ClassNotes 6: Practice of Multicultural Worship

1. **Resources for Multicultural Worship**

As you find in the section of Resources for Multicultural Worship on the course homepage of the Canvas, I have posted three worship bulletins that I created for special occasions as your reference:

1. Worship at the 2010 Academy of Homiletics Conference:

As I already mentioned in ClassNotes 5, this service was designed as a multicultural and multilingual service in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Dutch. As a member of the Executive Committee, I was privileged to prepare for this worship service. Although the Academy of Homiletics is a forty-year-old professional guild, of which about 300 preaching professors in the Us and other countries are members, this service was the first that used more than English by including some of those whose native languages are not English to participate in worship in their native tongues. They created the liturgical components assigned to them in their native languages and practiced together before the service. I invited a Korean preacher who was good at the Korean “chang” style (the Korean traditional opera) preaching to do Scripture reading and preaching in that style in Korean, in order to provide the attendees with a learning moment about a different style of preaching, and his sermon was translated into English on the screen. Other liturgical components done in other than English included English translations in the bulletin for the understanding of the worshipers. The Benediction was done in three different languages at the same time harmoniously. During the Sing-Along time, the congregation was taught the songs in different languages, that they were going to sing in worship.

My goal for this service was not to simply introduce different cultural practices of worship (“adaptation” in Yee’s term (Worship on the Way, 85-6)), but to integrate them into the service, so that the congregation might experience “authentic worship” by singing and praying together as part of their spiritual practice (“integration” in Yee’s term, (Worship on the Way, 86)). After worship, I got feedback from them that the service was a beautiful confluence through which they could experience the miracle of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-11.

1. Worship at the 2012 Denver Presbytery Assembly:

Like the service for the Academy of Homiletics, this service was designed as a multicultural and multilingual service in the similar pattern. While the majority members of the Denver Presbytery of about 200 membership are Anglo-Americans, there are racial and ethnic minority members who have been underrepresented in the Presbytery. When I was invited to prepare the liturgy and preach a sermon for the service, I intentionally tried to make this service a celebration of God’ presence in many languages and many cultural practices. My sermon was preached in English, but its substance was about racial and ethnic diversity that challenges the worshipers (pastors and elders of the PCUSA churches in Denver) to reconsider the identity of their churches. The Benediction was offered from the four corners and from the center of the sanctuary in five different languages at the same time. One hour before the service began, the worship participants met in the sanctuary and had a brief rehearsal for twenty minutes.

After the service, I heard from many worshipers that the service flew seamlessly like a harmonious chorus in five languages, and that the sermon was the climax for them to be challenged theologically and biblically on the issue of racial and ethnic diversity in the church.

1. Worship at the Iliff Chapel:

I was invited to preach at the chapel on the Gathering Days week of this quarter, the first week of Easter. It was a joy for me to meet Bill there face to face. The basic format of the order of the service was prepared by the Dean of the Chapel, Cathie Kelsey, following the Iliff chapel service pattern. One week before the day of the service, I forwarded my sermon manuscript to her for her reference to the selections of other liturgical components. Based on the content of the sermon, she crafted the Litany and chose some songs. Since a few dozens of people gathered, as usual as in other Iliff chapel services, I chose to preach on the floor rather than on the chancel in order to feel intimate with the congregation. Unfortunately, the photographer was so sick at the last minute that she could not come to videotape the service. The bulletin gives an impression that this service seems not to be designed from a multicultural perspective, compared with the previous two worship bulletins. However, it was a multicultural and bilingual service. Although the bulletin includes only English, I used Korean when I offered the Benediction. I spoke in Korean and then in English. I also requested Dr. Kelsey to include “Come Now, O Prince of Peace (“O-so-so”)” as the responsive song after preaching. It is a bilingual song in Korean and English, originally composed to sing for peace in Korea, yearning for national reunification through non-violence. I sang in Korean while others might sing in English. In addition, Dr. Kelsey included some words of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the Litany, based on my sermon. I prepared it as the highlight in the service (in fact, one of the longest sermons I have preached (25 min.)) as Dr. Kelsey requested of me. As you read, it is about the racial issue in our contemporary multicultural, “glocal” context, targeting the Iliff community which is sensitive to social justice issues.

In addition to the materials for the three worship services, I posted two more resources—“Gathering Prayer” created in a Native American ritual style and “The Lord’s Prayer from New Zealand”:

1. “Gathering Prayer”:

The “Gathering Prayer,” written by the Native American minister, Dolly Sokol is an intercultural resource for multicultural worship. When I attended a worship service at the 2013 North American Academy of Liturgy Conference, this was the opening prayer for that service. The style and content of the prayer is based on a Native American religious practice that prays toward the four directions. I think that this prayer is a good example for us to consider how culturally and religiously different practices can be integrated into the Christian worship through appropriate theological interpretations.

I asked two Native American students at Iliff about what they thought about using the Native American style of the four-directional prayer in Christian worship. One of them said that he was not happy about that because Christians stole rituals as well as the land from the Native Americans. But, the other student said that it was very nice that the Native American style of prayer was used by people of different races and ethnicities and could help them pray in a more meaningful way. In my opinion, it is important to let people learn about Native American spiritual practices deeply rooted in nature and adapt their way of prayer with respect through appropriate theological interpretation. By praying in their way with full knowledge about that practice, we can better understand not only their cultural and spiritual practice but also their unjust situation in our society. Through praying in their way, we also need to pray for bringing justice to them.

One of the concerns with this prayer is that some Christians who have exclusively been raised in the Judaic-Christian worldview might not feel comfortable with the terms, “our Mother Earth, our Father Sky.” These terms reveal the Native American worldview of the interconnectedness between humanity and nature. Worship leaders need to consider the variety of possible reactions of their worshipers to these terms before using this prayer and may need to either modify these words or offer some cultural education to the worshipers before the use of the prayer.

1. The Lord’s Prayer from New Zealand:

The Lord’s Prayer from New Zealand is another example of the influence of a different religious and cultural worldview on the Christian practice of prayer. It is included in *A New Zealand Prayer Book (He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa),* written in the Maori language for the indigenous people in New Zealand. The posted material is a translation from Maori into English. This prayer represents the Maori people’s worldview and their understanding of God. By praying the Lord’s Prayer from New Zealand, we can stretch our own understanding of God and pray in solidarity with those who pray in that way.

In addition to the resources I posted in Canvas, numerous liturgical resources are available for multicultural worship. Concerning music, for example, it is notable that mainline denominations are aware of the significance of multicultural worship and have revised their hymnals by including more international hymns and songs. In addition, they have published supplementary music books like *The Faith We Sing* (UMC), *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (Episcopal), *Lift Up Your Hearts* (PCUSA) and others that include many worldwide songs. Martin Tel’s essay in *Making Room at the Table* (eds. By Brain Blount and Leonora Tisdale) provides some insights into singing culturally different songs in a more meaningful and effective way.

1. **The Task of the Renewal of Worship**

It is not an easy task to renew worship from a multicultural perspective. Most churches have their own way of worship that most of the congregants are used to. Moreover, the racially and culturally dominant group in the congregation seems not want to change the way of worship that presents their favorite way of worship. It is an ongoing task for worship leaders to provide their congregations with more meaningful services beyond their limited cultural experiences, so that they may stretch their experience of the presence and work of God in the world and be more mindful to participate in God’s work of justice for humanity. In order to bring liturgical renewal, worship leaders need pastoral sensitivity and constructive strategies. Following are some suggestions for the change of worship:

* Be sensitive to the particular context for change.
* Don’t try to “sneak” changes but have enough communication.
* Continue to emphasize the need for change.
* Don’t try to pack in too many changes at once.
* A temporary change or a try-out period is effective.
* Offer occasional special opportunities to practice new things in worship.
* Education. Always accompany changes with information about the theological, biblical, and historical significance of the change.