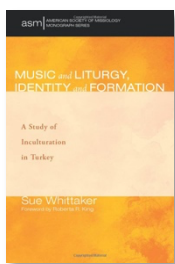


# [Review] *Music and Liturgy, Identity and Formation: A Study of Inculturation in Turkey*, by Sue Whittaker



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Research on the worship practices of Protestant Christians in the Middle East is limited. Much scholarly work on conversion studies, missiology, and church planting in the Muslim majority context is available. Yet, little research and resources around worship practices, liturgical studies, and congregational song focuses on Christianity in the Middle East. The Turkish Protestant Church (TPC) sits within this context and is latent with research potential.

In Turkey, a modern secular state with a Muslim majority, less than 0.1% of the population identifies as Protestant Christian.<sup>1</sup> The past two decades have seen significant growth fueled by conversion from Islam. James Bultema regards Bible translation as key to understanding the recent growth within the TPC that emerged around the year 2000, when the entire Bible was translated into modern Turkish (Bultema 2013, Kindle 4752–54). With this recent growth, a few contemporary scholars, including myself, have begun to reflect on the TPC's musical, missional, and liturgical practices (see Clark 2012; Perigo 2021; Whittaker 2019). Adapting her PhD dissertation from Fuller Seminary, Sue Whittaker presents a unique contribution to the study of TPC worship and congregational song through *Music and Liturgy, Identity and Formation: A Study of Inculturation in Turkey*. In this pioneering work, Whittaker explores issues in music, liturgy, theology, and identity for the community at All Saints Moda (ASM) church in Istanbul, Turkey, led by Rev. Dr. Turgay Üçal.

Broadly, this monograph explores Üçal's theological, cultural, and musical journey to find a liturgical identity that is at home within his Turkish culture and Christian beliefs. Whittaker explores Üçal and his congregation's inculturation strategies that blend Turkish cultural customs and musical forms with core Christian beliefs. Methodologically, Whittaker's interdisciplinary work sits comfortably in the emerging field of ethnodoxology and builds upon the work of Roberta King with the Senufo of Cote d'Ivoire (King 2009). Though well-situated within ethnodoxology, as one of the first published volumes on Turkish Christian worship, Whittaker's monograph is essential for studies of theology, missiology, liturgy, and identity in the Turkish Protestant context.

<sup>1</sup> Alliance of Protestant Churches Turkey (2010), "Letter from Turkish Church." Available online: <http://www.prayforturkey.com/letter-english-full.html> (accessed April 14, 2010). Statistics about Protestant and Evangelical Christianity in Turkey are limited and debatable. The above represents the TPC's own numbers in 2010.

In chapter 1, Whittaker investigates the influence of Turkey’s musical culture on *İstanbul*<sup>2</sup> Christian identity, particularly at ASM. Chapter 2 features Whittaker’s literature review, where she draws extensively on King’s pathway of a song model working to establish Üçal and ASM as distinct features in inculturation. She explores how they work to hold core Christian beliefs alongside mysticism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Sufiism, traditional Turkish poetry, and Turkish art music (King 2009). Extending the liturgical studies work of Mary McGann into the Turkish context, blended with John Witvliet’s work in liturgical inculturation (see McGann 1996; Witvliet 2003, 91–123), Whittaker argues for a “correlation between musico-liturgical inculturation, identity, and spiritual formation,” presenting a fresh approach for the study of congregational song in the local context (50). In chapter 3, she addresses her research design and methodology as a “diachronic embedded case study designed to . . . discover the impact of the indigenous songs of a pastor-composer on a church community over several years” (51). Chapter 4 describes the life, musical experiences, religious conversion, and ministry of Üçal, situating this pastor as a prophet, priest, and agent of musical and liturgical change. In addition, Whittaker distinguishes Üçal’s liturgical self-identity as an *İstanbul* follower of Christ.

In chapter 5, Whittaker’s monograph opens to a broader study of the corporate rituals and cultural discernment within ASM by exploring their use of space, prayer books, and instrumentation. Chapter 6 explores ASM’s use of music as witness, formation, evangelism, hospitality, and ministry. Whittaker views Üçal and ASM’s congregational song as an intentional, theological approach used to express cultural heritage and make disciples. Through musical and lyrical analysis of Üçal’s worship songs, Whittaker reveals how his inculturated worship expresses local identity and the theological beliefs of ASM within Turkish cultural forms. The book concludes with implications and future directions of the study of inculturation through music, arguing for “a more inclusive approach to missiological strategizing” and “more local musical experimentation” (156–57).

For students and scholars of congregational song, this monograph is a great starting point for exploring Christian worship song in a musico-liturgical cultural context. Additionally, those studying modern Middle Eastern Christianity will benefit from this work as a case study exploring a growing community’s embedded and expressed theologies through song and liturgy. Beyond the Turkish context, Whittaker’s work suggests exciting possibilities for applied worship studies in cultural discernment and artistic creation.

Using mixed methods and interdisciplinary research approaches always presents the challenge of knowing where to stop. How many academic disciplines and methods in theological, liturgical, ethnographical, musicological, and missiological analysis are possible? Whittaker has presented a bounded study, yet while reading this trailblazing work, I was curious about how Whittaker’s research methods, nomenclature, and analysis might be affected when put in conversation with recent ethnographic work in congregational song in the global context. Would engagement with Mark Porter’s “cosmopolitanization” of worship song, or Ingalls, Reigersberg, and Sherinian’s “musical localization” help nuance the contextualization and inculturation processes and the understanding of the hymnody of the broader TPC (Porter 2018; Ingalls et al. 2013)? Lim Swee Hong’s phases of contextualized congregational hymnody as “adopted,” “adapted,” and “actualized” could be a useful taxonomy to discuss Turkish believers’ adoption and adaptation of songs from Western contexts and ASM’s actualization of hymns drawn from local cultures “at the expense of overt Western nuances” (Lim 2017). At times, applied ethnographers, ethnodoxologists, and missiologists may be setting up a false binary of

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<sup>2</sup> Turkish for those who are from or live in Istanbul.

“western” vs. “indigenous.” The recent work of these ethnographers in closely related fields needs a better reading by all ethnodoxologists, including myself.

Whittaker’s volume presents fresh insights into the study of worship and congregational song in the global context, while simultaneously highlighting the rituals and practices of an understudied Christian minority group. Her passion for Turkish Christians is evident, and her goal of celebrating and supporting the songwriting and ministry of Üçal, ASM, and other Turkish Christians is commendable.

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