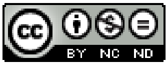
[Article] **Languages of Worship: Four Liturgical Theologies**



GLENN STALLSMITH

Glenn Stallsmith earned his Th.D. (Doctor of Theology) degree at the Divinity School at Duke University, where he studied Liturgy and Theology and the Arts. His dissertation focused on a theology of corporate prayer. Glenn is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, in full connection with the North Carolina Annual Conference. He serves as the pastor of Oxford United Methodist Church in Oxford, North Carolina. Before he was a pastor, Glenn worked as an ethnomusicology consultant in the Philippines.

In his *Confessions,* Augustine draws a contrast between the ways he learned two languages. Latin came first, and it was his mother tongue: "I learnt it with no fear or pain at all, from my nurses caressing me, from people laughing over jokes, and from those who played game and were enjoying them" (Augustine 2009, I.xiv.23). By contrast, his second language, Greek, was acquired through the labor of a student, an assigned subject in school. Augustine found Greek a chore, and being forced to read the odes and epics of Homer made Augustine regard them as "means of fearful and cruel punishments" (Ibid.).

This article is about liturgical theologies, which are acquired in ways that are not unlike the methods of learning languages. As with the view of the world that is created by a person's primary language, each Christian has a liturgical mother tongue—that is, a primary lens through which they understand their own and others' worship practices. That first liturgical language is likely to form a fundamental theological framework that remains, shaping the way one thinks about encountering God. Like learning a second language, it is possible to acquire additional theologies of worship, even to become fluent in them. Just as adding a second language can help a person better understand the logic of a first language, learning a second theological framework can uncover tacit assumptions that lie behind one's theology of worship. These biases are often hidden in plain sight, like the grammatical structures of a first language that few people interrogate. Many ethnodoxologists have learned additional languages and in doing so have gained helpful perspectives on their own mother tongues. This article is meant to help spark a similar process when it comes to liturgical theology.

In this article, I'm discussing theologies *of* worship. This is neither the only way—nor necessarily the best way—to construe the relationship between worship and theology. Many liturgical theologians, in fact, argue that parsing worship from theology constitutes a major categorical error. David Fagerberg (1992), Alexander Schmemann (1966), and Aidan Kavanagh (1984) all argue, in their respective ways, that worship *is* theology. They assume that the study of liturgy is necessarily a theological pursuit, and therefore theologians must not ignore the rites and practices involved in the church's worship.[1] They assert, for instance, that the first Christians did not see theology and worship as distinct endeavors; the apostles would not have placed these pursuits as separate courses within a seminary curriculum. Consider the claim attributed to fifth-century Prosper of Aquitaine: *ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*. Often translated, "the law of belief is constituted by the law of prayer," it reveals that early and ancient Christians viewed their beliefs through their prayers, and worship itself created the structure through which people sustained and developed doctrines about God. Beginning in the late Middle Ages

[1] "Therefore the science of liturgics cannot fail to be a theological science by its very character and purpose; and theology as a whole cannot do without the science of liturgics" (Schmemann 1966, 18).

the role of theology vis-à-vis worship became more systematized, eventually resulting in the two being construed as separate, if related, endeavors. In trying to correct this error, Fagerberg, Schmemann, and Kavanagh argue that the experiences of everyday worshipers are as much a part of theology as systematics. According to Kavanagh especially, worship *is* theology for Christians, most of whom pray together on a regular basis but will never open a book of systematic theology.[2]

For the purposes of the article, I assume a distinction between the categories of worship and theology. These four "liturgical languages" are theologies of worship, each with a set of theological assumptions that affect how their practitioners in fact worship. This relationship between worship and theology is not dissimilar to the distinction between language and linguistics. Like Augustine, we all encounter our first language before thinking systematically about how it is structured. Indeed, many people live their entire lives without referring to a dictionary or style guide, because such books contain systematized descriptions of what a native speaker knows tacitly. Here I am taking a perspective akin to that of a "liturgical linguist," explaining and systematizing experiences of worship that are rarely reduced to writing. These liturgical languages are attempts to uncover the theological assumptions driving four approaches to worship. The four categories in this article are presented autobiographically, tracing a chronology of my own experiences as an ethnodoxologist. I begin with my mother tongue: Gap Worship, based on theories of contextualization I learned from my earliest days as a Christian. Then I move to Gift Worship, a perspective originating in pentecostal circles that I encountered in my consulting work in the Philippines. I was then introduced to Biblical Worship, the third language, during my graduate studies in ethnomusicology at an evangelical university. Finally, Sacramental Worship represents the perspective I imbibed while studying liturgy at a mainline Protestant divinity school.

Gap Worship

The names of my first two liturgical theologies come from Lim Swee Hong and Lester Ruth, who organized their history of the Contemporary Praise and Worship (CPW) movement around two primary historical themes. In their book *A History of Contemporary Praise and Worship*, Lim and Ruth (2021) describe two primary sources of liturgical theology that led to the development of the phenomenon they call contemporary praise and worship.[3] The "Gap" language views worship as a means for building bridges between church and society. In short, worship is seen as a way to draw unchurched people into Christian fellowship and discipleship. This perspective assumes that the church's primary job is to lower the barriers to entry for people who are not currently Christians. The gap to be overcome is a cultural one, and the role of worship is to lessen the dissonances that unknown languages and music systems might create.

The Gap liturgical language assumes that worship can and should be structured in ways that accommodate understanding and comprehension. Like all the liturgical languages explored here, Gap worship has an underlying theological framework. Its key scripture verse is 1 Corinthians 9:22b: "I have become all things to all people, that I

[2] For Kavanagh the lived theology from the pew is more important than the formulations of the academy. He created a prototypical worshiper called "Mrs. Murphy." Mrs. Murphy and her pastor are just as attuned to the realities of God as any systematic theologian. Indeed, they have a front row seat of sorts: "Their theological capacity and discourse are nonetheless real for all this, and both lie closer to the reality which is faith than does the theological ability and discourse of those who practice analysis by concept and proposition in a scientific manner. Mrs. Murphy and her pastor do not fail to be theologians at the point where the seminary professor who taught the pastor succeeds in being one" (Kavanagh 1984, 146).

[3] The authors have intentionally melded two separate labels—"contemporary worship" and "praise and worship"—to show that this movement is built on the merger of two separate theological perspectives.

might by all means save some" (NRSV). The Christian's freedom from specific forms of worship is a prevalent theme among people who speak this liturgical language. Thus, liturgy is viewed as something that should be adapted so that it might be understandable to those outside the congregation. This creates, often even requires, a freedom from prescribed forms.

This is my own liturgical mother tongue. I grew up as a United Methodist, and like most mainline Protestants in the 1980s and 90s, I witnessed my denomination losing the battle for cultural relevance. We may have jettisoned the King James Version of the Bible for a more contemporary-sounding translation, but many of our songs remained outdated, both in terms of antiquated language ("How Great *Thou* Art") and instrumentation. I am among the cadre of Generation X worshipers who came of age when "seeker sensitive" services were introduced, which included relaxed dress codes, song styles that matched the Top-40 sounds we listened to on the radio, and guitars instead of organs (Hamilton 1999).

The narratives I heard from my United Methodist pastors—those who were interested in worship reform, anyway—assumed that the church's acts of worship needed to look more like popular culture. We read in the New Testament a call for a clean break from the worship of the Old Testament; the Israelites were bound by prescribed rituals and sacrifices, but Christians ought to be free to find new forms of worship. The general absence of prescriptive verses about worship in the New Testament provided rationale that we should find and adapt cultural forms that would be most effective at winning unbelievers. We also read church history through Gap-informed lenses, convinced of the need for contextualization. We talked, for instance, about sixteenth-century Protestant reformer Martin Luther, valorizing his attempts to set Christian hymn texts to secular tunes. (We even perpetuated the historically dubious assertion that Luther's "bar tunes" were drinking songs—that is, sung in bars—rather than being performed in a regular rhythmic pattern of measures separated by bars.) We reminded ourselves that the brothers John and Charles Wesley sparked a spiritual revival through robust congregational singing of easy-to-learn songs.[4] Congregations like Willow Creek Community Church became pilgrimage sites for those who wanted to draw unchurched people to services through popular music. These megachurches taught that well-produced music experiences would result in more conversions as people were convinced of the truth of the gospel via easy-to-hear forms.

When I joined SIL International, an organization that promotes minority languages, I gained additional fluency in Gap liturgical theology. In the early 2000s, the ethnomusicology training I received was based on principles of bridging cultures. The training materials included 1 Corinthians 9:22 and a variation of William Booth's rhetorical question: "Why should the devil have all the good music?" Like my United Methodist friends, these ethnomusicologists believed that evangelism was mostly about translation. They assumed that if the message of the gospel could be communicated in understandable ways, thus removing unnecessary barriers related to language and culture, then people would flock to Christian congregations. They were also influenced by a desire to reverse colonialist domination that threatened to extinguish local music forms. There was a shared conviction that each person has the right to worship God in their first language, free from the burden to learn a related tongue, much less a national or international language.

[4] The use of popular music forms was also a crucial part of William and Catherine Booth's founding of the Salvation Army. William saw the use of music as a spiritual and strategic tool: "I rather enjoy robbing the devil of his choicest tunes, and, after his subjects themselves, music is about the best commodity he possesses. It is like taking the enemy's guns and turning them against him" (quoted in Dowley 2011, 173).

Several years into my ethnodoxology work, around the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, I began to notice that our strategies aligned closely with other ministries built on a Gap mindset. Our approach as ethnodoxologists, for instance, had certain resonances with the church growth principles espoused by missiologist Donald McGavran. McGavran's primary mission experience was in India, where speakers of minority languages often accessed the faith only through other languages. Out of this context he formed the homogeneous unit principle, which assumed that people prefer to worship with others who are like them—that is, those who speak the same language or dialect and sing the same kinds of songs (MacGavran 1990). Our ethnodoxology principles tended to align with these ideas, because we also assumed that most speakers of minority language communities were already geographically sorted into homogeneous congregations. This was certainly the case in the mountainous areas of the northern Philippines where I conducted most of my fieldwork. For monolingual communities—or at least for those in which everyone shared a common language—it made sense for worship to be conducted in that tongue. But North American church planters who followed McGavran's ideas tweaked the homogeneous unit principle, using it as justification to create new congregations who not only spoke the same language but also had similar income levels and class strata.[5]

Ethnodoxology has never been such a major influence in the church as to catch the attention of most megachurch pastors. So, while those congregations did not coopt our strategies, shared similarities made for interesting convergences. As the church growth principles of several prominent North American congregations became the gold standard for planting new churches, an unwitting alignment seemed to develop between ethnodoxologists and McGavran's emulators. Meaning, I have found that it has always been relatively easy to convince other speakers of Gap about the necessity of sharing the gospel through locally meaningful forms of worship. In other words, pastors who were sensitive to variations in demographics, and shifted worship forms to capture the attention of those people they deemed most desirable, were easily convinced of the efficacy of ethnodoxology as a mission strategy. It makes sense to them that new songs, composed in the languages and musical styles of a specific culture group, can be used as primary tools for evangelism. I believe that our shared fluency in Gap Worship, due to a common liturgical theology, creates a natural affinity between ethnodoxologists and entrepreneurial church planters.

Gift Worship

In their history of contemporary praise and worship, Lim and Ruth identified a second branch that became prominent in the Latter Rain revival in the middle of the twentieth century. Guided by a specific interpretation of Psalm 22:3 ("But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel," KJV), the leaders of this pentecostal movement taught that corporate worship can summon the presence of God. The initial instances of the phenomenon were not particularly connected to music, but the movement quickly began to see the singing of congregational songs as the primary means for manifesting God's presence. In short, the praises of the gathered people, taking the form of "praise and worship" songs, led worshipers closer to God. The operational theology here teaches that worship is given by God as a means to experience this divine presence, hence the name "Gift" to describe this perspective.

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[5] The most explicit example comes from Willow Creek Community Church, which created a profile of a middle-aged, middle-income White man from the Chicago suburbs: Unchurched Harry. Most of the worship programming in that congregation in the 1970s and 80s centered on attempts to attract and retain people who fit that cultural profile. "Unchurched Harry" was imagined as a college-educated professional between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five, who was "the person . . . in his family room—feet upon the footstool, reading the paper, watching TV, a can of beer in hand" (Pritchard 1994, 11).

Versions of this teaching spread throughout churches in North America, reaching well beyond Latter Rain networks and into other pentecostal circles. Series of conferences and seminars taught this liturgical theology to worship leaders, and it became the default theology of various denominations and movements.[6] A signature of this approach, one that spread into many forms of contemporary worship settings, is the sonic distinction between praise and worship as separate categories of song. While worshiping with congregations in the Philippines, I first encountered the structural forms that resulted from these underlying theological commitments. Praise, understood as a style of exuberant singing that comes at the beginning of a worship service, focuses on who God is and what God has done. Worship songs, distinct from praise songs, follow later in a music set; they are slower in tempo and more lyrically introspective. The worship leaders I met in the Philippines spoke explicitly about this distinction, with each song in their sets fitting one category or the other.

I learned only later, thanks to the research of Lim and Ruth, that this progression grew out of the Latter Rain theology of presence; it was originally about more than slowing down the tempo to prepare worshipers for an extended sermon. There is instead an operational typology at work that imagines worship in the Old Testament tabernacle (or temple, depending on your tradition) as a map of the movement from praise to worship. This worship journey progresses from the outer courts of praise and thanksgiving (cf. Psalm 100:4) to the Holy of Holies of quieter forms of worship, and the progression of pre-sermon singing from faster to slower tempos is intentionally programmed to guide a congregation on this path (Ottaway 2022).

The Gift language lives today but is rarely expressed in a pure form as articulated by its Latter Rain originators. As shown in the historical account of Lim and Ruth, the phenomenon of contemporary worship in the twenty-first century is the result of a merging of Gift and Gap liturgical theologies. Even by the time I encountered this praise-then-worship style of programing twenty years ago, it had already been mostly separated from the original tabernacle/temple typology. I did find, however, that many Gift-based assumptions remained, especially among Christians aligned with charismatic or pentecostal movements. For instance, many saw the contemporary worship song repertoire itself as a blessing from God. That is, they believed God had sanctioned this entire genre of songs. Their evidence for this claim was the fact that contemporary worship songs—usually following a standard verse-chorus-bridge structure, and produced by a relatively small group of songwriters—have seemingly taken over a large portion of the repertoire shared by much of the global church.[7] This sonic and cultural standardization, seen by some as a blessing—that is, the advent of a universal musical language—confounded my ethnodoxology sensibilities when I first confronted them more than twenty years ago.

Those who advocate for the liturgical use of local cultural expressions are inclined to view this cultural and sonic consolidation not as a move of the Holy Spirit but as the outworking of capitalist power flows. Cultural products from rich nations, fueled by record companies and influential megachurch congregations, eradicate opportunities for local songs to take root, especially those from congregations with fewer resources. It is curious that these supposedly anointed contemporary worship songs come from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, even while most of the growth in the church is happening in Asia, South America, and Africa. Many ethnodoxologists, myself included, oppose this kind of musical colonialism, seeing it as a threat that needs to be

[6] For an account of how this liturgical theology spread through worship conferences see Perez (2021). For a look at the influence of charismatic Protestants on Catholic renewal movements, see Kangas (2020). The reach of these seminars also extended beyond the United States. See Stallsmith (2021), 708.

[7] For an analysis of shared lyrical and musical features of contemporary worship songs, see Ruth (2015). For a study about the consolidation taking place in the industry, see Perez et al. (2023).

curtailed. In the words of Vida Chenoweth, we need to "spare them Western music" (Chenoweth 1984). I have always thought it naïve to assume that super-national cultural products from the West are a benign force. That assumption carries its own embedded theology, one that implies that God requires a cultural conversion to new linguistic and musical structures in addition to a spiritual one. This clearly contradicts my own liturgical mother-tongue instincts to respect one's cultural heritage through the contextualization of the gospel message.

Biblical Worship

After working in the Philippines for a few years, I began an MA program in ethnomusicology at Bethel University. In one of my required courses, Biblical Principles of Worship, I learned another worship language spoken by many evangelicals: Biblical Worship. This liturgical language is more like a family of related dialects than a discrete language of its own. I will refer to it in the singular, though it is probably best considered a set of related systems that share key resemblances. The most fundamental shared commitment, stretched across all its dialects, is an understanding that the Bible itself contains all the necessary instructions to guide the church's worship. Modes of interpretation differ among those who speak this liturgical language, but the common denominator the application of so-called scriptural principles, an approach that assumes the Bible teaches relatively straightforward lessons about worship that extend to today's contexts.

Some speakers of Biblical Worship, for instance, make much of the encounters between God and the Israelites during their journey from Egypt to the promised land. The fashioning of the golden calf in Exodus 32 is understood as more than a historical account of the Israelites' struggles with syncretism, and a Biblical Worship method of interpretation teaches that this account still holds meaning for today. Although relatively few Christians now are tempted to build and worship statutes of God's creatures, some speakers of Biblical Worship claim that the temptation of idolatry is alive and well; only now that idolatry involves replacing the worship of God by other life pursuits. Those replacements could be anything from golfing on Sunday morning (and not attending worship) to spending one's tithe on a vacation trip. These ways of reading treat the Bible as a living and active liturgical document, one that continues to provide direction for worshipers in ever-changing cultural contexts.

Vernon Whaley is speaking Biblical Worship when he comments on another aspect of the Exodus account in his 2013 book *Called to Worship*. For Whaley, Moses's tent of meeting, as described in Exodus 33, serves as an example of how modern-day Christians can experience the presence of God. Though he does not expect his readers to build actual tents, he implores them to find their own metaphorical meeting places where they can encounter God.[8] Worship, in Whaley's reading of scripture, is more than a shared set of corporate practices. These divine instructions to Moses also speak to today's readers, forming a set of guidelines for creating personal and individual times alone with God. Worship, therefore, becomes a wider category of experience which includes a set of private and internal attitudes. Worship as an "all of life" activity is a common theme among Biblical Worship speakers, especially those who have inherited pietistic traditions that prioritize one's internal dispositions.[9] For them, worship also includes interior work that one does alone. Worship, as an all-of-life activity, begins in the heart.

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[8] "Where is your Tent of Meeting? Do you have a special somewhere to commune with the Lover of your soul? If not, I can't emphasize it enough: you must find a place to get alone with God, a place where you can hide away and find Him when your soul longs for His company" (Whaley 2009, 82).

[9] Romans 12:1 serves as a primary interpretive text: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship" (NRSVUE). For many speakers of Biblical Worship, the everyday nature of offering a "living sacrifice" includes much more than corporate liturgical

This method of gleaning the Bible for modern-day applications can happen from quite different interpretive perspectives. One such difference can be seen when it comes to construing the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. David Peterson, in his book *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, argues that worship in the Old Testament is a shadow of the full concept that Jesus inaugurated (Peterson 1992, 98). To Peterson, the entire concept of worship itself undergoes a transformation in the New Testament, forming a break from the ritual of cultic sacrifice that was centered at the temple in Jerusalem.[10] The purpose of the ministry of Jesus Christ, in Peterson's view, was not so much to improve upon the ancient Hebrew liturgical practices but rather to reorient how we think about worship itself: "Jesus did not come to destroy Judaism, but to bring it to its desired end in the worship of the new age" (Peterson 1998, 101). Jesus promised worship "in spirit and in truth" in John 4, and Peterson sees this as a call to reimagine the entire concept. By contrast, Daniel I. Block's *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (2014) treats Old Testament cultic prescriptions as foundational texts for Christian worship practices. He traces a consistent line of thought through both testaments, one that is completed in, not interrupted by, the ministry of Jesus and his apostles.[11] Whether viewing the Old Testament as a positive example or, in Peterson's case, as a foil, speakers of Biblical Worship glean from the Bible the primary principles for constructing worship practices, both those that take place individually and those that happen corporately.

While it might seem relatively straightforward to state that the Bible itself is the best guide for Christian worship, such differences in interpretation reveal that these claims are not so easily sustained. There are a variety of ways to read the scriptures, and one's cultural and denominational backgrounds play an integral part in determining what passages are given priority. Block and Peterson are ultimately not that far apart in their views; both are squarely in the range of orthodox Christian claims about the role of the Old Testament. Theirs is not, however, an insignificant difference when it comes to formulating a theology of worship. For anyone who speaks Biblical Worship as their primary liturgical language, the role of the first testament in their perspective is consequential. The point of this essay is to highlight the assumptions that everyone brings to their respective theologies. Even when one claims that their starting point is the Bible's role as worship guide, there are still prior (often tacit) assumptions that direct how those scriptures should be interpreted. Those assumptions may range from beneficial to benign to harmful, but they all ought to be examined, especially when one is engaged in cross-cultural ministry.

In my experience, many ethnodoxologists are fluent in Biblical Worship language, even when, as in my case, it is not their first. The appeal of the Biblical Worship approach is found in its direct application of the scriptures, a move which aligns with the practical nature of much ethnodoxology work. For instance, when I returned to the Philippines following my Biblical Principles of Worship class at Bethel, I led many workshops on the Bible's lessons about worship. In the evangelical churches I worked with, no one questioned the assumption that the scriptures should serve as a set of prescriptions, even in the twenty-first century. It was only when I enrolled in a course of

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gatherings.

[10] "What the New Testament says about worship, however, also sometimes stands in stark contrast to the perspectives of the Old Testament. Despite the continuity between the Testaments, the gospel demands a transformation of many of the traditional categories and patterns of worship. History shows that Christians have sometimes wrongly applied Old Testament terms and concepts to the church and different aspects of Christian worship" (Peterson, 1998, 24).

[11] "When we explore the forms of ancient Israelite worship and their underlying theology, we discover a remarkable continuity of perspective between the Testaments. Jesus does not declare the old theology obsolete; rather, in him the theology underlying Israelite worship finds its fulfillment" (Block, *For the Glory of God*, 7).

theological study that I confronted a different way of thinking about the fundamentals of worship, one that forced me to question these sets of interpretive lenses I had acquired.

Sacramental Worship

At Duke Divinity School, where I earned the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Theology degrees, I learned a new liturgical language that I had not encountered during my work in the Philippines. It was everywhere in that country, but my affiliations were nearly all with Protestants, not the Roman Catholics who speak this language fluently. Had I been in conversation with Roman Catholic Filipino liturgical scholars, I would have been introduced to this way of speaking about worship much sooner.

For speakers of the Sacramental Worship language, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper create a framework for understanding how all Christians should worship. Even if not all worship services include instances of baptism and Communion, they remain the prototypical liturgical acts that center all common life as Christians. The Lord's Supper plays an especially important role in how one discerns the meaning of a worship service, with the structure of the Communion liturgy itself creating a framework for understanding the gospel. The two central moves in the service carry much of that weight: preaching (word), followed by Communion (table). The tie between word and table provides an essential unity for understanding the economy of the good news: God's revelation precedes human response. If there is a central interpretative scripture for this worship language, it is likely the account of the resurrected Christ meeting with his disciples in Luke 24. Jesus spent the day explaining the scriptures to the two travelers, but they did not see him for who he was—that is, they did not grasp the nature of the resurrection—until that preaching was paired with the "breaking of the bread."[12]

Dom Gregory Dix's book *The Shape of the Liturgy* is a sustained argument that the structure of the liturgy is just as important as the actual words that are spoken.[13] Later scholars such Fagerberg, Schmemann, and Kavanagh, who were mentioned above, further developed this structuralist approach in their own respective ways. Each one argued that form is an integral part of the communicative content in liturgy. Gordon Lathrop, another structuralist, wrote in his book *Holy Things* that it is the cooccurrence, or juxtaposition, of various parts of liturgy that make worship meaningful.[14] Placing word next to table is therefore itself a statement of God's nature; God reveals truth first, then we respond. In this paralinguistic perspective, meaning is formed in ways that transcend the lexical definitions of the spoken (or sung) words. That is, according to these structuralist scholars, the form of liturgy itself communicates truth about God and transforms worshipers into more faithful disciples. While none of these authors falls into magical thinking about the efficacy of the sacraments, as if comprehensible teaching and preaching were optional, they place a great deal of weight on the communicative power of the form of Christian ritual. This is a cornerstone of Sacramental Worship liturgical theology.

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[12] Luke 24:28–35.

[13] "It is the sequence of the rite—the Shape of the Liturgy—which chiefly performs the eucharistic action itself, and so carries out the human obedience to the Divine command 'Do this'. It is the phrasing of the prayers which chiefly expresses the *meaning* attached to that action by the theological tradition of the church. Both are essential parts of eucharistic worship" (Dix 1945, 2).

[14] "Meaning occurs through structure, by one thing set next to another. The scheduling of the *ordo*, the setting of one liturgical thing next to another in the shape of the liturgy, evokes and replicates the deep structure of biblical language, the use of the old to say the new by means of juxtaposition" (Lathrop 1993, 33).

The pivotal historical moment for Sacramental Worship speakers was the middle of the twentieth century. The Liturgical Movement, which sought to renew worship through the recovery of ancient Christian documents, culminated in the Roman Catholic Church's reforms following Vatican II (Second Vatican Council 1964). As a result, mainline Protestant denominations followed in adapting their own liturgical documents, especially their eucharistic prayers, to reflect wording that they gleaned from these ancient Christian liturgical fragments. For this reason, one can attend the Lord's Supper in a wide variety of Protestant and Catholic congregations and hear Communion prayers that resemble each other. They are all attempting to line up with recovered eucharistic prayers from the first four centuries of Christianity.

Sacramental Worship is the primary language for liturgical scholars who hold faculty positions at mainline seminaries and who populate societies like the North American Academy of Liturgy and *Societas Liturgica*. In my experience, Sacramental Worship is the liturgical language least spoken among ethnodoxologists, mostly because structuralism counters, or at least complicates, the priority on the written and preached Word shared by evangelicals. Structuralism also runs up against the strong bias toward explicit linguistic meanings that is held by ethnodoxologists.

Personally, I have found that Sacramental Worship is the most difficult worship language to reconcile with my Gap Worship mother tongue. This is especially true when it comes to my pragmatic instincts, which focus on how changes to worship might increase attendance and reduce cultural dissonances. In my dissertation, I attempted to bring the ancient theological worldview of St. Augustine to bear on the church growth principles that were played out in the worship of an American evangelical megachurch (Stallsmith 2022). I struggled to find areas of overlap that could put these two speakers of different liturgical languages—Augustine's and those of that congregation's worship leaders—into conversation. Sacramental Worship carries an inherent idealism about the efficacy of liturgical structure that is almost always treated with some level of suspicion among speakers of Gap.

Conclusion: Speaking Other Languages

I wrote this article in the hope that others may learn from my experiences over the past twenty-five years. A sketch of the theological landscape like this would have helped me in my own teaching ministry in the Philippines. I began as a native speaker of the Gap worship language, with a desire to lower cultural barriers to the gospel. I wanted people to have access to songs in their language, because I thought they were entitled to them. Many of the churches I interacted with, however, had been influenced by the theological assumptions that undergirded much of pentecostal Christianity. These speakers of Gift wanted to receive the "best" or most "anointed" songs, regardless of linguistic or cultural impediments to understanding them. By this logic, it made sense that those songs were the English-language worship songs they could buy on CD and stream on YouTube. Now I better understand that those Christians believed something different about meaning itself. They held that there is more to meaningful worship than semantics or cultural associations; there was an understanding of power that accompanied their evaluation of songs. This underlying mismatch in liturgical languages accounted for some degree of distress when, at times, I would find myself facing people who were bemused by my mission to provide songs in their own language. They were rarely opposed to the idea, but they found my advocacy quaint. Perhaps if I had worked to formulate a more robust category of "meaning," one that incorporated some shared theological assumptions about how God works, I could have made a better case about the power of singing in one's mother tongue.

Many ethnodoxologists are fluent in Biblical Worship. In both the Gap and Biblical Worship languages, worship is meant to accomplish a task—that is, the conversion of the unbeliever—and the Bible is seen as a guidebook for discerning those strategies of liturgical evangelism. My recommendation to those who speak Biblical Worship is to interrogate the theological assumptions behind your chosen method of interpretation. There is not a neutral way to read the Bible, and each of us has a theology behind our method. Even a decision about how much to rely on the Old Testament is embedded in hundreds of years of the church's struggle about its history in relation to Jewish texts.

One of my personal regrets is that I did not expand beyond Protestant churches in my ethnodoxology work in the Philippines. If I had interacted with Roman Catholic liturgical scholars, such as Benedictine monk Anscar Chupungco, I would have learned more about the ongoing work of liturgical adaptation that was happening in my host country.[15] Not every ethnodoxologist, of course, works in a context in which the Sacramental liturgical language has a direct impact on their work. There is, however, a significant body of literature on worship written by historians and theologians who speak this language. An ethnodoxologist who consults, for instance, the ecumenical journals *Worship* or *Liturgy* will encounter writers from the liturgical guild, many of whom assume that meaning is made in the combination of actions and words. There are, however, areas of agreement between ethnodoxology and Sacramental Worship. Ethnodoxologists, even with their emphasis on the lexical meanings of spoken and written language, are also interested in how the totality of a person's lived experiences combine in a thick web of associations. The field of Ritual Studies, for instance, provides a natural bridge between liturgical scholars and social scientists interested in meaning-making in human activities.

Every way of worshiping is based on theology, which may or may not be explicitly stated. An ethnodoxologist would do well to learn the underlying structures that make sense of other people's experiences in worship. The places of difference need not create the pain and anxiety of Augustine's forays into Greek literature. Rather, they can be sites for creating questions that enliven one's fieldwork and teaching ministry.

[15] See, for example, Chupungco (1992).

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