church and taught children in the local school system. Upon my return to Australia I founded the Christian Dance Fellowship of Australia (CDFA). During this time several Christian arts organisations came on the scene and after CDFA had been operating for ten years we decided to help other countries found their own dance fellowships. Since that time Christian Dance Fellowships have started in twenty-five countries on all continents.

The purpose of the dance fellowship is to encourage and network Christians interested in or involved with dance and movement, whether amateur or professional. It also seeks to provide training and to serve church communities that want to introduce or develop ministry through dance. There are three distinct advantages to using dance in worship: (1) it is visual and eye-catching, (2) it reaches the heart rather than the head and (3) it is not usually associated with the Church. Combined with music and often with words, it has a strong impact and a huge potential to reach a modern audience.

## Styles of Dance in Worship

There are many styles of dance used to reach different groups of people. Hip-hop is popular with the younger generation. Many youth groups have used it to attract and train youth and to outreach to other youth. A dance group is a practical discipleship group where people learn to relate, minister and develop as Christians. There is a growing body of Christian music in the hip-hop style, but often the message carried is not so much in the words of the song as in the life and energy of the dancers. It is important in all dance styles that the dance is "redeemed" instead of simply taken from a secular environment and copied. Even if put to Christian music, some movements may not express the right atmosphere or values. This may be true, too, of facial expressions or costumes. Choreographers, leaders and dancers need to prayerfully seek to make adjustments so that what is conveyed speaks of Christian values and conveys God's presence. Hip-hop, especially when combined with a testimony or short message, can be very effective in reaching young people.

Other Western dance styles, such as ballet, contemporary, tap and jazz, are also popular and will be appropriate for different themes and occasions. They can be used to outreach to the community in both performance and participation. There are several highly trained Christian dance companies that work both in Christian and secular settings. They have the opportunity to be salt and light in the dance community and to be an acceptable way of bringing the gospel to places that would not want or accept a preacher. Springs Dance Company in England takes programs to schools. Dance Ad Deum and Ballet Magnificat in the USA have both worked within Christian and secular settings in teaching, choreographing and performing. At one concert company performers prayed with audience members after the concert. But it is not only the highly trained dancer that can be effective. If something simple is done well and communicates strongly, it is often quite meaningful. Even more important than skill is sincerity and relationship; people are looking for meaning and reality that speak to them emotionally and spiritually.

National cultural styles are also being redeemed to express the gospel. These may be folk styles used for community dances or performance styles. Kaloob, one of the top cultural companies in the Philippines, is a Christian company. Their founder and director, Ed Lapiz, is senior pastor of Day by Day ministries and coordinator of CDF Philippines. Kaloob has a unique ministry in the way members have travelled to meet and spend time with tribal groups throughout the Philippines, researching their dances and asking permission to record, learn and perform them. In this way many dances have been preserved that might otherwise have been lost. When first performed the company dances them in the church and dedicates them. They will then perform them in both secular and Christian settings and adapt them to Christian music as part of the worship in church services. Kaloob performs regularly at large cultural festivals and expositions alongside other Filipino companies.

## Dance Around the World

Nyoman Murdita became a Christian through dancing with a Balinese troupe in Indonesia that was composed of both Christians and Hindus. He then went on to form his own company that had both Christians and Hindus; he had this mixture for two reasons: (1) because there are not enough Christians trained in Balinese dance and (2) because of his own experience in finding the Lord through a similar group. They dance both traditional dances and Christian stories using the Balinese style. A Christian College I visited in India teaches both the classical style Bharata Natyam and several folk styles to both Christians and Hindus. The repertoire consists of Bible stories, Christian themes and social themes. When the group goes to a temple, they will perform a social theme program but will include one or two Bible stories. In dance they are able to go to venues and occasions where the gospel would not be heard or accepted.

Seth Newman, CDF Ghana coordinator, teaches African dance at the University of Ghana. For years he has directed a dance and drumming group that has taken the different tribal dances of Ghana and danced them to Christian songs. The Church has been slow in seeing the opportunities this presents; however, as of late they have seen it bring both identification and joy into church communities and effective outreach in towns and rural settings. Dance is an integral part of African culture and when people see their own tribal dances bringing a Christian message they can feel that the gospel is relevant to them as Africans. In CDF South Africa, which includes a number of races, it is common to see a combination of Western and African styles used with exciting and effective results. This has modelled the working together of different racial groups that has been important in witnessing to the unity we can find in Christ.

## Beyond Performance

It is not only in performance where dance finds expression. There are many other ways of interacting with the community and bringing the Christian message in word and deed. Dancers can work with community groups to help them express their problems and aspirations. This has proved to be a significant way of working with disadvantaged communities. Classes and workshops can provide opportunities for performance, working creatively, relating to others, developing greater awareness of one's own body and feelings, exercise and relaxation. Many people are looking for exercise that has a spiritual component and often gravitate to yoga or Tai Chi. This is an opportunity to provide a Christian equivalent. Dance therapists work with those with social, psychological or physical challenges. Dance schools with a Christian foundation provide a service to the community. Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia, so well known for its contemporary worship music, has a large dance school from which many families have found their way into the church. The founder of the Christian Dance Fellowship in Canada was converted through a Christian jazz teacher at a dance class she attended in Singapore.

Unfortunately, many sections of the Church still believe that the body is inferior and that the emphasis needs to be on the mind. This does not help in reaching out into a postmodern world where the Church is often viewed as irrelevant. Dance can help to bridge this gap with its holistic character. It expresses the artistry and creativity of God and the two greatest commandments that Jesus spoke of: to love God with heart, mind, soul and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself.

*Mary Jones is founder of Christian Dance Fellowship of Australia. She is dean of dance studies at Wesley Institute in Sydney, Australia. In 2004 she served as co-convenor of Redeeming the Arts Issue Group at the Lausanne Forum in Thailand.*

## Anthropological Insights for Gospel Communicators in African-Muslim Contexts

### Islamization and Islamic Expressions in Africa

Anthropological efforts have uncovered a significant, historical fact that Islam was the result of indigenous inhabitants on the eastern coast of Africa rather than a dogmatic implantation by outsiders.<sup>1</sup> What is characteristic of the history of the spread of Islam in East Africa is that the process of Islamization was an Africanization of Islam in an anthropological sense. It was principally a mutual accommodation (or acculturation) between two religio-cultural entities, that is, between indigenous African traditions and the Islamic ideology. Such a culturally localizing process in the expansion of Islam is also palpable when we look

into the history of other Muslim societies in Africa. In the acculturating process Islam had naturally affected the deep level of African traditional worldviews to the great extent that it eventually became their own religion. In other words, Islamic beliefs and values were gradually incorporated into the extant structure of African traditions.<sup>2</sup> This is how Islam had been welcomed, nurtured and expanded in sub-Saharan Africa. For this reason, we often observe that most Muslim societies in Africa still maintain their local traditions while also keeping official Islamic beliefs and practices.

Often times we differentiate between "official Islam" and "folk Islam" for our convenience. Official Islam refers to the ideological dimension of Islamic faith, focusing on Islamic theology (tawhid meaning "the unity of God") and traditions (sunna referring to the Prophet Muhammad's deeds and words),<sup>3</sup> while folk Islam (or "popular Islam") designates the Muslim beliefs and practices that are apart from the official aspect of Islam. Folk Islam deals with everyday human problems that are seldom touched or resolved by official Islam.<sup>4</sup> However, these two categories do not mean that there are two different kinds of Islam in the Muslim world. Rather, these two terms should be understood as referring to two dynamic, religio-cultural dimensions of the Muslim faith.

Throughout the history of Islamic expansion in Africa, Islam as a religion has been embraced by local people without them losing their ethnic identity, traditional beliefs and cultural values. This is not to say that puritanical attempts to remove idolatrous elements from their umma (Muslim community) have been absent. Therefore, it should be noted that both folk-religious and "orthodox" elements are always present in most Muslim societies. In other words, Islam has been expressed not only through its universal tenets but also through diverse local cultures that host the Islamic faith.

### **An Illustration of Local Islamic Features**

Islam that has been accommodated into a particular locality can be labeled a "local Islam;" this is differentiated from the Islamic faith that is universally observed by all Muslims. On the eastern coast of Africa, Islam was accepted by the local population as the fulfillment of their old religions and traditions; thus, it was fundamentally restructured within old African worldviews. East African Muslims express their faith in a way that integrates both official Islam and their African traditions. Let me give an illustration on this type of synthetic feature of Islam.

On the Swahili coast of East Africa many Swahili Muslims perform a therapeutic ritual that synthesizes both official Islamic and folk Islamic elements. In such a ritual, what can be called "orthodoxy" becomes a magical means to bring baraka (blessings) to those in need. One of the rituals called *ngoma ya kupunga masheitani/majini* (literally meaning "a dancing ritual to reduce [power of] jinn") always begins with official-Islamic rituals, such as *adhan* (calling for prayers), Quranic recitation, *takbir* (claiming that Allah is great) and so forth. Although worshipping Allah is an essential part of the ritual, its ultimate goal is to solve the problems of the patient brought in the séance. At the outset of the ritual, African traditional practices, such as *tambiko*, are also observed. *Tambiko* is originally a traditional offering to ancestral spirits or nature spirits; however, in this Muslim context it is employed to deal with the possessive spirits (*jinn*) that are believed to have afflicted the patient under treatment with incurable illnesses. As the Muslim practitioner leads the therapeutic service, he or she often adopts from Sufism (Islamic mysticism) a ritual called *dhikr*, which was long ago invented by Muslim mystics in the attempt to flee from the rigidity of Islamic legalism toward experiencing a sort of mystical union with God. During the course of the healing ritual, the Swahili Muslims flexibly move between the official-Islamic elements and African traditions.

As seen above, what seems very distinctive in the sub-Saharan Islam is the power of cultural accommodation and absorbency. Despite frequent challenges from puritanical Muslims, the African "hospitality" was always able to digest Islam into its traditional metabolism.<sup>5</sup> In a generic sense, African Islam is more practical than dogmatic. African Muslims are capable of adopting any element (even from other religious sources) if it is deemed useful to bring a desired effect to their community.<sup>6</sup>

### **Suggesting a Culturally Relevant Ministry to Muslims in Africa**

For the presentation of the gospel to be meaningful and effective to the local audience, it needs to be done in a culturally understandable way. Any message can sound foreign to the recipient if it is communicated in a way that is familiar only to the communicator. It has to be contextualized in a way that the audience can see the validity of the message through their own cultural components. In the case of gospel communication, even the "religious" outfits in the audience's culture can be employed in delivering the meaning

of the gospel, as long as this does not offend locals or compromise the gospel truth. In other words, the gospel message should be not only heard; it should also be seen in a culturally appropriate way. Then, the gospel communicator should consider as many religio-cultural elements as possible that would positively affect the local perception of Christian meanings. The church that is to be planted among Muslims should also be contextualized by employing cultural forms that are not unfamiliar to local Muslims; these forms could be used to convey the redemptive meaning of the gospel.

### **Using Three Local Elements to Establish a Church**

The gospel communicator should consider the following local elements when establishing a Christian community (or church) among or around African Muslims.<sup>7</sup>

First, consider the umma element, which is a crucial component of the universal Islamic premise. Muslims live in a politico-religious society (umma in Arabic), in which all cultural subsystems, such as education, social relations, economy and sports, operate under the banner of Islam. In the umma, the members are strongly bound to one another in cultural cohesiveness and religious unity. For this very reason any convert to Christianity is liable to face unsympathetic challenges from his or her own society. Changing their religion means betraying their religion and culture; thus, it is regarded as "apostasy," which deserves the death penalty according to the Islamic law (shariah). If, therefore, gospel communicators believe sincerely in the work of the Holy Spirit, they should not use artificial methods to urge any candidate to convert hastily to the Christian faith, nor should they impatiently try to make any convert look and behave immediately like "Christians." The Christian community established among or around Muslims must be one that is committed to a strongly cohesive communal life where members feel secure and protected.

Second, the contextual church must be started at the level where Muslims can understand and appreciate Christian meanings. For this purpose, the mosque element should be considered. The original Arabic word for mosque means "a place for prayer or worship." The form of the worship service also needs to be contextualized in a way that can help Muslims to know that Christians worship God seriously. I have often witnessed that few Muslims believe that Christians sincerely seek and worship God. Christian communicators should creatively introduce a religious form that can function as a communicational channel through which worshippers demonstrate their sincere "surrender/submission to God" (the word "Islam" literally means this). Perhaps they may use bodily expression (such as prostration) to communicate that worshipping God is the most important part of Christian life. The preacher or the worship leader may read scripture in a way that God's words are seriously respected and recited. However, a relevant form of worship should be created under attentive scrutiny of each particular situation.

While these two elements are related to the dimension of official Islam, there are also many folk Islamic elements to be considered. For example, kilinge is the Swahili word for the ritual place where patients afflicted with jinn (evil spirits) are treated. Kilinge is centered in the notion of "healing" (uganga in Swahili). Healing, however, in the African context, does not simply mean a physical cure of illness. It indicates a comprehensive remedy, including looking after patients in a holistic manner. A kilinge usually operates as an institution that combines the functions of both religious community and spiritual clinic. The contextualized church among folk Muslims should attend to this dimension of the spirit world as well; the Christian community must do more than a kilinge. To this we must look back to the time of the apostles.

Third, we must consider sufism, which refers to Islamic mysticism. Christianity seems to have lost its inherently mystical dimension to rational theological explanations in the modern era. However, the Bible is full of mysteries, such as God's manifestation (theophany), miracles, signs, wonders, the union with Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit among believers and so forth. According to the Apostle Paul, the gospel is par excellence a great "mystery"<sup>8</sup> and so is the body of Christ! Unfortunately, secularism that has encroached on modern churches has deprived Christianity of its original mystical dimension, while only "oriental religions" are usually regarded as mystical. Even Muslims often seek God in a mystical way, whether in a folk context or in an official Islamic situation. The church planted among Muslims should demonstrate the mystical aspect of Christianity by letting them witness how faithfully and seriously Christians seek and experience God in both communal and personal prayers.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Endnotes**

1. For more details, see Kim, Caleb. 2004. *Islam among the Swahili in East Africa*. Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers.
2. To learn more about worldview theory from a Christian perspective, see Kraft, Charles. *Anthropology for Christian*

*Witness*. 1996. New York: Orbis Books. chapters 3-4.

3. The principal tenets of official Islam are found in the basic beliefs (the six articles of Iman) and the five pillars (five basic duties). The six articles of Islamic Iman are: belief in Allah, Allah's angels, Allah's books, Allah's prophets, Allah's predestination and Allah's Last Judgment. The five pillars in Islam consist of Shahadah (Muslim witness of Allah and Muhammad), Salah (prayer), Sawm (fasting in the month of Ramadan), Zakat (almsgiving) and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

4. These three elements of the expression of Islamic faith (that is, "official Islam," "popular Islam" and "folk Islam") are not simple to grasp in our Christian frame of reference. For more detailed discussions of their complication, see reference 1.

5. Cf. Sanneh, Lamin. 1997. *The Crown and the Turban*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. 15-29.

6. We need to understand the practicality in light of the African ethos. The practicality in African Islam is based upon social relationship. This is unlike the Western society, where the pragmatism is more related to individualism than collectiveness.

7. In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, churches have been planted among Muslims, or at least in the vicinity of Muslim communities. This is unlike Middle Eastern countries, where even a Christian presence may arouse aversion to Muslims.

8. See Ephesians 1:9; 3:3-4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Colossians 26-27; and Revelation 1:20; 10:7.

9. For more extensive discussions on this topic, see Musk, Bill. 1989. *The Unseen Face of Islam*. MARC. Or see Love, Rick. 2000. *Muslims, Magic and Kingdom of God*. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2000.

## One Testimony of Sports Outreach International

By Bill Simpson

**A**lthough the Church has used the vehicle of sport to reach non-believers for centuries, modern sports ministry has only been formalized in the West within the last sixty years. Today, the globalization of sports ministry is growing and the rest of the world is beginning to understand why it is important and how it can be used to share the gospel.

According to Steve Connor, a trainer and developer of resources for global sports ministry, "The need for global training with a rigorous strategic theological infusion will help the local church make a massive impact for Christ and his kingdom in the next sixty years. This year we will see three million people on six continents mobilise their villages and cities with sports ministry for children and youth."

Connor is director of Sports Outreach International (SOI), a non-profit sports ministry based in Bloomington, Indiana, USA. The son of an atheist and an alcoholic, Connor was led to the Lord by his high school football coach. This lesson in personal evangelism planted the seeds for Connor's vision to reach many with the gospel through sport. Today, SOI reaches millions of people around the world.

SOI exists to serve churches, develop leaders and encourage mission organisations globally. Its emphasis is on equipping Christians to reach their local community by providing help in three key areas: training, resources and support.

### The Early Days of Steve Connor

Connor is a product of sports ministry. He was born into a nominal Catholic family in Chicago, Illinois, USA. His father, a world record holding sky diver, rejected God and the Church, suffered from alcoholism and was involved in the drug culture. His mother suffered from mental health problems. Their marriage did not survive. Connor poured himself into sport as an escape. As an atheist, sport became Connor's god in high school and his football coach was his guru. Ironically, "Coach Rex," as the coach was affectionately called by players, was a Christian who was passionate about evangelism. When the coach suggested to Connor that he attend a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) camp, Connor went, unaware that it would open his eyes to the Christian faith. Connor was struck by the personal nature of the athletes' testimonies. He remembers that they spoke as though Jesus was alive today. Their stories demolished the stereotype he had constructed of Christians.

But the testimonies, by themselves, were not enough. Upon his return from camp, Coach Rex sat Connor down and went through Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Connor committed his life to Christ. He also began considering how to use sports to share his newly found faith.

Sports remained Connor's passion throughout his teens and twenties. He reached National Football League (NFL) status, playing with the Chicago Bears in 1984 and the Los Angeles Rams in 1985. A series of serious knee injuries ended his playing career. He began coaching, but felt increasingly led into Christian ministry.

In 1989 Connor traveled to Oxford, England to research possibilities for using sports ministry as effective evangelism in Europe. He discovered an openness and a desire among student athletes for his message. This openness presented an opportunity to reach athletes who may have been opposed to evangelism in any other form.

### **Steve Conner and Sports Outreach International**

In 1990 Connor and his wife Michelle were invited to join the newly established Christians in Sport UK, where they founded Sports Plus, a youth sports ministry. Connor remained there until 1998, when he moved to Scotland to develop an indigenous ministry.

In 2004 Connor moved back to the United States to become director of SOI. According to Connor, SOI focuses on building the Church and impacting communities through sport and associated events. SOI is part of the International Sports Coalition (ISC) network.

"The emphasis has been to train and mobilise volunteers and partner with many church and ministry organizations to strategically reach out to their local community," Connor says. "Much of sports ministry is about fun, community-based events that bring together a partnership of many groups across a city, village, island or region. Sports and games, values, compassion, creativity, leadership, involvement and action are all key components of church outreach."

Global sport ministry has grown exponentially. Events which include sport of all types have occurred in over one hundred countries. According to Connor, "This is already making a positive difference to the lives of tens of thousands of children through multi-day, multi-group, sport-focused, value-based, global initiatives inspired by Sports Outreach International."

Connor is convinced of sports influence in evangelism: "On a communication level, sport can be used as an effective delivery mechanism for the gospel. Sport builds an amazing system for relationship building and trust. This powerful connection of relationship creates an opening to encourage the heart with the gospel message.

"Sport also can open the way for truth, education, love and respect for opponents, regardless of ethnic, cultural, religious or other differences. Its inclusive nature makes sport a good tool to increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of Jesus Christ and his teachings," he said.

Connor knows that sport works in evangelism. After all, he came to Christ through sport and he now uses sport to bring others to Christ.

***Bill Simpson** has been a national Australian sports writer and syndicated newspaper columnist for over forty years. He has served as a Salvation Army officer his whole adult life.*

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# PEOPLES OF THE WORLD

## An Overview of Southeast Asia

By Justin Long

**Editor's Note:** Our new Peoples of the World section will consist of three parts: an overview of a specific region of the world, a deeper look into the least-reached peoples of this area and a focus on a specific unreached people group. We hope this will give you both a macro and a micro look at specific areas of the world.

**S**tretching from Indochina to the Malay Archipelago, Southeastern Asia is full of rich resources such as oil, gas, timber, minerals and metals. The region, however, sits on the intersection of large geologic plates, where earthquakes and volcanoes are not uncommon. Indonesia is one of the most volcanically active regions in the world, and Mount Merapi (less than three hundred miles from Java) is a current concern.

In 1900 the population in Southeastern Asia was eighty million; today it is 520 million. It is projected that by 2050 there will be over 750 million people in this area, making it the third most populous region in the world. Although mostly rural, it nonetheless boasts 269 mega cities, including Singapore, Bangkok and Jakarta. Children make up a third of the population, totaling 165 million. Over 115 million people live on Java, the most densely populated island in the world.

The region produces nine percent of Asia's total gross national product and the economies are growing. Brunei's economy is oil-dependent, but the rest are diversified and modernizing. There is widespread poverty and corruption, yet there is also advanced technology and industry. Malaysia is a center for the manufacture of computers and electronics; Singapore is leaping into the forefront of biotechnology. The entire region makes extensive use of migrant workers, so Southeast Asia is a natural place to reach out to Indians, Nepalis, expatriate Indonesians, Chinese, Thai, etc.

The national governments are stable, but with few exceptions riddled with corruption. All have serious concerns about terrorism, and some have been fighting localized wars. Singapore is noted for its efficiency and level of control. The Philippines have an active insurgency in the southern islands. Thailand is dealing with unrest near its border with Malaysia. Since the separatist guerrilla fighting ended after the 2004 tsunami, Indonesia's Aceh province has been largely at peace.

Despite heavy penalties, the drug trade remains a significant problem in the region. Prostitution and other sex-related structures of sin are common in the northern nations, notably Thailand.

The Indochina mainland countries are mainly Buddhist, while the countries on the Malay Archipelago are mainly Muslim. However, there are many other religious influences; Hinduism is found in many places, particularly with concentrations of migrant Indian workers. Christians are also present in small concentrations in most countries (the Philippines and Timor are exceptions, where Christians are in the overwhelming majority).

### Christianity in Southeast Asia

With only two exceptions, Christianity is growing, although it is still very much a small percentage of the region. Most Christians are found among minority workers. The growth amongst the majority peoples is sensitive and although much is said about religious freedom, in practice there are significant restrictions.

There are several national mission movements, and others even now being birthed. The numbers of cross-cultural workers, though small, is growing. See chart below for a breakdown of countries and issues.

Name	P'00	P'25	C'00	%	C'25	%	75-00	00-25	Issues affecting the future
Brunei	0.3	0.5	0.1	155%	0.1	15%	++	+-	Control, oil
Cambodia	12.7	20.0	0.2	1%	0.5	2%	++	++	Rebuilding, religious freedom, development, drugs, prostitution
Indonesia	209.2	263.7	27.8	13%	41.4	16%	++	++	Moderate restrictions, religious tensions, corruption, development
Laos	5.3	8.7	0.1	3%	0.3	3%	++	++	Drugs, poverty, corruption, heavy restrictions, syncretism, oppression
Malaysia	23.0	33.2	2.1	9%	3.3	10%	++	++	Religious freedom, reforms, Islamic law, high-tech development
Myanmar	47.7	59.0	3.8	8%	5.5	9%	++	++	Political oppression, drugs, resource squandering, restrictions
Philippines	75.8	109.1	67.7	89%	97.0	89%	+-	+-	Mission mobilization, Muslim-Christian tensions
Singapore	4.0	5.1	0.6	15%	0.8	16%	++	++	Control, materialism, moderate restrictions, mission mobilization
Thailand	61.4	72.6	1.0	2%	1.4	2%	++	++	Buddhism, drugs, prostitution, leadership, religious freedom
Timor	0.7	1.9	0.6	82%	1.8	95%	++	++	Deep poverty, post-war rebuilding, political stability
Vietnam	78.7	104.3	6.7	9%	11.3	11%	++	++	Government reforms, economic liberalization, heavy restrictions

**Key:** **P'00** - Population, AD 2000. **P'25** - Population, AD2025. **C'00** - Christianity, AD 2000 (followed by the percentage of the overall population). **C'25** - Christianity, AD2025 projection, World Christian Database (followed by percentage of overall population). **75-00** - Growth rate. The first (+/-) indicates whether Christianity is growing or declining; the second (+/-) indicates whether it is growing faster or slower than the population (thus whether Christianity's influence is growing or declining). **(+-)** means Christianity is growing, but not as fast as the population, and so is declining as a share of the country. **00-25** - Growth rate projected for AD2000-2025. Issues - A brief encapsulation of the issues affecting the growth of Christianity in the nation.

*Justin Long* manages [strategicnetwork.org](http://strategicnetwork.org) and is senior editor for *Momentum*, a magazine devoted to unreached peoples.

## A Focus on Southeast Asia: 663 Least-Reached People Groups Remain

### Overview

Did you know that many peoples in the eleven nations of Southeast Asia were once Hindus, later Buddhists and today Muslim? Most peoples in this region of color and diversity are either Buddhist or Muslim and over six hundred people groups remain least-reached. The gospel is making small inroads; however, except for a few tribes in northern Thailand and Myanmar, few people groups have embraced Jesus. Five countries have least-reached populations of over fifty percent; some, like Cambodia, are still 95.2% least-reached! Indonesia is a huge challenge with over two hundred least-reached people groups which include over 130 million people. We need to pray that spiritual obstacles will be removed.

### Prayer Points

- **Expatriate and Indigenous Workers.** Pray for God to send out workers and provide creative means of access to the least-reached peoples throughout Southeast Asia for the gospel.
- **Storying.** Pray for God to show workers how to tell his story effectively and accurately and for him to

confirm his word with signs and wonders.

- **Multiplication.** Pray for God to inspire new believers to share throughout their natural relational networks what Jesus has done and is doing in their lives. Pray for many to come to faith.
- **Fellowships.** Pray for believers to understand that where two or three gather in Jesus' name, there he is in their midst; pray that they would focus on living fellowships to encourage one another to love and good deeds.
- **Contextual Evangelism.** Pray that believers would remain involved in community activities and actively seek friendship with local leaders as indications of good citizenship. Pray for God to help believers creatively communicate the gospel and his truth through familiar means with an eternal message of hope and salvation.

## Links

Resources to pray and mobilize prayer and outreach. <http://www.ethne.net/DiscoverSoutheastAsia>. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/ethne.php>

Pray for the peoples of the Southeast Asia. [http://members.prayerguard.net/index.php?link\\_id=8aa54ad29](http://members.prayerguard.net/index.php?link_id=8aa54ad29)

Obtain daily prayer guides for peoples of this region. <http://www.global-prayer-digest.org/>

## Historical Background

*(Information taken from "Buddhism and Islam in Southeast Asia: So Different, Yet So Much Alike!" by Keith Carey, Global Prayer Digest, July 2006)*

It is hard to imagine two religions being more different than Buddhism and Islam. Buddhism has its roots in Hinduism. It is flexible, whereas Islam has a rigid set of theological beliefs. In Buddhism, there are many gods or none at all. One of the strictest tenets of Islam is that there is only one god. But ironically, once you scratch beneath the surface with both religions in Southeast Asia, you find they are very much alike. Animism pollutes both major religions.

## Buddhism in Southeast Asia

Buddhism was founded in the sixth century before Christ by Siddhartha Gautama, a privileged and well-educated son of a wealthy Hindu prince in northern India. Deeply spiritual, he tried to reform the Hindu system, especially its caste rules. This new form of Hinduism spread throughout India. Although the ruling elite rejected it, Buddhism was far from finished. It spread into much of East Asia, where it is still a dominant religion.

The two biggest sectors of Buddhism are Theravada and Mahayana. The latter is the form that is most prevalent in Northeast Asia; the former is dominant in Southeast Asia. They teach that spiritual enlightenment is accessible to only a few true believers. The individual moves toward enlightenment alone with no help from rituals or even statues of Gautama Buddha. This is the most orthodox form of Buddhism since it closely follows Gautama Buddha's teachings.

Though the form of Buddhism is orthodox, most peoples of Southeast Asia are more animistic than Buddhist. Remember that Buddhism is a very flexible religion; adherents can accept or reject much of the Buddhist teachings and embrace other religions along with Buddhism. In Southeast Asia even the dominant people groups like the Thai and the Burmese may call themselves Buddhist; however, if you look beneath the surface, you will find animism. These people, who call themselves Buddhists, fear ghosts, spirits, demons and a plethora of other spirit beings. Making peace with these spirits and living financially prosperous lives is what they seek. At least in name, Buddhism is the dominant religion in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Singapore.

## Islam in Southeast Asia

Like Buddhism, Islam was imported to Southeast Asia. In many areas where Islam now dominates, the people were once Buddhist or Hindu. As early as the seventh century, Muslim traders took Islam to Southeast Asia. Six hundred years later, Roman Catholic explorer Marco Polo noted a few Muslim enclaves in northern Sumatra. Through the centuries, kings and local chieftains, who were usually Hindu, became Muslim. Muslim traders married local women, and spread out throughout what is now Indonesia, Malaysia

and Mindanao in the southern Philippines. These parts of the world still have Muslim majorities.

Why did these leaders convert to Islam? Some of them were attracted by Sufism, a mystical form of Islam that seemed to be a spiritual high road to these Hindus; others were hoping that their conversion would help bring about more lucrative trade with these Muslims. Still others were trying to build political bridges with outsiders who might help them fend off the Roman Catholic Portuguese and Spanish invaders who came in the 1500s.

Whatever their reasons, the new Muslims were different from their more orthodox counterparts in the Middle East. They were not as interested in theological tenets, but in the mystical aspects of Sufism. In general, Muslims in this part of the world focus their attention on a number of non-Islamic rituals and customs. These include a belief in ghosts, the use of amulets and fetishes and consulting mediums to try to affect outcomes in everyday life. Their religion can be described as "folk Islam."

Orthodox Muslims would like to see changes in the Islamic practices in Southeast Asia. The most orthodox Muslims are from the Wahhabi sect of Saudi Arabia. This sect, which has inspired Osama bin Laden and other terrorists to use Islam as a geopolitical tool to gain power, has sent "missionaries" to Southeast Asia to bring the people into a "proper" understanding of Islam.

### **The Current Spiritual Condition of Southeast Asia**

Although Buddhism and Islam are not followed in their most devout forms in this part of the world, very few members of these dominant religions have turned to Christ. Christianity has made inroads among the Vietnamese however, Buddhist groups like the Lao, the Thai, the Burmese and the Shan have not allowed Jesus to become a part of their lives. With the exception of the Javanese, Islamic groups in this part of the world have shown little interest in the gospel. Mostly the smaller, weaker tribal groups like Karin sub-groups have become Christianized in Southeast Asia.

Why is this so? Whether we like it or not, people will reject Christ for political reasons if they believe it will make them lose power. History has also shown us that people will reject a major religion because their enemies embrace it. For example, the Karins have embraced Christianity in part to be different from their Burmese enemies, while the Burmese refuse to consider Christianity.

### **How can we pray for the peoples in this part of the world?**

**PRAY** that the call of Christ will overwhelm Buddhists and Muslims in this part of the world no matter what people group they belong to.

**PRAY** that people will find ways to embrace Christ without forfeiting their cultures and their identities within their ethnic groups and families.

**PRAY** that peoples in this region will embrace Christ despite what their enemies are doing.

## **Into Their World...The Hui of China**

*By Laurie Fortunak*

**W**ith over ten million Hui in China, it is astonishing that there are no known Christians among this people group. In fact, over ninety percent of Hui are Muslim and because of this Islam in China is often known as "the Hui religion." The Hui are the largest and most widespread of China's Muslim nationalities and their influence in the northwest region of China has led the area to be regarded as "Muslim territory."

Unlike other Chinese Muslim groups, the Hui do not have their own language; instead they speak local dialects mixed with Arabic and Persian words. The Hui have adjusted to their Chinese society so much so that they are often indistinguishable from the Han Chinese. The Hui are less strict in their Muslim faith and in following Muslim dietary rules than other Muslims worldwide. This has caused Muslims from other countries to question their commitment to Islam.

The Hui are descendants of Muslim traders, soldiers and officials who settled and married local Han women. Today the Hui are still known for their trading skills. They also make their living growing wheat and rice, raising cattle and working in factories and shops.

Since the 1949 Socialist changes in China, the Hui have outlawed early marriages, arranged marriages and polygamy. Women have the same divorce and inheritance rights as men; however, women are not allowed to marry non-Hui men (whereas Hui men are allowed to marry non-Hui women). Today, the Chinese government allows some flexibility for the Hui by allowing them to bury their dead and by exempting them from some aspects of the controlled birth program.

Due to the possibility of persecution, Chinese Muslims are reluctant to become Christians. Christian broadcasts and literature are available to the Hui. Pray that God would send workers to share the Gospel with the Hui, that he would raise up Christians among this people group and that he would do a mighty work among the Hui.

For more information on the Hui of China, visit:

[www.chinagate.com.cn/english/1251.htm](http://www.chinagate.com.cn/english/1251.htm)

[www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/shao-hui.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/shao-hui.htm)

<http://archives.tconline.org/news/lastfrontier/archive/Hui.html>

[easia.imb.org/peopleplaces/upg/hui.htm](http://easia.imb.org/peopleplaces/upg/hui.htm)

[www.chsource.org/Hui.htm](http://www.chsource.org/Hui.htm)

[www.ksafe.com/profiles/p\\_code/1033.html](http://www.ksafe.com/profiles/p_code/1033.html)

[www.paulnoll.com/China/Minorities/min-Hui.html](http://www.paulnoll.com/China/Minorities/min-Hui.html)

(Information compiled from [www.joshuaproject.net/](http://www.joshuaproject.net/))

*(Note: The website links above are intended to provide you with more information about this people group. Some of the links are to groups that are not religious in nature but who provide information and background that may be helpful in researching this people group. The content of each of the websites linked to is the sole responsibility of the linked-to organization. Views expressed on these websites do not necessarily reflect the opinions and beliefs of the staff or writers of Lausanne World Pulse or those of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Institute of Strategic Evangelism, Evangelism and Missions Information Service or Intercultural Studies Department.)*

*Laurie Fortunak is editorial coordinator of Lausanne World Pulse. She also serves as editorial coordinator for Evangelism and Missions Information Service (EMIS) and managing editor of Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ).*

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## STRATEGY, TRENDS AND STATISTICS

### Insider Movements: A New Phrase for an Old Idea

By Greg H. Parsons

**P**eople come to faith in many ways and from many backgrounds. As Christians, we seek to see the gospel penetrate and influence the remaining cultures around the world. Many years ago the Apostle Paul and those in Jerusalem struggled with the issues related to having people from different backgrounds coming to faith in a variety of ways. Acts 15 was the decisive moment where the question "Do these Gentiles need to become like Jews in order to follow Jesus?" was addressed. Today, we might ask a similar question: "Do these Hindus (for example) need to become like me in the way I practice my faith as a Christian?"

## Insider Movements Today

The idea of "insider movement" is following that pattern by seeking to allow those coming to faith to decide how to live out their faith in their culture and context; seeing the gospel spread through existing networks (like communities or families) is the focus. According to Rebecca Lewis this means "letting the gospel grow up in whatever form those networks choose under the authority of scripture and the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> She goes on to point out that this has been a part of how the gospel spread in history: "Insider movements are as old as James of the Jews and Cornelius of the Gentiles. This is not a new phenomenon but a reaffirming of a New Testament pattern, explained clearly as the use of 'open networks' by Rodney Stark in his book *The Rise of Christianity* (1997, Harper: San Francisco)."

While we might want others to believe and act exactly like we do, it often takes time for new believers from traditionally unreached peoples to fully understand what Christians have studied and written about for centuries. John and Ann Travis noted in a recent article on this subject, "Yet in spite of concerns that some may have on this issue, the fact remains that in a number of countries today there are groups of Muslims who have genuinely come to faith in Jesus Christ, yet have remained legally and socio-religiously within the local Muslim community."<sup>2</sup> Part of this relates to how these new believers relate to the established system we call Christianity. What might they choose—using the scriptures—in order to live out their faith in Jesus?

Certainly there are advantages and disadvantages in the history of each "religious" system—Christianity is no exception. When we talk about "historic Christianity" we usually mean the core doctrine that all Christians believe. Yet many (e.g. in the Muslim world) will "hear" the historic failures when they think about Christianity.

To be sure, error can come in. There are several movements around the world which have aspects that are extra-biblical and/or heretical. We must be clear that the scriptures are the source for faith and its out-working in life. Since it took Christians hundreds of years to agree on basic doctrines, perhaps we should let those from other faiths have more room to process their new found faith. By pointing to the scriptures, we will see people transforming their communities and family from the inside out.

### Endnotes

1. See [www.missionfrontiers.org/archive.htm](http://www.missionfrontiers.org/archive.htm) then click on Jan-Feb 2006 for the article "An Extended Conversation about Insider Movements."
2. See [www.missionfrontiers.org/archive.htm](http://www.missionfrontiers.org/archive.htm) then click on Sept-Oct 2005 for the article "Contextualization among Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists, A Focus on Insider Movements."

**Greg H. Parsons** is global strategist for the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. He is also general director of the U.S. Center for World Mission.

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## LAUSANNE REPORTS

### Redeeming the Arts

By Colin Harbinson

**Editor's Note:** This article is the introduction to the 2004 Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization *Redeeming the Arts* Lausanne Occasional Paper. The full text can be found at [http://community.gospelcom.net/lcwe/assets/LOP46\\_IG17.pdf](http://community.gospelcom.net/lcwe/assets/LOP46_IG17.pdf).

### The Church and the Arts

Apart from a small number of important voices, the Church as a whole has been virtually silent on the arts for generations. There is a clear need to find ways to speak of:

1. the intrinsic value of the arts
2. what they are able to contribute to our faith communities and the cultures in which we live
3. the unique ways in which they are able to move our spirit and shape our thinking

Evangelical communities have been inclined to neglect the arts. There are of course many reasons for this tendency, including common theological understandings and ways of thinking about spiritual life. However, in recent years a growing number of these same communities have begun to manifest a new interest in the arts and have made significant moves in engaging the arts in the life of the Church.

The task of global evangelism is a task of communication. It is evident that art, too, is about communication. The way in which art communicates is unique to the medium, but the power of the arts to move us, engage us and help us to see with fresh eyes is indisputable. Art is not simply a tool or a piece of technology to be used for a predetermined purpose. The integrity of both art and the artist require something more.

## **Education**

The task undertaken in Act I of the Redeeming the Arts Lausanne Occasional Paper is to provide perspective on the biblical and theological foundations for understanding the creative gift as manifested in human artistry. Imagination has been neglected as a resource for helping us to think more clearly about the world. As a result, we have impoverished Christian thinking and understanding. The time has come for Christians to recover the imagination and to discern its value for faith and life. The arts are one of the key areas where the imagination does this. As we explore the arts, looking particularly at the need for education, we consider biblical foundations and strategies for developing our understanding of these gifts.

There is a need for a paradigm shift in how we view the arts—a fresh vision to help us understand how the recovery of the imagination and the affirmation of the gift of artistic creativity can be both celebrative and significant for the Church. The biblical narrative serves as the context for the shaping of our theological understanding, and the resulting theology will have implications for all aspects of human life, including the arts.

In setting out biblical and theological foundations, we were concerned to do so in a way that provides not only fresh thinking, but also new practice. What we seek is not simply a set of ideas, but a living word with the power to change and transform. We explore how our understanding of scripture and of theology profoundly influences how we engage in the practice of our faith. Our concern is about our practice as it relates to the arts.

## **Discipleship**

In Act II we look at the artist in spiritual community. Our focus is the discipleship of the artist shaped by a kingdom view. It encompasses the calling, mentoring, training, empowering and supporting of artists as uniquely gifted and vital parts of the body of Christ.

To understand discipleship for artists as participants in the Church's mission in the world, we need to understand with more empathy and perspective some of the key issues that affect their involvement. Among the issues considered are:

- Attitudes of the Church toward the arts and of artists toward the Church
- The struggles of the artist with authority, freedom and accountability
- The nature of artistic language (the way art "speaks")
- The inspiration or empowerment of artists by the Holy Spirit
- How we understand the nature of the creative process itself
- The impact of "non-contextual" attempts at mission on indigenous art.

The Church today faces a different kind of world—one that has undergone profound changes in the past fifty years and continues to change at a rapid pace. Few people can avoid the realities of the information and artistic media that shape our everyday environment. At a time when communication has abandoned the age of the orator, we now find ourselves, culturally speaking, in the age of the artist.

## **Transformation**

With spiritual and cultural transformation as desired outcomes, Act III examines

1. the place of the arts within culture
2. the importance of indigenous and contextualized artistic expression, the role of the arts in evangelism and missions



3. the need for Christians to practice their art in the marketplace
4. significant contribution the arts can make to the process of personal healing and social change.

Art, in and of itself, cannot transform; only Christ can transform the human condition.

With that clarification as context, we show that the arts allow for diversity as they "witness" in verbal and nonverbal ways to the truth about the human condition and incarnationally "show" God's redemptive purposes. They can also draw people to Christ when linked to acts of compassion and service. The arts enable cross-cultural and cross-generational communication and contextualization. Social and economic barriers can be overcome through collaborative art making, and arts used in therapies can invigorate health and healing.

Jesus consistently invited people to use their imaginations, to allow the images he presented to come alive and to find meaning within those imaginings. He recognized that words or commands were insufficient. In order for people to make changes, they must first be able to imagine what is possible. Human transformative activity depends upon a transformed imagination. We illustrate that this is especially true in at-risk and impoverished communities or groups of displaced and broken people, where the arts can reinvigorate a sense of personal and social responsibility.

*Colin Harbinson has been involved in the arts and missions in over sixty nations. He is currently dean of arts at Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi, USA and editor of the Creative Spirit, an international journal on the arts and faith. Harbinson is founder and president of the International Festival of the Arts.*

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## LEADERSHIP MEMO

### Hope 2008 and the Gospel Message in Britain

By Lon Allison

**I** am currently traveling to different nations and after a short visit I am getting ready to leave Great Britain. I also have cause for new praise. Thanks to the efforts of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Youth for Christ in the UK, an "Emerging Evangelists Training Program" is making a difference in churches and ministry groups throughout Britain. Nearly twenty-five men and women aged 20-35 are giving two years of time to "think and train" to be more skilled and dedicated evangelism leaders. These people love Jesus, love the scriptures, love the lost and believe wholeheartedly that the gospel is a matter of both word and deed. They remind me in microcosm of the Lausanne banner phrase, "The whole Church taking the whole gospel to the whole world."

As a by-product of my teaching here this week, I visited with Roy Crowne, head of the YFC ministries in Great Britain. YFC in Great Britain includes more than three hundred staff who work with nearly 200,000 students each month. It is an amazing ministry. Roy spoke with me about "Hope 2008," a joint effort of churches and ministries throughout Britain (England primarily) which focuses on bringing the whole gospel to the land in 2008. YFC, Soul Survivor ministries, the Baptist Union, Churches Together, the Church of England and other networks have agreed to work together in this initiative.

Their plan is to take advantage of four key times of the year to do ministry:

**1. Easter.** Every group will work diligently to invite lost and loved people to consider Christ during the season of Lent and Easter. Special Lenten studies are being written to use with neighbors and friends.

**2. Pentecost Season.** From Easter Sunday to Pentecost, the groups will ask every local church and local youth ministry to make a commitment to care for their community with "acts of kindness." The goal is to have one million "hours of kindness" in Britain in fifty days. This will be displayed through caring for the poor, helping the victims of injustice, doing environmental clean-up and more. A local church might commit to fifty hours, a neighboring church to twenty-five hours and a youth ministry to twenty-five hours.

**3. Pentecost to September.** On Pentecost Sunday leaders will ask their members to begin regularly praying for three to five people to come to faith in Christ. In a special service in September every participating group will prepare a meeting to invite all of the people who were lifted up regularly in prayer. The gospel message will be given at the meeting.

**4. Advent Season.** The work of caring for and sharing Christ with local communities will be included in all Advent preparations.

The organizing leadership is preparing materials to be posted on a website which will help participating agencies in this effort. Every resource will be offered free. Lausanne World Pulse will continue to provide updates on Hope 2008 as it develops. What a fine way to bring Christ to a nation!

My plane is ready to depart. I leave London for Manila, where I will be helping to train twenty-five emerging evangelism leaders from Southeast Asia who are under the leadership of Sri Lankan Kumar Abraham and American Jim Craig. Wow, what a day to be alive as a gospel agent!

*Lon Allison is director of the Institute for Strategic Evangelism at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, USA. He also serves as co-publisher of Lausanne World Pulse.*

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