

[Article] The Arts in Intercultural Discipleship



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Can you walk with me?

The ethnodoxology movement inspires us to consider how the arts can transform the Sunday worship experience. But what about the other six days of the week? What discipleship issues could the arts address Monday through Saturday? If these important issues are not addressed, then people can easily get stuck in their spiritual growth. How are the arts particularly well-suited to spiritual formation in various cultures?

These are questions my Native American friend Richard Twiss asked me. Richard came to Asbury Theological Seminary as a doctoral student in the intercultural studies program, and I had the good fortune of being one of his professors. Richard helped me realize that discipleship in the Western world is often treated as a science to change the way people think. Viewing discipleship from the perspectives of other cultures, however, reveals that discipleship can also be considered an art that is meant to deeply transform the way people live. At the end of a course on the indigenous church, Richard asked me, “Can you walk with me for ten years in this path of learning how to be fully Christian and fully Native? I’m a Sicangu Lakota and I grew up on the Rosebud reservation. I’d like you to meet me every year on the Rosebud reservation for a week. You can bring seminary students with you, and we will discuss and learn contextualization in the Sicangu Lakota culture.”¹

Little did I know how transforming this journey would be for all of us as we experienced arts in the Sicangu Lakota culture, to include powwows, smudging, sun dance, sweat lodges, funerals, dances, stories, and building dedications. In this article, I would like to share some of the insights that were helpful in this discipleship journey as we learned to critically contextualize Christian faith with the arts. This article will discuss

1. A brief definition and description of intercultural discipleship.
2. Various oral art genres to foster discipleship for the Sicangu Lakota in the Rosebud reservation as well as among the Builsa people in Ghana, West Africa.
3. Examples of intercultural discipleship approaches using these art genres.

¹ Richard and I, along with the Sioux Falls Seminary, committed to the ten-year partnership. Unfortunately, Richard unexpectedly passed away in 2013. As promised, though, we continued the partnership for the remainder of the ten years in his absence. I hope this article honors the legacy of Richard in some small way.

What is intercultural discipleship?

Disciple-makers often follow the practices they observed or learned in their own culture and assume that they are the best approach when engaging other cultures. As a Kikuyu proverb from Kenya notes, “He who does not travel thinks his mother is the world’s best cook.” How could our understanding and practice of discipleship change if we traveled the world and observed how Christians faithfully follow Jesus in other cultures? This intercultural perspective would reveal a very different approach to discipleship, often using a variety of oral art genres.

Intercultural discipleship is defined as “the process of worldview transformation whereby Jesus followers center their lives on the Kingdom of God and obey Christ’s commands in culture utilizing cultural available genre.”² Several key terms here need explanation. First, discipleship is a lifelong process (not a program to graduate from) that focuses on worldview transformation. If a worldview is not transformed, then Christianity simply overlays a new belief system on top of an existing belief system to create either syncretism or “split level”



Figure 1. Richard Twiss on the Rosebud reservation, 2007.

Christianity. But if discipleship transforms a worldview, then someone like Richard Twiss can identify fully as a Native American and fully as a Jesus follower. The goal of discipleship, then, is to empower people to allow Christ to be in the center of their daily issues and concerns, rather than simply graduating from a program.³

When our focus is reorienting our lives to allow Jesus to direct our daily decisions and actions, then the ways we address various issues from the local culture will change. For this reason, we cannot simply adopt a discipleship program from mainstream American culture and insert it into Native American culture. The issues and concerns that Richard deals with are very different from what I experienced. Over ten years, Richard shared several of these cultural issues that are uniquely Sicangu Lakota concerns. Thankfully, God provides various indigenous art genres to help Richard deal appropriately with these unique cultural issues and concerns.

² This article draws from Moon (2017).

³ See Hiebert (1984), where he describes a centered set approach vs. a bounded set approach.

Richard (2000) explained that when he first came to Jesus, he cut his hair and went to the local church to just fit into what the Anglo culture portrayed as being “a good Christian.” After a while, though, it just didn’t feel right; he knew his Sicangu Lakota culture had much to offer. He said, “I recognize that there is demonic influence in my own culture, but why should I leave one demon-influenced culture and adopt another demon-influenced culture? Why not start with the culture God has already given me?” Instead of throwing out the baby with the bath water by rejecting his own culture wholesale, might he allow Jesus to transform his own worldview?

Transforming Worldviews

Since the term “worldview” is a key part of the discussion, I will use an anthropological definition by Paul Hiebert (2008, 25–26), who described worldview as “The foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives. It encompasses people’s images or maps of the reality of all things that they use for living their lives.” Hiebert noted that the worldview is not simply a set of beliefs in the head; rather, it also includes what people love and what they value. James K. A. Smith (2016) is fond of saying that people become what they love, not simply what they think. If people come to Christ and they simply adopt a new cognitive belief system but they still love the things of the world, guess how they are going to act? They will act like people of the world! So a transformation of the worldview needs to include what people think but also what they love as well as what they value. The arts provide a unique aid for discipleship, since they can affect what people love and value, as well as what they think, in order to transform a worldview.

Deist vs. Folk Religious Frameworks

Hiebert (1999a) presents a paradigm that helps us understand religious frameworks and the task of intercultural discipleship (figure 2).

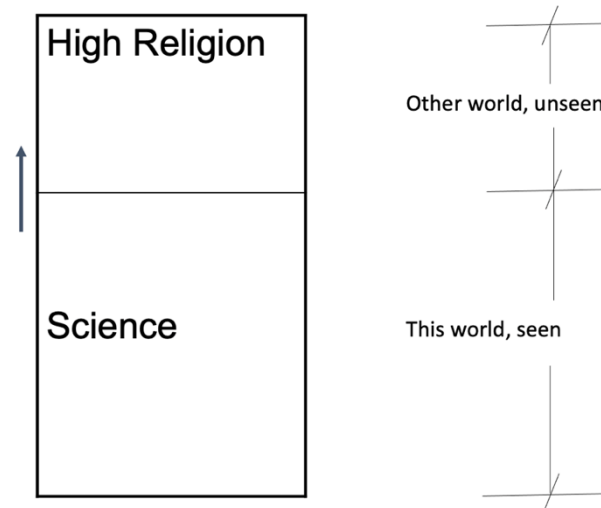


Figure 2. Deist religious framework.

In a deist religious framework, there tend to be two major areas from which people search for answers: science and high religion. Most questions reside in the area of science, such as when the baby gets sick, what medicine is needed? When there is a marital problem, what counselor can help? When considering a business decision, which business coach or business plan can help? These questions assume that what we can see will affect the issues and concerns of this world. The other area where people find answers is high religion. In this sector, questions are asked such as, How do you get to heaven when you die? What assurance can I have of salvation? What is the reason for suffering? These are the ultimate questions of life. These questions assume that the spiritual forces we cannot see will affect the issues and concerns of the *other* world. Interestingly, this dividing line between these two sectors continues to move up as secularization drives people to ask more questions of science and fewer of high religion.

When stepping out of a deist religious framework (which categorizes much of Western culture) and entering the Sicangu Lakota culture where Richard grew up, Hiebert suggests a different religious framework in operation (see figure 3).

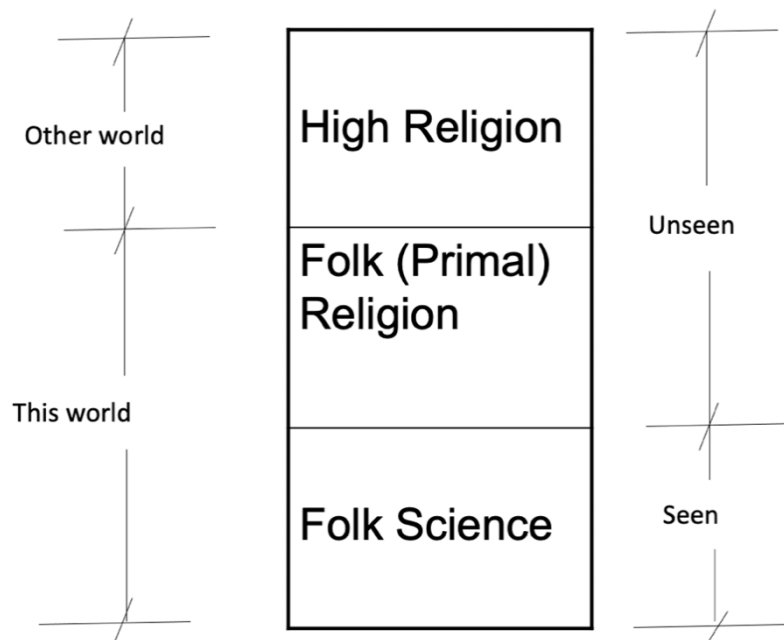


Figure 3. Folk religious framework.

There is still high religion, for questions about how the unseen forces affect the other world, and there is the folk science area, where visible forces affect this world, as described above. In addition, there is a third area in the middle. Hiebert explains that folk cultures have this “middle area” called “folk religion.” This sector addresses questions concerning how unseen forces affect this world. I suggest that these “middle issues” are ripe for discipleship. If Christians do not engage these middle issues, then Richard’s discipleship journey will become stuck. For example, the middle issues include concerns about when the baby gets sick (this-world concern), what spiritual forces can we go to for help (unseen forces). If there is no Christian response, then the Sicangu Lakota may visit a traditional healer or medicine man. Likewise, if there is a marital issue or a business decision

to be made, people searching for spiritual guidance so that unseen spiritual forces can affect the concerns of this world. Once again, these are prime concerns for Richard to be able to live his faith in a way that is fully Christian and fully Sicangu Lakota. Each culture has unique issues and questions that are answered in this middle area. These issues tend to be abundant and critical for discipleship, particularly in folk cultures, since this is where the cultural practices and the claims of Christianity often intersect.

Hiebert (1999b) identified the following general categories of middle issues that are common in folk cultures:

- Guidance and the unknown (travel, marriage, business decisions)
- Reasons behind someone dying or living
- Misfortune and well-being (sickness, barrenness, crop failure, poverty)
- Evil and injustice (protection from evil, addictions)

These middle issues are the prime areas for Richard's discipleship journey, since these were the sort of questions Richard was often asked to address. These become the "bulls-eye" for discipleship in the Sicangu Lakota experience.

In short, the middle issues are the intimate questions and concerns that require unseen spirit power and guidance to affect change in this world. I've discussed Hiebert's definition of middle issues here because these issues are not only for Richard Twiss on the Rosebud reservation. Increasingly in Western culture, people are not finding answers in either science or high religion.⁴ If those questions are not addressed, then people may go to psychics, horoscopes, or other sources. If these discipleship issues are not addressed, then spiritual formation suffers, often resulting in syncretism or "split-level" Christianity.

Genres available in culture

If these middle issues are the target for disciples like Richard, then most cognitive styles of discipleship rarely hit the target. The arts, however, provide plenty of darts that do! Thankfully, God provides these genres in culture to help Richard engage these cultural concerns such that he can identify himself as fully Christian and fully Sicangu Lakota (not one or the other). Here is a sample of the art genres available in culture:

- Symbols
- Rituals
- Dance
- Proverbs
- Music
- Stories
- Drama
- Holism

Why are these genres so important? Mikhail Bakhtin explains, "Each genre provides a specific way of visualizing a given part of reality since they each combine specific blindnesses and insights" (Morson and

⁴ For a description of the "crisis of secularism" whereby science is not providing sufficient answers for increasing numbers of people in the Western world, thereby drawing them to spirituality, see Keller (2016).

Emerson 1990, 275–276). Each genre, that is, provides unique strengths for discipleship to address middle issues in that culture. While language unifies a people and their perspective of reality, genres also stratify language and culture so that each genre provides a different perspective (Holquist 1981, 429). When taken together, a more complete picture of the cultural worldview is evident. In addition, these arts then provide a treasure chest for addressing intercultural discipleship concerns! This is important since this is often overlooked in typical discipleship approaches that focus on cognitive change but neglect the arts to produce life transformation.

In Richard’s culture, while the Lakota language unifies the Sicangu Lakota people, the various symbols and rituals portray unique aspects of the culture that other genres miss. The goal of intercultural discipleship is to make use of various genres to form robust disciples of Jesus. If these genres are disregarded or rejected, then significant aspects of Richard’s discipleship will be overlooked. Though some in the orality movement often champion the use of storytelling for discipleship, for example, that is not the first area that the Sicangu Lakota often go to for spirituality. Richard explained that the Sicangu Lakota will often apply the genres of symbols, rituals, and dance to engage the spirit world. These genres are then the oral arts that should be explored for an intercultural discipleship approach.

Symbols in discipleship

For Richard, a key part of his discipleship journey is to engage the world of symbols. A symbol is “something present that stands for something absent” (Leeds-Hurwitz 1993, 6)—something you see, smell, and touch can stand for something that you can’t see, smell, or touch. Robert S. Ellwood (1983) noted, “Even the plainest symbols . . . are magic portals into the other world where the truth of one’s religion is visible, felt, and far overshadows the inconsistent ordinary” (66). To understand how Richard can apply Sicangu Lakota symbols for discipleship, we look to Victor Turner’s (1967) three properties of symbols, which I will quickly summarize.⁵

1. *One Symbol and Many Meanings*

The first property of symbols is called the condensation property. This means that one symbol condenses various meanings (figure 4).

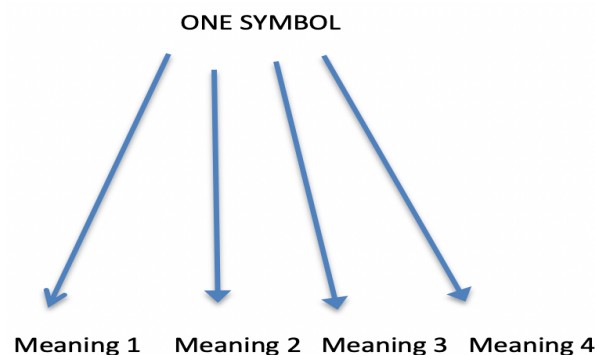


Figure 4. Condensation: One symbol and many meanings.

⁵ Turner’s work is now dated, but his seminal work was conducted among a folk culture in Africa that provided a groundbreaking understanding of how symbols can function when used well. This is important when applying symbols for Christian discipleship to help disciple makers use symbols well to create life transformation. This may help those who are skeptical or even opposed to symbols, seeing them as archaic, lifeless, or simply leftovers from before the Reformation. Turner’s work shows how theology with art can result in discipleship that is truly transformational.

For example, sage is grown on the Rosebud reservation, and it represents the cleansing of sacred space. During all of the Sicangu Lakota rituals I participated in, sage was burned such that the smoke filled the space and the aroma provided a unique smell. I attended a native ritual and the lady walking in next to me inhaled a deep breath. She exclaimed, “That’s the smell of forgiveness!” I wish every family and people group had the smell of forgiveness to create an environment where it’s time to forgive each other. The sage smell can also represent holiness or consecrating something to be holy. So one symbol, sage, condenses the various meanings of cleansing sacred space, forgiveness, and holiness.

2. *Many Symbols and One Meaning*

Turner describes a second property of symbols called the unification property. This means that many symbols are united by one meaning. This is somewhat opposite (but complementary) to the first property (figure 5).

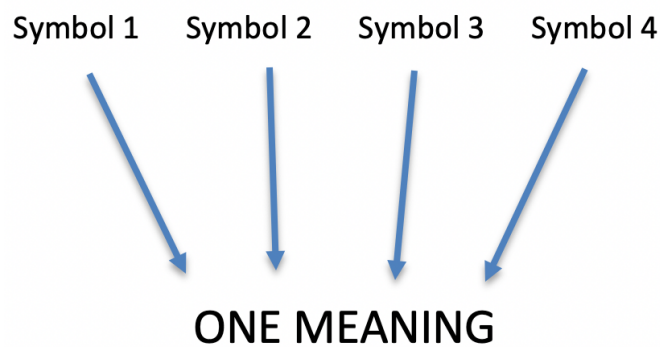


Figure 5. Many symbols and one meaning.

Figure 6 shows a smudging ceremony on the Rosebud reservation with Casey Church. Notice the various symbols used that are unified by one meaning. There is sage in the middle of the abalone shell, along with a pipe (including tobacco that is sacred), a red cloth and red strips on his shirt (a sacred color), and an eagle feather. All of these symbols together proclaim that you are entering a holy experience. When somebody walks into this setting, they expect a holy experience.

3. *Symbols Unite Sensory and Ideological Poles*

The third property of symbols that Turner described is one of the most powerful. This is called the polarization property. This means that one symbol can connect two experiences that are normally polar opposites. Symbols connect both an ideology and a sensory experience (table 1).



Figure 6. Casey Church on the Rosebud reservation.

Table 1. One symbol connects the sensory and ideological poles.

Ideological Pole	Sensory Pole
Beliefs	Feelings
Norms	Needs
Values	Appetites & desires
Head	Heart
What you <i>should</i> do	What you <i>want</i> to do

Connecting these two poles is rare. Normally, the ideological pole is in focus when people discuss beliefs, norms, and values. These are the cognitive areas that you should know in your head, and these are the things that you *should* do for right behavior. This is often separated from the sensory pole. The sensory pole includes the experiences, feelings, needs, appetites, and desires that affect your heart (not mind), and these are the

things that you *want* to do. A symbol connects the ideological and sensory poles to help you want to do what you should do. Often, disciples know what they should do, but they simply do not have the will to want to do it. A well-placed symbol overcomes this tension to form disciples who obey what they should do. Figure 7 and the following story present an example of how sage can be used to unite the ideological and sensory poles.



Figure 7. Burning sage for smudging ritual.

Another Native American seminary student told me that every morning and evening, he burned the sage and used the eagle feather to brush the smoke around his body, starting at his legs, then his midsection, and finally up to the top of his head. He said this reminds him of the Holy Spirit cleansing and making his body clean and holy. He does this to help him overcome his addiction to pornography. He tried a lot of other approaches that simply did not work. He knew what he *should* do, but he didn't have the will to break what he *wanted* to do. The symbol made him want to do what he should do in order to further his discipleship in this area. As the sage smell clung to his clothing throughout the day, it reminded him that he was a holy person whom God cleansed and sanctified. This polarization property of symbols helped him address this intimate concern that needed spiritual power to overcome. In Turner's terms, the symbol aroused the sensory pole (what he wants to do) to connect to the ideological pole (what he should do) in order to provide transformation.

For Richard's discipleship then, often the starting point is the selection of appropriate symbols to address middle issues to help him stay focused on Jesus and follow him more deeply. One symbol can condense many meanings, and many symbols can drive home one meaning. In addition, a symbol can combine a sensory and ideological pole to create a powerful experience. Hence, the genre of symbols is crucial for intercultural

discipleship. To make the power of symbols even more evident for discipleship, symbols then become building blocks or the molecules for rituals.

Rituals drive faith deep to the bone

Rituals are a crucial part of the Sicangu Lakota experience. As a result, they are important for Richard's discipleship journey. Arnold Van Gennep (1960) studied rituals from around the world and observed a common structure in ritual performance that included three distinct stages. Though he was primarily studying the rites of passage during lifecycle events, this same ritual structure also appears in other types of rituals, such as festivals, pilgrimages, retreats, celebrations, and calendrical rituals. The three-stage structure is diagrammed in figure 8.

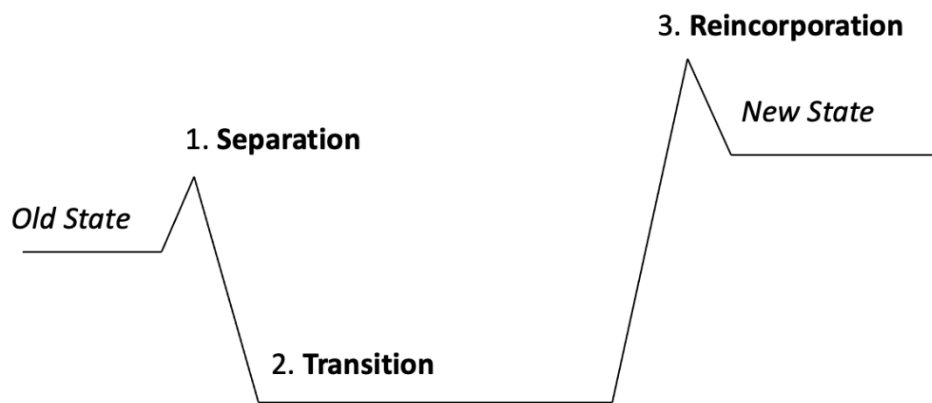


Figure 8. Ritual process structure: Three stages.

People entering a ritual are separated from normal time/space; they enter ritual time/space. This transition space is characterized by liminality. When done well, the ritual concludes with the participants reincorporating into normal time/space but at a higher spiritual level. The following story portrays the Inipi ritual (sweat lodge). Notice how symbols are embedded in the ritual to promote transformation.

Intense Encounter with Jesus⁶

Standing in shorts and bare feet, participants tentatively wait in a single-file line. Quietly, they approach a stick with an eagle feather tied at the top, blowing gently in the wind.

“If you have any animosity or resentment toward someone, you must confess it here,” Randy explains.

“Then you are ready to go inside the sweat lodge. We will wait until you are ready.” His voice trails off.

As each person approaches the feather, his or her face reveals deep reflection and honest soul-searching.

Some take longer than others.

⁶ This encounter summarizes my participation in this ritual with Randy Woodley, author and educator, who invited seminary students and me to his farm in Kentucky around 2013. Adapted from Moon (2015), 172–74.

As each person enters, Randy offers burning sage to those who desire to “bathe” themselves with the smoke. The smoke reminds them of God’s presence, which cleanses sacred spaces. They are about to enter a sacred space amid sacred time.

Bending down, they each crawl on hands and knees to find a spot to sit inside the small circular enclosure. With the entrance still open, light peeks through, revealing anxiety on the faces of the participants. Will I be able to endure the heat? Will I be freaked out by the darkness? Is it safe here? Such questions run through their minds.

Having concluded the separation stage, they prepare for the transition stage.

FLLLPPP. The entrance flap is closed. It is pitch-dark. Huddled close to one another, some of the women grab each other’s hands for support. This is instantaneous *communitas* (close bonding) created by this liminal condition. After hot rocks are ushered into the middle of the floor, water is poured over them to create steam that fills the enclosure.

Randy starts with a song. The small tentlike enclosure is filled with praise. Following a few choruses, he gives the opportunity for anyone to offer a song to God.

Round two.

More rocks enter.

More heat.

More steam.

“Pass this dipper of water to the person on your left,” Randy whispers. “When you receive it, drink all of it. Then you can offer some words to the group. The only stipulation is that they must be words that have come from your heart.”

Veiled by the darkness, deep thoughts and feelings emerge from the participants, one by one. These feelings have been bottled up for a long time. Perhaps they went Sunday to Sunday, hoping to share them with someone at church but never having the opportunity. These “middle issues” do not simply go away.

The last person drinks the water.

Round three. As more rocks are brought in, the heat and steam accumulate. Sweat pours from the participants’ bodies. Randy now offers words of encouragement and advice. Using Scripture and wisdom accumulated over the years, he addresses the intimate “middle issues” that people have revealed earlier. The liminal condition prepares people to listen closely without distractions. They take the words to heart. It has been over ten years since I first experienced this, and I can still remember the words that Randy spoke to me.

FLLLPPP. The flap is opened again. Light and refreshing air flood the enclosure. One by one we crawl out of the enclosure, ready to move to the next stage.

Reincorporation. Catching our breath and drinking water like horses returning from a long trek, we stagger toward the house. A potluck meal is ready for everyone. Seated at the table, I notice that we feel much

more connected to one another. Like a family that has been through tough times together, we now feel bonded. While this *communitas* wafts throughout the atmosphere like the smell of fresh coffee, I realize that I have just had a powerful encounter of Christian community. I have also just experienced a deep and personal touch with God concerning a “middle issue” that has been in the back of my mind for a long time.

Deep community.

Deep transformation.

I overhear the group discussion:

“I now feel stronger in my faith—God met me in the sweat lodge,” one participant exclaims.

“I had my most intense encounter of Jesus in the sweat lodge,” another affirms.

I know that I am not the only one who has deepened their discipleship as a result of the contextualized Native American ritual.

After the *Inipi* ritual on the Rosebud reservation each year, at least one seminary student would often explain that they’d had their most intense experience of Jesus there. For me, I experienced how the ritual process drives it deep into my bones what it means to be a follower of Jesus. This is not a cognitive experience alone; instead, the fully sensory experience provides a deep cleansing and renewal.

While symbols and rituals are two powerful genres available for discipleship, there are other genres as well. I will select one more to discuss in the Lakota Sicangu culture: dance.

We dance our prayers

Richard (2002) would say that the Lakota Sicangu dance their prayers. This statement implies that dance is an important genre for discipleship since prayer with God is a basic aspect of focusing his life on Jesus. The genre of dance can easily be overlooked unless someone recognizes the discipleship potential.

In Sioux Falls, SD, a hospital asked a Native American chief to dedicate the building before the opening. I was in the crowd watching the dedication. After a performance by several Native American dancers the chief brought with him, the chief proclaimed, “OK, this building has been dedicated, so you can now go in.”

People in the circle around the dancers looked at each other, silently wondering, “Where was the prayer of dedication?”

The largely Anglo crowd enjoyed watching the dances, but they were still waiting for the “official dedication.” What the crowd didn’t realize was that every time the dancer touched his feet to the earth, he was consecrating and commissioning that space. The dancers were praying and dedicating the building, but their prayers were conducted via the dances. The genre of dance, then, can be very powerful for Richard to identify as fully Christian and fully Sicangu Lakota.

While we have been discussing Richard’s discipleship journey in the Lakota Sicangu culture, Richard is not the only Christian has used local arts for contextual expressions of discipleship. When I lived in Ghana, West Africa, with the Builsa people, I observed their use of other oral art genres for discipleship.

Builsa culture in Ghana

The Builsa people live in Ghana, West Africa. From 1992 to 2001, my family and I lived among them. I was amazed at the use of various genres in the local culture. I will share a few stories that indicate ways these genres are particularly suited for discipleship. Similar to Richard's experience with the arts, these indigenous genres could help the Builsa be identified as fully Christian and fully Builsa, as they addressed the various "middle issues" the people faced.

Proverbs: Wisdom of Many through the Wit of One (adapted from Moon 2009)

I noticed early on that Builsa proverbs were used almost every day, particularly in discussing important, weighty matters. They were also used for entertainment, to lighten a conversation. Could they also be well-suited to discipleship?

Seated with a group of Builsa church leaders, I asked if there was a particular proverb that really helped them in their discipleship journey. One church leader did not hesitate. He shouted out, "Nurubiik a labri ka kpiak kawpta po" ("A human being hides in the feathers of a chicken").

There was a dramatic pause with a very puzzling ending. I thought, "Really? What does a chicken have to do with Christianity?"

Sensing my confusion, he continued. "In the life of the Builsa people, fowls are used to hide shame because of problems. If someone has money troubles, they can sell some of the fowls at market and then use the money to solve the problem. If someone suffers from sickness, infertility, drought, or famine, the traditional Builsa culture directs the sacrifice of fowls to the ancestors or earth shrines. Growing up, I knew that we were always protected from shame as long as we had fowls, because we could always hide inside their feathers.

"They also help us initiate friendships," he continued. "If I want to start a friendship with someone, then I offer them a chicken for us to share a meal together, or I give him a chicken to take home.

"Now that I am a *Kristobiik* [Christian], I feel that *Yezu* [Jesus] is the chicken that I hide under. When problems come, I can run to *Yezu* in prayer and ask him to cover my shame and protect me. He will bear the full impact of the problem that has come upon me, and I can safely rest in His feathers."

Another Builsa Christian chimed in, "When we rest in the feathers of *Yezu*, then we no longer need to have charms, juju, or any other black medicine to protect us. The feathers of *Yezu* will cover us. Our relationship with him assures us that he will cover us with his wings. *Naawen Wani* [the Bible] says that *Naawen* [God] will 'cover you with his feathers and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart' (Psalms 91:4)."

He continued, "This proverb has touched me deeply, and it helps me understand the heart of *Yezu*. When I hear this proverb and read Matthew 23:37, I can feel *Yezu's* heart and desire for us Builsa people. *Yezu* says, 'How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.' That is *Yezu's* desire for us—to protect us, cover our shame and receive the brunt of our difficulties. That is a closer friend than I have ever known!"

Yet another Builsa Christian added, “Do you remember how Ruth was a widow? Like our widows here, she had little hope for the future. When she placed herself under *Naawen’s* feathers, *Naawen* brought about a wonderful blessing. Listen to the praise she received from Boaz in Ruth 2:12: ‘May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, *under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*’” (italics mine).

I was astounded at this chicken theology! The Builsa worldview can be characterized as a “fear/power” culture (Moon, 2012). I observed that the fear of witchcraft was often present at many public events. To address the middle issues related to fear, the Builsa church leaders found great strength in this indigenous proverb as it engaged the Bible. To make this even more powerful, another genre was used to expand upon the proverb: story.

Stories: Portray it, don’t say it

Stories have a way of shaping reality and clarifying abstract concepts. The lively conversation around chicken theology continued with a recounting of the following story:

A man rested his hoe against his shoulder as he walked toward his bush farm to prepare the ground for planting. When he returned home that night, his heart sank as he saw only the scorched remains of his house. He forgot his weary arms and legs as he sprinted to his home, heart pounding.

The earth, his hut, and his animals were covered in black embers. Everything had been destroyed by a bush fire that got out of control.

Angered over his loss, he kicked the black scorched body of a lifeless chicken that lay amidst the ground. He screamed and raised his fists in the air to try and stop the all-consuming panic. As he sat in the deathly stillness, he heard a faint sound.

He stopped.

Bending over, he picked up the dead chicken to find live chicks under her limp wings. Evidently, the mother hen saw the approaching fire and gathered the chicks under her wings. Sitting on top of the chicks, the fire burned the mother hen while the chicks remained safe. And that’s what it means for Christians to hide under the feathers of Jesus. He takes the fire as we remain protected and safe.

This story further explained the meaning of the proverb in a way that was so vivid and concrete that it was easy to remember—in fact, it was impossible to forget. Months later, I would draw upon this chicken theology to help me address my own fears. To aid in this process, I will discuss one more genre for discipleship: songs.

Songs: We become what we hum

I did not translate any English songs into the local language of Buli for worship in church; instead, I listened to the songs that local Christians composed to describe their faith experience, such as the following:

Wa [Yezu] chawgsi mu, Wa chawgsi mu, Wa chawgis mu.

Wa chawgsi mu, Wa sum jam chawgsi.

Wa chawgsi mu, Satana yaa de mu,

Wa chawgsi mu, Wa sum jam chawgsi.

He [Jesus] wraps me tightly, He wraps me tightly, He wraps me tightly.
 He wraps me tightly, He really does wrap me tightly.
 He wraps me tightly, Satan wants to destroy me,
 He wraps me tightly, He really does wrap me tightly.

This song's theme is similar to that of the proverb and story: amidst the cultural issues that bring fear, Christians can be wrapped tightly in the arms of Jesus in order to receive protection.

Months later, I remembered this lesson as the harvest time approached. Seated in my house, I heard a sound from far away. *Waaaaa-hoo*. Gradually, the sound increased in volume as people from neighboring houses used this call to drive away a *sakpak* [witch] that was said to wander in the high millet.

"WAAAAA-HOO!" the shout came from my close neighbors as they provided the traditional response to shout and push the *sakpak* away from the house.

Fear slowly crept in and was now at my doorstep. I was reminded of this song, along with the proverb "Humans hide under the feathers of a chicken," and the story of the hen covering her chicks amidst the fire. I began to sing the song,

He [Jesus] wraps me tightly, He wraps me tightly, He wraps me tightly.
 He wraps me tightly, He really does wrap me tightly.
 He wraps me tightly, Satan wants to destroy me,
 He wraps me tightly, He really does wrap me tightly.

As I continued to sing, my faith strengthened and the fear subsided. Instead of shouting, "Waaaaa-hoo," I hid under the feathers of Jesus as a powerful response to this serious spiritual issue. The proverb, story, and song combined for effective discipleship.

This helped me appreciate the middle issues and concerns that Christians in the Builsa culture have to address on a regular basis. Using various arts from their culture, they are able to engage Scripture with culture for discipleship. They show us how to use the arts on a regular basis and not limit them to a liturgical setting.

Conclusion

The arts are particularly well-suited for discipleship. Through proper contextualization, various genres provide critical responses to help Christians engage the middle issues that are often the focus of discipleship. While the arts are helpful on Sunday morning for a worship experience, they are also apt for use Monday through Saturday. Whether you are caught in fear when you hear the sound of a spirit force coming your way or you need to overcome some addiction, these genres are available to help Christians engage these issues in order to remain focused on Christ.

A story is told (Moon 2017) about a young girl in an African village who longed for the day she could see hippos. She heard the tales about the big hippos who would swim up the river near her hut and wrestle each other. She wanted to see this with her own eyes. Finally, the day she longed for arrived. Somebody shouted, "The hippos are down by the river!" She moved her legs as fast as they could carry her to the river. Looking to the left and then to the right, but she did not see any hippos. Her excitement soured to disappointment. Finally,

she stepped out on a rock to get a closer look but to no avail. She lowered her head and slowly trekked home. Noticing her downcast countenance, her mom asked what happened.

“I was so excited to see the hippos that I searched up and down the river. I even stepped out on a rock to get a better view, but I could not find them,” the girl explained.

The mom replied, “Wait—there are no rocks at that spot on the river. That was the hippo! The hippo was right under your feet and you didn’t know it.”

Like this girl, people looking for better ways to promote transformative discipleship often miss the potential of the arts. The indigenous oral arts are right under our feet, embedded in the local culture. But disciple makers often do not understand their potent value for addressing middle issues. Recognizing and using these genres for a Sunday worship experience is an excellent start. For the Monday through Saturday life experience, though, these genres are right under our feet to help us engage the spirit world for healthy contextual discipleship. Why not recognize them and apply them for life-transforming discipleship?

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