

# ENTER THE CONVERSATION FROM URBANA '12

## MF STAFF

### EMPOWERING EVERY TRIBE AND TONGUE TO WORSHIP JESUS

*A Conversation with the editors of the new book from William Carey Library, Worship and Mission for the Global Church, by Robin Harris, James Krabill and Brian Schrag (see page 41). They are all part of ICE, International Council of Ethnodoxologists. For more information, go to [www.worldofworship.org](http://www.worldofworship.org)*

**MF: What is ethno-doxology, and what kind of response have you seen here at Urbana?**

**Robin:** We study how people around the world worship God. We would like to see that worship grow and see more people worshipping God in their own heart-music and heart-styles. This generation especially wants to engage with the arts in ministry. This is a huge wave. At this Urbana we've seen the most response ever. This is the first time that ICE (International Council of Ethno-Doxology) has been here as a presence. When we interact with students they tell us, "God has gifted me as an artist and I want to be involved. Can we do this in missions?" This is the first time Urbana has offered a whole bevy of seminars on this. They brought on five speakers from ICE. The sessions are well attended and we're really excited that Urbana has this vision of exposing people to ethno-doxology.

**MF: How does someone get involved?**

**Robin:** There are a number of different approaches. The first is taking what you know, your arts, your music, and you bring them overseas, and you just do them. The second model is a bridges model, where you go and you learn about that culture's music, and you use this as a bridge into the culture and as friendship evangelism. The third approach is where you go and learn how to encourage local people to use their own local artistic and musical

resources to spread the kingdom of God and encouraging their expressions of worship to the Lord.

**Brian:** A great way to get involved is to connect with ICE. You can join as an associate or an organization, and that opens a door to the 300 people and organizations that are members.

**Robin:** ICE is not a mission agency but a large network. We just network people together and provide resources. The big deal this year is the book and handbook we are publishing with William Carey Library. The title is *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*, edited by Robin Harris, James Krabill and Brian Schrag.

**MF: Tell us a little about this amazing book you guys have put together.**

**James:** Our ICE team was being asked to conduct intensive courses in a variety of contexts on this subject. We kept compiling collections of articles and eventually became aware that we needed to do something more substantial. The book has three main sections. The first section is foundations, which includes biblical and theological reflections on why supporting culturally appropriate worship is the goal of the church. The second section, another 200 pages, is stories from around the world of all the things people are doing in this field. And the third section is a tools section, which shows you how to do all kinds of practical things—how to design a multi-cultural worship service, how to conduct an arts-worship seminar, how to mentor artists, etc. The book includes 100 authors from over 20 countries. It really was an attempt to be as international as possible. The book includes a fabulous DVD in the back as well.

**MF: Western music, and especially Christian worship music from the West, is becoming increasingly dominant around the world. How much of a concern is this, and what can be done about it?**

**James:** That's really central to part of the issue. There's probably a tendency in this group to be a little unrealistic about the huge wave of impact that Western music

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will continue to play. We obviously want to encourage something that we would call culturally appropriate, but realistically the church is going to be a hybrid. At the very least what we want to do is legitimize and encourage people to take another look at their own cultural gifts. I just talked to someone from Central Java who said that the worship leader in their church just got permission to translate all the Hillsongs into Central Java. I thought, “Central Java? I think there are a few arts there!” So I just began to encourage him about appropriating what God has given Central Java and trying to find a way to integrate this into the worship life. But realistically it’s going to be a hybrid. To be most cynical, the people with the money who can produce the CDs, the videos and the television programs will continue to have huge impact. It’s the new form of empire and cultural hegemony, and that’s what you’re up against.

**Robin:** God has given us a burden to encourage those who are being marginalized by this huge wave of stuff coming out of the West. And we can be the voice for those who have immensely expressive means of communication but are being pushed off to the side. We believe this is a gift to the church that should not be lost.

**Brian:** When I was in Congo, the church had been there for 50 years, and the first evangelist there had told all the people to burn their instruments because they were associated with their old life. Inside the church no one knew how to play the traditional instruments. So when they decided to integrate the local instruments in the church, specifically the *kundi*, we had to go outside the church to find someone who knew how to build it, tune it, and play it. The first time I played the *kundi*, there was complete silence. Normally there’s a lot of noise going on, and I thought we had done something wrong. So after the service, I asked a church member why everyone was so quiet. He replied, “What could we do? It cut our hearts.” Even though they had lively music, and translations of the hymns, the community arts penetrate into the hearts in ways that other things can’t do.

### **MF: What is the significance of ethno-doxology for reaching unreached people groups?**

**Robin:** Working with local music and art forms is the ideal way to show love to people. When they see you asking about their music and arts they feel so loved and

validated. That cuts through the barriers. The result is then a church that is not foreign but is deeply rooted and has much more potential with connecting with other people. It is generative and reproducible.

### **MF: Tell us about the history of how you got started as a network.**

**Robin:** One of the exciting things about the history of this movement is how connected it is to *Mission Frontiers* magazine. The 1996 July/August edition had a whole spread on worship—on having the focus of mission being worship. Many of us in this movement read that issue. Those articles were so influential and really launched us. I read it when I was in Siberia at that time, very isolated, not really understanding how God could use a musician in ministry. It really came alive for me when I read those articles. I went on to do some masters studies and then a PhD in this field. We are extremely grateful to the USCWM and to WCL for working with us on these volumes. We sense a great sense of partnership. You guys get what we do.

## WHERE DO WE FIT?

*A conversation with Paul Borthwick, author of Western Christians in Global Mission: What’s the Role of the North American church?, which was selected as one of the “Book of the Day” offerings at Urbana 2012.*

### **MF: You have written a very timely book, and one that is highly overdue. What led you to write about the role of the Western church in global mission today?**

**Paul:** I speak at about 12 or 14 mission conferences a year, and I’ve discovered two opposite extremes. On the one side are churches that still have a mindset of “the West to the rest”—we have to reach the whole world on our own. The other extreme is saying, “There are so many people rising up from Nigeria, India, Brazil or South Korea—our work is done, we’re off the hook.” So I start by giving the reader a global overview of trends and a sense of what is happening in the world today. I give the pros and cons of how I see the North American church and the pros and cons of how I see the non-Western church. One of the flaws that many of us get into is thinking the non-Western church is perfect and all we need to do is get out of the way for them. Let’s not over-romanticize the church around the world; let’s be realistic about it. I fundamentally disagree with the idea that the baton has been passed, because in the analogy, the person who releases it is out of the race. I don’t think there is ever a time when the Western church is released from our obedience to the Great Commission.

**MF: You talk about how Western missions has been conducted from a position of power, and that we need to come now as servants. How do we begin doing that?**

**Paul:** Coming as servants is tough because of our academic and financial power. It's easy for us to want to dictate the agenda. I believe it takes some major effort to convince our non-Western brothers that we are there to serve and not dictate our agenda. But, of course, power is a two-way street. It's not always that we assume the power, but in the majority world they often give us the power. Pastor Oscar Muriu, of Nairobi Chapel, said at Urbana 2009, "When I go into a meeting with a white missionary, I say please just listen, because when the white man speaks the conversation is basically over." There's politeness, they defer and, at times, there's the residual effects of colonialism.

**MF: What would you say to a local church that says, "We have \$100,000 in our missions budget, and we could use this to send out two American missionaries, or 100 national missionaries." How do we decide what is most strategic in this equation?**

**Paul:** It's a very good question, but unfortunately it is reflective of our materialism. Our pre-occupation with money drives the agenda with the question "What is most cost-effective?" Sure it might be true you could send more national missionaries. But in India, for example, sending missionaries from lower castes to higher castes might be cheaper but less effective than sending Westerners or people from other countries. So it's a very over-simplified view of missions. If I were talking to a church, I would say find out if there are people in your church that you believe are prepared for and called to strategic ministry. The reality is that as soon as the only thing the church gives to missions is our money, our vision diminishes. When your own flesh and blood is out there, the church prays more, they are more concerned about it.

**MF: It's been said that Westerners suffer from a guilt-complex about how rich we are in an age of great poverty and suffering. How might you advise a short-term mission group who will be exposed to some of this firsthand and may want to make a difference?**

**Paul:** The best advice I can give to short-term missions—and I'm a lifelong fan of short-term missions even though I'm aware of all the potential damage they can do—is make sure you're connected to some long-term ministry locally. Otherwise you're just going on a poor tour, and maybe you'll feel like you've put a band-aid on something. But if it's going to be sustainable there needs

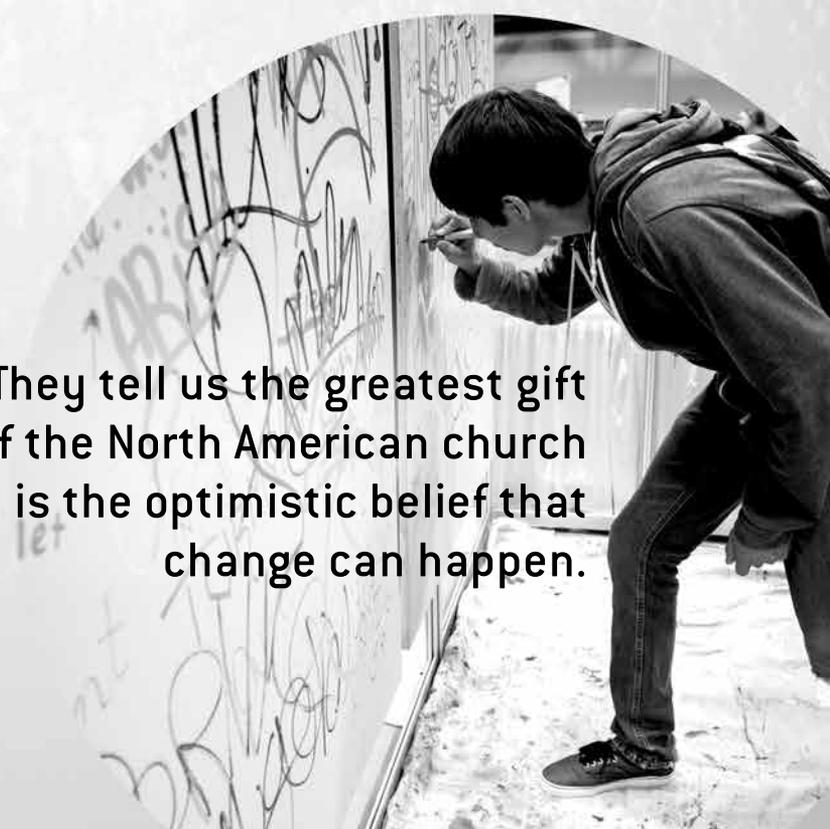
to be some group on the ground that's there long-term, and you go in to serve their purposes. Poverty-alleviation is not going to happen by doing a one-week training on micro-finance; it's not as easy as a ten-day project. Ultimately, short-term missions shouldn't be just about having a great experience for your group, but actually doing something that's going to have a long-term, kingdom-building effect in the location you are serving, long after you are gone.

**MF: What do non-Western leaders want to say to us in the West?**

**Paul:** One of the things I try to do in the book is give voice to the non-Western church. Overwhelming, the number one thing they want us to hear is to prioritize pioneer church-planting. They tell us the greatest gift of the North American church is the optimistic belief that change can happen. We look more in the future than the past, and pioneer work really requires this.

**MF: You've been to many Urbanas. How would you evaluate Urbana 2012?**

**Paul:** Urbana leadership has listened to some of the critique. As one person put it about Urbana 2000—it was more of a worship conference with missions thrown in, than a missions conference with worship. In 2012 David Platt pulled out all the stops. Tom Lin called students to ask God, "Where is my Mongolia?" I think Urbana 12 was an excellent call to global and local mission. And over 4000 students committed themselves to two years or more of cross-cultural service! 



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