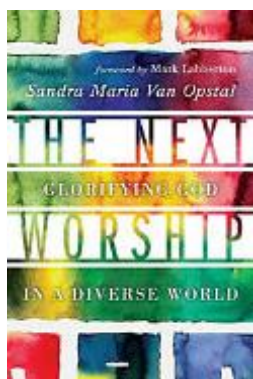


**[Review] *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*, by Sandra Maria Van Opstal;
Worship Together: In Your Church as in Heaven, by Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner**

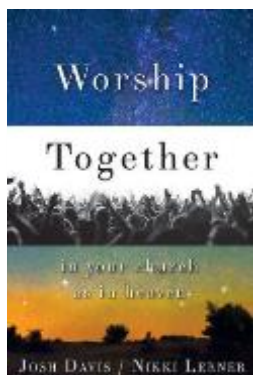
MEGAN MEYERS

Megan Meyers is an ethnodoxologist, working with WorldVenture Mozambique since 2009, focusing on the development of disciples, church ministry, and mission through the use of contextualized worship arts. She is a lecturer of worship arts, communication, and contextualization at the Bible Institute of Sofala and the Baptist Bible Institute in Beira, Mozambique, and is an adjunct professor of Global Arts and World Religions at Fuller Theological Seminary.



Van Opstal, Sandra Maria. *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*.

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2016. 216 pp. ISBN 978-0-8308-4129-5.



Davis, Josh and Nikki Lerner. *Worship Together: In Your Church as in Heaven*. Nashville,

Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. 202 pp. ISBN 978-1-4267-8806-2.

“I love Jesus Culture, it really helps me worship!” This comment from a young Mozambican worship leader a few years ago revealed to me that contextualization in worship is much more complicated than I initially anticipated. As a missionary using contextualized worship arts in discipleship, church ministry, and mission in the city of Beira, Mozambique, I assumed that encouraging “heart music” would be critical to creating authentic worship. I soon learned that local identity is “ambiguous and hybridized” (Ott 2015), leading to multiple “heart musics,” or “heart music” that is appropriated from distant cultures.

The people I work with have a missions legacy that failed to tap into traditional music sources, and an increasingly global influence via YouTube and iTunes, leading to a “West is best” belief. Many of the youth I work with speak only Portuguese (Mozambique’s national language), and have never been exposed to the rich artistic traditions of Mozambique. I often find myself helping musicians and worship leaders understand, process, and navigate global influences, activating the freedom to be nourished by multiple artistic traditions.



Andrew Walls suggests that there remains a necessary tension between the “indigenization principle” and the “pilgrim principle”—that while we seek to contextualize, we must not lose our awareness of others on the journey with us. It is the essence of hospitality: not just feeding those who are already at the table, but also providing “crumbs” for others (Mark 7:27–29). *Next Worship* and *Worship Together* both speak to this dual reality, prophetically challenging the Western church to move beyond consumer Christianity. Worship is not just about *me* as an individual and my musical preferences, but also about *us* collectively. Worship has both vertical (God and me) and horizontal (us) dimensions.

Next Worship and *Worship Together* are part of a growing body of literature that addresses multicultural congregations and worship—including *Diverse Worship* (Maynard-Reid 2000), *Making Room at the Table* (Blount & Tisdale 2001), *One Bread, One Body* (Hawn 2003), *Worship Across the Racial Divide* (Marti 2012), *Worship on the Way* (Yee 2012), and *Exploring Bilingual Worship in the Multicultural Context* (Cho 2017). “It is no longer a question of whether we like or want diversity. The church is diverse” (Van Opstal 14). It is clear that diversity is a pressing issue for the church today.

Both books are deeply personal, written from painful experiences of exclusion and misunderstandings. Sandra Maria Van Opstal is a second-generation Latina American. Josh Davis was a missionary kid who “no longer fit in one world or another” (4). Nikki Lerner felt she was never “black enough” (7) and is married to a white man. Davis states what could be true of each author: “It is this tension inside me that in many ways has led me to consider why the body of Christ is so segregated when it comes to worship” (5). These authors’ personal stories and places shape the nature of their ministries.

Mark Labberton, in the Foreword to *Next Worship*, sets the stage for the book’s thesis:

It would be impossible to say we “love God” and not “love our neighbor.” Faithful worship inevitably leads us to this and makes this dual reality plain. . . . As our neighbors change, our worship needs to change. If our worship does not include or embody our love for our real neighbors, then it does not adequately reflect the God we worship. . . . Multicultural worship is critical for our theology and for our mission. . . . Worship draws us toward God and toward our neighbor. (Van Opstal 8)

Van Opstal expands Labberton’s point, stating, “We must create worship services that enable prophetic imagination in which people can see the future reality of God’s kingdom breaking into the present” (15). *Next Worship* describes her journey of learning how to lead worship in a diverse world for God’s people “around the world and on the block” (17). Using the metaphor of the Lord’s Table as a guiding image, Van Opstal explores the inevitable tensions that exist when diverse people come together, the myth of “normal”

worship, pursuing reconciliation through worship by demonstrating hospitality, solidarity, and mutuality, and how to share leadership through collaboration.

After laying the theoretical foundation, Van Opstal then gives some practical guidelines for how a church or worship ministry might move forward in pursuing multicultural worship: describing models of diverse worship; considering liturgical components beyond music; creating culture change; and training worship leaders.

Next Worship ends with a case study of North Park University Chapel, and helpful appendices on topics from additional books on culture and worship, to orders of services. The appendices bring the depth and breadth of Van Opstal's experiences leading diverse worship into accessible, practical resources for worship leaders who are just beginning the journey of diverse worship; they are well worth the price of the book.

Worship Together, co-authored by Davis and Lerner, has a theological premise similar to *Next Worship's*. The authors concede that "multi-cultural worship can be incredibly uncomfortable, complicated, difficult, and time consuming" (11), yet argue that "worship has always been and will always be bigger than us" (12). Rather than asking what we want or what our target audience is, "we should be asking what does God want?" (12).

Davis and Lerner argue that God created the nations and desires all nations to worship him together. Though he separated the nations at Babel, he united them in Christ. We see this reversal manifested in Jesus's lifetime when he drives out the money-changers because "my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:7); and again at Pentecost, when people are able to understand one another through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Davis and Lerner conclude that worship that is not diverse is dangerous. Why? When worship is not diverse, we risk valuing one culture over another, judging one culture as right and another as wrong, failing to engage the hearts of all our congregants, failing to give God glory in his diverse creative acts, and giving an inaccurate picture of Christ, in his trinitarian oneness, to the world. Though there is a tendency to "cater to the consumer mind-set of many church members communicat[ing] that worship is about them" (23), the truth is that Paul encourages us to follow Christ's example of humility:

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

The following sections of *Worship Together* give practical insights: developing diverse worshipping communities; learning to live and lead a multicultural lifestyle; knowing your own culture; and navigating cultures using culture coaches. Davis and Lerner explain how to lead change for good, providing the nuts and bolts of multicultural worship leading, and concluding with models of multicultural worship and case studies of encouragement.

Next Worship and *Worship Together* are remarkably similar. Both books are supported by contextual experience and academic research and are written for lay leadership, in an accessible, conversational style. Both begin with a similar theological foundation for the necessity of multicultural worship and conclude with practical suggestions and strategies. Where they differ is in the goal of multicultural worship. While Davis and Lerner are intent on getting everyone at the same table together, Van Opstal states that “the ultimate goal of diverse worship is not to have everyone at the same table” (50).

Referencing the body imagery of 1 Corinthians 12, she argues that “worshipping communities will live into hospitality, solidarity and mutuality in distinct ways, both within each congregation as well as in partnership with other congregations” (50). Through global and local partnerships, “next worship is an inclusive and diverse table that embodies reconciliation and points to the future celebration of God’s people from every tribe, tongue, people and language” (52).

As an ethnodoxologist working in Mozambique, my main concern is not whether or not music is “foreign” or Mozambican, but whether or not a local body of believers—whatever their cultural identity (or identities)—can connect with God’s presence together in worship. Furthermore, a local body should look beyond the formation of its own contextual identity to embrace those outside the four walls of the church; worship and witness are interdependent. “Christians the world over must move beyond consumerism to hospitality, considering how to welcome others into the transformational presence of God” (Meyers 2016, 265).

In “Multicultural Congregations and Worship: A Literature Review,” Terry York says, “No congregation is expected to wrap its arms around the entire world. But every congregation is expected to open its arms to the entire world” (2014, 50). While the idea of multicultural churches is admirable, many neighborhoods are just not that diverse. Yet even in a monocultural setting with a parish model, there are ways each church can move forward into local and global partnerships. In so doing, a church can “open its arms to the world” and engage in ethnically diverse worship together. Both *Next Worship* and *Worship Together* encourage churches to embrace the global, already-not-yet Kingdom.

References

- Blount, Brian K., and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. 2001. *Making Room at the Table: An Invitation to Multicultural Worship*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox.
- Cho, Sung Hwa. 2017. *Exploring Bilingual Worship in the Multicultural Context: Korean–American Bilingual Worship Project*. Bilingual edition. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Hawn, C. Michael. 2003. *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship*. Herndon, Virginia: Alban Institute.
- Marti, Gerardo. 2012. *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U. 2000. *Diverse Worship: African–American, Caribbean and Hispanic Perspectives*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press.
- Meyers, Megan. 2016. “Contextualization is Complicated: A Case Study of Contextualized Worship Arts in Mozambique.” *Missiology* 44(3): 257–268.
- Ott, Craig. 2015. “Globalization and Contextualization: Reframing the Task of Contextualization in the Twenty-First Century.” *Missiology* 43(1): 43–58.
- Walls, Andrew. 1982. “The Gospel as the Prisoner and Liberator of Culture.” *Missionalia* 10(3): 93–105.
- Yee, Russell. 2012. *Worship on the Way: Exploring Asian North American Christian Experience*. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press.
- York, Terry. “Multicultural Congregations and Worship: A Literature Review.” *Journal of Family and Community Ministries*. 27(2014): 1.