

[Article] Local Arts as Theodrama: Toward a Practical Theology of Ethnodoxology



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Introduction

Within a relatively short period of time, the field of ethnodoxology has demonstrated its value in the missiological task. As ethnodoxologists have plied their trade, the interdisciplinary nature of their craft is also readily apparent. But which disciplines should ethnodoxologists and local communities incorporate into this field as they produce local Christian art? And what should be the governing principle for how practitioners apply ethnodoxology? To identify the fundamental assumptions that direct the practice of ethnodoxology, the discipline requires a theoretical grid to guide ethnodoxologists in the practice.

Works such as Schrag's *Creating Local Arts Together* provide a tremendous service in explaining *how* to practice ethnodoxology, but what is still needed is an interdisciplinary matrix that tells us *why* ethnodoxologists perform these particular practices but not others, or why ethnodoxologists should act according to certain assumptions rather than others. I argue that what is needed is a practical theology of ethnodoxology that combines theological reflection, research, and ministry method. Unfortunately, the field of practical theology is far from monolithic; there are nearly as many practical theologies as there are practical theologians.¹ However, we can take some preliminary steps to produce a practical theology of this discipline.

As a starting point, I propose that Kevin Vanhoozer's theodramatically revised Scripture principle should be the architectonic principle for a practical theology of ethnodoxology. Because practical theologians interact with theology, philosophy, and the human sciences, this discipline is already well-equipped to integrate other disciplines of study, especially ethnodoxology. After a brief definition of practical theology, I will next explain the Scripture principle in dogmatics and how Vanhoozer's theodramatic revision improves it. Once I've explained the theodramatically revised Scripture principle, I will then describe how it functions as the paradigm for practical

¹ Richard R. Osmer (2011) identifies six different contemporary perspectives with regard to different practical theologies: (1) a postmodern transforming practice approach (Chopp 2009; Fulkerson 2010; Graham 2002); (2) an American hermeneutical approach (Browning 2009; 1995; Fowler 1999; Gerkin 1984); (3) a Dutch South African empirical approach (Pieterse 2001); (4) A Christo-praxis approach (Anderson 2001); (5) an American neo-Aristotelian practices approach (Bass and Dykstra 2008; Dykstra 1991); (6) an American Barthian approach (Hunsinger 1995; Loder 1999). To this I would add two other approaches: (7) pastoral (practical) theology in the classical tradition (Oden 1983; Purves 2001); (8) a Kuyperian or Dutch Reformed approach (Johnson 2014).



theology, which includes ethnodoxology. My objective is to introduce some first steps toward a working practical theology of ethnodoxology.

Practical theology is one of four fields in Christian divinity making up what is known as the theological encyclopedia. The other fields (biblical theology, historical theology, and dogmatics) interact with one another and culminate in the practice of theology. Swinton and Moffat provide a succinct definition of practical theology:

Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to, and for the world. (2006, 6)

Practical theology, then, is the synthesis of biblical studies, historical inquiry of the doctrines and practices of the Church in the past, and dogmatic formulations (systematic theology) into concrete ministry practices.² It is also a hermeneutical discipline—that is, it engages in the principles of interpretation of all forms of human communication, in that practical theologians interpret the milieu in which they practice ministry. It is an empirical task in that practical theologians frequently use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to identify and to understand the ministry problem. How exactly these hermeneutical and empirical concerns interact with the broad field of theology (exegetical, thematic, dogmatic, ministry practice) is a subject of contentious debates among practical theologians.³ Vanhoozer, a systematic theologian, offers a proposal that respects these contemporary hermeneutical and epistemological questions while upholding evangelical commitments.

A Brief History of First Principles in Theology

The field of dogmatics or systematic theology comprises multiple *loci* or categories, traditionally starting with Scripture (bibliology), God, humanity, and so forth. Theological prolegomena, of which the Scripture principle is one aspect, logically precedes these traditional theological *loci*. This domain considers how a person obtains knowledge of God—that is, religious epistemology. To develop the first part of my argument, this section will provide a definition and brief history of the development of the Scripture principle. I'll discuss the first principles of dogmatics as understood by the post-Reformation theologians and then proceed to modern evangelicalism. Then I will examine Vanhoozer's theodramatic revision of the Scripture principle.

² For a history of the development of practical theology (sometimes called "pastoral theology") as a discipline, see Woodward and Pattison 2000. Part One discusses practical theology as a discipline as well as its historical development in the United Kingdom and the United States in three chapters: Hiltner 2000; Patton 2000; Ballard 2000.

³ Cahalan (2005) mentions three responses of practical theologians to modernism: late modern, countermodern, and radical postmodern. Others recommend a fourth view, transformative praxis, as an alternative. Vanhoozer's theodramatic revision of the Scripture principle, then, would be an evangelical fifth alternative that relies on postmodern categories in its counterproposal to the modern/postmodern project.

Post-Reformation Era

Classical post-Reformation theologians categorized God and Scripture as the first principles of theology, which is to say they identified the object of theological inquiry (God) and the means by which he is known (Scripture) as the basis for performing the theological task. God as the object of theology is the *principium essendi*. The Protestant divines understood that we know God through two cognitive principles (*principia cognoscendi*). Scripture is the external cognitive principle (*principium cognoscendi externum*), and the Holy Spirit is the internal cognitive principle (*principium cognoscendi internum*) (Berkhof 1996, 93–97).

Protestant divines from the post-Reformation era attested to these first principles. Lucas Trelcatius identified the *principia* as God and the Word (Muller 1987, 296–99; Trelcatius 1606, 1.1). Edward Leigh similarly recognized the *principia*: “Two things are to be considered in Divinity: First the rule of it, the Scripture or the Word of God. Secondly, the matter or parts of it concerning God and man. *Principium essendi* in divinity is God the first essence; *principium cognoscendi*, the Scripture, by which we know God, and all things concerning him” (1654, I.2). Johannes Wollebius wrote, “There is a two-fold principle of Divinity; the one by which it is, and that is God; the other by which it is known, and that is the Word of God” (1656, Praecognita 1.3). Francis Turretin acknowledged that a proper knowledge of God is possible only through Scripture: “The Proper rule of things to be believed and disbelieved is not the apprehension of their possibility or impossibility, but the Word of God” (1992, 1.9.20). We may therefore conclude that there was some measure of consensus among the Protestant divines concerning the basis of one’s knowledge of God, and that Scripture is a non-negotiable component of this knowledge.

Modern Evangelicalism

Modern evangelical theologians have likewise affirmed the necessity of both God and Scripture for any saving knowledge of God. Millard Erickson identifies “God as the object and Scripture as the means of knowledge about God” (1998, 32–33). Yet Erickson recognizes that locating the precise starting point for a saving knowledge of God in dogmatics is problematic, much like identifying which came first, the chicken or the egg. If one starts with God as the basis of knowledge, then one must ask how God is known. On the other hand, if one starts with Scripture, one must then ask what legitimates that particular holy text and its God above all others. Priority between God and Scripture for a proper knowledge of God presents a seemingly unsolvable conundrum. As a solution, Erickson writes, “Instead of beginning with either God or the Bible, either the object of knowledge or the means of knowledge, we may begin with both . . . perhaps we might think of the self-revealing God as a single proposition” (33). The self-revealing God of the Bible, therefore, is knowable and makes himself known to us through Scripture.

But there is a weakness in Erickson’s definition of the knowledge of God, because of its predominantly cognitive basis. John Frame contends that knowledge of God is not exclusively cognitive but entails normative, situational, and existential perspectives (1987, 89–90). The normative perspective is concerned with the propositions that state what God requires of human

beings and how people should respond to God. The situational perspective is concerned with how to express devotion to God within concrete circumstances. The existential perspective refers to one's experiential and emotive awareness of God in a specific time and place. Finally, knowledge of God from an evangelical Christian standpoint implies both an affirmation of and a fiduciary response to the apostolic kerygma, the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the primary message of Scripture.

The personal and social elements of a proper knowledge of God that were included in Frame's model are generally missing in Protestant Scholasticism, as well as in modern evangelicalism, and the traditional understanding of the Scripture principle is accordingly inadequate. Vanhoozer seeks to remedy such deficiencies, among other considerations, in his effort to "reclaim the Scripture principle" (2005, 63).

Vanhoozer's Theodramatic Scripture Principle

Vanhoozer shares Erickson's concern for the proper starting point for a saving knowledge of God.⁴ But he goes further by proposing an analogy that considers God, Scripture, *and* hermeneutics in a "manner that combines theological matter with theological method" (Vanhoozer 2002, 16). The result is a *revised* theodramatic Scripture principle that simultaneously pierces the epistemic fog of contemporary hermeneutical doubt and suspicion in God-talk. Moreover, it reaffirms the Scripture principle, but as the product of the Triune God's communicative activity. Finally, Vanhoozer's theodramatic Scripture principle presents a theological method that conveys salvific knowledge of God that is at once cognitive, existential, and practical. I will begin by summarizing Vanhoozer's understanding of theodrama.

Vanhoozer's Model of Theodrama

Vanhoozer⁵ begins by identifying the triune God as "a speech-agent, as a word, and as the breath that carries the word to others" (2005, 63). He further upholds the orthodox position that Scripture itself is a species of divine discourse. Yet, unlike the Protestant divines and other contemporary evangelicals, Vanhoozer refuses to separate God and Scripture as a "first theology." Rather, Vanhoozer asserts, "The proper starting point for Christian theology is *God in communicative action*. What this means in practice is that Christians must neither think God apart from Scripture nor

⁴ Vanhoozer writes, "[W]hich comes first: the doctrine of God or the doctrine of Scripture? On the one hand, starting with God prompts the question, 'How do we know about God?' Just as starting with Scripture raises the question, 'Why *this* particular text rather than another?' On the other hand, it is difficult to talk of God without appealing to the Bible, just as it is difficult to treat the Bible as Scripture without appealing to God" (2002, 15–16).

⁵ By calling this section "Vanhoozer's Model of Theodrama," I am distinguishing Vanhoozer's understanding of theodrama from that of Hans Urs von Balthasar (see Balthasar 1988).

Scripture apart from God. . . . Theologians should pay . . . greater attention to the Bible as itself a *communicative act of the triune God*” (2005, 62–63).

It is well and good to acknowledge God as a communicative agent and Scripture as his communicative act. The problem is in recognizing that it is in fact *God* speaking. Furthermore, having established that it is God speaking, it is then incumbent upon the hearers to interpret the message correctly. Vanhoozer is well aware that epistemological issues were front and center in philosophical circles during the modern era, and hermeneutical concerns likewise in the postmodern. In response he creatively threads the epistemic needle of God-talk with the hermeneutics of speech-act theory.⁶ An assumption of speech-act theory is that communication is a complex interaction involving the one communicating, the medium of language, and the hearer. Utterances composed of words (locutions) are performative actions (illocutions), rather than mere linguistic abstractions, that result in either intended or unintended responses (perlocutions) (Briggs 2005). In speaking, the illocutions actually *do* something, whether it is to promise, issue a command, or make a statement (Searle 2008, 1–29).⁷ Relying on the insights of speech-act theory, Vanhoozer proposes that the Trinitarian economy can be understood as communication in action (2005, 65n29),⁸ and the divine self-communication to humanity “rides a train of illocutions” in the Bible (Vanhoozer 2005, 64; 2009; Wolterstorff 1995, 75–129). In God’s self-disclosure there, we see God promising, declaring, or commanding us—all of which are illocutionary acts. And God’s illocutionary acts are comprehensible to humanity.

Vanhoozer selected drama as an analogy for God’s communicative activity and the faithful, obedient response of the church because drama conveys *action* rather than *abstractions*. The drama begins within the Trinitarian relations themselves (Vanhoozer 2010, 181–240), whose divine intercommunication also consists of speech acts (illocutions). The Bible, in both its inscripturation and in its content, is an extension of the triune God’s eternal communicative activity. The whole of redemptive history as recounted in Scripture reveals God’s dramatic activity, not only in the divine self-communication but also in the grand drama of creation-fall-redemption-consummation.⁹ The divine discourse enacted and brought forth the creation *ex nihilo*. In the fall, God declared that Adam would die if he disobeyed his directive; afterward, God asserted various curses upon humanity (both the man and the woman), the creation itself, and the serpent. In a

⁶ Searle 1969; Austin, Urmson, and Sbisà 1975. For a comprehensive treatment of speech-act theory in Vanhoozer’s theological development, see Vanhoozer 2009.

⁷ Searle identifies five categories of speech-acts: assertive, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

⁸ Vanhoozer writes, “In what we may call ‘the analogy of speech acts,’ the Father (‘who spoke [*est locutus*] by the prophets’) locutes; the Son is the illocution, the promise of God; the Spirit is the ‘perlocution,’ the effect achieved *through* (per) the speech-act” (2002, 148–155). See also Vanhoozer 2009, 455–59.

⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar says approximately the same thing in *Theo-Drama*, 151–72. However, his distinctions are God’s lawsuit, Christ’s dramatic struggle, and the drama of discipleship.

redemptive history punctuated with covenants, the drama includes the time of the patriarchs, the Exodus, and the various stages of Israel's national history (Judges, monarchy, exilic, post-exilic periods), culminating in Jesus Christ—the Word of God (John 1:1, 14) and the commission that he gave to his disciples and to the church. Each of these stages along the path of redemptive history reveals theodramatic activity not only in God's words (his speech acts) but also in his saving actions.

The story of Scripture, therefore, is not something to be considered apart from the nature of God but is an extension of his dramatic communicative activity. The Holy Spirit not only inspired the words (locutions from the Father) but also their intent (illocutions of the promise of the Son) and he acts as the perlocutionary agent (conversion) on the grand stage of redemptive history. Even more, as the church, Christians are able to provide direction in following God's message to them in Scripture via theology. Even in this age of postmodern uncertainty, the church of Jesus Christ has an authority to which it may appeal. The "*ultimate authority for Christian theology is the triune God speaking in the Scriptures*" (Vanhoozer 2005, 65). The impossible task of speaking about God begins with the divine word-acts: with the living Word (incarnation) and with the written word (inspiration). To construe God, Scripture, and theology together in theodramatic terms: the triune God is the paradigm communicative agency; Scripture is a human–divine communicative act; theology oriented to the Scripture principle is a means of participating in the theodramatic action (Vanhoozer 2005, 65).

Lived obedience to God's communicative action in Scripture means that faithfully responding to God's commands is in itself a dramatic activity, a dialogue among God, the individual, as well as the church. Hearers of the good news of the gospel identify dramatically with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ when they respond to it in repentance and faith not only in conversion but also in the on-going process of conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. Moreover, Bible study is dramatic in that the reader is invited to become a participant in the drama of redemption in the act of reading the biblical narrative (Vanhoozer 2005, 18).¹⁰ As Vanhoozer argues, since the Scripture is intrinsically dramatic and the process of reading it is dramatic, doing theology itself (which includes proclaiming the gospel as story) is a dramatic activity.

And as a hermeneutical nexus for each component of his revised Scripture principle (theodrama, Scripture principle, gospel), Vanhoozer proposes the *missio Dei* (Vanhoozer 2005, 68–69).¹¹ The missional God communicates to us precisely for the task of saving us via the gospel and imparting to us his values and moral character. The incarnation, the cross, and even Scripture itself

¹⁰ Vanhoozer (2005) writes, "The biblical narrative is a three-dimensional discourse that operates with historical, literary, and ideological principles. The remembered past is rendered through a plot, which in turn renders a proposition: a possible way of viewing and living in the world. The reader, thus propositioned, becomes a player in the ongoing drama of creation and redemption. As a participant in this historical process, the reader is *spoken to* in the text."

¹¹ See Wright 2006, 58; Bosch 2011, 389–93. The term *missio Dei* has multiple definitions. Contra a Christological or a pneumatological *missio Dei*, I propose a "two hands of God" (Irenaeus) understanding of the *missio Dei*, incorporating proclamation of the *euangelion* as well as humanitarian aid as a faithful, tangible expression of a gospel witness. The two are not irreconcilable.

are missionary acts of the missional God (Wright 2006, 22–25),¹² and mission as “a focus of hermeneutical coherence” (40) based on the Scripture principle should compel us to make a participatory response to the divine mission in one way or another. Whatever form that faithful response may take is an example of the human side of a covenantal dialogue involving the theodramatic divine discourse of Scripture that communicates the *euangelion* with the purpose of saving humanity, which is the goal of the mission of God. To hear God and respond in faithful dialogue, then, is to join him in his mission.

Vanhoozer’s Theodrama as a Paradigm for Practical Theology and Ethnodoxology

In manifold ways, Vanhoozer’s theodrama is an improvement of the classical Protestant understanding of the Scripture principle. His synthesis of the *principium essendi* and the *principia cognoscendi* offers more than an apologetic for Scripture as the norm of norms. The theodramatically revised Scripture principle’s emphasis on wisdom over knowledge and the priority given to practice over theory bridges the gaps that often separate biblical exegesis from systematic theology as well as theory and practice.¹³ This creative merging of all four elements of the theological encyclopedia suggests its incorporation as the paradigm for practical theology.

According to Vanhoozer, theodrama reconciles the unfortunate cleavage between theory and practice that has become prevalent in Christian ministry. Because theodrama is about action, our participation in it via obedient response to Scripture goes far beyond mere intellectual assent: “The drama of doctrine is about refining the dross of textual knowledge into the gold of Christian wisdom by putting one’s understanding of the Scriptures into practice. . . . [Its] proper end is wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of the truth” (Vanhoozer 2005, 21). *Sapientia*, or wisdom, embraces *scientia* but goes even further: lived, heartfelt obedience. Vanhoozer’s theodrama assigns to theory and practice their proper roles within the dramatic participation in God’s plan of redemption, his theodramatic revision is inclusive of biblical studies, history, and dogmatics such that it incorporates all of them but emphasizes the *telos* of action—that is, the practice of theology.

¹² Wright gives the following definitions for the following terms which I shall hereafter follow. Wright defines the Christian *mission*: “(if it is biblically informed and validated) [as] . . . our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.” Wright defines *missionary* as “those who are sent by churches or agencies to work in mission or on missions,” but acknowledges that “the word is also used as an adjective.” Wright defines *missional* as “an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities attributes or dynamics of mission.” *Missiology* “is the study of mission.” Throughout this article, I will use the adjectives “missionary” and “missional” interchangeably, as I have done above.

¹³ Vanhoozer comments, “One is hard pressed to say which is uglier: the ditch separating theory and practice or the ditch that separates exegesis and theology” (2005, 20).

This emphasis on action intersects all expressions of ministry practice, including missions.¹⁴ According to Richard Osmer, practical theology is a discipline characterized by reflective practice (2008, 1–30).¹⁵ Ministry as reflective practice has four essential tasks: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretive, the normative, and the pragmatic. The starting point in any practical theological project is the “descriptive-empirical task,” in which one attempts to describe the ministry setting as well as to identify the specific issue that is the focus of the investigation. Having gathered information on the topic of focus and its setting, it is then necessary to interpret the findings. Osmer calls this step the “interpretive task.” Next is the “normative task,” in which the practical theologian appeals to theological resources (biblical studies, history, systematic theology) in order to provide direction regarding the issue within the ministry setting. Finally, having identified a fitting response to the ministry issue, the practitioner should describe the practical steps necessary to engage the subject in a manner that is sympathetic to the socio-cultural context in which one is located, which is the “pragmatic task.” Even informal practice of ministry follows a trajectory of development similar to the four-fold ministry task identified by Osmer.

I now turn my attention to ethnodoxology and suggest that it, too, is an expression of practical theology whose practitioners exhibit reflective practice in ministry. As such, Vanhoozer’s theodramatically revised Scripture principle applies as a paradigm for ethnodoxology in its reflective practice. First, practical theologians acknowledge many sub-disciplines within the field, including liturgics (worship), homiletics (preaching), religious pedagogics and catechetics (education), poimenics (shepherding/counseling), evangelism and missions, oikodomics (church growth), and administration (Heitink 1999, 251–52, 288–90). I argue that practitioners of ethnodoxology, through the medium of worship (liturgics), interact with almost all of these sub-disciplines. Their involvement with various communities worldwide produces artistic expressions that evangelize, proclaim, teach, and perform pastoral counseling. As such, ethnodoxology is action-oriented theological reflection (practical theology).

Furthermore, the process of ethnodoxology is reflective practice, as defined by Osmer. Osmer’s four tasks of reflective practice (descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, pragmatic) are visible in the steps of Schrag’s *Creating Local Arts Together*. Following the process of ethnodoxology,

¹⁴ Missiologists do provide their own paradigms for practice. I have deliberately selected Osmer’s conceptualization for practical theology for two reasons. First, orality strategies are not exclusively in international missions work but also in urban evangelism in Western countries. Practical theology, then, is inclusive of all aspects of ministry including international missions. Second, Van Rheen’s missional helix resembles Osmer’s four tasks of reflected practice but does not account for the metatheoretical assumptions like Osmer. A paradigm should begin with the metatheoretical domains before it influences reflected practice. See Van Rheenen n.d.

¹⁵ Reflected practice is by no means the only manner in which to do practical theology. In contrast to a Barthian theory-to-practice model, a fundamentalist Bible-application model, or a traditional mainline Protestant dogmatics-application model, reflective practice involves the act of *doing* theology (arriving at normative conclusions based on Scripture and dogmatics and then performing them in a manner appropriate to a given sociolinguistic context).

as listed in the table of contents of *Creating Local Arts Together*, should illustrate how the implementation of ethnodoxology follows the four tasks of reflective practice.

Benefits of a Practical Theology of Ethnodoxology

Some may question the relevance of a practical theology of ethnodoxology. Manuals such as *Creating Local Arts Together* may seem to be all that is needed. But beneficial as they are, manuals are not equipped to respond to intramural discussions like “Why Music Is Not a Universal Language” (Harris 2013). Questions such as these transcend the theory of ethnodoxology and enter into metatheoretical questions. Practical theology, particularly because of theodrama’s metaphysical categories and interdisciplinarity, is equipped to respond to these sorts of topics. It also can evaluate and improve the existing practice of ethnodoxology.

As a test case for how Vanhoozer’s theodrama contributes to the practice of ethnodoxology, I’ll examine Harris’s dictum, “Music is a universal phenomenon; but music is not a universal language” (Harris 2013). This statement has already received much commentary from others, including Aniol et al. (2015) and Stallsmith (2015). Though it may seem that there is little additional light that I can add in this brief space, I do believe that the application of theodrama has a contribution to make. Analyzing this statement also raises questions concerning how we should define ethnodoxology, and the nature of music itself. In response to the discussion among Harris, Aniol et al., and Stallsmith, I will show how theodrama can assist us with the issues raised, as well as demonstrate theodrama’s applicability for a needed practical theology of ethnodoxology.

Before I respond to the statement that “music is not a universal language,” we will see how theodrama contributes to our understanding of the definition of ethnodoxology, which in turn will enable us to give a more informed response. Much writing about ethnodoxology relies on insights from the social sciences. Glenn Stallsmith, for example, makes a revealing statement when he writes, “[O]ur intellectual heritage is more closely aligned to the social sciences than any other discipline” (2015, A21). As one example, Stallsmith refers to semiotic theory and music as evidence that music and language share similar features (A31).

As important as the social sciences are to ethnodoxology, I suggest that this discipline should derive primarily from a *theological* intellectual heritage. This is clear in the official definition of ethnodoxology as “the *theological* and *practical* study of how and why people of other cultures praise and glorify the true and living God” (emphasis mine) (Shubin 2001, 11).

The application of Vanhoozer’s theodrama can help us understand why this is the case. As I stated above, theodrama begins with God’s revelation—what Vanhoozer calls “the divine communicative action” in reference to speech-act theory. These divine performative utterances provide us with the text of the canon [locutions], through which God speaks to us today [illocutions]. Our responses [perlocutions] include our theological actions. Because ethnodoxologists see artistic expressions as performative acts that communicate theological content, all of ethnodoxology, including its reliance upon the social sciences, represents a dramatic participation in God’s theodramatic activity. Since the theodrama begins with the godhead

(metaphysics), theology transcends all of the other disciplines of human inquiry. Theology is the queen of the (social) sciences. And as a theology of action, ethnodoxology is primarily an expression of practical theology (Heitink 1999, 251–52, 288–90).¹⁶ Because practical theology interacts with the human sciences, among other disciplines, integrating the social sciences into ethnodoxology should not pose any difficulties (Heitink 1999, 45; Browning 1995, 77, 79–80; Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 255–58)¹⁷—only, theology is not one disciplinary voice among many, but rather, the umbrella upon which all the other disciplines depend.

Vanhoozer’s reliance upon speech-act theory can also assist us with our understanding of the nature of music. Stallsmith referred to Turino’s application of Peircian semiotic theory to music (2015, A31; see also Turino 1999, 221–55). Certainly semiotics can provide great insight into the nature of music. I suggest that, to be consistent with a theodramatic approach to ethnodoxology, we should also consider the contributions of speech-act theory to our understanding of music (Chung 2019; London 1996). Besides the desire for consistency with the theological method, I also suggest that speech-act theory offers a better analogy for communication for arts, and specifically the Christian arts. Speech-act theory conceives of communication as action, specifically “performative action.” All arts, Christian arts included, require action to produce them. Following the ternary structure of speech-act theory to indigenous music, for example, the rhythms from a West African talking drum are the locutions. The message implicit in the rhythms themselves is the illocution. And the response from the listeners is the perlocutionary result. Christian arts, as a theological participation in the divine communicative action (Scripture), then, is a continuation of the *missio Dei*. Vanhoozer (2005) calls it the drama of doctrine.

Having explained how theodrama defines ethnodoxology, and having defined music as performative action, I can now respond to the discussion of the phrase “Music is a universal phenomenon; but music is not a universal language.” Harris and other ethnodoxologists rightly express their concern for protecting local expressions of the arts. They also wish to avoid the tendency of universal artistic practices to dehumanize local artistic expressions (Stallsmith 2015, A28). We believe that the Church should uphold this ideal in its ministry to the world.

Aniol et al., however, wish to preserve the integrity of worship when they disagree with the idea that “music is not a universal language” (2015, 20–21). Stallsmith agrees that music must possess some universal features (2015, A31). At issue, however, is the reason why music possesses

¹⁶ Among the subdisciplines of practical theology, Heitink lists liturgics (worship).

¹⁷ Swinton and Mowat write, “Within the social-scientific model of action research the focus of action tends to be on generating solutions to particular problems. Practical Theology has a wider theological remit which involves challenging current practices in the hope that they will move closer towards faithfulness” (256).

universal features and whether or not music and language are similar to one another in this regard.¹⁸

Ethnodoxologists and theologians have expressed valid concerns regarding the universal-particularist nature of music. Each side has compelling arguments. I propose that theodrama as the practical theological principle of ethnodoxology offers a solution that respects both sides of the argument. Music possesses both universal and particular qualities. All ethnodoxology, as practical theology, is a dramatic interpretation of the great things of the gospel as communicated in Scripture. Inasmuch as artistic expressions are faithful to the canon of Scripture, they share in its universal message and its universal truths. That is one universal aspect shared by all music as Christian art.

But I would also argue that all music shares certain characteristics. Our exploration into speech-act theory in theodrama helps us here. Music, like language, is communication. And as communication, music is *performative language*. The notes and rhythms of music form the locutions. But the message implicit within the notes themselves form the illocutionary acts. And the audience's response to the music is the perlocutionary result. Regardless of whether or not all music shares the same tone, key, and so forth, all music communicates illocutions to the listener. Thus, while not all musical expression (tonality, atonality) conveys the same idea among all cultures, music still communicates.

We may concur with both sides of this discussion at various levels, depending on the specific question, through the insights of theodrama. With Aniol et al. and Stallsmith, we can agree that music carries some universal features because music is a form of communicative action consisting of locutions, illocutionary acts, and perlocutions. But I disagree with Aniol et al. when they write, "Thus music and spoken language are not equivalent categories since the meaning of spoken language is mostly conventional, while musical meaning can be universally perceived, on at least some levels, due to that fact that all people share a common physiology and thus a culture of humanity" (2015, 21). For the reasons explained above, I disagree with Aniol et al. and affirm Harris and Stallsmith.

I also agree with Harris, Stallsmith, and the ethnodoxology movement about the necessity to record, preserve, and promote the creation and distribution of local Christian arts. Vanhoozer's theodramatically revised Scripture principle allows for a form of contextualization that respects local, cultural considerations while at the same time upholding the truthfulness of Scripture. This type of contextualization is what Vanhoozer analogously refers to as "dramatic improvisations" (2005, 128–29, 335–44, 349, 388). The ministry actions, accommodated to the local culture, are faithful to the illocutions of the divine communicative action in Scripture (the Script). However,

¹⁸ Aniol et al. write, "Thus music and spoken language are not equivalent categories since the meaning of spoken language is mostly conventional, while musical meaning can be universally perceived, on at least some levels, due to that fact that all people share a common physiology and thus a culture of humanity" (2015, 21). This understanding contradicts Harris's (2013) observation that some music in Russia, for example, often communicates joy and triumph in minor keys, whereas much European and United States music consider music in a minor key to be melancholy.

like actors improvising their lines, the locutions from the local artists (local arts in whatever media) are notably different in form, though not in substance, to the story of the Script in their theodramatic participation. The mark of truly good theology should be the level of fidelity to the Script as well as the creativity in the role that one plays.

Conclusion

Ethnodoxology is a fruitful endeavor on the mission field. Greater development of it as a discipline of practical ministry would only augment its worth and efficacy. In my explanation of Vanhoozer's theodramatically revised Scripture principle, I demonstrated its contribution to practical theology. Having identified ethnodoxology as an application of practical theology, I then explained how Vanhoozer's theodrama would make a positive contribution to the field by acting as the starting point for a practical theology of ethnodoxology. It is my prayer that ethnodoxology will continue to grow and develop, and that more will see its value in the missionary task.

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