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INCREASING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE
WORSHIP AT HICKORY GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

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INCREASING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE
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To the three most influential people in my life:

My father, Mr. Sylvestre Hakizimana; my mother, Mrs. Antoinette Nahimana;
and my wife, Mrs. Megan L. Hakizimana. Your investment in my spiritual growth over
the past years has not passed by unnoticed.

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PREFACE

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose mercies are unceasing. By his grace, He has equipped me through various blessings and challenges to accomplish this project through His Word and for his people. The experience among faculty, classmates, seminars, and assignments over the past three and half years has enlightened my understanding of stewardship and servanthood of the body of Christ in my ministry.

Thank you to, Megan, my godly wife and partner, whose encouragement was a fuel needed to continue in my education, even though we were not sure sometimes where it would lead. Thank you to our children, Zuri, Esyiah and Zakiah, who traded some of the best family time that a father owes to his children for the sake of the body of Christ.

With great appreciation and love, thank you to Hickory Grove Baptist Church, senior pastor Clint Pressley, worship pastor John Stegemerten, staff, and members of worship ministry for providing me with the resources and opportunity to complete this project under their leadership and supervision.

Finally, thank you to Dr. Jeffrey Hunter, my project supervisor, who authentically supported and guided me through my doctoral project with immeasurable proficiency and grace, and Dr. Esther Crookshank, my second reader, whose insights and contribution were invaluable. All glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Olivier Hakizimana

Charlotte, North Carolina

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Hickory Grove Baptist Church (HGBC) is a community of believers in Jesus Christ whose members come from many different backgrounds and cultures. They are involved in distinctive activities at the church. HGBC's desire is to teach and show what it means to walk daily as a Christian, to have a firm foundation in the Word of God and, ultimately, to understand that the church is sent out to the community, nation, and the nations.

Ministry Context

Over the last decade, HGBC has made significant changes in its worship philosophy and methodology. The change in worship ministry began with the pastor's teaching on a biblical theology of worship. The sermon series during 2011-2015 compelled the congregants to participate in corporate worship as they gather on the Lord's Day to hear God's Word and respond to Him in prayer and praise. The pastor's vision for the church was to see the congregation singing songs that are God-centered, theologically-accurate, and easy to sing. The pastor's vision made a great impact on HGBC and changed the direction of its worship ministry.

During the same time (2011-2015), cultural diversity within HGBC's local community increased drastically due to Charlotte's population growth, primary through growth in immigrant communities. Therefore, if HGBC desires to increase cultural diversity in corporate worship, then church leaders need to assess the church worship ministry to incorporate culturally appropriate worship. Every church has a specific culture that affects its liturgy and weekly services to varying degrees. HGBC members

supplement different cultural values in the way programs are run. Church leaders do not have to reinvent the culture of the church. At the very basic level, the church needs to continue to find a home in its new cultural and demographic setting, and continue to borrow new possibilities to tell the story of Jesus and become the church that God is calling them to be in their specific context.

The leadership of HGBC believes that God delights to see all people from different nations joining together corporately to worship Him because Christ shed his blood for all the nations. Psalm 117:1-2, which may be regarded as a doxology, suitable to be appended to any Psalm of similar character, is a call to nations to praise God for His mercy to them.

Until recently, cultural diversity in corporate worship has been largely overlooked by the worship ministry leadership at HGBC. John Stegemerten, worship pastor at HGBC Harris campus, recalls that before pastor Clint Pressley came to HGBC, it was a largely a monocultural church that sang mostly English hymns and contemporary worship songs in corporate worship. Song selections and service planning did not consider the congregation's cultural diversity. Leaders were always thankful for the ethnic diversity that God brought to the church, but were not actively pursuing it.

The members of HGBC grew significantly in their understanding of the doctrine of worship. As a result of the sermons, the church moved from massive productions, pageants, and performance-led worship to a worship-team-led participatory, celebratory corporate worship. The church's further growth into a multiethnic congregation required reflection on the diversity of its community at every level of ministry while maintaining the core values of a biblical theology of worship.

The focus of this project was on the worship ministry of HGBC. In seeking to reach the heart of a multiethnic congregation, the question leaders must answer is: "Do we want diverse voices or just diverse faces?" When senior pastor Clint Pressley was asked how diversity has become an important consideration in the planning of worship

services at HGBC, his response was that diversity has to do with biblical mandates. The two passages Pressley identified as biblical mandates governing corporate worship were the Great Commission in Mathew 28 (the missionary mandate—to go and share the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth), and the Revelation description of worship (all tongues and tribes). Pressley acknowledged that in the last fifteen years, our church’s Jerusalem has changed significantly. Part of the leadership’s responsibility is to make sure not only that HGBC is aware of its own diversity, but that the church pursues it by making choices that are active, intentional, and are perceived as such. Just as HGBC’s worship liturgy in each service is marked by gospel narrative, however, the elements chosen for worship liturgy should also where possible to reflect the diversity of HGBC; cultural diversity brings unity over uniformity. Therefore, affirming diverse cultures and ethnicities in corporate worship at HGBC is fundamental, for it will help to facilitate culturally appropriate worship for all of God’s people present in the service and is based on biblical principles.

Historical Overview

In 1901, First Baptist Church of Charlotte started a mission church that was first organized under the name Pritchard Memorial Baptist Church. On April 19, 1955, this church sent a committee of three men—W. T. Harris, Albert Eggleston, and Bar Favell—to meet with the missions committee of the Mecklenburg Baptist Association to investigate the possibility of establishing a church in the Hickory Grove Community. The first Sunday school and worship service were held on June 12, 1955, in the Hickory Grove Elementary School. The Sunday school enrolled ninety-eight members and forty-six people joined the church that morning, four of them by baptism. Harvey Morris’s dairy barn was the church’s home from October 1955 until July 1957. On November 6, 1955, the congregation met to organize the mission into a fully cooperating Southern Baptist church. They had a vision and were determined to bring it to pass. Much hard work made it possible for the first three buildings to be occupied in July 1957. Between 1960 and 1966, five more buildings

were completed. The dedication service of the Worship Center on June 5, 1988 marked the eleventh building on the Harris campus—each one standing as a tribute to all the faithful who are a part of Hickory Grove Baptist Church’s heritage.

Timeline

1955

- June 12: Hickory Grove held its first worship service at Hickory Grove Elementary School. Later that year, they began meeting in a dairy barn and purchased the land on which the Harris Campus is currently located.

1957

- July: The first three buildings of the Harris Campus were occupied.

1988

- June 5: The Worship Center, which was the eleventh building of the Harris Campus, was dedicated.

1995

- March 26: The first service of the Mallard Creek Campus was held at Cabarrus Academy.
- August: Hickory Grove Christian School began its first classes.

1996

- April 14: Grand opening of the Mallard Creek Campus.

1998

- April: Hickory Grove expanded to include a Latin American Campus.

2011

- January 30: Hickory Grove voted Clint Pressley as Senior Pastor.

Demographic Overview

For the City of Charlotte (FORCLT) is a non-profit Christian organization that aims to unite the churches of the city to transform Charlotte. The organization recently released “Charlotte State of the City Report: 2019,” which is the primary information source for this overview. This report notes Charlotte, North Carolina has experienced remarkable population growth for the past three decades. The majority comes from the growing immigrant community.¹ The report indicates that from 1990 to 2013, immigration

¹ FORCLT, “Charlotte State of the City Report: 2019,” accessed December 20, 2022, <https://forcharlotte.org/state-of-the-city/>, 40. This reports contains reliable data from the Immigrant

made up approximately a quarter of the growth of Mecklenburg County. By 2013, nearly 1 in 7 people residing in Charlotte were born outside the United States. Charlotte receives immigrant growth from people from all over the world; regions with greatest representation are Latin America (48 percent) and Asia (30 percent).²

In addition, Charlotte is a shelter for many refugees who cannot return to their country of origin due to religious persecution, political asylum, or other reasons. The report estimates that roughly 17,000 refugees have immigrated to Charlotte since the mid-1990s. In recent years, between 600 and 700 refugees have arrived in Charlotte every year. Many of the refugees in Charlotte are from Syria, Burma, Bhutan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.³

In light of the recent migration shifts, Hickory Grove Baptist Church has grown significantly in cultural and ethnic diversity of its membership. At the Harris campus, where I serve as the associate worship pastor, approximately fifty-six nations are represented.⁴ The Harris campus is located on Harris Boulevard, ten miles from uptown Charlotte where the church continues to engage and make an impact within the community. The church's cultural engagement helps to assist the community's needs, the advancement of the gospel, and make a greater difference as relationships and trust grows within the surrounding communities.⁵

Integration Task Force Report, 2015; US Census Bureau 2013-2107; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate; Refugee Support Services; and Brookings Institution Report, 2014. In addition to this full report, the FORCLT website provides important trustworthy resources to assist pastors and church leaders to learn, connect, and take action together as they aim to transform the city of Charlotte.

² FORCLT, "Charlotte State of the City Report: 2019," 40.

³ FORCLT, "Charlotte State of the City Report: 2019," 40.

⁴ See appendix 8 for the nationalities represented at all the campuses. Hickory Grove Baptist Church did not have a mechanism to gain this information. This information is constructed on active community group church members. However, HGBC desires to have a better mechanism to gather in-depth information of nationalities represented.

⁵ HGBC reaches out to neighbors by meeting their physical and spiritual needs in tangible ways through service projects often with various local organizations. Projects are available for all ages. For

Rationale

HGBC, once predominantly monocultural, has transitioned since the mid-1990s into a multicultural congregation. Such transition demands contextualizing corporate worship to meet the needs of the diverse congregation. This project sought to develop a framework for increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship. HGBC leaders have acknowledged that liturgical principles that come from a monocultural context may not always apply to a heterogenous congregation. Worship Pastor John Stegemerten explains that after Clint Pressley began serving as the senior pastor at HGBC (2011), God began making the church more diverse.

Once this started happening, the worship staff realized that they must do everything within their power to remove any obstacles that might keep the church from becoming more diverse. Worship leaders began planning with the people's diversity in mind, thinking about how the songs on Sunday might affect people of different ages and ethnicities.

Worship leaders also expressed a desire that the faces (i.e., ethnicities) people see on stage reflect those of people in the community, whom HGBC wants in the church. The church began to understand the value in having different worship leaders; different worship leaders of both genders and different ethnicities involved in the planning and leading of services. First, increasing diversity in corporate worship would help create a space where HGBC members can admit that they are not the same but are embodied together in the communal story of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This beauty of the gospel would continue to be demonstrated to the multifaced body of Christ through their leadership, while the congregation continues growing in a relationship with God.

example, (1) HG Food Pantry assists families experiencing a financial crisis with food items. The Food Pantry is open once a week and is located at the Latin American Campus. (2) HG Clothes Closet is a community shopping event held quarterly at Harris Campus to provide those in the community with clothing essentials. (3) HG offers an ESL class. The class is open to those in the community seeking to learn English as a second language.

Theologian and scholar Charles Briggs refers to Psalm 86:9 as a universal reference and mandate for conversion of the nations: “All nations whom Thou hast made will come and worship before Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name.”⁶ Increased diversity in corporate worship edifies believers and enriches the local congregation as it seeks to reflect in a small way the global church.

First John 4:18 reminds believers that fear, which is essentially self-centered, has no place in love, which in its perfection involves complete self-surrender. The two cannot exist side by side. The presence of fear is evidence that love is not yet perfected.⁷ Second, HGBC should continue to move toward diversity in corporate worship because the perfect love of Christ is the “very emblem of diversity.” Third, God created diversity and therefore cares about diversity. Increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship at HGBC would help the congregation celebrate and see the picture of heaven’s worship, and celebrate the works of God seen most evidently in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Revelation 7:1-19 depicts the human race as being “one nation—Israel” by origin in verse 4, but afterward distinguishes itself into “tribes, peoples, and tongues” in verse 9-17, referring to gentiles. They were crying out with a loud voice saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev 7:10). When the saints get to heaven, they will surround the throne of God, praising and worshiping Him alongside saints from every nation, every tribe, and every tongue from the earth.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a practical framework for increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship at Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

⁶ C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (New York: C. Scribner’s, 1906-1907), 237, Logos Software.

⁷ Alan England Brooke, *The Johannine Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Bloomsbury, NY: T & T Clark, 2014), 124-25.

Goals

Three goals were established to determine the completion of this project. The first two goals focused on the importance of gospel-centered songs for corporate worship of a diverse congregation. The third goal ensured that application would occur within the context of the HGBC.

1. The first goal was to assess the knowledge and practices of the worship team and choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship at Hickory Grove Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a six week-session curriculum to teach the worship team/choir at Hickory Grove Baptist Church why diverse gospel-centered songs matter within corporate worship.
3. The third goal was to develop a ministry plan to include more ethnically diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at Hickory Grove Baptist Church.

A complete research methodology measured the successful completion of these three goals. The research methodology and tools used to measure the success of each goal are described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of three goals. The first goal was to assess the knowledge and practices of the worship team/choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship at HGBC. This goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey to assess the knowledge and practices of diverse gospel-centered songs.⁸ This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

The second goal was to develop a six week-session curriculum to teach the worship team/choir at HGBC why diverse gospel-centered songs matter within corporate worship. This goal was measured by the expert panel consisting of pastors who utilized a

⁸ See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁹ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion/criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC. The ministry plan developed was a robust practical plan to increase diverse gospel-centered songs to equip the worship team/choir for corporate worship at HGBC. This goal was measured by a panel of HGBC pastors/associates of worship ministry who utilized a rubric to evaluate the functionality of the plan.¹⁰ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the rubric indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

Definitions and Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Cultural diversity/ multiculturalism. *Cultural diversity* is the inclusion of diverse people in a group or organization. Scholar and cultural theorist Terry Eagleton defines the term *culture* to be (1) a body of artistic and intellectual works; (2) a process of spiritual and intellectual development; (3) the values, customs, beliefs, and symbolic practices by which men and women live; or (4) a whole way of life.¹¹ In addition, Caleb Rosado, Professor of Urban Studies at Warner Pacific College, defines *multiculturalism* this way: “A system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-

⁹ See appendix 2.

¹⁰ See appendix 3.

¹¹ Terry Eagleton, *Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2016), 1.

cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society.”¹²

Diverse worship/blended worship. Ron Man, director of worship Resources International, describes *diverse worship/blended worship* as “the mixing of historic, traditional, contemporary, and global expressions of worship into a diverse mosaic of praise with the goal of glorifying God by encouraging the united participation of believers across demographic and generational lines.”¹³

Diverse gospel-centered songs. Matt Boswell’s article published by 9Marks gives a helpful definition of *gospel-centered songs* as “diverse songs that contour the gospel and tell of God’s salvation so that the gospel rings forth as the theme of the songs.”¹⁴ Theologian Mark Dever and Paul Alexander put it this way: “As the main teaching pastor, it is your responsibility to shepherd the congregation into the green pastures of God-centered, gospel-centered songs, and away from the arid plains of theological vacuity, meditations on human experience, and emotional frenzy.”¹⁵

Ethnodoxology. *Ethnodoxology* is “the interdisciplinary study of how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions.” The term *ethnodoxology* was coined by missionary and ethnomusicologist Dave Hall, founder of Worship from the Nations, a ministry of Pioneers.¹⁶ *Ethnodoxology*

¹² Caleb Rosado, “Toward a Definition of Multiculturalism,” *Academia*, October 28, 1996, https://www.academia.edu/777187/Toward_a_Definition_of_Multiculturalism, 3.

¹³ Ron Man, “Blended Worship: Good for the Body” (lecture presented at the Calvin Symposium on Worship, Grand Rapids, January 24-26, 2008, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/symposium-2008-blended-worship-good-for-the-body>).

¹⁴ Matt Boswell, “Five Qualities of a Congregational Song,” 9Marks, April 23, 2004, <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalfive-qualities-congregational-song/>.

¹⁵ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 85.

¹⁶ Global Ethnodoxology Network, “What Is Ethnodoxology?” *World of Worship*, May 19, 2019, <https://www.worldofworship.org/what-is-ethnodoxology/>.

finds its expression predominantly through the leading scholarly work of the Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN), which was founded in 2003 under the name International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE), but whose heritage can be traced much earlier in several other mission movements.¹⁷ Names such as David Hall, James Krabill, Roberta King, Thomas Avery, Frank Fortunato, Brian Schrag, Paul Neely, and Robin Harris are among the leading scholar practitioners in the field and the GEN, which connects hundreds of members and missions organizations all over the globe. Key pioneers in the field have been influential across the globe. Taiwanese scholar I-to Loh, a global theologian, hymnwriter, and world-renowned ethnodoxologist has for decades collected, published, and advocated for indigenous Christian song of people groups across Asia. Pablo Sosa in Latin America, and Patrick Matsinkyere in Africa, have done the same for their continents. Roch Ntankeh, a church leader, pastor, and ethnodoxologist seeking to biblically reach the people groups in Cameroon.¹⁸

Writing as the official spokesperson for GEN in defining the discipline, Katherine Morehouse defines *ethnodoxology* as “the worldwide practice and study of *arts facilitation* that encourages the grass-roots, *local* composition and production of artistry that is culturally relevant, biblically sound, and emotionally resonant, for use in the body of Christ for worship, discipleship, evangelism, and other extensions of God’s love in the world.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Esther R. Crookshank, “Ethnodoxology and the Church’s Worship: An Introduction,” *Augustine Collegiate Review* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2018), 37-53. In this article, Crookshank, Ollie Hales Chiles Professor of Church Music at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, offers a concise scholarly introduction to the discipline of ethnodoxology. The article seeks to identify the biblical basis for the discipline of ethnodoxology, clarify definitions of key related terms, and offers an overview of the field, its vision, task, challenges, and promises in current practice.

¹⁸ Another way to get to know ethnodoxologist leaders is to peruse the interviews of the “I am an Ethnodoxologist” YouTube playlist where several practitioners discuss their ethnodoxology ministries. Global Ethnodoxology Network, “I am an Ethnodoxologist,” YouTube, August 4, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPtFuENWa02fNe7MKHDsAXhvvG104JP>; or read more works in the members’ virtual library at the website (<https://www.worldofworship.org/>).

¹⁹ Global Ethnodoxology Network, “What Is Ethnodoxology?”

Other definitions of ethnodoxology provided by the Global Ethnodoxology Network²⁰ used during the first two decades of the term being developed are:

Paul Neely defines *ethnodoxology* as “the theological and anthropological study, and practical application, of how every cultural group might use its unique and diverse artistic expressions appropriately to worship the God of the Bible.”²¹

Dave Hall defines *ethnodoxology* as “the theological and practical study of how and why people of diverse cultures praise and glorify the true and living God as revealed in the Bible.”²²

Brian Schrag defines *ethnodoxology* as “a theological and anthropological framework guiding all cultures to worship God using their unique artistic expressions.”²³ Significantly, none of these definitions are limited to or even use the word “music.”

Heart language and heart song. *Heart language* is one’s mother tongue. A *Heart song* is essentially one’s musical mother tongue and is a musical expression in one’s native local language. Robin Harris writes, “Just like each person has at least one heart language, we all have our own heart music and arts; it’s like a mother tongue for expressing your heart, and it affects how you worship.”²⁴

Liturgical imperialism. Brenda Eatman Aghahowa explains *liturgical imperialism* as “the imposition of Euro-American worship preferences on Christians of African or other descent.”²⁵

²⁰ Global Ethnodoxology Network, “What Is Ethnodoxology?”

²¹ Global Ethnodoxology Network, “What Is Ethnodoxology?”

²² Global Ethnodoxology Network, “What Is Ethnodoxology?”

²³ Global Ethnodoxology Network, “What Is Ethnodoxology?”

²⁴ Robin, P. Harris, “The Great Misconception: Why Music Is not a Universal Language,” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, ed. James R. Krabill, Frank Fortunato, and Robin P. Harris (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 85-86, Kindle.

²⁵ Brenda Eatman Aghahowa, *Praising in Black and White* (Cleveland, OH: United Church, 1996), 28.

Contextual/contextualization /Sitz im Leben. Ethnodoxologist I-to-Loh defines *contextualization* as “an intimate and complicated double wrestling of the ‘text’—the word of God—with our present ‘context’ (the *Sitz im Leben*).²⁶ Loh adds, “Contextualization is the use of one’s own verbal and musical language to interpret the gospel, to express praise and thanksgiving to God, to voice concerns on issues confronting one’s time and environment. When this is done, one’s expression of faith in worship and witness in daily life become more meaningful and challenging.”²⁷

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, the project was limited to volunteers in the worship ministry, consisting of those who serve on the praise team and choir. Only worship team and choir members were tested and surveyed. Finally, this project was precisely designed to serve HGBC and all research methodology was focused at the Harris Campus. Therefore, this project was limited to serve the worship ministry at Harris Campus while its application may be broadly useful.

Conclusion

The multicultural movement provides opportunity where local churches are to welcome and embrace people from different parts of the world into their ministry contexts. Leading worship in a fast-growing multiethnic church requires contextualizing its diversity in a corporate worship setting. This project intended to help HGBC worship ministry members develop worship that embodies diverse gospel-centered songs for the multiethnic body of Christ. Every Sunday when worship leaders gather to lead in corporate worship, they tell the gospel story. The gospel story is for *every nation, every tribe, every tongue* through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Edmund P. Clowney writes, “Corporate worship is a means of grace, it expressed the design of God’s saving call, his

²⁶ I-to Loh, “Ways of Contextualizing Church Music: Some Asian Examples,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 91.

²⁷ I-to Loh, *In Search for Asian Sounds and Symbols in Worship*, CSCA Christianity in Southeast Asia Series 5 (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2012), 80.

gathering together from every tribe, tongue, and nation the people of God. In days when ethnic identity trumps all, the church gathered shows the true multiethnic identity of the nations brought to the Lord of all.”²⁸

²⁸ Edmund P. Clowney, “Corporate Worship: A Means of Grace,” in *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 100.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR
CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN
CORPORATE WORSHIP

Increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship requires church leaders to celebrate the expression of God’s people made in his image, the church’s unity in Christ Jesus, and God’s heart for the nations. Genesis 1:26-27, Ephesians 2:11-22, and Revelation 7:9-17 are addressed successively in this chapter, revealing God’s desire for cultural diversity in corporate worship.

God’s People Are Made in His Image (Gen 1:26-27)

Genesis 1:26-27 presents the Lord God’s perspective on creating man in his image. Human life reveals the crown of God’s handiwork. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” has been debated by many scholars. Several interpretations have been taken into account by scholars; disputes have emerged to differentiate the word “image” and “likeness”—whether they are synonyms or refer to two different aspects for understanding the unique place of human life in the divine scheme of creation. The passage focuses on two primary issues: creation and dominion. Along with these two primary issues, I focus on two other issues: God does speak in the plural (us/our) and the meaning of *image* and *likeness*.

**The Use of the Plural Divine Pronoun
“Us” in Genesis 1**

Kenneth A. Mathews provides six scholars’ variations interpretation of the

plural reference¹: (1) a remnant of polytheistic myth; (2) God address to creation, heavens, and earth; (3) a divine honor and majesty; (4) self-deliberation; (5) a divine address to a heavenly court of angels; and (6) divine dialogue within the Godhead.² Mathews seems to lean on the traditional contention that the plural refers to a divine plurality. He explains that the passage describes the result of God's creative act by both plural (v. 26) and singular pronoun (v. 27). Mathews articulates in both verses (26-27), the unity and plurality of God are in view. The plural indicates an intra-divine conversation; a plurality in the Godhead between God and his spirit.

The divine dialogue within the Godhead described by Matthew seems to be favored by John Calvin as well. John Calvin explains that in creation God was introduced simply as commanding, but when he approaches the most excellent of all these works he enters into consultation. Calvin argues God certainly might here command by his bare word what he wished to be done, but he chose to give this tribute through the Excellency of man, that he would, in a manner, enter into consultation concerning his creation. "This is the highest honor with whichh he has dignified Christians," Calvin concludes.³

Though I agree with Matthews's explanation, David J. A. Clines cites a different interpretation by Karl Barth. Barth's interpretation brings a contrasting point of view and is worthy of remarks. Clines comments on Barth's findings:

The plural of Genesis 1:26, which he considers can only be understood as a "summon to intra- divine unanimity of intention and decision"; that is, that there is within God Himself a distinction between the I and Thou. This is not a return to the old dogmatic trinitarian interpretation, but an attempt to take seriously the plural of Genesis 1:26 and to use it positively in exegesis instead of laboring under it as

¹ For major positions see David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God," *The Tyndale House Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53-103. See also Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis*, New American translation, vol. 1 (Atlanta: Brown University, 1985).

² Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 160-61.

³ John Calvin, *Genesis, Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 91.

encumbrance that has to be disposed of before the meaning of the image can be apprehended.⁴

Barth argues that the *image* refers to the individual man. The man is the bearer of the image, and he is the partner of God himself, capable of dealing with God and having a close relationship with God. Thus, the relationship between man and man, and between man and God, is described as “I” and “Thou” relationship. In sum, Barth’s view of “let us” is the “plurality within the deity, an unanimity of intention and plan.”⁵ If Barth’s interpretation is justifiable, then it is difficult to put the interpretation within the context of the text itself. Verse 26 is unclear. What may be a truthful assessment of the nature of man and God in Barth’s view may not be an acceptable assessment of what the author of Genesis intended to communicate to the readers.

Claus Westermann explains that “let us make” refers to (a) the Trinity; (b) God and his heavenly court of angels; (c) an attempt to avoid the idea of an immediate resemblance of humans to God; and (d) an expression of the liberation on God’s part as he set out to create man.⁶ Moreover, John H. Sailhamer provides helpful insight as he compares verses 26-27. On verse 27, it is stated twice that the man was created (ברא - *bara*) in God’s image and the third time that man was created (ברא - *bara*) “male and female,” the same pattern as that found in Genesis 5:1-2a. Following this reasoning, the divine plurality expressed in verse 26 is seen as an anticipation of the human plurality of the man and woman, thus casting the human relationship between men and women in the role of reflecting God’s personal relationship with himself.⁷

⁴ Clines, “The Image of God,” 61.

⁵ Clines, “The Image of God,” 69.

⁶ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 144-45.

⁷ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, A Biblical-Theological Commentary, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 38.

Image and Our Likeness

Gordon J. Wenham continues with the idea that the phrase צֶלֶם, “image,” is rare in the Bible and the uncertainty of its etymology makes the interpretation of this phrase highly problematic.⁸ It comes from the root meaning to “cut” or to “hew” attested in Arabic or from a root attested in Akkadian and Arabic, “to become dark.” “Likeness,” דְמוּת has an ending of an abstract noun and it is obviously related to the verb דָּמָה “to be like, resemble.”⁹ Wenham marks five interpretations on *image* and *likeness* that have been proposed by some scholars:¹⁰ (1) *image* and *likeness* are distinct—the *image* refers to the natural qualities in man (reason, personality, etc.) that make him resemble God while the *likeness* refers to the supernatural graces, e.g., ethical, that make man godlike; (2) the *image* refers to the mental and spiritual faculties that man shares with his creator; (3) the *image* consists of a physical resemblance; for instance, man looks like God; (4) the *image* makes man God’s representative on earth; (5) the *image* is a capacity to relate to God—man’s divine *image* means that God can enter into a personal relationship with him, speak to him, and make a covenant with him.¹¹

However, Calvin denies that the word *image* differs from his *likeness*. Calvin notes that “let us make man in our image, according to our likeness” may refer to man being like God, or may represent the image of God.¹² Calvin continues, “The question is

⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 29.

⁹ Of the seventeen occurrences of צֶלֶם, “image,” ten refer to various types of physical image, such as models of tumors first (1 Sam 6:5); pictures of man (Ezek 16:17); or idols (Num 33:52); and two passages in the Psalms liken man’s existence to an image or shadow (3:7; 73:20) the other five occurrences are in Genesis (1:26, 27; 5:3; 9:6). On the contrary, “likeness,” דְמוּת, is transparent in its meaning. Most of its twenty-five occurrences are found in Ezekiel’s visions, e.g., 1:5, where it could be aptly rendered “something like,” “the likeness of.” Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 29.

¹⁰ See P. Humbert, *Etudes sur le Récit du Paradis et de la Chute dans la Genèse* (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Neuchâtel, Secrétariat de l’Université, 1940), 153-63; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 3:183-87; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 148-59; Clines, “The Image of God,” 81-83.

¹¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 29-31.

¹² Calvin, *Genesis*, 94.

respecting that glory of God, which peculiarly shines forth in human nature, where the mind, the will, and all the senses, represent the Divine order.”¹³

David Atkinson points that many of these approaches to the divine image concentrate on some capacity in all human beings to be able to do certain things.¹⁴ The focus is on something in which a person can point and say, “there you see the image of God.” Though many Old Testament scholars disagree with this approach, they argue that the image is not a question of equality in people, but that God has created people as his counterpart and human beings can have a history with God. Westermann argues that human beings are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God.¹⁵

Atkinson provides two applications on the divine image amidst different interpretations.¹⁶ First, to be “in the image of God” is not primarily a matter of one’s capacity to be or to do anything. Being in the image of God is about the relationship God has toward human beings and, in a derivative way, of the human relationship of sonship to the Father. It is not about some characteristic of possessing; it is about the whole existence of humanity. True humanness is found in personal communion with God. In such personal communion his glory is reflected and in his image is seen. Jesus is the image of God in this world because he is in a relationship of loving communion with his Father, and Christians reflect God’s image to the extent that they are growing in personal communion with him and therefore with one another. Second, true humanness is about becoming more like Jesus Christ. Relationships develop over time. To be in a relationship

¹³ Calvin, *Genesis*, 96.

¹⁴ David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 36-37.

¹⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 158.

¹⁶ Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11*, 38.

with God is, as Westermann puts it, to have a history with God.¹⁷ In a sense, therefore, while it is proper to speak of Jesus Christ as the true Human Being, Christians should speak within the context of “Human Becoming.” Atkinson concludes,

To understand the image of God primarily in terms of relationship, is to see it as not only a gift from God—as he calls us into a relationship with himself—but as the task to be undertaken, a destiny to be followed.... what we see in one another is an unclear reflection, because our relationship with God is very far from perfect. The story of God’s relationship with us is one of forgiveness, regeneration, and resurrection.... to be made as God’s image means that human beings represent God on earth. We are God’s proxy, so to speak, in the community of creation.¹⁸

The passage in Genesis 1:26-27 assures Christians about the Lord’s perspective on creating man in his image. God creating man in his image suggests that man resembles something greater, his Maker. Hypothetically, God’s people bear the image of God both physically and spiritually and are a copy of their Maker. However, Genesis 1:26-27 is not clear on what the descriptions of “likeness” might be. The passage affirms what is of first importance: God’s people are made in His image.

Unity in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:11-22)

Paul illustrates in Ephesians 2:11-22 that before receiving Christ Jesus they (Gentiles) were alienated from God and His people (Israel). Now, Jews and Gentiles are individually reconciled to God in Christ and to one another. Though, Christians are to contemplate their past and the misery of their sin by nature. Harold W. Hoehner notes, “Individual sinners have obtained the gracious gift of Salvation on the basis of God’s grace by faith. That is not the end. They are not left alone but are united with other believers into a corporate unity.”¹⁹ That is the good news of the gospel.

¹⁷ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 158.

¹⁸ Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11*, 38-39

¹⁹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 351.

Andrew T. Lincoln sees this passage falls into three main parts. (1) Verses 11-13 set out the reminder in terms of an initial contrast between the Gentile's former alienation from Israel and her God and their now having come near to the God of Israel. (2) Verse 14-18 then adapt a hymn to Christ as a "bringer of cosmic peace"²⁰ and make use of a combination of Isaiah 57:19 and Isaiah 52:7 to illuminate how Christ, through his work of reconciliation, accomplished this change for the Gentiles. (3) Verses 19-22 complete the section, as verse 19 recaps and explains on the earlier contrast and leads into a representation of the church in terms of building and temple imagery in verses 20-22. Furthermore, Andrew Lincoln asserts how the readers are asked to reflect on the previous condition in terms of categories valid at the former stage in the history of salvation to appreciate all the more their present-day privileges. Christ is now pronounced to have made Jews and Gentiles one by breaking down the dividing wall and source of hostility between them, that is, by put an end to the law and all its decrees through his death. On the horizontal level, he made "peace between the two old enemies, Jews and Gentiles, and reconciled them in the one body of the church."²⁰ At the same time, as Lincoln explains, on the vertical level "he has reconciled both groups to God through his death on the cross, indicating in a way which the opening verses did not, that there is a fundamental sense in which Israel too was alienated from God."²¹

For this matter, Lincoln concludes that Christ's death on the cross can be seen as affecting peace both on a horizontal and a vertical level. By dealing with the law as the foundation of hostility, his death overcame the alienating split between Jews and Gentiles and was the creative power that generated a unified new humanity from these two groups.²² The church is not only the place of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles,

²⁰ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Word, 1990), 160.

²¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 160.

²² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 160-61.

but also the place where reconciliation between humanity and God is experienced, where harmony between heaven and earth has been restored, and where access to the Father is enjoyed. The high God of heaven has chosen to make it his dwelling place on earth, and the Christ who has been exalted to heaven forms the crowning stone in its structure.²³

Charles Hodge notes, “Christ is the only Redeemer of man and only mediator between God and man; to be without Christ was to be without redemption and without access to God. To possess Christ, to be in him, is the sum of all blessedness; to be without Christ includes all evil.”²⁴ Hodge continues, “Christ by his death freed humanity from the law. Christians are no longer under the law but under grace (Rom 14).”²⁵ Just like the miserable former state of the Gentiles, for the people living in a Christless condition today, it is wretched and lamentable for their souls. Without a saving relationship with Christ, there is no hope. Charles Hodge explains that abolishing the law means “causing it to cease or rendering it as no longer binding. Thus, by satisfying its demand, Christians are judicially free from the law. To be free from the law means to be free not by the act of a sovereign, but by the sentence of the judge; not by mere pardon, but by justification.”²⁶ Christians, both Jews and Gentiles converted, have received great privileges from Christ Jesus. Those who were in a condition of enmity have been reconciled through Jesus Christ. He is their peace. Hodge summarizes,

The long feud in the human family is healed; the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is abolished; the exclusive privileges of the former are abrogated. The wall that had so long shut out the nations is removed. There is now one fold and one Shepherd. Since the abrogation of the law, there is neither Jew or Greek, there is

²³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 162.

²⁴ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: James Nisbet, 1856), 83.

²⁵ Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 89.

²⁶ Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 89.

neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; all believers are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).²⁷

The cross is the means of this reconciliation. The enmity that prevented the reconciliation between both Jews and Gentiles has been removed by the crucifixion of the Lord.²⁸ This is still relevant today. There is a hostility between God and humanity. Christ Jesus put to death that enmity and reconciled humanity to himself. Hodge writes, “When Christ is said to reconcile men to God, the meaning is that he propitiated God, satisfied the demands of his justice, and thus rendered it possible that he might be just and yet justify the ungodly.”²⁹ Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus regardless their origins. His death was not merely for the Jews with the exclusion of the Gentiles. It was intended to “bring unto God the whole number of the redeemed, whether Jews or Gentiles, as one living body, filled with his Spirit as well as washed in his blood.”³⁰ In light of Hodges’s view, Christians can be comforted today that Christ has established the throne of grace to freely come to and approach, for he has granted the permission by his death and resurrection. Christ having redeemed believers from the curse of the law—they now have the privilege of freedom as one family, servant and children of God.³¹ Francis Foulkes remarks,

When Christ was slain, the hostility between humanity and God through sin was brought to an end. Christ bore sins and made forgiveness possible. He reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God but also reconciled them (and the people of all the different divisions of mankind) to one another and caused them to be in one body, thus putting to death hostility between them.³²

²⁷ Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 92.

²⁸ Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 92.

²⁹ Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 93.

³⁰ Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 93.

³¹ Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 95.

³² Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity, 1989), 91.

Foulkes explains further, “Jews and Gentiles, people of whatever race or color or class, are together of the household of God, of the same family.”³³ Now “therefore, you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (v. 19).

R. Kent Hughes identifies three key principles in Ephesians 2:11-22. First is alienation of the Jews and Gentiles (vv. 11-12). The Gentiles suffered a fivefold alienation, he argues. (1) They were Christless—aliens to Messiah. The Gentiles were separated from Christ, they were not part of God’s people; had no hope of the Messiah; and they were souls without Christ. (2) They were stateless—aliens to God’s nation. Hughes explains that “Israel was a nation under God, a theocracy, but the Gentile had no part in this.”³⁴ (3) They were friendless—alien to the covenants because they did not have the covenants of promise like Israel. God had joined himself unconditionally to bring about a blessing upon and through Israel; the Gentiles had no such promise (cf. Gen 12:2; 13:14; 15:1; 17:1, 22:15). (4) They were hopeless and (5) godless—alien to hope and to God although they were highly religious, having temples and statutes everywhere. Consequently, Hughes sees the Gentiles’ dilemma as the world’s dilemma today, “a dilemma that produces alienation from God—with all its dehumanizing and debilitating results. Hughes argues that this alienation is the root of racism.”³⁵

Hughes’s second main principle is reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles (vv. 13-18). In Herod’s temple, a wall separated the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple, and on that wall were inscriptions in Latin and Greek that forbid Gentiles to

³³ Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, 93.

³⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 1990), 88.

³⁵ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 88-89.

enter.³⁶ The inscriptions read, “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary end enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”³⁷ Reconciliation is essential to worship because it unites people from all backgrounds; church members should not be alienated based on their origins. If reconciliation is a problem with the church, says Hughes then “Christians must spend time in prayer, restoring fellowship with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, asking for strength for reconciliation, and practice reconciliation.”³⁸

Hughes’s third principle is what he calls “third race.” The greatest privilege the Gentiles could have been given was to be brought near to God by the blood of Christ. Hughes articulates, “Now, the death of Christ has created a new humanity, a third race. . . . For the Gentiles, the effects were immediate and stupendous. Upon believing, these outcasts moved to the very center of God’s purpose. Interlopers became insiders, aliens heirs, and the lowest class first class.”³⁹ The cross of Christ which united Jews and Gentiles in the New Testament church can surely be the means of reconciliation for today’s church that may be currently divided or blinded by differences of ethnicity, nationality, status quo, or any other worldly distinction.

Tony Merida, elaborating on Hughes’s argument, explains that people live in a world of rivalries: “There are violent rivals who killed each other due to cultural and racial

³⁶ Josephus Flavius says, “Proceeding across this towards the second court of the temple, one found it surrounded by a stone balustrade, three cubits high and of exquisite workmanship; in this at regular intervals stood slabs giving warning, some in Greek, others in Latin characters, of the Law of purification, to wit that no foreigner was permitted to enter the holy place, for so the second enclosure of the temple was called.” Josephus Flavius, quoted in Hughes, *Ephesians*, 271-72.

³⁷ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 133.

³⁸ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 93.

³⁹ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 95.

hostilities.”⁴⁰ In Paul’s time, the rivalry between Jews and Gentiles was deep, complex, and hostile. The Greek word for Gentile used in verse 11 is *ethna* (plural: *ethne*), which means a person of non-Jewish ethnicity. Merida identified three types of rivalries. First, the rivalry was religious—Gentiles did not know the God of Israel. Second, the rivalry was cultural. Jewish culture was distinguished by its own rituals, feasts, and ceremonies unknown to other nations. Third, the rivalry was also racial. Merida explains, “The Jews could boast of having the blood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob flowing in their veins.”⁴¹ Now, through Christ, these two enemies become friends.

Merida develops these three points as follows. First, the Gentiles, being alienated from God and from the people of God (Israel), were Christless; they were “without Messiah.” The Gentiles were separated from the messianic hope of Israel, his salvation, and excluded from the life of God (Eph 4:18).⁴² Being foreigners, they were excluded from the citizenship of Israel and were strangers to God’s covenant, whereas Israel was a commonwealth under God, a theocracy. The Gentiles were hopeless and godless. Merida argues that Gentiles did not have the “hope of the promises, nor did they know the God of the promises.”⁴³ They had chosen idol substitutes for God, suppressed the truth revealed to them, and did not have true hope.⁴⁴ According to Merida, practically, before believers trust in Christ for salvation, they are in the same tragic position. They were separated from God and his people. At one time Christians were separated from Christ and the gospel community. But thanks be to God that they now have a place in the kingdom and a place at the King’s table. The gospel of Jesus Christ not only breaks down

⁴⁰ Tony Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 55.

⁴¹ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 55.

⁴² Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 56.

⁴³ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 57.

⁴⁴ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 57.

hurdles of racism but unites hearts from different backgrounds and ethnicities in profound ways.⁴⁵

Second, Christ initiated reconciliation between the Gentiles and Jews. The sin of racism among believers should not be justified and must continue to be resisted at any cost. Just as the diversity in the church of Ephesus was noticeable, the church should continue to celebrate diversity among members, for it is a glorious demonstration of the work of Christ as it pictures heaven. At the center of it all, Merida argues, “The best antidote to disunity and hostility between believers is a fresh comprehension of the cross of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶

Third, the Gentiles have received a new identity in Christ; they have become part of new community. Gentile believers joined together with Jewish believers and now belong to a new community. Merida writes, “The Gentiles have been synced not only to Christ but also to other Christians.”⁴⁷ This fellowship is the Gentiles’ new identity. Merida notes that Paul uses three metaphors to illustrate the new identity: Gentiles are part of God’s kingdom citizenship, Gentiles Christians are members of God’s family and are the stones in God’s temple.⁴⁸ Consequently, Gentiles share equal rights and privileges with the Jews. Merida expresses that though they are distinct in their ethnicities and backgrounds, both Jews and Gentiles have lost their national identities by becoming Christians. They are members of the body of Christ and they have the hope of reigning with Jesus Christ. There is nothing like being a citizen of the kingdom of God, being full members of the kingdom of God and living life together, Merida explains.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 57.

⁴⁶ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 61.

⁴⁷ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 62.

⁴⁸ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 63-64

⁴⁹ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 63-64

On a side note, the Gentiles were previously not allowed to enter the temple, but now they are a part of it.⁵⁰ Even though Israelites did recognize that God promised to dwell in the temple's inner sanctuary, now his presence is not limited to a location, building, or ethnicities. God's presence is extended to the nations wherever people confess Christ as their Lord and Savior. Merida here coins the term "red church" to describe what he believes church ought to be. Merida expounds manmade distinctions between of a "black church" or a "white church" are not part of a gospel-centered local church; Christians are to be a part of a "red church."⁵¹ He uplifts Christians to be part of the red church, which is "a group of people, from every tribe and tongue, that has been redeemed by the torn-apart Christ, who spilled his red blood that they may be reconciled to God and to one another."⁵²

John R. W Stott adds that, in the first half of the Ephesians 2:1-10, "human beings are depicted as alienated from God" and in the second half of Ephesians 2:11-22, "human beings are also depicted as being alienated from each other; particularly, Gentiles are alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel (v. 12)."⁵³ Just like Merida, Stott argues that "Paul traces his Gentile readers' spiritual biography in three stages." The first stage, "Gentiles were alienated from God and from his people Israel (vv. 11-12)." The second

⁵⁰ *TableTalk* magazine published a devotion in 2016 about R. C. Sproul's commentary on Mark 11:15-17. Sproul makes an important observation about the temple:

In the first century, the Jerusalem temple did have a court of the Gentiles that measured some thirty-five acres where non-Jews could come and pray to Yahweh, the God of Israel. However, the Gentiles were not really welcome there. The popular Jewish mind-set hoped that the Messiah would cleanse the temple of all Gentiles. There was no place there for Gentiles to worship the Lord. Seeing this, Jesus drove the merchants and money changers out of the temple. They had no business conducting their business in that place and violating God's design for the Gentiles to pray there. The worship of the people and their leaders was thoroughly corrupted, and Jesus was going to cleanse it." (R. C. Sproul, "Judgement on the Temple," *TableTalk*, August 2016, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/daily-study/2016/08/judgment-temple/>)

⁵¹ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 67.

⁵² Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 66.

⁵³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 90.

stage, “the death of Christ Jesus on the cross has reconciled Jews and Gentiles both to each other and to God, ushering in a new humanity.” In the third stage, “Gentiles are no longer separated from God and Jews but they are members of God’s family.”⁵⁴

First-century Gentiles and Jews regularly called each other insulting names. The term “uncircumcised” was an ethnic slur to the Gentiles. On the other side, Jews were proud to call themselves circumcised, which signified to them that they were set apart and were God’s chosen people. Here Paul is declaring the unimportance of names and labels compared to the reality behind them. He reminds readers that circumcision of the heart is spiritual, not physical, and is needed by and available to Jews and Gentiles alike. In verse 12, Paul comes to the serious reality of the Gentiles’ alienation. Stott states, “The Gentiles were neither in Christ nor with Christ but separated from Christ; they had no expectation of a coming Messiah.”⁵⁵ Only the nation of Israel had covenants that promised salvation. Stott explains, “Gentiles were hopeless because, although God had planned and promised to include them one day, they did not know it and therefore had no hope to sustain them. Gentiles were godless and they suppressed the truth they knew and turned instead to idolatry.”⁵⁶ Now they have been reconciled, however, and Christ has brought them home, Stott argues. To shorten Stott view, the pre-Christian life is characterized by hopelessness and racial alienation, but in Christ a new humanity is created because of God’s grace, which forgave and transformed lives, given through Jesus Christ on the cross. Unity in Christ Jesus means that Christians should not think of unity as a matter of rights and privileges, but a genuine obligation of a godly way of life rooted in a relationship with God.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 94.

⁵⁵ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 95.

⁵⁶ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 95.

⁵⁷ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 96-101.

Additionally, “unity in Christ Jesus means that Christians are no longer foreigners and strangers to each other, but fellow citizens as God’s people. This unity signifies that Christians from different backgrounds and ethnicities are to be involved with people who look different from them.”⁵⁸ Stott explains that even in the church there is often alienation, disunity and discord. And Christians erect new barriers in place of the old which Christ has demolished, now a color bar, now racism, nationalism or tribalism, now personal animosities engendered by pride, prejudice, jealousy and the unforgiving spirit, now a divisive system of caste or class, now a clericalism which sunders clergy from laity as if they were separate breeds of human being, and now a denominationalism which turns churches into sects and contradicts the unity and the universality of Christ’s Church.⁵⁹ Considering Stott’s interpretation, diversity becomes the way Christians display the gospel of Jesus Christ. As in one body, Christians have many members assigned to different roles. They do not have the same function and they are different (Rom 12:3-4). As a result, church diversity is not uniformity, but unity. Church diversity is God’s handiwork. Different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds are God’s image on display and should compel Christians not to be colorblind to one another’s identity, but instead to embrace the differences between each other. God’s glory is revealed and celebrated in the diversity of His people. Stott concludes,

It is simply impossible, with any shred of Christian integrity, to go on proclaiming that Jesus by his cross has abolished the old divisions and created a single new humanity of love, while at the same time we are contradicting our message by tolerating racial or social or other barriers within our church fellowship. . . . It (the church) cannot preach the gospel while acquiescing its imperfections.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 95-105.

⁵⁹ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 110.

⁶⁰ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 111.

God’s Heart for the Nations (Rev 7:9-17)

The passage of Revelation 7:9-17 addresses a multitude of people from every nation, tongue, and tribe on earth but in heaven. They are free from suffering, pain, and sorrow, and are worshipping the Lamb of God. What a privilege and joy that would be for a multitude of saints from all around the world, who have labored faithfully, and endured suffering, to be with Christ. Several scholar’s interpretations of this passage are addressed successively, revealing the readers of the extent to which the gospel of Jesus Christ has saturated the entire earth.

Mounce states that “the visions begin with a great throng standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”⁶¹ this throng is made up of the elders, living creatures, and angels described in Revelation 4 and 5, now joined with a multitude of the redeemed. There is an account of fourfold division of the multitude: nations, tribes, peoples, and languages.⁶² They were clothed in robes of white (v. 14), which symbolizes “not only the victory of faith but the righteousness of Christ.”⁶³ Many members of the human race have been redeemed. Mounce articulates, “The jubilant response of the angels with the saints prostrating themselves before God offering Him a doxology of praise reveals a posture of humility and a profound reverence before God. The eternal blessedness of the redeemed is illustrated in phrases that come from Isaiah 49:10.”⁶⁴ The Lord is promising to restore Israel and promises that Israel will neither hunger nor thirst. Similarly, Mounce adds that John’s vision in this passage points to the “ultimate satisfactions of the soul’s deepest

⁶¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 162. Robert H. Mounce refers to the multitude: nations, tribes, peoples, and languages as a fourfold division. However, Christopher Silas Padiath in his thesis, sees this multitude not as a fourfold division but as a merism—nations, tribes, peoples, and languages referring to the whole multitude. See Christopher Silas Padiath, “Reconciled in Christ: An Intertextual Biblical Model for Ethnodoxology Practice in Local Church Ministry” (DEdMin thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 48-52.

⁶² Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 162.

⁶³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 162.

⁶⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 162.

longing for spiritual wholeness.”⁶⁵ Matthew 5:6 says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.” The saints were free from all hardship of this earthly life. Every need was supplied, they were freed from all pain and saved from all sorrows. God himself, as a tender father, wiped away their tears, comforted them, and turned their sorrows into joy. Mounce writes, “The Lamb as heavenly Shepherd leads his flock to the wellspring of life and wipes away the last trace of earthly sorrow. . . . The tears that God wipes away are not the tears of grief over a wasted life; rather, like the tears of a child brought suddenly from sorrow to delight, they linger rather ridiculously on the faces of the redeemed.”⁶⁶

Philip Hughes adds that the multitude is the vast company of the redeemed—an international assemblage. The fourfold specification of nations, tribes, people, and tongues represents the four quarters of the earth.⁶⁷ Hughes expounds further, “There is no confusion of tongues here, for Babel is a thing of the past and this is a shout of unanimity which is heard as a single voice.”⁶⁸ Hughes clarifies,

The saints have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb and are clothed Christ’s perfect righteousness. They are before the throne of God, the place of his immediate, ultimate presence. The saints are blessed to be near God, to serve him day and night, to have genuine fellowship with God, and are eternally secure. . . . The presence of the Lord God as he dwells with his people is the guarantee of their complete security as it is also the attainment of that perfect relationship of personal harmony that binds the creator to those who are created and in Christ re-created.⁶⁹

According to Hughes, “the promise is given to God’s people that they will neither hunger nor thirst, for Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant is their bread of life and the water that he gives wells up to eternal life. The Lamb of God will guide the saints to the fountains

⁶⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 166.

⁶⁶ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 167.

⁶⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, N. T. Revelation-Critical Studies (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 95.

⁶⁸ Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, 96.

⁶⁹ Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, 99.

of the water of life, and perfect joy will be displayed, for every tear from their eyes will be wiped away.”⁷⁰ Hughes concludes, “The further and complementary promise is added that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, which again echoes the terms of the new covenant with its assurance that the Lord will swallow up death forever and will wipe away tears from all faces (Isa 25:8).”⁷¹

Leon Morris teaches that “John paints an unforgettable picture of a vast crowd of people from every nation on earth now in the bliss of heaven. They are free from pain, anxiety, suffering, and sorrow.”⁷² “The definite number of 144,000 in Revelation 7:4 points to completion of Israel’s tribes” of which none was missing, “whereas in verse 9 the great throng shows the impossibility of counting the number of the redeemed. They came from every nation, tribe, people, and language.”⁷³ Morris explains that the redeemed are dressed in white robes. “The Greek noun *stolas* signifies long robes. These long white robes could mean glorious garments compared to workday clothing; the whiteness of the robes possibly points to justification and victory, often the emblems of triumph.”⁷⁴ Morris maintains, “the redeemed ascribe in a loud voice salvation to God and the Lamb. Through the death of the Lamb, this multitude is able to stand before God’s throne as God makes his *Shekinah* (His presence) to dwell with them.”⁷⁵ “Salvation comes from the sovereign act of God in Christ and his tender concern makes complete provision for the needs of his people,”⁷⁶ Morris concludes.

⁷⁰ Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, 100.

⁷¹ Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, 101.

⁷² Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 113.

⁷³ Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 113.

⁷⁴ Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 113.

⁷⁵ Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 114-15.

⁷⁶ Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 116.

Paige Patterson speculates, “John must have been delighted to discover that God’s entourage included more than just the 144,000 Jews.”⁷⁷ Patterson argues that John is making the point that this great multitude in verse 9 is “ethnically distinct from the Jews who are sealed in verse 4. They are further ethnically, tribally, and linguistically diverse from one another.”⁷⁸ Verses 13-17 narrate the “identification of the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and nation standing before God in praise and adoration.”⁷⁹ Patterson summarizes that the great multitude of people are washed white, having been cleansed from their sin by the Lamb’s sacrificial death, coming out of great tribulation, and they stand before the Creator and Mediator. The saints have been persecuted throughout the church age—they have suffered through intense trials, but even great tribulation did not separate them from the love of God.⁸⁰ Patterson adds, “Existence on this earth is never easy, and for followers of Christ it is inevitably fraught with confrontation and often persecution and sorrow. . . . The difficulties the saints of God encountered during their lifetime on earth are never experienced again.”⁸¹ In the present age, everyone professing Christ as Lord will suffer persecution and tribulation of some sort. But even then, suffering shall pass, as Patterson writes, “What is presented in this passage is the promise of God not for ultimate intervention in the present age but for perfect intervention in the age to come.”⁸²

Daniel L. Akin finds two main themes in Revelation 7:9-17. The first is a *global* theme: “In this massive throng of the redeemed in heaven there is not the slightest

⁷⁷ Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, The New American Commentary, vol. 39 (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 199.

⁷⁸ Patterson, *Revelation*, 200.

⁷⁹ Patterson, *Revelation*, 202.

⁸⁰ Patterson, *Revelation*, 202-3.

⁸¹ Patterson, *Revelation*, 203-4.

⁸² Patterson, *Revelation*, 205.

hint of bigotry, ethnocentrism, prejudice, or racism; all people groups in the world are present and represented.”⁸³ “The Lamb of God is reaching out to [the unreached people groups around the globe] and calling them unto Himself by the Spirit and through His people,” says Akin.

Akin’s second theme is a *glorious* theme. All blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, power, and strength have one focus, one direction, and one deserving object—God forever and ever (7:12). The nations will worship not temporarily, but eternally. This worship will not be for a moment but forever. Akin adds, “This worship is the praise of all nations and angels ringing through the corridors of heaven.”⁸⁴ The saints have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The metaphor is striking and even paradoxical, possibly coming from Isaiah 1:18. For Akin, this metaphor illustrates that the Lamb took the

filthy, soiled, ugly garments of sin and plunged them into His red, pure blood (his death) and miraculously and supernaturally they come out white, pure, clean. . . . The *shekinah* glory of God’s radiant presence is in their midst and the saints serve in priestly and worshipful service for God. Consequently, never again will they feel forsaken, be tortured and tormented.⁸⁵

Akin writes, “They will enjoy the supreme presence and protection of God forever and ever.”⁸⁶ In heaven there will be no hunger, no thirst, nor heat of the sun, for the great Shepherd gives satisfaction.⁸⁷ If ethnic diversity is being displayed in heaven, then the local church should strive to pursue diversity and intentionally cultivate diversity.

⁸³ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Christ in Revelation*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 157.

⁸⁴ Akin, *Exalting Christ in Revelation*, 158.

⁸⁵ Akin, *Exalting Christ in Revelation*, 160-61.

⁸⁶ Akin, *Exalting Christ in Revelation*, 161.

⁸⁷ Akin, *Exalting Christ in Revelation*, 161.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
ISSUES FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY
IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

Increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship requires church leaders to confront prevailing hypotheses and definitions of diversity in corporate worship, cultivate intercultural engagement in corporate worship, and cultivate what can be called an ethnodoxological foundation for corporate worship. This chapter will pursue each of these challenges.

**Confronting Hypotheses and Definitions of
Diversity in Corporate Worship**

One of the dangers of failing to pursue genuine diversity in corporate worship is that monocultural worship practice can foster misunderstandings of the principles of biblical theology of worship. These misunderstandings can result in widespread presuppositions surrounding multicultural worship. Some church leaders attempt to draw concepts of ethnicity and worship into the larger conversation on engaging diversity in the church. Some leaders advocate for what they believe to be multicultural ministry with the goal of making services more appealing; they seek to implement different music genres and creative elements that appeal to the targeted audience in the name of diversity.

However, diversity in corporate worship is rooted within the entire narrative of Scripture, not in popular perceptions. Church leaders can cultivate diversity in corporate worship biblically and worship God as He is revealed in Scripture regardless of given ethnicities or music genres. Daniel I. Block, Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, asserts, “True worship involves reverential human acts of submission and homage before the divine Sovereign in response to His gracious revelation of Himself

and in accord with His will.”¹ With that supreme aspiration in mind, this chapter will explore one major misconception, the fallacy of “universal language,” and advocate for one positive approach to achieving culturally relevant worship, that of “musical buffet.”

Dangers of Seeking to Achieve Diversity through the Fallacy of a “Universal Language”

The great nineteenth-century poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote in a passage expressing his love for Spanish ballads: “Music is a universal language for mankind.”² Unfortunately, the notion of music as a universal language has infected the way diversity in corporate worship is perceived. Music is present in every culture, but the same music can carry different meanings and can be experienced differently from culture to culture. Robin Harris, World music scholar and the co-founder and president of the Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN), emphasizes, “Next time you hear the phrase ‘music is a universal language,’ do the world a favor and speak up! Point out that music systems, more than any verbal language, are culture specific and must be learned to be understood. Music, although universally found in every culture, is not a universal language!”³

The songs the congregation sings are culturally informed, and experienced worship leaders can misinterpret cultural musical elements that might attach meanings they do not recognize. For example, in my home church in Burundi, the congregation can sing an opening worship song built on pentatonic scales and in a minor key with a range of joyful and enthusiastic expressions, whereas at HGBC, songs in minor can carry a

¹ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 23.

² Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Outre-mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea*, 3rd ed. (Boston: W. D. Ticknor, 1848), 197.

³ Robin Harris, “The Great Misconception: The Universal Language of Worship,” *Worship Leader*, August 7, 2015, <https://worshipleader.com/leadership/worship-theology/the-great-misconception/>.

lamenting and somber connotation. Todd Agnew further illustrates how members of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE) took the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah* to several people groups in different cultures and received the following responses: “The Senufo people in the Ivory Coast said it sounded like crying music; the Masai people in Kenya said it reminded them of noisy jet engines, and Tibetan said it was not steady, they wondered how a song with so many high and low pitches and loud and soft volumes could be considered a fine art.”⁴

For many, diversity in corporate worship means advocating for the use of music as a “universal language” to promote racial and ethnic inclusivity. Yet, what music communicates in one culture and what that culture may understand “the language” of music does not communicate the same thing to other ethnicities. Scott Williams, still embracing Longfellow’s Romantic paradigm, argues, “Worship is a universal language,” and if church leaders want to reach diversity, they “must understand a lot of it has to do with music and leadership.”⁵ Williams does not describe what constitutes universal worship. Prominent ethnomusicologist Gerardo Marti, in contrast, asserts, “When the creed ‘music in a universal language’ is followed, the style of music considered universal is not in itself universally shared.”⁶

Worship leaders at the Harris campus cannot assume certain rhythms of worship songs are universal and tie to the multiethnic congregation. HGBC worship services are marked with various musical patterns. There is not a single dominating music genre because the “universal music” fallacy does not inform the diversity at HGBC, the

⁴ Todd Agnew, “Ethnodoxology: Arts and Worship in a Multicultural Church,” *Voice*, September 27, 2021, <https://voice.dts.edu/chapel/ethnodoxology-arts-and-worship-in-a-multi-cultural-church/>.

⁵ Scott Williams, *Church Diversity* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf, 2011), 162.

⁶ Gerardo Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32.

gospel does. The gospel compels the church to come together and sing and declare as a body of believers Christ's accomplishment of bringing an end to sin.

The apostle Paul reminds believers that corporate worship must be lived in the shadow of the cross, not tied to a humanist philosopher of a universal form of music that is suitable and important to the church's existence. Colossians 3:16-17 is the picture of what corporate worship should aspire to be. In light of this passage, the church sings corporately to tell of God's salvation. The church can sing about the saving work of God, about the great salvation that has come to those who believe, about the cross, about the blood that was shed, and about the wrath of God assuaged through the sacrifice of God's only Son Jesus Christ. When the Word is read and faithful biblical lyrics from hymns and spiritual songs are sung, they unveil the grace of God, and the grace of God promotes holiness and sanctification. Author and theologian Bryan Chapell states,

Worship cannot simply be a matter of arbitrary choice, church tradition, personal preference, or cultural appeal. There are foundational truths in the gospel of Christ's redeeming work that do not change if the gospel is to remain the gospel. So, if our worship structures are to tell this story consistently, then there must be certain aspects of our worship that remain consistent.⁷

Models of Diversity: Musical Buffet and Inclusive Worship

One of the benefits of being part of a local church is hearing a congregation singing of God's saving work when gathered as the body of Christ. To achieve such authenticity in worship, church leaders can connect worship service and culture through offering what Marti has termed a "musical buffet."⁸ When people think of a buffet, one might assume "all you can eat," or a table garnished with several dishes so people can serve themselves. The idea of a potluck applies here as well—everyone bringing their favorite dishes from their own household and putting them together for others to enjoy. In

⁷ Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship: Letting Gospel Worship Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 85.

⁸ This term *musical buffet* comes from Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide*, 34.

the same way, worship might leaders lead different forms of music such as gospel music, Latin music, rock music, southern gospel, blues, jazz, afro-beat, hip-hop, or more to offer variety to a multicultural congregation.

The strength of the musical buffet model, like the earlier “blended worship” approach discussed earlier, lies in the musical plurality of styles that can help worshippers in their cultural consciousness. A weakness of the musical buffet model is that it can reveal people’s racialized norms stereotypes about the correlation between musical style and ethnic identity. In American culture in general, it seems that many people associate gospel music with the black church, salsa music with Hispanics, and so forth.

Unfortunately, church leaders can unconsciously promote these stereotypes in an effort to endorse the model of musical buffet, causing them to pressure worship leaders to incorporate greater inclusivity of styles into worship services. In some churches, the ethnic style may even change from song to song as leaders try to satisfy the cultural expectations people bring to their services. Such church leaders apparently hope that songs of various ethnic origins will speak the heart language of worshippers of different ethnicities and racial groups.

Sociologist George Yancey uses the term *inclusive worship* instead of a *musical buffet* to advocate essentially the same approach. For Yancey, musical style can communicate acceptance to a visitor of an ethnic or cultural majority:

Inclusive worship means that the congregation does not limit itself to a worship style that is identified with only one racial culture. How we worship can be an important way to symbolize acceptance. An inclusive worship style communicates to visitors of different races that they and their culture are respected. Therefore, it is vitally important to include worship style elements from other racial groups that a ministry hopes to reach.⁹

Churches that defend this approach often fail to identify which liturgical elements are most relevant to their context. There is rarely clarity on how different forms

⁹ George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity, 2003), 67.

of music, cultures, experiences, and theology convictions find peaceable coexistence. The musical buffet approach seems to concentrate on where each culture is coming from and create a common ground of “musical reconciliation.” This type of reconciliation cannot be managed, and often results in discouragement and is deflated by unauthentic cultural diversity. The effort should not be to secure cultural identities through musical buffet while intending to appreciate and encourage the flourishing of those whose culture is different from their own. Yancey continues,

Churches that desire to become multiracial or to maintain a racially integrated congregation tend to look for ways to incorporate different racial cultures into their worship. . . . The challenge for multiracial churches is to find a balance of different worship styles that will enable these churches to attract members of different racial groups. . . . When a church limits its style of worship to only one racial culture it is sending out signals about who is supposed to be comfortable at its service.¹⁰

In *Praising in Black and White*, Brenda Eatman Aghahowa, associate professor at Chicago State University, finds some congregations to be guilty of what she terms *liturgical imperialism*: “Liturgical imperialism has to do with the imposition of Euro-American worship preferences on Christians of African or other descent.”¹¹ She associates liturgical imperialism with a cultural Christianity that equates Euro-American culture and Christianity, and regards Euro-American worship styles as normative and superior. She proposes that the church purge itself of various types of cultural-spiritual imperialism and see people through the lens of Christ’s saving and inclusive love. This course of action, she believes, will lead believers to greater tolerance and unity, and less divisiveness, spiritual arrogance, and exclusion.¹² While her solution seems attractive and appealing, the message is flawed because of the dynamics of human desire to cultural self-absorbed ideology.

¹⁰ Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit*, 73, 78.

¹¹ Brenda Eatman Aghahowa, *Praising in Black and White* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1996), 28.

¹² Aghahowa, *Praising in Black and White*, 30.

The inclusion of persons of minority cultures and ethnicities into the church's leadership and worship practices has become an increasingly attractive trend in the evangelical church's culture representation. Considering this trend, the cultural experience becomes the "rule" of regulative principle and cultural recognition, acknowledgment, acceptance, and the validation become the normative principle.

To cite Jesus's discussion of cultural differences in worship, his response to the Samaritan woman demonstrates how God seeks worshippers who will worship in spirit and truth. David Peterson notes, "Throughout the Bible, acceptable worship means approaching or engaging with God on the terms that he proposes and in the manner that he makes possible."¹³ God is the worship-seeking God. He supplies satisfaction for souls, confronts the condition of sin, and reveals the Redeemer and the Giver of salvation who is Christ. Even God's exposure of our own human sinfulness is a grace from Him. True worship is less about cultural musical preferences and more about what God desires. God longs for more than just diverse ethnicities being represented and culturally diverse songs being sung. He desires more than merely a theological understanding on diversity in corporate worship. God has a claim on the entire being and the whole life of each worshipper.

David Peterson adds, "Worshippers are asked to admit that they cannot give God anything to satisfy his needs and yet he is to be honored by every expression of faith, gratitude and obedience. What is required of those who would come into God's presence is purity of heart and life."¹⁴ Christians can and must engage their hearts and focus their minds on Christ who is the truth. Both aspects result in delighted thankfulness to God informed by Scripture.

¹³ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 283.

¹⁴ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 46.

Church leaders can reproduce the glorious freedom of the heart of God about diversity through Scripture. Diversity of cultural expression is not the ultimate aim of Christian worship, God is. When glorifying God is upheld as the ultimate aim, then the church can gather for corporate worship united in the desire to see cultural diversity flourishing in the Bible-believing, Christ-exalting, and gospel preaching congregation.

Cultivate Intercultural Engagement in Corporate Worship

Over the past four centuries, corporate worship practices have evolved, and will continue to do so around the world. From ancient Israel through the Middle Ages to present, cultural influences have played a vital role in shaping worship practices. David Lemley writes, “From Greco-Roman musical practices, first-century Jews, Augustine, and other influencers, what one sang, and with whom one sang established who a person was in society.”¹⁵ Christopher Ellis, writing about Baptist worship in the early seventeenth century, notes, “Some General Baptists did not normally allow congregational singing even of psalms, as it might result in promiscuous singing in which unbelievers sing hypocritically and defile the praises of the covenant people.”¹⁶ Thus, early British Baptist services might have had a solo or no singing at all. The many cultural shifts in Baptist worship between the seventeenth-century practices and the present day show how radically Baptist corporate worship has changed—from non-singing General Baptists to an ecclesial dimension of hymn singing.

Church leaders continue asking questions about how best to restructure the content of intercultural engagement in corporate worship while adopting the popular forms of the surrounding culture in the current generation. In 2008, blogger Chuck Edwards,

¹⁵ David Lemley, *Becoming What We Sing: Formation through Contemporary Worship Music* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 61.

¹⁶ Christopher Ellis, *Gathering: A Spirituality and Theology of Worship in the Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM, 2004), 52.

writing on how Christians should respond to influences from popular culture, referred back to a foundational premise from the writings of Francis Schaeffer in the 1970s:

Francis Schaeffer once wrote that the secular philosophies of intellectuals filter down to the general population through the arts, becoming what we call “popular culture.” Thus, pop culture is the prevailing worldview expressed primarily through blockbuster movies, best-selling novels, “top-forty” music, highly rated television shows, the visual arts, and advertising.¹⁷

The influence of Western popular culture in North American as well as global corporate worship over decades is irrefutable. The embrace of popular culture at Schaeffer’s time until the present dramatically shaped worship in mainstream evangelicalism. It features personal preference of worship and influences doctrine and church traditions. Worship songs derived from popular culture encourage a make-believe community of conservative evangelicals whose foundation should lay on an utilitarian body focusing on personal preferences, attractive worship experience, and seeker sensitive worship forms. The influence of popular culture is not surprising because worship leaders sometimes use songs that sound like well-known radio songs with the hope of attracting members or people who might spend time listening to radio stations and Christian artists. In addition, pop culture continues to influence the sound and lyrics of the worship service format. Sonically, there is a similarity between popular music in the broader culture and pop music in the church. Both styles use the same instrumentation, loops, and performance templates (staging, lights, visual design). Also, the lyrics of some worship songs can sound very similar and basic, like popular music outside the church.

One cannot help but realize that some evangelical churches see the incorporation of US popular culture and its music “intercultural engagement” as an essential part of the negotiation between churchly tradition and practical faith. If the church focuses on issues of musical genres, tastes, or familiarity with ethnic songs of certain people groups in the name of diversity, they will be limiting other members’ potential for

¹⁷ Chuck Edwards, “Pop Culture: How Should a Christian Respond?,” Summit, June 17, 2008, <https://www.summit.org/resources/articles/pop-culture/>.

participating fully in the liturgy. One people group may feel alienated by an ethnic song whereas another may be moved. In contrast, the gospel should be the vehicle for cultivating intercultural engagement in corporate worship. There are three ways the gospel can help cultivate intercultural engagement.

First, the gospel informs cultural diversity in corporate worship. The gospel is the means for nurturing cultural diversity in corporate worship. God's Word must supply the principles, pattern, and content of diversity. Cultural diversity in corporate worship is not an ideal to be attained but a reality to be met in Jesus Christ. Chapell reminds, "Gospel priorities require us to try to understand the culture in which we minister, so that our worship will glorify God and minister his goodness in that context."¹⁸ Church leaders ought to think holistically about how the gospel informs cultural diversity in corporate worship within the context of the local church.

Second, the gospel compels church leaders to acknowledge, honor, and exemplify the demographic and ethnic diversity of the local church. Having members in the church from different people groups is a reminder that differences are embodied in the communal story of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Supporting this point, United Methodist theologian and hymn writer Ruth C. Duck names two criteria for the engagement of culture in worship: "Worship must incarnate the gospel through the cultural expressions of its context." At the same time, she notes that worship must "build the culture of the reign of God within the congregation."¹⁹ The latter point seems to speak clearly of personal discipleship as well as "building the [kingdom] culture" of God through members edifying one another in corporate worship.

The beauty of the gospel is revealed through the multifaceted body of Christ in all areas of ministries. Psalm 86:9 declares, "All nations you have made shall come and

¹⁸ Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship*, 122.

¹⁹ Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 36.

worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.” As congregation members grow in appreciation for one another through culturally diverse worship, diversity can inspire them and to love one another more to reflect on how Christ loves the church. In Romans 12, Paul wrote to a church made up of people from different countries and cultures; they had various situations and came into the church with different mindsets. Worship leaders should rejoice in diversity among church members because diversity displays the sufficiency of Christ that binds believers together in reconciling them to one another. In addition, Senior Pastor Clint Pressley, exegeting Romans 12:3-4, reminds Christians of who they are: “God-chosen people, one body in Christ, individually connected. They receive spiritual life from the same source, and are saved by the same cross, filled with the same Spirit, loved by the same Father, and on the same mission.”²⁰ Pressley concludes, “diversity becomes the way the church displays the gospel of Jesus Christ. As in one body, believers have many members with different responsibilities; they do not have the same function; they are different and have different roles. Church diversity is God’s handiwork. Christians are not colorblind, but colorful because God’s glory is revealed and celebrated in the diversity of His people.”²¹ Theologian Michael Hawn uses the phrase *culturally conscious worship* and states,

Culturally conscious worship²² leads congregations towards a community that reflects the one new community presented in Ephesians 2. This new humanity values the dignity and perspective of each person. Worship that emanates from this diverse body of believers is greater than the sum of its parts. The mosaic of a culturally diverse congregation in worship reflects the face of God from whom all cultures come.²³

²⁰ Clint Pressley, “Sermons,” Hickory Grove Baptist Church, June 20, 2020, <https://www.hickorygrove.org/resources/sermons/passage/romans/?page=22>.

²¹ Pressley, “Sermons.”

²² C. Michael Hawn notes that the term *culturally conscious worship* comes from Kathy Black, *Culturally-Conscious Worship* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000). Black expresses gratitude to the Mary Kraus for the term. Black, *Culturally-Conscious Worship*, 11.

²³ C. Michael Hawn, *One Bread, One Body* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2003), 12.

Third, the gospel points to church leaders that singing diverse gospel-centered songs plays a significant role for intercultural engagement in corporate worship. Corporate worship transcends music. Some accounts of corporate worship in the Bible do not contain the word music or singing in them (Exod 29:45-46; Deut 6:13-15; Acts 2:42; John 4:23-24; Heb 12:28-29; 1 Tim 4:13).²⁴ Music can be part of corporate worship, but music is not synonymous with corporate worship. When church leaders equate music with corporate worship, they lose the essence of true biblical worship. The idea of responding to the God who reveals himself to his people in corporate worship is the activity of everyday life (Rom 12:1). People's right response to God's revelation is the recalibration of their hearts and minds according to his Word daily. Therefore, when the saints gather in corporate worship, they respond to the infinite grace given to them through what Jesus Christ has done on their behalf. Corporate worship becomes a means of cultivating relationship rather than merely experiences, productions, or music.

God gifted the church with music so the congregation would have an incredible way of joining with diverse voices and hearts as one voice. For this reason, the congregation responds to God and to the relationship with Him made possible through the work of His Son Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. As leading ethnodoxologist Ron Man has stated memorably, "The church of Christ was not meant to gather around music, because music culturally changes so drastically. The church gathers around Christ, and around His Word. The Word of God is transtemporal, transgenerational, and transcultural."²⁵ The Word of God pierces and judges the thoughts and attitudes of human hearts (Heb 4:12) in every culture; God's Word reaches out to every generation. If the church focuses more on the Word of God to direct and guide worship, then the

²⁴ Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship*, 122.

²⁵ Ron Man, "'The Bridge': Worship between Bible and Culture," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, ed. James R. Krabill, Frank Fortunato, and Robin P. Harris (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 71-75, Kindle.

congregation has something they can unite around, regardless of their origins. The authority of the Christian church is Scripture, not song. The congregation ought to see the focus of the worship as a dialogue between the self-revealing God and His redeemed people being able to respond.

How can HGBC develop an environment where the movement of intercultural worship can grow? How can the church provide a substantial voice for its congregation in a worship space and be aspirational to exemplify the global church on a local scale? There are no easy answers to these questions. However, one of the foundations that must be laid is for the church to develop a theology of “liturgical *Sitz im Leben*.”

Theology of Liturgical *Sitz im Leben*

Lim Swee Hong expounds on this approach of *Sitz im Leben*. Starting with the notion of “global song,” he explains, “Post-colonial scholars interpret global song as a genre that is a concept developed on the idea of a benevolent dominant culture’s act of hospitality and welcome.”²⁶ This means the church ought to contextualize global songs to allow for the proper interpretation of a particular cultural setting into corporate worship. Though HGBC has not fully incorporated these ideas of contextualizing global songs in corporate worship, the ideals of the global songs are to shape the approaches of its cultural engagement in corporate worship ministry. These approaches should lead the church to be united with the universal church and have a global perspective in its liturgical elements. Lim cites the work of S. T. Kimbrough Jr., who offers a noteworthy principle of global perspective:

“The pluralization of the Christian community which emerged using primarily the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages—helps us to realize that there is no lingua franca of the Christian faith—It may be expressed in as many languages and cultures as there are people of the earth. God’s truth is not limited to a specific linguistic/cultural expression. Hence, the pluralization of the Christian church’s constituency has expanded the horizons of musical expressions of faith from the life

²⁶ Lim Swee Hong, “‘Where Is Our Song Going?’ vis a vis ‘Where should our song be going?’” *The Hymn* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 8.

and soil of the people. With this pluralization comes a multiplicity of musical expression from diverse cultures.”²⁷

In addition, in developing a theology of liturgical *Sitz im Leben*, Lim articulates that the local church’ nurture of global songs can only be pursued if they recognize the “danger of cultural appropriation in worship.”²⁸ Lim cites John Witvliet to support his argument: “Much as non-Western songs are fascinating to most Western congregations, they need to be discerningly used to avoid “ethno-tourism” that may result in unfortunate cultural appropriation and showcasing the music without understanding its *Sitz im Leben*.”²⁹ To put it in another way, contextualization should drive the means of intercultural engagement toward worship expressions.

I-to Loh provides a better definition to help understand contextualization: “Contextualization is the use of one’s own verbal and musical language to interpret the gospel, to express praise and thanksgiving to God, to voice concerns on issues confronting one’s time and environment. When this is done, one’s expression of faith in worship and witness in daily life become more meaningful and challenging.”³⁰ These worship expressions speak to people’s hearts when they are part of a healthy diet of global songs that are culturally appropriate for corporate worship. As Loh explains, “The ultimate goal of contextualization involves achieving a mature proficiency in technical skills in which lyrics exhibit sound theology infused with poetic beauty and reflect the needs and concerns of the culture.”³¹

One among many other practical methods that can be implemented in analyzing liturgical *Sitz im Leben* is what Lim calls “hybridity—a comingling of both Western and

²⁷ S. T. Kimbrough Jr., quoted in Hong, “Where Is Our Song Going?,” 9.

²⁸ Lim, “Where Is Our Song Going?,” 9.

²⁹ Lim, “Where Is Our Song Going?,” 9.

³⁰ Loh, *In Search for Asian Sounds and Symbols*, 80.

³¹ I-to Loh, “Ways of Contextualizing Church Music: Some Asian Examples,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 101.

local idioms.”³² This means a song can have a fusion of musical idioms, such as singing a traditional style accompanied by an assortment of western instruments. The church can sing global songs that transform God’s people by engaging them to sing what they believe and to believe in what they are singing—*lex cantandi, lex credendi*. As the congregation sings global worship songs, they rehearse God’s promises and steadfast love toward his people. Frank Fortunato asserts eloquently,

Worship songs revive hope; rehearse God’s greatness, love, grace, and mercy; celebrate the Redeemer and the work of salvation completed at the Cross; and anticipate the anthems of eternity that will praise the Lamb. Through song, the church on earth joins all redeemed humanity from every nation, tribe, and tongue, declaring the praises of “him who sits on the throne” (Rev 5:13).³³

Jaewoo Kim, beginning with Lim’s idea of hybridity, arrives at a different approach to cultural engagement. He maintains, “Singing worship songs from other parts of the world often brings spiritual benefits and a sense of unity with believers from those places. But when it does not happen mutually and on a complementary basis, dominant cultures may unintentionally communicate that one form of musical worship is superior to others.”³⁴ For this reason, Kim proposes a biblical approach to embracing glocal worship. He defines the term “glocal” as a unified integration between “local” and “global” matters.³⁵ He maintains that Glocal worship lines up well with biblical worship.

Kim notes how the form and location of worship were fixed in the Old Testament during the times of both tabernacle and temple, and that worshippers had to come to the same location and follow a prescribed sacrificial system, whereas in the New

³² Hong, “Where Is Our Song Going?,” 9.

³³ Frank Fortunato, “How Song Sustained the Church,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 114.

³⁴ Jaewoo Kim, “The Whole World Has Gone ‘Glocal,’” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 122.

³⁵ Kim, “The Whole World Has Gone ‘Glocal,’” 122.

Testament worship became radically decentralized.³⁶ Kim argues that true worship is not limited by location or time, for Christ himself has replaced the physical temple and he desire to see his people gathered to worship in Him in spirit and truth. Glocal worship in the glocal world unveils the missional nature of God, which is people of every tribe, nation, and tongue coming to know Christ. God has planted creative resources in different cultures and the invitation should be extended for it will enrich fellowship as the church sing and rejoices with brothers and sisters in Christ's far-flung Body. Hence, glocal worship is missional.³⁷ Kim further maintains that glocal worship is not merely a method to mobilize more people into missions but a direction of worship that reflects both the current era and the vision of a missional God. The goal of designing glocal worship is to help local congregations see the inseparable connection between Psalm 96:3; Matthew 24:14; and Revelation 7:9. Glocal worship involves musical incarnation of the gospel in the musical styles of various people groups, both those near to us and those far away.³⁸

Kim concludes with a reminder to church leaders seeking to nurture glocal worship to be united in diversity, for this unity brings greater glory to God: "When Christ is recognized and celebrated by worldwide communities, people will recognize that Christ is not a God who favors a specific region or culture but a global Savior and the Lord of all."³⁹

Implementing a theology of liturgical *Sitz im Leben*, whether by employing hybridity forms, glocal songs, or global songs, may create healthy habits by which church leaders may nurture cultural appropriate worship. These healthy habits, though sometimes uncomfortable, may inspire the congregation to participate during worship services, states

³⁶ Kim, "The Whole World Has Gone 'Glocal,'" 122.

³⁷ Kim, "The Whole World Has Gone 'Glocal,'" 126.

³⁸ Kim, "The Whole World Has Gone 'Glocal,'" 126.

³⁹ Kim, "The Whole World Has Gone 'Glocal,'" 126.

Kim.⁴⁰ He advises the church to pray and provide spaces where innovations such as glocal worship or hybridity can be introduced gradually. The purpose of these innovations is to be stated clearly and done intentionally to avoid syncretism.⁴¹ Through prayer and growth in cultural sensitivity, church leaders can learn and understand the value of worship and the love languages of the local church. Therefore, worship leaders can cultivate Christ-exalting glocal worship that is both expressive and progressive. Worship leaders can learn to recognize the scope of the congregation's tolerance to new material as they seek to disciple and provide new songs. The primary goal is to continue expanding the congregation's song repertoire gradually.

Furthermore, songs must meet biblical and theological criteria. Kevin DeYoung reminds readers, "The songs that we sing in corporate worship must be biblically and theologically sound. No song gets a free pass just because its 'diverse.' No matter how brilliant or moving or catchy the music, if the words stink, we shouldn't sing it."⁴² But he also proposes,

While we want to sing deep, theologically rich songs in our worship—songs about election, the Trinity, the atonement, God's sovereignty—we don't need to sing all of our theology in every song. To be sure, we don't want lyrics to be misleading or present half-truths, but we can sing simple truths. If all we sing are the most basic biblical truths, we are not doing justice to the whole counsel of God, but even a meal with roast and mashed potatoes needs a side salad and some jello. In other words, there's nothing wrong with singing "Jesus Loves Me" or "We Love You Lord" or "God is Good All the Time." These may not plumb the theological depths, but they do speak biblical truths and do so with childlike trust. Songs with 101-level truths should not be the staple of our musical diet, but they should be on our plate.⁴³

As the church continues to cultivate intercultural engagement in corporate worship, worship leaders are to keep in mind that congregations gather to hear and

⁴⁰ Kim, "The Whole World Has Gone 'Glocal,'" 124

⁴¹ Kim, "The Whole World Has Gone 'Glocal,'" 122-26.

⁴² Kevin DeYoung, "In Defense of Musical Diversity," The Gospel Coalition. August 12, 2009, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/in-defense-of-musical-diversity/>.

⁴³ DeYoung, "In Defense of Musical Diversity."

rehearse the gospel story. The gospel story reaches every nation, every tribe, and every tongue through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 15:2-3, John records, “They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!’” The song that Moses and the people of Israel sang on the banks of the Red Sea is the song of the redeemed that Christians have been singing through the ages, and it is the same song Christians will be singing throughout eternity. Moses was singing, the church is singing, and in heaven all will be singing “The Song of the Redeemed.” That is the church’s song regardless of ethnicities, tempo, instruments, genres, choir, band, brand new or hundreds of years old—the church is singing the same song. The song of the redeemed should be the one that unites the congregation to worship and respond.

Cultivate an Ethnodoxological Theology of Corporate Worship

As defined at the beginning of this project, *ethnodoxology* is “the interdisciplinary study of how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions.”⁴⁴ How can church leaders advocate ethnodoxology as a theological and anthropological framework to guide all churches in cultures represented in their local settings to worship with a missional perspective? *Ethno* comes from the biblical Greek word *ethne* (people) and *doxology* from *doxos* (praise or glory). Luis Bush with Mission Frontier’s issued an article on the intended meaning of Matthew 28:19 to understand the biblical basis of the term *ethne*. He reports,

According to the analysis by the Content Innovation Team (CIT) at Logos Bible Software (<http://www.logos.com>) based on a review of lexical and exegetical resources, the Greek word *ethnos* is translated into the English Bible by the term *Gentiles*, 84 of 161 times that it is used in the New Testament; the term *nation* 63 of

⁴⁴ Global Ethnodoxology Network, “What Is Ethnodoxology,” World of Worship, May 19, 2019, <https://www.worldofworship.org/what-is-ethnodoxology/>.

161 times, the term *people* 6 of 161 times, the term *pagan* 6 of 161 times and the term *country* and *heathen*, one time.⁴⁵

In addition, the Nairobi statement⁴⁶ presents four important principles on which Christian worship relates to culture: (1) worship is transcultural, the same substance for everyone everywhere; it is beyond culture; (2) worship is contextual, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture); (3) worship is countercultural, challenging what is contrary to the gospel in a given culture; and (4) worship is crosscultural, making sharing possible between different local cultures.⁴⁷ Before church leaders can encourage their local congregations to worship with a missional perspective, a correct view of Christian worship and culture must take all into account to understand ethnodoxology.

Biblical Foundation of Ethnodoxology

Ethnodoxology as a discipline seeks to deploy biblically in worship the artistic gifts and excellence of corporate worship in beauty and excellence of every people, tongue, tribe, and nation toward the goal of glorifying God. The biblical foundation of ethnodoxology is grounded in biblical worship. Andrew E. Hill defines biblical worship as “the expression of a relationship with the Triune God—always simple and always

⁴⁵ Luis Bush, “The Meaning of Ethne in Matthew 28:19,” *Mission Frontiers*, September 1, 2013, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-meaning-of-ethne-in-matthew-2819>, emphasis original.

⁴⁶ Anne Zaki, “Shall We Dance? Reflections on the Nairobi statement on Worship and Culture,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 158. In addition, The Nairobi Statement was developed 1993 to 1995 to explore contemporary issues and questions of the relationships between the world’s cultures and Christian liturgy. For the entire history on the full text of Nairobi Statement on worship and culture, see Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture Full Text,” June 16, 2014, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/nairobi-statement-on-worship-and-culture-full-text/>.

⁴⁷ For more on which Christian worship relates to culture, see Anne Zaki, “Four Ways Culture & Worship Relate,” *Mission Frontiers*, September 1, 2014, <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/four-ways-culture-worship-relate>. Anne Zaki is the resource development specialist for global and multicultural resources at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship based in Cairo, Egypt. Zaki explains in depth how culture and worship relate in attempt to navigate the crises facing Christianity and culture. In addition, the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture was released by the Lutheran World Federation as a framework for discussions of contextualization of worship. (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture”).

complex, both an event and a lifestyle.”⁴⁸ Before one can understand how to nurture and cultivate the foundational principles of ethnodoxology in a ministry context, a biblical foundation of corporate worship needs to be presented to ease the tension of church leaders’ attempts for cultural appropriate worship.

Julisa Rowe provides nine solid principles to help undergird biblical worship in culturally appropriate worship. First, biblical worship is “the Christian’s response to God.”⁴⁹ This means worship is a manifestation of God’s response to the daily activity and lifestyle of every believer (Ps 89:15; Rom 12:1-2). Second, biblical worship is “involved.”⁵⁰ To worship is to act and be involved. When Christians gather to worship, they are involved together in worshipping as a body of Christ. This act of worship is neither based on people being spectators like to a show, nor an observation of a performance. This act of worship is seen in the very nature of the words used in describing worship, such as to bow down to serve, to confess sin, to sing, to shout, and so forth (Gen 18:2; Ps 100:2; Isa 19:21; Matt 4:10; 18:26; John 4:21-24; Heb 9:9,14; Rev 4:11; 5:12; 13:4; 22:3). Third, biblical worship is “wholehearted and totally focused”⁵¹ (Deut 6:5; Ps 27:4; Matt 22:37). Forth, biblical worship is “communication, not transmission.”⁵² Transmission sends facts from giver to recipient; there is no feedback, no continual cycle of learning, and no communication. In other words, there is no response. The ultimate communication is God revealing himself to us and us responding to His revelation of Himself (Neh 8:6; Ps 106:48; Isa 6). Fifth, biblical worship is “the body of Christ caring for one another and

⁴⁸ Andrew E. Hill, “Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 44.

⁴⁹ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 757.

⁵⁰ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” 757.

⁵¹ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” 758.

⁵² Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” 758.

for others.”⁵³ The Bible commands us to be concerned for the poor, the disadvantaged, and the people around us (Amos 5:21-24; Jas 1:27). Since biblical worship is holistic, one can integrate faith into all aspects of life (work for justice, social activities, etc.).

Sixth in Rowe’s list, biblical worship is “a delight, not a duty”⁵⁴ (Eph 1:5-6, 11-14). Seventh, biblical “worship witnesses”⁵⁵ (Ps 57:9; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pet 2:4-5). Eighth, true worship sacrifices—worship is “an action and a giving of something that costs”⁵⁶ (Rom 12:1). One cannot easily give the whole self to God in service and servitude. The sacrifice requires God first rather than one’s desires or wants; that is the sacrifice that pleases God. Ninth, biblical worship “remembers Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ Without Christ, our worship becomes no different from any other religion. “To meet together as a body of Christ,” she argues “is to fully realize the benefits of the new relationship with God made possible by Christ; thus, believers express the faith continually as an ongoing relationship and to fully understand what has been done (Acts 10, 13; 18:5-8; Eph 5:19, 20).”⁵⁸

Rowe’s nine principles provide a solid understanding of what Scripture tells of biblical worship and can guide church leaders to aspire to a movement of ethnodoxology in corporate worship services that acknowledge a people group to worship God in a way that speaks to their hearts. Ethnodoxology is Christocentric in that it acknowledges that God’s redemptive work in Jesus is for every nation, tongue, and people group who confess Jesus Christ is Lord. The church is global, making disciples of Jesus Christ

⁵³ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” 758.

⁵⁴ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” 758.

⁵⁵ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” 759.

⁵⁶ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” 759.

⁵⁷ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” 759.

⁵⁸ Julisa Rowe, “How to Develop Culturally Appropriate Worship,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 758-59.

among all the nations (Matt 28:19, 20) and worshiping the Lamb as a kingdom of priests unto God in a new creation (Rev 5:9; 7:9,10).

The nations⁵⁹ represented at HGBC present a unique opportunity for church leaders and worship leaders to nurture ethnodoxology with the intention of becoming a relational community. At the beginning of Psalm 96, the psalmist commands to sing a new song. Who is supposed to sing? “All the earth” (v. 1). One cannot help but ponder ethnodoxology in this passage. The new song of Psalm 96 is the foretaste of the new song that will be sung around the throne forever, to the end of the age. Within the context, this is a nationalistic event, bringing back the ark to Jerusalem. Even on this event of nationalistic prominence, David is declaring through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to have an ethnodoxological view. This song is not just for Israel; this is a song for all the earth. This coming of the ark is not a picture of an isolated blessing for Israel, but a picture of a blessing extended to all the earth. One day, all nations, all people groups, all ethnicities, tribes, and tongues will be gathered around the throne of God worshiping a new song.

As John Piper has famously claimed, “Mission is not the ultimate goal of the church; worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn’t.”⁶⁰ Worship is ultimate, not mission. God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and countless saints fall on the face of God, missions will be no more. Missions is a temporary necessity, but worship abides forever. The chief end of missions is not just the salvation of souls—though that is what the church wants to happen. The highest priority is that those saved souls will become worshipers and give glory to God. Thus, missions of reaching unsaved souls exist because those souls need to worship the true God. Worship leaders are to think of the

⁵⁹ See appendix 8 for a list of nations represented at HGBC.

⁶⁰ John Piper, “Missions Exists Because Worship Doesn’t: A Bethlehem Legacy, Inherited and Bequeathed” (sermon preached at Bethlemin Baptist Church, Minneapolis, October 27, 2012), <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/missions-exists-because-worship-doesnt-a-bethlehem-legacy-inherited-and-bequeathed>.

global church. When the congregation sings cross-cultural gospel-centered songs, not only do the songs bring unity among the diversity represented but they point out that the gospel has the power to penetrate all nations, tribes, tongues, and cultures. The goal is not for HGBC to worship like a church under persecution in the middle east or Asia, but to be the global minority church. HGBC corporate worship should neither exist outside of its corporate worship context nor idolize it. Diversity in the church is glorious, and ethnodoxology demonstrates the work of Christ as it foreshadows the eternal corporate worship gathering that for which the saints long.

Drawing the Congregation toward a Culture of Global Worship

Vision for global worship. As previously stated in the theology of liturgical *Sitz im Leben* section, the ideals of global songs are to shape the approaches of HGBC corporate worship ministry. Building on other scholars' perspectives on global worship already discussed, I will now turn to C. Michael Hawn's proposed seven steps⁶¹ for congregations to move toward becoming churches with a vision for global worship. The influence of these other scholars, whether there is a direct connection or not, is evident in the writing and other areas of scholarship. First, Hawn proposes that congregations begin with their own neighborhoods, "especially those who live among you."⁶² Demographic research might help to know ethnic diversity in the community. One of the ways to connect to the community is to pray and sing for neighbors in their own language and from their culture.⁶³ Even though HGBC has many nations represented, more work need to be done to continue to reach the community in the spectrum of global songs. For worship leaders, leading a music genre they are not comfortable with, and sometimes do not understand,

⁶¹ C. Michael Hawn, "Worshiping with the Global Church," in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 775-77.

⁶² Hawn, "Worshiping with the Global Church," 775.

⁶³ Hawn, "Worshiping with the Global Church," 775.

requires intentionality. Engaging the congregation by having them sing different languages in songs can be done intentionally and deliberately by worship leaders to weave in songs from various genres and sometime languages during worship services.

Second, Hawn instructs reading the Bible together. A cross-cultural Bible study opens new understandings of the Scripture. The limitations of culture of origin create myopia when sharing Scripture. A cross-cultural Bible study reveals a richness and depth that points to the God of all, whose Son redeemed all people.⁶⁴ HGBC takes discipleship seriously. To take discipleship seriously means to bring clarity and direction to what discipleship is and what it looks like in all areas of ministries.⁶⁵ HGBC urges every member to be involved with discipleship in some way, as it is the Great Command. J. T. English articulates: “If you do not have mature disciples, it is because you have not trained them.”⁶⁶ As church leaders encourage reading God’s Word together, I am indecisive whether Hawn meant cross-cultural Bible study refers to a church creating space for all people groups speaking their native language to study God’s words, or a plethora of people groups from different nations within a community speaking a common language, such as English, to share the depth of God’s words.

Third, Hawn urges churches to observe the Christian liturgical year such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost with the hope of sharing the songs of the world church.⁶⁷ These seasons of the Christian liturgical year lend themselves naturally to expand the church’s understanding of the reach of the gospel around the globe. In addition to this point of liturgical year, Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner (members of ICE) suggest,

⁶⁴ Hawn, “Worshiping with the Global Church,” 775.

⁶⁵ Hawn, “Worshiping with the Global Church,” 775.

⁶⁶ J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B & H, 2020), 154.

⁶⁷ Hawn, “Worshiping with the Global Church,” 775.

Worship leaders can sing the first verse in English and the second verse in Spanish or vice versa, have one person on your worship teams to sing the chorus in English while another harmonizes with him/her in Spanish and so forth. . . . Take a song from one culture and connect it with the song from another culture by being intentional carefully considering the themes of the songs and the musical connection.⁶⁸

This combination can be done intentionally and deliberately by worship leaders to weave in songs from various genres and sometime languages during worship services. Worship leaders can take small steps by examining liturgical seasons and then incorporating familiar choruses. For instance, singing a chorus of “O Holy Night” in Russian, Spanish, French, or any one of the languages of the people represented in a congregation can be more significant than singing only English during the Christmas season.

Similarly, worship leaders can lead the chorus of a familiar hymn, such as “How Great Though Art,” in one language for one Sunday service and do it again over time until it becomes familiar with the congregation. One of the ways HGBC has integrated cross-culture worship is by adding Scripture reading by choir members from different ethnicities on a regular basis (especially missions week). This adds another component of diversity in corporate worship. Nevertheless, the goal is to encourage the congregation to take small steps that will display the heart of nurturing ethnodoxology in corporate worship where it becomes part of the liturgy.

Along these lines, DeYoung identifies four different “traditions” of songs that the church should be singing. One of those is “non-Anglo songs.” He argues that while singing non-Anglo songs category might sound artificial, it is important to a church’s life:

Singing non-Anglo songs (with translation if necessary) is good for us not only because it broadens our horizons, but because we are not all white Anglo-Saxons! We may not ever sing “just like the black church downtown,” or “just like my church back in Nigeria.” That’s not the point. I am not embarrassed that I like Isaac Watts, but neither should I be embarrassed to clap along with a spiritual or stumble my way through a Spanish chorus. Singing these songs has many benefits. It guards us against resting smugly in our own tradition or preferences; it reminds us that God is a God of all peoples; and it gives voice to other traditions in our midst.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner, *Worship Together in Your Church as in Heaven* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 148.

⁶⁹ DeYoung, “In Defense of Musical Diversity.”

Fourth, Hawn suggests that praying for the world while singing songs from a region where strife or oppression emanates is one way to empathize with the suffering persons for whom God came to save.⁷⁰ Fifth, church leaders can expose the congregation to different cultures beyond their culture of origin by singing songs from different Christian communities around the world. As a result, rather than building walls of hostility and fear, bridges are built between young people and other ethnic groups, and trust in relationships are continued to be strengthened. Sixth, change the soundscape of worship when the congregation gathers to worship. There are sounds the congregation expects to hear in the liturgical elements during services. These sounds nurture the faith of the congregation, Hawn notes.⁷¹

Through the music of other cultures, the congregation can experience a sense of the presence of others as a means of praying more fully and completely. Thus, the soundscape of worship is enlivened with instruments, prayers, songs, and Scripture in at least one language other than the language usually used in worship, to remind the congregation of a God much bigger than any one cultural perspective. In addition to changing the soundscape of worship, worship leaders should have a musical “center” that defines the church’s worship and continues to assess diverse gospel-centered songs that do not go against the church’s corporate worship “heart song.”

As an illustration, I was born and raised in Burundi. I do not expect my home church in Burundi to worship like HGBC, neither should HGBC worship like the church in Burundi. Even though the regulative principle echoes sameness in God’s revealed truth, the forms are flexible. The regulative principle of worship holds that only what is specified in Scripture is permissible in corporate worship; whereas the normative principle holds that any elements not forbidden by Scripture is permissible in corporate

⁷⁰ Hawn, “Worshiping with the Global Church,” 776.

⁷¹ Hawn, “Worshiping with the Global Church,” 776.

worship. The church in Burundi and HGBC should have the same content of first importance in gatherings: the good news of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 15:3-4 says, “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” In the same way, the church in Burundi and HGBC should be very different. For example, in how their respective liturgies are structured. Scripture offers the content for both churches, but within broad biblical instructions, the forms are flexible. William Chong, English pastor at Pakuranga Chinese Baptist Church in East Auckland, New Zealand explains how he seeks to steer a middle path between the regulative principle and the normative principle in worship, using a practical analogy to make his point:

Just as one needs both the accelerator and brake to drive a car well, both regulative and normative impulses are helpful in order to drive our gathered worship well. Therefore, the wise pastor or service leader will order gathered worship in a way that does what Scripture clearly commands, avoids what it clearly forbids, and uses biblical wisdom for everything else.⁷²

As his seventh and final principle, Hawn instructs congregations to show hospitality as a principle of worship. Extending hospitality to those beyond one’s cultural context demonstrates that Christ is among his people in the faces of the stranger and the alien.⁷³

Worship leaders should be open to expanding their limited horizons in song selection and not being enslaved to one musical style center. A common observation in some churches is an attempt of worship leaders to have one dominant music genre associated with a particular racial group. In many cases, this mixture ends up looking like

⁷² William Chong, “How Then Shall We Meet?,” Chongs Worship, September 9, 2020, <https://chongsworship.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Regulative-normative-online.pdf>, 18. Chong provides a helpful and well expounded argument on both regulative and normative principle. The basis of regulative and normative principle should drive the church to desire diversity in corporate worship even more. When Scripture penetrates all nations, tribes, tongues, and cultures, one cannot assume that one principle pleases God more than another. Churches, whatever their context, should not be oblivious to their congregation’s need in corporate worship. God, the creator of diversity, is gathering every tribe, nation, and tongue to himself for his glory.

⁷³ Hawn, “Worshiping with the Global Church,” 777.

an intercultural experiment that hurts the local body instead of an intentional pursuit of diversity. HGBC has a musical language that reflects its liturgy. Adding an Afrocentric flavor or Eurocentric liturgical style should not take away the music language of the church. In other words, the mere incorporation of this kind of integration will not create a true worship (John 4). Writing on diversity, Juan Sanchez provides two questions as thoughtful challenges to find balance for worship leaders as they wrestle with their church's musical language: first, is the worship leader's worship song selection in corporate worship rooted in Scripture or driven by culture?, and second is the church practice of cultural diversity in corporate worship rooted in Scripture or cultures?⁷⁴

Obstacles to culturally diverse worship. To ensure that the global worship reflects the worship culture of the congregation, some obstacles need to be overcome. David M. Bailey has identified three common obstacles to multicultural worship.⁷⁵ First, there is a lack of instruction and awareness. The congregation must be made aware of the theological and practical reasons for the need of practicing multicultural worship. The default tendency of people in general is to focus only on their own culture unless someone or a situation makes them aware of others. For this reason, worship leaders and church leaders in all ministries can patiently and intentionally help the congregation achieve this awareness. This step is foundational. The willingness to make sacrifices for new changes in the way that things have been done in the past will initially create criticism and complaint from the congregation. However, if the leadership is committed to global worship both theologically and practically, the congregation will embrace the importance of a global worship focus. In addition to instructing the people, Bailey

⁷⁴ Juan Sanchez, "3 Questions to Ask about Multiethnic Worship Gatherings," LifeWay Research, February 4, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/02/14/3-questions-to-ask-about-multiethnic-worship-gatherings/>.

⁷⁵ David M. Bailey, "Worship and Mission for the Global Church," in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 778.

emphasizes, church leaders are to listen to the congregation with good intentions when introducing global worship. As the congregation proceeds and adjusts to the changes, they need not be rushed, pushed, or run over to embrace new ways of global worship. Church leaders must understand that raising awareness of the importance of multicultural worship requires laying a solid foundation for its future practice, so the process must be intentional and patient. Discerning the process by listening to both God and the congregation, church leaders can know if they are moving too fast or too slow in bringing the congregation to an awareness of the fullness of God in worship.

Bailey's second principle is finding qualified people. Having qualified people to execute the vision of multicultural/global worship is not an easy task. One must either find new people or cultivate the people the church already has. One of the blessings at HGBC is that God has provided qualified people to nurture the vision of global worship. Qualified worship leaders can be developed within the diversity that presently exists in the church as well. This is the reason the process of raising awareness is crucial. In agreement with Bailey's second principle, the church must continue to develop the vision of global worship. If qualified worship leaders aspire to magical desegregation with the hope that global worship will be fulfilled by the diversification of platforms, then church leaders have missed the point. Spotlighting worship leaders of different ethnicities without openness to nurture the awareness and relationships from different people groups will bring damage to the church. Shifting the culture of a church to a place of so-called global worship is not achieved merely by employing minority worship leaders that is tokenism, even if the vision was a well-intended attempt to cultivate global worship. Therefore, church leaders are to be intentional in finding qualified people.

Third, Bailey advises that congregations must acquire skills and resources to worship with excellence and integrity. In raising awareness of global worship, worship leaders fall short of presenting the musical style of the culture that one is ignorant of. No one person knows everything about all cultures; however, establishing a system of

musically and culturally education for worship leaders and musicians allows them to grow in their musical and cultural competencies. This is the place where ethnodoxologists equip worship leaders and church leaders by providing educational resources and various cultural styles. Creating a space of awareness and education will eventually equip the church leaders and the congregation to overcome these obstacles, among many others, to implement global worship.

In today's rapidly changing culture, the concept of cultural diversity in corporate worship offers much to think about with respect to how the church should minister to a multiethnic congregation. The approach to corporate worship found throughout the Bible embraces God's people of all ages and life and situations. Parents, children, youth, singles, families, and seniors from different backgrounds all connect in the corporate worship of the Lord. Every decision made in ministry is a value proposition—every decision made should contribute to the growth of the congregation. Serving a multiethnic congregation requires serving with patience, consistency, humility, and love. Increasing diversity in corporate worship should not promote the self-esteem of different ethnicities. In contrast, viewed through the lens of the Scriptures, diversity in corporate worship demonstrates to the church and the world that all persons from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, are sinners needing God's mercy every day. At the same time, diversity in corporate worship reasserts that all have been created in God's image and redeemed by His grace. Therefore, worship leaders must strive to understand how today's worship songs are vital in shaping global worship engagement for the congregation.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter describes the project implementation and offers a detailed account of its execution. The purpose of this project was to develop a practical framework for increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship at Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The project had three goals: (1) to assess the knowledge and practices of the worship team/choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship at HGBC; (2) to develop a six week-session curriculum to teach the worship team/choir at HGBC why diverse gospel-centered songs matter within corporate worship; and (3) to develop a ministry plan to increase diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC. Implementation of the project began with a review of the curriculum on February 23, 2022, and continued through June 31, 2022.

Projection Promotion

Project promotion occurred from February 27, 2022, to March 1, 2022. Working with the worship pastor and worship admin, the “Increasing Cultural Diversity in Corporate Worship” teaching series was announced during choir rehearsal on February 27, 2022. A follow-up email was sent to church choir members and offered information for participation. Course registration occurred responding by email starting March 1, 2022. The registration email gave information about the project and asked participants to respond whether they will be able to attend or not. Upon registration, each participant was asked to commit to participate in at least five of the six sessions, which took place before choir rehearsal on Sundays. Pre-session surveys were provided to fourteen committed participants.

Summary of the Project

This project implementation depended upon the completion of three phases. (1) The pre-session survey phase to assess the knowledge and practices of the worship team/choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship. (2) The curriculum phase to develop a six-week-session curriculum to teach the worship team/choir. (3) The ministry plan phase to develop and implement the ministry plan for increasing diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship.

Pre-Survey Phase

During this phase, I assessed the knowledge and practices of the worship team/choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship at HGBC through survey. A pre-session survey facilitated this goal.¹ Hard copies of the survey were delivered and participants used a four-digit number as a pin code instead of their names so they could complete the survey anonymously. At the end of the last teaching session, participants used the same pin code for the post-session survey to enable the matching of the pre- and post-session survey for a t-test score. On March 1, 2022, fourteen surveys were returned and the results were analyzed, providing a clearer understanding of the knowledge and practices of the worship team/choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship.

The results of the pre-survey showed that participants had a generic knowledge of diverse gospel-centered songs. For example, in an open-ended item question, “When you think about diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship, what stands out to you?,” one participant noted, “I think about using all cultures to dictate our worship music. I think we could use additional diverse songs. I believe a church can attract more followers by offering a more diverse selection of corporate worship songs. Thus, engaging our people to become accepting of all race and cultural along with all ages.” Another participant wrote, “I now feel that there is no need to sing different culture songs. When we sing God’s word

¹ See appendix 1.

in song, culture will recognize God's word in the song and their heart will be glad and they will praise.” The first example shows that one can think of the use of diverse gospel-centered songs as an attractional means to reach out the culture and draw people to church. The second example shows that cultural neutrality can blind people even those who mean well. Those two examples were among many that helped guide the writing of the curriculum to help participants understand a biblical approach of gospel-centered songs.

Curriculum Phase

During this phase, I developed a six-week-session curriculum to teach the worship team/choir at Hickory Grove Baptist Church. The curriculum addressed why diverse gospel-centered songs matter within corporate worship. A preliminary curriculum was conceptualized alongside chapters 2 and 3 from February through April 2022. Writing of the curriculum was completed in March 2022. Resources for the curriculum were consistent with Scripture—the general positions of the authors from the bibliographic entries for chapters 2 and 3. The curriculum focused on the structure and elements of cultural diversity in corporate worship. In addition to this focus, the curriculum aimed to train and equip those in worship ministry to develop and encourage a culture of diversity. The curriculum exposed how the choir/praise team may reflect a comprehensive understanding of cross-culture in corporate worship.

Curriculum evaluation. The curriculum was presented with the rubric² for evaluation to a six-member expert panel from the Harris campus only at HGBC. The expert panel members have been involved in pastoral teaching ministry for decades. They are well immersed and experienced in teaching and serving, and some have advanced degrees in biblical and theological studies. The panel included the senior pastor; senior associate pastor; two adult discipleship pastors; worship pastor; and the choir and orchestra director. The initial curriculum review began on February 23, 2022, when each member of the

² See appendix 2.

expert panel was provided an emailed copy of the rubric and the teaching outlines. The reviewers used the rubric to evaluate the biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicability of the curriculum. It also allowed for commentary on each section of the curriculum. A review of materials and feedback continued until March 1, 2022, when the reviewers returned their assessments. Revisions of the course material occurred as reviews were submitted. This goal was considered successfully met on March 2, 2022, when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the “sufficient” level. Several comments were made by the reviewers which facilitated the refinement of the project.

Session 1 was rated as sufficient and no feedback was offered. Reviewers were pleased with the biblical emphasis and direct nature of the lesson.

Comments on session 2 included a recommendation to add a more detailed outline of the application points for the lessons and more description of what the “third race/red race” meant.

Regarding session 3, no informative or critical feedback was offered. The lesson reflected on God’s Word and how it should be applied.

Session 4 comments included a suggestion to expand the point “why you cannot achieve diversity through music as universal language and musical buffet.” The expansion of this point would give participants a better idea of how this point connects with the others in corporate worship. This suggestion resulted in a fuller explanation of how diversity in corporate worship is rooted within the extensive narrative of Scripture.

Comments for session 5 included the request to articulate clearly the big idea of how the understanding of cultural influences ties with the implementation of diverse Christ-centered songs in corporate worship.

Session 6 comments included how to provide more transparency to the theme of the lesson and connect it with the application. For instance, from a gospel-centered and theological framework, how does ethnodoxology relate to the global church.

Overall, reviewers were pleased with the biblical focus and direct nature of the sessions and suggested it would be helpful to be consistent in the themes, points of each lesson, and application. The recommendations provided by the reviewers were suitably noted and incorporated into the curriculum. The suggestions were not rated as unfavorable responses, but feedback intended to make the curriculum clearer, more robust, and more defined before offering the sessions to the participants. One reviewer explained, “I like how you start with the beginning of mankind and build through the New Testament—God’s people did not just mix cultures in the New Testament.” This comment was encouraging because I intended to present the curriculum based on the Scriptures.

Curriculum content. “Increasing Cultural Diversity in Corporate Worship” was taught in a six-session series with twenty-five minutes allocated for each session. The first part of the curriculum (weeks 1-3) was offered on Sundays, March 6-20, 2022, from 3:30 p.m. until 3:55 p.m. Fourteen choir/praise team members participated in the first section. Week 1-3 focused on (1) human life in the divine scheme of creation; (2) the cross as the means of ethnic reconciliation; and (3) the heart of God for the nations. These three main points were supported exegetically from Genesis 1:26-27, Ephesians 2:11-22, and Revelation 7:9-17.

Respectively, the second part (weeks 4-6) was offered on Sunday April 10, 2022, from 3:30 p.m. until 3:55 p.m., and Sunday April 24, 2022, from 3:15 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. The teaching session on April 24 included the material for weeks 5 and 6 because of a conflict in the choir calendar. Session 5 was supposed to occur on April 17, but it was Easter Sunday, so there were no afternoon ministry activities on that day. Thus, the April 24 session was longer than previous ones. Fourteen choir/praise team members participated during the sessions. The second part of the curriculum focused on (4) the contrary hypotheses of diversity in corporate worship; (5) intercultural engagement in corporate worship; and (6) an ethnodoxology of corporate worship. These main points were

addressed successively, revealing God’s perspective on cultural diversity in corporate worship.

Teaching curriculum. At the beginning of each teaching session, I opened with a prayer, asking God to teach us through his Word and make our ears attentive and our hearts to understand only what He can reveal. Each session had a question and answer time at the end. I provided hard copies of the outline for participants to follow along and defined any terms as necessary.

Session 1 covered Genesis 1:26-27. Though I presented several interpretations of the passage provided by scholars previously in chapter 1. The focus was on the assurance of the Lord’s perspective on creating man in his image. God has made us in his image and our human nature revealed the crown of God’s accomplishment until it was marred by sin.

Session 2 tackled Ephesians 2:11-22. In this session I emphasized that the cross is the power that generates unified new humanity. Christians should not think of unity in Christ’s body as a matter of rights and privileges, but as a genuine obligation of a godly way of life rooted in God’s relationship. God’s glory is revealed and celebrated in the diversity of His people.

Session 3 covered Revelation 7:9-17. I addressed how the multitude of people from every nation, tongue, and tribe are free from suffering, pain, and sorrow, and are worshiping the Lamb of God. I expressed what a privilege and joy that will be for the multitude of saints from all around the world, who have labored faithfully and endured suffering here to be with Christ. Therefore, if diversity is being displayed in heaven with the multitude, then the local church should strive to pursue and intentionally nurture diversity.

For session 4, I presented the two most common controversial hypotheses: universal music and musical buffet. I argued that an attempt to apply “the musical buffet and “universal music” concepts in the local church will not create cultural diversity in

corporate worship because there is no peaceable coexistence between the two. The concepts of musical buffet seems to concentrate on where each culture is coming from whereas, although universally found in every culture, music is not a universal language. Thus, cultural diversity in corporate worship can only flourish through Bible-believing, Christ-exalting, and gospel preaching congregation.

In session 5, I proposed three ways to cultivate intercultural engagement in corporate worship. This can take place when the church (1) presents the gospel of Jesus Christ; (2) acknowledges, honors, and exemplifies the diversity of the local church; and (3) sings culturally diverse gospel-centered songs corporately. Also, I proposed two ways to engage interculturally in corporate worship: (1) intentionally implement diverse Christ-centered songs in corporate worship that unify church members; and (2) intentionally assess cultural diversity in corporate worship. Leaders of the church should do everything they can to eliminate hindrances that might keep the church from becoming more diverse. In addition, worship leaders can expand song selection and not be enslaved to one “musical center.” Cultural engagement should be driven by Scripture and done in love.

In session 6, I introduced the discipline of ethnodoxology. This concept of ethnodoxology was new to many participants and drew a lot of attention and questions after the lesson. I used Psalm 96 as a foretaste of ethnodoxology and how worship leaders should think of the global church. Cross-cultural worship might present its obstacles, but it is not impossible to attain. This desire of cross-culture worship can be done intentionally and deliberately. I concluded the session by reminding participants that though racial diversity is an important issue, the emphasis should not be on race, but on *ethne*—every tribe, people, culture, and language. If church leaders continue to be passionate about it and bring it to life, then the choir/praise team has the responsibility to trust their leaders to align with the vision of nurturing diversity in corporate worship.

Ministry Plan Phase

The third phase was to develop a ministry plan to increase diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC. The ministry plan aimed to equip and disciple the worship team/choir for corporate worship at HGBC. This ministry plan will facilitate worship leaders to see the need to increase gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC. As a result, the multiethnic congregation will continue to celebrate the works of God seen most evidently in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus (Gal 2:20).

A three-member expert panel from the Harris campus assessed the ministry plan with a rubric.³ The panel member experts have years of experience in worship ministry at HGBC. They are distinguished in the field of worship ministry and two of them have degrees in concentration of worship ministry. The panel included the HGBC worship pastor, the student girls discipleship director and worship associate, and the choir and orchestra director.

Intending to increase the singing of diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship, the ministry plan aimed at to accomplish four objectives based on Colossians 3:16-17: (1) exalt God; (2) edify the body of Christ; (3) equip those in the worship ministries; and (4) evangelize through diverse gospel-centered songs. The main method used to implement the ministry plan was to know the context of the congregation at HGBC, understand what the congregation connects to and is encouraged by when worshiping, and discern the kinds of worship music that stir the congregation's soul to glorify God.

Three points were used as criteria for the section of diverse gospel-centered songs for the congregation: (1) the truths of God—the lyrics must be inspired and filtered by God's word; (2) rejection of personal stylistic preferences of the staff; and (3) what best fits and serves the congregation. In addition, the ministry plan considered several obstacles that may occur. For example, making sure the current corporate worship structure reflects

³ See appendix 3.

the worship culture of the congregation; believing that only a certain kind of song allows the congregation to experience a genuine encounter with God; and being willing to make sacrifices for new changes in the way things have been done in the past.

Finally, the ministry plan provided an action plan. To increase the usage of gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC, leaders made a gradual and repeatable ground plan. First, worship leaders can provide reasons for diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship by giving regular biblical teaching to the choir and praise team. Second, worship leaders can avoid introducing songs in a rush, especially songs in a different language. Taking time and singing the songs in upcoming weeks draw the congregation in and make the singing an enjoyable experience. Third, worship leaders asked different people and ensembles lead the new songs, demonstrating to the congregation that the song is for the whole church. Fourth, if singing in a different language, the worship team can learn the correct pronunciations of the words and prepare translations on-screen. The congregation needs to understand about what they are singing. Fifth, worship leaders can be intentional about choosing worship music for the congregation. When choosing songs, worship leaders can determine the kind of theological diet to feed the congregation. This diet will enhance how to efficiently plan, prepare, and present God-honoring diverse gospel-centered songs for worship services.

Conclusion

This project was implemented in three phases. I assessed the knowledge and practices of the worship team/choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship at HGBC; the curriculum was developed and taught in a six-week-session to the worship team/choir; and the ministry plan was developed to increase diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC. These indicators show that the project was executed.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter evaluates the project by assessing its purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. The recommendations offered are for future adjustments to maximize potential ministry impact. Lastly, theological and personal reflections are offered upon the experience encountered with this project.

Evaluation of Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a practical framework for increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship at Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The purpose originated from a desire to see HGBC develop corporate worship that acknowledges, honors, and exemplifies the diversity of the local church.

Observations from cultural diversity within HGBC's congregation demanded contextualization of its corporate worship to meet the needs of the multiethnic congregation. These observations helped formulate a general profile of global worship aspiration related to the concept of cultural diversity in corporate worship.

The purpose of increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship is consistent with Scripture in that all people are made in God's image and they represent the crown of God's handiwork. God's people bear his image and are a copy of their Maker (Gen 1:26-27). The purpose of this project is to demonstrate how a congregation of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds living biblically will display God's plan for His people. This display compels Christians not to be colorblind or ignore their ethnic and cultural differences but instead to embrace the differences; cultural diversity becomes the

way Christians display the gospel of Jesus Christ toward each other (Eph 2:11-22). Moreover, this project was based on the foundational premise that cultural diversity in corporate worship exhibits a global expression of corporate worship in God's family (which will ultimately include worshippers from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages). This global expression of corporate worship in the church glorious demonstrate the work of Christ Jesus, foreshadowing the eternal corporate worship gathering that the saints long for (Rev 7:9-10). The purpose of this project was successfully met.

Evaluation of Project Goals

The project goals were well-aligned with the project purpose and proved effective approaches in equipping the choir/praise team for gospel-centered corporate worship. These approaches enhance both knowledge and practice of cultural diversity in corporate worship. The three goals of the project were: (1) to assess the knowledge and practices of the worship team/choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship at HGBC, (2) to develop a six week-session curriculum to teach the worship team/choir at HGBC, and (3) to develop a ministry plan to increase diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC.

Goal 1

The first goal assessed the knowledge and practices of the worship team/choir of diverse gospel-centered songs for corporate worship at HGBC. The pre- and post-session survey was made available upon course registration.¹ Fourteen participants received hard copies the week before the teaching session. The choir director provided time to share about the project, which proved an appropriate way to distribute and collect data for the pre-session survey. The survey responses were analyzed and incorporated

¹ See appendix 1.

into the lectures to help enhance the teaching lessons. At the end of the last teaching session, the post-session surveys were distributed, and data was collected for the *t*-test scores.

During the implementation period, there were fourteen participants in pre-sessions survey and the same number of participants were matched to the post-session survey, ensuring a valid comparison. The survey contained ten questions about the participants’ general understanding and practices of diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship.

The questions were formulated using a six-point Likert scale. In the pre-session survey, the average score for these questions was 45, whereas in the post-session survey, the average score was 48. This comparison proves the results were not as significant with the average scores rising only 3 points. Even though the *t*-critical one-tail value of 1.77 was larger than the *t*-stat value of -1.34, the *p*-value of .010, was larger than the alpha of 0.05. The survey showed no statistically significant change between pre and post-training survey scores: $t_{(13)}=-1.34, p>.10$.

Table 1. *T*-test: Paired to sample for means

	Pre -Test Total	Post -Test Total	
Mean	45.7142857	48.2142857	+
Variance	30.989011	17.5659341	
Observations	14	14	
Pearson Correlation	-0.000471		
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		
df	13		
t Stat	-1.3421128		
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.10126505		> 0.05
t Critical one-tail	1.7709334		Yes
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.2025301		
t Critical two-tail	2.16036866		Yes

This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test dependent samples

demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. However, the test did not show significant change. Some reasons for this may have been that (1) there was a small number of participants—the *t*-test would have likely worked best if there had been more than thirty participants; and (2) I only provided ten scaled questions for the survey items, which did not provide sufficient opportunity to document change. Even though I did not meet this goal, some of the open-ended survey responses were encouraging. One participant said, “Instead of looking for songs that we think would promote diversity we must build diverse relationship and then choose music that represent the culture that already exists.” Another one mentioned, “Diverse gospel-centered songs are songs with music that is scripturally rooted and appeals to the congregation. Cultural diversity is celebrated through our music as the general congregation enjoys and responds to each other, and music preference style is different just like each person, yet we are united in Christ.” Other participants responded: “Gospel-centered songs are driven by the gospel to all tribes, tongues and nations,” and “Diverse gospel-centered songs are songs taken directly or paraphrased from scripture in different styles and genre of music.” The comments show that the teaching sessions made an important change in the viewpoints of many participants.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop a six-week-session curriculum to teach the worship team/choir at HGBC why diverse gospel-centered songs matter within corporate worship. The curriculum was developed synchronously with chapters 2 and 3 of this project, and the outlined lessons were presented to an expert panel for review and feedback. The panel members were made up of six staff on the pastoral team who agreed to participate in the two-week review period.² All six panel members completed and

² See appendix 2.

submitted feedback for consideration within the time allotted for the review. While the initial feedback was rated above 90 percent sufficient, changes to the curriculum were made based on the expert panel's feedback. Upon completion of the review and revision, this goal was considered successfully met. The curriculum was taught for the first three consecutive weeks, covering one session per week. After a two-week break, the teaching resumed and covered the last three sessions; the fifth and the sixth sessions were combined teaching sessions with extended time. Participants had unique dynamic participation that provided genuine conversations that impacted the teaching. From a pastoral perspective, participants benefited and grew in knowledge of how the good news of Jesus Christ ought to inform the local church's understanding of cultural diversity and decisions around corporate worship.

Goal 3

The third goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC. The ministry plan focused on practical approaches such as (1) knowing the music context of the congregation at HGBC; (2) understanding what the congregation connects to and is encouraged by during corporate singing; and (3) discerning the kind of varieties of worship music that stir the congregation's soul to glorify God. Three panel members, made up of three staff members in the worship ministry, agreed to participate in a one-week review period. All three panel members completed and submitted feedback for reflection within the time allocated for review.³ While the initial feedback rated above 90 percent sufficient, modifications to the ministry plan were made based on the reviewers' comments. Upon completion of the review and revision, this goal was considered successfully met.

³ See appendix 3.

Project Strengths

The first strength of this project was its alignment with Scripture. The Word of God provided an authoritative framework for a biblical understanding of cultural diversity in worship. Scripture lays out God's desire for every *ethne* participating in corporate worship. In the implementation of the project, the inerrant Word of God was the foundation of conviction to execute the project. Anyone can misread the Bible and fall prey to advocating "cultural diversity" through unclear lenses. These distorted lenses tend to blind leaders to the correct biblical interpretation of multiculturalism. The project offered participants an environment that was scripturally focused and guided. Prevalent secular presuppositions about diversity—some helpful, some not as helpful—can be presented with neutral perspectives. The remedy to solve the risks that may be posed by this cultural neutrality is Scripture alone. Thus, the project focused on the doctrine of Scripture and its implications for the congregational awareness of cultural diversity in corporate worship.

The second strength of the project was that the methodology provided the choir and praise team extensive opportunities to engage with the lesson topics. Time was limited because the sessions were scheduled before the choir rehearsal. However, several times conversations continued to take place afterward concerning the importance of diversity and its main obstacles. The project methodology allowed the group to interact, ask questions, and explore the topic without any constraints during the teaching. One participant once said, "Oh, what will heaven be like when all nations and people praise God and worship God!" Another added, "Diversity is not limited to one culture or race. Our desire to be diverse should not be for diversity's sake, but the sake of the gospel." These interactions confirmed the edification of the participants. Participants were encouraging and building up each other, as well as myself.

The third strength of the project was the willingness of participants to be present in the training. Having fourteen choir/praise team members who completed the pre- and post-surveys suggested a steady commitment. Teaching before rehearsals forced participants to be flexible in their schedules. Participants were willing to make sacrifices

in their schedules to help contribute to the project. As a result, none of the fourteen participants missed any sessions, even after Easter and spring break. Participants weighed in toward understanding the larger foundational concepts of increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship. Also, the commitment of being present benefited both the participants and the teacher regarding the responsibility of discipleship.

The fourth vital strength of this project was the purposeful study of the ministry plan that contains structure and elements to increase cultural diversity in corporate worship. These elements ensured emphasis on (1) planning of diverse gospel-centered worship services; (2) intentional discussion on current cultural diversity issues in worship planning; and (3) intentional cultivation of a culture that welcomes diverse gospel-centered songs in worship. Consequently, this ministry plan exposed how to reflect a comprehensive global minority church in pursuing ethnodoxology in corporate worship. Thus, the project addressed the challenges of providing theologically balanced and nourishing worship songs for the congregation; and how to efficiently plan, prepare, and present God-honoring diverse gospel-centered songs for worship services.

The final strength of this project was the impact it had on the worship ministry staff of HGBC. Although some part of this curriculum is now being implemented, there are many others possible opportunities to teach the curriculum. This curriculum could be taught in a different segment to the entire choir instead of fourteen participants only, and hopefully other ministries as well. One expert on the worship staff noted, “Our choir and worship ministry seems to be on the same page about gospel-centered diversity in musical worship, but the rest of the congregation would benefit from the same teaching and training.” This awareness among the worship ministry staff leads to a high response of participation in implementing the project. This implementation would aim at the church family of HGBC in the context of many different ministry settings in the future.

Project Weaknesses

One weakness in this project was the design of the pre- and post-survey. In retrospect, it could have been written clearly and simply on some of the specific items; some items may have been confusing. For instance, participants may have been puzzled by the similarity between “diverse gospel-centered songs” and “cultural diversity.” Clarification on the survey would have helped to produce better results for statistical analysis. The difference between the pre- and post-survey scores did not make a significant change, so rephrasing some items may have better obtained the change the project was targeting.

Another weakness of the project was the timeline of the sessions. The project was intended as a six-week in-person course on consecutive Sundays before choir practice. Though reasonable efforts were made to integrate the sessions into the choir’s spring schedule, conflicting courses took precedence. Only the first three weeks of the sessions were consecutive. The last three sessions conflicted with spring break and Easter, which delayed the sessions for another two weeks. At the beginning of the project, twenty-five participants were interested in attending, but due to the inconsistent schedule, only fourteen participants fully committed. Also, the last class meeting was two sessions combined because of another incompatible schedule with the choir. In addition, time was short in the last sessions, making the time too short to allow for participant questions and answers. Because this project targeted choir/praise team members only, meeting the demands of the choir calendar proved challenging.

What I Would Have Done and Did Differently

If I were to implement this project again, I would make some adjustments to address the weaknesses acknowledged. First, since there were several encounters of questions and answers after choir practice, the length of the teach sessions would need to be extended. This extension would allow participants to have more opportunity for discussion and implementation. To teach the curriculum more effectively, I would

expand the teaching sessions into an eight-week study instead of six.⁴ In addition, recruit a larger group and increase the number of survey items for better result.

Second, a positive result of the project implementation was the opportunity to teach the choir/praise team. A more intentional approach to involving pastoral staff in the project during the teaching would broaden the scope of the material offered. As a result, pastoral participation would open the door for the curriculum to be taught to a larger part of the church body, beyond the worship ministry department.

Third, the curriculum's immediate effects were on the structure and elements of increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship. The curriculum also intended to communicate a biblical theology of worship through the lens of cultural diversity. The teaching session on ethnodoxology was a new concept to most participants. The application should have reinforced the reflection of a comprehensive understanding of the global worship aspect of our services.

Fourth, because goal 1 was considered weak and needed adjustment, I provided additional participants through the use of interviews to demonstrate a significant change in addition to the pre- and post-session survey. For this reason, I conducted written interviews with four participants. The four participants were interviewed with open-ended questions with the hope of gathering data to strengthen goal 1. Three participants were singers in choir and one participant was a long-tenured staff and church member. The interviews worked best as an opportunity to reinforce the survey analysis.⁵

Theological Reflections

The project allowed me to foster a more comprehensive understanding of a biblical framework for increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship. I made the assumption that the participants' understanding of cultural diversity previous to the study

⁴ See appendix 6.

⁵ See appendix 4 for all participant interviews.

was mostly derived from tradition or general knowledge without a clear biblical interpretation. As previously mentioned, biblical interpretation was the main vehicle of this project while researching, studying, and implementing. Without a proper understanding of the gospel, cultural diversity ideology can lead to an adaptation of secular applications. Just because cultural forms deem something acceptable does not mean God’s Word endorses it. Genesis 1:26-27, Ephesians 2:11-22, and Revelation 7:9-17 passages were addressed in chapter 2 as scriptural foundations to support a clear account of God’s Word and cultural diversity. I realized God’s desire for diversity is not based on the realm of human self-awareness or a self-centered approach. His desire is based solely on his love, grace, and mercy provided through his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit enables us to serve selflessly. As a result, the congregation can sing gloriously diverse gospel-centered songs corporately in the church, by which they demonstrate the work of Christ and provide a foretaste of the eternal corporate worship gathering. In addition, one can fall into the temptation of making culturally appropriate worship praiseworthy even when unintended as a “race issue.” Making race (or anything else) the starting point for corporate worship is idolatry; culturally appropriate worship as a race issue shies away from Christian worship doctrine to something egocentric and less than scriptural. Considering culturally appropriate worship in the Scripture with a biblical interpretation, Christ is always the focus, not race. To that end, to situate cultural diversity in corporate worship theologically means the Bible is sufficient. The Bible provides an authoritative structure for a better understanding of what ought to shape the worship life of the congregation—including the interpretation of and response to cultural diversity in corporate worship.

Personal Reflections

Global Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Lausanne Movement, Michael Oh, based on his talk at Sing! 2022, Getty Music Conference in

Nashville, made a statement that will continue to have an impact on my life and my ministry. He challenged thousands of conference attendees:

How global is your faith? . . . There are so many Christians today who have a very monocultural Christianity. It's a tiniest slice of the faith that we have in Jesus Christ. Many Christians don't know about African theology. They don't know about Southeast Asian worship music. They don't know the stories of the persecuted church in North Korea and China and the Middle East and North Africa.⁶

Oh's statement was convicting and presented a global perspective with which every church leader should wrestle. Sometimes in leading through change one may simply make the change without understanding the impact on the people involved. Other times, changes are made without anyone realizing things are changing. What price are church leaders willing to pay to really know their brothers and sisters in Christ in their local context and around the world? Do church leaders realize that as they await the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, their citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), and that the church is a global movement in which every tribe, nation, and people group will be represented.

The willingness to make sacrifices and face changes to incorporate culturally appropriate worship will continue to be an unfinished task. Nevertheless, as church leaders lead their people in songs of worship, are they willing to break from the ties of a single culture and reflect the multiple cultures in their communities and display the love of Christ of their global faith to their global family? Every written worship song is composed by people that are influenced by a specific culture and are in need of God's grace. Desiring to foster a culture that sings diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship requires that leaders think neither in terms of cultural neutrality nor of cultural superiority; both undermine the gospel (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:12-14). In the context of the local church, the worship ministry staff must consider and decide what fits and serves the congregation best—a hybrid, glocal, or global forms, as this is glorifying and pleasing to God (Phil 2:3-4). God does know what his people need.

⁶ Michael Oh, "How Is Your Global Faith," Lausanne, October 2022, <https://lausanne.org/about/blog/how-global-is-your-faith>.

In addition, as a leader, I am reminded that I have a responsibility to help determine what kind of theological diet to feed the congregation. This project helped lessen my preferences for a certain kind of genre of music to serve better the congregation. It sounds simple, but it is not easy to lessen my ego and let God take the wheel. This is a great admonition for everyone in the worship ministry, church leaders, and missionaries.

In her article, “Ethnodoxology and the Church’s Worship: An Introduction,” Esther Crookshank presents four misconceptions views related to the field of Ethnodoxology. The third misconception, “I/we know what is best for someone else’s culture,” stands out the most to me because it can relate to any field of worship leadership, and it is worth quoting the whole paragraph. Crookshank states,

This view is also ethnocentric and an expression of cultural imperialist thought, and as such is ethically indefensible. Several opposite tenets, however must be refuted with equal vigor as being false and damaging to the gospel: 1) that the gospel of Jesus Christ is insufficient for the salvation of all peoples across the globe, 2) that indigenous theologies and a culture’s traditional pre-Christian religion are superior to the gospel precisely because they are indigenous and therefore deemed to be more “authentic” (i.e., authenticity to one’s culture is of greater ultimate value than fidelity to Scripture) and 3) that Western believers must make their determination as to whether the gospel should be brought to a given culture based on their human judgment as to whether it “fits” into the culture’s traditional religious belief system, values, and practices. The gospel by definition does not “fit” into any human culture because all cultures reflect the fallenness of human nature in various aspects.⁷

As I read this paragraph, it was a defining moment for my soul, and also inspired in me a prayer asking God to lessen our ego as church leaders. How often do church leaders dogmatize cultural preferences, serving the congregation or a particular people group (in this case missionaries) with a foregone conclusion or set of assumptions? This conclusion is then used to interpret the evidence of song selection, worship structure, or liturgical elements, thereby assuring the desired conclusion will be acknowledged as valid. Cultural experience should neither be taken as the norm nor as a valid general experience to

⁷ Esther R. Crookshank, “Ethnodoxology and the Church’s Worship: An Introduction,” *Augustine Collegiate Review* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2018): 44.

nurture a movement of global worshipers. For leaders to plan and choose songs that have depth, great biblical principles, simple biblical truths, and gospel explanation they must rely on God's immutable Word. When Christ is the center of worship structures, and every decision is deeply rooted in his Word, God will continue to unveil biblical principles to promote and raise a movement of global worshipers.

Conclusion

While this project succeeded in its stated purpose of increasing cultural diversity at HGBC, its greater potential is yet to come. The content of the project is a starting point, and its impact on the body of Christ is ongoing. Through this project, the discernable takeaway was that people are ministry. The project should serve the congregation best and provide tools to do what God has called them to do: (1) exalt God through the power of the resurrection of Jesus that enables growth; (2) edify the body of Christ (every tribe, people, and tongue) by the power of the Holy Spirit through encouragement and building up each other; (3) equip the saints for discipleship; and (4) evangelize through a mosaic of diverse gospel-centered songs. Equipping the worship team/choir to lead diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship does not stop with this project. Culturally appropriate worship enables all people to celebrate the global church family as seen through God's Word. Regardless of one's origin or cultural identity—whether (African, African American, North American, Asian, South American, European, or others)—all people are a gift from our Maker. Though condemned by sin, through Christ Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be made right with God and given the strength to serve one another and honor our differences. Church leaders have the responsibility to be the voice of the global church and increase the awareness of the diverse setting God has graciously and providentially provided. The body of Christ can glorify God through its witness to the world that cultural diversity in corporate worship is essential. Through God's Word and prayer, as well as dialogue with one another, church leaders will continue to nurture a space for global worship in their local context.

Finally, the only thing that distinguishes true worship from false worship is the faithfulness of Scripture, not cultural diversity. The gospel is not about making cultural diversity the center of corporate worship, the gospel is about Jesus Christ making dead people alive—people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. For we were dead in our sins until God made us—*ethne*—alive by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:1-9). Nonetheless, one of the marks of a healthy church is to foster cultural diversity in corporate worship and seek to remove barriers that can become hindrances to gospel transmission. God is not the God of any one culture. For by him and through him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him (Col 1:16-17). God is the Lord of all, and He values the diversity of his people. Let the church's desire be to promote biblical foundations of cultural worship transparently and intentionally. In humility, wisdom, and grace, I pray for every church leader (including myself) to continue to pursue genuine delight and satisfaction in God, and in loving and serving God's people. May we do so with both mind and heart when helping our congregations apprehend the character and works of Christ in the diversity of the family He has called to be His own.

APPENDIX 1

DIVERSE GOSPEL-CENTERED SONGS: PRE- AND POST-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of diverse Gospel-Centered songs in corporate worship of the participant. This research is being conducted by Olivier Hakizimana at Hickory Grove Baptist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Four last phone Digit ID Code:
Please write down your code to use in the post-survey!

Part 1

Part 1 of the survey will obtain demographic information about the individuals taking this survey.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an 'X' next to your answer.

1. To what age group do you belong?
 A. 20-30
 B. 31-40
 C. 41-50
 D. 51-60
 E. 61-70
 F. 75+

2. What is your gender?
 A. Male
 B. Female

3. How long have you been a Christian?
 A. 1-5 years
 B. 6-10 years
 C. 11-20 years
 D. 21+ years

4. How long have you been a part of the worship ministry at HGBC?
 - A. 1-5 years
 - B. 6-10 years
 - C. 11-20 years
 - D. 21+ years
5. How long have you been attending HGBC?
 - A. 1-5 years
 - B. 6-10 years
 - C. 11-17 years
 - D. 21+ years
6. Which vocal part do you sing? _____
7. If you are an instrumentalist, what instrument(s) do you play? _____
8. How often do you volunteer in the worship ministry?
 - Weekly Bi-weekly Monthly Seasonally (Christmas, Easter, etc.)

Part 2

Part two of the survey will assess the knowledge and practices of the diverse Gospel-Centered Songs for corporate worship.

Directions: Give your opinion using the following scale. Please circle your response.

SD strongly disagree
 D disagree
 DS disagree somewhat
 AS agree somewhat
 A agree
 SA strongly agree

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. HGBC sings gospel-centered worships songs. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. Cultural diversity in music for HGBC is important. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. HGBC's worship ministry celebrates cultural diversity by integrating diverse gospel-centered songs into services. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. HGBC's use of diverse gospel-centered songs is rooted in Scriptures. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. HGBC's practice of diverse gospel-centered songs is rooted in a specific culture. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 6. My desire for diverse gospel-centered songs is rooted in Scriptures. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. My desire for diverse gospel-centered songs is rooted in a specific culture. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. The music styles offered in worship service reflect the diversity of HGBC | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I believe there is a need for more diverse gospel-centered songs to contribute to the overall service. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. Music in other languages should be included along with translation of the text occasionally in the worship service? | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

When you think about diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship, what stands out you?

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the teaching curriculum. The expert panel completed the rubric and gave recommendations.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound and relevant to the topics of worship ministry.					
Each lesson was faithful to the Bible’s teaching on diversity in corporate worship.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum was theologically sound.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each point of the lesson sufficiently supports the main idea.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to integrate diverse Gospel-Centered songs in corporate worship.					
Overall, the lesson was clearly presented.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the ministry plan. The expert panel completed the rubric and gave recommendations.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The goal of the ministry plan to improve the overall effectiveness of diversity in corporate worship is clearly stated.					
The need to multiply diverse Gospel-Centered songs is clearly stated in the ministry plan.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound.					
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.					
A timeline for implementing the ministry plan is clearly stated.					
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated.					
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed will promote cultural diversity in corporate worship at HGBC					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4

WRITTEN INTERVIEWS WITH CHURCH MEMBERS FROM THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF HICKORY GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH

Participant 1

Date: November 12, 2022

QUESTIONS

- **What year did you Join HGBC**

I joined in 1959-1960; joined Mars Hill Baptist when I went to college and rejoined Hickory Grove Baptist Church in 1974.

- **Why did you join HGBC**

I grew up at HGBC (my parents were charter members) and when I rejoined, I felt as if I were “home.”

- **What do you remember of the early years at HGBC?**

Everyone working together to get the barn ready for church, the “choir loft” consisted of some chairs behind a low wall of velvet fabric hung on plumbing pipes; how exciting it was to have a “sanctuary”; there was no choir room, the choir practiced in the choir loft; the choir robes were kept in the building next to the Chapel and the choir walked through the grass and stepped over the low wall (no wrought iron fence then) to walk in the side door to the choir loft; we always had a choir from the beginning and a youth choir when I was a teenager. HGBC has always been mission minded and gave as much as to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering as the big churches.

- **What would you credit for the multi-ethnic growth of HGBC**

We were a rural Church at the beginning and as Charlotte expanded so did the population around HGBC. The “nations” are moving in all around us now. I feel that HGBC Has always been a welcoming church and perhaps people of other ethnic groups felt comfortable coming. The main reason is the way our worship services are structured to lift up Jesus in Scripture reading, music, sermons and prayers. He is the one that draws

people to HIMSELF. In the area of music, there is something for everyone. It's like the weather- if you don't care for today's weather, wait for tomorrow.

- **Is there anything else you would want to share?**

I feel sorry for other churches because they do not have the staff that we have. We have been so blessed.

Participant 2

Date: November 24, 2022

QUESTIONS

- **What year did you Join HGBC**

Technically, I have been at HGBC since 2005 since I was dedicated as a baby. But members of my family have been a part of HGBC from 1966-1988 and 2002-present.

- **Why did you join HGBC**

I didn't voluntarily choose to join. I have always gone to HGBC my entire life because my family continued to attend. I have stayed at Hickory Grove because the people at this church work to create a welcoming environment. More recently, I saw greater diversity and found people of different ethnicities such as my own, so I felt at more comfortable.

- **What do you remember of the early years at HGBC?**

My early years of Hickory Grove would be the early 2000s, which is not much different from current times. I do remember how crowded the church used to be every Sunday. My family had to park near the fields and took the bus to the front doors. The church had more large-scale events (some were non-religious) like the Fall Festival where children could dress up and play games. There also used to be a youth choir for kindergarten through 5th grade, until maybe 6-7 years ago. Overall, I think there was greater attendance of church members and the adult choir. My parents remember the various activities that took place in the 60s and 70s such as Bible school, potluck dinners, Christian dramas, youth choir and musicals, and the living Christmas tree.

- **What would you credit for the multi-ethnic growth of HGBC**

I would say that the church has become more welcoming and open to people of different cultures. As HGBC modernized, it branched out to serve the local community that was also growing multi-ethnically. Some of the things I've seen in my lifetime are the ESL program and community services like the clothes closet and food pantry which could draw people from other ethnicities to attend. Back in the day (70s-90s), my parents recounted that the church was mostly comprised of white people, but there were increasingly more outreach programs to the neighborhood. Missionaries visited (and still do) to increase awareness about other people in other parts of the world.

- **Is there anything else you would want to share?**

A few weeks ago, an older disabled African American woman shared to me and my friend that she had lived in Charlotte and known of HGBC, but had never attended

recently, likely due to a presumed lack of diversity. When she attended that Sunday, she told us that she was delighted to see more ethnicities and ages represented in the church and especially on stage. It helped her feel more welcomed and valued.

Participant 3

Date: January 19, 2023

QUESTIONS

- **What year did you Join HGBC**

2003

- **Why did you join HGBC**

My husband and I were looking for a Bible believing church where we could find fellowship with other believers. We were members of another church that had a great Pastor, but it was extremely hard to get connected to other people. Many churches were no longer following the Sunday School model, and we wanted weekly interaction and accountability. HG offered both: good preaching and fellowship. We visited one week and joined the church two weeks later!

- **What do you remember of the early years at HGBC?**

It seemed so BIG! It was a thriving mega church with a great reputation in Charlotte. We were very event driven (as many churches were at the time). Sadly, looking back, I can see that we were a mile wide, but not very deep in our discipleship.

We transitioned to a new pastor in 2009 with a new vision, and that was hard for many people. While many embraced the new vision, many missed *the stuff* and dismissed the substance. As a result, we may be smaller in numbers, but we are healthier than ever.

- **What would you credit for the multi-ethnic growth of HGBC**

I think there are several factors to consider. Location, reputation, income, and longevity all play a part in the diversity of our church membership. But I largely credit our move from topical to expository preaching as the reason we draw the members we do. They may initially come because it's convenient to where they live, but they stay because of the message and the people. People long for the truth of God's Word. People long for a place to belong. Over the years, HGBC has been a welcoming church. Our members are down to earth, working-class people from all walks of life. The current vision of the church and her emphasis on discipleship has brought us members from other ethnic groups who are like minded in wanting to grow in the Word, walk with the Lord, and reach people for Christ.

- **Is there anything else you would want to share?**

Hickory Grove has been on this corner for almost 70 years. Our neighborhood has changed and many of the original owners of homes in this community have moved out

further into the suburbs (and a great many still drive into town to worship here). We are a multi-generational congregation as well as multi-ethnic congregation.

I feel it's important to note that the Lord has chosen to leave HG on this corner, in this community (that looks different than it did in 1955). This is our community and our mission field. A beautifully diverse community where HG stands a beacon of light to world living in darkness.

Participant 4

Date: January 19, 2023

QUESTIONS

- **What year did you Join HGBC**

2006

- **Why did you join HGBC**

I wanted to join HGBC because of its devotion to the word. It is a welcoming church and a loving church, its motto was:” Know Christ and Make Him Known”. So right!!

- **What do you remember of the early years at HGBC?**

We had two pastors that were taking turns to preach or so it seemed; the choir was wearing robes, and the songs were mostly hymns. “BIG MAMA” attic was a place for kids and my kids loved it.

- **What would you credit for the multi-ethnic growth of HGBC**

The Senior Pastor has brought multi-ethnic growth to a new dimension. He has allowed people of different race to be in position of leadership in the church and that has brought tremendous growth.

- **Is there anything else you would want to share?**

Hickory Grove Baptist Church is right for everyone who wants to know Christ. The expository preaching from the Senior Pastor and the Senior Associate is appropriate and I love it. HGBC has not departed from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Senior Pastor brings the Gospel and its meaning every time he takes the stand; so refreshing.

APPENDIX 5
LESSON OUTLINES

**Increasing Cultural Diversity
IN CORPORATE
WORSHIP**

Hickory Grove Baptist Church



INCREASING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to develop a practical framework for increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship at Hickory Grove Baptist Church.

Goal

The goal is to teach the worship team/choir why diverse gospel-centered songs matter within corporate worship.

This project provides an intense six week-session divided into two parts.

Part one: week 1-3 covers the biblical and theological expression of God's people made in his image, unity in Christ Jesus, and God's heart for the nations. Genesis 1:26-27, Ephesians 2:11-22, and Revelation 7:9-17 are addressed successively, revealing God's desire for cultural diversity in corporate worship.

Part two: week 4-6 cover theoretical, practical, and historical issues for cultural diversity in Corporate Worship. The sessions include contrary hypotheses of diversity in corporate worship, intercultural engagement in corporate worship, and an ethnodoxology of corporate worship—embracing cross-cultural worship for the global church.

Definitions

Diverse worship. Ron Man, director of worship Resources International, describes diverse worship as “the mixing of historic, traditional, contemporary, and global expressions of worship into a diverse mosaic of praise with the goal of glorifying God by encouraging the united participation of believers across demographic and generational lines.”

Diverse gospel-centered songs. Matt Boswell's article published by 9Marks gives a helpful definition of diverse gospel-centered songs as diverse songs that contour the gospel and tell of God's salvation so that the gospel rings forth as the theme of the songs.

Ethnodoxology. Ethnodoxology is the interdisciplinary study of how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their artistic expressions.

TEACHING CONTENTS

PART 1: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

SESSION 1: GOD'S PEOPLE ARE MADE IN HIS IMAGE – GENESIS 1:26-27

SESSION 2: UNITY IN CHRIST JESUS – EPHESIANS 2: 11-22

SESSION 3: GOD'S HEART FOR THE NATIONS – REVELATION 7:9-17

PART 2: THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

SESSION 4: CONFRONT CONTRARY HYPOTHESIS OF DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

SESSION 5: CULTIVATE INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

SESSION 6: CULTIVATE AN ETHNODOXOLOGY OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

**PART 1: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR CULTURAL
DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP**

SESSION 1: GOD’S PEOPLE ARE MADE IN HIS IMAGE – GENESIS 1:26-27

Theme: Human life in the divine scheme of creation

1. The Use of the Plural Pronoun “Let Us”
2. The meaning of “image” and “our likeness”

Application:

- Man resembles something greater, his Maker.
- Human life reveals the crown of God’s handiwork.
- God’s people bear the image of God both physically and spiritually and are a copy of their Maker.

NOTES

SESSION 2: UNITY IN CHRIST JESUS – EPHESIANS 2: 11-22

Theme: The cross is the power that generates a unified new humanity.

1. Alienation of the Jews and Gentiles
2. The cross is the means of ethnic reconciliation.
3. A unified New Humanity in Christ - The “third race”; the “red” race

Application:

- Christians should not think of unity as a matter of rights and privileges, but a genuine obligation of a godly way of life rooted in God’s relationship.
- Christians are no longer foreigners and strangers to each other, but fellow citizens as God’s people.
- God’s glory is revealed and celebrated in the diversity of His people.

NOTES

SESSION 3: GOD’S HEART FOR THE NATIONS – REVELATION 7:9-17

Theme: The vast company of the redeemed worship the Lamb of God.

1. The heart of God for the Nations is a global theme
2. The heart of God for the Nations is a glorious theme

Application

- The lamb of God will guide the saints to the fountains of the water of life, and perfect joy will be displayed, for every tear from their eyes will be wiped away.
- If diversity is being displayed in heaven, then the local church should strive to pursue diversity and intentionally cultivate diversity.

NOTES

PART 2: THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

SESSION 4: CONFRONT CONTRARY HYPOTHESIS OF DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

Theme: Diversity in corporate worship is rooted within the extensive narrative of Scripture, not popular beliefs.

1. Achieving Diversity Through Universal Music
2. Achieving Diversity Through Musical Buffet

Application

- The gospel informs diversity, not universal music.
- God longs for more than just diverse cultures and songs. He desires more than mere theological understanding on diversity in corporate worship. God wants “all of us.”
- True worship is less about cultural musical preferences and more about what God requires.

NOTES

SESSION 5: CULTIVATE INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

Theme: How cultural influences shape corporate worship

1. Intentional Implementation of Christ-Centered Songs in Corporate Worship
2. Intentional Assessment of Diversity in Corporate Worship

Application

- God's Word must supply the principles, pattern, and content of diversity in corporate worship.
- Cultural diversity in corporate worship is not an ideal to be attained but a reality to be met in Jesus Christ.
- Cultural diversity in corporate worship acknowledges, honors, and exemplifies the diversity of the local church
- Cultural diversity in corporate worship is an ongoing process. There is a need for intentional discernment and willingness to open-up and close-down possibilities for anything that will hinder genuine congregational corporate worship.

NOTES

SESSION 6: CULTIVATE AN ETHNODOXOLOGY OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

Theme: The Global Church in Corporate Worship

1. Ethnodoxology – from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.
2. Cross-culture in corporate worship

Application.

- From a gospel-centered and theological framework, the cultural diversity in corporate worship is not about race. The emphasis is on ethno—every tribe, people, culture, and language
- Diversity in corporate worship is powerful. It speaks to the deep places inside people—to their hearts. Diversity in corporate worship can inspire or discourage, wound and heal. It has the power or the potential to unite and to divide

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APPENDIX 6
MINISTRY PLAN

Main Goal

- To develop a ministry plan to increase diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at Hickory Grove Baptist Church. This ministry plan aims four subgoals (Colossians 3: 16-17):
 - To exalt – God is the chief one to please and exalt.
 - To edify – encouraging and building up the body of Christ which is the church from week to week as worship ministers plan and lead worship.
 - To equip – a responsibility to disciple those in the worship ministries.
 - To evangelize – share the good news through a mosaic of gospel-centered songs.

Main Message

- The ministry plan sees the need to increase gospel-centered songs in corporate worship at HGBC to help the congregation celebrate the works of God seen most evidently in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus (Galatians 2:20). One of the most glorious ways to exalt in the gospel is through singing diverse gospel-centered songs corporately. (Psalm 86:9-10)

Main Method

- To know the context of the congregation at HGBC.
- To understand what it is that the congregation connects to and is encouraged by.
- To discern the kind of varieties of worship music that stir the congregation's soul to glorify God.

Main Measurement

- The truth of God; the lyrics are inspired and filtered by God's word.
- To lessen preferences over a certain kind of genre of music.
- To decide what fit and serves best the congregation as this is glorifying and pleasing to God. (Philippians 2:3-4)

Main Obstacle

- To make sure the current corporate worship structure reflects the worship culture of the congregation.
- To believe that only a certain kind of songs allows the congregation to experience a genuine encounter with God.
- The willingness to make sacrifices for new changes in the way that things have been done in the past.

Action Plan

- **Make a gradual and repeatable ground plan.**
 - Provides reasons for diverse gospel-centered songs in corporate worship by giving regular Biblical teaching to the choir and praise team.
 - Recruit instrumentalist, vocal teams and choir
 - Avoid introducing songs in rushes. Introduce a new song (sometimes in a different language) and sing it again in the upcoming weeks. This is to draw the congregation in and make it an enjoyable experience.
 - Have different people lead the new songs, demonstrating to the congregation that the song is for the whole church.
 - If singing in a different language, learn the correct pronunciations of words and prepare translations on-screen. The congregation needs to know what they're singing about.

- **Song selection's intentionality.**
 - To be intentional about choosing worship music for the congregation.
 - To determine what kind of theological diet to feed the congregation.
 - songs that have depth and great biblical principles.
 - songs that have the gospel explained in different ways to the different songs.
 - songs that have simple biblical truths.
 - Songs that are non-Anglo-Saxon.

- **Timeline – Annual target**
 - Efficiently plan, prepare, and present God-honoring diverse gospel-centered songs for worship services.
 - Update regularly worship ministry songs repertoire
 - Exploring more resources for deepening song selection.
 - Changes are to be reevaluate every year.

APPENDIX 7

NEW EXTENDED CURRICULUM

Course Description

A study of the structure and elements of cultural diversity in corporate worship with an emphasis on planning diverse gospel-centered worship services. Special consideration will be given to current cultural diversity issues in worship planning. This course will help train and equip those who are in worship ministry to cultivate and nurture a culture of global songs in worship ministry. God delights to see all people from different nations joining together corporately to worship because Christ shed his blood for all the nations. Therefore, this course will expose how to reflect a comprehensive understanding of cross-culture in corporate worship.

Context

Developing a practical framework for increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship. Participants are primarily choir/praise team members

Content

A general foundation to why diverse gospel-centered songs matter within corporate worship. This course will focus on: (1) the human life in the divine scheme of creation; (2) the cross as the means of ethnic reconciliation; (3) the heart of God for the nations; (4) the prevailing hypotheses and definitions of diversity in corporate worship; (5) the intercultural engagement in corporate worship; (6) an Ethnodoxological foundations for corporate worship.

Lesson Plan

I. What is Cultural Diversity?

- a) Week 1 will introduce the concept of cultural diversity in corporate worship by situating it biblically, historically, and philosophically. It will be demonstrated that cultural diversity in corporate worship is best understood as the mixing of historic, traditional, contemporary, and global expressions of worship into a diverse mosaic of praise to glorify God.
- b) *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be able to identify the foundational presuppositions of cultural diversity in corporate worship.***
- c) **Outline**
 - a. **Introduction**
 - i. This class is not really about cultural diversity...
 - It's about the core value of the biblical theology of worship

through which to interpret cultural diversity and recognize the biblical mandates of pursuing cultural diversity in corporate worship.

- We aim at loving every **nation, and tribe, and people, and languages**
- ii. We nurture Cultural Diversity in Corporate Worship by bringing a robust, biblical understanding of God & humanity seen most evidently in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus.
- iii. To apply a biblical framework to the vast array of cultural diversity in corporate worship, we need to have a clear understanding that God created diversity and therefore cares about diversity.

b. What is cultural diversity

Every term has its connotations/associations - What associations come to mind with the word cultural diversity?

- i. *Cultural diversity* is an establishment of patterns, beliefs, and deeds that describe or represent an individual or particular group within a society or an organization.
- ii. At its most basic level, *cultural diversity* is the inclusion of diverse people in a group or organization.

c. What is cultural diversity in Corporate Worship

- i. Working Definition - A ministry of corporate worship that acknowledges, honors, and exemplifies the diversity of the local church. This cultural diversity is best understood as the mixing of historic, traditional, contemporary, and global expressions of worship into a diverse mosaic of praise to glorify God.
- ii. The biblical mandates of cultural diversity in corporate worship
 - The Great Commission in Mathew 28
 - The Revelation mandate of worship (all tongues and tribes)
 - The missionary mandate (from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, etc.)
 - Part of our responsibility is making sure not only that we are aware of diversity, but pursue it by doing things that are active, intentional, and perceived as such.

d. Christ's perfect love, the emblem of diversity

- i. Revelation 7:9-10.
 - a. This passage paints the human race as “*one nation*” by origin but afterward distinguished itself into *tribes, peoples, and tongues* referring to Israel and gentiles.
 - b. The multitudes were crying out with a loud voice saying salvation to our God. When we get to heaven will surround the throne of God, praising and worshiping Him alongside saints from *every nation, every tribe, every tongue* from the earth.

- c. ***Ethno*** comes from the biblical Greek word *ethne* (people). Luis Bush with Mission Frontier issued an article on the intended meaning of Matthew 28:19 to understand the biblical basis of the term *ethne*. He reports, that the Greek word *ethnos* is translated into the English Bible by the term *Gentiles*, 84 of 161 times that it is used in the New Testament; the term *nation* 63 of 161 times.
- ii. Cultural Diversity in the church is glorious and demonstrates the work of Christ foreshadowing the eternal corporate worship gathering that the saints long for.

e. **Situating Cultural Diversity in Corporate Worship**

- To that end, we will situate Cultural diversity in Corporate Worship historically, theologically, and philosophically

Conclusion

- The congregation ought to see the focus of the worship service being built upon worship leaders who facilitate a dialogue between the self-revealing God and His redeemed being able to respond.
- The congregation ought to see the focus of the worship service being built upon worship leaders who facilitate a dialogue between the self-revealing God and His redeemed being able to respond.

II. **Cultural Diversity and the Gospel**

- a) Week 2 will consider the fundamental commitments of cultural diversity in corporate worship, including its authority, focus, and goals. Special attention will be given to examining how the good news of Jesus Christ ought to shape our interpretation of and the response of cultural diversity in corporate worship.
- b) ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be able to apply the foundations of Christology to interpret cultural diversity in corporate worship.***

c) **Outline**

a. **Introduction**

- God's glory is revealed and celebrated in the diversity of His people.
- God's heart for the nations

b. **Revelation 7:9-17**

- This addresses a multitude of people from every nation, tongue, and tribe on earth but in heaven. They are free from suffering, pain, and sorrow, and are worshipping the Lamb of God.
 - **The heart of God for the Nations is a global theme**
 - "In this massive multitude of the redeemed in heaven there is not the slightest hint of bigotry, ethnocentrism, prejudice, or racism; all

people groups in the world are present and represented.”¹ “The Lamb of God is reaching out to [the unreached people groups around the globe] and calling them unto Himself by the Spirit and through His people,”

- **The heart of God for the Nations is a glorious theme**
 - What a privilege and joy that would be for a multitude of saints from all around the world, who have labored faithfully, and endured suffering to be with Christ.

c. Conclusion

- The lamb of God will guide the saints to the fountains of the water of life, and perfect joy will be displayed, for every tear from their eyes will be wiped away.
- If diversity is being displayed in heaven, then the local church should strive to pursue diversity and intentionally cultivate diversity.

III. Cultural Diversity and the Bible

- a) Week 3 will focus on the doctrine of Scripture and its implications for diversity in corporate worship. It will be demonstrated that the Bible provides an authoritative framework for understanding cultural diversity in worship and God’s desire for cultural diversity in corporate worship.

b) Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be able to relate the doctrine of Scripture to nurture cultural diversity in corporate worship.

c) Outline

a. Introduction

- Human life in the divine scheme of creation
- Genesis 1:26-27 presents the Lord God’s perspective on creating man in his image. Human life reveals the crown of God’s handiwork.

b. Genesis 1: 26-27

- Disputes have emerged to differentiate the word “image” and “likeness”—whether they are synonyms or refer to two different aspects for understanding the unique place of human life in the divine scheme of creation.
 - The Use of the Plural Pronoun “Let Us”
 - Claus Westermann
 - John H. Sailhamer
 - John MacArthur

¹ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Christ in Revelation*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 157.

- The meaning of “image” and “our likeness”
 - Wenham marks five interpretations on “*image* and *likeness*” that have been proposed by some scholars:² (1) *image* and *likeness* are distinct—the *image* refers to the natural qualities in man (reason, personality, etc.) that make him resemble God while the *likeness* refers to the supernatural graces, e.g., ethical, that make man godlike; (2) the *image* refers to the mental and spiritual faculties that man shares with his creator; (3) the *image* consists of a physical resemblance; for instance, man looks like God; (4) the *image* makes man God’s representative on earth; (5) the *image* is a capacity to relate to God—man’s divine *image* means that God can enter into a personal relationship with him, speak to him, and make a covenant with him.³

Conclusion

The passage in Genesis 1:26-27 assures Christians about the Lord’s perspective on creating man in his image. God creating man in his image suggests that man resembles something greater, his Maker. Hypothetically, God’s people bear the image of God both physically and spiritually and are a copy of their Maker. However, Genesis 1:26-27 is not clear of what the descriptions of likeness might be; the passage affirms what is of first importance: God’s people are made in His image.

IV. Cultural Diversity and Reconciliation

- a) Week 4 will consider the doctrine of reconciliation and its implications for cultural diversity in worship. Reconciliation will be discussed as both a positional reality and a progressive journey toward perfection. Attention will be given to the cross as the power that generates unified new humanity.
- b) ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will identify how the doctrine of reconciliation imparts the necessary foundations of unity for cultural diversity in worship.***

c) Outline

a. Introduction

- Unity in Christ Jesus – Ephesians 2:11-22

² See P. Humbert, *Etudes sur le Récit du Paradis et dela Chute dans la Genèse* (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Neuchâtel, Secrétariat de l’Université, 1940), 153-63; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 3:183-87; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 148-59; David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God,” *The Tyndale House Bulletin* 19 (1968): 81-83.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 29-31.

▪ The cross is the power that generates a unified new humanity
b. Alienation of the Jews and Gentiles - Verses 11-13

- The Gentiles suffered alienation.
 - They were Christless – aliens to the messiah. The Gentiles were separated from Christ, they were not part of God’s people; had no hope of the Messiah; and they were souls without Christ and excluded from the life of God (Eph 4:18).⁴
 - They were stateless – aliens to God’s nation. The gentiles were foreigners, excluded from the citizenship of Israel and were strangers to God’s covenant. Hughes explains that “Israel was a nation under God, a theocracy, but the gentile had no part in this.”⁵
 - They were friendless– alien to the covenants because they did not have the covenants of promise like Israel. God had joined himself unconditionally to bring about a blessing upon and through Israel, yet the Gentiles had no such promise (cf., Gen 12:2, 13:14;15:1;17:1,22:15).
 - They were hopeless and godless– alien to hope and God for they were religious in everything, such as having temples and statutes everywhere. Gentiles did not have the “hope of the promises, nor did they know the God of the promises.”⁶ They had chosen idols as a substitute of God, suppressed the truth revealed to them, and did not have true hope.⁷

c. The cross is the means of ethnic reconciliation - Verse 14-18

- Christ is now pronounced to have made Jews and Gentiles one by breaking down the dividing wall and source of hostility between them, that is, by put an end to the law and all its decrees through his death.
- Christians, both Jews and Gentiles converted, have received great privileges from Christ Jesus. Those who were in a condition of enmity have been reconciled through Jesus Christ. He is their peace
- Christ’s death on the cross can be seen as affecting peace both on a horizontal and a vertical level.

⁴ Tony Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 56.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 1990), 88.

⁶ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 57.

⁷ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 57.

- On the horizontal level, he made “peace between the two old enemies, Jews and Gentiles, and reconciled them in the one body of the church.”
- on the vertical level “he has reconciled both groups to God through his death on the cross, indicating in a way which the opening verses did not, that there is a fundamental sense in which Israel too was alienated from God.”⁸
- Reconciliation is essential to worship because it unites people from all backgrounds; church members should not be alienated based on their origins. If reconciliation is a problem with the church, then “Christians must spend time in prayer, restoring fellowship with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, asking for strength for reconciliation, and practice reconciliation.
- The cross is the means of this reconciliation. The cross is the means of this reconciliation. The enmity that prevented the reconciliation between both Jews and Gentiles has been removed by the crucifixion of the Lord.⁹

d. A unified new humanity is found in Christ - Verses 19-22

- The great privilege the Gentiles could have was to be near to God by the blood of Christ. Now, the death of Christ has created a new humanity, “a third race”.
- Gentiles’ believers joined together with Jewish believers and now belong to a new community. “The Gentiles have been synced not only to Christ but also to other Christians.”¹⁰
- Paul uses three metaphors to illustrate the new identity:
 - Gentiles are part of God’s kingdom citizenship; Gentiles Christians are members of God’s family and are the stones in God’s temple.¹¹
 - Consequently, Gentiles share equal rights and privileges with the Jews. Though are distinct in their ethnicities and backgrounds, both Jews and Gentiles have lost their national identities by becoming Christians.
 - They are members of the body of Christ, and they have the hope of reigning with Jesus Christ. There is nothing like being a citizen of the kingdom of God, being full members of the kingdom of God, and living life together.

⁸ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Word, 1990), 159.

⁹ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: James Nisbet, 1856), 92.

¹⁰ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 62.

¹¹ Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 63-64

Conclusion

- The church is the place where reconciliation between humanity and God is experienced, where harmony between heaven and earth has been restored, and where access to the Father is enjoyed. The sin of racism among believers should not be justified and must continue to be resisted at any cost.
- Just as the diversity in the church of Ephesus was noticeable, the church should continue to celebrate diversity among members, for it is a glorious demonstration of the work of Christ as it pictures heaven. At the center of it all, Merida argues that “the best antidote to disunity and hostility between believers is a fresh comprehension of the cross of Jesus Christ.”¹²
- The cross of Christ that united Jews and Gentiles together can surely be the means of reconciliation for the church that may be currently divided or blinded by ethnicity, nationality, status quo, or any other worldly distinction. Only the cross of Jesus Christ can remove the stain of racism.

V. Cultural diversity and the prevailing hypotheses and definitions

- a) Week 5 will examine the centrality of historical issues for cultural diversity in corporate worship, with particular attention given to the various prevailing hypotheses and definitions of diversity in corporate worship in which cultural experience becomes the regulative principle and cultural recognition, acknowledgment, acceptance, and validation become the normative principle.
- b) ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be able to recognize that cultural diversity in corporate worship displays different acceptable expressions of worship fundamentally regulated by the authority of Scripture.***
- c) **Outline**
 - a. **Introduction**
 - Diversity in corporate worship is rooted within the entire narrative of Scripture, not in popular perceptions
 - b. **Two common prevailing hypotheses far from comprehensive or complete for achieving diversity in corporate worship:**
 - i. **Dangers of Seeking Diversity through the fallacy of Music as Universal Language**
 - Inspired by his journey to Europe, Henry Wadsworth

¹² Merida, *Exalting Christ in Ephesians*, 61.

Longfellow once wrote, “Music is a universal language for mankind,”¹³ expressing his love for Spanish ballads. Unfortunately, universal music has infected the way diversity in corporate worship is perceived.

- Music is present in every culture, but music unveils different meanings and experiences from culture to culture.
- Music, although universally found in every culture, is not a universal language.¹⁴
- The songs the congregation sings are culturally inclined, and conditioned worship leaders can misinterpret cultural musical elements that might attach meanings they do not recognize.
- Worship cannot simply be a matter of arbitrary choice, church tradition, personal preference, or cultural appeal. There are foundational truths in the gospel of Christ’s redeeming work that do not change if the gospel is to remain the gospel. So, if our worship structures are to tell this story consistently, then there must be certain aspects of our worship that remain consistent.¹⁵

ii. Models of Diversity: Musical Buffet and Inclusive Worship

- The musical buffet lies in the musical plurality in the development of cultural consciousness. The musical buffet hypothesis is a display of racialization norms about the correlation between music and ethnic identity. At large, people associate gospel music with black, salsa with Hispanics, and so forth.
- Unfortunately, church leaders can use these stereotypes to endorse this hypothesis of musical buffet and pressure worship leaders to incorporate music inclusivity into worship services.
- Leaders who defend this hypothesis can fail to identify which liturgical elements are most relevant. There is rarely clarity on how different forms of music, cultures, experiences, and theological convictions find peaceable coexistence.

¹³ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Outre-mer: A Pilgrimage beyond the Sea*, 3rd ed. (Boston: W. D. Ticknor, 1848), 197.

¹⁴ Robin Harris, “The Great Misconception: The Universal Language of Worship,” *Worshipleader*. August 7, 2015, <https://worshipleader.com/leadership/worship-theology/the-great-misconception/>.

¹⁵ Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship: Letting Gospel Worship Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 85.

- Musical buffet seems to concentrate where each culture is coming from and create a common ground of “**musical reconciliation.**” This type of reconciliation cannot be managed and often results in discouragement and is deflated by **artificial diversity.**

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- True worship is less about cultural musical preferences and more about what God requires. God longs for more than just diverse cultures and songs. He desires more than mere theological understanding on diversity in corporate worship. God wants “all of us.”

Conclusion

- The musical buffet will not fix diversity in corporate worship. Church leaders can reproduce the glorious freedom of the heart of God about diversity through Scripture. Diversity of cultural expression is not the ultimate aim of Christian Worship, God is. When glorifying God is ultimate, then the church can gather for corporate worship, united in the desire to see cultural diversity flourishing in the Bible-believing, Christ-exalting, gospel preaching.

VI. Cultural diversity engagement in Corporate Worship

- a) Week 6 will overview the primary understanding of cultural influences in corporate worship. The focus will be on intentional Implementation of Christ-Centered Songs in Corporate Worship and assessment of Diversity in Corporate Worship.
- b) *Learning Outcome: By the end of this week, participants will be able to evaluate various worship design techniques and strategies from a variety of multi-cultural worship traditions.*

c) Outline

a. Introduction: Popular Culture

- Over the past four centuries, corporate worship practices have evolved, and they will continue to do so progressively. From ancient Israel to the medieval age, the present age, and around the world, cultural influences have played a vital role in worship practices.
- The influence of popular culture in corporate worship over decades continues to shape today’s liturgy. Popular culture is among the new suitable, nonsectarian, and mainstream evangelicalism.
- One cannot help but realize that some evangelical churches see intercultural engagement as an essential part of the negotiation between churchly tradition and practical faith; love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31).
- The understanding of cultural influences continues to compel worship leaders and pastors to develop worship practices suitable for their congregation.

b. Three subpoints that demonstrate the basis of cultivating cultural engagement in corporate worship.

- The gospel informs cultural diversity in corporate worship.
 - The gospel is the means for nurturing cultural diversity in corporate worship. God’s Word must supply the principles, pattern, and content of diversity. Cultural diversity in corporate worship is not an ideal to be attained but a reality to be met in Jesus Christ.
- Cultural diversity in corporate worship acknowledges, honors, and exemplifies the diversity of the local church.
 - Having members of the church from different people groups is a reminder that differences are embodied in the communal story of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - Ruth C. Duck articulates, “Worship must incarnate the gospel through the cultural expressions of its context, while at the same time, building the culture of the reign of God within the congregation.”¹⁶
 - This beauty of the gospel continues to be exposed to the multifaced body of Christ in all areas of ministries. Psalm 86:9 declares, “All nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.”
 - Cultural diversity informs and shapes congregations to love one another and to reflect on how Christ loves the church. In Romans 12:3-4 reminds Christians who they are: God-chosen people, one body in Christ, individually connected. They get spiritual life from the same source and are saved by the same cross, filled with the same spirit, loved by the same father, and on the same mission. Thus, diversity becomes the way the church displays the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - Christians are not colorblind, but colorful because God’s glory is revealed and celebrated in the diversity of His people.
- Singing diverse gospel-centered songs plays a significant role for intercultural engagement in corporate worship.
 - Music can be part of corporate worship, but music is not the epitome of corporate worship. Church leaders may fall into the trap of wrongly associating corporate worship with music.
 - The idea of responding to the God who reveals himself to his people in corporate worship is the activity of everyday life (Rom 12:1).
 - God’s response and revelation is the recalibration of people’s heart and mind daily.
 - When the saints gather in corporate worship, they respond to the infinite grace given to them through what Jesus Christ has done

¹⁶ Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 36.

on their behalf. Corporate worship becomes a means of relationship rather than merely experiences, productions, or music.

c. theology of liturgical *Sitz im Leben*

- *Definition:* Ethnodoxologist I-to-Lo defines contextualization as an intimate and complicated double wrestling of the ‘text’—the word of God—with our present ‘context’ (the *Sitz im Leben*). Loh adds, contextualization is the use of one’s own verbal and musical language to interpret the gospel, to express praise and thanksgiving to God, to voice concerns on issues confronting one’s time and environment. When this is done, one’s expression of faith in worship and witness in daily life become more meaningful and challenging.¹⁷
- Global Song:
 - global song is a genre that is a concept developed on the idea of “a benevolent dominant culture’s act of hospitality and welcome.”¹⁸
 - the church ought to contextualize global songs to allow for the proper interpretation of a particular cultural setting into corporate worship. Though HGBC has not fully incorporate these ideas, the ideals of the global songs are to shape
 - the desire to nurture global songs must be applied in knowing of the danger of cultural appropriation worship
 - the ultimate goal of contextualization involves achieving a mature proficiency in technical skills in which lyrics exhibit sound theology infused with poetic beauty and reflect the needs and concerns of the culture.¹⁹
- Glocal Worship:
 - “glocal” a unified integration between “local” and “global” matters.²⁰

¹⁷ I-to Loh, *In Search for Asian Sounds and Symbols in Worship*, CSCA Christianity in Southeast Asia Series 5 (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2012), 80.

¹⁸ Lim Swee Hong, “‘Where Is Our Song Going?’ vis a vis ‘Where Should Our Song Be Going?’,” *The Hymn* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 8.

¹⁹ I-to Loh, “Ways of Contextualizing Church Music: Some Asian Examples,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 101.

²⁰ Jaewoo Kim, “The Whole World Has Gone ‘Glocal,’” in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, ed. James R. Krabill, Frank Fortunato, and Robin P. Harris (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 122.

- Glocal worship in the glocal world unveils the missional nature of God which is people of every tribe, nation, and tongue coming to know Christ.
- Glocal worship is not merely a method to mobilize more people into missions but a direction of worship that reflects both the current era and the vision of a missional God. The goal of designing glocal worship is to help local congregations see the inseparable connection between Psalm 96:3; Matthew 24:14; and Revelation 7:9. Glocal worship involves musical incarnation of the gospel in the musical styles of various people groups, both those near to us and those far away.²¹
- Implementing a theology of liturgical *Sitz im Leben* either as hybridity or glocal worship will create healthy habits sometimes uncomfortable but tangible characteristics for the congregation to partake in during worship services.
- Through prayer and cultural sensitivity growth, church leaders can learn and understand the value of worship and the love language of the of local church. Worship leaders can cultivate Christ-exalting glocal worship that is both expressive and progressive. Worship leaders can learn to recognize the scope of the congregation's maturity to disciple and provide songs that can help determine the sustainability of a liturgical set that builds one to the next.

Conclusion

- Music is a distinctive expression to each culture. Even within regular worship services, music is specific to the individual's form of communication. The church of Christ was not meant to gather around music, because music culturally changes so drastically. The church gathers around Christ, and around His Word. The Word of God is transtemporal, transgenerational, and transcultural.²² The word of God pierces and judges the thoughts and attitudes of human hearts (Heb 4:12) in every culture.
- God's Word reaches out to every generation. If the church focuses more on the Word of God to direct and guide worship, then the congregation has something around which they can unite, regardless of their origins. The authority is Scripture, not song. The congregation ought to see the focus of the worship as a dialogue between the self-revealing God and His redeemed people being able to respond.

²¹ Kim, "The Whole World Has Gone 'Glocal,'" 126.

²² Ron Man, "'The Bridge': Worship between Bible and Culture," in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, ed. James R. Krabill, Frank Fortunato, and Robin P. Harris (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2013), 71-85, Kindle.

VII. Cultural diversity and Ethnodoxological Theology

- a) Week 7 will walk through a process for helping participants to understand biblical foundations of ethnodoxology in a corporate worship setting. How can Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their artistic expressions?
- b) **Learning Outcome:** *By the end of this week, participants will be able to synthesize and evaluate how every cultural group might use its unique and diverse artistic expressions appropriately in corporate worship.*
- c) **Outline**
- a. **Introduction**
- **Definition:**
 - *Ethnodoxology.* Ethnodoxology is the interdisciplinary study of how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions.²³
 - Other definitions provided by the GEN used during the first 20 years are:
<https://worshipleader.com/leadership/worship-theology/the-great-misconception/>
 - Ethnodoxology is the theological and anthropological study, and practical application, of how every cultural group might use its unique and diverse artistic expressions appropriately to worship the God of the Bible. (Paul Neeley)
 - Ethnodoxology is "the theological and practical study of how and why people of diverse cultures praise and glorify the true and living God as revealed in the Bible." (Dave Hall)
 - Ethnodoxology is a theological and anthropological framework guiding all cultures to worship God using their unique artistic expressions. (Brian Schrag)
 - Ethnodoxology is the worldwide practice and study of *arts facilitation* that encourages the grass-roots, *local* composition and production of artistry that is culturally relevant, biblically sound, and emotionally resonant, for use in the body of Christ for worship, discipleship, evangelism, and other extensions of God's love in the world. (Katherine Morehouse)
- b. Advocate ethnodoxology as a theological and anthropological framework for worship
- ***Ethno*** comes from the biblical Greek word *ethne* (people) and *doxology* from *doxos* (praise or glory). In Psalm 96, the psalmist commands to sing a new song. Who is supposed to sing? "All the earth" (v. 1). One cannot help but ponder ethnodoxology in this passage.

²³ Global Ethnodoxology Network, "What Is Ethnodoxology," World of worship. May 19, 2019, <https://www.worldofworship.org/what-is-ethnodoxology/>.

- Nations present a unique opportunity for church leaders and worship leaders to learn their particular worship genre with the intention of becoming a relational community.
- Worship leaders should think of the global church. When the congregation sings cross-cultural gospel centered songs, not only do the songs bring unity among the diversity represented but they point out that the gospel has the power to penetrate all nations, tribes, tongues, and cultures
- Corporate worship should neither exist outside of its corporate worship context, nor idolize it. Diversity in the church is glorious and ethnodoxology demonstrates the work of Christ foreshadowing the eternal corporate worship gathering that the saints long for.

c. Drawing the congregation towards a culture of Global worship

▪ Vision for global worship

- Engage different languages in the same song.
- Examine liturgical seasons and then incorporate familiar choruses in different languages.
- Adding Scripture reading by church members from different ethnicities on a regular liturgical calendar, which adds another component of diversity in corporate worship.

⇒ Kevin DeYoung offers four different “traditions” of songs that the church should be singing. One of those is singing “non-Anglo songs.” He argues that the non-Anglo songs category might sound artificial, but it is an important truth that needs to be heard:

- “Singing non-Anglo songs (with translation if necessary) is good for us not only because it broadens our horizons, but because we are not all white Anglo-Saxons!
- We may not ever sing “just like the black church downtown,” or “just like my church back in Nigeria.” That’s not the point. I am not embarrassed that I like Isaac Watts, but neither should I be embarrassed to clap along with a spiritual or stumble my way through a Spanish chorus.
- Singing these songs has many benefits. It guards us against resting smugly in our own tradition or preferences; it reminds us that God is a God of all peoples and it gives voice to other traditions in our midst.²⁴

²⁴ Kevin DeYoung, “In Defense of Musical Diversity,” The Gospel Coalition, August 12, 2009, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/in-defense-of-musical-diversity/>.

- **Obstacles to culturally diverse worship.**

There are three of the common obstacles to multicultural worship proposed by David M. Bailey.²⁵

- There is a lack of instruction and awareness
- Church leaders must find qualified people
- congregations must acquire skills and resources

Conclusion

- From a gospel-centered and theological framework, the cultural diversity in corporate worship is not about race. The emphasis is on ethno—every tribe, people, culture, and language.
- Diversity in corporate worship is powerful. It speaks to the deep places inside people—to their hearts. Diversity in corporate worship can inspire or discourage, wound and heal. It has the power or the potential to unite and to divide.

VIII. Cultural diversity and gospel-centered songs

- a) Week 8 will focus on various approaches to implement diverse gospel-centered songs. Diverse songs that contour the gospel and tell of God’s salvation so that the gospel rings forth as the theme of the songs.
- b) ***By the end of this week, participants will be able to develop cross-culture worship services that reflect a comprehensive understanding of historical, liturgical, worship design and structure.***

- c) **Outline**

- a. **Introduction**

- *Definition*
 - Diverse gospel-centered songs. Matt Boswell’s article published by 9Marks gives a helpful definition of *diverse gospel-centered songs* as diverse songs that contour the gospel and tell of God’s salvation so that the gospel rings forth as the theme of the songs.²⁶
 - Mark Dever and Paul Alexander put this way: “As the main teaching pastor, it is your responsibility to shepherd the congregation into the green pastures of God-centered, gospel-centered songs, and away from the arid plains of

²⁵ David M. Bailey, “Worship and Mission for the Global Church,” in Krabill, Fortunato, and Harris, *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, 778.

²⁶ Matt Boswell, “Five Qualities of a Congregational Song,” 9Marks, April 23, 2004, <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalfive-qualities-congregational-song/>.

theological vacuity, meditations on human experience, and emotional frenzy.”²⁷

b. Cultivate Christ-exulting songs that are both expressive and progressive.

- Worship leaders can learn to recognize the scope of the congregation’s maturity to disciple and provide songs that can help determine the sustainability of a liturgical set that builds one to the next. The primary goal is to continue expanding the congregation’s song repertoire gradually.
- Every Sunday when worship leaders gather to lead in corporate worship, they tell the gospel story. The gospel story reaches every nation, every tribe, and every tongue through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

c. Singing diverse gospel-centered songs.

- d) Singing diverse gospel-centered songs is not wanting to sing the “gospel music genre” or the “Christian pop genre” to integrate with other minority groups or attract new people.
- e) One cannot master all genres to accommodate every taste or to recruit for diversity. Kevin DeYoung states, “The songs that we sing in corporate worship must be biblically and theologically sound. No song gets a free pass just because its ‘diverse.’ No matter how brilliant or moving or catchy the music, if the words stink, we shouldn’t sing it.”²⁸

⇒ **Kevin DeYoung proposition** ²⁹

- f) While we want to sing deep, theologically rich songs in our worship—songs about election, the Trinity, the atonement, God’s sovereignty—we don’t need to sing all of our theology in every song.
- g) To be sure, we don’t want lyrics to be misleading or present half-truths, but we can sing simple truths.
- h) If all we sing are the most basic biblical truths, we are not doing justice to the whole counsel of God, but even a meal with roast and mashed potatoes needs a side salad and some jello.
- i) There’s nothing wrong with singing “Jesus Loves Me” or “We Love You Lord” or “God is Good All the Time.” These may not plumb the theological depths, but they do speak biblical truths and do so with childlike trust.
- j) These types of songs should not be the staple of our musical diet, but they should be on our plate.

²⁷ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 85.

²⁸ DeYoung, “In Defense of Musical Diversity.”

²⁹ DeYoung, “In Defense of Musical Diversity.”

Conclusion

- Singing diverse gospel-centered songs helps the congregation appreciate and honor that same diversity in the gospel. In Revelation 15:2-3, John records that “they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!’”
- The song Moses and the people of Israel sang on the banks of the Red Sea is the same song Christians have been singing through the ages, and it is the same song Christians will be singing throughout eternity. Moses was singing, the church is singing, and in heaven all will be singing “The Song of the Redeemed.” That is the church’s song regardless of ethnicities, tempo, instruments, genres, choir, band, brand new or hundreds of years old—the church is singing the same song. The song of the redeemed should be the one that unites the congregation to worship and respond.

APPENDIX 8

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED AT HICKORY GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH

Harris Campus Countries Represented:

United States	Central African Republic
Canada	Ukraine
Honduras	Panama
Vietnam	Kuwait
Hungary	Belize
Belarus	Bahamas
Serbia	Peru
Iran	Malaysia
Germany	Ghana
Sierra Leone	Jamaica
Dominica	Venezuela
Thailand	Indonesia
Bulgaria	Brazil
United Kingdom	Romania
Nicaragua	Chile
France	Guatemala
El Salvador	Ecuador
Tanzania	Chad
Congo DRC	Russian
Myanmar	Georgia
Kenya	China
South Korea	Mexico
Costa Rica	Japan
Colombia	Burundi
Liberia	Ethiopia
Spain	Haiti
Uganda	Philippines
Argentina	Dominican Republic
	India

Mallard Campus Countries Represented:

Nepal	South Korea
Philippines	Ecuador
India	Congo DRC
Mexico	Taiwan

Harris and Mallard Latin Campus Countries Represented:

Argentina
Uruguay
Ecuador
Peru
Colombia
Honduras
Salvador
Guatemala

Costa Rica
Nicaragua
Puerto Rico
Dominican Republic
Cuba
Mexico
Venezuela
Brazil

Hispanic Countries not represented at HG Latin Campus

Bolivia
Paraguay

Chile
Panama

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ABSTRACT

INCREASING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP AT HICKORY GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

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This project aimed to develop a practical framework for increasing cultural diversity in corporate worship at Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Chapter 1 presents the context and rationale of HGBC while also stating the goals for equipping the ministry. Chapter 2 presents an exegesis of three passages of scripture (Gen 1:26-27; Eph 2:11-22; Rev 7:9-17) to give Christians a biblical view of cultural diversity in corporate worship. Chapter 3 presents a biblical view on diversity that moves beyond ethnicities, while focusing on practical patterns of cultural diversity in worship. Chapter 4 details and describes the project by showing what occurred each week during the six-week process. Chapter 5 gives an evaluation of the project by analyzing data and reflecting on the strengths and the weaknesses of the project.

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