ClassNotes 3: The Renewal of Worship in Multicultural Contexts

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**Worship, Multiculturalism, and the Interdisciplinary Dialogue**

Thinking about Christian worship in a multicultural context is not a new approach. The Christian church has always been situated in multicultural circumstances and worshipped God in diverse ways by incorporating cultural elements. As Richard Niebuhr summarizes in *Christ and Culture*, the church has related to the surrounding culture in a variety of ways.[[1]](#footnote-1) Obviously, Christian worship is one of the best illustrations of cultural impacts on the church.

While it is a relatively recent concern for the Protestant church to think about worship from a cultural perspective, a number of Roman Catholic theologians and liturgics scholars have already researched in-depth on the relationship between liturgy and culture and published valuable resources for the study on that subject. Many of these resources, including those that were written by Protestant scholars, presuppose that a congregation is culturally homogeneous and that the cultural approach to worship has to do with the unique culture of the congregation. Mark R. Francis, C.S.V., however, pays special attention to the changing reality of churches in the United States. According to his acute observation, a growing number of the churches in the United States are becoming culturally and racially diverse and their liturgies need to be renewed, reflecting this cultural change.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In *Shape a Circle Ever Wide: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States*, Francis argues that Roman Catholic churches in the United States are no longer “national parishes” built by the immigrants of the same nationality, but are becoming multiracial and multicultural. This case also applies to Protestant churches in the United States. From the New England Colony period till now, Protestant immigrants brought with them strong connections to their homeland churches and worshipped following their unique liturgical patterns. Although their congregations are becoming multicultural as rapidly as the larger society they belong to, and many already have a great number of congregants of different races and ethnicities, they do not take seriously how to renew their worship to appeal to this changing demography.

A student in my worship class insisted that he was serving a mono-cultural congregation composed of only white European Americans so that he did not need to consider the issue of multiculturalism. When we look deeper, however, even his white European American congregation is not culturally homogenous. As Francis points out, churches built by the original national groups of the early settlers in the United States have largely disappeared into mainstream U.S. society, and nowadays they worship with people who are culturally different.[[3]](#footnote-3) Even among Asian and other non-European American communities that have relatively short histories of immigration, an increasing number of people, particularly second and third generations, actively interact with different cultural groups and search for a worship community where they can experience meaningful and memorable worship across racial and ethnic boundaries.

One of my colleagues asked me why I am interested in multicultural worship, since for her as a Jew the reason why she attends her religious services is to pray, sing, and listen to scriptures in her mother language with other people of her own race and ethnicity. As a first-generation Korean American, I understand what she means. I attended worship in Korean American churches for fifteen years, the first half of my life in the United States. Whenever I worshipped with other people of my own race and ethnicity in my native language following their unique liturgical tradition, I could immediately feel at home and reaffirm my identity as a Korean American Christian. Nonetheless, the more I attended these worship services, the more I felt that the mono-cultural worship was theologically exclusive and liturgically limited, due to its primary task of serving the interest of a particular racial and cultural group. This experience raises for me a theological and liturgical question that Francis phrases eloquently, “Is culturally exclusive worship ‘consistent with Christ’s challenge for us to look beyond our own cultural limitations and prejudices to the universality of the Kingdom of God?’”[[4]](#footnote-4) I think that this question is a challenge to all ethnic minority churches, as well as to European American congregations. Even though the congregants have the same racial and cultural backgrounds, their worship should not be limited to themselves. Instead, they should extend their theological concerns and liturgical experiences beyond their limited worldview and spiritual practices.

During the second half of my life in the United States, I have attended worship in a predominantly white European American church. At first, my family was one of a few ethnic minority people in the three-hundred membership church. Of course, we did not feel at home in spite of the hospitable atmosphere of the church. Worshiping in our second language with the “strangers” following a European American Presbyterian worship pattern was a sort of wilderness experience. Yet, this church has gradually changed, becoming more multicultural, and more than a decade later now, about twenty percent of the attendees at Sunday services are non-white, and the number is increasing every year. The worship leadership team seems to be aware of their presence and attempts to embrace them by occasionally requesting some of them to participate in the service. This changing situation makes me think seriously about how Sunday worship can be a genuine spiritual experience for all that attend the service beyond their racial and cultural differences. In other words, how can Christian worship in multicultural contexts be more faithful to the Christian gospel and more meaningful and memorable to the multicultural congregation? Half a century ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. said that the Sunday morning worship time is the most racially segregated hour in the United States. Congregations now are no longer sharply divided by race and ethnicity, but their liturgies still are. Then, is it possible for them to renew their worship experience to be inclusive in the multicultural context?

The renewal of worship is not an easy task. Hundreds of Protestant denominations have their own liturgical traditions, and their local congregations have worshipped following their unique liturgical patterns. Tension between tradition and transformation becomes tangible whenever the worship committee or the pastoral leadership tries to renew congregational worship. In fact, some churches have had the painful experience that the tension escalated to “worship wars” and witness how costly the renewal of worship is.[[5]](#footnote-5) Why, then, does the tension occur surrounding the renewal of worship? Can the tension be transformed into energy that leads the congregation to renew its worship experience in a positive way? In other words, can the renewal of worship happen in the multicultural context in a theologically constructive, liturgically meaningful, culturally relevant, and pastorally sensitive way?

While these questions can be explored through a variety of theological and liturgical approaches, the rest of the chapter focuses on the interdisciplinary approach with religious ritual theories and church history. The interdisciplinary approach means conversation between the truth claims of a particular religious tradition and human and natural sciences such as biology, ecology, philosophy, history, sociology, art, and so forth, in order to scrutinize and articulate specific religious and theological concerns in depth. The interdisciplinary dialogue, particularly, with religious ritual theories and church history, is helpful in examining the renewal of worship in multicultural contexts, because it provides some clues to probe the liturgical questions from the viewpoint of the religious experience and ritual behavior of humanity and the cultural impact on Christian worship.

A variety of different models of interdisciplinary dialogue are available to deal with tension between the Christian tradition and its ongoing reinterpretation in the changing cultural and historical contexts. In his essay, “A New Clue for Religious Education?” Richard Osmer summarizes three existing models—the correlational, the transformational, and the transversal. According to his brief descriptions, correlational models regard theology and nontheological disciplines as equal dialogue partners[[6]](#footnote-6); the transformational model considers them “standing in an asymmetrical bipolar unity”[[7]](#footnote-7); and the transversal model is

a fluid and dynamic understanding of the disciplines in which they intersect at some point and move apart at others. Disciplines are viewed, not as hermetically sealed wholes but as evolving traditions in which boundaries, core concepts, and research instrumentalities are constantly changing. Moreover, all disciplines are viewed as inherently interdisciplinary, as transversing other fields, often in surprising ways. It would be expected, for example, that philosophical theology would overlap cosmology or evolutionary epistemology at certain points while sharply diverging at others.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The transversal model, originally proposed by J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen as a postfoundationalist approach to interdisciplinary studies,[[9]](#footnote-9) is appropriate for the study of the renewal of worship in the multicultural context. As Osmer explains, it is conversation “ad hoc, moving back and forth between the disciplines to discover areas of convergence and divergence in ways that cannot be determined in advance but are specific to the disciplinary perspectives being engaged at any given time”[[10]](#footnote-10) This model leads the study of worship to overlap a number of scientific fields such as religious studies, ritual theories, sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology, history, communication theories, etc. In the following two sections, religious ritual theories and church history are invited as primary conversational partners for the critical thinking about the renewal of worship in multicultural contexts.

**Religious Ritual Theories and the Formality of Worship**

Christian worship has often been regarded as a branch of historical studies, particularly, doctrinal history of the Christian church. Christian worship, however, embraces not only the doctrinal assumption about God but also the way one believes in God. In other words, it is about not the systemic theories but the religious practice of human interaction through ritual behavior. Thus, historical and theological studies alone cannot fully explain the nature and function of Christian worship.

In *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Roy Rappaport understands the nature of religion in association with the nature of humanity. For him, human beings are “a species that lives and can only live, in terms of meanings it must construct in a world.”[[11]](#footnote-11) The primary concern of humanity that pursues meaning-making, states Rapparport, has to do with “religion’s most general and universal elements, ‘The Sacred,’ ‘The Numinous,’ ‘The Occult,’ and ‘The Divine’ and with their fusion into ‘The Holy’ in ritual.”[[12]](#footnote-12) G. Van Der Leeuw agrees on this view, saying that “*Homo religious*”seeks ultimate meaning, or “the ultimate superiority he [sic] will never attain, but that it reaches him [sic] in an incomprehensible and mysterious way.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

According to Leeuw, religion can be observed in two ways—the horizontal and the vertical. The horizontal way views religion as “intelligible experience”[[14]](#footnote-14) while the vertical way is concerned with “a revelation, which never becomes completely experienced, though it participates in experience.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Religious phenomenology, explains Leeuw, deals with “what appears” from these two observations through systematic discussion. Phenomenology presupposes that what appears is “neither pure object nor the actual reality,”[[16]](#footnote-16) but is “inseparably connected with its interpretation as experience.”[[17]](#footnote-17) In other worlds, intelligible experience and revelation are inseparable in reality since the former is the interpretation of the latter or a human reply to the divine revelation. Intelligible experience can be expressed in the form of worship including prayers, singing, the confession of faith, and the proclamation of the Word.[[18]](#footnote-18) Therefore, worship means, as J. D. Critchton defines, “a religious phenomenon, a reaching out through the fear that always accompanies the sacred to the *mysterium* conceived as *trememdum* but also *fascinans*, because behind it and in it there is an intuition of the Transcendent.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

In order to express homage to the Holy in the appropriate and “correct” manner, all religions, including Christianity, have their particular form of worship or ritual. The definition of the term “ritual” is broad. According to Mark Searle, ritual means, in general, communal or collective “behavior that is patterned, repetitive, and thus more or less predictable.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Through the process of formalization, all rituals have fixed basic forms or phenomena that occur repeatedly. Even if new ritual forms are created and remain flexible for a while, they tend to quickly develop fixed forms, since rituals call for “conformity rather than uniqueness, practice rather than inventiveness.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

The community regards the fixed form of a ritual as the correct way to celebrate the event and preserves it as a tradition. Members of the community are invited to participate in the ritual and are supposed to actualize the meaning of the ritual through “joint actions,” following the fixed form in the communal context. In this regard, Rappaport point out the significance of ritual performance, saying that “unless there is a performance there is no ritual.”[[22]](#footnote-22) He distinguishes between ritual and other performances and clarifies that the great difference between them is that while those who are present at a ritual performance constitute a congregation who is invited to participate in the ritual by taking action, those who are present at other performances such as theatrical or athletic events are audiences who are allowed to only watch and listen to the performers.[[23]](#footnote-23) That means, the uniqueness of ritual performances is that they are actualized through communal actions. Through participating in the ritual performance following the particular order or fixed form, explains Rappaport, the community accepts “whatever is encoded in the canon of that order”[[24]](#footnote-24) and “does something, . . . that is meant to affect the world.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

Religious ritual theories help us understand why the renewal of Christian worship causes tension between tradition and transformation within a congregation. Christian worship is a religious ritual that is, on the one hand, profoundly sacred in the sense that it is the divine accommodation of the Transcendent to humanity. On the other hand, it is profoundly human in the sense that it is based on the human-made liturgical pattern. Human beings are social animals who ritualize great events of life such as birth, marriage, and death, as a way to relate to the community of which they are part. Through the formality of ritual interactions, people enter into the community and deepen their relationship with others. The fixed formal liturgical pattern plays a major role in renewing the identity of the congregation and enhances its solidarity. In short, Christian worship is “the doorway-to-the-transcendental approach of cultural anthropology.”[[26]](#footnote-26) It is an empirical reality of communal interaction that happens through the formality of a ritual.

Christian worship is also a ritual performance. Ritual performances are not restricted to the verbal dimension of the rite but are embodied events of the community acted following a certain rule. Members of the congregation are supposed to interact with one another through “the physical presence of living bodies” in the same place at the same time. They pass “a series of prescribed motions” by repeating the prescribed order in worship.[[27]](#footnote-27) The participatory experience of the liturgical performance grounded in formality makes the congregation conservative in changing the liturgical form. Consequently, the fixed liturgical form rarely changes, and any action to renew the life of worship should expect resistance to a certain degree.

Then, is it unrealistic to anticipate the renewal of worship in multicultural contexts? Is there no possibility to transform the tension between tradition and innovation into energy for the renewal of worship? Concerning these questions, it is notable that Randall Collins suggests that “the formality and the stereotyped activity” of a ritual are not natural but functional.[[28]](#footnote-28) According to his interaction ritual theory, they are “not the crucial ingredients; they only contribute to the core process of intersubjectivity and shared emotion, which is to say to the experience of collective consciousness and collective effervescence, insofar as they contribute to a mutual focus of attention.”[[29]](#footnote-29) The effectiveness of a ritual performance thus depends on whether it generates emotional energies and symbolic meanings. If it fails to be effective in this way, the formality of a ritual is subject to change. Collins eloquently articulates this functional view as follows:

Religion is not simply a body of beliefs, but beliefs sustained by ritual practices. When the practices stop, the beliefs lose their emotional import, becoming mere memories, forms without substance, eventually dead and meaningless. By the same token, new symbols can be created; whenever the group assembles and focuses its attention around an object that comes to embody their emotion, a new sacred object is born.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Despite the observation that adherence to form is palpable in all rituals, Rappaport also assumes possibility for the renewal of religious rituals. Considering the special mode of ritual communication, states Rappaport, a ritual transmits two different messages—“self-referential and canonical messages.”[[31]](#footnote-31) While the former is variant, conveying “information concerning the current states of the participants, often transmitted indexically rather than symbolically,” the latter is invariant, conveying the concerns with “enduring aspects of nature, society or cosmos.”[[32]](#footnote-32) The seemingly changeless message of the canonical information is transmitted symbolically, incorporating with the self-referential information in a ritual form. In the process of transmission, explains Rappaport, if the participants feel that the ritual order makes the ritual “mere ritual” by not adequately conveying both messages, it is “likely soon to pass away,” and a sudden and abrupt change possibly happens.[[33]](#footnote-33) It cannot be guaranteed that the structure of the ritual remains unchanged. It is rather evolutionary in “an unpredictably changing universe.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Once a change happens in a ritual, it plays a significant role in changing the identity and role of the community, for the form and substance of a ritual are inseparable in performance.

Collins’ and Rappaport’s ritual theories suggest that the formality of Christian worship should be subject to change. It is a ritual interacting at the level of the congregation’s emotions and survives not through rigid formality but by opening itself to “an unpredictably changing universe.” The tradition of Christian worship is to be constantly reinterpreted by people living in particular times and places. Certain elements of liturgical practices, including symbolic and linguistic expressions and their meanings, are to be renewed in order to make the experience of worship intrinsic to the contemporary worshipers. Intrinsic worship experience engaging in the congregation’s emotions, in turn, generates energy that fuels personal and communal transformation. Church history gives witness to numerous occasions of renewal of worship that attempted to make Christian worship intrinsic in different times and places, as illustrated in the following section.

**Renewal Movements of Worship in Church History**

It would not be an overstatement that the history of the Christian church is at some point the history of the renewal of worship. Church history proves that numerous movements happened to renew worship experience to be theologically more relevant and culturally more sensitive to changing liturgical contexts. While some historical resources for the study of liturgy are available, the following is a brief summary of church history from the perspective of the cultural interaction of Christian worship:

In *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*,[[35]](#footnote-35) Paul Bradshaw considers the Jewish synagogue liturgy the root of Christian worship and investigates the influence of the liturgical practice of Judaism on the fledging practice of Christian worship. According to him, the synagogue liturgy during the first century was diverse due to a variety of liturgical occasions and the geographical dispersion of the Jews. Some standardized forms included only general rules about the liturgical elements like benedictions, recitations, and general contents, rather than “their exact words,”[[36]](#footnote-36) and even the general liturgical rules and orders were different from place to place. One of the examples of the diversity of synagogue worship is that the Babylonian Talmud prescribed that the entire Pentateuch should be read through in a year while the Palestinian practice was a three-year lectionary cycle both for the Torah and for the Prophets.[[37]](#footnote-37)

As the New Testament and other historical resources inform us, Christian communities, in the beginning stage, worshiped following the synagogue liturgical pattern. Yet, they gradually changed it to make their worship more efficacious to express their theologies of the Christian faith in their particular cultural environments. They were open to reinterpreting theological meanings of the liturgical elements based on their unique experience in Jesus Christ and flexible to practice worship in diverse ways to actualize their “intelligible experience.” As a result, just like synagogue worship, Christian worship was not in a unified form. It varied considerably from place to place. Geographical difference and cultural fluidity within the primitive churches led them to continuously renew their worship life as a response to the changing context for worship. Baptism and the Eucharist are among the examples of liturgical diversity. They were reinterpreted in diverse ways by different communities in order to provide relevant theological meaning to particular communities, and the rites were administered in different ways through the ongoing process of cultural adaptation.[[38]](#footnote-38)

In relation to the issue of liturgical renewal, it is important to be reminded that liturgical manuscripts of the early church were not fixed materials but “living literature.” According to Bradshaw, living literature means a literary genre that includes the written material “which circulates within a community and forms a part of its heritage and tradition but which is constantly subject to revision and rewriting to reflect changing historical and cultural circumstances.”[[39]](#footnote-39) In other words, living literature is “constantly growing, changing, and evolving as it moves from generation to generation, or from one ecclesiastical tradition to another.”[[40]](#footnote-40) The notion of living literature implies that in the primitive and early Christian communities, their worship did not have the absolutely fixed liturgical form, but was flexible in the changing cultural context. It was not static but dynamic in order to provide believers with intrinsic emotional interaction in their particular cultural contexts on their particular theological stances.

There is a misunderstanding that the Roman Catholic Church has always worshiped based on the unified liturgical form. Timothy Thibodeau, however, argues that in West Christendom, liturgical uniformity was realistically impossible until the end of the medieval era “when the printing press could codify and effectively impose what Klauser terms the rigid rubricism of the Counter-Reformation papacy and its Congregation of Rites.”[[41]](#footnote-41) More precisely, most of the time during the Middle Ages, churches were dynamic in interacting with surrounding cultures and underwent cultural adaptation to appeal to contemporary worshipers.

In his essay, “The Conversion of Nations,” Michael S. Driscoll proves that a tremendous amount of liturgical divergences existed from the early period of Christianization to the medieval era. Churches in such different geographical regions as Gaul, Milan, Spain, the British Isles, etc. worshiped with “their own characteristic variations.”[[42]](#footnote-42) During the medieval era, numerous liturgical movements happened on small and large scales against the clerical perpetration of the formalization of the liturgy. Even during the high medieval era when Rome wanted to unify the liturgy and sacraments and fix the Roman rite in order to bring forth “church unity that centered on absolute papal leadership,”[[43]](#footnote-43) local parishes and cathedrals as well as monasteries still used their particular liturgical forms.

As Thibodeau mentioned, the practice of the rigidly unified Roman Catholic liturgy began as a result of the Council of Trent (1545-63) in the late medieval era. The Council of Trent standardized the conservative Tridentine liturgy as a countercultural reaction to the liturgical challenges of the Reformation and enforced churches to use that universally. Roman Catholic churches continued to use the unified rite until the Second Vatican Council that initiated the renewal of worship in the middle of the twentieth century.[[44]](#footnote-44)

It is worth noting that liturgical diversity persisted in the Eastern churches, too. In the Byzantine Empire, local churches in the city of Constantinople as well as in Christianized countries in the East kept their own uniqueness in worship. According to Alexander Rentel, even after the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, liturgical diversity continued in monasteries in its various forms, though the church made an effort “to consolidate and codify the rite to maintain their identity”[[45]](#footnote-45) Since the modern era, the change in worldview and cultural ethos has challenged Eastern churches to keep renewing their liturgies in order to appeal to their contemporary worshipers.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The movement of the Reformation in the sixteenth century was a historic landmark for the renewal of worship in Western Europe. It is often understood that the movement was a reaction to the “abuses” of the late medieval church. But, it was not simply a fight against the corruption of the church. It was also a theological and liturgical response to the changing culture of the larger society. Sixteenth-century Western Europe was under the force of the cultural movement of the Renaissance. The philosophy, science, and art of the Renaissance challenged people to reconsider their Christian faith in a rational and humanistic way and eventually instigated the religious reform. In addition to the Renaissance movement, as James F. White adequately evaluates, such cultural characteristics as the zeal for Christian mission into the newly discovered parts of the globe, the emergence of a political sensibility for new national consciousness, and the expansion of commerce and education with the invention of printing contributed to the liturgical reform of the church.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The reformers were challenged to renew Christian theology and liturgical practice to make Christian worship more authentic and intelligible in the changing cultural atmosphere. They brought about substantial changes in Christian worship while they did not deny the fundamental importance of the liturgy and sacraments. Diverse rational approaches to sacramental theology, the practice of worship in vernacular languages, and the emphasis on preaching and the frequent administration of the Eucharist for the laity were just a few examples of the renewal of worship by the reformers.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, Western Europe went through modernization through Enlightenment rationalism. While the Roman Catholic Church stood for the unified Tridentine rite as a countercultural approach to the secular culture of modernism, Protestant churches enjoyed freedom to renew their worship to make it appeal more to human rationality. They focused on the Word and practiced sermon-centered worship. For them, preaching was a tool to teach the Christian faith intellectually and rationally through knowledge of the Bible and moral instructions.

Not all Protestant believers were, however, satisfied by the dry rationalistic and intellectual practice of worship. Baptists, Pietists, Methodists, and a variety of free-church groups in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attempted to renew head-oriented worship to be in balance with the heart-oriented approach. Their liturgical movements against Enlightenment rationalism were supported by Pietist theologians like Friedrick Schleiermacher and church reformers like John Wesley. They promoted “theologies of the heart” and emphasized the significance of personal experience in worship. Their theological and liturgical renewal was in affinity with the secular culture of Romanticism, “the most important cultural revolution of modern times.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

As the history of the Protestant Church unfolded, once the Reformation movement settled down by establishing official Protestant denominations or national churches, they developed their own liturgies. Particularly, Protestant churches in the German lands, Scandinavia, and England contributed to the diversity of Protestant worship by creating their own worship styles appealing to their particular cultural ethos. The distinctive liturgical pattern of each denomination or each national church soon became formalized and the fixed liturgical form was later considered its liturgical tradition.

The United States, as an immigrant society, has been an arena exhibiting the rich diversity of Protestant worship. The diversity of worship in the United States, in fact, epitomized racial, ethnic, and regional divisions based on immigrants’ national origins. English pilgrims and other early Christian settlers from Europe brought with them strong connections to their homeland churches and worshipped in the new land as they did in their old lands. Sermon-centered worship that granted priority to the mind over the heart and understanding over feelings was the dominant liturgical style in the New England Colony.[[49]](#footnote-49)

However, the two Great Awakenings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries changed the landscape of Protestant worship in the United States. They were mass movements, countercultural to Enlightenment rationalism, that “featured emotional release” through heartfelt worship with “enthusiastic singing and the joyful tears of conversion experience.”[[50]](#footnote-50) The first Great Awakening (1730-1740) in New England, led by Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and others, made an effort to pull away from the dry formality of Christian worship. They tried to revitalize worship to make it become an experience of a deep sense of spiritual conviction and redemption. The movement contributed to breaking down the walls of race and class by worshiping together with the converted regardless of their race and social class, including black slaves.[[51]](#footnote-51)

The Second Great Awakening during the early nineteenth century was a revival movement targeting the unchurched in the rural South and urban towns in upstate New York and other States. Many Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian ministers and lay leaders joined the movement and held numerous camp meetings, recruiting people from a wide range of classes and races to evangelize the country. Worship in camp meetings was innovative in many ways. First of all, people worshipped together across the boundaries of denomination, language, and racial and ethnic background, even though “Baptists, native peoples, and persons of African descent celebrated the Lord’s Supper separately.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Camp meetings were, as White comments, probably “first ecumenical occasions” in the history of the Protestant Church.[[53]](#footnote-53) Above all, camp worship was a multicultural experience, as Karen B. Westerfield Tucker describes:

The presence at the camp meeting of persons of different ethnic and racial backgrounds provided an occasion for the sharing and mingling of musical forms, influencing the development, for example, of white and black spirituals. The camp in effect was a nursery for the gospel style of church song that became widespread in the late nineteenth century. Singing was an integral component of worship in black communities from the outset and was regarded as a medium of prayer, spiritual empowerment, and proclamation but also as a vehicle for inveighing against human injustices before God. The song could take the characteristically African from of call and response…, inviting easy participation.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Another distinctive aspect of revival camp worship is the invention of a new worship style. In order to appeal to the secular culture of the unchurched and uneducated group of people, the style of worship was intentionally designed to be a simple, extemporaneous, and emotion-driven service, rather than following the fixed liturgical forms of the established churches.

It is remarkable that, in *Lectures on Revivals of Religion,* Charles G. Finney, the most prominent theologian and preacher of the Second Great Awakening, elaborated details of revival worship.[[55]](#footnote-55) For him, the purpose of worship is to increase a conversion experience, i.e., to “harvest” sin-sick souls, and the worship style must be “the *most effectual* way, to make the truth stand out strikingly.”[[56]](#footnote-56) He convinces us that

God has *established no particular system of measures* to be employed and invariably adhered to in promoting religions. . . . it was left to the discretion of the church to determine, from time to time, what *measures* shall be adopted, and what forms pursued, in giving the gospel its power.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Standing in this position, Finney proposes “new measures” as effective ways to promote the Christian faith. His new measures are concerned with emotional approaches to worshipers. According to him, the emotions are “purely involuntary states of mind” that are not under direct control but are controlled “indirectly.”[[58]](#footnote-58) In order to have a conversion experience, states Finney, worshipers must examine themselves, not looking “directly within to see what is the present state of [their] feelings” but looking “back over [their] past history” by taking their sins up “*one by one*” and reviewing and repenting of them “one by one.”[[59]](#footnote-59) In addition, Finney critically reviews the practice of music, prayers, and preaching in traditional public worship and suggests a series of new measures, including singing for the benefit of sinners,[[60]](#footnote-60) lay prayers in public,[[61]](#footnote-61) extemporaneous preaching in a colloquial style,[[62]](#footnote-62) and “the anxious seat”[[63]](#footnote-63) or an altar call for the repentant. Finney insisted that any particular form and mode of worship should not be regarded as an absolute way for Christians to worship and that the new measures should be applied to the revivals in “decency and order” in order to make known the gospel to the unchurched in the most effective way.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Tom Lawson analyzes that the revival worship pattern based on the new measures flows in three connected stages—“the preliminary, the message, and the harvest”—with the climax on preaching.[[65]](#footnote-65) The preliminaries include singing and prayers that lay the emotional groundwork for people to soften their hearts to hear the sermon. The role of music is especially important to move the heart and touch the emotions. The message is supposed to aim at the conversion of sinners. Extemporaneous and theatrical preaching without sermon manuscripts is strongly recommended as the most effective way of communication with the congregation.[[66]](#footnote-66) Finally, worship ends by gaining new believers through an altar call at the end of the sermon.

Although Finney’s new measures worked productively for the harvest of souls in the particular cultural soil of the early nineteenth-century United States, his pragmatic approach to worship has been criticized not only by his contemporaries but also by later church leaders and theologians. Lawrence R. Rast, Jr. evaluates Finney’s new measures as the mixture of the secular culture of “democratic individualism and market capitalism” linked to “Arminian theology.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Finney’s worship style for an event of evangelism focusing exclusively on the unchurched was criticized as distorting the biblical and theological meaning of Christian worship. Furthermore, the “decision theology” of salvation by individual work backing up Finney’s new measures was disputable as different from Reformation theology, the foundation of Protestantism.[[68]](#footnote-68)

In spite of these criticisms, Finney’s pragmatic worship style became quite influential in Protestant worship in the United States. One of the new waves after the Second Great Awakening was the “gradual proportional move away from the established liturgical churches” and resulted in the birth of hundreds of new Christian communities such as Adventists, Disciples of Christ and other Holiness churches, and a number of evangelical free-churches.[[69]](#footnote-69) By 1900, a large number of these churches adopted Finney’s revival worship style, along with music written for revivals, in their Sunday worship.[[70]](#footnote-70) The revival style of worship also became the predominant form of Christian worship in other parts of the globe where Protestantism was spread by the offspring of the Second Great Awakening. Eventually, the revival style of worship was fixed as the liturgical form of evangelical churches in the United States and became the typical worship style of Pentecostalism, the Vineyard Movement, and other church growth movements. Notably, today, this particular form is used even in mainline traditional churches as the style of “contemporary worship,” that is getting popular as a worship style supplementary to their traditional style of worship.

Evangelical worship, church growth movement worship, contemporary worship, and emergent church worship which is a recent movement, are all associated with the free-church liturgical tradition of the Protestant Church and contribute to the diversity of contemporary Protestant worship in the United States. The target of these worship services is either Christian believers who do not feel any authentic engagement in traditional Christian worship or spiritual “seekers” who are searching for a new religious experience. Their services seem to be sensitive to the postmodern secular culture in the United States and intend to respond to the changing culture by adapting advanced information technology, currently popular music, and other cultural elements. It is surprising, however, that contemporary free-style worship, as well as traditional Christian worship, is not fully concerned with racial and ethnic diversity within and beyond the church.

As church history shows, Christian churches have survived or thrived by opening themselves to changing cultural contexts. The tradition of Christian worship has constantly been tested and reinterpreted by people living in particular times and places. Although not all the renewals of worship were theologically constructive and liturgically meaningful, Christian churches continued to renew their worship to make it more faithful to the Christian gospel and more relevant to the changing culture. The review of the history of Christian worship encourages us to take the renewal of worship in our multicultural contexts urgently and to think seriously about how Christian worship in twenty-first-century multicultural contexts can be renewed in “a theologically constructive, liturgically meaningful, culturally-relevant, and pastorally sensitive way.” It is time for Christian worship to partake of another renewal movement in order to be a faithful Christian practice in our particular cultural context.

**Concluding Remarks**

The interdisciplinary dialogue with religious ritual theories and church history provides some implications for the renewal of worship in our multicultural contexts. First of all, religious ritual theories promise a possibility of the renewal of worship to make it more meaningful and memorable even for the congregation with a wide range of diversity. Like other religious rituals, Christian worship is supposed to create “heightened emotional energy,”[[71]](#footnote-71) and that energy can be generated through active participation of the congregants in the liturgical performance at the personal and communal levels. This hypothesis has already been proven by church history. It is crucial, therefore, to consider the quality and extent of congregational participation when planning the worship in the process of the renewal of worship.

Ritual theories and church history also imply that the integration of theological and liturgical assessments is important in considering cultural adaptation to worship. As Geoffrey Wainwright reminds us, cultural adaptation to worship is not “mere ornamentation.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Just like in other religious rituals, once a liturgical form is changed through cultural adaptation, it would lead to a far-reaching transformation of theological and liturgical directions of the church. Thus, the process of cultural adaptation requires careful and critical evaluations of the symbolic meaning of new cultural elements from the perspective of the theological and liturgical tradition.

The last implication that the interdisciplinary dialogue offers for the renewal of worship in multicultural contexts is that the effectiveness of worship depends not only on intellectual but also on emotional interactions. The unilateral approach with either head-oriented dry formality or excessively emotion-driven extemporaneity cannot appeal inclusively to the culturally diverse congregation. In order for them to experience meaningful and memorable worship, the style of worship should be balanced with diverse spiritual and cultural approaches.

Christian worship as a religious ritual is to be continuously renewed through interaction with the surrounding culture to become a meaningful and memorable religious experience. The renewal of worship is, in essence, the renewal of the identity and role of the church in our changing cultural context. It is not a new but an old and vital task for every generation of the Christian Church.

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2. Mark R. Francis, C.S.V., *Shape a Circle Ever Wide: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 2000); *Liturgy in a Culturally Diverse Community: A Guide Towards Understanding* (Washington, D.C.: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf., Thomas G. Long, *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Richard Osmer, “A New Clue for Religious Education?” in *Forging a Better Religious Education in the Third Millennium*, edited by James Michael Lee (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 2000), 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid,; J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World: Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 9, 32-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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11. Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. G. Van Der Leeuw, *Religion in essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 680. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 679. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 680. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 671. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., 672. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., 679. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. J. D. Crichton, “A Theology of Worship,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, Revised Edition, edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, S.J., and Paul Bradshaw (New York: Oxford University, 1992), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Mark Searle, *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual, and Social Perspective* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Rappaport, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., 42-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Mark Searle, “Ritual,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Collins, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Rappaport, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid., 58, [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 419. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., 46-47, 56-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Timothy Thibodeau, “Western Christendom,” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, edited by Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Michael S. Driscoll, “The Conversion of the Nations,” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Francis, *Shape a Circle ever Wide*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Alexander Rentel, “Byzantine and Slavic orthodoxy,” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 105-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
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49. Cf., Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
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52. Tucker, 606. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. White, 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Tucker, 606-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, edited by William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., 251. Italics are original. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid., 250-1. Italics are original. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid., 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid., 40-41. Italics are original. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid., 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid., 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid., 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid., 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid., 275-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Tom Lawson, “Adorate: Worship,” on <http://www.adorate.org/2013/02/how-finney-ruined-worship-2-reviving.html>. Viewed on December 10, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
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