

# BACK TO ORALITY: EMBODYING JESUS IN POST-TEXTUAL EUROPE

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The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford

**For centuries**, European Christianity has been shaped by a strong, over-arching cultural norm: reading! Believers are encouraged to read the Bible and Christian books while ministers form their preaching and service by studying commentaries and works of theology. In fact, the impact of the printed page is more significant than most of us imagine; literacy shapes the very way we process our thoughts and determines how we communicate.

However, across Europe, there are a growing number of communities who use very different forms of communication. Alongside indigenous populations who have always had an oral culture, there are diaspora groups for whom a writing-based culture is not the norm. There is also a growing group of secondary oral communicators—people whose communications are often screen-based and whose thoughts are not shaped by longer texts.

If we want to see Christ take root in these cultures and for his church to grow and thrive, we will need to learn how to communicate with people who think very differently. This is not simply a case of adopting a new fashionable communication technique, but of learning to orientate ourselves to a different way of thinking altogether.

The consultation '**Back to Orality: Embodying Jesus in a post-textual Europe**' seeks to draw academics, church leaders and people from the mission community to learn how to embody the love and message of Christ in primarily oral communities. Alongside presentations from experts in the field, there will be ample time for discussion, questions and sharing experiences.

Europe is increasingly a post-textual society and we need to learn together how to bear witness to Christ in this changing world.

For further information & registration details, please visit:  
<https://orality.net/oxford-2019>

## Consultation Concept Summary:

Many of the foundational proponents of orality were European anthropologists and literary critics, Havelock, Lévi-Strauss, Finnegan, Goody, et al. Yet, very little has been written about orality in Europe today. In fact, we recognize that there are multiple “oralities” within the European context, including four potentially overlapping orality spheres.

First, there are first-generation diaspora communities in Europe. In the last few years, there has been a huge influx of migrants who are coming to Europe by choice or who are fleeing from conflict in their home countries. These first generation diaspora communities often come from cultures rich in oral culture and communication preference. Secondly, there are primarily oral European communities. These are groups which have retained their cultural distinctives such as the Roma communities of continental Europe or the South Asian communities of the United Kingdom. These communities are very much European, but they have unique cultural expressions many of which exhibit oral tendencies. Third, Europe also has oral-by-choice communities. These are communities and individuals who are quite comfortable in an academic environment. They are fluent readers who can read documents with comprehension; however, they choose not to communicate through text and may operate in both oral and literate domains. Finally, there are technologically oral communities. A growing number of people are choosing to become oral through a shift from text-based communication to technologically-based communication.

We hope that the 2019 consultation '**Back to Orality: Embodying Jesus in a post-textual Europe**' will explore these orality spheres through theological and missiological reflection, examining theoretical approaches, drawing from orality studies in other parts of the world, and considering case studies. In doing so, key questions will be addressed:

- How can oral communities in Europe be best classified and mapped with a view to arrive at a taxonomy?
- What are the challenges and hindrances faced by oral communities in Europe including those that are being least addressed?
- What are the main needs of orality thinkers and activists in their work in Europe?
- What insights can we learn about orality, particularly in its interplay with textuality, from the European experience?

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