

# [Article] What Is the Right Kind of Worship . . . If You Want North American Congregations to Sing Global Songs?

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## Introduction

The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.

Edward W. Said (1994, xiii)

The question about what is the right kind of worship to sing global songs addresses the relationship between the practice of worship and global songs set in the context of North America. Within these parameters, it is important to recognize the postcolonial ethical dimension of this question, highlighted by Marissa Glynnias Moore in her recent essay published in *The Hymn*. Insightfully, she noted that this musical practice is “fraught with ethical concerns” (2017, 9). Yet this has not curtailed the growth of this musical genre in North America as music leaders advocating this musical genre see their efforts as “a concrete way to invite the voices of all Christians into the worship space and to better represent the global church on a local scale” (Moore 2017, 9).

Global songs are not just temporal sonic artifacts, but they embody a meta-narrative about “the Other.” Therefore, in this essay I will redesignate global songs as songs of the Other. The concept of the Other is connected to postcolonial studies and depicted as a binary opposition, such as “Self – Other,” “Us – Them,” “First World – Third World,” “Powerful – Powerless,” “Local – Global,” and so forth. These verbal distinctions embody values. They speak of power dynamics that contrast “us” from “others,” and draw an insider/outsider boundary. “Global” in this instance is about the unfamiliar, unknown, and, more recently, unwelcome.

According to Afaf Ahmed Hasan Al-Saidi,

Binary opposition is the principle of contrast between two mutually exclusive terms, which argues that the perceived binary dichotomy between civilized/ savage has perpetuated and legitimized Western power structures favoring “civilized” white men. The existence of “binaries” within a text “acts to develop often powerful layers of meaning that work to maintain and reinforce a society or culture’s dominant ideologies.” (2014, 95, quoting Campsall 2009)

This concern is also expressed in the writings of postcolonial theologians Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, who ask,



Do the discourse, texts, symbols and imageries (of the hymns) perpetuate bondage and notions of empire? How do they represent Black peoples, ethnic minorities, the Other, gender and sexuality? What do symbols and language communicate *vis à vis* the agenda of empire/colonialism and the politics of location? When is inculturation and the appropriation of other people's songs and music another form of exploitation or a new kind of colonialism? (2011, 51–52)

From Latino Episcopalian liturgical scholar Juan M. C. Oliver's perspective, this attempt to incorporate global songs into North America speaks of "A project of the colonizing, dominant culture . . . a monocultural Anglo version of multiculturalism that wants to host, invite, and include" or incorporate "the other in otherwise Anglo realities and structures" (1996, 267). Equally critical is the reality that this music-making activity is taking place in North America, the epicenter and the lone superpower of the world, which many postcolonial scholars readily regard as *the* empire.

In eras past, empires desired dyes, spices, and minerals. Perhaps songs of the Other are now the in-demand resource. So, the church in North America has to grapple with this dilemma in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and ensure that its advocacy for songs of the Other is aligned to the Christian intrinsic ethos for justice and peace. Thus, we return to the nagging question that Jagessar and Burns asked: "How can these songs come alive in a transforming way and not sound patronizing" (2011, 64)?

It's important to note that this ethical concern about the Other is not merely the preoccupation of progressive Christianity. In fact, evangelical theologian Richard Mouw, in his book *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, clearly demonstrates the same concern about the relationship between Christianity and cultures. He asserts that

God's redeeming love reaches out to people from all tribes and nations. God was not satisfied to limit his covenant promises to the Hebrew people; he has called many nations to come and dwell in his City. . . . "The image of God" has a "corporate" dimension. That is, there is no one human individual or group who can fully bear or manifest all that is involved in the image of God, so that there is a sense in which that image is collectively possessed. The image of God is, as it were, parceled out among the peoples of the earth. By looking at different individuals and the groups we get glimpses of different aspects of the full image of God. (2002, 83–84)

In this paper I propose that an expanded understanding of the concepts of *epiclesis* and *anamnesis* within the world of sacramental theology might mediate the ethical use of songs of the Other by the church in North America. The juxtaposition of epiclesis, proactivity of the Holy Spirit, with anamnesis, the faith community and its ministry, is an effective transformational agent for our congregations that helps to shape "right" worship.

## Avenue of Transformation: Epiclesis

In the realm of Christian worship, we see several avenues of divine–human encounters that speak of transformative moments. Chief among these are the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, in which earthly elements are transformed to be bearers of the divine, and the church is invited to participate so as to be revitalized. The invocation, “Pour out your Holy Spirit to bless this gift of water and those who receive it, to wash away their sin and clothe them in righteousness throughout their lives,” speaks of the water imbued by the Holy Spirit to transform those who wash in it (United Methodist Church 1992, 90). The transformation of people is equally explicit in the Eucharist. Consider this: “Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood” (United Methodist Church 1992, 38).

In recent years, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, also known as the epiclesis, has become rather ubiquitous in Christian worship. It is no longer restricted to the ritual domain of baptism or eucharist. As liturgical scholar Anne McGowan observes,

It is impossible to consider the risen Christ who gathers the Church together as his body without remembering the Holy Spirit, for the community which assembles in Christ’s name is bonded together in the fellowship of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who makes God’s word, proclaimed in that assembly, a living and active one in the lives of the faithful. (2014, 10)

Hence, she asserts,

Epiclesis is an explicit recognition of an implicit truth—that the Spirit mediates Christ’s grace and God’s love to human persons, enabling them to worship God as their origin and destiny and to minister with hope to the needs of a wounded world here and now. (2014, 11)

If we apply this concept to singing songs of the Other, then our perception of this musical genre changes. Instead of a genteel gesture by the dominant culture to accommodate the Other, it is now an expression of epiclesis—an act of God whereby the Holy Spirit takes center stage to transform all who sing its songs.

Through these songs and their singing, the Spirit of God transforms the community and enables it to influence its *sitz im leben* (setting in life), thereby fulfilling its purpose of ministry to the world. It is not too far-fetched to see a correlation between what is sung and the ministry enactment of the congregation, particularly if the maxim “we are what we sing” holds true.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “we are what we sing” is my adaptation of Albert van den Heuvel’s remark, when he wrote, “Tell me what you sing, and I’ll tell you who you are!” See van den Heuvel 1966, 6.

At the same time, through the music-making the Holy Spirit enfolds the singing community into a fellowship that includes the Other. Scripture reminds us,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12–13, NRSV)

Therefore, epiclesis via music-making crystalizes the one-ness. The songs are no longer songs of the Other but are our songs as well—particularly when we subscribe to the understanding of being united in the one Spirit. In this unity, the Other is family, not strangers, known not unknown, welcomed not rejected, and equally loved by God.

The prophetic challenge of loving and being identified with the Other is a rather serious challenge for North American congregations, especially in the present age in which nationalism is advocated at the expense of hospitality and compassion. In light of this nationalism at the expense of the Other, congregations need to decide how they might respond to St. Paul’s challenge in their music-making: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12: 2, NRSV) The use of songs of the Other in worship becomes patronizing and tokenistic when congregations sing them and yet resist their message, or when congregations remain inactive or reject efforts to explicitly stand with the Other.

### **Avenue of Transformation: Anamnesis**

By the rivers of *the empire* (Babylon)—  
there we sat down and there we wept  
when we remembered Zion.

<sup>2</sup> On the willows there  
we hung up our harps.

<sup>3</sup> For there our captors  
asked us for songs,  
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,  
“Sing us your *global songs!* [one of the songs of Zion!]”

<sup>4</sup> How could we sing the Lord’s song  
in a foreign land?

<sup>5</sup> If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand wither!

<sup>6</sup> Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not set Jerusalem  
above my highest joy. (paraphrased Psalm 137:1–6, NRSV)

Anamnesis is about juxtaposition, and it is in the liturgical enactment of juxtaposition that existential purpose is found. Gordon Lathrop explains,

A significant pattern is discoverable in the texts and practices of Christian worship. There is a design, an *ordo*, and it is one that is especially marked by juxtaposition as a tool of meaning. (1993, 79)

An important tenet of our faith is to remember what God has accomplished. This serves to energize our action. We remember our baptism so that we may fulfill our earthly purpose of resisting evil and being empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear faithful witness of the Gospel to the world. We continually participate in the Eucharist as an act of active remembrance until Jesus's return. Clearly, this recalling is not mere recollection of past events. It calls for our present-day commitment in view of future goals.

In anamnesis, the past, present, and future are juxtaposed. The linear concept of time is transposed. For a moment in time, eternity prevails through this liminality, as the community of the faithful remembers and then acts. Scripture, in Luke 24, offers an account of two disciples who experienced this on their way to Emmaus when Jesus met them. They walked, learned, and experienced community with Jesus as he revealed himself to them through the unfolding of anamnesis. What resulted is the action that they took: they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. Anamnesis is active remembering with an impetus for action.

Songs are not merely sonic artifacts; they facilitate memory and create community through nonmusical properties. Additionally, the temporality of songs is a suitable agency for anamnesis, even as it defines us. Through singing, we know who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. In this liminal setting, the community is constituted when individuals sing together. The juxtaposition of singing the songs of the Other in the land of the empire provides an opportunity to experience God's transformative power. In musically remembering the Other, the singing community acts to musically proclaim the narrative and ethos of the subaltern community. This subverts the imperial agenda, as its divisive binary of "us – them; insider – outsider" is confronted by God's loving "all are welcome" stance. This is the feast of God, where all are one. As Mouw asserts,

The church must be, here and now, a place into which the peoples of the earth are being gathered for new life. ...The Canons of Dort say that the gospel "ought to be declared and published to all nations, promiscuously and without distinction." . . . so the Christian community ought to be promiscuous in inviting people without regard for racial or ethnic or national identity, into the fellowship of God's redeemed people. (2002, 93)

## Characteristics of “Right” Worship

What is the “right” kind of worship if we want North American congregations to sing songs of the Other? I suggest that it is the kind of worship where both epiclesis and anamnesis have room to manifest their potency by engaging the faith community in its surroundings. It is crucial to understand that music-making for this genre is not about the authenticity of the performance practice. Rather, it is about ethical practice manifested in the embodiment of its narrative, the respect of its ethos, and the welcoming of the “stranger.” The “right” worship is worship that actively divests power from the empire to the subaltern—even in the choice of worship leadership. It is worship that endeavors to honor diversity at God’s table, recognizing that all are in one fellowship of the Spirit. This worship approach recognizes that diversity provides a clearer perspective into the realm of God, which has justice and peace as its hallmark.

Such worship calls for sonic hospitality. Is there room at the table for the Other, the stranger, the unknown, the unwelcome of the empire? Such response requires that the community practice proactive love for the Other. This accepting attitude can be seen in the attention to ethical practice regarding how the Other is represented or portrayed. Has the community sought to prioritize diversity in liturgical design, congregational life and leadership in order to stand in solidarity with the narrative and ethos of the Other? For monocultural settings, this calls for raising awareness of diversity and challenging sentiments of xenophobia and racism. In the present context of the United States, Mouw reminds us that

A theology that pays special attention to particularities of African-American history can be a healthy effort to articulate an understanding of the gospel that is free from the “white” interests and priorities and illusions that have for so long shaped, in both obvious and subtle ways, the thinking, life, and witness of the Christian community. This can be an important kind of preparation for the entry of many peoples into the transformed City. It is one significant exploration of “the glory and the honor of the nations” that will someday be received into the place that God has prepared for his people. It is a necessary program for guaranteeing that the cultural and theological wealth of the nations will not be dominated by patterns of prejudice. . . . This is one of those situations in which we can become less racially conscious only by becoming more conscious of the patterns of racial oppression. If “the glory and the honor” of white people is to be received into the transformed City, the patterns of white cultural life and theological reflection must be cleansed of the deep and long-standing influences of racism and ethnocentrism. (2002, 96)

In my seminary every significant community event, including corporate worship, begins with an anamnesis that defines our relationship with the Other. We begin by receiving the Statement of Acknowledgement of Traditional Land that reads,

We acknowledge this sacred land on which the University of Toronto operates. It has been a site of human activity for 15,000 years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations,

the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, the meeting place of Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory. We are also mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations. (Emmanuel College 2014)

The University of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board have adopted similar statements. These statements are proclaimed at the commencement of their official functions.

How might “right” worship practice anamnesis as part of its sonic hospitality? Is worship leadership suitably empowered to present these songs? Consider the song “Ouve, Deus de Amor” (figure 1), collected by Methodist composer Simeu Monteiro. How might it find its place in our North American worship, given that many South American tribes who knew this *Guaicuru* melody were exterminated by Europeans who came to conquer for God and King?

Lament has a place in “right” worship. In the midst of current North American Christianity—which seems to champion joyful praise at the expense of lament—songs of the Other help us remember (anamnesis) that Christian living is not about the pursuit of happiness but about the advocacy for justice and peace. It illuminates the empire’s blind spots. The “right” worship provides us an avenue to lament as we realize our shortcomings in fulfilling God’s mission, but it also challenges us to persevere as we are renewed. Mouw reminds us, “We prepare for life in the City when we work actively to bring about healing and obedience within the community of the people of God” (2002, 129).

Worship is “right” when the rippling effect of the lived experience of the transformed community influences the neighborhood. In this context, the lived experience of the faithful transcends the temporal worship act convened on Sunday morning, and the songs find their way into energizing the worshipers to live out their call in their life setting. Worship is holistic where the church stands with the Other, and where it welcomes, shelters, and advocates for them against the pushback from the empire.

Finally, the “right” worship is not about the worship format or about adopting a particular *ordo*. Rather, it is about the community being released as the Holy Spirit is poured forth, that “(we) may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.” For in that moment of epiclesis, the community remembers (anamnesis) as it seeks to fulfill its call, till Jesus comes again.

$\text{♩} = 120$

Portuguese: Ou - ve, Deus de\_a - mor, nos - so cla - mor!  
 Spanish: ¡O - ye, Dios de\_a - mor, nues - tro cla - mor!  
 English: Hear us, God of love! Hear this our cry!

Ou - ve, Deus de\_a - mor, nos - so cla - mor!  
 ¡O - ye, Dios de\_a - mor, nues - tro cla - mor!  
 Hear us, God of love! Hear this our cry!

Ou - ve, Deus de\_a - mor, ou - ve, Deus de\_a - mor,  
 O - ye, Dios de\_a - mor, o - ye, Dios de\_a - mor,  
 Hear us, God of love! Hear this our cry!

ou - ve, Deus de\_a mor, ou - ve, Deus de\_a - mor,  
 o - ye, Dios de\_a mor, o - ye, Dios de\_a - mor,  
 Hear us, God of love! Hear this our cry!

o nos - so cla - mor, o nos - so cla - mor.  
 nues - tro cla - mor, nues - tro cla - mor.  
 Hear our cry, we pray, hear our cry, we pray.

Ou - ve, Deus de\_a - mor, nos - so cla - mor!  
 ¡O - ye, Dios de\_a - mor, nues - tro cla - mor!  
 Hear us, God of love, hear this our cry!

WORDS: Simeí Monteiro, Brazil  
 MUSIC: Guaicuru melody, Brazil; adapt., Simeí Monteiro

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Figure 1. “Ouve, Deus de Amor.”

In conclusion, the place of songs of the Other is not simply to “enhance” North American worship experiences. These songs have a nonmusical purpose to remind congregations in North America to live out God’s purpose in the land of the empire. This is done by advocating for justice and peace—even on behalf of its subaltern sisters and brothers—through the songs that are received and rendered. In this essay, I’ve sought to offer a theological method in which this gift of God can be received and rendered with integrity. This method centers on framing the effort of music-making with an understanding of epiclesis and anamnesis, in which the impetus rests on the work of the Holy Spirit and the efforts of the community. With this method, the singing of songs of the Other avoids the pitfall of a patronizing attitude.



In the second half of the essay I offered select characteristics of “right” worship. This is not an attempt at profiling; rather, it is my assertion that “right” worship is not about form or *ordo* but that it needs to resonate with the community’s lived experience. Ultimately, the integrity of such worship is found not in its musical performance practice but in its active hospitality toward the Other.

Drawing from the experiences of the Truth and Reconciliation movement in Canada, I suggest that American congregations need to be thoughtful in the use songs of the Other in their worship life. They need to be aware that these songs from the Other embody messages for the empire. Congregations need to understand that in singing these songs, they are spiritually bonded to their subaltern sisters and brothers and therefore have a moral obligation to advocate for the realm of God that is marked by justice and peace, as we are one. Hence, the clearest sign of “right” worship is in the life and ministry of the faith communities, since “we are or will be what we sing.”

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