

BIBLE STORYING WITH THE CREATIVE ARTS FOR CHURCH PLANTING



TOM FERGUSON

Tom Ferguson has served as an Ethno-Arts and Orality Specialist since 1994. He and his wife Tina have worked in Africa and Asia, equipping local believers in the use of creative arts and oral communication in church planting strategies. Tom holds music degrees from the University of Southern Mississippi and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is a charter member of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists.

Email: ethnomusic@earthlink.net

August 1996: It was time for the festival celebrating the founding of Tsévié, the town where we were living in Togo. The stadium field was covered with traditional musical groups demonstrating their prowess, creating a veritable smorgasbord of sound for a new ethnodoxologist like myself.¹

The central piece was a presentation of the story of the village's founding. Atumpani, the talking drums for the Ewé people, told the epic story that was translated into both Ewé and French languages for those uninitiated in the language of the drum. As the story unfolded, dancer-actors played it out for all to see. The crowd was thoroughly captivated. And then it occurred to me how powerful it would be if God's story could be told in this way. Thus began my journey into the realm of storying with music and other arts.

LOCAL STORY CRAFTERS AND MUSIC

Among the Kotokoli people of Togo and the Bisa people of Burkina Faso, story-based songs have been used with radio broadcasts of Bible stories. These programs have become extremely popular within the Muslim population. In Mali, a story crafter composed songs for every story in his language's story set. He also has begun creating music videos from these songs. Story crafters among a North Indian people composed a song in place of a story, finding that the story would be more easily told through song.

VISUAL ARTS AND STORYTELLING

The visual arts are also being used in conjunction with stories. A small group of believers in North India created songs for a Christmas outreach party for family and friends. Two young artists in the group were commissioned to paint scenes from the nativity story on large canvases. These were hung around the venue and were used to tell the Christmas story. The following year the believers added drama to their presentation.

Believers in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa combine Bible storytelling and henna art to share the gospel. Women use henna to draw beautiful designs on their hands and feet for special occasions. While drawing the henna designs, the women talk, build relationships, and share the Bible story they are drawing. When women are wearing henna, others admire the art on their hands, opening doors for the story to be shared again and again.²

EMPOWERING STORYTELLER CHURCH PLANTERS

The value of using the performing and visual arts with stories is growing among storying practitioners and trainers. Impromptu drama and storyboarding are tools regularly used to help teach a story. A new song creation module is included as part of the storying church formation training in South Asia.

Increasingly as church planters, storytellers, and creative artists are trained and empowered, creative arts paired with Bible stories become powerful tools for communicating the message of Scripture.

¹ This article was condensed and reprinted with permission from Krabill, James R. et al, eds. 2013 *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 103–105.

² See more about henna art in chapter 27 of the *Ethnodoxology Handbook*, “Contextualizing Visual Arts for Faith Sharing,” by Scott Rayl.