

“Worship from the Nations”: A Survey and Preliminary Analysis of the Ethnodoxology Movement

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As the world grows smaller through advancements in technology, communication, and transportation, Christians face important questions regarding the appropriate relationship between ministry and culture. Christian missionaries are increasingly forced to wrestle with cultural dilemmas, particularly in the area of worship. Older models imposed traditional western forms on worship in foreign contexts, yet many have recently questioned this practice as ignoring a culture’s own indigenous styles and forms. One growing movement that seeks to answer these questions by encouraging full integration of Christian worship with the indigenous target culture is ethnodoxology. Building upon developments in missiology over more than forty years, the ethnodoxology movement has begun to impact significantly the conversation about and the practice of music and worship in missions, and of the missions endeavor in general.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the history and emphases of the ethnodoxology movement, assessing its strengths and offering proposals for further study. The paper begins with a brief summary of the historical developments that were antecedents to this new emphasis. It continues by synthesizing the movement’s primary arguments. It concludes by offering a preliminary assessment of its strengths and potential areas of weakness.

History

The term “ethnodoxology” was coined by David Hall in 1997—a combination of the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning “peoples,” and “doxology,” meaning “praise”—as a way to describe a new set of principles that encourages the use of indigenous cultural forms in worship. Hall describes his definition of the term:

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I define ethnodoxology as “the study of the worship of God among diverse cultures” or, more precisely, “the theological and practical study of how and why people of diverse cultures praise and glorify the true and living God as revealed in the Bible.”²

Today, the movement finds its expression primarily through the work of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE), which was founded in 2003, but its roots appear much earlier in several other missions movements.

Movements

Wycliffe, SIL, GIAL. The developments that led to the beginnings of ICE can be traced first to “Camp Wycliffe,” a linguistic training school founded by William Cameron Townsend (1896–1982) in 1934.³ By 1942, Camp Wycliffe spawned two organizations, Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL complement one another as Wycliffe seeks “to translate Scripture, train field personnel and promote interest in translation,”⁴ and SIL is a Christian non-profit organization with the purpose to serve “language communities worldwide as they build capacity for sustainable language development.”⁵ In 1998, the SIL board of directors approved the formation of an independent graduate school—the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics (GIAL)—in Dallas, Texas, as an accredited institution, which eventually gave birth to a Master of Arts degree in World Arts, a program that trains cross-cultural workers in many of the principles of ethnodoxology. Brian Schrag and Robin Harris, who are both currently on the board of ICE, are among the World Arts faculty at GIAL.

Heart Sounds International. Separate from the Wycliffe stream, but also a contributor to the start of ICE, is Heart Sounds International (HSI), founded by Frank Fortunato in 1997 as a division of Operation Mobilisation (OM). The purpose of HSI is to establish a “partnership with local churches, ministries, and mission organizations to help fulfill the Great Commission and to see spiritual maturity developed in believers through their wor-

² ICE, “Ethnodoxology,” *International Council of Ethnodoxologists*, accessed April 14, 2014, <http://www.worldofworship.org/Ethnodoxology.php>. At the first Global Consultation on Music and Missions conference in 2003, Hall indicated that he had worked with Paul Neeley to develop a preliminary definition of “ethnodoxology,” which they explained as the “study of how and why people of diverse cultures worship the God of the Bible” (Dave Hall, “Ethnodoxology 101 (What I Wish I’d Known Before I Got Off the Plane)” [Workshop presented at the Global Consultation on Music and Missions, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, September 2003], audio cassette).

³ John Wycliffe, the first person to translate the Bible into English, was the inspiration for the name of the camp.

⁴ Wycliffe Bible Translators, “About Us,” *Wycliffe*, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.wycliffe.org/About/OurHistory.aspx>.

⁵ SIL International, “About SIL,” *SIL International*, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.sil.org/about>.

ship and arts expressions.”⁶ HSI’s mission relates to ICE as it seeks to promote “worship predominantly in the non-western world by providing services in audio and video production, training and teaching, and songwriting workshops.”⁷ In other words, the work of HSI is consistent with ICE’s goal to help people groups worship God from the heart. Harris has also served with this organization.

Worship and Arts Network (AD2000 and Beyond Movement). Another organization that played a role in influencing ICE was the AD2000 and Beyond Movement, founded at the Global Consultation on World Evangelism (GCOWE) in 1989 with a “vision of a church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000.”⁸ The AD2000 and Beyond Movement was a global evangelical network that sought “to encourage cooperation in establishing a church within every people group and the gospel for every person.” In 1997, AD2000 and Beyond launched the Worship and Arts Network as a track “to inspire and affirm musicians and artists throughout the world to cooperate in seeing a worshipping church which is biblically faithful and culturally relevant for every people.”⁹ Although the AD2000 and Beyond Movement “was phased out” at the end of 2000,¹⁰ those involved with the Worship and Arts Network decided to continue their work, which led to the formation of the Global Consultation on Music and Missions (GCoMM).

Global Consultation on Music and Missions (GCoMM).¹¹ The initial idea for GCoMM emerged when Frank Fortunato, coordinator of the Worship and Arts Network, invited a group of exhibitors at Urbana 2000 with an interest in the arts to an informal discussion over breakfast. Those joining Fortunato included Roberta King, Ron Man, Paul Neeley, and George McDow. The result of the meeting was an agreement to create a conference focused on missions, music, and the arts. The next year, McDow met with Thomas Avery, who was then the International Ethnomusicology Coordinator for Wycliffe, and Stan Moore, a former music missionary who was then the church music chair at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), to discuss the possibility of such a conference.¹²

⁶ Heart Sounds International, “Who We Are,” *Heart Sounds International*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://heart-sounds.org/whoweare>.

⁷ Heart Sounds International, “Main Page,” *Heart Sounds International*, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.heart-sounds.org>.

⁸ Luis Bush, “A Brief Historical Overview of the AD2000 & Beyond Movement and Joshua Project 2000,” *AD2000 Conferences*, 1996, <http://www.ad2000.org/histover.htm>.

⁹ Mission Frontiers Staff, “The Worship and Arts Resource Network Helping the AD2000 Movement: Present Worshipers to the Lord from Every People,” *Mission Frontiers* 18, no. 5–8 (August 1996), <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-worship-and-arts-resource-network-helping-the-ad2000-movement>.

¹⁰ GCoMM, “A Brief History of the Global Consultation on Music and Missions,” *Global Consultation on Music and Missions*, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.gcommhome.org/history.htm>.

¹¹ GCoMM met subsequently in 2006 (St. Paul, Minnesota) and 2010 (Singapore), and will meet in 2015 (Chiang Mai, Thailand).

¹² GCoMM, “A Brief History of the Global Consultation on Music and Missions.”

They agreed that SWBTS, with the support of Wycliffe, could host the conference; thus the first GCoMM took place at SWBTS on September 15–18, 2003. During the conference, the International Council of Ethnodoxologists officially launched.

Mission Frontiers. The forming of ICE and other ministries can also be linked to a unique edition of *Mission Frontiers* magazine, as Harris explains:

One of the exciting things about the history of this movement [ICE] is how connected it is to *Mission Frontiers* magazine. The 1996 July/August edition had a whole spread on worship—on having the focus of mission being worship. Many of us in this movement read that issue. Those articles were so influential and really launched us.¹³

International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE). The purpose of ICE is “to encourage and equip Christ-followers in every culture to express their faith through their own heart music and other arts.”¹⁴ Currently, ICE offers a certification program with several levels—Arts Worker, Arts Specialist, or Arts Training Specialist—equipping people to serve in the field of ethnodoxology in over 70 nations and on six continents.¹⁵ The current board members of ICE are Robin Harris (President), Frank Fortunato, Jean Ngoya Kidula, James Krabill, and Brian Schrag.

Key Figures

Several key individuals who have been influential in working with the aforementioned movements deserve specific mention.

Frank Fortunato, Vice President of ICE, is one of the earliest influences on the ethnodoxology movement. Fortunato coordinated the Worship and Arts Network of AD2000, co-founded HSI, and currently directs the Global Renewal of Worship Center located at the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies. Fortunato’s publications include *All the World Is Singing: Glorifying God through the Worship Music of the Nations*,¹⁶ which he co-authored with Paul Neeley and Carol Brinneman.

David Hall played a significant role in the ethnodoxology movement as one who helped coin the term “ethnodoxology,” which “was birthed from the labor pains of many dear friends who banded together a rag-tag collection of artist-musician-theologian-missionaries from many parts of the globe through the Worship and Arts Track of the

¹³ Mission Frontiers Staff, “Enter the Conversation from Urbana ’12: Empowering Every Tribe and Tongue to Worship Jesus,” *Mission Frontiers*, March 2013.

¹⁴ ICE, “Vision Statement of ICE,” *International Council of Ethnodoxologists*, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.worldofworship.org/vision.php>.

¹⁵ ICE, “ICE Association Benefits,” *International Council of Ethnodoxologists*, accessed April 29, 2014, http://www.worldofworship.org/Associations/Association_Benefits.php.

¹⁶ *All the World Is Singing: Glorifying God through the Worship Music of the Nations* (Tyrone, GA: Authentic, 2006).

AD2000 Movement.”¹⁷ Hall served as a Worship and Missions Pastor at Harvest Bible Chapel in Rolling Meadows, Illinois, from 1989 to 1995. Additionally, he was part of Pioneers from 1995 to 2008 as an International Worship Leader & Cross-Cultural Worship/Arts Trainer. Pioneers launched “Worship from the Nations,” with Hall as the Founder and Director of Worship from 2000 to 2007.

James Krabill serves on the ICE board of trustees and is the general editor of *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*,¹⁸ likely the most influential recent expression of ethnodoxology philosophy and practice. With approximately twenty years of living internationally in France, England, and West Africa, Krabill believes that “ethnodoxology at its best does serious research into the music and art forms within a given culture and then builds on them to explore how they might be used in the life, worship and mission of the local church.” He believes that his “training has been more shaped by missiologists-interested-in-the-arts” than by ethnomusicologists, revealing “that there is an important link between the emerging discipline of ethnodoxology and what [he] would call ‘incarnational missiology.’”¹⁹

Roberta King was a charter member of ICE and currently serves on the advisory council and the ICE certification committees. King served for more than twenty years as a missionary in Nairobi, Kenya, teaching at Daystar University and working with WorldVenture mission society to assist African church leaders “to develop appropriate songs for communicating the gospel in over 80 different languages.”²⁰ She is currently Associate Professor of Communication and Ethnomusicology in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary. King is a contributor to the *Ethnodoxology Handbook* and numerous journals and magazines. She has stated that “her passion is to communicate Christ through song and the arts of a culture in ways that lead to her ultimate missional goal: to release God’s people, from all nations, to worship Jesus Christ.”²¹

Thomas Avery (1942–2008) was among the founders of GCoMM. Avery studied under ethnomusicologist Vida Chenoweth while earning his PhD in ethnomusicology at Indiana University.²² Chenoweth later inspired him to develop computer programs based on the melodic analysis method she devised.²³ He was SIL’s first international ethnomusicology coordinator and a member of the Society for Ethnomusicology, GCoMM, and ICE. Avery

¹⁷ Hall, “Greatest Influencers: John Piper.”

¹⁸ James Krabill et al., eds., *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013).

¹⁹ James Krabill, Email message to Da Jeong Choi, March 20, 2014.

²⁰ “Faculty Profile: Roberta R. King,” *Fuller Theological Seminary*, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.fuller.edu/faculty/rking/>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Brian Schrag, Email message to Lori Danielson, March 29, 2014.

²³ James Krabill, Email message to Da Jeong Choi, April 2, 2014.

is credited on the ICE website as having “helped to promote missions in general and ‘heart music worship’ in particular,” having “popularized that phrase in missions.”²⁴ Moreover, he was a co-founder of the Wycliffe World Music Band, now called IziBongo,²⁵ which widely performs global Christian music.

Paul Neeley is a past President of ICE and co-founder of the Wycliffe World Music Band and has started other multicultural bands in the Dallas area.²⁶ He worked for twelve years with Wycliffe Bible Translators in West Africa from 1986 to 1998 and taught courses in ethnomusicology and missions at Dallas Baptist University.²⁷ He currently teaches multicultural worship at the Robert Webber Institute for Worship Studies. Neeley co-edited with Brian Schrag *All the World Will Worship: Helps for Developing Indigenous Hymns*,²⁸ a practical guide to ethnodoxology on the mission field, and co-authored with Frank Fortunato and Carol Brinneman *All the World Is Singing*.

Robin Harris is the current President of ICE and Assistant Professor and director of the Center for Excellence in World Arts at GIAL. Harris is the daughter of missionaries and served along with her husband in Alaska, Canada, and finally Siberia, where she worked with the Sakha people. During her time in Siberia Harris began to recognize her need for further education in ethnomusicology and cross-cultural ministry, leading her to pursue several degrees in ethnomusicology. Roberta King introduced Harris to Jean Kidula, who eventually became Harris’s PhD advisor at the University of Georgia.²⁹

Brian Schrag is Vice President of Education and Training for ICE, the International Coordinator for Ethnomusicology and the Arts for SIL, and an adjunct professor and the founder of the Center for Excellence in World Arts at GIAL. In 2006, Schrag “began to develop a core of World Arts courses for GIAL, expanding the ethnomusicology focus to include other arts such as dance, visual arts, and oral verbal arts.”³⁰ Schrag and his colleagues have built their program on the foundation that was laid by “pioneers such as Vida Chenoweth [with whom Schrag studied at Wheaton College]³¹ and Tom Avery, who began apply-

²⁴ Brian Schrag and Paul Neeley, “Tribute to Dr. Tom Avery,” *Tribute to Dr. Tom Avery*, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.worldofworship.org/tomavery/index.php>.

²⁵ “IziBongo,” accessed April 29, 2014, <http://ethnodoxology.org/izibongo/index.htm>.

²⁶ “Paul & Linda Neeley,” *IziBongo*, accessed April 29, 2014, <http://www.ethnodoxology.org/izibongo/bios.htm#Paul&Linda>.

²⁷ “Paul Neeley - Music Faculty,” *DBU Music Faculty Bio - Paul Neeley*, accessed April 29, 2014, http://www3.dbu.edu/fine_arts/Faculty/MusicFaculty-PaulNeeley.asp.

²⁸ Brian Schrag and Paul Neeley, eds., *All the World Will Worship: Helps for Developing Indigenous Hymns* (Duncanville, TX: EthnoDoxology/ACT Publications, 2005).

²⁹ Robin Harris, Email message to Da Jeong Choi, March 21, 2014.

³⁰ “World Arts Program,” *GIAL Insider*, July 2013, <http://www.gial.edu/news-views/insider>.

³¹ Schrag, Email message to Lori Danielson, March 29, 2014.

ing insights and methods from ethnomusicology—the study of music in culture—to the Bible translation movement beginning in the 1960s.”³² Schrag worked with SIL as a linguist and ethnomusicologist in the Democratic Republic of Congo (1992–1998) and as an ethnomusicology consultant in Cameroon (2002–2006).

Influences

While the field of ethnodoxology finds its direct roots in these relatively recent movements and key individuals, some of its emphases developed earlier, and continue to find support today, in the work of missiologists, music missionaries, ethnomusicologists, and theologians.

Missiologists. Although not necessarily musically trained, missiologists have impacted the strategies used for employing music in native contexts. Their work has shaped the way that ethnodoxologists formulate their understanding of what missions is and the role that music plays. Two missiologists in particular have had a significant impact on the development of the ethnodoxology movement.

Paul G. Hiebert (1932–2007) served on the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) with influential missiologist David Hesselgrave³³ and, prior to that appointment, on the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary. Hiebert’s direct connection to the ethnodoxology movement is through Roberta King, on whose doctoral committee he served. Born to Mennonite Brethren missionaries in India, Hiebert spent much of his career researching and writing about that region. During his thirty years of service at Fuller and TEDS, Hiebert taught his students to contextualize their message according to the preexisting cultural systems.³⁴

Charles H. Kraft served on the faculty of Fuller with Hiebert and was Roberta King’s mentor during her doctoral studies.³⁵ Kraft’s influence on the subject of contextualization cannot be overstated,³⁶ some of which has been quite controversial, particularly his in-

³² “World Arts Program.”

³³ Hesselgrave has no direct connection to the ethnodoxology movement, but his prolific writing in the area of missiology and cultural contextualization may serve as something of a philosophical framework for the ethnodoxology movement. See David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2003).

³⁴ See, for example, Paul G. Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” *Missiology* 12, no. 3 (July 1, 1984): 287–96.

³⁵ Roberta Rose King, “Pathways in Christian Music Communication: The Case of the Senufo of Côte d’Ivoire” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989).

³⁶ Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 59. Especially influential was Kraft’s *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

volvement with the so-called “insider movement.”³⁷ Kraft teaches that “dynamic-equivalence transculturation” goes beyond merely contextualizing cultural forms but also includes content as well; thus for Kraft each culture will produce its own distinctive theology as well as cultural and ethical norms. Although some of Kraft’s ideas were influential in the early 1990s, much of his more recent philosophy is not accepted by a broad range of ethnodoxologists today.

Music Missions. GCoMM traces its history in part to the groundwork laid in the mid-twentieth century by music missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and especially through the influence of Southwestern Seminary. In April 1951, the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC appointed its first music missionaries, Don and Vi Orr, graduates of Southwestern. A seminary piano professor, though, would most significantly impact the movement.

T. W. Hunt (1929-2014) developed an interest in music missions while serving on the faculty of SWBTS, where he became the teacher of a generation of music missionaries. His teaching on music in missions culminated in his influential *Music in Missions: Discipling through Music*,³⁸ a book that began to articulate many of the core principles at the heart of what would become known as the ethnodoxology movement.

Stan Moore taught on the faculty of SWBTS from 1987 to 2003 following his service as a music missionary in Brazil under appointment from the Foreign Mission Board from 1978 to 1987. A former student of T. W. Hunt, Moore co-founded and directed the first GCoMM in 2003 on the SWBTS campus, the meeting during which ICE was launched, and has become involved in the planning for subsequent GCoMMs. Since 2003, he has been a Senior Fellow and Professor of Church Music and Worship at B. H. Carroll Theological Institute.

Ethnomusicologists. An older discipline that has particularly influenced the field of ethnodoxology is ethnomusicology. The field of ethnomusicology emerged in the 1950s out of the comparative musicology studies of the late nineteenth century. Heavily influenced by anthropological theories and research techniques, ethnomusicology promotes the study of music from within various and diverse cultures.³⁹ The principles of ethnomusicology spread to the field of ethnodoxology through several influential figures, including, beyond Tom Avery and Brian Schrag, Vida Chenoweth and more recently Jean Kidula.

Vida Chenoweth became a Wycliffe Bible translator in 1965 with the Usarufa people in New Guinea. Using her musical background, she became a world-renowned ethnomusicologist as she studied Usarufa music and developed a theoretical system that enabled her to write Christian songs for the Usarufa believers in their own musical style. Chenoweth “believed in the importance of finding the right musical expression to transmit and rein-

³⁷ See Charles H. Kraft, “Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society,” in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, ed. Don M. McCurry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1979), 114–22.

³⁸ *Music in Missions: Discipling through Music* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987).

³⁹ Helen Myers, ed., *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992); see also Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), and Ruth Stone, *Theory for Ethnomusicology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2007).

force the villagers’ newfound Christian beliefs” because “it would have more impact and be more readily accepted.”⁴⁰ Chenoweth wrote music for the people to use in worship; she also taught some of them to compose their own music, so there would be a growing repertoire of indigenous Christian music.⁴¹ In 1975, Chenoweth returned to the United States to teach at Wheaton College and develop an ethnomusicology major within the Conservatory of Music in cooperation with Wycliffe and SIL. Among the more than 50 students that studied with her were Tom Avery and Brian Schrag.

Jean Ngoya Kidula, a native of Kenya, has been teaching ethnomusicology at the University of Georgia since 1998, where she served as Robin Harris’s doctoral advisor. She is a contributor to the *Ethnodoxology Handbook* and is co-author with Roberta King, Thomas Oduro, and James Krabill of *Music in the Life of the African Church*.⁴² Her most recent publication is *Music in Kenyan Christianity: Logooli Religious Song* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

Theologians. At least two theologians with burdens for missions have influenced ethnodoxology in significant ways.

John Piper has impacted the movement through his writings on worship and missions. For example, an excerpt from his 1993 *Let the Nations be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*,⁴³ which addresses the interdependent relationship of worship and missions, appeared in the May–August 1996 issue of *Mission Frontiers*, and other excerpts from his writings were included in the *Ethnodoxology Handbook*. Hall credits Piper for

influen[ing] a young worship and missions pastor to pursue the dream of seeing people from every tribe and nation worship God in a way that employs their cultural expressions to give [God] glory in a way that is truly beautiful, and unique among the earth’s peoples while being grounded in the eternal truths of his Word.⁴⁴

At GCoMM 2003, Piper was invited to give the keynote address in which he spoke extensively on the subject of music and missions.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Laura LeAnn Phillips, “Vida Chenoweth and Her Contributions to Marimba Performance, Linguistics, and Ethnomusicology” (D.M.A. diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2000), 103–4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴² Roberta King et al., *Music in the Life of the African Church* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008).

⁴³ *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993).

⁴⁴ Hall, “Greatest Influencers: John Piper.”

⁴⁵ The John Piper sermon page on the ICE website (<http://www.worldofworship.org/Articles/JohnPiper.php>) provides all these addresses, and they are archived in video format in the Roberts Library at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Ron Man is a worship theologian active in ICE and was a contributor to the *Ethnodoxology Handbook*. Man served as a pastor in Vienna (1983–1988), as a worship pastor in Memphis, Tennessee (1988–2000), and in Germany (2000–2003) as a missionary with Greater Europe Mission. While in Germany, Man started Worship Resources International (WRI), which focuses on teaching the biblical foundations of worship as well as developing resources and networks of worship leaders and teachers. Since 2009 Man is serving again as a worship pastor in Memphis, and he also continues to minister worldwide through WRI.⁴⁶

Other Influences

There have been other streams of influence on ICE and those involved with it. One of the earliest formal expressions of the necessity of cultural contextualization in worship was the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture, which was created by the Lutheran World Federation's Study Team in January 1996. The statement presents four significant principles on the relationship between worship and culture: (1) worship as *transcultural*, (2) worship as *contextual*, (3) worship as *counter cultural*, and (4) worship as *cross-cultural*.⁴⁷ The Nairobi Statement is used in ethnodoxology curricula and by many ICE members in their teaching.⁴⁸

Another group that advocates ethnodoxology principles is the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship,⁴⁹ including its director, John D. Witvliet. Witvliet has written extensively on the subject, was a contributor to the *Ethnodoxology Handbook*, and frequently teaches among ethnodoxologists. Several books in the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies series address issues related to ethnodoxology, including *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices*, edited by Charles E. Farhadian.⁵⁰ Among the contributors to this volume are Witvliet and C. Michael Hawn, another contributor to the *Ethnodoxology Handbook* and an influential voice in the global worship movement. Hawn is now University Distinguished Professor of Church Music in the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, where he has taught since 1992.

⁴⁶ "About the Director," *Worship Resources International*, 2014, <http://www.worr.org/about-the-director>.

⁴⁷ Lutheran World Federation, "The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture," Document, *The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture* (1996), <https://app.box.com/s/22dcrg4csocmkv7ggl3>.

⁴⁸ Robin Harris, Email message to Lori Danielson, April 22, 2014.

⁴⁹ <http://worship.calvin.edu>.

⁵⁰ *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

Primary Tenets of Ethnodoxology

The ethnodoxology movement is certainly not monolithic. However, proponents of ethnodoxology share core understandings that inform their philosophy and practice. The following section synthesizes the philosophical, theological, and biblical emphases of ethnodoxologists, which are rooted in two primary understandings concerning the nature of music and the nature of worship. It is important to note that the following principles continue to develop through dialogue among the figures mentioned above, and therefore they are not necessarily articulated the same way by all involved in the movement.

The Nature of Art

Music and other arts are common to people throughout history and around the world. The ethnodoxology movement recognizes the universal presence of art, but asserts that meaning in art is not universally understood. According to Harris, “Music may be a universal phenomenon, found in virtually every culture around the world. But it is definitely not a universal language!”⁵¹ This they believe to be God-ordained; as Avery states, “The Lord did his work well at Babel and confused not only tongues, but human cultures and music as well.”⁵²

Rather, each individual people group nurtures its own “heart language,” the “musical system(s) that a person learns as a child or youth and that most fully expresses his or her emotions.”⁵³ According to Avery, heart music may be “even experienced prenatally. A musical style associated with the warmth and safety of a mother’s womb must have profound emotional associations with that most secure period of a person’s life.”⁵⁴ Difficulty arises in the church when multiple heart languages are present. Rather than fight over music, the church must recognize that

cultural heart languages are a gift from God to us and a gift that we should share with each other. The process of learning to honor and understand the various heart languages of our brothers and sisters with whom we are in Christian community is a key element of spiritual formation that can’t be easily substituted.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Robin P. Harris, “The Great Misconception: Why Music Is Not a Universal Language,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 89.

⁵² Tom Avery, “Music of the Heart: The Power of Indigenous Worship in Reaching Unreached People with the Gospel,” *Mission Frontiers* 18, no. 5–8 (August 1996).

⁵³ Schrag and Neeley, *All the World Will Worship*, 98.

⁵⁴ Avery, “Music of the Heart.”

⁵⁵ David M. Bailey, “Honoring Diverse Heart Language in a Christian Community,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 443.

This is as true of all arts as it is with music. Because a person is conditioned to a heart language, perhaps even before birth, some ethnodoxologists suggest that heart language is not likely to change; it will remain the same for life regardless of change of location or experience. One's heart language is "rich in nuance, humor, gesture, and inflection. It's the words you naturally dream in."⁵⁶ Thus a people group is ultimately unable to express its range of affections without the use of indigenous art forms.

This is why music is not a universal language according to ethnodoxologists; in fact, it is impossible for someone from outside a culture to assign musical meaning. Harris suggests, "Our ability to decode the sounds we hear is culturally conditioned. And it is quite possible for us to misinterpret musical and other artistic signs because they have attached meanings which we don't understand."⁵⁷ Furthermore, Schrag insists that the "musical integrity" of a culture's music can only be "determined by musical experts in local culture."⁵⁸ One may need to focus even more narrowly within a given culture to determine meaning, because "confusion about the meanings of music and other artistic forms is not limited to cross-cultural misunderstandings. It happens even with different contextual microgroupings of a society or culture."⁵⁹ Members of a culture, then, may not necessarily be equipped to interpret musical meaning even within their culture. "The only way to know, therefore, what a musical or artistic form means is to *ask*"—that is, do research in the origin culture.⁶⁰

The Nature of Worship

The second key understanding that influences many ethnodoxologists is their understanding of the nature of worship. Ethnodoxologists base their philosophy of earthly worship on the biblical principle that worship on earth should reflect the worship of heaven. Thus their understanding of the relationship of heavenly worship to human culture is a key ingredient in their philosophy and practice.

Likely the most commonly used Bible passage to describe heavenly worship comes from Revelation 7:9–10:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out

⁵⁶ Joan Huyser-Honig, "Ethnodoxology: Calling All Peoples to Worship in Their Heart Language," *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship*, February 10, 2009, <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/ethnodoxology-calling-all-peoples-to-worship-in-their-heart-language/>.

⁵⁷ Harris, "The Great Misconception," 83.

⁵⁸ Schrag and Neeley, *All the World Will Worship*, 111.

⁵⁹ Harris, "The Great Misconception," 84.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Emphasis original.

with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”⁶¹

Some ethnodoxologists interpret John’s description of “every nation, from all tribes and people and languages” worshipping God as necessarily including cultural expressions, hence multicultural worship in heaven. They also point to God’s prescription for Old Testament worship to support their view. In Exodus 25:8–9, God described to Moses the pattern for his sanctuary: “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.” God gave very specific instructions for corporate worship, and Hebrews 8:1–2, 5 elaborates on the reason for this precision:

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. . . . [The priests] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”

In other words, the tabernacle the Israelites built was “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things,” so earthly worship should mirror heavenly worship. Hence, the thinking goes, the multicultural nature of heavenly worship should be reflected in worship on earth. Jaewoo Kim explains, “biblical worship in heaven will be like a global feast with a potluck dinner where every people group contributes its national dish and shares it with everyone.”⁶²

Kim’s analogy of heavenly worship sheds light on how heavenly worship should encourage multicultural worship on earth. Farhadian explains,

One advantage of becoming multicultural worshipers is that we can get a glimpse of the specter of heavenly worship, where all tribes and languages will be assembled before God, and where we really will have a sense of the fullness of Christ.⁶³

The Philosophy of Ethnodoxology

The two understandings articulated above—namely, that music is not a universal language and that earthly worship should reflect the multicultural worship of heaven—converge in a two-pronged philosophy of ethnodoxology. First, ethnodoxology insists that each people group should be enabled to worship using its own indigenous art forms. Sec-

⁶¹ Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001).

⁶² Jaewoo Kim, “The Whole World Has Gone ‘Glocal,’” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 46–48.

⁶³ Farhadian, *Christian Worship Worldwide*, 15.

ond, ethnodoxologists encourage the integration of diverse cultural expressions in local worship gatherings. Both of these emphases find support in Scripture, according to ethnodoxologists, several examples of which are given below.

Psalm 117 is a call to universal adoration of God. Joan Huyser-Honig summarizes, “You might think of Psalm 117 as ethnodoxology in a nutshell. Like the psalmist, ethnodoxologists know there are as many God-given ways to worship as there are languages and cultures.”⁶⁴ The ethnodoxologist interprets the psalmist’s command to “Praise the Lord, all nations!” as an imperative to praise God within each distinct culture. It would therefore be inappropriate to hinder a people group from worshipping in their heart music by only using music from another culture.

A similar sentiment appears in Psalm 86:8–9: “There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.” Josh Davis believes that part of the believer’s responsibility is to help others experientially realize the worship of the nations on earth.⁶⁵ “It starts with a vision. Many years ago, God gave me a glimpse of nations coming together to worship him, here on earth as it is in heaven. It is a vision, birthed in the heart of God, recorded throughout scripture, and therefore worthy of energy, resources, and even my life!”⁶⁶ Davis sees this passage and others such as Matthew 24:14⁶⁷ as “further evidence of God’s heart for all peoples” and that “God’s mission, and therefore ours, will not be complete until all nations have received the testimony of the gospel.”⁶⁸

Therefore, according to some ethnodoxologists, these passages imply that people groups must be encouraged to worship with what is natural to their culture. Hall believes that God requires worship “from the inside-out, not the outside-in.”⁶⁹ He contends that this idea “goes far beyond just the individual and corporate worship expressions of the body of Christ to embrace the remotest unreached people group and their culture. Not only must worship come from within the heart of an individual, it must come from within the heart of a people.”⁷⁰ Similarly, using passages such as Isaiah 61:11,⁷¹ ethnodoxologists explain that

⁶⁴ Huyser-Honig, “Ethnodoxology.”

⁶⁵ Josh Davis, “Designing Multicultural Worship with the Missio Dei in Mind,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 57.

⁶⁶ Josh Davis, “PROSKUNEO: Bringing Nations Together in Worship,” *Unity in Christ Magazine*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://unityinchristmagazine.com/ministry/featured-ministries/proskuneeo-bringing-nations-together-in-worship/>.

⁶⁷ “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

⁶⁸ Davis, “Designing Multicultural Worship with the Missio Dei in Mind,” 58.

⁶⁹ Dave Hall, “Taking Worship to the Nations: Three Biblical Principles to Guide Us into Worship Renewal among the Nations,” *Mission Frontiers* 18, no. 5–8 (August 1996). In fact, this understanding later led Hall to change his ministry’s name from “Worship to the Nations” to “Worship from the Nations.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

the praise that “sprouts up” comes from the “indigenous praise, not some western import.”⁷² God does not intend the worship from the nations to be “planted, fed, fertilized and watered in some foreign land, then transplanted.”⁷³

The New Testament church itself faced the necessity of multicultural sensitivity since the church very quickly spread beyond just one people group. For example, Acts 15:1–35 recounts the dispute that arose in Antioch between the Jewish and Gentile believers and the ensuing council at Jerusalem. The Jewish believers insisted that the Gentiles should adopt their culture and customs. Paul and Barnabas, realizing the gravity of the issue, left for Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders. The result of the council was “to allow the Gentiles to express their culture as long as their activities were not idolatrous or immoral.”⁷⁴

Each of these passages, according to ethnodoxologists, implies the necessity of encouraging particular people groups to worship with their own local art forms. Each culture should be able to praise God using its own artistic styles as the “nations” that are represented within the Body of Christ. God is able to take all the artistic styles and use them for his honor and glory. Chenoweth states, “We must accept that the Holy Spirit can inspire and speak through vernacular music expression just as through vernacular prayer and Bible translation, or else we must deny the universality of God.”⁷⁵

Some ethnodoxologists insist that other passages, such as Philippians 2, stress the importance of creating unity through the incorporation of multiple cultural expressions in one given worship gathering. This command for unity “is not a mandate to have one dominant culture make other cultures assimilate.”⁷⁶ Rather ethnodoxologists believe that verses 3 and 4 imply the encouragement of multiple heart languages out of humility and concern for one another. This means that “whoever is a part of the decision-making process needs to take an inventory of their own cultural biases and consider these verses.”⁷⁷ In humility the leader considers the heart languages of those in his congregation and focuses worship toward Christ through the multiplicity of heart languages represented.

Likewise Ephesians 2, according to Andrew Walls, “explores the relationship between cultures in the Church.”⁷⁸ At the time of the writing of Ephesians, there were only

⁷¹ “For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.”

⁷² Hall, “Taking Worship to the Nations.”

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Bailey, “Honoring Diverse Heart Language in a Christian Community,” 444.

⁷⁵ Vida Chenoweth, “Spare Them Western Music,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 119.

⁷⁶ Bailey, “Honoring Diverse Heart Language in a Christian Community,” 445.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Andrew Walls, “The Ephesians Moment in Worldwide Worship: A Meditation on Revelation 21 and Ephesians 2,” in *Christian Worship Worldwide*, 32.

two dominant cultures to bring together into the body of Christ, and that has grown as a myriad of cultures have been reached with the gospel. Walls points out, "Each converted entity is necessary for a single-functioning body of Christ in the world. We will not reach the fullness of Christ without them."⁷⁹ The idea is that Christ needs to have all the nations or cultures represented in his body for the church to be complete. Because humanity is full of diversity, the Church must mirror that diversity, but also the "Church must be one, because Christ is one, embodying in himself all the diversity of culture-specific humanity."⁸⁰

Thus, the worship of God among the nations and the cultures of the world could be described as a multi-faceted mosaic. Believers from diverse cultures should seek to "influence" each other and "appreciate . . . the contribution of every perspective," helping us to gain in "our understanding of God."⁸¹ Hawn, for instance, prefers to use the "image of the mosaic . . . [with each piece that] has its own shape and hue, yet it fits together to form a larger whole."⁸² Kenneth L. Wallace Jr. believes that God's kingdom is a mosaic of diverse cultures, and worship should reflect all of the cultures: "Multi-ethnic worship and ministry" displays heaven on earth (Revelation 7:9) as a "mosaic of God's elect [and] will become the new norm, to the glory of God and for the sake of his kingdom."⁸³ Similarly, John Witvliet suggests that each people group representing a culture worshiping God should think of itself as "one strand of a rich tapestry."⁸⁴

Preliminary Analysis and Proposal for Further Research

The primary purpose of this paper is to survey the history and philosophy of the growing ethnodoxology movement. The remainder of the paper will briefly summarize strengths and weaknesses of the movement, providing a few issues that we believe need more careful consideration in the days ahead.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ C. Michael Hawn, "Praying Globally: Pitfalls and Possibilities of Cross-Cultural Liturgical Appropriation," in *Christian Worship Worldwide*, 211.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Kenneth L. Wallace Jr., "Mosaic Church of North Carolina: From the Ground Up," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 36.

⁸⁴ John D. Witvliet, "Afterword: Inculturation, Worship, and Dispositions for Ministry," in *Christian Worship Worldwide*, 276–77.

Strengths

The first strength of the ethnodoxology movement is its emphasis on heavenly worship as the model for earthly worship. Since God clearly articulated that earthly worship is a shadow of worship in heaven, both in the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 25:1) and the New Testament (e.g., Hebrews 9), drawing principles from the worship of heaven and applying them to worship on earth is clearly beneficial. Additionally, Hebrews 12:22–24 indicates that in Christ, Christians who worship on earth actually join with those in heaven, further strengthening the position that Christian worship should reflect that of heaven even now.

Second, the desire of ethnodoxologists that all ethnicities should have the opportunity to worship God is a worthy and lofty goal that can be supported in Scripture. Since God himself created ethnicities by confusing the languages at Babel, and since at Pentecost (Acts 2) he drew all nations together through the gospel, God desires all nations to worship him (Psalm 67:3–4; 117:1). Likewise, Jesus specifically commands, “The gospel must first be proclaimed to *all nations*” (Mark 13:11) and “Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*” (Matthew 28:19). It is against this biblical backdrop that ethnodoxologists seek to introduce people from every nation to God so they are afforded the opportunity to worship the true God on earth in preparation for complete worship in heaven.

Third, placing emphasis on vernacular worship is an important aspect of worship life since for worship in spirit and truth to take place, the worshipers must understand the elements of a service. This was an important emphasis of the Reformation, which is often lost when believers are expected to worship in languages that are completely foreign to them. This is certainly true for spoken language, and although we find some limitations in how ethnodoxologists discuss musical language (see below), recognizing the various layers of meaning in music that are restricted to specific times and civilizations is an important consideration when advocating vernacular worship.

A related strength is the desire for authenticity in worship, a value that concurs biblically with how God wants to be worshiped. For example, God insists in Malachi 2:1–2 that what matters to God in worship is not simply the actions of the worshipers but also the state of their hearts. Moreover, Hebrews 10:19–22 emphasizes that a worshiper is to draw near to God “with a true [sincere] heart in full assurance of faith.” Christians cannot draw near to God in worship with sincere hearts unless they understand what they are saying and singing.

Finally, the ethnodoxology movement has become an important voice in the call to look beyond American evangelicalism to the vast work God is doing around the globe. Ethnodoxologists are investing resources and time in people groups around the world, specifically by learning their arts, so that they may better know and interact with those peoples. This reflects the biblical prophecy that God will “cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before *all the nations*” (Isaiah 61:11).

Weaknesses

The first potential weakness with some ethnodoxologists is in their interpretation and application of biblical terms related to ethnic identity. As shown earlier, ethnodoxologists base their understanding of the nature of worship primarily on passages that indicate

the presence of all cultures in heaven. The terms they interpret to carry cultural connotations are those connected to ethnic identity, terms such as *ethnos*, *phulē*, and *laos*. Revelation 5:9, a passage ethnodoxologists often cite, uses such terms: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people from every tribe [*phulēs*] and language [*glōssēs*] and people [*laou*] and nation [*ethnous*].”

The problem with how some ethnodoxologists interpret the worship of heaven and apply it to philosophy about earthly worship is that these kinds of terms do not refer to *culture*, but rather to a group of *people* united by common ancestry and heritage.⁸⁵ These people may also share a common culture, but the people and their culture are not inherently connected so that they may be equated. Furthermore, passages like this do not even necessarily imply that all ethnic groups will maintain their ethnic identities in heaven; rather, Scripture simply emphasizes the fact that Christ will redeem people *from* every kind of people group on earth.⁸⁶ In fact, while the New Testament certainly proclaims that Christianity will spread across all ethnic boundaries, the emphasis for the Church is that, rather than asserting its multi-ethnic composition, it is actually a *new* and distinct people group:

But you are a chosen race [*genos*], a royal priesthood, a holy nation [*ethnos*], a people [*laos*] for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:9)

Thus, even if NT terms of ethnic identity were the same as culture, this does not prove that all cultural expressions and art forms are equally valid and will all be present in heaven. These passages teach that all *nations* will be in heaven; they do not teach that all *cultures* will be there. Regardless, the NT idea that more closely resembles a contemporary notion of “culture” includes terms that describe *behavior*, not ethnicity.⁸⁷ Behaviors are clearly not neutral, are to be judged whether they are good or evil, are not all appropriate for Christian worship, and will not all be present in heaven whether or not they are uniquely identified with particular ethnic groups. Therefore, using passages of Scripture that high-

⁸⁵ Cf. Ethelbert William Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament: Together with an Index of Greek Words, and Several Appendices* (London: Longmans Green, 1908), 316; D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Peter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 134; James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order, Together with Dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek Words of the Original, with References to the English Words* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁸⁶ See, for example, Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 136 (“It is fruitless to attempt a distinction between these terms as ethnic, linguistic, political, etc. The Seer is stressing the universal nature of the church and for this purpose piles up phrases for their rhetorical value.”); Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 401 (“The enumeration includes representatives of every nationality, without distinction of race, geographical location, or political persuasion.”).

⁸⁷ For a full explanation of this point, see [Scott Aniol, “Toward a Biblical Understanding of Culture,” *Artistic Theologian* 1 \(2012\): 40–56.](#)

light the multi-ethnic nature of the church and heavenly worship does not necessarily prove the acceptability for corporate worship of all cultural forms on earth.⁸⁸

This leads to a second problem, namely, the assumption that newly converted Christians will naturally worship God appropriately. Ethnodoxologists appear to assume that the fact that a particular people group has created and cultivated musical forms is inherent justification of those forms in worship once people in that group come to faith in Christ. Yet, when “culture” (including music and other arts) is understood correctly as “behavior,” potential problems with this way of thinking become clear. New Christians do not always naturally behave in ways that are good. Although they are freed from the penalty and power of sin (Rom 6:17–18), the Holy Spirit indwells them (Rom 8:9–11), and they have new desires to please God (2 Cor 5:17), they nevertheless continue to battle indwelling sin (Rom 7:15–25), and the process of sanctification is one in which they progressively learn and grow in their understanding of what kinds of behavior are biblically acceptable. These biblical realities at least raise the possibility that what cultural and musical expressions are most natural to a newly converted people may not necessarily be good and right for Christian worship. Behavior in worship, like any other kind of Christian behavior, is something that must be taught and learned (1 Tim 3:15).

A third weakness relates further to the defense by ethnodoxologists of aesthetic relativism. Key to their argument is that music (and other art) is not a universal language; if music is not a universal language, then it follows that no moral judgments could be placed on particular kinds of music. This presupposition is rooted primarily in “arguments from disagreement,” e.g., that anecdotal disagreements over what a particular song means prove that music is not a universal language. This is similar to arguments used by music formalists in the mid-nineteenth century beginning with Eduard Hanslick’s *The Beautiful in Music*. However, after about 100 years of formalism dominating music philosophy, philosophers began to question “arguments from disagreement,” and the consensus in music philosophy since at least the work of Susanne Langer (*Philosophy in a New Key*, 1942) is that there certainly is some nearly universal agreement about what music means on physiological and emotional levels.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ To be fair, some ethnodoxologists do caution against using cultural forms that are strongly associated with paganism (see, for example, Robin Harris, “Contextualization: Understanding the Intersections of Form and Meaning,” *EthnoDoxology* 3, no. 4 [2006]: 14–17). Nevertheless, any critical contextualization ethnodoxologists advocate is centered only on conventional associations that might exist and ignores natural, universal meaning.

⁸⁹ See Peter Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Leonard B. Meyer provides one representative example of acknowledgment of differences between cultures while at the same time affirming the common-sense reality of universals between kinds of music: “My premise is simple: one cannot comprehend and explain the variability of human cultures unless one has some sense of the constancies involved in their shaping. . . . Because we are all products of a special and limited time and space, our behavior and beliefs are invariably influenced by the cultural and personal circumstances in which we find ourselves. But, needless to say, it does not follow from this ‘provenance relativism’ that the significance and validity of works of art, theories, and so on are confined to the time and place of their genesis. If they were, the art of the past (for instance, the plays of Sophocles) and the actions of the protagonists in history (Caesar’s crossing the Rubicon) would be incomprehensible” (Leonard B. Meyer, “A Universe of Universals,” *The Journal of Musicology* 16, no. 1 [1998]: 6).

Differences in music among various people groups, where they certainly do occur, seem to exist in primarily surface-level features such as characteristic timbres, certain functional harmonic systems, and unique rhythmic patterns that come to be associated with certain groups rather than anything more fundamental. Indeed, universals do exist among people in areas of sound perception, scale structures, and melodic contour because of the common humanity that all people share. Thus music and spoken language are not equivalent categories since the meaning of spoken language is mostly conventional,⁹⁰ while musical meaning can be universally perceived, on at least some levels, due to that fact that all people share a common physiology and thus a culture of humanity.

Therefore, the ethnodoxologist's assumption that all cultural expressions are equally valid and appropriate for Christian worship cannot be proven using the reasoning outlined above. Rather, a people group's natural behaviors, including their music and other arts, must be evaluated as to their moral worth and fittingness for worship before they are adopted. In many cases, a missionary will find that some indigenous music of a people expresses sentiments perfectly appropriate for Christian worship, but this is not a given.

Conclusion

The ethnodoxology movement has provided a helpful call for American evangelicals to recognize God's work among the peoples of the world. It has also supplied a necessary corrective for missionaries who have blindly transferred western music into the worship contexts of foreign societies without giving careful attention to what those forms expressed to those not naturally familiar with them. We are encouraged by these individuals and groups that are thinking, writing, teaching, and providing resources in these areas.

However, we believe that more careful dialogue is needed in order to prevent uncritical contextualization and the dangers of religious syncretism. We are concerned that in their attempt to caution missionaries from failing to consider what western musical forms mean in foreign contexts, some ethnodoxologists may have equally failed to consider that some indigenous forms may simply be ill-fitted to appropriate biblical worship, regardless of the culture. We fear that the ethnodoxology movement has at least the potential of swinging the pendulum in the opposite, but equally problematic, direction from what had been the *status quo* in missions practice.

Nevertheless, we believe that if ethnodoxology advocates define "culture" biblically as "behavior," if they recognize that music carries meaning universally on at least some levels, and if they recommend care and discernment in determining what music in a given society may or may not be appropriate for biblically shaped worship based on its inherent meaning, their other emphases will continue to be a great benefit to Christian worship around the world.

⁹⁰ We say "mostly" since even some meaning in spoken language is rooted in universals; see Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Boston: The MIT Press, 1969). Cf. Leonard Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard (The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures)*, new ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).