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A new movement slowly grows through mission organizations to not only embrace the verbal and written languages of the world but their artistic languages as well. This movement is the rallying call of *ethnodoxology*, where the “ethnos” (peoples) of the world come before the throne of God with “doxology” (praise) expressed uniquely through their culture. The phenomenon has grown to such a scale that in recent years, six missiological journals (five within the past two years) focused solely on this theme. I will review four of them in turn, in the order they came out: *Mission Frontiers*, *Journal of NAIITS*, *Transformation*, and *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, and briefly mention two more: *Connections* and *Missiology*.

***Mission Frontiers* — “Arts, Worship, and Mission in Today’s Church: Celebrating 20 years of the Global Ethnodoxology Network” (Issue 45:5, Sept/Oct 2023)**

For many artists serving in missions, *Mission Frontiers* is where it all began. In 1996, a groundbreaking issue investigated the role of the arts in reaching the nations. The next year, Dave Hall coined the term ethnodoxology. Then, in 2003, the very first Global Consultation on Music and Missions started along with the birth of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists.¹ Within ten years, the ethnodoxology handbook *Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities Reach their Kingdom Goals* (Schrag 2013) had been published, and ethnodoxology as a concept had seen exponential growth, impacting mission agencies, non-profits, and institutions around the world in thinking, working, and training.

Perhaps the most important group to grow out of this movement is the Global Ethnodoxology Network, and this issue begins by specifically investigating the seven core values that guide the network. The articles point out that much harm has been done over the years by the Christian mission to dismiss, demean, and destroy local artistic expression around the world. James Krabill states the case well in the opening article: “Commonly employed terms for arts of European origin, such as ‘fine arts’ or ‘high culture’ imply that some arts are better than others, superior in aesthetic content, quality, and performance, and perhaps even closer to God’s plan for humanity. In many parts of the world, Western arts expressions have long played the privileged, authoritative role of defining, shaping, and judging local arts, labeled condescendingly as ‘folk arts’ and thus as inferior, incompetent, and a grade below the Euroarts standard of excellence.” Now, native groups often do not want to use local art forms in worship, no matter how much the leaders encourage it. But as Héber Negrão writes, “We cannot force

¹ Now known as the Global Ethnodoxology Network.

people to go in a way they do not want to go. . . . We must respect the right and capacity of every individual and all communities to shape their own artistic realities.”

This issue not only looks back to where the movement has come from but where it is going as well. It looks ahead to the goal of seeing “all the arts, from all the world, for all of God’s purposes,” as Brian Schrag writes. Article after article proclaims that God imprints his image on every language and culture, and this is the basis for polycentric missions. Ethnodoxologists best support the global church by building up the local body of Christ while recognizing that this movement is indeed from everyone to everywhere.

Of all the journals mentioned in this review, this is perhaps the one I recommend starting from. Besides its stated goal of covering twenty years of ethnodoxology, it is also beautifully designed and illustrated with pictures.

Journal of NAIITS (Volume 21, 2023)

Around the same time as the issue by *Mission Frontiers* was published, the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies (NAIITS) released an issue focused solely on reporting stories and discussions from their June 2023 symposium entitled “Ethnomusicology: The Indigenous Heart Language.” The issue is unique in that it explores culture, art, anthropology, and Christian mission solely from the perspective of indigenous minority groups.

Indigenous, as they define it, means “native, belonging naturally, born in a country, tied to the land.” The interaction of Christianity with indigenous cultures around the world creates tensions that need to be addressed. I personally found the questions asked by authors, such as, “Can I be fully indigenous and fully a follower of Jesus?” and “Must I leave my Mohawk culture behind in order to love and serve the Lord?” extremely helpful. One writer shared how a remote community destroyed all their cultural items in a fire and put up a cross to celebrate that Jesus had “conquered the culture.” On the other hand, another writer shared how using local arts helped bring about a deeper worship of Jesus in the community. According to the stories told, conversations often swing between these two extremes.

The authors also work toward a solution, pointing out that traditional cultures do not need to divide groups based on their differences but rather can affirm, unite, and enrich all the peoples of God. Local arts encourage people to connect with a larger family of believers in their ethnicity while also giving a taste of the future we have in store when all the *ethnos* will bring their doxological praise before the throne of God. God does not call individuals devoid of culture but specifically as peoples, tribes, and nations.

Transformation — “Special Issue: Arts and Mission” (Volume 41, Issue 2, April 2024)

In 2024, *Transformation* also came out with an issue entirely focused on arts and missions. It appropriately begins with an article by James Krabill entitled “Arts and Mission: An Emerging Conversation,” which states that “The church is without a doubt the most linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse movement on the planet. Through the arts, we can reflect this diversity best.” There is still a long way to go, he asserts, as he calls for many more artists to be recruited for missions.

More academic in nature than the other journals, the papers here investigate the relationship of arts and mission at a scholarly depth. Xiaoli Yang focuses on how, in the Chinese church movement, the arts naturally fight against colonization tendencies from the outside as well as nationalistic tendencies from within because they give marginalized Christians a voice. The use of the local arts enables Christians to root their identity in the soil of where they live, in that time and place, and in that local culture. Rather than the three C's of Commerce, Christianity, and Civilization, the arts promote the exact opposite, the three E's of Embedded, Embodied, and Empowered.

Susangeline Patrick investigates the process of deculturation, inculturation, and interculturalization of pre-Columbian artistic traditions. Because Franciscans saw indigenous art as superstitious and of the devil, they sought the *deculturation* of “idol culture” and then the *inculturation* of “icon culture” from Catholic Europe. Eventually, native Christians and missionaries interacted to form new art forms of *interculturalization*, a testimony to how God works through faulty missiology to continue to build his church and develop new ways to praise him.

***Evangelical Missions Quarterly* — “The Arts & Missions” (Volume 61, Issue 1, January–March 2025)**

The most recent issue of the six is *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* and, like *Mission Frontiers*, is beautifully designed and illustrated. It shares many stories of how local arts have played an important role in sharing the gospel among minority groups: the Xerente people of Brazil, the Altai people of southern Siberia, the Basque people in Spain, the Waorani people of Ecuador, and others. The articles give examples of how the arts have always been important for mission movements, for good and for bad, but stress that today, the global church is getting better and better at thinking about the arts in healthy ways.

The journal begins by reminding us that God not only calls missionaries from the “West to the rest,” or from one section of the world to another, but *from* everywhere and *to* everywhere. Polycentric missions is global in scale, and every church and every tradition has a role to play. Rather than divisive debates over style, the focus slowly shifts toward listening, learning, encouraging, developing, and collaborating. Missionaries should not only “bring it and teach it” but also “find it and encourage it,” and through the new relationships built, they will see God embolden the local church while also building up the global church one person at a time.

***Missiology* — (Volume 52, Issue 1, January 2024)**

This issue of *Missiology* presents an engaging array of papers broadly responding and interacting with the material presented at the 2023 annual meeting and 50th anniversary celebration of the American Missiological Society, which centered on the theme of “Global Arts on Mission: Embedded, Embodied, Empowered.” The journal offers two papers by ethnomusicologists Roberta King and Kyama Mugambi that emphasize the importance of local music genres in embodied worship, peacebuilding, and intercultural work and describe the pivotal role of music in African faith communities, respectively. Other papers in this issue discuss the interactions at the junction of culture and worship, reflecting on discussions that took place at the annual meeting and looking toward the future.

Connections — “Arts in Mission” (Volume 9, No. 2–3, September 2010)

Written fifteen years ago, this landmark double issue offers a treasure trove of stories. One of the first to be entirely devoted to the theme of “Arts in Mission,” it offers a sweeping and richly textured mosaic of global voices, theological reflection, and practical engagement. Edited by William Taylor, these contributions serve as both a report on the burgeoning ethnodoxology movement and a call to action. Comparing with other issues in this review, I did feel that, at times, it missed the good that can be found in every culture, including Western music and arts, urban communities, and outside minority people groups. But the ethnodoxology movement has grown since this was published. Rather than taking a defensive posture in worship wars, I appreciate the growing focus of more recent scholarship on building relationships through listening, encouraging, and developing in the arts. Despite the dated nature of the conversations, this issue serves as a valuable companion to the others in understanding how the movement has changed and as a resource for anyone exploring the intersection of faith, culture, and artistic creativity.

Conclusion

The examples cited above are just a small taste of the wonderful buffet of stories being lived out in missions and the arts around the world. These issues not only provide a good overview of what is happening right now but also a solid foundation to encourage continued growth and expansion. Many more stories are yet to come!

The whole earth, including the artistic languages of every nation, is full of the glory of God, and through those artistic languages, we call to one another to praise—from everywhere and to everywhere. No goal could be more valuable than this eternal future in store for us. For one day in heaven, we will unite with people from every language, tribe, and nation to call one another into deeper and deeper praise through all the diversity of our artistic realities. May God increase our joy as we are brought closer to that reality here and now.

References

Schrag, Brian. 2013. *Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities to Reach Their Kingdom Goals*. Edited by James Krabill. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.