Big Picture Curricula for Multiethnic Ministry

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The story is told, of which I have lost the source, of a passer-by in Europe who came upon a construction site. As he entered the work area he met a worker who, though deeply involved in his task, acknowledged his presence by offering a friendly glance. "What are you doing?" inquired the passer-by. "I'm laying bricks," replied the worker as he returned again to his assignment. The passer-by watched for a moment and then meandered on a bit further where he came across two other workers. After a slight pause he asked, "What are you men doing?" "We're installing stained glass windows," one of them replied.

Impressed with what he was seeing, yet still curious as to the purpose of the construction, the passer-by leisurely moved on. It wasn't long, however, until he met a worker moving toward him, pushing a wheelbarrow. The worker was whistling as he approached, had a lift in his step, and a gleam in his eye. With a slight wave of the hand the passer-by signaled the worker and asked, "What are you doing?" Without hesitation the worker positioned his wheelbarrow, stood upright, and with a confident tone in his voice, declared: "I'm building a cathedral!"

Because the story[2] nature of Scripture has been lost in most of our Bible training centers (institutions, colleges, universities, seminaries), evangelists, church planters, leadership developers, disciplers, and yes, even pastors and trainers in multiethnic congregations, have often failed to use this powerful and predominant mode of communication found in Scripture. This often results in the recipients receiving a dry and fragmented understanding of Scripture, the Trinity, the gospel, the Christian life,

and missions. This article will propose a storied, big-picture approach to multiethnic ministry. It will advocate curriculum that builds a cathedral rather than isolated rooms. Before considering story-based, big-picture curricula I will first look at how the multiethnic church, and other types of churches, relates to the dominate theological themes of unity and diversity. While this paper will focus on comprehensive curricula for the multiethnic church, particularly in relation to the big picture of Scripture, its application will extend to all the models represented in the figure.

Ethnicity Curve for Churches

Figure 1 attempts to capture the ethnicity curve for four church models in relation to the unity and diversity axis. The *monocultural church* is certainly the most common model that exits today. Chaney offers a possible reason: "Most of us do our most effective ministry within certain related pieces of the mosaic of human society. We do not communicate effectively across cultural lines" (1982:83). Stevens takes a slightly different view, calling them the "'you-all' club" (1999:208). Church Growth advocates call these homogeneous unit churches in that the church is comprised predominately of one ethnic group. For many in the Church Growth Movement, this is seen as the start-point rather than the end goal. This model allows diversity to be minimized so that likes can enjoy likes.

The *renter church* opens its doors to ethnic groups in search of a meeting location. Sometimes they charge rent, sometimes not. Either way, the rentees work around the exiting schedule, possessing only rentee rights. This model allows the renters to maintain their cultural differences even while hosting those of a different ethnicity.

The *multiethnic church* seeks to downplay diversity, focusing on unity through the incorporation of different ethnicities under one roof at the same time. In this model diversity is minimized so that unity is maximized. What will tie such diverse groups together? My friend Geraldo Marti of Mosaic Church would argue that at least four things are necessary: (1) a common relational affinity (2) a common status, (3) common roles—brothers and sisters dedicated to follow Jesus Christ, and (4) common rites and rituals. I would add to this instructive list a shared vision, hero stories, and symbols.

The *multicongregational church* attempts to respect both uni-

versality and diversity, allowing each to maintain its own diversity while working together in a unified way. In this model a number of churches of various ethnic backgrounds share a common facility (see Appleby 1990). Each congregation meets separately with periodical joint services led eventually by all churches. This allows each ethnic church to experience worship predominately from their own perspective as well as from different cultural perspectives periodically. The budget is often shared based on size.

The Big Picture Lost

Why have we lost the big picture in theology, and hence in evangelism, discipleship and missions, for all of the above church models? Why do we tend to prefer to isolate and investigate the multiple nuances of Scripture? Why does our understanding of Christ and Christianity come through the template of parts rather than the whole? Why do we continue to teach from this perspective even when our audience may prefer to learn from the opposite perspective? The multiple disciplines in theology have led towards hyper-specialization resulting in a host of "fragmented fiefdoms," creating the loss of the big picture of Scripture.

Edward Farley (1983) argues in *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* that *theologia* (salvic knowledge of God) was lost as the unifying core in theological education in the early eighteenth century and must be reclaimed. As the Enlightenment spread throughout Europe the focus of theology shifted from *theologia* to theological encyclopedia—rational categories. The encyclopedia movement, finding inspiration from Friedrich Schleiermacher, eventually established a curricululm of four rational categories: (1) Bible, (2) church history, (3) dogmatics, and (4) practical theology. Many theologians in Germany, Europe, and eventually North America, now viewed theology as a science requiring a scientific methodology to discover truth via these four categories. The following quotes capture the change to rationalistic thinking:

"…the science of God—a summary of religious truth scientifically arranged." —W. L. Alexander
"…the science of God and of relationships between God and the universe." —A. H. Strong
"…the science of the facts of divine revelation so far as those

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facts concern the nature of God and our relation to him."
—Charles Hodge

"…collecting, scientifically arranging, comparing, exhibiting, and defending of all facts from any and every source concerning God and his works." —Lewis Sperry Chafer

"Theology has its own laws, and the theologian merely observes these, confident that their observation will yield doctrinal fidelity to God's truth." —J. Oliver Buswell

"…the science of Christian faith." —Friedrich Schleiermacher

Farley astutely argues that the scientific emphasis produced a fundamental flaw in theological education—a fragmented theological curriculum. As each category divided and subdivided, it created a host of new specialists, methodologies, and terminologies. Mining the depths of the respective disciplines resulted in the loss of a unifying theme of theology.
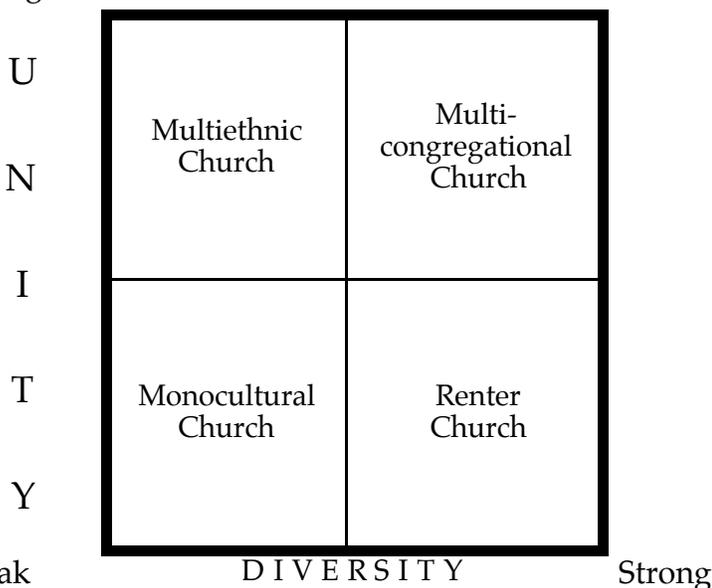

Figure 1: Ethnicity curve for churches

But this loss did not stop with the theologians. Because people tend to teach as they were taught, the cycle continues. It goes something like this: theologians with a fragmented understand-

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ing of Scripture tend to produce students with the same fragmentation who then reproduce the same fragmentation among the people in the pews. Those who minister in multiethnic contexts and churches at home or abroad tend to repeat the cycle with their respective audiences, often intuitively. The whole gets lost to the parts; synthesis is sacrificed for separation; proof-texts replace full-text; integration is left to the learner. Wells notes some of the fallout in the typical seminary curricula:

> Subjects and fields develop their own literatures, working assumptions, vocabularies, technical terms, criteria for what is true and false, and canons of what literature and what views should be common knowledge among those working in the subjects. The result of this is a profound increase in knowledge but often an equally profound loss in understanding what it all means, how the knowledge in one field should inform that in another. This is the bane of every seminarian's existence. The dissociated fields—biblical studies, theology, church history, homiletics, ethics, pastoral psychology, missiology—become a rain of hard pellets relentless bombarding those who are on the pilgrimage to graduation. Students are left more or less defenseless as they run this gauntlet, supplied with little help in their efforts to determine how to relate the fields one to another. In the end, the only warrant for their having to endure the onslaughts is that somehow and someday it will all come together in a church. (1993:244-245)

The unifying center of theology continued to shift. Science would eventually demonstrate its bankruptcy, as would Friedrich Schliermacher's proposal to use human experience. Rowan (1996:96) believes that Farley also missed the center with *theologia*. He advocates that *missio Dei* offers the only true coherence to all theological disciplines. Rowan prefers *missiologia* over *theologia.* Bosch would concur: "We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology, rather than just a theological agenda from mission…; for theology, rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei.* So mission should be 'the theme of all theology' (Gensichen 1971:250)" (1991:494). Martin Kahler agreed decades earlier when he claimed that mission is "the mother of all theology." This raises some serious questions that demand reflection from multiethnic

practitioners: Is our entire curricula driven by *missio Dei?* Does our evangelism and dicipleship curricula capture the big picture? Does systematics supercede story? Does the last 25 percent of the Bible, the New Testament, dominate our curricula? What role does the Old Testament play? Can one really understand the parts without understanding the whole?

It comes as no surprise that one of the favorite undergrad Bible courses for intercultural majors at Biola University is Dr Harold Dollar's Theology of Mission. One major reason for this is that this is one of the few courses that provide the student with the big picture of Scripture. For many of the students this will be the first time they finally receive a clothesline to hang the numerous clothes received on their theological journey to graduation. The multiple mini-narratives of Scripture now begin to make sense because the meta-narrative exists. We now turn to the story nature of Scripture—the basis for the big picture.

Story—the Basis of the Big Picture

God, for some reason, chose to deliver the majority of the Bible to humanity in narrative form. The narrative percentage of Scripture varies, depending upon definitions. Here are two scholarly attempts to ascertain the literary percentages:

> The Bible contains more of the type of literature called 'narrative' than it does of any other literary type. For example, over 40 percent of the Old Testament is narrative. Since the Old Testament itself constitutes three-quarters of the bulk of the Bible, it is not surprising that the single most common type of literature in the entire Bible is narrative. (Fee and Stuart 1981:78)

> Indeed if one does a comparative analysis of the content of the Bible, the New Testament books that seem to deal most explicitly with narrative constitute only 56 to 62 percent of the content, depending upon whether one treats Revelation as narrative. In the Old Testament, the narrative books (Genesis-Job) constitute 57 percent of the material. It can, of course, be argued that the prophetic books contain considerable narrative, which they surely do, or even that they represent interpretation of the narrative and that the narrative is an interpreted narrative. (Erickson 1997:58)

It is probably safe to say that at least 65-75 percent of Scripture is narrative, making it the dominate genre of the sacred Storybook (Steffen 1996). This dominate genre, however, is not necessarily even a small part of our evangelism, discipleship, teaching, or Bible curricula. Why do four laws dominate our evangelism? Why does systematic theology dominate the way to teach theology (check your church/school curriculum)? How many teaching institutions cover narrative theology in depth? At all? In many cases, "narrative theology" and "narrative" in general are often labeled as "liberal"—look who promotes it; "too risky" —it opens itself up to multiple interpretations, "too subjective —in contrast to objective truth, and certainly "too emotional"—in contrast to rational stability. Interestingly, one would probably have a rather difficult time convincing Jesus, the master parabolic storyteller, of all this!

My own reacquaintance with story began with the Ifugao of the Philippines. I began evangelism the way I was taught, that is, a systematic approach: the Word, God, Satan, Sin, the Fall, and Jesus Christ. The Ifugao were neither impressed with this approach, nor could they reproduce it. So much for a church-planting movement. It was back to the drawing board. I decided to add stories to these abstract concepts. What a change. Not only was there interest, but I now had instant evangelists of all generations and genders as they repeated the stories to family and friends.

Not only did the Ifugao teach me something about the power of story, they also challenged my concept of God. At that time I would have agreed with a theology professor speaking at a Talbot chapel during my student days at Biola. He emphatically stated that God is a linear, logical, rational Being. Period! As I listened I thought that this is not the God I worship, nor that of my Ifugao friends. My experience among this tribal people would no longer allow me to buy into this limited Enlightenment bias. Yes, God is a linear, logical, rational Being, but he is *much more!* He is a combination of rational and emotion, of linear and cyclical, of mystery and meaning, of risk and truth. Why did it take the Ifugao to make me reach these conclusions? What if I had grasped the sweeping story nature of Scripture early in my Christian walk or training? What if I had discovered that the Bible was not a teaching Textbook but rather God's sacred Storybook? Would my concept of the Bible, God, teaching, and Bible curricula have required such a huge paradigm change? These are

haunting questions.

As study and time went by I began to grasp the sweeping nature of narrative in Scripture. I started to realize that words were not separate from phrases; phrases were not separate from sentences; sentences were not isolated from chapters; chapters were not isolated from the themes that tied the book or letter together. The Epistles were not isolated letters but found their roots in the Acts narrative. Yet Acts could not make sense without the life of Christ presented in the Gospels. Nor would the Gospels make sense without the Israelite story. And the Israelite story would require some of the Psalms and the Abraham story, just as the Abraham story would require the Adam and Eve story, to make it all make sense. Finally, Revelation and Genesis provide the bookends for all writings in between. Wright recognized the overall story nature of Scripture when he wrote:

> When the early church told stories about Jesus these stories were not, as might be imagined, mere random selections of anecdotes. They were not without a sense of an overall story into which they might fit, or of a narrative shape to which such smaller stories would conform....As has been recently shown in relation to some key areas of Paul's writing, the apostle's most emphatically 'theological' statements and arguments are in fact expressions of the essentially Jewish story now redrawn around them...So, too his repeated use of the Old Testament is designed not as mere proof-texts, but, in part at least, to suggest new ways of reading well-known stories, and to suggest that they find a more natural climax in the Jesus-story than else where. (1992:407)

My understanding of story and Scripture continued to expand. At first I focused on the pedagogical value of story, perceiving it as a great teaching tool. I saw narrative as an excellent way to make dry, abstract concepts come alive through emotional, concrete means. Then I began to note narratives' grand emphasis in Scripture. It was much more than Jesus' favorite teaching approach for holistic thinkers; it was the *dominate genre* of Scripture for all peoples of the world. Systematic theology, which I had privileged in my teaching and library, now required narrative clarification *because narrative preceded and informed it!* I also recognized that narrative would require prepositional clarification as well. It was not an either-or.[3]

I then began to notice the role of story in building relation-
ships in mono- and crosscultural contexts. Shared stories pro-
vided the invitation for initial and on-going relationships. This
would lead me to collect lifestories, place much more emphasis
on the use of faithstories (testimonies) then I had prior, and
promote the use of congregational stories so that participants can
see God's hand in the birth and ongoing development of their
churches (Steffen 2000b). From there I began to realize that story
was much more than an excellent communication tool or rela-
tionship building technique; it is one's very identity or world
view. Symbol-based story determined the elastic parameters of
an individual's identity and community's world view (Steffen
2003). Following similar thinking, Fisher (1987) argued persua-
sively that the root metaphor for humanity is *homo narrans*. This
raises an interesting question. If the root metaphor for humanity
is *homo narrans*, what or who influenced this? Is it not because
our Creator is the greatest Storyteller ever. People are *homo nar-
rans* because God, metaphorically, is *Theos Narran.*

Not everyone has reached the above conclusion, including
those ministering among multiethnic communities of faith. Some
may conclude, Ifugao are tribal people; what do they have to do
with modern urban America? Let's dig deeper. What are some
ministry implications for any people group should the narrative
nature of Scripture is lost? It is to this topic we now turn.

A Fragmented Picture

In "The Sacred Storybook: Fighting A Fragmented Under-
standing of Scripture" (Steffen 2000a) I attempted to identify
some of the features that become lost once the narrative nature
of Scripture is neglected intentionally or unintentionally. These
include: (1) an abridged picture of God, (2) argument-based
evangelism becomes privileged, (3) one-fourth-of-the-book
evangelism takes preference, (4) follow-up, rather than founda-
tion, receives the focus, and (5) timid testimonies prevail. Ex-
panding beyond evangelism, at least two more could be added:
(6) Scripture tends to become dry due to its cognitive orientation,
and (7) topical preaching and teaching predominate. I'll now
unpack each of these.

*When the Bible is seen as a teaching Textbook rather than a sacred
Storybook, many aspects of Scripture becomes skewed, including how
people perceive the Trinity.* For example, when the New Testament
(NT) dominates evangelism (or follow-up), Jesus is defined pri-

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marily through the Gospels, highlighting his humanity ("Son of man"). Unless Jesus' role in the Old Testament (OT) is added, along with the returning reigning King found in Revelation, a skewed picture of Jesus Christ emerges. Revelation's description of Jesus Christ comes across in a very different way then that found in the Gospels.

By-passing the OT, common in most of today's evangelism, the picture of God the Father is lost. No other section of Scripture portrays the role of the Father better than does the OT. This is where the awe of God is thoroughly defined through his interactions with people and the lower creation. When the OT is jettisoned in evangelism, the awe of God is omitted. Without the awe of God, wisdom is lost, which is the foundation to genuine Christian belief and behavior (Psa 36:1; Prov 1:7). The lack of transformed behavior so prevalent in the Church today may find its roots in the absence of the Old Testament's emphasis on the awe of God (Ro 15:4; 1 Co 10:11; 2 Ti 3:16).

Figure 2 illustrates the emphasis given to different players of the Trinity according to the size of the font. Seventy-five percent of the Bible, the OT, covers all members, but gives the majority of ink to God the Father. The final 25 percent, the NT, gives the major roles to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It offers two views of Jesus, his humble human role (the Gospels), and his powerful and just kingship role (Revelation). *It takes the whole Bible to present the whole picture of the Trinity, all of which impacts the legitimacy of evangelism and on-going discipleship.*
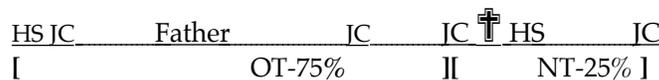
HS JC   Father   JC   JC ✝ HS   JC
[OT-75%   ][NT-25%]

Figure 2: It takes the whole Bible to define the Trinity

A second result is that *argument-based evangelism becomes privileged.* Most evangelism conducted globally finds its basis in the Four Spiritual Laws. Developed in the late 1960s when science was at its height, the Four Laws offered love, acceptance, and stability through an assumed God to university students living in a society that emphasized independence and mobility. The question arises, "Does this model remain relevant in cross-cultural contexts or for postmoderns who prefer narrative logic[4] over the moderns' preference for propositional logic?"[5]

How would such laws soften (without compromising the

gospel) for postmoderns if Christian workers viewed Scripture as relational events centered around the stories of characters rather than rational ideas logically presented? Would this increase the number of people confident to witness in contrast to specialist who can marshal facts, organize them in logic sequence, and debate them eloquently? Why is giving "a reason for one's faith" most often interpreted as accomplished through propositional logic?

Another result when the story nature of Scripture is lost is that *one-fourth-of-the-book evangelism becomes the norm.* This is evident when one peruses the existing evangelism models. For many, the preferred start point is the gospel of John;[6] for the majority it is the NT. This is much like going to a movie you have never seen, wait until it is three quarters of the way through, watch the last quarter, and then attempt to figure out who is doing what to who and why. One wonders what percentage of the time the screenwriters would agree with the viewers' interpretation of the film. One also wonders how often the Storyteller agrees with the hearers' interpretation of the gospel when presented from the NT (which was never intended to introduce Jesus Christ to the world). Christian workers would do well to follow Paul Harvey's advice and provide "the rest of the story," so that, among other things, the broader cosmic conflict between God and Satan and the consequent ensuing battle for human allegiance, is not lost.

A fourth result is that *follow-up takes precedence over foundation.* The assumption seems to go like this: Give them a quick introduction of Christ and we'll clean things up later. Colsen points out the fallacy of such thinking:

> Christians often seek to evangelize others by starting with salvation—John 3:16 and the gospel message. And for an earlier generation that approach worked. Most people had some kind of church experience in their background, even if they did not have strong personal beliefs. But in today's post-Christian world, many people no longer even understand the meaning of crucial biblical terms. For example, the basic term 'sin' makes no sense to people if they have no concept of a holy God who created us and who therefore has a right to require certain things of us. And if people don't understand sin, they certainly don't comprehend the need for salvation.

Consequently, in today's world, beginning evangelism with the message of salvation is like starting a book at the middle—you don't know the characters, and you can't make sense out of the plot. Instead, we must begin with Genesis where the main character, God, establishes himself as the Creator and the 'plot' of human history unfolds its first crucial episodes. (1999:98)

Foundational characters and themes, such as Adam (sin, fall, and promise), Noah (hope), Abraham (justification by faith), Moses (law and grace), Job (God's sovereignty), David (Kingdom reign), and Jonah (grace for the undeserving) not only set the backdrop of God's story, they tie the complete story together, making the Jesus story comprehensible. Follow-up is important, but foundation is of equal importance for foundation is follow-up in advance.

Timid testimonies (faithstories) often result when the story nature of Scripture is lost. Even though faithstories (note Paul's examples: Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-21; 25:23-26:23) can connect powerfully with friends, family, and foes, they often take a back seat to formula-based evangelism models that can be delivered quickly. Why is it that Christian workers often spend more time teaching the "how's" of evangelistic models than the "how's" of personal faithstories, especially in communities where relationships are central? Faithstories that integrate emotion, reason, history, transcultural experiences, and point towards Christ deserves much more attention by trainers. Done sensitively, faithstories can provide a rival story told in a non-threatening way to friends and foes. Practiced faithstories can help unleash the laity majority.

A sixth result when the narrative nature of Scripture is lost is that *Truth tends to become dry and sterile due to its cognitive orientation.* When Truth is taught through ideas rather than events and characters, the emotional, experiential, human side of Truth becomes lost. This makes the Bible seem unrelated to life. When Truth is taught, however, through a cast of Bible characters, the Bible rings true. Paul often exemplifies this contrary to the thinking of many. For example, when teaching about the abstract concept of justification by faith Paul used two characters to define the concept, David and Abraham (Ro 4).

Lastly, *topical preaching and teaching predominate.* Pastors and teachers tend to feed attendees with a variety of topics from the

teaching Textbook. Over the years, the faithful hear a little about this and a little about that; something about this character and something about that character. Lost in the maze is the big picture and timeline. They receive the clothes without the clothesline. This does not mean topical preaching or teaching is unimportant or unneeded, rather it calls for the topics to be embedded in the overall context.

The Big Picture Restored

Restoring the big picture of Scripture will require the reintroduction of its narrative nature. Multiethnic church leadership can facilitate this through a variety of ways, of which I will discuss ten.

1. *Present the Bible as God's sacred Storybook with a Storyline that connects Genesis to Revelation.* The Bible is much more than referenced proof-texts, one-verse sermons, NT-based evangelism, or isolated topical studies. Rather, it is a story composed of multiple stories; God's sacred story, held together by a plot that offers choice, change, and a conclusion of hope. The Author introduces some 2930 characters (heroes, heroines, rogues) to the Bible stage to challenge and transform listeners of different generations, genders, and ethnicities. The Author also chose to make narrative the predominate genre (65-75 percent) of Scripture, highlighting God's concern that his kingdom rule be instituted in all relationships: human to human, human to creation, and human to spiritual. It's time to reconnect God's sacred story to ministry.

2. *Compose a song that conveys the overall story of the Bible, and sing it often.* I am indebted to the Ifugao of the Philippines for this idea. After hearing a sweeping presentation of the gospel from Genesis through the ascension, several Ifugao, using a traditional tune, composed a song that presents the story of good news from start to finish. This song provides the Ifugao a sweeping overview of Storyline of the sacred Storybook every time it's sung. Moreover, it calls for congregational participation as they join in on the chorus after each stanza. Adding more stanzas to cover the remainder of the Bible would complete the story. Such a sweeping overview would provide first-time visitors an introduction to the unified nature of God's sacred Storybook while reinforcing the cosmic drama for regular attendees.

3. *Learn narrative theology and biblical theology to the same level as systematic theology.* Narrative theology takes seriously the

dominant story genre of Scripture as it is the "discourse about God in the setting of story" (Van Engen 1996:49). Biblical theology takes seriously the "successive installments" of the historical progression of Scripture; it is a "recital of the acts of God in history" (Wright 1991). Wise teachers will glean from all theologies, recognizing that each comes with its own strengths and weaknesses, and that some provide the foundation for others, e.g., narrative lays the foundation for systematic theology.

4. *Structure the sanctuary as story.* During the European Middle Ages artist transformed cathedrals into "Bibles in stone and glass." Walls and ceilings provided illiterates and literates alike a sweeping overview of the Bible, linking isolated pictures to the big picture. What is the second millennium version of a visual storyline on the walls (and screens) of traditional church buildings? Of house churches? Of warehouse churches? Of theater churches? Does modern technology make weekly updates possible for ongoing review or new additions?

Such artwork would allow Christian workers and artists to show how the present snapshot (lesson) under discussion connects to the big picture. Structuring the sanctuary as story would provide the listeners, teachers, and artists with a sense of story continuity over time and cultures, and a story that ends in hope because Jesus Christ is a winner!

5. *Develop sermons and lessons that cover the big story in one session, and teach them often in multiple contexts.* Stephen reviewed a host of OT characters, developing a plot that the hostile audience was not about to accept (Acts 7). How long did it take him to cover this? An hour? Two hours? On the Emmaus road, Jesus reviewed key OT characters, providing two despondent disciples a sweeping overview that would restore their hope (Luke 24). It takes approximately 2.5 hours to walk the seven miles. (See Peter's sermon in Acts 2). Wise teachers in multiethnic churches will present a single lesson that overviews the entire Bible, the OT, and the NT in the main service, cell groups, and Sunday School. Other means to accomplish this objective could include: Walk Through the Old Testament, Walk Through the New Testament, providing attendees a calendar to read through the Old Testament in one year, and the New Testament the next year, or the whole Bible in one year, concluding with a celebration for participants. Such overviews will go a long ways to provide an audience a comprehensive picture of the sacred Storybook.

6. *Contextualize the Chronological Teaching model for your audience*. This story-based model developed by New Tribes Mission of the Philippines in 1980 by Trevor McIlwain (1992) should not go overlooked because of its tribal origin or some of its weaknesses (Steffen 1997:154-165). When contextualized, it can provide one of the better discipleship models that exists today. It demands a foundation be laid for the gospel, including the conflict between God and Satan. It takes seriously the Old Testament's introduction of the New Testament (thereby emphasizing the awesomeness of God that challenges polytheism and ritualism). This model finds its basis in biblical theology, thereby encouraging discovery learning of the cosmic plot (big picture) as the history of redemption unfolds (human and material world), it fights fragmentation by tying evangelism and follow-up together, takes seriously *missio Dei,* and gives narrative its rightful role.

This approach, however, can easily deteriorate into a program rather that a dynamic, spontaneous process. Start-points should differ for particular audiences. For example, many Muslims come to Christ through psalms and proverbs. Nevertheless, these start points should eventually find their foundation in the unfolding big story of Scripture, and the recipient should eventually hear their relationship to the big picture as soon as possible. Also, the number of lessons will have to be adapted to one's situation. The model also tends to overlook major issues covered in the biblical texts, such as politics, economics, poverty, injustice, and so forth.[7]

When expanded and contextualized, this model can provide a way to story evangelism, discipleship, spirituality, family development, leadership development, felt needs, church planting, and a host of other topics. Postmoderns will appreciate such storied ministry, especially when deep relationships between trainer and trainee has preceded it.

7. *Teach books thematically and create a repertoire of songs that communicate the themes for each.* Rather than just teaching topically, teach a book or letter thematically in a condensed timeframe. As the study begins have the participants read / listen to / view the entire book so that they can capture the big picture the author wishes to communicate. Assign those gifted in music to create songs that capture the theme of a book or letter. Such songs can reinforce the Bible author's intent during the study, and review it long after. I wait for the day when a song-

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book is developed that includes thematic songs for all 66 books of the Bible.

8. *Teach abstract doctrines through concrete characters.* Just as Paul, who had a narrative thought world (see Witherington 1994), taught justification by faith through the lives of David and Abraham, so multiethnic leaders should do the same for all doctrines of the Bible. One way to begin this is to start a "Who's Who" list for each book of the Bible, and identify how they relate to the book's major and minor themes and doctrines. Tying doctrines to characters will bring life to ideas, mirroring present day reality. And it makes abstract ideas easily remembered and reproducible.

9. *Make sure missio Dei drives all curricula.* Since the goal of the sacred Storybook is to have God's reign and rest impact all peoples and places so that worship can become global, this theme should drive and dominate all curricula in the multiethnic church. It will highlight God's right to rule and provide rest in all relationships: human, spiritual, and material.

Missions does not begin with the Great Commission found at the end of one of the Gospels, such as Jesus' command in Matthew: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:18-20, NIV). Nor does the Great Commandment begin with Jesus' command to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind…Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37, NIV). While both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment are stated by Jesus in the New Testament, both find their roots in the Old Testament. Through a host of OT and NT characters God lays out his plan to reinstitute his *global* rule by restoring broken relationships among *all* peoples, and providing spiritual and physical rest. Judicious curriculum developers for multiethnic churches will make sure that *missio Dei* is reflected throughout.

10. *Develop maximum impact lessons (MILs).* Lessons that integrate a number of communication approaches are far more effective than those that take only one or two. John White (2002) advocates the following be included in each story lesson:

1. Raise a topic question
2. (They) identify Bible story that answers the question
3. Dialogue theologically and applicationally over story

4. Dramatize story for present culture
5. Compose a song that covers issues

White believes this approach will help develop problem-solving skills as well as communicate Truth, something of key importance for those ministering to rote learners. I would add one more element—symbol, and design it this way (see Figure 3 below).
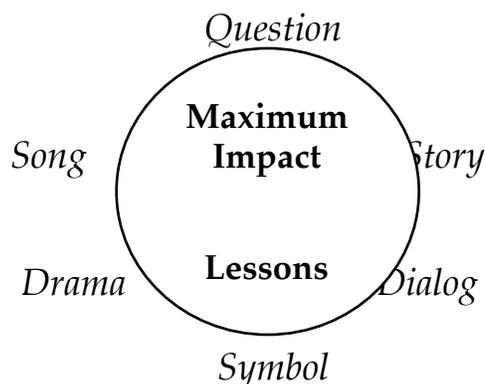

Figure 3: Maximum impact lessons

Conclusion

A postmodern, sometimes postChristian, often mobile, multiethnic audience that lacks the Bible basics requires a big picture understanding of the sacred Storybook immediately. God has a story for them, whether for antagonistic groups like Stephen faced, despondent disciples encountered by Jesus, maturing followers, or those in need of Christ who the multiethnic Christian worker meets on a daily basis. A multi-strategy approach that views the Bible as God's sacred Storybook rather than a teaching Textbook to be dissected; that promotes art, song, and curricula that will connect the isolated snapshots (topics) to the big picture (themes) will help to fight the fragmented understanding of Scripture that so many Christian workers have inherited, and passed on to future generations unwittingly. Starting with the sacred drama when it's three-quarters over will no longer cut it with today's postmodern, postChristian audience, nor will 3-point sermons or topical studies unconnected to the big picture. To correct this, multiethnic Christian workers will give narrative its rightful role, allowing it to weave oppositional categories (reason from modernity and experience from postmodernity)

into a unified whole, denying nor minimizing neither. They will fight a fragmented understanding of God's sacred drama by making sure their listeners tie it all together through connected stories, art, song, and *missio Dei* driven curricula.

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NOTES

1. This article is adapted from a paper presented at the Multicultural Local Church Conference held at Biola University, October 4-5, 2002.

2. I will use story and narrative interchangeably.

3. Neff's discussion is helpful: "The narrative nature of doctrine is important—not only for interesting and holding readers, but also because the Christian faith is itself rooted in God's saving activity in human history and therefore narrative in essence. Those important narrative elements include:

- The historical background of doctrinal discussion, including the alternative history: What would have happened had the church acted differently?
- The history of any current debate about the doctrine (including insights into the key debaters).
- The author's personal interaction with a particular doctrine (this is the testimony or witness that is a fundamental evangelical theme).

- • Any current news or trend that makes a classic doctrine of particular interest" (2002:8).

4. Fisher defines narrative logic this way: "I propose the narrative paradigm as a philosophy of reason, value, and action. Narrative rationality is its logic. The essential components of this logic are the following. Human communication is tested against the principles of probability (coherence) and fidelity (truthfulness and reliability). Probability, whether a story 'hangs together,' is assessed in three ways: by its argumentative or structural coherence; by its material coherence, that is, by comparing and contrasting stories told in other discourses (a story may be internally consistent, but important facts may be omitted, counterarguments ignored, and relevant issues overlooked); and by characterological coherence" (p.47).

5. Bradt distinguishes the two groups this way: "This 'modern' world preferred reading and writing to speaking and listening; facts, information, and proofs to stories; texts that were portable, private, individual objects to the communal interactive work of storying with others" (1997:30).

6. After listening about a storied-evangelism model that covers both Old and New Testament a Chinese house church leader remarked to me: "Thank you for giving us permission to move away from John as an evangelistic model. We were taught to use John in evangelism but it just never made sense to me no matter how many times I read it."

7. Bryant Myers of World Vision makes these comments in relation to the Chronological Teaching model in his book *Walking with the Poor:* "presented in the training materials and books, this method focuses solely on the issue of personal salvation and the Bible as the story of God's salvific work in history. While this is certainly true it is not enough. Part of the story is left out. After all, God's story is about more than saving souls . . . the biblical account has a more holistic view of salvation, seeking the restoration by grace alone of our relationships with God, with each other, and with God's creation. While personal salvation through faith in Christ is the center of God's concern, it is not the limit of God's concern . . . God's concern for people as productive stewards living in just and peaceful relationships could emerge alongside God's concern for people living in right relationship with God" (1999:234).