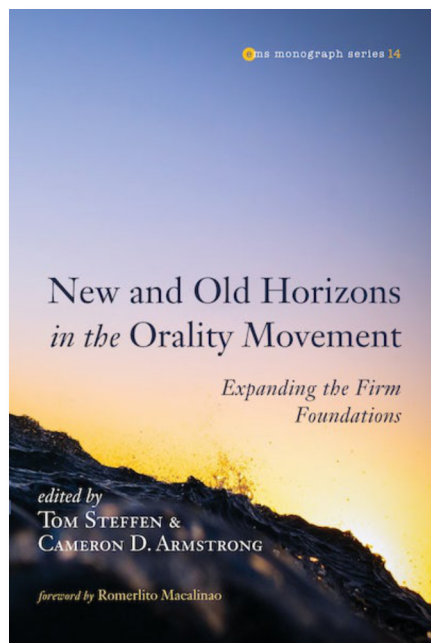


REVIEW: *New and Old Horizons in the Orality Movement: Expanding the Firm Foundation* by Tom Steffen and Cameron D. Armstrong, eds.

ems

REVIEWED BY
CHRISTOPHER J.
BRAINOS

Edited by Steffen, Tom and Armstrong, Cameron D.. *New and Old Horizons in the Orality Movement: Expanding the Firm Foundation*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022. 304 pp., ISBN: 978-1-6667-3080-7. \$39.00 paperback.



Tom Steffen and Cameron Armstrong's edited volume, *New and Old Horizons in the Orality Movement*, explores orality within the context of twenty-first-century missiology. It consists of twelve essays that present the theoretical foundations of orality, explore its applications, and offer some nontraditional applications of orality. Notably, nearly all contributors oppose Ong's dichotomized view of orality and literacy and maintain that orality is not a replacement for literacy but complementary to it. Stark and Barger (chaps 8-9), especially, demonstrate this with their discussion of orality in Bible translation, which reinforces the centrality of written Scriptures to the Christian faith and places orality and literacy in a reciprocal relationship within missionary practice.

The volume's main strength is the proven success of orality strategies around the world. Evans' and Armstrong's (chaps 5-6) respective classroom experiences prove that oral structures are pedagogically effective. Their observations may encourage those working in individualistic contexts, but there is little exploration of the relationship between the efficacy of oral methods and collectivism. If the strength of orality is connected to the truth that Scripture is a metanarrative, are oral methods effective in collectivist cultures because the methods themselves are effective or because they fit within expected social structures?

While the message of the book is well-presented, two issues emerge that could detract from its reception. First, there is no standardization in terminology; some authors protest the use of the term "illiterate" while others use it comfortably. Terms

such as “oral learners,” “oral preference learners,” and “relational learners,” are used interchangeably. The inconsistency gives the impression that the contributors are not aligned regarding orality terminology. Second, Part 4 feels out of balance with the rest of the volume. Though exploring various applications of the orality movement is valuable, these chapters read like “rabbit trails” in which orality takes a back seat to the ways it is integrated into other areas of study. More intentionality in linking these expansions to orality studies would create continuity.

Another issue, because of its inclusion as a foundation of the orality movement, is Thigpen’s work on “Deconstructing Oral Learning,” which ignores the task of education to empower individuals to educate themselves and others. Further, Thigpen (chap 12) does not address the reality that the paradigm of connected learning she suggests leaves the learner subservient to the teacher in a system that inhibits the production of new knowledge. “We are your books” sounds generous but moves quickly to disallowing the creation of any new books. More work to align “connected learning” with the goals of education as a social institution is warranted.

Considering how many unreached people worldwide are not served by literacy-based methods, this volume is needed within the community of intercultural workers, especially those in low-literacy contexts. Pastors, small group leaders, and even North American classroom educators would also benefit from implementing orality practices within their respective fields. Orality is consistent with the intended reception of the biblical text and creates an environment of collective learning. This volume would benefit any Christian looking to integrate these themes into his or her life.

Christopher J. Brainos