

AFRIGO

Encouraging the African Church in world mission

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**ARTS IN MISSIONS
GOD'S VOICE THROUGH
OUR CREATIVITY**

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CREATIVE ARTS IN MISSIONS

BY SUZY ABRAHAMS



Once taught movement and singing to a group of Thai nationals using the song, ‘There is power in the name of Jesus to break every chain.’ Even though most of them were Buddhist, the Lord used that piece to bring such conviction that some started asking more about Jesus. Lifelong relationships formed, and I realized that physical actions really speak clearly to the spirits of people. As we’ve travelled worldwide portraying the message of hope through the arts—music, drama, singing, spoken word, and movement—it has proved most effective every time we used it.

Art finds its biblical basis in the nature and character of our Creator God. When God breathed into mankind the breath of life, we, too, received that creative ability. That ability is God’s power and not our own: “I have filled him with the Spirit of God ... to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts” (Ex. 31:3-5).

We cannot work independently of God. God has given us his power and attributes, and provided us with the energy, materials, and technology to represent him accurately through our creative work, whether through a song, poem, spoken word, dance, mime, drama, or other art form. In the arts we have to become carriers of God’s name, his love, and his grace.

Jesus instructed his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). If we grasp the nature and purpose of the arts in every culture, tribe, and tongue, we would understand their strategic role in evangelism and missions. In some places, the Great Commission is being accomplished by integrating storytelling, baptism, and cross-cultural communication.

Art finds its biblical basis in the nature and character of our Creator God.

On the mission field, I have learnt that every people group has a redemptive purpose and role on earth, given by God. They pass their culture on to the next generation by embedding it in stories and allegories. We listen to these stories to find redemptive connections and write them into scripts and productions, thus bringing their stories to life with Christ at the centre.

The arts bear witness to the truth and are meaningful ways to engage audiences with the truth of the Gospel by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. When we use arts in missions, we present God’s truth which transcends religion, culture, and language, and works powerfully in any given context.

In Africa, the arts are woven into our daily lives. When we minister through the arts, we in essence are telling our stories, which in turn become tools that God uses for the salvation of our peoples and the redemption of our true identity.

In this edition of AfriGO, discover Declare Global’s ministry of reaching the Sahel region through local music and films. For our Perspective article, Roch Ntankeh shares his experiences and insight on the power of the arts for missions. Alberic Kouassi, a Christian artist reveals the purpose of his paintings and the spiritual themes behind them. For our Training pages, we delve into the concept of ethnodoxology, and provide practical helps for anyone who wants to engage the arts for missions. Enjoy this edition of AfriGO and share with others. Happy reading!

Suzy Abrahams is the National Director of Perspectives, South Africa. She is a nurse, missions mobilizer and trainer, a dance teacher and choreographer, and a creative arts content developer.



Photo: Creative Commons C/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie

REACHING THE SAHEL THROUGH INDIGENOUS ART

BY KATE AZUMAH

A crowd has gathered in a small Mandinka community in West Africa. The village griot is narrating a story as Oluwaseyi serenades along on his *kora*, a local 21-string harp. On a mounted screen, images drawn by a local artist depict the griot's recital. The audience, one of Africa's unreached people groups, is engrossed in the Bible story of the Good Samaritan. The griot is speaking their language, the characters on the screen look like their own neighbours, and the *kora*'s tunes have been familiar to their ears since childhoods. That's the power of indigenous art for the Gospel.

Oluwaseyi (Seyi) David Ige is the Director of Declare Global Outreach Mission, a Nigeria-based ministry with the vision to produce 1000 indigenous worship songs, 300 indigenous music videos, and 100 evangelistic films for

unreached people groups in the Sahel region. His interest in the arts started at a young age with his love for music, and accompanying his evangelist father on church-planting trips to remote villages lit in him the spark for missions. It was no surprise then, when he was appointed outreach coordinator for the Nigerian Christian Corpers' Fellowship while doing his National Youth Service in Nigeria's Delta State.

**Music is not
a universal
language.**

An attempt to organize an outreach to one of the islands backfired, however, when the community mistook his team for spies and threatened to kill them. As they fled by boat, the Lord told Seyi, "I have many such communities in this area. When you finish with your service, I want you to come back and work here." Seyi resisted the call and had no peace until he gave in and returned to serve as a missionary.

Fascination and questions

Seyi had learned to play the guitar, keyboard, and drums before his missionary posting to Delta State. Whenever a local community held a festival, he would go and watch. "I'd see people singing local songs, playing local drums, and doing the local dances. It captivated me so much and I loved it, but a nagging question lingered in my mind, 'Why should the Devil have the best of our local instruments and dances?'"

The question bothered Seyi, until he came across a 2014 issue of the Mission Frontiers (<https://bit.ly/3wQJyeq>) that focused on ethnodoxology. "It was then I caught the connection between the arts and missions. Eureka! This is my passion; this is what I want to do!" he recounts. Right away, Seyi formed a church group that employed local instruments and dance in their music.

"Whenever we went on outreaches to show the Jesus Film, we started with local music and dancing. Everyone got excited;

and they came, both the young and old. They had never seen Christians doing their local dances before. We had many breakthroughs using this method.”

Seyi stayed in the area for eight years and planted churches among the Itsekiris, Nembes, and Ilajes. He eventually moved to The Gambia to work with Youth With A Mission (YWAM).

A new assignment

While in The Gambia, Seyi discovered the *kora*, and learned to play it. He did the same with the *balafon*, a type of xylophone; and the *ngoni*, similar to a guitar.

He attended the YWAM School of Frontier Media (Create International) in Thailand, equipping himself further in how to produce music, write scripts, and make videos. He also went to Dallas International University to study World Art.

Seyi reveals, “While on a retreat in Thailand, the Lord said to me, ‘As my worship is in heaven, so I want it done here on earth, and I want you to catalyze it.’ I reasoned that worship in heaven is done in different languages, with different instruments, and with understanding, so the Lord wanted me to produce indigenous music to help indigenous people to worship him.”

The process

Seyi explains, “Art is a special kind of communication. Just as we learn a language in order to understand it, we must do the same with art. Music is not a universal language. A form of music may be universally accepted, but it is defined locally. For example, in western music, playing a minor scale communicates sadness, but for others, it communicates joy. It’s the same with dance.”

“Before producing anything for a people group, we first go to the community and research their artistic genre—their music, dance, drama, oral arts, etc. We listen to their stories and proverbs, inquire about their meanings, and then search for Bible



Seyi playing the kora

stories or concepts that communicate a similar idea. Critical contextualization is crucial, because we are careful not to adopt forms or expressions that conflict with the Gospel. Our findings inform the lyrics and type of music we write for the songs. We incorporate elements that resonate with the people and preserve their cultural heritage. In one of our Songhai songs about Mary and Lazarus, the youth wanted to add a rap. We fused that with the traditional elements, and it’s now one of our most-watched videos.”

“There’s a technical side too. We hire professional audio engineers to mix and master our music, and we shoot our videos in 4K. This ensures a quality production that can be broadcast anywhere on radio and television. We give our work back to the community at no cost to them.”

It works

In one country where conversion is punishable by law, a missionary played one of Declare Global’s recorded songs about Jesus to a group of university students. The students said, “This is our tribe. We like this song and the story in it.” The missionary invited them to listen to more songs, and through that, started a Discovery Bible Study. After a few months, four students became followers of Jesus and got baptized.

“We go to communities where the Gospel is resisted; yet, they welcome us when they hear their local songs and see their own people acting in our films. People reject the Gospel not because they don’t want it, but because of the mediums used to communicate it. When the Gospel wears a local dress, it travels faster and penetrates deeper,” Seyi explains.

Artists as missionaries

For Christian artists who don’t see their role in missions, Seyi offers this encouragement, “Your art is a great tool in your hand. Don’t say it’s an ordinary guitar or paintbrush. Go for a short-term mission. Talk to artists in that context and value their art. Learn how to play an indigenous instrument in your locality. Volunteer with organizations that are producing local content for missions.”

He cautions African missionaries: “Your culture is not superior to that of those you are reaching. Don’t repeat the errors of Western missionaries who tagged our art forms as demonic because they didn’t engage to know their meanings. Allow people to be culturally authentic. Christianity can find expression among any people group, and the arts are a non-threatening way to reach anyone with the Gospel.”

Patrick Johnstone, author of Operation World, described the Sahel as “a most challenging and spiritually needy area of Africa.” Could the arts be God’s vehicle, at last, for traversing this terrain with the Good News of joy and abundant life in Christ Jesus?

www.declareglobal.org

www.worshipfromthenations.com



The Sahel Region

PRAY FOR:

- The Holy Spirit to bring conviction through every production by Declare Global.
- God’s provision and open doors for their work.
- God’s protection as they travel and minister.

CALLED: ALBERIC KOUASSI

MY PAINTINGS ARE MY SERMONS

AS TOLD TO OLIVIA ACHEAMPONG

I grapple with connecting my artistic work with my faith, because to me, faith is a deeply personal matter between an individual and their God. However, I am intrigued by certain African practices regarding religious matters. What is our spiritual place today as Africans? Do we lean towards Christianity, Islam, or the worship of statues and masks? What is our role in a society that seems lost? My paintings are therefore the questions I pose to society. They are an invitation for each person to connect with God. What matters most to me is living daily for God through our relationships with the people around us.

Connections for evangelism

I trained at *Ecole des Beaux Arts d'Abidjan* (School of Fine Arts of Abidjan). Alongside my job as an art teacher, I travel around participating in exhibitions and selling paintings. I also do a lot of graffiti and street art. I love missions and evangelism, and during art gatherings, I find subtle ways to present Christ to attendees.

I see art as an amiable tool for reaching others with the Gospel. Evangelizing to others is good, but sometimes, constantly badgering people about God can make them

distance themselves, or feel uneasy and pressured. However, painting and art are recreational and attract people.

During mission programs, we can take a break and allow people some entertainment. It could be an art workshop where we take them into the street and paint on walls.

In 2021, I did wall paintings with prisoners in Abidjan.

Later, when some of them were released, they contacted me. They said they loved what we did together in the prison, and wanted to become painters. Some of those I trained are now professionals who earn a living through painting.

My creations are meant to initiate religious debates and allow people

to discuss what is spiritually wrong with society. We all talk about similar societal problems: poverty, education, health, etc.; however, we rarely discuss the religious dimension. I want people to search together and find a spiritual solution to these problems because things are primarily spiritual before they manifest physically.

Addressing religious hostilities

Religious conversations can be complicated and dangerous; so, my art also addresses religious intolerance. I did an exposition in an Ivorian village a year ago and created an artwork with a lot of Jesus crosses in it. They watched me work on the painting all day, but at night, some people woke me up with news that the indigenes had destroyed my work. I went to the location and found an agitated crowd. They said they had welcomed and treated me well, but I wanted to provoke them with my crosses. They accused me of trying to convert them, and insisted they didn't want to see my art in their village. The experience traumatized me.

As a Christian whose art is meant to speak to the minds and souls of others, I have come to appreciate the animosity missionaries face. I aim to convey the message of respect for the practices of others. While our desire is that everyone accepts Jesus Christ into their lives, the world doesn't always conform to our wishes. If you coexist with neighbours who practice another faith, it is important to respect their choice and foster harmony.

Challenges of Christian artists

One of the challenges we face as Christian artists is discrimination. We are often approached by questionable organizations that promise us success if we compromise and collaborate with them. The school where I teach currently used to be dominated by Freemasons. If you weren't a Freemason, you couldn't teach there. Through persistent prayer and effort, God intervened and they became considerate. Sometimes exhibition opportunities are also denied us.

Taking it upon yourself to do missions and reach lost souls may not be easy, but we know that God is in control.

I see art as an amiable tool for reaching others with the Gospel.



Alberic at work

PLEASE PRAY:

- For the Holy Spirit to keep inspiring Alberic's artworks.
- That his artworks will open doors for spiritual and social transformation.

THE ARTS: A POWERFUL COMMUNICATOR

BY ROCH NTANKEH



Not long ago, it was uncommon to encounter missionaries whose calling was rooted in the arts. “Arts and mission have not always been the best friends” (Krabill 2023),* leaving the arts absent from the work of missionary societies and organizations. Now, however, this paradigm is evolving. The arts—spanning theatre, dance, music, oratory, painting, sculpture, and a myriad other forms—are becoming acknowledged as intrinsic to missions, comparable to Bible translation, education, health, and more.

Unfortunately, Africa appears largely untouched by these developments. Despite the growing number of artists joining Western missionary societies, recognizing the arts as essential to *Missio Dei* still presents a challenge. This disparity reveals the urgency of strategies to highlight the arts’ pivotal role in spreading the Gospel and worshipping the Lord in Africa.

A unifying force

The arts, particularly those rooted in local culture, can be harnessed as a communicative force that transcends cultural and linguistic limits. Whether conveyed through the resonance of music, the eloquence of dance, the strokes of a paintbrush, the craftsmanship of sculpture, the intricacies of weaving, or other artistic forms, these creative expressions can evoke profound emotions. Additionally, they have the power to surmount social barriers, fostering harmonious relationships between individuals and groups—even those with divergent religious beliefs.

I had the privilege of participating in the Africa Sings Festival, a Christian event held in a predominantly Muslim village in Benin. Africa Sings is committed to “utilizing music as a tool for peacebuilding, peacemaking, and reconciliation between different ethnic groups and faiths in West Africa” (www.africasings.com).

The diverse turnout with a majority of young people impressed me. People representing multiple faiths gathered from across the region, including Christians and Muslims and their respective pastors and imams. This diverse assembly underscored the unifying influence of the arts within the African missionary context. The artistic synergy demonstrated during the festival transcended religious and societal divisions, producing profound experiences.

The arts for missions

On this continent, we generally view what is African as

inferior, and instead, prefer Western forms which do not always fit the local context. However, local arts, when used appropriately, are a potent vehicle for conveying the Good News of the Kingdom. They function as a heart language, nurturing connections among individuals and groups who, in other circumstances, might seem worlds apart. We need a paradigm change regarding local arts, and we can begin by promoting their use in the Church and on the mission field through seminars, workshops, festivals, and artistic creations that spark interest and discussions. We should also review the curriculum in theological institutions and mission training schools to teach about arts and missions in ways that will be useful for the pastor or missionary on the field.

Contextualization and syncretism

Despite the arts’ potential contribution in missions, its integration into African contexts—especially local expressions—must overcome obstacles. Some people fear the risk of syncretism and the complexity of contextualization. Effective contextualization, however, opens pathways for deeper assimilation of the Gospel within

each cultural context. In contrast, syncretism hinders this assimilation by diluting the purity of the Gospel message. Hence, our approach must be steeped in prayer, insight, and foresight, and implemented with patience and love. This love speaks to the need to gain a thorough understanding of the local, cultural, and spiritual contexts, which are indispensable if the arts are to be bridges that unite hearts. Within

this delicate equilibrium lies the transformative potential of arts in missions: unique opportunities to share the universal message of Christ’s love intricately woven into the rich tapestry of the world’s cultural and artistic diversity.

*Krabill, J. R. (2023, SEPT/OCT). Why Arts & Mission Belong Together. *Arts, Worship, and Mission in Today’s Church: Celebrating 20 years of the Global Ethnodoxology Network*, 45:5, pp. 8-10.

Roch Ntankeh, PHD, is an Arts Training Specialist and a member of the Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN). He serves as a professor of missiology and ethnodoxology at the Cameroon Faculty of Evangelical Theology. He also consults for various organizations, where he frequently conducts composition workshops in Africa.

ETHNODOXOLOGY

EVERY PEOPLE'S PRAISE



Photo: AIM Stories

Ethnodoxology—what is that? It is a word that was created in 2019 to describe a new global movement which encourages all cultures to use their art forms to worship God. From the Greek words *ethnos*, which means nation, tribe, or race, and *doxology*, which means praise, comes a combined word which describes a whole new approach to church planting and local church practice.

Often in the past, Western missionaries brought with them not only the Gospel of Jesus, but the hymnbooks and song styles of their home churches. Postures of sitting in church, prohibitions on dance, attitudes of prayer, and even styles of clothing were modeled after the West. You still see it in most of our churches today, and for many it has become the “right” way to worship.

Now, established churches across the globe, as well as new believers and converts from other faiths are finding that their traditions in music, dance, art, and other cultural practices can make worship and teaching about Jesus more meaningful. In acknowledgement

of the power of local arts in the local church, “ethnodoxology” was born.

How does it work?

You can see one example in our article on the opposite page, “Local Music, Local Language, Local Impact.” Another example might be visual artists in a community expressing praise to God in their paintings, clothing patterns, or house decorations. What is important is that people who participate in the process turn it toward God, and the people outside the process see God.

Of course, believers will have to wrestle with the possibility of syncretism, which is when something that conflicts with Scripture is brought into Christianity. Local believers must carefully consider this. See Ige’s article on the next page for a deeper dive into this subject.

Arts – not just music and painting

In our How We Did It section, John Karanja relays how he is creating videos to share about missions. Is this art? Certainly. The images, music, and spoken word all

come together to create an emotion and ignite a response in the viewer towards something that glorifies God.

How about pottery, dance, weaving? All of these can be used to praise God, and they are especially valuable when they spring forth from the heritage of the people making them. When God redeems something so recognizable and deeply connected within an individual, a family, or a community, the familiarity brings a knowledge of him closer.

The Church does not have to use something foreign to be legitimate. In a culture where people sit on the ground, the congregation can sit on the ground. In a culture where teaching is done orally through stories around the fire, biblical truths can be imparted to all ages. In a culture where dance communicates, those dances can tell about God. Ethnodoxology describes all of these.

People who can think about the use of local arts to enrich the Church are vitally needed, and you can learn more about courses, resource materials, and journals in the box next page.

LOCAL MUSIC, LOCAL LANGUAGE, LOCAL IMPACT

Africa Inland Mission (AIM) missionary Rosina Ferdinand and her coworkers wanted some Gospel songs for the newly-translated scripture portions in the Sakalava language, so they asked Ladis, founder of the local band, Groupe Tsinfitaka. Ladis and the other band members had grown up together in Nosy Be, Madagascar.

Ladis was raised in Islam, which taught him that music was from Satan, and he must abandon his guitar and drums. He couldn't stay away though, and the missionaries asked the band to take a verse from Genesis and make a song about God creating the world. Rosina says, "They came back in just two days! We gave them another verse, and in less than a week they returned."

The group of friends sang the Word of God before they even knew what it was all about, and Rosina thought God was working to change their hearts. The band was invited to sing at the missionary retreat, and during the altar

call, Ladis came forward to give his life to Jesus. Five band members accepted Christ before the end of the retreat.

From that time, Ladis' heart began to grow in love for his community. He composes worship songs by reading the Bible, asking God for help, and writing. Then the group meets to put the music together. After checking with leaders to ensure it is scriptural, they record the song and sing it with the church.

Ladis says, "Because God's Word came in Sakalava and in music, now there are Sakalava who are following God." Rosina agrees: "Now, Sakalava people are singing the Gospel in their own rhythm. That speaks powerfully to the local people."

Their story is one that could be repeated all over Africa—using the local language, local music, and local people to make the Word of God alive through music and local arts. Watch the band's story at <https://bit.ly/3v9xpku> (A ministry of AIM Stories).

RESOURCES ON ETHNODOXOLOGY

- Global Ethnodoxology Network: Offers networking, training, and resources for the flourishing of biblical and culturally appropriate arts. <https://www.worldofworship.org/>
- Ethnodoxology: A Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith: A journal to report, inspire, and train. <https://artsandchristianfaith.org/index.php/journal>
- Global Consultation for Arts and Music in Missions: A tri-annual conference to celebrate and instruct on using the arts in missions. <https://gcommhome.org/>
- Inspiro Arts Alliance, a ministry of OM: sends artists around the world. <https://inspiroartsalliance.org/>
- Dallas International University's Center for Excellence in World Arts. justin_randolph@sil.org
- Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand: <https://ia.payap.ac.th/linguistics/>
- All Nations Christian College in the UK: offers degrees in Arts and Intercultural Worship. <https://www.allnations.ac.uk/>
- For information about SIL's arts programme, contact arts@sil.org.

ARTS AND SPIRITUAL ATTACHMENTS

By Oluwaseyi David Ige

Some people are sceptical about adopting local art forms for Christian purposes because they fear possession by or attacks from evil spirits. This is a legitimate concern.

Artistic forms or instruments are often divided into those for religious purposes, and those for social or recreational use. When a community's musical instrument, dance form, or music genre is for religious purposes, the participants (dancers, musicians, priests, etc.) generally believe it belongs to the deity they dedicated it to. Spirits and demons also claim ownership and want to guard it jealously. A cultural set of assumptions—spiritual and social values, allegiances, and repercussions—govern how people relate to its usage.

If, for instance, the *Bata* drum is dedicated to the worship of the Yoruba god *Ogun*, can anyone use it without *Ogun* possessing the drum

or the person? It is the responsibility of Christians in that community to decide. If the drum is played, what is the drum saying: is it honouring God or glorifying *Ogun*? They should understand the underlying symbolism to ensure it aligns with Scripture.

It is important to determine what element about the artistic form makes it idolatrous or susceptible to demonic possession, and if possible, detach that meaning before using it. Christians in a certain community considered wearing a cultural attire that was mostly used in the worship of idols. They dug deeper to unravel the origin, purpose, underlying meaning, and the implications of adopting that form. Their analysis revealed that a particular red feather was the idolatrous component. They could therefore remove the red feather and attach a different meaning to the use

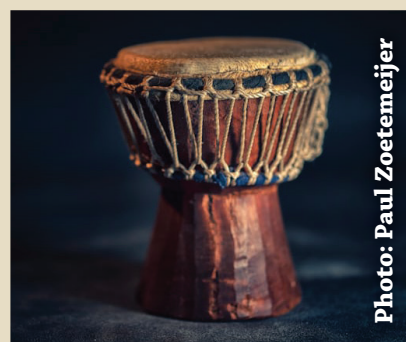


Photo: Paul Zoetemeijer

of the attire.

Discern how far you can go: which aspects of the art are malleable and which should you avoid? Do the believers' conscience approve of the new meaning? Does the new form remind them of the old ways? Does it instil a fear of the spirit it was dedicated to initially?

Today, many churches use the *Bata* drum for worship. A new meaning has replaced the former one.

GO! NEWS OF AFRICA'S MOBILIZING CHURCH

SIM WEST AFRICA MISSIONS OFFICE HOLDS RETREAT

By Stephen Nitte La'abes

The SIM WAMO Retreat, the first-ever assembly of SIM West Africa members took place in October 2023 in Accra, Ghana.

The retreat commenced with a warm welcome from the current director, with the former acting director for SIM WAMO setting the tone with a heartfelt prayer for God's presence in the ensuing discussions. The SIM International Director, Dr. Joshua Bogunjoko, and his wife, Joanna, lauded key figures who had shaped WAMO's trajectory, underscoring the theme of faithful Gospel witness amid life's trials.

Attendees delved into the question: Is there a vast resource within West Africa waiting to be tapped for global missions? The discourse on leadership development highlighted the roles of shepherds, servants, stewards, the practice of shared leadership, and the transformative power of guiding others towards Christlikeness.

The retreat focused on mobilization and church partnership, and the intricacies of support-raising.

Finally, this special gathering ended with a communion service led by a WAMO board member.



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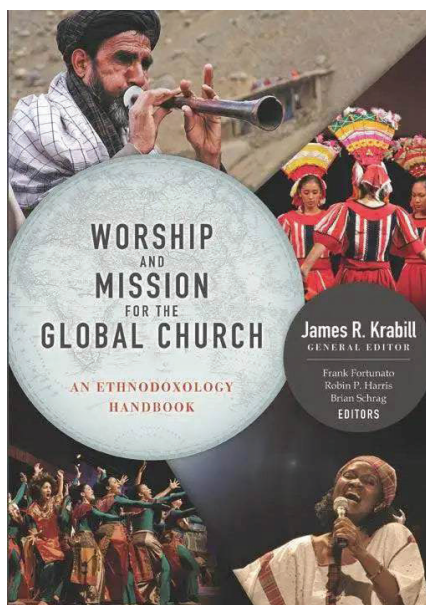
11TH MAY 2024
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS
9:00AM-3:00PM



<https://meet.google.com/zpy-aqvt-cfv>



BOOK REVIEW



By Mawunyo Kuuku Win-Tamakloe,
Missionary Evangelist, OneWay Africa

Comparing a church tambourine to a golden bell dedicated to deity worship at a village temple raises questions about their respective holinesses. If members of this village embrace Christ Jesus as Lord, do they discontinue the bell's use as an instrument of worship to their new Lord?

Exploring worship in diverse cultures while remaining faithful to scripture is the central theme in this inspiring handbook that emphasizes Psalm 46:10's call for God to be exalted among all nations. Ethnomusicologists and ethnodoxologists contribute to its depth as it explores the Gospel's impact across cultures, encompassing music, art, dance, and more.

Structured in three sections, it addresses foundational theology, shares impactful stories of Gospel contextualization, and provides practical resources for missionaries and Christian workers engaging other cultures. The book's perspectives may challenge conventional norms; yet they align with God's incarnational approach.

In one of its stories, Prophet Harris of Liberia was asked by new indigenous believers to teach them the songs of heaven for true worship. He responded, "God has no favorite songs." It's a beautiful notion for missionaries and Christians to appreciate the arts of various cultures, seeking the most fitting ways to bring each people's heartsong to God. I highly recommend this book for its thought-provoking exploration of worship, missions, and the intersection of cultures.

GEMAFEST GHANA'S ANNUAL MISSIONS CONFERENCE

The Ghana Evangelical Missions Association (GEMA)'s annual missions conference met at the Living Springs Assemblies of God Church from 1-3 November under the theme, "Joining hands with the diaspora to reach the unreached." The 187 participants comprised mission leaders, missionaries, pastors, and students. Conference speakers—African leaders at home and in the diaspora—addressed topics such as: "The state of the diaspora in joining hands," "Collaborating in sending missionaries," "The state of the unreached in Ghana," and "Artificial Intelligence and Missions." The live interviews of missionaries in attendance inspired many participants. Lifetime of Service awards were presented to men and women who had served faithfully in missions, evangelism, and Christian service throughout their lives.

JENGA FILMS IMPACTS LIVES

BY JACOB MUGENDI

John Karanja took four years studying for a bachelor's degree only to realize he did not need one to become a filmmaker. The skills he needed were not taught in class, but learned in the streets through working with other people. Now, a decade later, John has found his niche as the owner and co-founder of Jenga Films, a multimedia company that uses video to tell stories and impact lives.

Starting out

Jenga Films started with what John calls a divine encounter during a short-term mission organized by the Centre for Mission Mobilization. On the trip, a friend introduced him to Neil Sandoz, a missionary who helped John to kickstart his filmmaking career and later co-founded Jenga Films. Although John had a background in theatre arts and film technology, his encounter with Neil gave him the hands-on skills and exposure.

One of their first jobs was a documentary for an organization that was rescuing pregnant girls in the slums. It introduced him to mission-related filming; but afterwards, similar opportunities were scarce and he struggled to make ends meet.

Power of filmmaking

A turning point came when Jenga Films did a documentary for an organization that offered trauma counseling for kids. Through the video, the organization created awareness and raised more funds, enabling them to secure a bigger space, hire more people, and counsel more kids. It was an opportunity to see his work directly transform lives, and this was his goal.

To date, Jenga Films has worked on many projects with the clear result of reaching many people and transforming organizations. He recently did a documentary for an organization supplying water filters to remote



communities in Kenya. It is not easy for partners and other people who are not on the ground to tell the impact of such work. However, in a documentary, viewers see and hear people talk about falling sick from drinking contaminated water and how that has stopped because of the filters.

John believes that missionaries and ministries need to tap the power of multimedia to tell their stories and connect with partners. It is one thing to read a report and another to see the people who have been impacted by someone's support. Videographers can help bridge the gap between field workers, their sending organizations, and the partners who support them. Video stories also enhance accountability because of the visual confirmation

Challenges for videographers

Videographers face many challenges. John says that those who acquire all the funds needed before starting a project can plan their activities well. In his case, he depends on payments from interested clients to meet his needs, and this affects his work when projects are few. Since many Christian organizations do videos at the end of the year, he is usually

inundated with offers, but cannot take on all of them because shooting and editing are time-consuming. Some people do not see the value of video documentaries and are unwilling to engage videographers to tell their stories. Others are reluctant to pay a decent fee to cater for filmmaking expenses, mainly because they don't understand what goes into making a compelling video. A five-minute documentary could involve interviewing 15 people, hours of editing and searching for good music, and take up to two weeks to finish!

Use media

In this era of high media consumption, John encourages believers to use media for greater impact. It may be as simple as sharing a photo or video with partners. This is more appealing than the usual PDF newsletter. Those without advanced media skills can use free apps on smartphones to aid editing. "You can take a long time explaining to people what you do, but a video or a photo will do it in seconds," John shares. He advises those planning to venture into filmmaking to find professionals who can mentor them. Learning is hands-on; hence, apprenticeship is key to learning the ropes.



Photo: Freepik

PEOPLE GROUP: AFRICAN YOUTH IN MISSIONS

Spoken word is a type of poetry that often focuses on social justice issues. It is also being utilized by young people to proclaim God's missional message. Across Africa, young people are rising up to take the challenge, but we are also losing part of that generation to materialism, humanism, and atheism. The words of young poet A.F. Asiibii can inspire that generation, in a whole new way:

God's Word, World, and Work

I was afraid to look through the 10-40 Window, but when I did, what I saw was heartbreaking because I never knew so many people could be found wasting. But he said to me; "It is not their lostness that matters, but their access to the Gospel."

I could not hold back my willingness, but I sought counsel from my littleness and said to him, "I am young and always broke, I do not have enough to send to these people." But he said, "It is not the amount that matters, it is an attitude of sacrifice." Knowing this, I said to him, "Lord, I hold up my wallet with hands that are widely

open, use it."

He again began speaking, "Know these people, do not be people-blind." Then I remembered Aisha in my neighbourhood and the Mai Suya that sells on the next street. His words made me see that I was to open up my life, welcoming them with open arms into his Kingdom.

"I will go to these people," I said. "But I have not received a special call from you." This time, he smiled even broader and asked, "Are you willing and available?" I answered, "Yes, I am. Even though I'm just a college student, I know of some friends who'll love to join me. Should I get them to come along?" He replied, "Anyone can mobilize, with or without being formally trained."

Asking his leave, he turned, smiled and said, "These are my last words to you. Go into the world and make friends of all people groups, translating the love you've received into their hearts, making them disciples, and welcoming them with open arms into my Kingdom: for I am with you always." This is God's word. This is God's world. This is God's work. Missions is God's heart.

AT A GLANCE

- People under the age of 25 make up 60 per cent of Africa's population.
- Young people are pulled in every direction by social media, globalization, and popular trends.
- More and more youth are leaving the Church of their parents and grandparents, at the same time that young Muslim people are turning to Jesus.

PRAY FOR

- Bold youth who have a passion to reach the lost elsewhere and among their peers, and parents and mentors to encourage them.
- A stirring of the Holy Spirit among the youth of Africa, and creativity in sharing the message of Christ.
- Discipleship and strengthening of emerging young leaders, with an emphasis on humility and sacrifice.



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