

[Article] Singing from Our Soul: Worship Music Development in Latin American Vineyard Churches (1994–2017)



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Fernando Mora has been a pastor in Venezuela since 1983. He joined the Vineyard movement in 1996. From 1989 to 2005 he led two church planting teams in the metropolitan area of Caracas, where contextualized worship was quite important. From 2003 to 2007 he was the first Latin American Coordinator for Vineyard Missions, a role that allowed him to travel throughout Latin America. Mora has written articles and books in the areas of ecclesiology and missiology, and he has blogged about his experiences in the Vineyard (<https://famorac.wordpress.com>). For thirty years, he was a bivocational minister, working as a full-time professor at Simon Bolívar University in Biomedical Engineering alongside his church work. Currently, he is a Visiting Professor at St. George's University (Grenada) in Health Management. His wife, Nora, is also a pastor and feminist theologian. Fernando and Nora have four children and eight grandchildren.

Introduction

Youth culture during the 1960s and 70s in the USA and around the world represented a discontinuity with regard to the structure and message of the traditional evangelical church, giving rise in the US to the Jesus Movement (Eskridge 2013). One of the byproducts of this cultural revolution among younger people was the change in ritual patterns, and in particular the emergence of new religious music and its prominence in church services (Stowe 2011). The Vineyard movement started in 1982 as a small network of thirteen churches separated from the Calvary Chapel denomination due to different views regarding the expression of spiritual manifestations and gifts in the church (Higgings 2012). Two musicians, John Wimber (Park, Ruth, and Rethmaier 2017) and Ken Gulliksen (Stowe 2011) were responsible for leading the new charismatic movement, instilling a spirituality in which music-mediated encounters with God were part of the normal life of those churches (Luhmann 2012). Today the Vineyard movement claims to include over 2,400 churches in 92 nations, including every Latin American country.¹

Since its beginnings, worship music in the Vineyard has been guided by the well-known idea captured by the slogan “From the church to the church” (Borkett-Jones 2015). Moreover, all efforts in musical composition, production, technical, and pastoral areas have been driven by one of Vineyard’s central values: to experience God in worship (Wimber 1999). This resulted in a minimalist approach in all areas of worship as the basis for the music ministry. The insistence upon Vineyard values and the desire to demonstrate an authentic spirituality throughout the movement (Williams 2005) defined the styles and forms used to create worship music, as well as its public expression. Instead of hype and technological manipulation to gather followers, frugality, sincerity, and authenticity became hallmarks of the movement, something closely related to its view of spiritual

¹ Uruguay was the last country in which a Vineyard church plant was started. Cuba has had a large effort without much success, but still several churches keep working there. Other than that, I believe all other Latin American countries have at least one Vineyard church.



manifestations which were treated as “naturally supernatural” in the life of Christian communities (Williams 2005).

Almost in parallel with the development of the Vineyard movement, with a heavy influence from the Latter Rain Movement, the International Worship Symposium, and from Integrity Hosanna Music, by the middle of the 1980s an important Christian music scene developed in México, in what later became the widely known Latin American *Movimiento de Adoración y Alabanza* (MAA, or Praise & Worship Movement). Among the initiators of this new wave of Pentecostal worship music were Marcos Witt, Marcos Barrientos, Jesús Adrian Romero, Cesar Garza, Coalo Zamorano, Lorena Warren, Edgar Rocha, Emmanuel Espinoza, Miguel Cassina, and the band Torre Fuerte with Héctor Hermosillo, Heriberto Hermosillo, and Alvaro López. Several Central American worship leaders, including Danilo Montero, Juan Carlos Alvarado, and Jaime Murrell, shared ideas, resources, projects, and training initiatives over several years, contributing to the rapid spread of contemporary worship music in Latin America. New independent record labels were started, such as CanZion Producciones (Marcos Witt), Aliento Music Group (Marcos Barrientos), and Vástago Producciones (Jesús Adrián Romero), and Editorial Vida, and several other Spanish Christian publishers started to produce the new music (Ingalls 2014). These outstanding MAA leaders and performers developed praise and worship songs attractive to Latin churches (Lazaro 2013b), especially to its youth culture (Mosquera 2016; Tec-López 2020). As the MAA movement blossomed around the continent, megachurches in the region also started to grow rapidly, providing resources, space, technological means, gathering large audiences, and organizing events and conferences, and creating networks for distribution and commercialization of the new and attractive musical product to the growing evangelical² consumer base in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

Before that, Maranatha! Music (Elliot 2010; Smith 2014), where many of the original Vineyard Music musicians started, pioneered in Latin America in the 1970s, becoming quite popular as a more contemporary style of congregational music. However, Vineyard worship music in Spanish only began to be known in the region around the end of the 1990s. Around that time, the Vineyard movement ventured into Latin America to extend the kingdom of God (Jackson 1999), carrying with it very particular ways of communicating and embodying the message of the kingdom, using innovative values, priorities, and practices that were quite revolutionary within the evangelical culture in the region. In particular, the worship model was quite different (Park, Ruth, and Rethmaier 2017; Park 2002), and its musical style and lyrics stood in stark contrast to the MAA. As a New Paradigm American church, birthed in the post-Vietnam era, its innovative ecclesiology, which emerged from the youth movements of the era (with jeans, Hawaiian shirts, long hair, relaxed style, electric guitars, and pop-rock music) (Miller 1999), seemed quite different from the traditional conservative foreign missionaries (Gladwin 2020), and from the expansive and populist Pentecostalism of Central and South American nations, which was very conservative, and traditionally considered escapist, or a protective “refuge” for rural migrants living in the margins of huge Latin American urban centers (Fediakova 2012). The Vineyard had come to define itself as being in the *radical middle*, combining evangelical (biblical) and Pentecostal (experiential) models of religious practice in a dynamic tension that defined their worldview and language (Bialecki 2009), calling themselves *empowered evangelicals* (Nathan and Wilson 2009), a terminology and worldview that was difficult for Latin Americans to grasp.

² *Evangelicos* in Latin American usage includes both the American evangelicals and the Pentecostals. Pentecostals and charismatics make up over 75% of evangelicos, and therefore I will use the term “evangelical” to refer to them.

The new music associated with Vineyard movement, which had its roots in the Jesus Movement (Fromm 2006) and was representative of the spirituality of a new strand of North American Protestantism originating in Southern California (Miller 1999), was going to be used in its transition into Spanish-speaking churches located in cities with socioeconomic realities that were completely different, sometimes even in places where extreme poverty and violence had been endemic for generations. Given this context, it's not surprising that the philosophy behind the Vineyard movement's congregational music, its origins, influences, history, and contributions to the global church were, and still are, so poorly known and understood in Latin America, even in *La Viña*³ churches. The purpose of this article, in addition to highlighting key aspects of the history of the Vineyard movement in the region, is to show some of the problems encountered in the process of incorporating North American-originating worship music in the liturgical practices of new *La Viña* church plants and church adoptions in the Latin American cultural ethos.

Latin Winds: The Vineyard and Its Music Go South

Bill Jackson (1999) dates the first Latin American Vineyard groups to 1991 in Fresnillo (México) and to around 1995 in the church plant of *La Viña de Mazatlán* (México). At about the same time, the Association of Vineyard Churches (USA) had also recognized *La Viña de San Miguel* in Santiago de Chile as part of the movement; several missionary efforts were also started in Costa Rica, Brazil, and Venezuela around 1996. To consolidate these initial efforts, in November 1998 *La Viña del Este* in San José (Costa Rica) organized the First Ibero-American *La Viña* Conference, or *Encuentro*, with the blessing and participation of Todd Hunter (at the time National Director of the Association of Vineyard Churches USA), Bob Fulton, Mark Fields, and Phil Strout, and featuring Eddie Espinosa, one of the fathers of Vineyard worship in California (Park, Ruth, and Rethmeier 2017), as the main speaker. This *Encuentro* marked the launch of the movement at a continental level, as it began expanding rapidly throughout Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela, Colombia, and México.

In conjunction with its church planting and church adoption strategy in these countries (Fields 2011), the Vineyard's unique approach to worship music also left its mark along the way. Visits to regional conferences or local churches by well-known North American worship leaders such as Randy and Terry Butler, Andy Park, and David Ruis became commonplace. The development of the Vineyard in Brazil was a special case because the music company Vineyard Music Brazil was started to organize regional conferences and to produce and promote Vineyard albums in Portuguese. This worship-music business model preceded any influence of the movement in the already large Brazilian evangelical culture in areas such as ecclesiology, missiology, signs and wonders pneumatology, and kingdom theology. In other words, even before planting or adopting any churches, the Vineyard had produced and distributed at least a couple of albums in Portuguese.⁴

³ This is the name of the Latin American branch of the Vineyard movement. Some older translation used *El Viñedo* as well, but it was later discarded.

⁴ There is no published research about the development of Vineyard Worship Brasil. However, the approach Vineyard took there differs from the rest of Latin America. This is an aspect that should be investigated but is outside the scope of this paper.

With the 1998 Costa Rican Encuentro as the starting point, Vineyard worship music, with all its achievements and shortcomings, has over twenty-five years of history in Latin America. By the late 1990s, the Latin American praise and worship movement (MAA) had more than a decade, expanding from Mexico to Argentina (Tec-López 2020; Vélez-Caro and Mansilla 2020; Deiros and Mraida 1994; Gladwin 2015). For this reason, many of the musicians and worship leaders joining the new La Viña churches were already familiar with this musical expression, its liturgical use, and, to some extent, its underlying theology. Many of the MAA pioneers, such as Marcos Witt and his colleagues at CanZion, were widely known among Latin American evangelicos, selling thousands of their records in the bookshops of major cities, and playing their songs on Christian radio (Gladwin 2015; Ingalls 2014; Perez 2021). Also, some US-based worship music labels had ventured into producing Spanish speaking albums; brands such as Maranatha! Music and Integrity/Hosanna Music (Perez 2020) were popular throughout the region. In those years, Latin American worship leaders created their congregational music repertoire from that material, following a liturgical structure based in the Davidic worship flow of Psalm 100, which was already well-known among Pentecostals and Neopentecostals (Perez 2021; Lim and Ruth 2017).

Latin Americans Take Over: Learning the Vineyard Flow

As a researcher, I need to clarify my observation point regarding the Vineyard movement in Latin America. I have been part of the evangelical church in Venezuela since 1979 and became part of Vineyard in 1996. From 1996 to 2009 I helped plant and adopt several churches in Venezuela and throughout Latin America. In 2003, the Association of Vineyard Churches USA appointed me the first Latin American to coordinate efforts to plant new churches in the region, visiting the countries and becoming aware of their realities, including the fast expansion of the evangelical church as a whole. This gives me a unique vantage point, as I am familiar with the process from the start. From 2008, I began to study the development of the evangelical church in Latin America, including church growth, worship movements, and the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). As part of this work of trying to understand how the Vineyard movement had been established in Latin America, in 2018 I interviewed six La Viña worship leaders and composers from Chile, Perú, Colombia, and Venezuela to find out how the process of assimilation of musical styles among Latin American churches had developed.

In these interviews, I noted that those who joined the movement between 1998 and 2002 commonly mentioned the experience of migrating from the MAA style to Vineyard worship music and flow, something they typically did within a relatively short period of time. The following examples from three worship leaders, who today pastor La Viña churches, illustrate my point:⁵

I was so used to the Latin American style. . . . inevitably, we copied that model. Like talking a lot from song to song, forcing people to shout or to applaud, and other stuff. But the new way of worship that we encountered was definitively different . . . I convinced myself that I had to change the way I was leading worship. (Paiva 2018)

When I first heard Vineyard music, honestly, I didn't like it too much. I found it quite simple, compared to what I had seen in the MAA, from where I was coming. It took me several years to understand . . . (its) richness, depth, simplicity, and authenticity. (García 2018)

⁵ Quotes from interviews cited are translations by the author.

I was accustomed to a different kind of musicality, much more aimed at big venues with large audiences, and much more complex in arrangements. When I began to explore Vineyard music . . . I found . . . how something simple could also become deep and excellent, with lyrics that were out of the box to me. (Tello 2018)

The new Vineyard musical style that these young worship leaders were experimenting with was musically quite close to the MAA. In fact, contemporary worship music (CWM), MAA, and Vineyard music are stylistic by-products of pop and rock music (Ruth 2015; Ingalls 2017). Perhaps the main difference that the interviews revealed was the distinct role of the worship leader in each context. In the MAA, the worship leader held a certain authority and directionality during congregational worship, following a Davidic liturgical flow (Perez 2021), whereas in the Vineyard, the role was more a matter of modeling, and leading with spontaneity, just like any other worshiper who yearns for a point of total surrender where intimacy with God is experienced and following a flow based on progressive levels of intimacy (Lim and Ruth 2017). This point is important because it speaks about motivations and the ideal of honest worship that expresses itself through simple songs of love, intimacy, passion, closeness, and vulnerability (Reagan 2015). In the Vineyard, this kind of worship was available to everyone and could be performed and sung in a variety of spaces, from personal devotions and small groups to Sunday services and even larger venues, without the need of sophisticated equipment and highly professional performance (Park 2002).

Hans Wüst, a soft-spoken, talented young man with experience in the Costa Rican pop-rock scene, was an initial key figure in the translation of what had been done in the Vineyard in the US or UK to the Latin world. Wüst was also a composer, adding his personal creative touch to whatever materials were available. From the start of this process, Wüst made important contributions, especially to the musical direction of that first Encuentro in 1998. For this landmark event, he prepared the lyrics and musical scores, creating what was to be the first Vineyard music repertoire in Spanish. This musical collection contained twenty-six songs of North American origin (US and Canada), composed mostly during the 1990s, with some of them produced in the early stage of the Toronto Blessing⁶ (Poloma 2003). Compositions by Terry Butler, Scott Underwood, John Barnett, Brian Doerksen, and Craig Musseau stand out. Notably, this shows that from this initial stage in the process very few songs composed and popularized between 1976 and 1990, either from John Wimber, Carl Tuttle, Eddie Espinosa, or others, factored into the churches of the region at that stage. Four songs originally composed in Spanish were included in the collection, all of them by Wüst. Another original song was incorporated during the Encuentro, a simple intercessory chant composed in 1992 by Iván Sepúlveda, a Chilean Vineyard worship leader.

Over the following year and a half, Wüst produced the CD *Canciones de la Viña* (2000), which became the first Vineyard Music production from Latin American soil. Another event of enduring influence in the Vineyard worship movement in Latin America was the Congreso Latino de Adoración de La Viña (CLAV), also held in Costa Rica, on January 22–25, 2002. At this gathering a live recording was made by Vineyard Music as part of

⁶ The Toronto Blessing refers to a long-lasting revival that started in January of 1994 at the Airport Vineyard Church in Toronto, Canada. One of the most attractive characteristics of the revival was its spiritual manifestations, such as laughter, body movements, and animal noises. The effects of this revival are still felt in more recent movements, such as the New Apostolic Reformation.

the production of the first La Viña live worship CD in Spanish.⁷ Of particular interest is the testimony of Cristian Tello (2018), founding pastor of La Viña Barranquilla (Colombia) and a well-known musician who has worked for Marcos Witt's CanZion School in Colombia:

I was utterly surprised when I saw a very simple setup, without lighting or other props, neither were there announced any famous or renown artists. Hans Wüst was the first one I saw leading worship during the conference . . . he greeted those attending and immediately started to worship. He didn't talk to the public again, trying to induce them to raise their hands, clap, or close their eyes. He was simply worshiping in a way that inspired us to do the same, in the most natural and deep manner . . . I experienced God's presence as never before. . . . That event marked my life and my understanding of what it means to lead worship.

The CLAV initiative had support and financial backing from Viña Music, a small division of Vineyard Music. Bob Fulton, at the time director of Vineyard Ministries International, created Viña Music to produce music in Spanish. *Yo Clamo a Ti*, the album recorded at CLAV, was not released until 2005; this delay affected its popularity and distribution in the region. In the meantime, however, Viña Music released other albums. In *Alma Hambrienta* (2003), Spanish vocal tracks were recorded over the original instrumental tracks of the album *Hungry*, originally produced by Brian Doerksen and Nigel Hemmings in 1999 for Vineyard Records UK. This also marks the introduction of British sound into Latin American worship, something that is now commonplace (Ingalls 2016). In *Aviva el Fuego en mí* (2002), a nonprofessional translation team was assembled from Spanish speaking churches from various countries. The worship leaders on the album were mainly from Mexico and other Latin American nations. Critics readily noted that the musical arrangements were still heavily influenced by US and UK styles; a press release from the time says, "very little true, authentic, or, for lack of a better word, *traditional* Latin American influence (is heard) in these renditions of audiences' favorite Vineyard tracks" (Jenkins 2003).

In 2003, Viña Music had already launched a more ambitious project with the Chilean Vineyard churches, where several local innovations were going to be incorporated. The Chilean Vineyards had songs in Mapudungun or Araucana, the language of the Mapuche ethnic group; some original Chilean compositions; several live recordings made during the III Conferencia de Adoración de La Viña Chile; as well as studio recordings with well-known Chilean musicians. The recordings were done at the beginning of 2002 in Santiago, Chile, with the intention to release the album the following November. That record, *Rendido a sus Pies*, however, was not released until 2005, also marking the end of the Viña Music initiative. From that point on, the development of worship music in the Latin American Vineyard movement proceeded according to the vision and agency of a few musicians and worship leaders in the region. As far as I know, since 2004 VMG has produced only two other Spanish records: *Gracias por la Cruz* (2006) and *Nos Despiertas a Vivir* (2015), the latter recorded live at La Viña Las Condes church in Santiago de Chile (Bravo 2016), under the musical direction of David Berguño.

To compensate for the void left by Viña Music, several local production efforts emerged in those countries that had sufficient human resources (producers, musicians, singers, sound technicians), materials (equipment, studios, editing systems), and at least a small distribution potential at the local or translocal level. Among the

⁷ Live worship CDs became very popular through the work of IHM. Vineyard Music also did a large project with live CDs that was very successful. In this case the idea was to capture on recording the spiritual atmosphere of the singing congregation.

more relevant that the author has been able to identify are the Chilean Vid Producciones, founded by Rodrigo García; Crossover in Costa Rica, by Hans Wüst; Fuego, also in Costa Rica, led by David Bustamante; Viña Studios in Peru, led by Keyla De La Cruz, where at least one album was released in cooperation with Vineyard Music UK; and Ágape Música, part of the music ministry of La Viña Ágape Ñuñoa in Santiago, Chile.

Localization and Appropriation of Vineyard Music through Translation

From the beginning of the Vineyard movement in Latin America, worship music was brought by partners, or USA partner churches, which were involved in mission efforts (Fields 2011). In the Vineyard's case, "the key decisions as to whether a local congregation will minister somewhere cross-culturally, where that will be, and what level of commitment will be involved" (Fields 2011, 163) were left to these associations of local churches known as *partnerships*. This decentralized view of mission created a variety of approaches in all matters related to the new indigenous church's characteristics, particularly in worship. In a rather spontaneous way, without much central control or strong denominational guidelines, the musical repertoire of the Spanish-speaking Vineyards was quickly flooded with the most popular songs of the North American movement. This meant that it was necessary to translate the lyrics and, in a few cases, make local adaptations and alterations to reflect a more indigenous sound, as many other groups and denominations have done (Meyers 2016). As a result, most songs currently used in the Latin American branch of the movement ended up being local nonprofessional translations from English (US, UK, and Canada), without much supervision from the centralized Vineyard Music label. Thus, the desire to have a homogeneous "Vineyard sound," easily recognizable as a brand throughout Latin America, became very difficult to achieve. This contrasts with the approach taken by other megachurches, record labels, and denominations that prioritize standardization (Wagner 2014) and song translation (Evans 2015) in their musical products.

To determine whether the preceding affirmation was valid, I looked at twelve albums recorded in Spanish over a span of twenty-three years (from 1994 to 2017). After subtracting the repeated tracks, a total of 136 unique songs in Spanish remained. From these, only thirty-one were songs originally composed in Spanish—about 23% of the recorded songs over a twenty-three-year period. For a continent with such a vast musical and cultural heritage, this is a very low number of original songs. By any estimation, Latin America promises huge potential for musical creativity and diversity, given the quick expansion of the movement to countries from the Caribbean to the Andes. Moreover, when the distribution of the recorded songs by countries is taken into account, only four nations are represented in the sample: fifteen songs from Costa Rica, thirteen from Chile, two from the US, and one from Perú. Additionally, only on the CD *Yo Clamo a Ti*, recorded during the CLAV, are there music arrangements that could be considered Latin, or Latin *rock* to be more specific; the rest of the records fall in the pop/soft rock category.

I then consulted two songbooks—one compiled by a Peruvian Vineyard church with about ninety songs, and another belonging to the Asociación de Iglesias Viña de Chile and containing 131 songs. In both of these, the percentages were even lower. In the Peruvian songbook only 12% of the listed songs were originally composed in Spanish, whereas in the Chilean example 11% of the songs were originally written in Spanish. It is clear that Spanish-speaking Vineyards in Latin America use translated songs on a regular basis and make very little effort to write their own songs, much less to share their few original ones with other churches in the region. This is just a numeric account of the number of translated songs. A more substantive analysis would be

to classify the themes of these songs that have been translated and try to understand why these songs were chosen for translation and where they are used.

These low percentages contrast with findings in a recent ethnographic study conducted in Hispanic churches in the state of Oregon, where about 70% of the music used in Sunday services (203 songs, including traditional *coritos*,⁸ hymns, and contemporary worship songs) was composed originally in Spanish (Berhó 2020). Admittedly, most of it (63%) could be classified as pop/soft rock, composed by a few worship leaders from the MAA (Witt, Barrientos, Alvarado, and others). In Vineyard churches, it is customary to use the large collection of songs composed and recorded by their own worship leaders. A few songs from other labels and artists are featured from time to time, and some churches sometimes use one historic hymn in a contemporary arrangement in their dominical service. It is likely that in Latin American Viñas worship leaders currently employ a combination of MAA songs, even some *coritos*, combining them with the translated Vineyard songs and with other translations from labels that are becoming popular, such as Hillsong and Bethel Music.

Spanish-translation Vineyard worship music is further complicated by many poorly translated songs, with unlyrical texts that either become difficult to sing or fail to convey the message intended by the composer. These issues constitute an aesthetic problem that generates countless limitations in the use of the translated music. It is well-known that music translation has been regarded as a rather complex task (Low 2003), especially when a song expresses a theological proposition or a Christian message in a lyrical way. Rhymes should not be forced, and the original intent of the author with rhythms and emphasis should be kept in mind. Because it is impossible to balance all the variables that come into play during translation (Low 2008), however, an immediate consequence is that there can be multiple translated versions of the same song, all of them acceptable, depending on singers and audiences. In the Latin American Vineyards, official translations were not enforced; the decision of which songs to translate was left to the worship leaders at the local churches. Given the decentralized approach of the Vineyard in the development of its mission efforts in Latin America, with translation remaining the main source of its congregational music, it was impossible to avoid the existence of multiple Spanish versions of the same song.⁹ Rodrigo García (2018), a respected Chilean worship leader and pastor, speaks strongly about the uneasiness that this produced for him:¹⁰

⁸ This refers to Latin American nonformal, spontaneous, traditional fast-paced songs used in the liturgy of popular Pentecostal churches. These are very characteristic of Latin Pentecostal spirituality and were beloved by people years before contemporary worship music became popular among Neopentecostal and third-wave churches. For the most part, one of their recurring themes is the second coming of Jesus, the rapture, and the afterlife in heaven. See, for instance, Aponte 1995.

⁹ It's important to note that by the time the Vineyard started missions in Latin American countries, the catalog of Vineyard Music CDs was already huge, and the number of songs available was overwhelming. Churches would pick songs to translate based on their own needs and exposure to the catalog, translating the ones they felt were appropriate.

¹⁰ A similar situation is described in the already cited study of Hispanic churches in the US by Berhó (2020), due to the presence of bilingual worship leaders who can use either Spanish-language songs or their own translated songs. Due to generational differences, the trend in these churches is to develop what Berhó (2020) calls a bimusicality, where the musicians can use songs originally written in Spanish in combination with translated songs, and others sang in English. However, this is different in Latin American churches in which such an approach may be deemed a form of colonialism and the loss of cultural identity.

During the first years of the movement in Latin America . . . there was a lot of disorder with regards to the Spanish versions of Vineyard Music songs, with double- or triple-translated versions, even in the same country. That was terrible!

Localization and Appropriation of Vineyard Music through Ritual Identification

Researchers have identified the development of several reproducible rituals as a unifying element of the international Pentecostal/Charismatic movement (of which the Vineyard forms a relatively small part) (Robbins 2009). For some, they may appear uniform in nature, even across many cultures and on virtually every continent (Robbins 2004). In the case of the Vineyard movement, the unifying worship ritual started to develop rather intuitively since its beginning; but later it was conceptualized according to models of flow that became popular in the 1970s and 80s (Lim and Ruth 2017). Vineyard flow is based on several stages defined by John Wimber (Park 2002): *call, engagement, intimacy, visitation, and giving or offering* (Lim and Ruth 2017). This progression allows ample space for the manifestations of bodily and emotional expressions in response to God's presence, according to how the congregations are facilitated by worship leaders and musicians. Due to its prolific creative activity and the development of a new liturgy based on congregational music, Donald Miller considered the Vineyard the most innovative and experimental among the new-paradigm churches, due to its exploration of "new modes of worship that break with traditional models of mind-body separation" (Miller 1999, 52). Miller concludes that it is not possible to know the Vineyard if music is not understood as the main contributing element to its expansion and growth. It should be clear then, that in the Vineyard's incursion into Latin America, besides song translation, it was indispensable to teach and disseminate this new way of structuring and planning worship times for congregational gatherings. To facilitate this training, translated songs served to communicate the narrative of the movement, becoming the main communication channel for some of the most important Vineyard values, such as the search for intimacy with God, the longing for healing and deliverance, and the hope of God's kingdom in the now and not yet.

One issue whose importance should not be underestimated is that this musical material originated in sociocultural realities that were foreign to the local and national expressions of the Vineyard in Latin America. Despite the questionable Spanish translations and mediocre poetic constructions in the translated versions of the songs, however, as well as the foreign musical styles far from the identity of the cultural groups in which the first Vineyard congregations were born, the music was accepted and became very popular among the first congregations in the region. One possible explanation for this is that for those joining the movement during its initial years in Latin America (around 1995), Vineyard music represented a symbol of renewal and rebirth. The new music was a constant reminder of the new visitation of the Holy Spirit, opening a door into a new space of grace and freedom. For many worshipers, it was also the encounter with more transparent, simple preaching, and ritual expressions, without manipulations, abuses, hype, and exaggerations.

For some critics, acceptance of the movement was seen as a new form of transculturation of evangelicals with trendy North American church models (Bravo 2016). But for others, the Vineyard offered a way to heal the scars from abusive churches and ministry burnout provoked by the extremely rapid growth of Neopentecostal churches. In the 1980s, John Wimber had envisioned the ministry of the Vineyard movement as a gift of refreshing and renewal for the church at large, and for that reason he preferred to hold conferences to bless local churches through healing ministry and worship music instead of planting churches abroad. This pattern changed in 1986 when the first Vineyard church was started in England (Kay 2006), which led to developing

new initiatives for planting congregations abroad (Jackson 1999). More ministry teams were sent around the world to hold conferences and revival meetings, and the idea of missions through church partnerships was developed (Fields 2011). The preferred way to enter a particular country was through conferences, where local contacts were established and national leaders recruited to plant the new churches. This pattern was repeated in the early years of Vineyard missions to Latin America (1995–2007), when more churches were adopted than planted in the countries visited. These leaders who were joining the Vineyard movement came from different backgrounds and sought new spiritual experiences. An exercise of collective reflection during a meeting of thirty Latin American Vineyard pastors and leaders in 2005 in Los Teques, Venezuela,¹¹ produced a piece which tried to capture their identity as they became part of the Vineyard (Mora 2006):

We were adopted, covered, and rekindled when we started a relationship of friendship and transparency. . . . We arrived worn out, dry, hungry, and thirsty for a new move in our lives that was fresh and transparent. . . . God, by shaping our lives through our circumstances, has permitted us to *find the tribe*. . . . *Music has been a way to achieve intimacy and consecration, based on Biblical values and practices, bringing forth, without doubt, a refreshing to us and to many other groups in our continent.*

Note how worship music is placed at the same level as theology, preaching, and biblical values. These leaders ascribed to worship music the transcendent power of assimilating, appropriating, and indigenizing the values, priorities, and practices of the movement. In this sense, we might mention the suggestion from Ingalls, Swijghuisen Reigersberg, and Sherinian (2018), based on the anthropological work of Robbins (2009), that in many situations, Christians in the global periphery (for example, Latin America) use the cultural products of the center (US) to distance themselves from their current situation and identify with places of greater spiritual advancement and development. For these Latin American leaders, Anaheim¹² became the reference point, the pacesetter, or, we could say, the source of the new wine. By identifying themselves with its music, the old, less satisfying religiosity that had stalled spiritual growth or had made it heavy and routinized could be left behind, giving rise to a new experience of refreshing growth.

A similar cultural identification phenomenon has been described by Timothy Rommen (Rommen 2007) in the widespread use of North American contemporary Christian music in Trinidad and Tobago congregations; a trend that cast aside indigenous styles like *gospelypso*, traditional Trinidadian gospel choruses, or other Caribbean Christian music. For Rommen, the key to this development is in what he calls the *local applicability* of imported music. Rommen examined the benefits of appropriating foreign compositions in congregational music; in his research, traditional and indigenous songs evoked problems and situations (divisions, lack of unity, denominational strife, and so on) that these Christians were trying to avoid. On the other hand, imported music brought a new sense and more positive meaning to a Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality that sought to be rekindled and raised up from its ashes, so to speak. This is not necessarily a passive stance, a simple consumerist position. In the long run, a complex process of appropriation begins, with imported music progressively assimilated based on its contributions to Christian practice, and new meanings are created within the host culture.

¹¹ From Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador.

¹² Where the headquarters of the Association of Vineyard Churches was located and where John Wimber had planted the Anaheim Vineyard, focal point of the movement for around twenty-five years. These reference centers have changed over time, especially because Vineyard megachurches are no longer located in California.

Ingalls, Swijghuisen Reigersberg, and Sherinian (2018, 13) call this process *musical localization*, suggesting that the appropriation of this music could reach a point at which it can be locally meaningful and useful in the construction of Christian beliefs, theology, practice, or identity. This concept allows us to see how a host culture exercised its own power to decide what to use from the immense Vineyard musical resources, according to its local applicability potential. This helps avoid the essentialist label of *cultural imperialism* or the argument of weak cultural identity of Latinos as the only explanation. This is important, given the globalized world, in which cultural influences come into play from a variety of places, and with open access to virtually everything. As discussed previously, song translation adds aesthetic and pragmatic difficulties to musical localization in Latin American context (in contrast with the Trinidadian case mentioned above), because factors such as singability will come into play. At the same time, the concept of localization adds an element of unpredictability in terms of what is translated and who translates it. In worship music the musical repertoire chosen will depend upon the importance and meaning these songs have had in the different congregations. As a result, Vineyard musical appropriation will vary from country to country, typically with a common sound that tends to be US-based, mixed with some local flavor. However, “only after (the) usefulness (of imported music) has been established . . . the process of localization infuses the style” (Rommen 2007), that could be identified with local, regional, or national cultural expressions, infusing innovation and creativity.

In this regard, consider the perspective of Cristian Tello (2018) and Daniel Hernández (2018) and their vision for this pilgrimage from Anglo-Saxon Vineyard worship music to what could eventually emerge in the Latin American realm. They propose a vision based on Latin culture and identity, without underestimating the needed dialogue between an established and powerful stream, and another at an earlier stage of relative weakness, such that it could easily be overlooked:

[Translations served us] to acquire the language and universal identity of the movement . . . (but it) struggled with our own search . . . , with the need to engage with . . . our *identidad latina* in worship. Simply, trying to find a way of expressing ourselves. (Tello 2018)

We took those English compositions as the standard to follow, when they should have been a push or a motivation for us to broaden the horizons of the movement . . . [perhaps] we could have done more and would have been more creative in terms of styles and lyrics, with richer cultural expressions incorporated in our own compositions. (Hernández 2018)

Neither of them denies the usefulness of translating and adopting the original Vineyard songs. In fact, they served as helpful landmarks for the break made with the past, away from less fulfilling spiritualities. It also represented a starting point in a long process, which, according to the creativity of Latin American musicians and composers, would end up in local innovation, indigenous composition, and experimentation. These new songs emerging from La Viña congregations would use local musical expressions, with lyrics that speak of their struggles and felt needs and how God responds in those circumstances. This kind of music would enrich the worldwide Vineyard movement, by providing new rhythmic and stylistic possibilities to the rest of the nations, according to the vision of Revelation 7:9, when those gathered “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” will be standing in adoration before the throne of Jesus.

Latin American Songs before the Throne: Composing Worship Music from Latin America

The remarkable effort made to train and empower composers in Vineyard USA churches during the early years established a creative culture in the movement (Tuttle 2009). From its beginnings, the movement fostered original compositions in the local churches and the distribution of those songs, largely due to Wimber's vision for the development of a completely "new liturgy" based on novel musical expressions (Park, Ruth, and Rethmeier 2017, 74–75). Following this model, hundreds of new songs had to be composed and produced for the development of Vineyard worship within Latin American cultures. For many Latin American leaders, however, the task seemed overwhelming and difficult to emulate, leading to undervaluing Spanish compositions and becoming extremely dependent on translations. This is also true of other denominations and Christian groups in the region (Godoy and Danielson 2017), where missionaries controlled "hymn books, publishing only hymns they approved of and using their own translators," reducing to only 15% of hymnbooks the material composed originally in Spanish and not necessarily with a Latin American sound. The trend has continued with new labels such as Hillsong, Bethel, and others, making Anglo-Saxon worship music the main influence in contemporary Latin American Christian music (Lazaro 2013a).

The life stories of people in local congregations are at the heart of congregational music-making, and "few things are more powerful than songs written out of the teaching of a local church, for that local church" (Evans 2006). Compositions that come out of the daily life of churches preserve their history; because they help remember and reflect on what God has done in their midst, they contain the theological elements that explain their pilgrimage as a community (Doucette 2014). But as Evans has warned, "one possible consequence of the global migration of popular Christian songs is the disappearance of the local within congregational song" (2015, 189), which must urgently lead to a reconsideration of the local as "different and valuable" (190). It is crucial to underscore this point: it is not the same to compose worship songs from the prosperous, white Anglo-Saxon worldview of the Vineyard movement's origins as from the *favelas* of Recife, Brazil, the slums of Petare, Venezuela, the Medellín of Colombia, wounded by drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare, or even from the cosmopolitan, multiethnic, but socially unequal, Panama City. Sentiments are different, without mentioning the scarcity, needs, and realities faced daily. With this ever-present suffering, songs of lament, written from the context of exclusion, marginality, and conflict, should be among the most common expressions in Latin American indigenous worship, but for the most part they are absent from the collections of translated songs of the Latin American Vineyards. Almost twenty-five years after the Vineyard movement's first incursion in Latin America, churches insist on copying music styles and lyrics that speak about contexts and realities that are so different.

The challenge to compose songs that truly speak from the Latin American soul, is not just for the Vineyard movement alone. To date, very few attempts have been made to blend these feelings and aspirations, laments, laughter, and shouts of joy in a way that is truly Latin American, and which is inspired from a theology that originates from life experiences, such that it can be shared throughout the region.¹³ The challenge is huge because it implies going beyond the stereotypical image of Latin music as fun, superficial, shallow, sensual,

¹³ The Venezuelan Viñas were among the first to experiment with the composition of songs in Spanish with a fusion of Latin rhythms and the use of indigenous instruments such as the *cuatro*. One of these songs has been published by Vineyard Music on the album *All the Earth Shall Worship*. This is the song "Quiero," composed by Daniel Hernández when he was worship director of La Viña de San Antonio de Los Altos. The song was chosen as the opening of the multicultural worship time during the *Vineyard Global Conference* in Columbus, Ohio, in 2015. This is a special song that came out of the history and ministry of the local church to persons in need, during a period of intense development of the Vineyard in a turbulent Venezuela.

noisy, or trivial. The proposed task is not easy for Vineyard worship leaders and composers who have relied so much on the narrative and imagination of foreign poets and have depended on translating songs from English to Spanish. Latin American worship could become a powerful prophetic declaration of the manifestation of the kingdom in our own time, by producing the musical language that speaks about the inbreaking of the kingdom in those harsh realities, where Jesus lives among the poor, humble, vulnerable, oppressed, discriminated, anguished, and stressed-out, and among the victims of generalized violence and persecution from unjust governments, femicide, and domestic violence—journeying with the people in times of conflicts, displacements, migrations, and terrorism. These would be songs that proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, manifested in freedom, grace, forgiveness, healing, renewed vision, prosperity, joy, gladness, and complete restoration (Isaiah 61:1–4).

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