

MUSICAL CHOICES IN EARLY BAPTIST MISSIONS AMONG THE XERENTE¹

Escolhas musicais nas primeiras missões batistas entre os Xerente

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Abstract:

The people group in central Brazil known by the name 'Xerente' has had a Baptist missionary presence for almost seventy years. Through multiple approaches, the work has produced fruit and a Bible translation into the native language is well under way. In the early stages, choices were certainly made regarding music for Christian worship. Given the traditional western character of those choices, one may surmise that certain pre-determining concepts governed their decisions. However, the development of the following decades unveils rather a growth process both among the missionaries and among the local believers. This essay considers the motivation for the introduction of Western hymnody, compares it with the present musical perception of the Xerente, and makes relevant the question of authenticity in artistic worship forms particularly for cross-cultural contexts.

Key-words: Xerente Tribe, Indigenous people, Cross-cultural Missions, Worship and Music, Baptist Church.

Resumo:

O povo Xerente do centro-oeste brasileiro recebeu os primeiros missionários Batistas quase 70 anos atrás. Através de uma variedade de abordagens, o trabalho tem produzido fruto e uma tradução da Bíblia está em progresso. Nos primeiros estágios da missão, escolhas sem dúvida foram feitas sobre as músicas utilizadas para o culto cristão. Dado o caráter ocidental tradicional destas escolhas, poderia-se supor que certos conceitos pré-determinantes dirigiram estas decisões. Porém na verdade, o desenvolvimento das décadas seguintes revela um processo de crescimento tanto entre os missionários como entre os crentes locais. Este artigo considera a motivação em potencial para a introdução da hinódia ocidental, a compara com a percepção musical atual do povo Xerente, e dá relevância à questão de autenticidade em formas artísticas de adoração, particularmente para contextos transculturais.

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Palavras-chave: Tribo Xerente, Povos indígenas, Missões transculturais, Culto e música, Igreja Batista.

Introduction

The indigenous people group of Brazil known as the Xerente (Sheh-ren'-teh) has been in contact with Western culture for about three centuries. The most recent census reports a population numbering around 3,500 distributed among sixty or more villages. Local oral history suggests that they originally inhabited areas close to the Atlantic Ocean but have effectively lived in the northcentral state of Tocantins at least since the eighteenth century.³ Despite being faced with numerous conflicts over land and worldview during the previous centuries, the Xerente community has displayed a strong determination to maintain their culture, particularly their language.

Since before World War II, evangelical missionaries have had some level of contact with them. In the fifties, the New Tribes Mission sent Anna Muller as the first missionary who settled among the Xerente.⁴ In 1959, Missionary/Pastor Guenther Krieger, later accompanied by his wife, joined the work with the Xerente, sent by the Brazilian Baptist Convention. In 1960, Missionary/Pastor Rinaldo de Mattos⁵ joined them as a missionary with the New Tribes Mission. In the 1980s, after a period away from Tocantins, Mattos also became a missionary sponsored by the Baptist Convention.

Guenther Krieger and Rinaldo de Mattos have continued their work with the Xerente since those early days until the present. These pioneers, along with others who have assisted them since then, have used various approaches to bring the gospel to the Xerente population. They have sought to improve the precarious health conditions of the Xerente, to provide literacy and further their education, as well as to guide them into the knowledge of the Christian gospel. The missionaries testify that “since the beginning, [they] intended to be a support, an anchor for the Xerente in existential issues, and similarly be a support, and perhaps a bridge, for the

³ Povos Indígenas do Brasil (Indigenous Peoples of Brazil), “Quadro Geral dos Povos” (General People Group Chart), <https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/povo/xerente/1171>, (accessed October 18, 2016).

⁴ Anais do XVI Encontro Regional de História da Anpuh-Rio: Saberes e Práticas Científicas (Annals of the 16th Regional Meeting on History of the Anpuh-Rio: Scientific Knowledge and Practices), “O Evangelho Não Destrói Culturas” (The Gospel Does Not Destroy Cultures), http://www.encontro2014.rj.anpuh.org/resources/anais/28/1400426618_ARQUIVO_encontro2014_anpuh_pgrigorio_oevangelhonaodestruiculturas.pdf (accessed October 20, 2016), 1.

⁵ Reflecting common practice in Brazilian evangelical circles of calling every ordained minister a ‘pastor’ (Pr.) whether he functions as a local church pastor or not, followed by the first name, this article will often refer to Guenther Krieger and Rinaldo de Mattos as Pr. Guenther and Pr. Rinaldo.

accomplishing of their sociological aspirations.”⁶ This concern and approach to the local people is indeed confirmed by the missionaries’ high esteem within the Xerente community, the informal status as consultants they have attained even among secular institutions, and by the frequent reliance on their reports found on secular written and electronic materials concerning the Xerente.⁷

As these early Baptist missionaries actively engaged with the people to live and preach the gospel, church meetings were presumably planned and contents for each considered. Among the various elements of a Christian church service, as understood in Western culture, music serves as a regular form of expression in almost every model of collective worship. Thus, Pastor Guenther and Pastor Rinaldo would have felt the need to teach songs to or about God to the Xerente people right from the start of their meetings.⁸ At this point, choices would have been made as to what songs they would need, considering style, tempo, mood, textual content, and possibly other elements. Observing the outcomes over half a century later, the question of motivation and direction for these musical choices becomes relevant if one wishes to understand the present state of development in the musical practices of Xerente believers. Although one could presume that choices made by missionary leadership are always determined by ideological, philosophical, theological, or missiological guidelines, it is also possible that *none of them* were used as *strategies* for musical choices for the Xerente church in the early years of Baptist missionary activity among them. If such was the case, how should its present-day forms be understood?

Considering the developing character of anthropological knowledge throughout the last one hundred years, and the ongoing changes taking place in missiology at the same time, the testimony of the missionaries gives evidence that their choices were fluid and even circumstantial, rather than settled on unmovable norms from the aforementioned fields. Based on the public sources available about the Xerente culture, as well as the possible motivational factors one could deduce, the testimonies of these missionaries, personal and recent interaction with the missionaries and Xerente believers, and a reflection on the perception of the value of

⁶ Rinaldo de Mattos, “Entrevista sobre os Xerente e a Missão Batista” (Interview about the Xerente and the Baptist Mission), <http://www.missoesnacionais.org.br/upload/arquivos/entrevista-xerente-02-99.doc>, 1999/2003, (accessed October 20, 2016), 8.

⁷ Povos Indígenas do Brasil (Indigenous Peoples of Brazil), “Quadro Geral dos Povos” (General People Group Chart), <https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/povo/xerente/1171> (accessed October 24, 2016).

⁸ This article relies not only on published and unpublished documents, but also on personal conversations and interviews with the missionaries Guenther Krieger and Rinaldo de Mattos. References to such personal interviews will be cited simply with mention to their last names.

musical and artistic expression for Christian communication, a complex and challenging development emerges. This article will consider these factors, seeking to deepen the understanding of the Christian musical environment among the Xerente and to provide direction in the missional use of music and the arts in the twenty-first century.

Ideologies about People and Music

Since the early encounters between European explorers and aboriginal societies, the incoming culture entertained various ideologies about the “newly discovered” peoples. Guido Abbattista classifies the prevalent views into two main camps: one which regarded the autochthonous people as pre-fall, innocent communities, capable of receiving religious information, and receiving salvation; the other camp regarded the so-called “savages” as “semi-human beings,” which “had to be subjected to a superior political authority.”⁹ A wide range of opinions between these two extreme points would likely appear within Western society across the centuries. According to Abbattista, these two prominent ideologies continued to permeate the thoughts of Westerners well into the nineteenth century and their presence can be verified in the history of conquest in the South American continent. Considering the presence of such ideologies, some could allege that the missionaries among the Xerente also applied their cultural prejudice, based on faulty ideology, against the use of the Xerente community’s musical heritage for the propagation of the Christian faith among the Xerente. Even if well-intentioned, deeming their choices to be superior and more helpful to the people, such attitudes would have probably damaged the relationship between the messengers and the Xerente. However, this does not appear to have taken place between the Baptist missionaries and the community. Rather, the apparent result of these last fifty years of interaction is one of mutual respect and appreciation.¹⁰

As products of their own age, the missionaries did indeed have personal musical interpretive philosophies which they could have imposed onto the Xerente.¹¹ Music is commonly perceived as being able to transport the human mind to other places or to create and re-create emotions previously experienced, some of which may have even been superficially forgotten, and to guide the listener or music participant into deep roots in his or her

⁹ Guido Abbattista, “European Encounters in the Age of Expansion“ at European History Online (German: EGO – Europäische Geschichte Online), at <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/european-encounters>, 2011, 17. (accessed October 26, 2016) .

¹⁰ Guenther Krieger, Personal Communication, January 17-21, 2017.

¹¹ Rinaldo de Mattos, Personal Communication, October 2016-March 2017.

consciousness. In view of this, ideas and philosophies (systems of “precepts and propositions”)¹² about this phenomenon have arisen and been recorded since the ancient world. For example, “in the *Republic*, Plato outlines his view of the qualities of the modes (musical scales) of the time.”¹³ In the Western world during the middle ages, the Catholic Church had a particularly strong influence in musical choices. After the Renaissance, many philosophers looked for answers from the ancients while at the same time developing new ideas that progressively added to the spectrum of music perception. Music has become an integral component of Western culture and plays an important part in modern education. Whole curricula have been developed based on specific concepts about what music does and should do to people as individuals and as members of society. A perusal of the sources used for this essay would be valuable to confirm this development, but it would be beyond the scope of its thesis.

Within the Christian church, music choices have frequently reflected the desire to maintain a discernible distance from what is locally considered to be *of* the world. The issue of using a traditional native music style that may be intimately tied to pagan religious concepts, as well as the use of contemporary styles (such as jazz, blues, rock and roll) in Western society, revived many ancient concepts mentioned above along the course of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Such concepts have been frequently used to defend the idea that sacred music *must* be particularly distinct from what society at large used. Arguably, the controversies usually referred to as the “worship wars” result partly from opposing schools of thought concerning the absolute character of music styles, choices of instruments, vocal techniques, volume, origins of the genres, as well as other factors.¹⁵

At the heart of the issue stands the question: is music moral or amoral? Does music have the capability of teaching or inducing moral values, especially apart from a song’s lyrics, or is it a neutral art that can be used, whatever its genre or style, for either a good or bad message?¹⁶

¹² Peter Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12.

¹³ Denise Grocke, “Music is a moral law” – A Quotation from Plato? *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, 2006, at <http://testvoices.uib.no/?q=colgrocke061106>. (accessed December 11, 2012).

¹⁴ For instance: Shelly Hamilton, *Is Music Neutral*, Ministry127, 2011, under “Music Communicates Moral Connotations, with or without Lyrics,” <http://ministry127.com/music-ministry/is-music-neutral> (accessed December 20, 2012) and, Kurt Woetzel, “Is Music Neutral? An Interview with Robert Shaw,” in *Front Line*, September-October, 1998, <http://www.projectprobe.org/showpage.php?p=article4>, p.11. (accessed December 20, 2012 – now offline), <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2014/07/14/guidance-from-frontline-for-those-confused-about-music/>.

¹⁵ Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 178.

¹⁶ Kurt Woetzel, “Is Music Neutral? An Interview with Robert Shaw,” *Front Line*, September-October 1998, at <http://www.projectprobe.org/showpage.php?p=article4>, 11, (accessed December 20, 2012).

The conclusion of some is that music styles¹⁷ do indeed possess inherent qualities that would preclude them from being used in a Christian context. Others, however, believe that the evidence available, especially when evaluated worldwide with a consistent comparative methodology, cannot support the proposition that music's morality is innate in its patterns of melody, harmony, and rhythm, nor in any other of its basic elements.¹⁸ This view proposes that, as the paint on a canvas may carry a good or a bad message, so musical elements are neither good nor bad in and of themselves. To convey a "message," one must combine them in specifically cultural ways. Thus, the listener's culture serves as the interpretive lens through which the sounds create meaning. Much like phonemes and words, which must have a linguistic meaning agreed upon by cultural convention, the message of musical sounds can be accurately comprehended by only those who understand its cultural significance. From this point of view, the style of music (as the style of art on a canvas) is not irreparably tied to a moral message, but rather draws meaning based upon the values and customs of the culture from which it comes, thus being capable of either positive or negative messages (and everything in-between).¹⁹

Missionaries Meet Xerente Music

The philosophical dilemma described above could have caused hesitation in the use of local musical forms in the early years of the Baptist Mission. However, the diligence of Rinaldo de Mattos in collecting information on traditional instruments of the Xerente is an indication of their desire to value their culture rather than to dismiss or discard it.²⁰ Through the years, a list of traditional instruments has been compiled describing their construction, their appearance, their sounds, as well as their purpose in the community. With various names, although different in form, sound, and application, they would fall under the Western categories of percussion and wind instruments. Even if distinct, or even exotic, to Western ears, the characteristics of these instruments are not so uncommonly disagreeable that they would have necessarily produced any rejection based on prejudice among the missionaries.

¹⁷ The term *style* is used here to refer to music classifications that typically incorporate a regular set of features that distinguish them from other classifications.

¹⁸ Liesch, *ibid.*, 178-180; Steve Miller, **The Contemporary Christian Music Debate**. (OM Literature, 1993), 25-26.

¹⁹ Robin P. Harris, "The Great Misconception: Why Music is Not a Universal Language," in Krabill, James, Frank Fortunato, Robin P. Harris, Brian Schrag, editors, **Worship and Mission for the Global Church**, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), KL 2945. Kindle Edition.

²⁰ Mattos, Rinaldo de, "Instrumentos Musicais Xerente" (Xerente Musical Instruments), unpublished file based on personal research in the years between 1960 and 1998). On file. (Translation mine)

Philosophically and theologically, the association of local traditional instruments and styles with Xerente religious practices could have caused the missionaries to doubt the possibility of their use for Christian worship. For instance, the instrument list compiled by Pastor Rinaldo makes mention of a rattle-like instrument called *Zâ*, which he describes this way: “This instrument is used exclusively by the *Sekwa* (Portuguese: *pajés*; English: witchdoctor) who, besides employing it in his witchery, also uses it for the *warri nõkrêze*, yard songs, in which the witchdoctors function as MCs.”²¹ On the other hand, however, Pastor Rinaldo’s list indicates that the *Kupkrnãihirê* (a type of flute) and the *Wanêkumkrê* (an instrument resembling a tambourine) could have only been incorporated into the community’s musical practices after the Xerente came into contact with non-indigenous music, and that they served exclusively “secular”²² ritualistic purposes.²³ In general, Pr. Rinaldo suggests that music in the Xerente context is exclusively ritualistic—whether they are religious or secular rituals—and that people do not typically sing along while performing daily activities.²⁴ Nevertheless, the missionaries believed that traditional musical instruments were not so intrinsically bound to traditional religion that they would have inevitably created opportunities for misunderstanding Christian doctrine or led to syncretism.²⁵

Other important musical characteristics they would have considered include elements such as melody, harmony, and rhythm. Pastor Rinaldo, in his brief description of Xerente music,²⁶ describes the Xerente musical vocabulary as consisting typically of five different notes—a form of pentatonic scale—with an occasional use of two other alternative tones, which do not both appear in the same piece of music. His brief rhythmic analysis describes a consistent binary musical pulse, with a strong first beat and a weak second. Xerente music is always accompanied by “choreography” (his general term for “dance” or “movement”) except for songs of mourning. Since binary musical pulse and accompanying dance movements are also part of Western music, the missionaries did not believe this would be detrimental to the Christian message in any way.²⁷

One other concern could have led the missionaries to distance themselves from Xerente

²¹ Mattos, *ibid.*

²² The Portuguese term that Pr. Rinaldo de Mattos used for ‘secular’ is *profane*. While it can mean the same as ‘profane’ as a cognate, would, in this case, be a false cognate in the sense Mattos and the Xerente use it.

²³ Mattos, *ibid.*

²⁴ Mattos, Rinaldo de, *Características da Música Xerente* (Characteristics of Xerente Music), unpublished file, 1996, revised in 2003, 1. On file. (Translation mine)

²⁵ Rinaldo de Mattos, Personal Communication, October 2016–March 2017; Guenther Krieger, Personal Communication, January 17–21, 2017.

²⁶ Mattos, *Characteristics of Xerente Music*, 2003, 1. On file. (Translation mine)

²⁷ Mattos, Personal Communication.

styles. Pastor Rinaldo explains, “In the Xerente worldview, there is no human composer. The authorship of the music they sing is not attributed to any one person. All of them were ‘left’ (given) by Bdâ, the cultural hero, as were the other cultural features.”²⁸ This attribution of authorship could have had the potential to connect the source of music to a spirit world alien to the tenets of Scripture. Nevertheless, this confusion would be unlikely if specific, present-day, human beings composed a new repertoire of Christian music in traditional genres. Indeed, the missionaries openly express their desire to see a genuinely Xerente hymnody for the local churches.

Missionary Training and the “Great Awakening”

Both Pastors Rinaldo and Guenther participated in the first course in Linguistics offered by SIL in Brazil in 1958, although the course was unofficial.²⁹ It was a three-month intensive course, without formal publications in Portuguese to guide them and led by a guest teacher from the United States who later went to work with another indigenous group. In those days, he said, the study of Anthropology was still “in diapers” in Brazil.³⁰ There were very few books written on this topic in the Portuguese language, and unless one had a good enough grasp of English or German, a Brazilian reader would have had little encouragement to discover deep cultural features and to apply these in the communication of the Gospel. This was the extent of training in cross-cultural communication provided for the missionaries at the start of their work with the Xerente.

It was only after they were confronted with the realities of the Xerente culture in day-to-day interaction that the missionaries “woke up” to the need of gaining a deeper understanding of their worldview and their cultural expressions. Due to the regular exchanges between the Xerente and the Brazilian society that had taken place since colonial times, many of them already understood basic Portuguese. This factor led the missionaries to set aside serious consideration of translating the New Testament until the end of the 1960s. At that point, they sought out further preparation and took on the task of translating the New Testament. Pastor Rinaldo stated that Pastor Guenther had become a more avid translator than he had. Pastor Guenther, who speaks

²⁸ Mattos, *Characteristics*, 3.

²⁹ Mattos, *Personal Communication*.

³⁰ Expressions like “in diapers,” found in quotation marks in this section of the article, are derived from this author’s personal conversation with Pr. Rinaldo. They are direct translations of his mode of expression and are included here to emphasize the interviewee’s characteristics and intended messages.

better English—and German—than Pr. Rinaldo, had, therefore, more access to translation aids and literature to help him in this task. They agreed that Guenther would dedicate more time to the translation process and Rinaldo would focus on other needs of the Mission.

During the 1970s, a “great awakening” began to take place in these missionaries’ indigenous ministry.³¹ They achieved a better understanding of culture and sensed the need to have a deeper knowledge of it to accomplish Christian mission in a more effective manner. Don Richardson’s books describing potential “redemptive analogies” in every culture around the world were greatly influential in this process, particularly *Peace Child*. Pr. Rinaldo first read about it in a short book review in the Reader’s Digest publication (called *Seleções* in the Portuguese edition). Although he still had a weak grasp of the English language at the time, he ordered the book from the United States and struggled to read it all. The missionaries eventually identified an analogy that Pastor Rinaldo termed “Xerente Existential Messianism.”³² This and other newly attained perspectives of cross-cultural missions deeply affected the two pioneer missionaries’ expectations and emphases in their work. Xerente Baptist churches of today, established in various villages in their territory, continue to reap positive fruits of their impact.

Concerning the early choices of music for Christian worship among the Xerente, Pr. Rinaldo describes a different scenario at the beginning of the Mission’s endeavor than some might expect. Mattos explains that the missionary team was truly unaware of the importance of cultural consideration for musical choices and they had not pre-formulated a set of calculated choices based on philosophical, theological, or missiological guidelines. They had not made a conscious choice based on some form of cultural prejudice nor by a feeling of cultural superiority.³³ Neither did they totally discard the musical elements of Xerente music due to their traditional and religious purposes. Pastor Rinaldo affirmed, rather, the use of “corinhos” (worship choruses) and of some of the traditional hymns from the “Cantor Cristão” (the standard Baptist hymnbook in Brazil at the time), was simply *a practical choice* since these were the songs and hymns the missionaries knew. After translating the lyrics into their traditional language, they shared the songs with the Xerente and incorporated them into their services.

³¹ Mattos, *ibid.*

³² Anais do XVI Encontro Regional de História da Anpuh-Rio: Saberes e Práticas Científicas (Annals of the 16th Regional Meeting on History of the Anpuh-Rio: Scientific Knowledge and Practices), “O Evangelho Não Destrói Culturas” (The Gospel Does Not Destroy Cultures), http://www.encontro2014.rj.anpuh.org/resources/anais/28/1400426618_ARQUIVO_encontro2014_anpuh_pgriatorioevangelhonaodestruiculturas.pdf, 2014, 6. (accessed October 20, 2016).

³³ Mattos, Personal Communication.

The Xerente Response to the Missionaries' Music

Pastor Rinaldo clarified that the indigenous people never questioned the use of those songs at the time.³⁴ There could be various reasons, including cultural predispositions and temporal factors, that facilitated the seemingly smooth introduction of Western music genres and their integration into church practices. It could be that the long-standing acquaintance with the “white man’s religion”—particularly Catholicism, which typically maintained standard forms along with the meaning-content—had already imprinted an expectation of absolute form onto the Xerente mind. They would have assumed that these forms were irreplaceable if they were to accept Christianity’s tenets as their own. This view would have also been reinforced by their own religion’s presumably stable forms. They could have thought another faith would bring specific unalterable forms with its message that new believers were expected to accept.

A further potential predisposition among the Xerente could be the expectation of distinct forms of expression for worship or communication with the transcendent world found in multiple cultures around the world. These, accepting as “natural” the use of a heightened linguistic or artistic form for these purposes, may be particularly prone to accept Western Christian hymnody, being stylistic distinct from their own musical forms, as part of the total “package” that the new message brings. Discussing philosophies of religions early in the twentieth century, Emile Durkheim proposed that the *dichotomy of sacred and profane* was a cultural universal.³⁵ Although this universality may not be as comprehensive as Durkheim suggested, the worldview of countless people groups around the world does indeed contain such dichotomy.

Another possible reason behind the Xerente acceptance of Western music could be that the new believers themselves (or those at least listening in to consider the gospel) felt that the other musical styles were too closely related to their traditional religion to be utilized in God’s service. This is not an unusual occurrence among converts who sense that many of their old customs are not compatible with a committed Christian life. Alternatively, it could be that the missionaries had gained the respect of the population to such degree, that they were willing to trust their musical choices, even if they felt their traditional music would have been more conducive to their worship expression.

When Western music genres were first introduced, the Xerente may not have held certain

³⁴ Mattos, *ibid.*

³⁵ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (Dover Publications, 1915), 37.

artistic features of their own culture in high regard. Furthermore, when encountering what appeared to them to be of a higher nature, they may have begun to lose interest in their own music. It is possible that they developed a greater appreciation and enjoyment for the new songs than they had for their own traditional songs.³⁶ The rhythmic patterns, the harmony, and many other musical elements found in the new genres could have had a personal appeal to a good number of individuals and could have been catalysts for a change of “musical taste” or preference in that society. A potential low view of their own cultural arts, or at least of their musical vocabulary, at the point of contact, could have been a factor in this presumed “taste shift.” In fact, societies that come under the political or social pressure of another society naturally struggle with the value of their own cultural identity.

One appealing factor in the foreign songs could have simply been the very newness of the music. According to Pastor Rinaldo’s account, the presumably limited musical repertoire of the Xerente had some beginning in a distant past and may have contained few new creations. Arts specialists around the world have observed that preservation and revitalization of a musical repertoire or style of minority ethnic groups can be very difficult when the community does not produce new songs or instrumental pieces. Considering the need for new music creations among people groups facing this dilemma, Todd Saurman, who describes the cultural identity crisis among the Tampuan people in Cambodia in his doctoral dissertation, suggests that new creations, coupled with some important internal attitudes and processes of transmission, are necessary for an artistic revitalization process to take place.³⁷ Among the Xerente Christians, the development of new compositions in traditional genres is the expressed desire of their friend and mentor, Pastor Rinaldo, who continues to look for a revitalization of the cultural musical inheritance.

Pr. Rinaldo recalls that years into the Mission’s ministry, people in the church became more interested in preserving their own cultural styles for Christian purposes. The Baptist missionaries had gradually recognized the value of cultural preservation and had discussed it with the church people through the years. Since the 1980s, several musicians have successfully attempted to compose Christian songs in one of the Xerente styles (Mattos). Pastor Rinaldo believes, however, that the moment to create their own hymnody in Xerente style is still to come

³⁶ I-to Loh, **Hymnal Companion to Sound the Bamboo: Asian Hymns in Their Cultural and Liturgical Contexts**, (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2011), KL 3731. Kindle Edition.

³⁷ Todd Wayne Saurman, **Singing for Survival in the Highlands of Cambodia: Revitalization of Music as Mediation and Cultural Reflexivity**. (Dissertation, Chiang Mai University, 2013).

and remains hopeful that the time may be soon. As a step in this direction, fellow ethnomusicologist Heber Negrão and I began a process of addressing revitalization of traditional styles and sparking new creations among Xerente Christian musicians in July of 2017. During an eight-day course, a group of about twelve Xerente musicians gathered in a village deep in their territory, received training in the Biblical foundations of music, and took part in a music-creation workshop. They gave clear indications that they wish to value their traditional musical heritage. Early during the workshop, they requested to have a short service during which they dedicated to the Lord the traditional *Zâ*, the percussion instrument that only the village shamans used in their traditional culture. Nevertheless, the Christian musicians also gave evidence of having a multi-faceted and pluralistic perception of music in their community. The songs (or new lyrics to traditional Xerente songs) which they created in the course of that week seemed to always call for the keyboardist and guitarist to add Western harmony, a characteristic that would not have been found in their songs decades ago.

Present Day Xerente Christian Music: A Complex Integration of Elements

Around the world, after decades and even centuries of employing musical forms originating from outside the community, such forms and their derivatives become standard for Christian worship. They become *integrated into these cultures*. Thus, generations arising after the introduction of outside musical elements are predisposed to accept them as their own and may view all artistic forms they experience in their early life as part of their identity. The two sources (inside and outside) may not be perceived as opposites, but any genre to which they are exposed—including those resulting from a fusion of elements—can be genuinely *theirs*.

At present, there are concurrent musical preferences among the various Xerente village churches. Some musicians have tended to adopt the popular northeastern Brazilian style known as *Forró*. When asked by Pastor Rinaldo why they do not write songs in their Xerente style, certain musicians reply that their traditional songs are too slow, and that the people now want more movement. Pastor Rinaldo expressed doubts about that evaluation, but he, as customary, respectfully allows the Xerente musicians to make their own choices.³⁸ Regarding this preference for faster movement, it could very well be that the leading musicians' preferences are becoming the standard styles primarily because they are empowered to utilize them and make the

³⁸ Mattos, Personal Communication.

congregation's choices for them. There may be a variety of ideas within one single church that would lean towards another musical direction, but the people who hold different opinions may not be able to make these choices, or their sentiments may simply be disregarded.

Some Ethnodoxologists, as well as other supporters of contextualization efforts, may lament a cultural direction towards a fusion of elements from the local indigenous tradition with those of Western genres. As human experience, history, and Anthropology attest, however, *cultures do change*. This fact is also manifested in the development of Christianity. Dr. Swee Hong Lim of Emmanuel College in Toronto explains, "Christianity, like culture, is not static: it is shaped by a myriad of sociocultural forces, and as it grows its roots in the culture, its outlook and expression will change."³⁹ When we contemplate the cultural transformation which has taken place throughout known history and the various ways in which customs and artistic forms penetrated or modified an earlier culture, both within and without the church, it may be unreasonable to expect a community that has already adopted and incorporated Western musical elements to decide suddenly to discard them all. After all, they now belong to *their* own cultural tradition! Authors who have surveyed Christian artistic development in other parts of the world, as in Asia for instance, confirm this observation and demonstrate the presence of practically all of the above-mentioned predispositions and factors among the Eastern people groups.⁴⁰ Any or many of them may also have been determinant in the case of the Xerente Church.

The existence of a fusion of musical elements can be easily verified in the Xerente Christian community. Those early musical choices, as well as subsequent ones along the way, have in fact helped to shape the musical character of the Xerente church into its present form. The shape remains fluid and may yet incorporate further Xerente traditional characteristics as its community develops a genuine hymnody. Although one could take a purist approach to culture and prefer to eliminate everything that has been "recently" imported (anywhere from days to decades), the present complex character of a community will likely continue to be accepted communally as authentic.

Further Reflection on the Place of the Arts in Mission

³⁹ Lim, Swee Hong. "Forming Christians through Musicking in China." **Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute**, 2017, 7. www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/8/4/50/html. (accessed August 18, 2018)

⁴⁰ Loh, *ibid.*, 3731; John F. Butler, **Christian Art in India**, (The Christian Literature Society, 1986), 117-118; Daniel Johnson Fleming, **Heritage of Beauty** (Friendship Press, 1937), 55.

Pastor Rinaldo's report on the Mission's experience with the Xerente presents a picture that does not correspond to my original expectations concerning the Mission's early musical choices. The structured, premeditated guidelines one might have expected to find are seemingly absent in this case. Although up to this point the comprehension of music's value in Church environments has been assumed and the question has focused on the motivations and reasons behind the stylistic choices in this specific people group, perhaps further reflection should take place. In view of the frequent lack of intentionality in the use of music and the arts for Christian worship in the history of missions, it would be appropriate to inquire how the missional community should address the place of arts in the total mission of God. A variety of nuances exist in the relationship between the value of artistic expression and the value of the propositional and expository "preaching" of the Word. Although music and the arts have been present throughout the history of Jewish and Christian worship traditions, their value and position have been perceived in various ways depending on cultural context, religious tradition, and numerous other factors. The study of Scripture demonstrates God's use of the arts to reveal Himself, including oral-verbal forms, music, drama, sculpture, and architecture. Yet the perception of the value and place of artistic expression—in the case at hand, music—in Christian worship and mission has often relegated it to an aspect of decoration rather than to an integral and indispensable medium of communication. Missionary and ethnomusicologist Roberta King addresses this dilemma specifically in the context of worship. She describes it as being "on the sidelines or on the edge of society"⁴¹ and that "it can be at the heart of society."⁴² On the other hand, positive changes are taking place:

I find in contemporary society, in this postmodern age, [that] music is becoming a major vehicle for communicating a message. We have had a tendency to say there's only one form that is valid for worship. Really, there is only one God whom we worship—and many forms can help us to worship, depending on what our backgrounds are and what our musical language is.⁴³

So, it could be argued that music, as well as other artistic forms of expression, does not simply serve as the "icing on the cake" of a carefully planned worship service, nor is it some form of expression without substantial value. It is, or at least can be, a powerful, effective,

⁴¹ Russell G. Shubin, "Worship That Moves the Soul: A Conversation with Roberta King," **Mission Frontiers**, vol. II, issue II, June 2001, 12-13.

⁴² Shubin, *ibid.*, 12-13.

⁴³ Shubin, *ibid.*, 12-13.

formative, and lasting communicator of the truths of the Christian faith.

When one recognizes the communicative value of artistic expression as suggested above, musical choices for worship settings are more likely to become intentional. Absent at the early stages of earlier missionary projects, *intentionality of musical choices* could have played a key role in the development of a “native” hymnody in multiple instances across the world. Later results do not need to necessarily be critically evaluated as good or bad at this point. The early and on-going artistic choices, however, and the value attributed or denied to the local culture, do ultimately affect the development of the Christian community receiving the mission. In the Baptist Mission with the Xerente, an intentional dismissal of the local arts due to erroneous preconceived philosophies would have likely damaged the relationship with the population. By the same token, an intentional but uncritical attitude towards anything in the local culture could have damaged the message of the Gospel. On the other hand, an intentional esteem of the potential of local cultural arts to communicate with God and humans, combined with a Spirit-led, critical contextualization approach towards the evaluation of artistic forms for worship and for the proclamation of the Gospel, could have possibly avoided the creation of cultural barriers against the gospel message that are still in place, particularly among the older members of the Xerente population.⁴⁴

Many of the authors who have written about the purpose and need of arts in Christian worship in the last decades, would likely admit readily to a process of learning and growth they have experienced. Pastor Rinaldo, serving as a spokesman for the Baptist missionaries among the Xerente, readily acknowledges their lack of clear guidelines for musical choices at the early stages, but also looks forward in hope that a native Christian hymnody will exist someday. This essay represents an effort to signpost a plainer path for those entering cross-cultural mission, as well as for those who are disposed to have a similar “great awakening” to that of Pastor Rinaldo.

Looking towards future research, the question of foundational guidelines for the use of music in evangelical mission endeavors among indigenous people groups in Brazil or anywhere else in the world could possibly encounter similar answers as the ones uncovered in this instance. Perhaps, in view of the absence of settled foundations for musical choices at the early stages of the Baptist mission among the Xerente, further projects among other people groups should begin with open questions regarding musical perception among the host people group, a study of their own traditional arts, and an examination of the missionary views of artistic expressions for

⁴⁴ Guenther Krieger, Personal Communication.

worship and mission. The answers are likely to display a complex panorama of arts and mission interaction in Brazil, but one that would hopefully energize the growing desire among indigenous Christians to offer their authentic arts in worship to God.

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