

Biblical Storytelling Mission Trip to India

A Joint Project of IMPACT and GoTell Communications

October 2009

BACKGROUND

The impetus for a biblical storytelling mission trip to India came about through conversations between Fr. Joseph Palakeel and Dr. Thomas E. Boomershine, during Dr. Palakeel's sabbatical in Dayton two years ago. Dr. Boomershine is Professor Emeritus of New Testament, and president of GoTell Communications, Inc. The connection between Dr. Palakeel and Dr. Boomershine was made by Dr. Francis Forde Plude, internationally known as a pioneer, integrating communication research and practice into Christian theology. Dr. Plude is Research Professor, Notre Dame College in Cleveland. She had visited India and traveled there with Fr. Jose.

Dr. Palakeel is a Roman Catholic priest and a member of the missionary Society of St. Thomas in India. He is a PhD graduate of the Gregorian University in Rome, professor of theology and communications, and founder of IMPACT which is organizing the trip. IMPACT stands for Initiatives for Missionary Pastoral Animation and Communication Theology. It is located in Cochin, India and is the capital of the state of Kerala. Land was purchased in 2008 and a building to house the center is currently under construction to be completed by the time of our trip.

The IMPACT program is aimed at generating missionary awareness and enthusiasm, promoting missionary vocations, and generating local resources for missionary work. This is achieved through publications, audiovisual productions, workshops, seminars, exhibitions and the like. IMPACT produces a mission monthly mission magazine for children, with the name Kadukumani (mustard seed). It brings stories from missions, comics, puzzles, cartoons, narratives to 7000 families. This mission trip will be IMPACT's first large-scale educational program.

During his sabbatical, Dr. Palakeel was fascinated by the idea of telling biblical stories for missionary work. Indian religions have a tradition of storytelling so it seems to be a natural fit. Dr. Boomershine's experience on a biblical storytelling educational mission to The Gambia of West Africa in 2008 confirmed the value of introducing biblical storytelling in communities with strong oral cultures.

RATIONALE

Biblical storytelling as an exegetical and evangelizing method is very relevant, meaningful and practical to India, as India already has a strong tradition of storytelling. Among the followers of Indian religions, faith transmission and faith education take place through stories – epics, myths, and sacred tales, both in oral narration as well as audio-visual performance. Although the first missionaries communicated the Gospel by stories, and many of those who work with non-literate people groups still do, mainline

Christianity in India is following the literate tradition in biblical interpretation, faith education and faith proclamation. Christians have become accustomed to doctrinal sermons in which biblical stories may be used more as illustrations of doctrinal truth and the Bible is considered as 'read only' from a book.

Introduction of biblical storytelling in the areas of understanding, learning and teaching of faith as well as pastoral and evangelizing ministry can be very enriching to the faith proclamation in India, where Christians are still a miniscule minority of 2.3%. Especially in the present context of anti-Christian violence, we need to develop subtle ways of making the Word of God present and heard by people. Storytelling will also serve to nourish and revitalize the faith of the Christian communities.

PURPOSE AND GOALS OF TRIP

The primary purpose of this trip is to introduce biblical storytelling as a resource for the life and mission of the Christian church in India. Our hope and expectation is that biblical storytelling will connect with the rich storytelling traditions of the Indian culture. We hope by this trip we will help more people in India learn and tell biblical stories.

Another goal is to support the development of IMPACT as a center for educational outreach in India and to train Indian leadership in the art of biblical storytelling. We will interact with the community of biblical scholars in India and introduce performance criticism, biblical storytelling, and communication theology as potential dimensions of biblical study in theological education. In addition, we will provide a theoretical framework for the work of IMPACT in communicating God's Word in India through digital media.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of this trip include:

- Familiarize biblical storytelling and performance criticism as an exegetical method
- Popularize biblical storytelling as a means of catechetical/faith formation
- Promote storytelling as a missionary method
- Create awareness on the impact of digital storytelling
- Give professors, priests and other pastoral personnel a tool and skill for presenting the Gospel

ANTICIPATED OUTCOME

We anticipate the following results as a consequence of our trip:

- Formation of a group of biblical scholars using biblical storytelling and performance criticism for exegesis.
- Introduction of biblical storytelling in regular catechesis.
- Adoption of storytelling in proclamation, especially in mission.
- Publication of the papers in print and multimedia formats
- Development of a network of biblical storytellers in India

PROGRAM

Presenters for the program include Dr. Joseph Palakeel and three persons from the United States: Dr. Thomas E. Boomershine and his wife Rev. Amelia Boomershine of GoTell Communications, Inc., and Dr. Francis Forde Plude of Notre Dame College. The month-long teaching tour is planned as a series of workshops, conferences and events in Delhi, Cochin, Ujjain, and Bangalore. It includes a scholar's conference primarily for biblical scholars. Papers to be presented by members of the team from the United States are: "Today's Global Digital-Communication Culture: A New Challenge/Opportunity for Biblical Storytellers and Contemporary Churches" by Dr. Plude, "The Future of Biblical Interpretation in Digital Culture" by Dr. Boomershine, and "Principles and Practices of Introduction to Biblical Storytelling" by Rev. Amelia Boomershine. There will also be workshops and an epic telling for Christian educators, pastoral personnel, and youth.

1. **3-day scholars' conference** on "telling the sacred stories of the biblical tradition in post-literate, digital culture." The conference will invite 30 Bible scholars and communication experts from all Christian denominations, especially those who are teaching in the seminaries. This conference will explore biblical storytelling as and performance criticism as a means of learning and teaching the Bible. They will later serve as the core group for future developments especially for introducing biblical storytelling in pastoral formation. Scholarly papers will be presented on biblical storytelling and the papers will be edited and published.
2. **Two 2-day workshops in Delhi and Bangalore for all pastoral personnel**, clergy and the religious, catechists, leaders of prayer groups. This will be an intensive workshop to introduce biblical story telling to people who are in charge of faith formation in the dioceses. It will teach how to internalize biblical stories and tell it with all available means of communication, both traditional and modern. The purpose is to make biblical storytelling reach the grassroots levels of faith education.
3. **One 3-day "epic telling" intensive workshop** on internalizing and telling biblical stories for selected number of diocesan directors of Bible apostolate, Catechism teachers, and youth. Here, all participants will be introduced to storytelling and the members will choose "The Acts of the Apostles", learn it by heart and tell it chapter by chapter. Traditional forms of storytelling like 'Koodiyattom' will also be explored.
4. **Three 1-day workshops on digital culture:** (1) for seminarians of Ruhalya Seminary Ujjain; (2) Deacons in Mangalapuzha seminary, Aluva as part of course on digital culture taught by Fr Jose Palakeel; (3) one-day event in Cochin on the impact of digital culture. These events will explore how the emerging digital culture is changing the way humans understand and express themselves, others and the world. The audio-visual-textual multimedia communication culture has several implications for faith formation and theology. These issues will be systematically explored.

INDIAN MISSION CONGRESS

In Mumbai we will attend the "Indian Mission Congress" for one day. This is a meeting of select Bishops, priests, sisters and laity of all the Catholic dioceses of India. There will be about 1500 participants gathering for three days of reflection and prayer, celebrating the theme "Jesus as the light of the world" John 8:12.

IMPACT FOLLOW-UP PROGRAMS

Once the awareness is created and biblical storytelling is popularized in the formation houses, catechetical instruction, and as method of preaching and proclamation, regional follow-up programs will be organized, especially for catechism teachers, missionaries, seminarians, youth groups etc. Storytelling clubs and forums could be formed and organized all over India in seminaries, religious formation houses, parishes, and schools.

PROGRAM COORDINATOR AND PROJECT HOLDER

The Program will be planned and executed by IMPACT, Cochin. Dr Joseph Palakeel, the director of IMPACT is a specialist in theology and communication and coordinated several similar conferences in India. He holds a doctorate in theology and has 10 years experience in teaching theology and conducting pastoral communication training programs in the seminaries and for various youth groups and children. He and his assistant priests in IMPACT at Cochin will find the resource persons, schedule the programs and organize the events.

In each city IMPACT will organize the program in collaboration with the local centre: NISCORT in Delhi; NSK in Bangalore and POC in Cochin.

CONCLUSION

A national workshop on biblical storytelling is a timely program for India. The first Asian Mission Congress, with the title "Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia", organized by the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference) in Chiangmai, Thailand in Oct. 2006 has created a lot of interest in storytelling in mission and ministry. There have been some write-ups and discussions thereafter and time is mature to initiate biblical storytelling systematically. Storytelling methodology will make the proclamation of the Gospel more powerful and appealing. Biblical storytelling can greatly enhance the faith formation activities.

BUDGET

<i>Item</i>	<i>@</i>	<i>Expense in INR.</i>	<i>Contribution in US\$</i>	<i>Requested in US\$</i>
Flight charges for the 3 resource persons from the US to India	3x62,000.00	186,000.00	3875.00	0
Flight tickets for 4 resource persons (Fran, Tom, Amelia and Jose) within India Delhi-Ujjain; Ujjain-Mumbai; Mumbai-Cochin; cochin-Bangalore; Bangalore-Delhi 5 flights for 4 persons each = 20 flights	Average rate of Rs. 4800/- per person per flight 20x4800	96000.00	2000.00	2000.00
FACILITIES COST		0	0	0
Food and accommodation for participants of the events Average of 13 days for 7 workshops with average 30 participants : 30participants x13 days = 390	@500.00 (\$10) per day for 390 persons (for 7 workshops in 13 days	195000.00	4062.00	4062.00
Rent for the hall, Generator, LCD projector, Sound system, teaching resources.	@ Rs. 5000 per day for 13 days	65000.00	1350.00	1350.00
Local transportation during conference days two taxis @3000 per one per day	@6000per day x13 days of the conference	78000.00	1625.00	1625.00
Food and Accommodation and travel on other days for resource persons (to be met by IMPACT)	@6000 per day x12 days without conference	72000.00	1500.00	0.0
Office expenses for printing stationery, correspondence for organizing the entire program	LS	60000.00	1250.00	0.0
Total Expenses		752,000.00	15662.00	9037.00