Writers For Cambodia From Cambodia

Introduction

"Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man." Francis Bacon thus lauds exactitude as writing's unique contribution.

He is correct. Writing, re-writing, and re-re-writing, allow an author to hone her words till they say neither more, nor less, than other than what she intends. This is the joy and strength of the pen. A word mouthed extemporaneously may fill a moment's need, but carefully crafted composition—be it aphorism, essay, or tome—can be faceted into a diamond. Many of the world's most memorable spoken words were painfully labored over in the study before being uttered. Lengthy extemporaneous speech often wanders into fuzziness and redundancy. Editing shaves the fuzz and lops the loquacity. Writing, indeed, maketh an exact man. Arthur Hunt has recently highlighted the specificity of written vis-à-vis visual communication, and hence its appropriateness to the Christian faith.¹

Writing tends to last longer. A word well spoken may ring in the ear for a month, but a written word can counsel for generations. A book, an article, a letter can be pulled off the shelf and pondered. Wrestled over in detail, the written word can be half-nelsoned into acknowledging its nuances. These can then sink deeply into heart and mind. Writing's witness continues for decades. Abel is not the only one who "still speaks, even though he is dead." So do Paul and Isaiah and John, whose compositions nourish the human soul centuries after the men themselves passed on.

Writing naturally lends itself to broad distribution. The publication of Luther's tracts rooted his reformation, in contrast with the rapid blossoming and wilting of Hus. Written materials are a low-cost, low-tech, but effective way of conveying thought to the masses.

Unfortunately, Khmer literature and those who produce it suffered between 1975 and 1979. The blows dealt then raised welts that fester today. Cambodians in general (but with happy exceptions) neither write nor read significant literature. That can change. And for the church, it must change if she is to fulfill her mandate of teaching everything the Lord commanded.²

To help raise a new crop of Cambodian Christian writers, Training of Timothys recently sponsored two seminars. The first was taught by accomplished Khmer authors Mam Barnabas, Chhon Phan Kong, Uon Seila, and Arun Sok Nhep. Two weeks later, a select group of invitees studied four more days under Mr. Wightman Weese from Tyndale House Publishers. At the conclusion participants were asked to write short parables.

What follows are reflections on the second writers' seminar by Mr. Weese, and then three of the student parables selected for publication in Honeycomb. We hope that others will catch the vision of training a new generation of Cambodian Christian authors to help ground the church with words that are incisive, lasting, and widely read.

—Editor

²Matt 28:20.
Seminar Reflections

Wightman Weese

Four days was not a long time to spend with a group of fifteen men and women—dedicated people who already sense a deep need of developing literature for the church in Cambodia. But those four days, September 1–4, 2003, convinced me that all the desire and commitment needed to make a vital contribution was highly visible in this gathering.

My willingness to come to Cambodia, as a writer and editor, and with some publishing experience both in magazine and book publishing, was based on several assumptions.

First, I assumed that all writing—no matter in what language—had structures close enough in form to be workable, and that such structures could be taught through translation and language interpreting. I wasn’t really sure it was true, but the week’s experience brought some new insights into the nature of the scriptures, its literary forms, and language itself.

Evangelical Christianity is based on the belief that the original biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and koinē Greek were God-ordained. God, who brought about the consequences of the Tower of Babel in the confusion of languages, planned that the Word of God that would come down to all humankind through these
three languages would adequately convey sacred truth. Bible translation efforts since then have called for the best scholarship and linguistic skills to replicate this sacred truth in languages that would be understood by "every tribe and language and people and nation." 1

Even the most cursory examination of Scripture reveals a number of literary forms—extended narratives, dialogue, and a rich array of figurative language and literary devices. Accurate renditions of these forms have proven that even the colorful nuances of these forms can survive translation efforts.

I came to see in a new way while in Cambodia that these literary structures are manageable in Bible translation. So it seemed safe to assume that some basic literary forms are in fact universal. Writing forms have evolved in other parts of the world to communicate to a fast-moving society with an ever-decreasing attention span. There is no reason not to believe that the same writing forms will be needed as well in what is becoming a fast-moving culture in Cambodia.

Everyone at that gathering would agree with me, I am sure, that it won't be easy to provide the churches and Christian leaders in Cambodia with a wealth of Christian literature—commentaries, inspirational materials, education and evangelism tools to meet the needs of a growing church. As an outsider looking in, as I was during the September Writer's Seminar, I was delighted at what I saw. In spite of certain limitations on the development of writers, editors, and publishers, the vision of those gathered for the seminar, appeared in every way to be an exceptionally good beginning.

So, as an outsider looking in, I will be praying for the Cambodian church and its leaders what I believe to be the most needs are:

1. A church on its knees in prayer for unity and a spirit of Christlike humility to see you through some potential. Scripture challenges us to that kind of a teachable spirit: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." 2

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1Rev 5:9.
2Phil 2:3–4.
2. A commitment of time by the best-educated and spiritually mature people in the Cambodian church to understand the difference between what is "urgent" and what is "essential for the future." A ministry in a church that is already experiencing the blessing and nurturing truths that are coming across the pulpits to the pages of literature that will bless others also, now and in years to come.

3. A concentrated effort to restore classical language—Khmer and others—to the education system of both public and private and Christian schools. The 1611 Authorized Version of the English Bible, clumsy as its language seems to be today, provided for centuries a standard of English usage. The writings of William Shakespeare also contributed to the stability of the language. Khmer needs also some such stabilizing body of literature. Further work in developing Christian literature needs clear language standards in order to stand the test of time.

Many nations around the world are on the brink of imploding, just as Cambodia did several years ago. The example that the Cambodian church can set may provide a valuable model of how a recovering church can aid in the redevelopment of a recovering nation.

Some of us outsiders looking in are hoping, praying, and desiring not to control or manipulate, but to offer constructive help in any way we can. We are aware of the potential dangers pointed out in Uon Seila’s insightful and instructive article in the July Issue of Honeycomb. It would be wrong for anyone on the outside to try to inject alien and divisive cultural or theological ideas into the Cambodian church, especially at this critical time of recovery.

All in all, I was enlightened and encouraged by my short visit. I didn’t get to meet many people during my short stay in Phnom Penh, but the fifteen leaders whom I met through the seminar will be very much in my prayers and in my thoughts in coming days as I have opportunities to share what I learned there.

\[\text{Phil 2:3–4.}\]

Three Parables

(1) The Heart of the Father

After eating a meal one rainy Sunday evening last month, I sat down to watch the national and international news on TV. My children also sat around me. The news described some young people who had been arrested for the fearful drug addiction that affects our neighboring country. Suddenly one of my daughters turned to her brother, “Oh Bong Kha, what happened to your friend who was addicted to drugs?”

The brother answered, “You mean Rithy? He is healed.”

When I heard my children talking this way about his friends I asked my older son, “Kha, who is Rithy? What happened to him?”

My older son told me everything. “Mother, you remember. Rithy studied with me in Baktouk High School, and he used to come to our house. Rithy is the son of Uncle Brak Sambath, who has huge villa in front of Toulkok. His father is very rich; they have several cars. When he completed high school he went to study at the National
Institute of Management near Wat Phnom. Just two years ago he earned his bachelor's degree."

"After finishing college, why did he fall into drug addiction?" my other daughter asked.

My older son continued, "Life is very easy for rich children, unlike the poor who can do nothing. We are too short to reach anything. After earning his degree, Rithy asked his father to give him money to open a tourism business in Siem Reap. Because father favors him and always gives him whatever he asks, he agreed, and gave him a lot of start-up capital.

"Rithy began well as a business owner, but later he became acquainted with friends who enticed him to do many bad things for kicks. Now he was learning bad habits from a neighboring country—going places, drinking, getting girls for his business. Finally he became addicted to drugs. As a result he lost his credit as a moral and knowledgeable young man, and his company closed its doors. He had nothing.

"Later he realized that he had wasted everything that his father had given him. Not only that, he had also become addicted to drugs—something that society hates. After contemplating all this, he decided to come back to Phnom Penh to apologize to his father, even though he was scared that his father would punish him severely.

"When he arrived home he was so afraid he almost could not go inside. But when his father saw how very skinny he was, he felt great pity for him. When Rithy saw his father, he knelt down and begged his father's forgiveness, but his father lifted him up and called all his brothers and sisters to come and welcome him home. Then he found a good doctor to treat him until he got better. This year his father sent him to another school to get his doctor's degree."

At that time my youngest son said, "Rithy's father is very kind; he loves his son so much."

All the words that my son says remind me of the prodigal son in the Bible. Jesus told this parable to the Pharisees to teach them about God's compassion for us. We as his children do many wrong things against him, but our Heavenly Father forgives all our sin when we turn back to him.
This story also reflects to us the problems of present society, and reminds us to carefully teach our young people not to fall into those bad things. Don’t conform to this world. Watch out for the influence of the culture of our neighboring country that may lead us to fall into this destruction. We all know that young people are like young bamboo. If they don’t value their lives as belonging to God, they may end up practicing the immorality that society hates. Our young people must not become like salt without taste. Therefore they must think carefully about making friends, listening carefully, controlling themselves, not loving money, and living with integrity. As good citizens we must unite together to build up our society to be pure and peaceful.
Two Americans, Dale and Rick, went for a stroll in a town in Siem Reap province. While walking Dale touched his pocket—and a shock ran through his body when he realized that his passport and the $1,000 that had been there were gone. Dale and Rick grew very nervous, and searched everywhere on that day in 1999.

While he was searching, a Japanese man approached him. “What is your name?” he inquired. Because Dale was so worried he snapped back, “What is your name?” Then he continued his search.

After a while the same fellow approached Dale again. “What is your name?” he repeated. “What is your name?” Dale again retorted. Still later the Japanese man came to him one more time with the same question. Dale started to grow curious, and this time answered in a polite manner, “My name is Dale.”

“What is your family name?”
“My family name is Jones.”

“What are you looking for?” the stranger asked. Then he took out a picture and asked, “Is this yours?”
With surprise he took the picture in his hand. “Yes, this is mine!” he replied.

That Japanese man then returned the more than $1,000 and passport that had fallen from Dale’s pocket. Dale was very happy ... but at the same time sorry about his bad attitude and behavior toward the Japanese man. He should not have used impolite words with him. Dale apologized and thanked the man for finding and returning what had fallen from his pocket.

This Japanese person was a faithful man. Do we have people like him in the Christian community? How many of our leaders have this kind of commitment to keep themselves pure by fearing God? Jesus said, “If you love me, you have to obey my commandments. You have to carry your cross everyday.” God did not create people to act any way they want, but rather to obey and worship Him only. True worship takes place not just inside the church once a week, but should be our activity every minute in praise of His name. If you do not do good to people, how can you say that you are glorifying God?

We must not forget to do good, although we remember that good works do not save us. We received salvation to do good works, and to do them with gladness of heart. This Japanese man did good with gladness. Most people would not be willing to give up something valuable they found and could keep, but this Japanese man wanted to keep purity of heart as the pattern of his life.

People often do not practice good because we have been born into a sinful world. Sin leads us to do bad things. Good works cannot happen unless there is a motivating strength inside, and that strength is love.

The Son of God came to this world not because somebody forced him to come; he came voluntarily out of obedience to his Father and love for humanity. Because of love he sacrificed his life for our sake. To do good honors him and shows that the love we have toward him is not enough. Faithfulness requires total commitment to him.

The Japanese man wanted to return the passport and money even though the owner at first treated him rudely and impolitely.

To fulfill his plan Jesus confronted the Pharisees and the teachers of the law although they mocked and crucified him.
Commitment is the strong foundation for a leader and also is the underlying strategy that leads to success in every endeavor.

Finally, Jesus is giving you time to return to him. Let him give you strength and mold your life so you may become like a diamond that shines brightly to the lost world. Whatever situation you are in, God still needs you. You are an example to other people by your good work and loyalty to what you are doing. One day you will meet Jesus and He will say, “You have been a good, faithful servant; please come and be happy with me” (Matt. 25:21–22).
Talking about Cambodia reminds us of the famous Angkor Temple, which draws many people to visit it at least once in their lifetime. But we also remember the dark age of the Pol Pot regime when millions of Cambodian lives were lost. There is no exact answer to the questions of what happened to all the people then.

I also am one of those who endured that horrible time. On April 17, 1975 all who lived in the city were forced by black-shirted solders to leave for the various provinces of Cambodia. My family was among them. Along the way were crowds of people. My father and family were unsure of where to go; we just followed the crowds. At that time I was only six years old. My father said, “Come, I’ll carry you,” and he carried me and later put me on his back. When I was on his back, I felt very happy and warm. Nothing could compare with this peace. While we are walking along the way I frequently asked my father, “Father, father, are you weary?” He answered, “No.” I asked him many times about what I was seeing but didn’t understand. Often time we laughed together and were very happy.
This reminds me of the love between a father and his son. God is not different—he loves us as his children, he protects us, he carries us away from the trouble that arises from sin. His love means that he never complains, but continually protects us in all circumstances because he loves us as his children. The Bible says, “... in the wilderness ... you saw how Yahweh your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place” (Deut 1:31).

- Whenever son face a problem, the father always protects him.
- Protection is love.
- In his love God sacrifices everything to protect and care for us.
Conclusion

Perhaps the preceding has prompted you to write an article for *Honeycomb*. If so, we offer, with tongue in cheek, the following advice to our English authors:

**Advice to Our Contributors**

**“How to Write Good”**

1. Avoid run on sentences they are hard to read.
2. About sentence fragments.
3. It behooves us to avoid archaisms.
4. Also avoid awkward or affected alliteration.
5. Don’t use no double negatives.
6. If I’ve told you once I’ve told you a million times: don’t exaggerate.
7. Avoid commas, that aren’t necessary.
8. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
9. Likewise, pronouns have to agree with its referents.
10. Use of the passive voice should be avoided.
11. Never use a long word when a miniscule one will do.
12. Don’t verb nouns.
13. Kill all exclamation marks!!!!!!!
14. When dangling, don’t use participles.
15. Who needs rhetorical questions?
17. Proofread carefully to sure you didn’t any words out.
18. Eschew obsfuscation, and employ the vernacular.
19. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
20. Avoid ampersands & abbrevs., etc.
21. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are unnecessary.
22. Remember to never split an infinitive.
23. Contractions aren’t necessary.
24. Foreign words and phrases are not à propos.
25. One should never generalize.
27. Be more or less specific.
29. Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
30. Beware of irregular verbs that have crepe into our language.
31. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague (they’re old hat).
ប្រឌិតវិទ្យាបច្ចេះការនៃការកាត់ប្រទានតូច៖

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