

Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook

James R. Krabill, general editor; Frank Fortunato, Robin P. Harris, and Brian Schrag, eds. 2013. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

and

Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities Reach Their Kingdom Goals

Brian Schrag. 2013. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library.

At the heart of any ministry is the desire to communicate the gospel message in as clear and understandable a manner as possible. But charting that course is rarely simple or direct, no matter what the context. Whether your ministry is in a cross-cultural setting or right at home, urban or rural, you are likely to encounter questions of worship style. The so-called ‘worship wars’ in churches in the US over the last couple of decades only highlights the tortuous complexities involved. Decisions about musical style, visual elements and other expressive arts are complicated by generational differences, previous church experiences and other socio-economic demographic variations.



In recent years, a growing number of missionaries and scholars have been specialising in exactly this area of arts in Christian worship. The developing field is called *ethnodoxology*. Robin Harris, president of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists, explains that the word was coined in the late 1990s by Dave

Hall (then serving with Pioneers) by combining *ethne* (peoples), *doxa* (glory) and *logos* (word). Hall defined the term as ‘the study of the worship of God among diverse cultures’ (p. 86, *Handbook*). The foundation of the ethnodoxology movement in the years since is the belief that music, while a universal activity among humans, is *not* a universal language. That is, a single musical style does not communicate clearly across all cultures. And the same is true of drama, dance, oral verbal arts, visual arts, and other forms of expressive culture. A musical work that to one person signifies joyfulness may be completely incomprehensible to someone from a different culture.

The danger of the ‘music is a universal language’ trope in cross-cultural missions is that when the gospel is brought into a community it will likely bring the artistic trappings of the messengers along with it. What seems clear and beautiful to the missionaries may introduce unnecessary distance between the scriptures and the community. The communication of truth cannot ignore the artistic forms in which that communication is presented.

Understanding the value of local arts is more urgent now than ever before, with even the remotest communities increasingly touched by global media influence. This international influence leads minority communities to make cultural choices, in some cases without fully comprehending the future effects of their present choices. Attracted by the allure of international performance options, these communities risk losing their own distinctive artistic traditions. This is a moment in history in which weakening local arts will fade away if they do not find a meaningful place in new contexts. Not only does the church need these creative expressions, but it may soon be the only context in which these traditions continue and thrive. The church now has the opportunity to show its love for God's creation and the world's cultures in a tangible, vital way; and in turn, these expressive arts can enhance the communication of the gospel.

Into this discussion comes a two-volume set of books from the ethnodoxology movement. The first volume is *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, edited by James R. Krabill, Frank Fortunato, Robin P. Harris and Brian Schrag. The *Handbook* is an eclectic anthology of readings old and new that celebrates a wide panorama of Christian worship. Organized into three sections – Foundations, Stories and Tools – the *Handbook* comprises 148 short chapters by 95 authors, representing many geographical regions. What a task, to summarize and review such a collection! The journey through the many questions and issues of Christian worship is guided by a few broad themes, including: biblical foundations and theology, autobiography, and case study. Many chapters are a mix of all three themes, and as the reader progresses through the book, the interplay of these perspectives in the chapters paints a vivid picture of global worship experiences.

For biblical foundations, I enjoyed Andrew Hill's too-brief overview of what the Bible definitely says about Christian worship and its Old Testament foundations. I was also challenged by Harold Best's 'Seven Affirmations' about God's creation and human creativity. The affirmations move the reader from the biblical example to personal applications for individuals and congregations.

I always find autobiography compelling, and the autobiographical chapters in the *Handbook* are no exception. In particular, I would recommend Jean Ngoya Kidula's story of growing up in a musical family in Kenya and then maintaining those connections after relocating to the US – all the while negotiating the expectations of multiple musical identities. Also fascinating is Tanya Riches' contemplation of her worship experiences, first as manager of Hillsong United, and then as researcher in rural Australian Aboriginal churches. She considers the hard questions of how musical choice in worship relates to issues of social justice, power and identity in Australia:

I have felt for some time that to truly engage music mission *as an Australian* means facing our history and all it entails: the colonisation of the Indigenous population, as well as the experiences of the original immigrants and their ensuing generations. Will ignoring the rhythms and beats of our country's first peoples not put me in danger of a new imperialism, one that threatens the realm of worship and which would be so far from the true spirituality God desires? (p. 333; emphasis in original)

In just three pages, Riches raises some of the most difficult, yet most urgent, issues for any ministry. Her Australia-specific reflections urge the reader to consider the same questions in his or her context.

Case studies abound throughout the *Handbook*, especially in Section 2: Stories, whose chapters are arranged by geographical region. The wealth of stories collected in the book include:

- Two chapters by Rob Baker which give an entertaining, honest glimpse into leading music workshops in West Africa.
- Mark Charles's explanation of the struggles and successes of bridging Christian faith and a Navajo party celebrating a baby's first laugh.
- A history of black gospel choirs in Japan, told by Gary Fujino, including how one choral association is building community through performance.
- Eric Sarwar's experience designing a recording project to produce children's Christian songs in the predominantly Muslim context of Pakistan.
- Jo-Ann Faith Richards confronted with the difference that language choice in worship can make to clear communication of the message.

As I read the book and vicariously lived through the case studies, I was overwhelmed anew at the incredible variety that exists in the world's arts, in the ways Christians express themselves in worship, and in the responses to difficult situations.

The *Handbook* speaks equally to leaders in urban, multi-ethnic churches and to missionaries and leaders in minority communities. Sections 1 and 2 include chapters about each of these streams, but they become especially clear in Section 3: Tools. Chapters by C. Michael Hawn, David M. Bailey, Kenneth L. Wallace, Jr., and Ian Collinge look at creating a more multicultural worship experience in a Western (especially North American) church context. The advice in these chapters is applicable to any urban church with a multi-ethnic congregation, or a church that is looking to connect with other ethnic communities in the neighbourhood, or a church that simply wants to explore connections to the rest of the world. Other chapters in the Tools section – for example, chapters by Brian Schrag, Robin Harris, Kenneth R. Hollingsworth and Héber Negrão, and Michelle Petersen – speak more directly to people working in a primarily mono-cultural, minority community which is exploring the use of local arts in Christian worship perhaps for the first time.

The *Handbook* doesn't need to be read straight through (though in preparation for this review, I did just that and I enjoyed it immensely). Some of the chapters flow naturally from one to the next, but more often each chapter is its own distinct moment. I recommend setting a copy of the *Handbook* beside your computer keyboard on your desk, or even on your bedside table, and commit to reading a little bit each day, letting the stories and encouragement wash over you and inspire you toward more effective artistic expression in worship.

The second volume in the ethnodoxology set is Brian Schrag's *Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities Reach Their Kingdom Goals*. The goal of the *Manual*, from the title of the first chapter, is to see 'all the arts from all the world for all of God's purposes'. The *Manual*, therefore, becomes a natural 'what's next' after reading chapters in the *Handbook* and wanting to get involved with arts in any context. The *Handbook* inspires the reader to do *something* with local arts, and the *Manual* outlines a flexible, practical model to initiate action.

Schrag identifies three approaches missionaries tend to employ in using the arts. The first he calls the 'Bring It – Teach It' model: when the missionaries teach their own arts to the host community. This model can lead to wonderful exchanges of artistic styles, but it also risks excluding local arts in favour of introduced styles. In the second model, 'Build New Bridges', the missionary learns just enough of the local arts styles to incorporate some elements of those styles into his or her own arts; or, the missionary seeks collaboration with local

practitioners. As with 'Bring It – Teach It', this can be a fruitful approach; but it can also lead to unsustainable results, as well as conflict in cases of vast power differentials. The third model is 'Find It – Encourage It'. In this model the missionary acts as a catalyst to encourage local practitioners to create new works themselves in a sustainable, culturally appropriate way. The *Manual* takes 'Find It – Encourage It' as its guiding framework, and the method Schrag proposes flows from that approach. The Creating Local Arts Together (CLAT) method is a seven-step process:

1. Meet a community and its arts
2. Specify kingdom goals
3. Select effects, content, genre, and events
4. Analyse an event containing the chosen genre
5. Spark creativity
6. Improve new works
7. Integrate and celebrate for continuity

CLAT is not a rigid model in which each step must lead to the next with no deviation. Rather, the expectation is that a community working through this model will move back and forth through the model as they learn and grow in their worship arts. And though the process was originally designed to help outsiders understand and encourage local arts in Christian worship, the model is also appropriate for local leaders as they seek greater depth in their own congregation's worship.

The CLAT process begins with getting to know the community. This section of the *Manual* includes practical tips for engaging in different kinds of field research. One result of this step is a Community Arts Profile, which helps community members and others identify their local artist resources. These resources will be the building blocks of using the arts to reach 'kingdom goals'. These goals, common to any community seeking to follow Christ, include: identity and sustainability, shalom, justice, Scripture, church life, and personal spiritual life.

In the remaining steps of the process, the community will consider ways to use their artistic traditions to speak God's truth into problems that need to be solved and questions that need to be answered. After thinking through the right arts for the right contexts, local practitioners begin creating new artistic works. Schrag offers guidelines for critiquing and improving those new works, and then integrating them into community life as the process repeats itself in a cycle of artistic creation and celebration in worship.

Schrag's model for co-creation, in various adaptations, has been field-tested all over the world. I have used it in teaching music workshops to Christian congregations in villages and towns in Papua New Guinea, and I have found it to be very helpful in working together with communities to discover ways of

using local arts for achieving kingdom goals. The CLAT method does not require that the reader have extensive background or education in the arts. The language in the *Manual* is understandable to the layman, and people with no arts training could incorporate the CLAT process into their existing ministries.

Taken together, the two-volume ethnodoxology *Handbook* and *Manual* represent not only a tremendous statement on the current state of expressive arts in Christian worship but also guidance in how to continue developing and enhancing the communication of the gospel. I commend both volumes to leaders and fieldworkers engaged in any sort of ministry. It will challenge you, stimulate ideas about future directions, and open up a vast panorama of God's creation in worship.

Reviewed by Neil R. Coulter

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Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes *Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*

E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien
Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012

Favourite Quote - Bible reading is necessarily contextual. There is no purely objective biblical interpretation. This is not postmodern relativism. We believe truth is truth. (12)

Richards and O'Brien see worldview as an iceberg. Worldviews can blind us to what is really being said, resulting in what they call 'cultural blinders.' The authors organize nine of these cultural blinders into three categories based on the iceberg idea. Those we see and know, like the ice above the water. Those just below the surface that are not so obvious. And those that are deep below the surface that can do the most damage to interpretation and application of scripture.

The book is organized into three parts corresponding to the top, middle and bottom of the iceberg. Each chapter ends with probing questions.

