

2019

Liturgical biography as liturgical theology: co-constructing theology at Hillsong Church, New York City

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Dissertation

**LITURGICAL BIOGRAPHY AS LITURGICAL THEOLOGY:
CO-CONSTRUCTING THEOLOGY AT HILLSONG CHURCH,
NEW YORK CITY**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2019

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DEDICATION

To Robert Ivy Cowan (1953–2018), my loving dad.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As an extrovert, writing a dissertation within the confines of a home-office over the course of a year was quite the challenge. Admittedly, the solitude helped me focus and accomplish my goals in a timely manner, but it came with a consequence: me [over]sharing my research and writing woes to anyone willing to listen! So, before I thank the “big hitters” who helped with the details of my dissertation, I want to thank the people who took time out of their schedules to listen to me—whether a gym buddy, a massage therapist, a hair stylist, a church member, or an innocent passerby. To you folks: thank you!

I am grateful for the constant support, encouragement, and incisive feedback of my advisor, Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker. She has believed in me from day one and has shown me how to balance scholarly rigor with a passion for teaching *and* a love for the Church. I am also thankful for Dr. Jonathan Calvillo, my second reader, who demonstrated an enthusiasm for the project even before I embarked on my first journey to Hillsong Church in New York City. There are two other faculty members worth thanking specifically. The first is Dr. Nancy Ammerman, who was very helpful in coaching me through the IRB process, as well as recommending thought-provoking questions to ask my informants. The second is Dr. Mayra Rivera at Harvard Divinity School, whose seminar in Theopoetics inspired the theoretical foundations of this dissertation. To all of you, I give you my thanks!

Traveling to New York City every week between January and April of 2018 was exhausting, but I appreciate the folks who made it easier. I thank Jared Lemine, who showed me around the city, entertained my extroversion, and offered hospitality. I am grateful for Paul and Lanie McNulty, who housed me on Sunday evenings each week, as well as provided thought-provoking conversations (and good wine!). I am also grateful for “Phoebe” and “Josiah,” my Hillsong NYC liturgical theologians. I give thanks for their time commitment and beautifully organic thoughts on worship. Thanks to Katie Ullmann, my friend and superb theological transcriptionist. Thanks also to my “coding partners” who spent time analyzing these transcripts: Laura, Alicia, Holly, Debbie, Heather, Dawn, Rebecca, Marcus, Robert, Gary, Eleanor, James, Verdell, and Jameson! Thanks, y’all!

Finally, I give thanks for my family, my friends, and church community, who functioned as anchors for this whole project. I thank my wife Samantha, who constantly encouraged me, who celebrated all the mini-milestones throughout the writing process, and who offered her keen editorial eye. I give thanks to my mom, Lisa, and my late-father, Robert, who have always supported my educational and ministry endeavors. Thanks to Joey Rodil, Richard Diaz, David Sandlin, and many others near and far who kept me laughing and grounded in our longstanding friendships. I give thanks to my worshipping community, First United Methodist Church in North Andover, for their constant pledge of support and for the privilege to serve as their pastor. Above all, I give thanks for the grace and lovingkindness of God who sustained and nourished me throughout this whole endeavor. *Deo gratias!*

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ABSTRACT

In the field of liturgical theology, there is a common understanding that the prescriptive theological claims of theologians do not often match the descriptive, lived reality of worshippers. Put differently, there is a gap between the “primary” theological activity of worship and the formal “secondary” theology of the academic liturgical theologian. Within this interstice lie the liturgical-theological articulations of “ordinary,” non-specialist worshippers. This project argues that liturgical theology has not focused upon the human subject to a sufficient standard and proposes the method of liturgical biography as a descriptive and analytically rich avenue to construct liturgical theologies. Liturgical biography utilizes longitudinal oral interviews and personal journal entries, supported by ethnographic fieldwork, to describe the lived reality of the “ordinary” primary theologian (the worshipper) engaging in worship and liturgical-theological reflection. In addition to a methodological proposal, this project offers and analyzes the liturgical biographies of two worshippers who attend the New York City campus of Hillsong Church, a global Pentecostal megachurch-turned-denomination.

Chapter One discusses the theoretical underpinning to liturgical biography, incorporating the concept of the rhizome developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Liturgical biography is needed because worship is too rhizomatically complex for the universalizing and prescriptive claims of liturgical theology. Chapter Two provides a working history and liturgical theology of Hillsong Church rendered from Hillsong's primary sources (i.e., books, sermons, song lyrics, blogs). Chapters Three and Four examine the personal histories and liturgical-theological claims of these two "primary theologians" who attend Hillsong New York City, whose claims are then placed in conversation with liturgical-theological interlocutors and other allied fields of discourse. These chapters are "co-constructed" insofar as the primary theologians' voices take the lead, but the researcher employs the thematization and organization of the materials. Their liturgical theologies demonstrate the "gap" between primary and secondary theology, elucidate the rhizomatic complexity of worship, and offer unique contributions to liturgical theology, especially by giving voice to the underrepresented perspectives of Pentecostals and Evangelicals. Chapter Five concludes the project by arguing in favor of liturgical biography as a viable method for liturgical theology and further theorizes its ecumenical import.

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INTRODUCTION

“You can’t have it both ways.” “You can’t have the best of both worlds.” “You can’t have your cake and eat it too.” Scholars who thrive on interdisciplinarity and hybridity would be inclined to disagree, much to the dismay of academicians upholding a form of idyllic disciplinary purity. The oft-deemed “postmodern” paradigm within which many twentieth and twenty-first century scholars operate is helpful insofar as the cross-pollination of disciplines and fields leads to new and compelling insights. In particular, the marriage of religious and theological studies with ethnographic methods has garnered increasing prominence.¹ However, this marriage is not without its difficulties.

Theologians Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen write of this dynamic:

This endeavor...encounters resistance from two different academic borders/sides: from theological ones that want to safeguard the purity and preeminence of traditional theological sources and methods from the “muddiness” of secular, experiential modes of inquiry; and from social scientific ones that take issue with an ethnographic project done by disciplinary “outsiders” and/or that would have the audacity to make theological or normative claims out of such research.²

The balancing act between disciplinary particularity and interdisciplinarity is difficult, but also attests to the continued evolution of academic inquiry. An anthropologist or

¹ See Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); see also Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

² Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, “Theological Justifications for Turning to Ethnography,” in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, ed. Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 58.

sociologist may engage in theological work just as a theologian may engage in anthropological or sociological work.

An unintentional consequence of increasing cross-pollination, interdisciplinarity, and hybridity is that scholars have a knack for making similar claims about methodology while employing dissimilar naming conventions. Within the academic realms of religious and theological studies, one could ostensibly speak of “popular religion,” “lived religion,” “everyday religion,” “lived theology,” “ethnographic theology,” “intersectional theology,” and “ordinary theology” in the same breath and be discussing similar content even though these designations come from a diversity of fields, including but not limited to the History of Christianity, Ritual Studies, Practical Theology, and Sociology of Religion. Central to these various nomenclatural designations is a methodological turn to the actions and claims of embodied individuals as being analytically fruitful for scholarly discourse—be it historiographical explorations “from below,” the “operant” or “ordinary” theologies of Christians, or “unofficial” religious practices.³ Employing mixed methods qualitative research drawn from the social sciences, this dissertation emerges from this

³ For a historical study related to “popular religion,” see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); for the hallmark study related to “lived religion,” see David Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); for “everyday religion,” see Nancy T. Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); for “lived theology,” see Charles Marsh and Peter Slade, eds., *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); for “ethnographic theology,” see Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, *Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); for “intersectional theology,” see Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press); for “ordinary theology,” see Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening, and Learning in Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002).

milieu of religious and theological scholarship dedicated to the claims of embodied individuals, yet retains the disciplinary specificity of liturgical theology.

Liturgical Studies and Liturgical Theology

Methodology in the discipline of liturgical studies has a long-established fixation with ritual texts, both on the historical and theological “sides” of the discipline.⁴ Through the pioneering work of Anton Baumstark, Gregory Dix, and others who used philological and historical-comparative approaches to liturgical origins, liturgical studies became an academic discipline in the nineteenth and early twentieth century; yet, it was focused principally on the historical development of ritual texts. On the theological side, Dom Lambert Beauduin, one of the early leaders of the Liturgical Movement of the early twentieth century, sought to connect the liturgical life to the academic discipline of theology. Beauduin, complemented by Romano Guardini, Odo Casel, and other early twentieth century Roman Catholic liturgical theologians, viewed liturgy primarily as a source of theology; put differently, liturgy was an accomplice to the academic discipline of theology.⁵ The mid-twentieth century, however, observed a *ressourcement* in liturgical

⁴ While the discipline of liturgical studies does not have any canonized sub-disciplines of theology or history, many scholars gravitate toward one approach. However, there are always exceptions (e.g. liturgists engaging in historical theology). I will be approaching this dissertation as a liturgical theologian who draws upon social scientific resources.

⁵ See Dom Lambert Beauduin, *Liturgy the Life of the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1926); Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953); and Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship, and Other Writings* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962). Additionally, for Roman Catholics, liturgy’s usefulness to theology was also tied to canon law.

theology: that of liturgy as a source for theology to liturgy as theology itself.⁶ Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann argued for liturgical theology as an independent theological discipline where liturgical experience as the primary foundation must then be connected secondarily to doctrine.⁷ For Schmemmann, Prosper of Aquitaine's fifth century maxim *ut legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi* ("the rule [or law] of prayer establishes the law of prayer") clearly articulates an order of primacy: worship informs doctrine.⁸

Building on the work of Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemmann, Aidan Kavanagh makes the stark distinction between "primary" and "secondary" theology. He refers to the human subject and worshipper as one who engages in primary theology (*theologia prima*), which is the lived experience of worship in the gathered assembly—both the individual and communal ritual action and experience.⁹ Secondary

⁶ A prime example of this in the Patristic period was St. Cyril of Jerusalem's *Procatechesis* and his five *Mystagogical Catecheses*. See F. L. Cross, ed., *St Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995).

⁷ See Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 3rd ed. (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986).

⁸ The relationship between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*—and in particular, the ordering of the terms—has been discussed amply in liturgical-theological and systematic theological discourse, though not uniformly. For a historical overview, see Frank Senn, *The People's Work: A Social History of the Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 225-229. See also Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Michael Downey, "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: Taking it Seriously in Systematic Theology," in *Promise of Presence*, eds. Michael Downey and Richard N. Fragomeni (Washington DC: Pastoral Press, 1992), 3-25; Mary M. Schaefer, "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: Faith, Doctrine, and Theology in Dialogue," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 26, no. 4 (1997): 467-479.

⁹ Among those who implicitly understand and/or discuss liturgy as primary theology, see Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*; Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984); see David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2004). See Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

theology (*theologia secunda*), then, is a reflection upon primary theology and is the written content of liturgical theology. Schmemmann and Kavanagh would later influence liturgical theologians David Fagerberg and Gordon Lathrop, who both continued this “line” of thinking, albeit with their own trajectories (I will return to this point in Chapter One).¹⁰ This dissertation continues in the same vein as the Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop line, and others who view liturgy as *theologia prima*, but argues that these scholars have not traversed far enough in attempting to capture the vernacular theological insights of primary theologians.

Problems in Liturgical Theology

Liturgical theology has a “gap” problem. In the development of liturgical theologies in both theological monographs and denominational worship books, it is a common conundrum that the prescriptive, theological claims made in these texts often do not match the descriptive, lived reality of worshippers.¹¹ What we do and what liturgical theologies say we do are not frequently aligned. As practical theologians Helen Cameron et al. have pointed out, sometimes the *operant theology* of worshippers differs from the other “voices” in theology—the *normative theology* of scripture and tradition, the

¹⁰ The use of “line” in describing the thought of Schmemmann, Kavanagh, Fagerberg, and Lathrop originates with Michael Aune. See Michael Aune, “Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship, Part I,” *Worship* 81, no. 1 (2007): 48.

¹¹ I will use the phrase “lived reality” frequently throughout the dissertation. By employing this phrase, I am invoking the shared discourses related to studies of lived religion, unofficial religion, popular piety, lived theology, and ordinary theology, while at the same time not confessing disciplinary specificity.

espoused theology of a religious group's beliefs, or the *formal theology* of academic theologians.¹² Regarding worship, this gap goes beyond the text and is also the elephant in the room in seminary classrooms, denominational meetings, and scholarly conferences. The very notion of liturgical-theological prescriptivism implies that things are not as they *should be*; otherwise, there would be no need for liturgical theologians to prescribe various theologies and practices.

Within this “gap,” liturgical theology has a complexity problem. The term “liturgy” cannot be reduced to “the work of the people” or the “work of God in Christ on behalf of the people.” A single act of worship is a complex nexus of negotiations in real time with real bodies who participate in the liturgy. These bodies carry with them complex histories, liturgical formation[s], all in tandem with biological and psychosocial nuances. Certainly, the eucharist, for example, does not hold similar *meaning* even with worshippers of the same denominational tradition. *Meaning* itself is fraught with complexity. Recognizing the complexity of bodies at work in worship, liturgical theologians of the twentieth century to the present have responded to this problem with what Thomas Schattauer describes as the “anthropological turn,” which is a turn away from solely textual studies by buttressing textuality with attention to the human subject.¹³

¹² See Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

¹³ Thomas H. Schattauer, “Liturgical Studies: Disciplines, Perspectives, Teaching,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, no. 1 (2007): 116.

Despite the turn to the *anthropoi*, liturgical theology has a people problem. The Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop line of liturgical theology speaks of people in abstractions rather than empirically driven realities. Whether this is Schmemmann's worshippers in the Divine Liturgy or Kavanagh's muse "Mrs. Murphy," the bodies these theologians speak of—while they are indeed capacitated by primary theology—are theoretical bodies. As such, these bodies with their potentially orthodox and/or heterodox theologies can be controlled by the secondary theologian.

Even when qualitative research methods are employed, there is still a large sense of control by the scholar. This is a value-neutral statement because authorial control has the ability to make liturgical-theological claims palatable, convincing, and even beautiful. For example, liturgical theologian Mary McGann argues for ethnography and the people therein as a "source of insight" into liturgical theology and consequently uses her subjects to articulate a beautiful and compelling liturgical-theological account of African American Catholic worship.¹⁴ Similarly, in the liturgical-theological scholarship of Dutch liturgical theologians Marcel Barnard and Paul Post, the qualitative data functions as source material for secondary liturgical-theological reflection, but not as liturgical theology proper.¹⁵ The anthropological turn in liturgical theology may have turned to real

¹⁴ Mary McGann, *A Precious Fountain: Music in the Worship of an African American Catholic Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), xix.

¹⁵ See Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, and Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture: Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors* (Leuven: Peeters, 2014). See Paul Post, "Liturgische bewegingen en feestcultuur. Een Landelijk Liturgiewetenschappelijk Onderzoeksprogramma," *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 12 (1996): 21-55.

people, but the *anthropoi* are used in service to the secondary theological predilections of the liturgical theologian.

Liturgical theology has an ecumenical problem. Liturgical theologies in Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Mainline Protestant traditions abound, but there is far less representation from Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic communities. Moreover, the few liturgical theologies from these traditions tend to maintain a prescriptive call back to the ecumenical “normativity” of Word and Table.¹⁶ Rather than impressing upon Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Charismatics to “fall in line,” what if ecumenicity could be conceived of more broadly? Perhaps quixotic notions of ecumenical normativity or even “ecumenical liturgical theology” must be abandoned in favor of a chorus of diverse voices across the ever-widening ecumenical spectrum. I am convinced that liturgical theology’s ecumenical problem is better aided by adding a diversity of voices instead of rendering a synthetic paradigm, pattern, or *ordo* into which traditions finagle their “fit.”

Liturgical theology has a Hillsong problem, although it may be equally incisive to say that Hillsong has a liturgical theology problem. Liturgical theology has a Hillsong problem insofar as liturgical scholars have remained considerably silent about the movement’s growth across the world and its near-ubiquitous penetration into Mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Free Church, Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic liturgies. At the same time, Hillsong Church has a liturgical theology

¹⁶ For two examples of this, see Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); Chris E.W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012).

problem, though I say this partly in jest because Hillsong does not have a denominational worship book or a prolific team of in-house academic theologians to which to adhere. The various worship ensembles of Hillsong Church—Hillsong Worship, Hillsong UNITED, and Hillsong Young and Free—have published hundreds of songs; Global Senior Pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston have authored many books; various church leaders have written books and composed thousands of blog posts; yet there is no “official” liturgical theology *per se*. This is likely intentional because Hillsong inherits and inhabits the orality associated with Pentecostalism. Yet, what claims does Hillsong’s extant literature make about the nature and function of worship?

The gap problem, the complexity problem, the people problem, the ecumenical problem, and the Hillsong problem in liturgical theology are the problems this dissertation intends to address. This dissertation argues that the “anthropological turn” in liturgical theology has not focused upon the human subject to a sufficient standard, thus perpetuating the gap between theological prescription and the complex lived realities of the worshipper, the primary theologian *par excellence*. The insights and reflections of the primary theologian are what this project seek to capture and name *as* liturgical theology itself—a descriptive, rather than prescriptive agenda. As such, this dissertation proposes a new adjustment to an existing methodology in the discipline of liturgical studies: liturgical biography as liturgical theology.¹⁷ Rather than ascertaining biographies as sources *for* theology, this project’s approach to liturgical biography will utilize

¹⁷ Chapter One unpacks the history and significance of the term “liturgical biography” in fuller detail.

longitudinal oral interviews and personal journal entries, supported by ethnographic fieldwork, to describe the complex lived reality of two primary theologians (the worshipper) at Hillsong Church in New York City.

I name the liturgical-theological articulations of the primary theologians “interstitial liturgical theology” because they occupy the interstice between primary theology (the worshipper participating in worship) and the secondary theology of a trained theologian. These biographies add much-needed voices to ongoing liturgical-theological developments in Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism, and Charismatic movements. Additionally, these interstitial liturgical theologies provide a window of insight into current thought and practice at Hillsong Church—a synthetic secondary theology which I will construct. The methodology of liturgical biography as demonstrated in my case studies exposes the gaps related to liturgical-theological prescription versus practice, highlights a descriptive approach to liturgical theology through unique interlocutors, unveils the limitations of *meaning*, and necessarily complicates the ecumenical implications of liturgical theology.

Progression of Argument

Chapter One argues the theoretical foundations for liturgical biography, and while a universal method by design, it is particularly well-suited for Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic liturgical theologies. I introduce Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, which is a subterranean root structure that demonstrates

acenteredness, nonsignification, and openness to egalitarian relations.¹⁸ Translated into liturgical action, the rhizome characterizes the nexus of actions, thoughts, feelings, gestures, words, smells, and sensations occurring in real-time within the individual and the gathered assembly. Put simply, there are too many things happening at once in a single liturgical action for it to *mean* what various liturgical theologies prescribe for it to mean. Thus, in order for liturgical theology to capture the rhizomatic intricacies of the liturgy, the approach for which this dissertation advocates centers upon the reflections of the individual: the primary theologian engaging in primary theology. I argue that liturgical biography is a suitable method for capturing these interstitial liturgical theologies and that liturgical theology as a discipline would be enriched by naming these insights as liturgical theology proper. While this method could be employed ecumenically, for the sake of relevancy to Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic communities (one of them being my field site at Hillsong Church, New York City), I draw particular lines of connection between liturgical biography and the Pentecostal appeals to experience and testimony.

Hillsong Church is a global, multisite Pentecostal congregation, its own denomination,¹⁹ and the subject of Chapter Two. In an effort for the claims of liturgical biography to elucidate the aforementioned “gaps” and problems, it is helpful to have an

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 16th ed., trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Originally published in French as *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980).

¹⁹ Brian Houston, “Has Hillsong Really Become Its Own Denomination?,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), October 4, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2018/10/has-hillsong-really-become-its-own-denomination/#.XDZM5M9KhT0>.

extant liturgical theology against which to weigh it. Hillsong Church does not have a denominational worship book, a codified liturgical theology, nor a liturgically oriented history. Consequently, the purpose of Chapter Two is to construct a working understanding of Hillsong's liturgical history and liturgical theology from its primary sources, including but not limited to books, articles, blogs, song lyrics, and sermons. The chapter begins with a historical overview of Hillsong Church's founding, followed by attention to historical themes and emphases as mediated through the primary sources such as Hillsong's "tradition of novelty," Brian Houston's relationship with his father Frank Houston, Hillsong's Pentecostal-Evangelical hybridity, and Hillsong's fixation with authenticity. Following a similar method engaging the primary sources, I construct a synthetic rendering of Hillsong's secondary liturgical theology organized around the themes of worship and scripture, the primacy and power of music, and the notion that "God does not need our worship." The chapter concludes by situating Hillsong's secondary liturgical theology within Pentecostal discourse and arguing for its distinctiveness as such.

Chapters Three and Four are the heart of the dissertation as they are case studies of liturgical biography in action. Based on ethnographic field data and extensive one-on-one interviews with my two primary theologians, "Phoebe" (Chapter Three) and "Josiah" (Chapter Four), we have "co-constructed" a liturgical biography, including their personal histories and a thematically-conceived interstitial liturgical theologies.²⁰ The chapters are

²⁰ I will say more about the methodological dimensions of Chapters Three and Four in the following section.

constructed in parallel fashion. Beginning with an ethnographic introduction to the worshipping community, I then present a brief life history of the primary theologian. Drawn from coded interview transcripts, I organize their liturgical-theological claims thematically, allowing their words to be integrated abundantly and with great frequency. Following their interstitial liturgical theology, I put their claims in conversation with liturgical theologians, as well as other academic discourses related to the themes and identities that rise to the fore. The chapters conclude by highlighting the rhizomatic nature of their experiences in worship and the [dis]continuities between their interstitial theology with Hillsong's secondary liturgical theology.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by summarizing the progression of argumentation, then analyzes and evaluates the method of liturgical biography for liturgical theology. It argues that the method was successful in implementation, while also conceding that the dissertation was a necessarily limited "trial run" because there is only so much one can glean over the course of a few months. The chapter concludes by discussing liturgical biography's viability for conversations that relate to the intersection of ecumenism, liturgical theology, and ecumenically-minded liturgical theologians.

Mixed-Methods Qualitative Research

Between January and April of 2018, I traveled weekly to New York City to attend the 7:30PM service of Hillsong Church. Prior to the beginning of the study, I recruited two participants from the 7:30PM service to meet with me independently following the service each week. We would meet for 45 minutes to one hour over the course of ten

weeks, discussing everything from life history, to key weekly questions, to other questions organized around liturgical-theological themes (see Appendix). Because I was not drawing “generalizable knowledge” per the language of the Institutional Review Board’s protocol, the methodology for the selection of candidates was up to my own devising. I wanted the candidates to be regular attenders of the 7:30PM service (two or more visits per month), to self-identify as “Christian,” and to not be staff members or key leaders at Hillsong Church in New York City. Aside from the basic parameters, I wanted my primary theologians to have attended Hillsong for differing amounts of time, and I wanted them to be objectively *different* from one another in terms of race, class, gender, and marital status, among other demographic variables.

Although I encouraged the participants to journal throughout the survey study, the main liturgical-theological content was derived from the in-depth oral interviews. Oral interviews are rich sources of insight, but are ridden with psychosocial complexities in terms of rapport building, status, power, and privilege. These complexities, among others, are variables that framed the tenor of the interviews, while also coloring the interview data itself. In my interviewing, I used an inductive and active approach to qualitative interviews. I framed my questions based on the Patton model,²¹ while the content of the data took cues from the natural rhythm of the interview and the insights that rose to the

²¹ The Patton Model attempts to straddle the breadth of interview communication by asking (1) behavior or experience questions, (2) opinion or value questions, (3) feeling questions, (4) knowledge questions, (5) sensory questions, and (6) background or demographic questions. For a helpful summary of the Patton Model, see D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 27-28. For more detail, see Michael Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990).

fore of the conversation.²² As a researcher and interviewer, I carried with me the awareness of the power dynamic at work in oral interviews. For instance, having the participant discuss theological concepts and issues with a researcher trained in theological studies was bound to shape the content of the interview. Moreover, the responses were hardly “natural” as they were in some sense “performed” for the researcher’s benefit.²³ Ethnographer Raymond Gordon argues that interviewers must be aware of threatening the ego of the participants, and also of the participants’ degree of forgetting, tendency to generalize, conscious versus unconscious experiences, degree of trauma, and degree of etiquette.²⁴ Ultimately, interviewing must be understood as a dynamic process of complex negotiations that are consistently in flux. It is “part technique, part ethics, part theory, part method, part intuition, part collaboration, and part openness to deep vulnerability.”²⁵ Because the dynamics and negotiations taking place in the interviews were complex, I am intentional about demonstrating reflexivity in Chapters Three and Four as a key practice of my method.

²² See James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Active Interview*, Qualitative Research Methods Series 37 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995); Dan Goodley, et al., eds., *Researching Life Stories: Method, Theory and Analyses in a Biographical Age* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004); James V. Pickard, J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith B. McGuire, eds., *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

²³ This is another reason why the data will be named “interstitial theology,” because the “primary” liturgical experience of the primary theologian will already be once or twice (or more) distilled in preparation for the oral interview.

²⁴ See Raymond Gordon, “Dimensions of the Depth Interview,” *American Journal of Sociology* 62 (2003): 158-164.

²⁵ Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 35.

While attending worship at Hillsong Church, I utilized the participant-observer method in ethnographic fieldwork.²⁶ As a liturgical scholar, I am particularly interested in recording insights related to time, date, liturgical space, objects, music, preaching, transitional elements, use of space, and leadership.²⁷ The function of my ethnographic insights is to fill in the descriptive voids that arise with qualitative interviews and journal entries. Additionally, I do it to corroborate some of the claims made in the sermon in effort to build rapport and to facilitate further dialogue in the interviews. Ethnographer Amanda Coffey has argued that the location of self is critical to the ethnographic research endeavor.²⁸ As such, I approached this qualitative research with both insider and outsider status. I am a liturgical scholar who is not a member of Hillsong Church (outsider), and yet the formative Christian tradition in which I was raised was based off of the Hillsong model of church leadership and liturgical predilections (insider). Reflexive awareness that I am neither a “professional stranger,” nor am I overfamiliar with the context is incorporated into my liturgical-theological project.

In the dissertation title, I employ the word “co-construction.” Traditional approaches to ethnography involve a presentation of the subject or subjects, but they are

²⁶ See Michael Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1996).

²⁷ A helpful resource to guide my liturgical-ethnographic observations is found in Appendix 3 of Susan J. White, *Foundations of Christian Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 208-210.

²⁸ Amanda Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 36.

presentations by the “particularizer.”²⁹ My approach in co-constructing ethnographic theology means to present and write an account of the subjects *in partnership with* those being represented by allowing their voices—and in this case, their liturgical-theological articulations—to lead the organization of their respective chapters. In this project, there are two other authors whose textual contributions come through interview transcripts: Phoebe and Josiah, both of whom co-participate with me in “particularizing” themselves.

Chapters Three and Four present their insights, but in partnership with my framing and organization of their primary material. Moreover, I take the notion of co-construction further by inviting Phoebe and Josiah to read and respond to how they are being represented in the chapters. This is rooted in “emancipatory” interview approaches, which allows the participant “ownership of the narrative,” inviting them to have editorial control.³⁰ A noted problem with this approach is that the researcher’s liturgical-theological predilections and theoretical frameworks may, at times, overwhelm the voices of those being researched. However, given the “interstitial” nature of my liturgical-theological project, some areas will be naturally dominated by the participant (i.e., the vernacular theological data), while others by the researcher (i.e., the analytical work). Ethnographer Thomas Tweed once had a participant disagree with his analysis; therefore, he included, word for word, the participant’s criticism of his analysis. Tweed did not

²⁹ For a brief overview of the intersection between religion and ethnographic methods, including the language of the ethnographer as “particularizer,” see James Spickard and J. Shawn Landres, “Introduction: Whither Ethnography? Transforming the Social-Scientific Study of Religion,” in *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*, ed. James Spickard, J. Shawn Landres, and Merideth McGuire (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 1-14.

³⁰ Goodley et al., 60.

grant the participant veto-power, but allowed for disputation, thus leaving it to the readers for their arbitration.³¹ I will conduct my writing in the style of Tweed when disagreements do occur. Thus, the co-construction of the data will be neither completely emancipatory (because participants will not have full editorial control), nor completely controlled.

To better understand Phoebe and Josiah’s interstitial liturgical theology, I invited “coding partners” to participate in the preliminary coding of the interview transcripts.³² Put simply, there are themes in Phoebe and Josiah’s transcripts that I—as a married White male with no children in my late 20s, a graduate theological education, and a clergyperson in The United Methodist Church—might not detect given my demographic variables and life experiences. For Phoebe’s transcriptions, I invited ten women who matched her demographic data,³³ who have a lived familiarity with Pentecostalism and/or Evangelicalism, and who possess a graduate degree related to Theology or Divinity.³⁴ For Josiah’s transcriptions, I invited ten men and women who matched his demographic

³¹ Thomas A. Tweed, “Between the Living and the Dead: Fieldwork, History, and the Interpreter’s Position,” in Pickard et al., 71.

³² In sharing the transcriptions, all identifying markers were removed to protect the confidentiality of Phoebe and Josiah. Per the confidentiality standards set out in the Institutional Review Board protocol, I did not share any audio files or personal journals of Phoebe and Josiah.

³³ 40 to 50 years old, White, female, married with at least one child.

³⁴ It must be noted that neither Phoebe nor Josiah possess a graduate degree in Religion, Theology, or Divinity. I requested that coding partners meet this criterion because this is a liturgical-theological project in which theological themes comprise the majority of the content.

data,³⁵ who have a lived familiarity with the Black church (broadly conceived), and who possess a graduate degree related to Theology or Divinity. I invited the coding partners to “interact with the document” noting themes they encountered, as well as areas of resonance with their own life experiences. The insights and observations of the coding partners fostered my own organization of the material and played a key role in helping me understand Phoebe and Josiah more thoroughly.

Mixed methods qualitative research and liturgical biography make for an excellent partnership. This dissertation is necessarily flexible as it takes on the shape of what the liturgical-theological data reveals. Importantly, this project does not seek to make normative or generalizable theological claims about Hillsong Church New York City, Pentecostal or Evangelical liturgical theology, or Pentecostalism or Evangelicalism at large. The intent is to allow the two liturgical theologians to speak for themselves and to honor that as liturgical theology itself. Mary McGann’s notion of contemplative ethnographic scholarship as “understanding...rather than evaluating” and “appreciation rather than critique” resonates with this project.³⁶ As a result, it is my hope that throughout this dissertation, we may learn to *understand* and *appreciate* the insights of “ordinary” worshippers at the not-so-ordinary congregation of Hillsong Church in New York City.

³⁵ 20 to 30 years old, Black, male, single or engaged with no children. I also included Black women (similar age range and theologically educated) as coding partners because Josiah is spiritually guided and mentored by Black women.

³⁶ McGann, *A Precious Fountain*, xx.

CHAPTER ONE: *THEOLOGIA PRIMA* AND THE RHIZOME

Introduction

The discernment of meaning within liturgical theology is a task fraught with methodological difficulty and undoubtedly stands in relation to the difficulty in defining the term liturgy. Is “liturgy” itself a noun that encompasses official services, rubrics, rites, prayers, and sacraments, which is then dissected and expounded upon in written theological discourse? Is liturgy a verb that capacitates worshippers as “primary theologians,” which then gives rise to subsequent theological reflection? Does the etymology of *leitourgia* lend to the “work of the people?” Or rather, is it the work of God in Christ on behalf of the people, where Christ serves as the preeminent liturgist?¹ Assuming one has an operative definition of liturgy, how does one approach liturgical theology as a meaning-making enterprise? Is it textual, linguistic, semiotic, phenomenological, empirical, or all of the above? Further, amidst the diversity of theological and liturgical expressions in the Church of past and present, is liturgical theology something that must *mean*?

The “anthropological turn” of liturgical theology in the mid-twentieth century has addressed a number of these questions by situating liturgical-theological reflection “from within human experience rather than outside from it.”² The gathered assembly of worshippers is a nexus of bodies and texts with[in] context, rubrics read and rubrics

¹ See David Fagerberg, “What is the Subject Matter of Liturgical Theology?” *Roczniki Liturgiczno-Homiletyczne* 1, no. 57 (2010): 41-51.

² Thomas H. Schattauer, “Liturgical Studies: Disciplines, Perspectives, Teaching,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, no. 1 (2007): 116-117.

observed, signs, speech acts, physical environment, and simultaneously personal and corporate experiences of God's self-giving. As such, liturgical-theological reflection must necessarily stand within the realm of human experience. However, in the writing of liturgical theology, the question becomes: even if liturgical theology is at least partially rooted in human experience, how does one negotiate writing something that can capture the complexity of this meaning-full event? Confessional approaches to writing liturgical theology are certainly more delimited than ecumenical ones; however, one must negotiate to what extent ecumenical commitments must be observed, how those stand in relation to confessional commitments, and the actual experiences of worshippers who embody that confessional identity. Ecumenical approaches to writing liturgical theology typically seek a common historical foundation for liturgy, such as Gordon Lathrop's use of *ordo* as bath, word, table, all within the context of a participating community.³ Yet, when one's primary focus is upholding liturgical-historical normativity as an exercise in *ressourcement*, the connection to contemporary bodies and human experience becomes tenuous, especially when looking outside of the Mainline–Roman Catholic–Orthodox realm of experience.⁴ Moreover, as Paul Bradshaw has argued, “the ‘deep structures’ running through the liturgy are very few indeed if we apply the test of universal

³ Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 59.

⁴ Maxwell Johnson questions Lathrop's use of Justin Martyr as a foundational source for a universal *ordo*, instead arguing that Justin's account is only describing one worshipping community. See Maxwell Johnson, “Can We Avoid Relativism in Worship? Liturgical Norms in the Light of Contemporary Liturgical Scholarship,” *Worship* 74 (2000): 146.

observance to them,” thus making a truly ecumenical liturgical theology even more difficult.⁵

Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic Christians⁶ and theologians are no stranger to being excluded from ecumenically-minded liturgical theology, especially when the “deep structures” of the liturgy are upheld as the ecumenically normative. Liturgical historian James White critiques the hegemonic nature of ecumenical normativity: “To imply that the *ordo* of Christian worship is missed by all those for whom the eucharist is an occasional service, for whom the pragmatic Christian year makes more sense than the traditional Christian year, is indeed risky business.”⁷ White then argues that liturgical theology, especially under the influence of Schmemmann, lends toward a “minority report” rather than reflecting current embodied practice.⁸ Efforts to lessen the distance between ecumenical liturgical-theological commitments and those of Pentecostal liturgical theology have been made by theologians such as Simon Chan and Christopher Green, but these accounts tend to pull Pentecostalism prescriptively toward

⁵ Paul Bradshaw, “Difficulties in Doing Liturgical Theology,” *Pacifica* 11 (1998): 184.

⁶ I have chosen to use the designation of “Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic” as one grouping because of the church I have chosen to study, Hillsong Church. Hillsong is its own denomination, but was formerly affiliated with the Pentecostal denomination, The Australian Christian Churches. Hillsong Church campuses across the globe attract Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Charismatics, among a host of other Christians from across the denominational spectrum. I am also taking cues from Pentecostal scholar Simon Chan who addresses his work to both Evangelicals and Pentecostals and Daniel Albrecht, who writes of Pentecostals and Charismatics. Recognizing that the terms are not interchangeable with one another, I choose to address them as one grouping because (1) Hillsong New York City embodies all three and (2) as a way not to get caught up in mire of the distinctives and theological battles therein.

⁷ James F. White, “How Do We Know It Is Us?” in *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God. Essays in Honor of Don E. Saliers*, ed. E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill, S.J. (Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 58.

⁸ White, 58.

ecumenical commitments.⁹ Borrowing White’s language, these projects function as liturgical-theological “minority reports” for the Pentecostal tradition. Perhaps what is needed is liturgical theology rooted in description over prescription. If the locus of liturgical-theological reflection lies within human experience, then the insights of the subjects are what ought to be captured, regardless of how they stand in relation to confessional or ecumenical liturgical-theological commitments.

This chapter argues that the discipline of liturgical theology has not been sufficiently anthropological in its attempt to capture the human experience, which I will also argue is imperative for the construction of Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic (PEC) liturgical theologies. The anthropological turn of the “primary” and “secondary” theological distinctions of the Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop line has merit, but fails to match (or even attempt to match) the descriptive reality of the gathered assembly. Despite Kavanagh, Fagerberg, and others employing the hypothetical muse “Mrs. Murphy” in order to elucidate the anthropological focus of liturgical theology, she functions as an unrealistic subject. Mrs. Murphy is not a *tabula rasa*.¹⁰ She might be worshipping at a Pentecostal congregation presently, but perhaps she was liturgically formed by the Anglican tradition, which will undoubtedly shape the articulations of her

⁹ See Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); see Chris E.W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012). Both Chan and Green issue a clarion call for the recovery of the centrality of the eucharist in Pentecostal liturgical practice and theology, which is in tension with empirical reality.

¹⁰ Paul Bradshaw makes a parallel claim to this regarding worshippers, in general. See Bradshaw, “Difficulties in Doing Liturgical Theology,” 191.

primary theological experiences. Liturgical theology needs more than a hypothetical thin description of Mrs. Murphy; it needs real bodies and thick description.

Taking the anthropological turn even further, I propose liturgical biography as a methodological entry point pertinent for liturgical theology. As such, this chapter observes the following trajectory: I situate my methodological proposal within liturgical theology's postmodern penchant of "doing" over "meaning," which leads to a discussion of the merits and deficits of the "primary" and "secondary" liturgical-theological distinctions. I argue that liturgical biography occupies the interstice between primary and secondary theology. I then incorporate Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the rhizome and articulate its suitability as a theoretical underpinning for liturgical biography. Drawing all of these strands together, I conclude the chapter by arguing that this methodology and theoretical underpinning is particularly well-suited for Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic liturgical theologies.

Liturgy as "Doing" over "Meaning"

The anthropological turn within liturgical theology of the mid-twentieth century was embedded within larger theophilosophical shifts, such as the abating influence of structuralist, positivist, and phenomenological endeavors to an increased attention to deconstructionism and Wittgensteinian language games. "Meaning" itself became less top-down, less vertical, and trended toward the grassroots level and a democratized understanding. Put differently in the words of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix

Guattari, meaning shifted from “arborescent” theories associated with modernity to “rhizomatic” tendencies associated with postmodernity.¹¹ While Schmemmann and Kavanagh, and later, Fagerberg and Lathrop had no intentions of eradicating meaning from their liturgical theologies, their attention to primary theology as the foundation for secondary theological reflection indicates that liturgy is enacted by embodied persons, each with their own complex intricacies. The problem is that the secondary liturgical theologies in the Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop line present the converse: liturgy as a neat and tidy corporate act. Thus, while their theologies of worship did not seek to relegate meaning to a peripheral status, their methodological and theological distinction between primary and secondary theology opened the door for other scholars to renegotiate or democratize meaning in liturgical theology.

One such liturgical scholar is Richard McCall. In 1997, McCall penned the *Worship* article, “Liturgical Theopoetic: The Acts of God in the Acts of Liturgy.” Building on the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet and other liturgical theologians who do “theology as liturgy,” McCall proposes a *theo-poetic* as a way of “doing theology which would derive not only from the content but from the structure of liturgy as act, work (*ergon*), event.”¹² McCall writes as a liturgist who is discontent with the discipline of liturgical studies’ focus on texts at the expense of embodied persons. As such, he incorporates the discipline and discourse of theopoetics as a method to signal the

¹¹ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 16th ed., trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 15-21.

¹² Richard D. McCall, “Liturgical Theopoetic: The Acts of God in the Acts of Liturgy,” *Worship* 71 (1997): 410.

corporality and the multiplicities of the gathered assembly. For McCall, the performance of the text and the rubrics are theologically equal to the content of the text itself. In an effort to overcome the longstanding shadow onto-theology has cast over liturgical, and more specifically sacramental theology, McCall argues that liturgy is primarily *act*. Doing liturgical theology must prioritize the *ergon* over the *logos*, *-urgy* over *-ology*, the illocutionary over the locutionary act. In effect, both in liturgy and liturgical theology, we should not ask “what does this mean,” but “what are we doing?”¹³

The concept of liturgy as “doing” is neither groundbreaking for liturgical theology, original to McCall, nor is it strictly associated with the postmodern paradigm. This type of language has clear antecedents in the discourse of the Liturgical Movement with the work of Romano Guardini. Though Guardini would argue that everything is purposeful or meaningful in liturgy, he also argues that liturgy cannot be viewed from the standpoint of purpose. Rather, the function of liturgy is to exist on its own for the sake of play. He writes, “the liturgy creates a universe brimming with fruitful spiritual life and allows the soul to wander about in it at will and to develop itself there.”¹⁴ For Guardini, one of the many definitions of liturgy is that it is an art that has no purpose but to express truth through play. However, Guardini’s practical theology of liturgical participation is more expansive than play as he also discusses the seriousness, the symbolic nature, the style, the fellowship, and the prayer of the liturgy. *The Spirit of the Liturgy* functions less

¹³ McCall, “Liturgical Theopoetic,” 404.

¹⁴ Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953), 177.

as secondary liturgical theology and more as what Gordon Lathrop would describe as the “pastoral” dimension of liturgical theology.¹⁵

While Guardini discusses play as an end in and of itself, theologian Zsolt Ilyés sees play as a means to an end:

Because of its ludic character, liturgy is called by some theologians ‘holy play.’ Liturgy is celebrated playfully, or rather, it requires a playful disposition for its celebration. Liturgy expresses and celebrates the playfulness of life. In contrast, the play one engages in in daily life is imperfectly realized and this in an often-unconscious manner; daily play, however, finds its full and complete expression in the liturgy, which raises play to a conscious celebration of, for example, joyful thanksgiving for the meaning of the world, of life, of suffering and death; for freedom or for order. Thus, play in liturgy helps one to consciously recognize, accept, celebrate and realize the gifts of God, whereas play in daily life celebrates and manifests these gifts in a veiled and incomplete way in as much as daily play anticipates and prefigures the playfulness of liturgy.¹⁶

Playfulness in the liturgy both realizes and is a conscious celebration of the fullness of the gifts of God. Ilyés moves closer than Guardini in characterizing his liturgical theology around “doing” through the lens of play, but play is still an abstraction—a neat and tidy secondary liturgical theology without any substantive claims from the gathered assembly. Liturgical theologians Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, and Cas Wepener boldly ask the question: “Do we really still like playing?”¹⁷ Based on their own ethnographic work, they

¹⁵ Lathrop writes, “Secondary liturgical theology is not merely descriptive: it always has something of a critical, reforming edge. When that edge is turned toward specific problems of our time, these reflections may be called, as they are here, *pastoral liturgical theology*.” Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 7.

¹⁶ Zsolt Ilyés, “The Human Person at Play: A Model for Contemporary Liturgical Understanding,” in *The Liturgical Subject: Subject, Subjectivity, and the Human Person in Contemporary Liturgical Discussion and Critique*, ed. James G. Leachman, OSB (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 138.

¹⁷ Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture: Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods*, Concepts and Metaphors (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 254.

argue that play has become democratized in our current culture.¹⁸ Their data has led them to muddy the waters of Dutch liturgical theologian Paul Post's claim that Christians have become "observers" of liturgical celebrations.¹⁹ Play has been a key and consistent concept for liturgical theologians across the modern and postmodern transition.

The notion of liturgy as "performance" is another key insight akin to liturgical theology's turn toward doing over meaning. Liturgical theologian Kevin Irwin's groundbreaking study *Context and Text* argues that the liturgical context is text, with context and text upheld in a dynamic dialectic.²⁰ One cannot evaluate the content of a liturgical text or rubric without considering the context, especially the performance of the rite itself. His scholarship is concerned with the reception of the liturgical reforms called forth in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and in particular, if the normativity of the reforms matches the understanding of the gathered community. He writes, "Investigation into what actually occurs at liturgy and (to the extent possible) how what occurs is appropriated by the gathered community is most useful especially since this method can help assess what has actually been implemented and the extent to which the revised rites are truly normative."²¹ Irwin then roots his liturgical-theological claims under the auspices of liturgy as acting or doing, making four claims about the theological aptness of

¹⁸ When referring to "our culture" and "we," it is important to note that these scholars write from Europe and South Africa.

¹⁹ Barnard et al., *Worship in the Network Culture*, 254-255.

²⁰ Kevin Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books, 1994), 63-67.

²¹ Irwin, 66.

the liturgy. First, liturgy is a *Word* event “wherein the Word of God is proclaimed and responded to, so every act of liturgy is necessarily regarded as an experience of divine revelation and of dialogue with God through the dynamic of revelation and response.”²² Second, liturgy is a church *event* that “enacts the community of believers into ever deepening communion with God and one another.”²³ Third, the act of liturgy “is to experience the three personed God, the Trinity, ever at work for our salvation.”²⁴ Fourth, liturgy has a euchology which expresses a theologically balanced soteriology, taking into account the “fullness and integrity of the paschal mystery.”²⁵ Interestingly, Irwin’s concern about receptivity does not have, or even propose to have, empirical substantiation.²⁶ In turn, I too wonder to what extent his own liturgical-theological musings about the “theological aptness of the liturgy” carry resonance with the gathered community. While context is indeed text for Irwin’s methodology, the extent to which context is substantiated by embodied persons leaves his liturgical theological claims and methodological claims wanting.

²² Irwin, 315.

²³ Irwin, 316.

²⁴ Irwin, 316.

²⁵ Irwin, 317.

²⁶ Indeed, this was not a concern at the time. Kevin Irwin was “fighting a different battle” in his book, namely, the textual fundamentalism present in the construction of liturgical theology, particularly, though not limited to, Roman Catholic voices. My own claims and reproaches are not intended to construct an anachronistic straw man, but instead to laud his accomplishments, then continue to push the envelope for further avenues of exploration, of which I hope to make my own contribution.

Jewish liturgical scholar Lawrence Hoffman takes the notion of performance and applies it to liturgical language, incorporating the insights of J. L. Austin. Like Irwin, Hoffman is also combatting textual fundamentalism in liturgical theology and proposes an incorporation of the social sciences in his method with anthropology and ritual theory at the forefront. He argues that ritual texts are performative; they accomplish what they describe.²⁷ Hoffman is concerned with the quality of performance and an innate awareness of the power of words because “one of the prime functions of the liturgy is the presentation of sacred myths to sacred assemblies, that through a selective vision of their past, they may learn how to plot their future.”²⁸ Again, as we have seen in Guardini, Ilyés, and Irwin, Hoffman’s emphasis on “doing” through the lens of performance is done *in service to* a more polished secondary liturgical theology. The performance itself—whether speech-acts or eucharistic prayers with a balanced soteriology—is not studied as a subject in its own right/rite.

Liturgy as play and liturgy as performance both signify that the substance of liturgy and liturgical participation is about “doing.” However, as we have seen with the above liturgical scholars, even a liturgical theological focus on “doing” is subservient to liturgy’s ultimate meaning. Notably, even in the most “postmodern” accounts of liturgy as “doing,” they have been seduced by modernity’s overarching metanarratives. Richard McCall, for example, argues that liturgy is “acting” or “doing.” He does not see liturgy as

²⁷ Lawrence Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 133-134.

²⁸ Hoffman, 144.

a series of episodic or disconnected acts; rather, they are held together by an Aristotelian “unity” principle in the “plot” of the liturgy. For McCall, the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the eucharist give a unifying structure and relate directly to a prayer of confession, for example.²⁹ McCall’s approach here is not unlike Gordon Lathrop’s principle of liturgical juxtaposition.³⁰ Liturgy and liturgical theology are held together by both a plot-unity and “holy things” in juxtapositions, respectively. This understanding of the liturgy or of liturgical theology is not incorrect, but it fails to take seriously the “action” or the “doing” of the liturgy as theological content itself because it shifts so quickly from “doing” to “meaning.”

The late liturgical theologian Graham Hughes would oppose many of the critiques I have outlined above because meaning is at the center of his project. He laments in his book *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* that the deconstructionist paradigm associated with Jacques Derrida has made the quest for meaning meaningless.³¹ Hughes asserts that Derrida’s agenda quashes onto-theology, metanarratives, Saussurian sign-systems, and other meaning-making theories, thus abandoning all frameworks for comprehending meaning. Postmodernism (or rather, poststructuralism) according to Hughes is obsessed with “difference,” while pure

²⁹ Richard D. McCall, “Liturgical Theopoetic,” 407-410.

³⁰ “The Sunday meeting of Christians, no matter what the denominational tradition, has focused around certain things: primarily a book, a water pool, bread and wine on a table; and secondarily fire, oil, clothing, a chair, images, musical instruments. These things are not static, but take on meaning in action as they are used, especially as they are intentionally juxtaposed.” See Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 10.

³¹ Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29.

modernity is captivated by “identity.” Difference eradicates meaning, while identity uplifts meaning in too pure of terms. Hughes thus proposes a liturgical theology for “late modernity,” where meaning is to be found in the interplay of identity and difference.³² For Hughes, bodies are what carry the ultimate word for the construction of meaning.³³ Liturgical theology, then, is making sense of the interior and exterior signs of worship; it is a meaning-making project. It is “doing,” too, but for the sake of “meaning.”

While I am sympathetic to Hughes’ concern about deconstructionism and poststructuralism, I reject the notion that the quest for meaning is vanquished by the deconstructionist agenda.³⁴ The validity of the deconstructionist project is embedded within the historical context it occupies: an ever-changing, expanding, diversifying, and globalizing world in the mid-twentieth century. Put differently, there is too much meaning in the world—especially within the liturgies in which people engage. Services of Christian worship are complex, replete with symbols, and enacted by an increasingly diverse population. How can the eucharistic bread mean the same thing to majority-White Lutherans in Chicago and to Lutherans in Asia for whom bread is not a staple pantry item? Even within one congregation, the parishioners carry different socioeconomic

³² Hughes, 255-256.

³³ Hughes draws upon the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, who argues that meaning-making occurs in triadic structures called “Firstness,” “Secondness,” and “Thirdness.” Firstness is pure possibility, which encounters Secondness—the object itself; actuality. Thirdness is the “interpretant,” which is the body that does the interpretive work. Hughes and Peirce argue that no semiotic exchange can be successful without Thirdness. See Hughes, 256.

³⁴ It must also be noted that Hughes repeatedly decries the process of secularization within the church and academic theology. This narrow viewpoint does not allow for him to see any benefit to the poststructuralist endeavors because this is yet another attempt for the church to over-contextualize with the world.

statuses, racial and ethnic identities, church traditions, anecdotal associations, and emotional dispositions for the eucharistic bread to carry a unified meaning, even though other points of contact may coalesce. It is my contention that there are far too many multiplicities occurring in any liturgical action at any given point for meaning to be a meaningful locus of discourse. This is not an attempt to negate meaning within liturgical theology, but rather to deemphasize its weight in the construction of liturgical theologies. This approach is consonant with the developments in liturgical theology, particularly the distinction between “primary” and “secondary” theology.

The Limitations and Benefits of “Primary” and “Secondary” Theology

As discussed in the introduction, the understanding of “primary” theology as the liturgical experience of the gathered assembly originates with Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemmann, which is then further developed by Benedictine Aidan Kavanagh and fine-tuned by David Fagerberg. The Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop line and its distinction of primary and secondary liturgical theology has been widely received and implemented, but not without critique, especially from liturgical historians and sociologically inclined liturgists.³⁵ Importantly, these discussions are rooted in a fundamental disagreement about the word order of Prosper of Aquitaine’s fifth century maxim *ut legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi* (“the rule [or law] of prayer establishes the law of belief”). Liturgical scholars who observe primary and

³⁵ See Schattauer, “Liturgical Studies”; also Melanie Ross, “Ecumenism after Charles Finney: A Free Church Liturgical Theology” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2010).

secondary theological distinctions understand the maxim to contain a prescribed order of primacy: worship informs doctrine. Scholars that take issue with this distinction understand worship and doctrine to be a two-way street. Of course, the dichotomy is not clear-cut, but a helpful framework for critique nonetheless.

Liturgical historian Paul Bradshaw writes one of the harshest critiques of the primary and secondary theological distinctions. He argues that the distinction is a highly romanticized one, wherein primary theology in particular is not reflective of *real* Christians who come to worship not as blank slates, but as people who have already been formed by an operant secondary liturgical theology.³⁶ The worshippers present possess different cultural backgrounds, ages, life histories, and many have been catechized in distinct traditions and locations, all of which affect their embodiment and understanding of the liturgical rite. Bradshaw also pushes back historically. He cites the Arian parties of the fourth century who were content to worship with subordinationist tendencies in doxological formulae, who were then anathematized by orthodox understandings.³⁷ The primary theology was corrected by “a more accurate vision of the Trinity in their worship.”³⁸ In other words, the law of belief directly changed the law of worship. However, what is the most scathing of Bradshaw’s critique is the following claim: “Those who are the strongest advocates of the theory that it is the natural piety of

³⁶ Bradshaw, “Difficulties,” 191.

³⁷ It must also be noted that Arian views remained for many centuries following its anathematization.

³⁸ Bradshaw, “Difficulties,” 191.

worshippers that should be accorded the most significant weight in liturgical theology are the ones most likely to be unhappy if this were to be put into practice.”³⁹ Bradshaw’s remarks here echo my own discoveries in analyzing the liturgical-theological claims drawn from “primary theology,” wherein the readers do not get the pleasure of meeting or interacting with the ones from whom such primary theological experiences and subsequent secondary theological claims are derived.

Liturgical scholar James White argues that a shallow understanding of liturgical history is present in the contemporary liturgical theologies of the Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop line. White argues that “most liturgical theology tends to be historically naïve, just as much liturgical history may be theologically unsophisticated.”⁴⁰ As a historian and liturgical “splitter” rather than “lumper,”⁴¹ White is suspicious of homogeneity in liturgical history. This leads him to question the claims that liturgical theology often makes on behalf of ordinary worshippers, as well as traditions for whom the eucharist is an occasional service. Liturgical historian Michael Aune continues this critique of historical naïveté, albeit with more specificity. Drawing from the work of Paul Marshall, Aune argues that liturgical theologians who observe the primary and secondary distinctions have altogether misunderstood the interpretation of Prosper of Aquitaine’s *lex orandi, lex credendi* adage. He contends that what is truly “primary” in Prosper’s text

³⁹ Bradshaw, 192.

⁴⁰ White, “How Do We Know,” 57.

⁴¹ On use of “lumpers” and “splitters” regarding liturgical history, see Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2002), ix-x.

is the teaching of the popes and conciliar judgments, as well as the grace of God—not the law of prayer.⁴²

Based on the above critiques, it would be reasonable to conclude that the primary and secondary distinctions based on a misreading of Prosper of Aquitaine’s adage should be abandoned in search of a more accurate framework.⁴³ This project has no interest in “settling the score” of debates spanning the last twenty years regarding the contextual or theological nature of Prosper’s adage nor will it attempt to create a new understanding of *leitourgia*. Recognizing that the primary and secondary theological distinctions are fraught with historical interpretive complications and that worship and doctrine, *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* flow in both directions, this project still finds value in the framework of “primary” and “secondary” liturgical theology for the following reasons: (1) the primary theology category engenders a liturgical theology focusing on “doing” over “meaning,” (2) the notion that the claims of secondary theology must be held in check and evaluated in light of primary theology, and (3) having the dichotomy of primary and secondary opens up the binary for interrogation.

First, the category of primary theology satisfies the postmodern penchant of focusing on doing over meaning. It stands to reason that an unintended consequence of the anthropological turn in liturgical theology was this emphasis on the “doing” of

⁴² Michael Aune, “Liturgy and Theology, Part I,” *Worship* 81, no. 1 (2007): 66-67. See also Joseph A. Novak, “Revaluating Prosper of Aquitaine in Contemporary Liturgical Theology,” *Studia Liturgica* 44, no. 1-2 (2014): 211-233.

⁴³ Paul Marshall proposes the demythologization and retirement of the adage altogether. See Paul V. Marshall, “Reconsidering ‘Liturgical Theology’: Is There a *Lex Orandi* for All Christians?” *Studia Liturgica* 25 (1995): 129-51.

gathered assembly. Though this is not without critique from scholars who would likely want to see more activity ascribed to God in the gathered assembly,⁴⁴ the “doing” allows liturgical theology to be opened up even further beyond the text. Though the Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop line was never concerned with escaping meaning, their utilization of the distinction between primary and secondary theology affords primary theology some hermeneutical and theological freedom. As such, having the category of primary theology opens the possibility of critical reflection upon the complexity and multiplicities of the liturgical assembly and enacted rites in real time with real bodies.

A second benefit of maintaining the primary and secondary theological distinction is the notion that secondary theology must be held, in some ways, responsible to the experiences and formulations from primary theology. In other words, if scholars are to say that primary theology informs secondary theology, then in order to maintain intellectual honesty, what we say about worship on a formal theological level must be kept in check with the experiences and understandings of real people. Kavanagh argues that liturgy is something that takes us to the edge of chaos, and it is from that edge that we make sense of worship.⁴⁵ Yet, which parishioner would ever articulate worship as something that brings us to chaos? If anything, worship would be something to bring

⁴⁴ Michael Aune, for example, says this of Gordon Lathrop’s liturgical theology: “What is interesting, in my judgment, is that while [Lathrop] is quite clear about who is the enabler of Christian worship—the Holy Spirit makes possible the meeting of believers and their relationship to God and to one another, his liturgical attention seems to fasten more on what the *assembly* does with its juxtaposing and using of ‘holy things’” (emphasis mine). Aune, “Liturgy and Theology, Part I,” 60.

⁴⁵ Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Books, 1984), 73-74.

order to a chaotic life.⁴⁶ As another example, Gordon Lathrop contends that the “holy things” of the gathered assembly are word, bath, table, among other things, and that their juxtaposition to other acts gives them meaning. Again, who among the non-theologically trained assembly would articulate such a theology of worship? Secondary theologies à la Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop tend to make claims on behalf of worshippers that cannot be substantiated. Michael Aune is also suspicious of the generalizing claims within this liturgical-theological line of thought:

As we make our way through the significant liturgical theological works of scholars like Alexander Schmemmann, Aidan Kavanagh, David Fagerberg, and Gordon Lathrop, it becomes clear that their proposals to unfold the dynamics of Christian worship or to speak of its “meaning(s)” do not quite connect with what either the students or the professors “know” about or “experience” in the worship of their respective faith communities. Our students as well as my colleague and I have concluded that what is missing in these liturgical theologies is “particularity.”⁴⁷

Particularity is indeed missing. For example, among trained liturgical-theological scholars, the eucharist is often spoken of as the unifying principle *par excellence* within the liturgy. As *Lumen Gentium* declares, the eucharist is the “source and summit” of the Christian life.⁴⁸ However, what are the realities of these “unifying” principles in the lives

⁴⁶ It is here where the work of sociologists can necessarily keep theologians in check with their claims. Sociologist Ann Swidler’s notion of “cultural toolkit” is particularly germane here. She contends that a cultural toolkit is comprised of stories, symbols, rituals, and other aspects of a socialized worldview from which people draw upon in effort to solve problems and/or develop strategies of action. See Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273-286.

⁴⁷ Michael Aune, “Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship, Part II,” *Worship* 81, no. 2 (2008): 154.

⁴⁸ *Lumen Gentium*: “Dogmatic constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, on November 21, 1964,” paragraph 11.

of the faithful? For example, is the eucharist enacted *as* summit in the Mass among each of the worshippers? What if singing evangelical hymns is itself the summit? It is clear that liturgical-theological prescription vis-à-vis popular reception and “experience” have been at odds throughout history.⁴⁹ Yet, in the task of writing liturgical theology, which is indeed shaped by the interpenetration of *lex orandi, credendi, and vivendi*, theological prescriptivism still reigns triumphant at the expense of popular practice.

Third, due to the need for increased particularity in liturgical theology and the deconstructible nature of binaries, the categories of primary and secondary theology must be interrogated. Indeed, as many scholars have remarked that the principle of *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* is a two-way street,⁵⁰ so too is primary and secondary theology. Both Paul Bradshaw and Michael Aune have argued that worshippers are not blank slates, but they carry with them preformed secondary liturgical theologies from their cultural backgrounds, previous experiences of worship, and racial and ethnic identities, among a variety of other factors. This nexus of preformed multiplicities is operant in the primary

⁴⁹ From the Apostle Paul’s injunction to correct the Corinthian community’s dining practices in the first century (a liturgical act, one could argue) to the twenty-first century “Online Communion” practice (and subsequent moratorium) in The United Methodist Church, worshippers have tended to vote with their feet against the “prescriptions” made. As a scholarly example about another time period, historian Edward Muir writes about the ritual lives of ordinary people—a “popular” history—in early modern Europe, actions which were often in tension with the Church’s prescribed theological understandings (e.g. the eucharistic host stolen and stored in an amulet for protection). See Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe: New Approaches to European History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Michael Downey, “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: Taking it Seriously in Systematic Theology,” in *Promise of Presence*, ed. Michael Downey and Richard N. Fragomeni (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1992), 3-25; Mary M. Schaefer, “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: Faith, Doctrine, and Theology in Dialogue,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 26, no. 4 (1997): 467-479; also Catherine LaCugna, “Can Liturgy Ever Again Become a Source for Theology?” *Studia Liturgica* 19 (1989): 1-13.

theological embodiment of the gathered assembly and necessarily informs the secondary liturgical-theological reflections.

The primary and secondary theological distinction is a helpful framework, yet there is another untapped area of focus between primary and secondary theology: the claims of “ordinary” worshippers.⁵¹ This does not seem obvious on the surface level given the incorporation of social-scientific data collection methods in liturgical studies. Liturgical scholar Mary McGann, for instance, utilized “liturgical ethnography” as a methodology in her study of an African-American Roman Catholic worshipping community in California.⁵² Qualitative and quantitative research methods are commonly employed among liturgical scholars in continental Europe, which makes sense given that liturgical studies typically falls under the auspices of programs in practical theology or ritual studies rather than a standalone discipline.⁵³ In all of these studies employing social scientific research methods, data is used as a springboard for further theological reflection. Indeed, these scholars take seriously the notion of liturgy as “doing” with their collection of data, but the data functions as near-primary theology which then leads to

⁵¹ I am using the term “ordinary” in the sense of practical theologian Jeff Astley, who writes that ordinary theology is “the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind (or, more generally, as ‘the content, pattern and processes of ordinary people’s articulation of their religious understanding’).” See Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 56.

⁵² See Mary McGann, *A Precious Fountain: Music in the Worship of an African American Catholic Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004).

⁵³ For a few examples, see Barnard et al., *Worship in the Network Culture*; Mirella Klomp with Marcel Barnard, “Sacro-Soundscapes: Interpreting Contemporary Ritual Performances of Sacred Music through the Case of The Passion in the Netherlands,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 240-258; see also Miranda Klaver, *This is My Desire: A Semiotic Perspective on Conversation in an Evangelical Seeker Church and a Pentecostal Church in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2011).

formal secondary theological reflection in their monographs or journal articles. This is not problematic methodologically, but there is an interstice that needs interrogation and breaking open, namely, viewing the data itself as liturgical theology.

Liturgical scholars have not sufficiently considered the theological claims of ordinary worshippers as liturgical theology proper. In the earlier ruminations of Aidan Kavanagh, David Fagerberg, and others who employ the muse Mrs. Murphy as a symbol of ordinary people embodying primary theology, or as Fagerberg remarks the “one who is capacitated by the liturgical rite,”⁵⁴ it is unsettling that Mrs. Murphy is only a hypothetical person, and an unrealistic one at that.⁵⁵ Moreover, even when real bodies are utilized in social scientific data collection, their embodiment of the liturgy and subsequent theological reflections (if they are even interviewed) are used as fuel for the secondary theological reflections of the qualified academic. Yet, why must such a quick shift be made? Why are the insights of non-specialists such as Mrs. Murphy and others with real bodies neglected?

I propose that the gap between primary and secondary theology, the liturgical theological articulations of “ordinary” people, must be considered in order to have a more robust understanding of liturgical theology. For the sake of nomenclature, I have termed this gap “interstitial liturgical theology.”⁵⁶ The understanding of “interstice” in interstitial

⁵⁴ David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2004), 133.

⁵⁵ Bradshaw, “Difficulties,” 192.

⁵⁶ “Interstitial theology” is a term already in use by scholars of interreligious dialogue. Tinu Ruparell writes, “Interstitial theology is not a method of grafting and absorbing the other onto oneself, but a

theology does not mean a gap, but a nexus of relations. Translated for liturgical theology, this captures the tension that Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell Johnson, Michael Aune, and others have named about the *a priori* relations of primary and secondary theology. Because there is already secondary theological reflection that has, in some ways, formed and shaped the minds of the ordinary primary theologians, the path from primary to secondary theology is not untouristed. This notion of the complexity between primary and secondary theology and between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* also finds resonance with the sociological literature surrounding “lived religion.” Sociologist Nancy Ammerman writes, “Change, throughout history, has been born in the interstices where everyday practice goes beyond official dogma, making both the existing religious structures and the emerging practices worthy of our attention.”⁵⁷ Indeed, the theological claims of ordinary people are particularly worthy of attention and are under-researched in the field of liturgical studies. The problem is that there has not been a method developed to capture the intricacies and the theological articulations of the living Mrs. Murphys within the gathered assembly. As such, I am proposing a new method in the field of liturgical studies to help capture this interstitial liturgical theology: liturgical biography.

form of reorganization, a re-creation of oneself in a fundamentally artistic or imaginative act. This is wholly appropriate and in keeping with contemporary discussions of identity as ‘oneself as another.’” Tinu Ruparell, “The Dialogue Party: Dialogue, Hybridity, and the Reluctant Other” in *Theology and Religions: A Dialogue*, ed. Viggo Mortensen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 246. Also see Tinu Ruparell, *Interstitial Theology: A Hermeneutic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious Dialogue* (West Sussex, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

⁵⁷ Nancy Ammerman, “Introduction: Observing Modern Religious Lives” in *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, ed. Nancy Ammerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13.

Liturgical Biography as Liturgical-Theological Method

James White was the first to coin the term “liturgical biography” as a method in liturgical studies, although he employs the term for the construction of liturgical history.⁵⁸ As liturgical historian Matthew Sigler describes in his dissertation—which offers a liturgical biography of White himself—White “explores the life, times, and work of [William] Durandus as a case study on the importance of liturgical catechesis.”⁵⁹ In the work of White and Sigler, the biographies of the subjects being studied play an integral role in understanding the texts and books they constructed. The narratives of the studied subjects—the lives they led, the passions and hobbies they maintained, their catechetical training—are not just historical facts, but theological proclamations in and of themselves. Theologian James McClendon offers foundational insights to the notion of biography as theology, which I will quote at length:

By recognizing that Christian beliefs are not so many ‘propositions’ to be catalogued or juggled like truth-functions in a computer, but are living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities, we open ourselves to the possibility that the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one which begins by attending to lived lives. Theology must be at least biography. If by attending to those lives, we find ways of reforming our own theologies, making them more true, more faithful to our ancient vision, more

⁵⁸ James F. White, “Thirty Years of Doctoral Studies at Notre Dame,” in *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith: Essays in Honor of Aidan Kavanagh, O. S. B.*, ed. John F. Baldovin, S.J. and Nathan Mitchell (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 333.

⁵⁹ R. Matthew Sigler, “Mediating Tradition, Navigating Culture: Toward a Methodist Paradigm for Liturgical Engagement” (PhD diss., Boston University, 2015). For the work with which Sigler is engaging, see James White, “Durandus and the Interpretation of Christian Worship,” in *Contemporary Reflections on the Medieval Christian Tradition: Essays in Honor of Ray C. Petry*, ed. George H. Shriver (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1974), 41.

adequate to the age now being born, then we will be justified in that arduous inquiry. Biography at its best will be theology.⁶⁰

Here it is important to note that McClendon is not attempting to abandon “propositional theology.” Instead, he sees a reforming edge to biography, namely that propositional theology is enfolded by real people, which may change the way others conceive of these propositions. In the method of liturgical biography as I am proposing for liturgical theology, the reforming edge is the construction of alternate liturgical theologies that challenge the status quo and articulations of formal secondary theologies among liturgical theologians.

James White’s own understanding of liturgical biography was never expanded upon at length nor was it written with liturgical theology in mind. As such, I will propose a few guiding principles for liturgical biography as a method for elucidating interstitial liturgical theology:⁶¹ using the living over the dead, description over prescription, and doing over meaning.

First, a liturgical biography must be conducted with a living subject. I emphasize a living subject for the practical reason that they are available for further questions if any arise after the interviewing sessions. Answers to questions can be further honed and

⁶⁰ James William McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 37-38.

⁶¹ To note, I think that liturgical biography could also be a method utilized in writing secondary liturgical theology if the interviews conducted are with a liturgical-theological specialist. This project takes no interest in that avenue as it is attempting to give voice to “ordinary” worshippers’ liturgical theologies. Liturgical biography could also be employed historically as do White and Sigler, but could be even more pointed in effort to unearth “popular” histories as it relates to liturgical practices. Some of this work has been done by scholars of American Methodist worship. See Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000); see Karen Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

clarified. The researcher can gather a life history to the extent that the study warrants. The obvious difficulty of interviewing a living subject is the complexities within the interview process, including but not limited to the negotiations of power, privilege, and the presence of the interviewer's own agenda in shaping the interview process. These issues and others related to the complexity of qualitative research gathering will be returned to in Chapter Three. Another issue with using living subjects in worship is that, as sociologist Martin Stringer writes, it is "impossible to question or interview people while they are actually involved in the process of worship."⁶² Importantly, there is no "liturgical-theological purity standard" for a set time period to receive the most "authentic" theological articulations. Different people process their experiences of God and their enactment of the liturgy at differing times, places, and circumstances. Every interview will be conditioned by the multiplicities experienced in the rite itself and the subsequent interview setting. This is why it is important for there to be multiple interviews with the same person so as to document recurring patterns and themes that emerge over time.

Second, liturgical biography should be rooted in description over prescription. The insights of the primary liturgical theologians are obtained and honed in descriptive process; these are not static vignettes of singularly reported experiences. The interstitial theological articulations of these theologians are not a means to an end, but an end in and of themselves. What does Mrs. Murphy, with a B.A. in sociology, who works full-time as

⁶² Martin Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship* (Birmingham, England: Birmingham University Press, 1999), 72.

a stay-at-home parent, who has an estranged sibling, have to say about the worship song lyrics “oh, the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God chases me down, fights till I’m found, leaves the ninety-nine?”⁶³ How did that change from last week to this week? Mrs. Murphy’s articulation of a theological response to these song lyrics will be subjectively and, mostly likely, objectively different than another worshipper, and may even differ in her own mind week to week. Yet, Mrs. Murphy’s multiplicities that inform her understanding of this worship song are an important theological proclamation that must be honored as a distinct contribution. Though the author of the song might intend for the lyrics to center upon God’s reckless love, if Mrs. Murphy understands the song to be about Christ seeking out the lost, that insight is equally theological. Or, the song might not “mean” anything; instead, it may function to prepare her heart and mind for the proclamation of scripture. As Martin Stringer advises, “what happens in the rite is only a part, and arguably only a small part, of what is happening within or around worship.”⁶⁴ One cannot assume things mean what they ought, which is why a liturgical theology rooted in process-oriented description is increasingly necessary among liturgical theologians.

Maxwell Johnson would likely disagree with my descriptive methodology as his article “Can We Avoid Relativism in Worship” cautions against an overly-descriptive methodology in liturgical theology. Johnson writes,

⁶³ Cory Asbury, “Reckless Love,” on *Reckless Love*, Bethel Music Publishing, 2017.

⁶⁴ Stringer, *Perception of Worship*, 73.

[I]t would seem that the *liturgical theologian* cannot be content with mere *description* but would want to accord still some kind of “normativity” to the “official” meanings of the rites and the continual need for ongoing catechesis in those meanings. Knowing and describing the various meanings gets one little further than laying out the data. And, unless liturgical theologians are to be nothing other than chroniclers of history, or sociological and/or anthropological “observers,” there must be some room for theological *prescription* as well.⁶⁵

I have no disagreement with the logic that Johnson presents, for I too would argue similarly if there were an abundance of liturgical theologies rooted in description; however, this is not the case. As one well-acquainted with the field of liturgical theology, I can say confidently that the reverse is true: liturgical theological prescription reigns triumphant at the expense of description. Indeed, as Gordon Lathrop has remarked, liturgical theology “does try to fashion a cup so that people today may drink from the water-spring that is the liturgy.”⁶⁶ Liturgical theology leading people back to the liturgy with greater richness and depth is appropriate and noble; yet, this prescriptive intent has been the established *modus operandi* of liturgical theology for too long. Furthermore, an incorporation of a variety of interstitial liturgical theologies would not make liturgical theology relativistic, but rather it would diversify and expand extant understandings.

Third, liturgical biography as a method focuses on “doing” over “meaning,” but not at the expense of meaning. Obviously, questions of meaning are important for articulating an interstitial liturgical theology, but the meaning of a particular worship event or liturgical action cannot be separated from the physical embodiment of that action, as well as the perceived understanding of what God is “doing” in the moment.

⁶⁵ Johnson, “Avoid Relativism,” 154. (emphasis original)

⁶⁶ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 7.

Further, there is a communal element to the task of meaning-making that occurs in real-time during worship services. The embodied surrender of one worshipper with her hands raised might influence how another worshipper makes sense of the song and how to theologially embody the song. While there ostensibly may be infinite meanings cohering within a particular act of worship, one must also consider the prevalence of a narrower set of meanings that have been delimited by socialization processes.⁶⁷ As such, liturgical biography recognizes the complex and fraught nature of meaning(s) at any given point in time.

Worship is a gathered assembly of real bodies, which include a near-infinite number of real-time negotiations that must be evaluated in tandem and in relation to the liturgical actions. Liturgical biography seeks to capture these complexities in the interview process. How does one dress for worship? How do worshippers select their seat for that particular Sunday? What else was on the mind of Mrs. Murphy or other worshippers during the worship service? What mental associations or stories entered the minds of worshippers as the pastor preached her sermon? How did the hymn or song lyrics interact with their own religious or theological dispositions? How is God understood to be among worshippers in the service? What does an experience with God

⁶⁷ Monique Ingalls' application of "imagined communities"—a term originally used by Benedict Anderson—is pertinent here. She argues that evangelicals participate in an imagined community insofar as they have a "shared discursive framework enabled by mass media technology." See Monique Ingalls, "Awesome in this Place: Sound, Space, and Identity in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 307. While Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians operate as individuals, they are connected in myriad ways by participating in a shared culture. This could be something as simple as shared musical tastes. There are also shared locutions and their corresponding illocutions, such as a Christian articulating that they are in a certain "season" of life. This shared "imagined community" has the potential to delimit the potentially infinite number of meanings an act of worship may assume.

feel like? Is it the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* as Rudolf Otto describes?⁶⁸ Perhaps it feels like butterflies fluttering in one's stomach. Liturgical biography does not eradicate meaning, but views meaning in relation to doing.

It is my understanding that there are no other liturgical scholars employing liturgical biography as a method in liturgical theology. However, my project resonates with the work of Melanie Ross' case-study approach in her dissertation-turned-monograph *Evangelical versus Liturgical: Defying a Dichotomy*.⁶⁹ Ross incorporates two case studies of congregations who represent the lived defiance of the perceived evangelical versus liturgical dichotomy. Through songs, prayers, sermons, and oral interviews with primary theologians, Ross emerges with a liturgical theology found in the “well curve” between “Free” churches and “liturgical” churches.⁷⁰ Both my project and Ross' work address the same larger problem: the interstice between the claims of secondary liturgical theology and the liturgical-theological commitments and articulations of primary worshippers and their respective worshipping communities. Ross proposes a solution to this problem on a corporate level, namely in how particular communities are defying the liturgical and evangelical divide. She also provides a secondary theological corrective to liturgical scholars who read Charles Grandison Finney without liturgical-theological finesse, as well as uplifts evangelical theologians

⁶⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), 2-8.

⁶⁹ See Melanie Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical: Defying a Dichotomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁷⁰ Ross, “Ecumenism after Charles Finney,” 18.

who would likely be ignored by scholars from Mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox traditions.⁷¹ My solution to the problem differs insofar as it lies within the individual. As such, I offer two case studies of individuals within a particular worshipping community: Hillsong Church in New York City. I situate the interstitial theologies of these two primary theologians within and possibly against the Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic liturgical-theological discourse in an effort to add additional voices and complexity to this understudied subfield within liturgical theology.

Throughout the course of the dissertation, but especially in Chapters Three and Four, I demonstrate that liturgical biography and my three guiding principles therein—using the living over the dead, description over prescription, and doing over meaning—are a viable method and a descriptive addition to the field of liturgical theology. These three guiding principles are not random but are embedded within a theoretical understanding put forth by poststructuralist philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari of the rhizomatic nature of everyday life. Their notion of the rhizome is particularly helpful for understanding the multiplicities and nexus of relations within the gathered assembly of the liturgy and subsequent interstitial theological articulations.

⁷¹ I am using Ross' language about "liturgical" and "evangelical" communities. Though it might be obvious, it is important to note that all churches are liturgical insofar as they worship together.

Theoretical Foundations: The Rhizome

Liturgical theologian Joris Geldhof contends that one should not inhabit postmodern⁷² thinking, treating it “as a *prima philosophia* when it comes to understanding and explaining the liturgy and the sacraments.”⁷³ He critiques postmodernism as something inconsistent with liturgical theology, arguing that it is characterized by a mistrust of reason, an opposition to metaphysics as *prima philosophia*, and the utilization of Wittgensteinian and Heideggerian philosophies of language.⁷⁴ As an example in his discussion of baptism, Geldhof asserts that postmodernity cannot grasp the infinitude of the Trinity (because postmodern thinking critiques reason) and therefore cannot protect baptism “from a profoundly indifferent prejudice, which can eventually give rise to a destructively nihilistic attitude.”⁷⁵ Yet, to set up a binary of infinitude and finitude is not a fair critique of postmodernism because the binaries themselves must be interrogated. Cannot a theological understanding of the Trinity inhabit both finite and infinite planes? Furthermore, the notion that finitude, variance, and plurality (other buzzwords affiliated with postmodernism) yield indifference is as groundless as the *ad absurdum* argument Geldhof sets forth. To his credit, many of the points Geldhof leverages against the postmodern project are valid, but his agenda is to protect

⁷² I am keeping “postmodern” as the term here because this is what Geldhof uses in his work. Indeed, some of the interlocutors he names—Wittgenstein and Heidegger—would not be classified as poststructuralists even though they may have inaugurated poststructuralist thought.

⁷³ Joris Geldhof, “The Place of Baptism: On Being and Becoming Christian in Postmodern Cultures,” *Studia Liturgica* 42, no. 1-2 (2012): 131.

⁷⁴ Geldhof, 139-140.

⁷⁵ Geldhof, 139-140.

metaphysics. He argues that “not only faith, beliefs, and doctrine need metaphysics but equally sacraments and liturgy.”⁷⁶ To Geldhof, postmodern liturgical theology’s rejection of metaphysics throws the baby out with the bath water.

While honoring Geldhof’s critique, it must also be noted that the destabilizing, decentering, and complexifying forces of the postmodern endeavor continue to be a provocative voice in challenging questions of *meaning*, the use of language, and the metaphysical foundations undergirding the majority of liturgical theology.⁷⁷ It is this provocative edge of postmodernism that I employ in the method of liturgical biography and its theoretical foundations. Earlier, I incorporated the work of Richard McCall and his clarion call for liturgy and liturgical theology to be fundamentally concerned with “acting” and “doing” over “meaning.” What McCall has argued for—which he names a “liturgical theo-poetics”—is much needed, but his secondary liturgical theological claims are too centered upon the eucharist giving “meaning” to all of the “doing.” Indeed, it is meet and right for McCall to incorporate “theo-poetics” as a discipline, although he does not define the term. In what follows, I will first describe the term more robustly, then put

⁷⁶ Geldhof, 139. In an earlier article, Geldhof associates “Wittgensteinianism” with giving rise to particularisms in writing liturgical theology, which he argues is problematic because “Christian faith is always called to universalism.” He recommends that liturgical theology should rely both on philosophies of language and a sound metaphysics. However, a sound metaphysics involves a prescription of *meaning(s)* that, from my perspective, cannot be universalistic across different cultures and expressions of the Christian tradition. See Joris Geldhof, “Liturgy as Theological Norm: Getting Acquainted with ‘Liturgical Theology’,” *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 52, no. 2 (2010): 175. For a perspective that employs philosophies of language and a sound metaphysics that attempts to universalize, see Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*.

⁷⁷ There is not enough space to grapple fully with the [late] modernity versus postmodernity dynamic in the underlying philosophies of liturgical theology, nor is that the intention of this project. At this moment, perhaps it is best to acknowledge and honor difference, then move forward.

it in dialogue with the work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Édouard Glissant.

According to the Arts, Religion, Culture website, which hosts the Theopoetics journal (formerly hosted under the name “The Association for Theopoetics Research and Exploration”), theopoetics is broadly defined:

Theopoetics is (1) an emphasis, style, and positive concern for the intersection of religious reflection and spirituality with the imagination, aesthetics, and the arts, especially as (2) it takes shape in ways that engender community-affirming dialogue that is (3) transformative in effect and (4) explicit about embodiment’s importance.⁷⁸

The author(s) of the above definition are quick to note that theopoetics is not an alternative to theology, but a way of doing theology. For the purposes of obtaining the biographies themselves, the above definition works well because liturgical biographies require religious reflection in the context of community, they may be transformative in effect, and they are explicit about embodiment. However, for theopoetics to serve as a dialogue partner for the theoretical foundations of liturgical biography, a different definition is needed.

Theologian David L. Miller argues for four marks of “radical poetics” as theopoetics; however, to clarify, he insists that these marks are “not really a ground for theopoetics, or if they be a ground then they are a groundless ground. The ground has cracked and dropped away.”⁷⁹ Fear of lingual entrapment aside, these four marks are the

⁷⁸ “ARC’s Definition of Theopoetics,” Arts, Religion, Culture, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://artsreligionculture.org/recommended-resources>.

⁷⁹ David L. Miller, “Theopoetry or Theopoetics,” *Crosscurrents* 60, no. 1 (2010): 18.

basis of how theoetics is understood in this project, namely: (1) no author, (2) no meaning, (3) no order—“complexity theory,” and (4) no end—enjambment.⁸⁰

By “no author,” Miller is referring to how authors of poetry do not have the last word when they write because authorial intent is broken open to those reading it. The poem and its interpretation is democratized and decentered. Second, theoetics is not concerned with meaning, but with *being*. As Miller pithily states, “A poem—like a poetic life—must not mean, but be.”⁸¹ Third, Miller argues that theoetics is like complexity theory, which is a non-linear way of conceiving and imagining a non-linear system.⁸² However, complexity is never completely chaotic nor orderly; it is unpredictable, but “not without moments of emerging signification and order.”⁸³ Finally, by “enjambment,” Miller is referring to a poetic technique where the end of a line forces the eyes to the line below. He notes, enjambment “keeps things emergent, adaptive, and open. There is not finality or fixity.”⁸⁴ It is not difficult to conceive of the liturgy of any tradition exemplifying these four marks. Even the most [con]scripted, didactic, predictable, and

⁸⁰ Miller, 11-18.

⁸¹ Miller, 14.

⁸² According to Neil Johnson, there are eight characteristics that describe complex phenomena: “(1) The system contains a collection of many interacting objects or agents. (2) The behavior of these objects is affected by memory and feedback. (3) They adapt their strategies according to their history. (4) The system is typically open. (5) It appears to be alive. (6) It exhibits emergent phenomena which are generally surprising and may be extreme and self-generated. (7) The emergent phenomena typically arise in the absence of any sort of invisible hand or central controller. (8) The system shows a complicated mix of ordered and disordered behavior, but it tends to move between different arrangements in such a way that pockets of order are created.” See Neil Johnson, *Two's Company, Three Is Complexity* (Oxford: One World, 2007), 13-16.

⁸³ Miller, “Theopoetry or Theoetics,” 16.

⁸⁴ Miller, 17-18.

fixed liturgical *ordo*, when viewed from the eyes of any participating clergy or layperson, can be co-created, illocutionary, surprising, and open-ended. Much of the complexity, multiplicity, and acenteredness of Miller's marks of theopoetics resonate with the work of French philosophers and poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Writing in the wake of the deconstructionist movement inaugurated by Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari uplift three pivotal concepts in the introductory chapter of their book *A Thousand Plateaus*: the root, the radicle, and the rhizome.⁸⁵ In describing the root, Deleuze and Guattari use words like “classical,” “this world,” “binary” logic, “dichotomies,” and other words related to the enterprise of structuralism.⁸⁶ The radicle, which is like a root with a cut-off end from which new growth comes, is associated with the project of modernity. No matter how hard it tries to exhibit multiplicity, for example, it is always connected to the root. The rhizome, however, is a subterranean stem that substantially differs from the root and radicle:

Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point...The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple...It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows...Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure. The rhizome is an *antigenealogy*. It is a short-term memory, or *antimemory*. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. Unlike the graphic arts, drawing, or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. It is tracings that must be put on the map, not the opposite. In

⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3-25.

⁸⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, 5.

contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system.⁸⁷

Continuing the eco-oriented analogies, crabgrass and ginger roots are both rhizomes.

Rhizomes are also websites like Wikipedia, in which one could follow all of its embedded links like a never-ending rabbit hole. The rhizome, or rhizomatic thought is most clearly associated with post-structuralism as evidenced by its characteristics of multiple entryways, acenteredness, proclivity to nonsignification, and openness to egalitarian relation, among others. Though the rhizome is “absolutely different” from the root and radicle, Deleuze and Guattari contend they are not mutually exclusive.⁸⁸ A rhizome can be entered through a root or radicle; root structures can exist within rhizomes; a radicle can burgeon into a rhizome; a rhizome may form in the hollow of a root.⁸⁹ However, the integrity of the rhizome does not change. It still exhibits the aforementioned principal characteristics.

Martinician poet and cultural theorist Édouard Glissant appropriates Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic thought, making it more corporeal and accessible in his *Poetics of Relation*. Though his argument is largely concerned with Caribbean identity as an enfleshment of Relation—which is anchored in rhizomatic thought—Glissant’s

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, 21.

⁸⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, 6, 14-15.

⁸⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, 15. For the purposes of this project in which simplicity is key, the rhizome in its purity will be explored in relation to liturgy. However, an interesting theoretical avenue to consider would be a rhizomatic system hollowed within a root or springing forth from the end of a radicle.

understanding of *being* can only be understood *in-Relation*.⁹⁰ One can only understand oneself in the context of relation to the Other, a task that is never static. In other words, *being* can only be *being-in-Relation*. Thus, the nexus of relations in a given moment remain forever conjectural and neither maintain nor presuppose ideological stability.⁹¹ The rhizomatic thought underscoring Glissant's discussion of enfolded identity can logically be applied to texts, to bodies, to ecclesiastical traditions, and the relational interplay of all of them.

Returning to David Miller, his grounded, but groundless "four marks" of theopoetics are consonant with a rhizomatic conceptual structure in the following ways. First, "no author." In a rhizome where lines of connection are abundant and variegated, the intention of the author is simply one of many points that a/effect the *act* of a reader. For example, the illocutionary speech-act of "peace be with you" might be one point in the rhizomatic structure, but it stands in relation to other points, such as the music sounding beautiful to a person, or the dying relative who just left a saddening message on the phone. Simply because the intention of the speech-act is to share peace and reconciliation does not mean this actually happens in real-time; thus, the recipient of the illocutionary act in our example is the one who ascertains the "meaningfulness" and the extent of being-in-Relation.

⁹⁰ The "R" in Relation is capitalized throughout the paper to be consistent with Glissant's usage, which demonstrates Relation's occupation as relational, but also a totality (a non-absolute totality).

⁹¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 32.

Second, rhizomatic structures, like theopoetics, are not meant to *mean*, but to *be*. Extracting meaning is too neat of an activity, too linear, too rooted, too radicular, whereas the messiness and near-chaos of the rhizomatic structure evinces multiplicity. The multiplicities within a typical Sunday liturgy—the bodies with all of their processes, the texts, the speech-acts, the smells, and all the other negotiations—are too extensive to cohere with what various liturgical theologies prescribe are happening. David Fagerberg’s definition of liturgy allows for this since he focuses on the “being” and “doing” of the liturgy. He writes, “Liturgy is the Trinity’s perichoresis kenotically extended to invite our synergistic ascent into deification.”⁹² While this is beautifully stated as a secondary theological claim and captures the “doing” of both sides, namely God and humanity, it would not likely resonate with the operant definitions of liturgy from ordinary worshippers even after years of catechesis.

Third, there is no codified order in a rhizome. Although every point is disordered, each is in relation to another and is never complete chaos; moments of order appear. As an example, a newcomer to a parish might arrive late, missing the initial prelude which orders the dispositions of some worshippers; however, he might grasp at order of a different kind later in the liturgy. Writing about the offshoots and connections within a rhizome, Melanie Ross muses,

These unregulated connections can occur between a person’s devotional reading on Thursday afternoon and the message of a sermon on Sunday morning. An invisible network sometimes seems to connect the music minister’s song list with

⁹² David Fagerberg, *On Liturgical Asceticism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 9.

precisely the hymn that the woman in the back pew needs to sing. The extemporaneous words of a teenager's testimony may nourish a visitor in a fresh and unexpected way.⁹³

In the example of the music minister's song list jibing with what the woman in the back pew "needs to sing," these were completely separate events in time, but in the gathered assembly a relational connection was forged, bringing signification to the moment. In the theory of complex systems that David Miller describes, despite what may seem like chaos, there are moments of emerging signification and order.⁹⁴ A rhizome may be simultaneously ordered and disordered, much like the liturgical assembly.

Fourth, the rhizome accords with Miller's notion of "enjambment" due to its lack of fixity and finality. In poetry, many authors will not end their poems with a period because this would signify that the work is complete.⁹⁵ Similarly, at any moment a juncture within the rhizome may be fissured and establish new rhizomatic structures in relation. A prayer in last Sunday's liturgy might inspire a parishioner to establish a new Bible study throughout the week, which stands in relation to the Sunday liturgy, thus adding to the milieu of relations among the Bible study participants vis-à-vis the Sunday liturgy. Rhizomes are open, complex systems that are ever changing, in flux, and have no definite ends.

In what I have described above, the image of the rhizome and David Miller's four marks of radical poetics are complementary concepts that break each other open

⁹³ Melanie Ross, "Lefts and Rites: One Evangelical's Perspective" *Liturgy* 23, no. 1 (2008): 39.

⁹⁴ Miller, "Theopoetry or Theopoetics," 16.

⁹⁵ Miller, 17.

hermeneutically when juxtaposed. The rhizome and Miller's understanding of theopoetics affords the liturgy of all traditions to be envisaged as open, adaptive, complex, and rhizomatic events in real-time. This is important as a theoretical foundation for liturgical biography because biographies are rhizomatic. The way living people interact with God and others in worship, the way they recount their experiences, and the way in which the presence of an interviewer interrupts and potentially shapes those experiences all must be viewed as multiple points in relation within the rhizome.

Liturgical theologian Nathan Mitchell is another scholar who has used the image of the rhizome in relation to the study of liturgy. In *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, and Sacraments*, Mitchell sides with theologian Graham Ward's understanding that culture is rhizomatic. He takes the specific example of the technological revolution in the last thirty years with the advent of the World Wide Web. The internet has "already begun to reshape cultures—and the church—in ways that affect five fundamental human interactions," which are "power and authority," "belonging," notions of "private and public," "content and access," and "community."⁹⁶ Similarly, the ritual of the church is rhizomatic insofar as it is "limitlessly multiple in meaning and internally...capable of verification only through the *exteriority* of ethical action."⁹⁷ It is here that Mitchell uses the rhizome as a tool for his secondary theological claims. Mitchell is arguing that the

⁹⁶ Nathan Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 26-30.

⁹⁷ Mitchell, 38.

rhizomatic nature of the multiplicity of meanings within the liturgy is only valuable if it is verified by the “liturgy of the neighbor.”⁹⁸

Where I differ from Mitchell is that I am interested in allowing the rhizomatic nature of the liturgical assembly, as demonstrated through the method of liturgical biography, to be presented in such a way that it may stand on its own as interstitial liturgical theology. Perhaps it will be messy, chaotic, and disorderly. Perhaps it will “fly in the face” of long-established norms within secondary liturgical theological reflections. Potential problems and hazards aside, the method of liturgical biography with its rhizomatic theoretical foundation will add another “testimony” to the chorus of liturgical theologies, which in my view necessarily complicates what liturgical scholars may call “ecumenical” or ecumenically-minded liturgical theology. The contributions of liturgical biographies from persons affiliated with Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic communities are especially needed in the midst of such a rhizomatic culture we occupy. In what follows, I will demonstrate how this method can accord well with these traditions in particular.

Liturgical Biography and Pentecostal, Evangelical, Charismatic Liturgical Theology

The gap between the secondary liturgical theological claims and the interstitial theological articulations of ordinary worshippers is not just an issue for Roman Catholic,

⁹⁸ Mitchell, 38. Mitchell borrows the “liturgy of the neighbor” language from Emmanuel Levinas, which was quoted by Louis Marie Chauvet. See Louis Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 238.

Mainline Protestant, or Orthodox scholars, but for Pentecostals as well. Moreover, Pentecostal theologians who engage directly with liturgical-theological discourse in a substantive manner are few and far between.⁹⁹ Simon Chan's monograph *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* is a notable exception wherein he argues that many Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Charismatics operate from a "false" primary theology.

When modern evangelical-charismatic churches arbitrarily construct their worship to cater to human needs and whims, they are doing primary theology. But it is a false theology, because it distorts our vision of the divine glory. This failure to understand what true worship is stems from a failure to understand what the church is. Conversely, a sound liturgical theology will also reveal the true nature of the church.¹⁰⁰

Accordingly, his liturgical-ecclesiological project carries with it a prescriptive agenda in effort to help Pentecostals and Evangelicals reclaim the balance of Word and Table as a central act of the Church, which is fundamentally a worshipping community. Chan's liturgical theology draws from a breadth of ecumenical liturgical scholars, including Alexander Schmemmann, Aidan Kavanagh, Geoffrey Wainwright, Jean-Jacques von Allmen, Joseph Ratzinger, Anscar Chupungco, and Edward Kilmartin, among others. This makes sense, given Chan's agenda of presenting a more ecumenically sensitive version of Pentecostal liturgical theology. However, it does not take empirical

⁹⁹ One scholar who will not be discussed in the body of the dissertation is John Jefferson Davis, who, like Chan, argues for a re-centering of Evangelical spirituality upon Word and Table, pleading that Evangelicals too can have a sense of "real presence" at the communion table. See John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁰ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 61.

verification to know that the eucharist, for example, is not at the center of Pentecostal spirituality.¹⁰¹ His project lacks a sustained commitment to the embodied Mrs. Murphys of Pentecostalism and is a “minority report” of Pentecostal and Evangelical liturgical theology.

Although there are many key aspects of Pentecostal theology and spirituality, two themes in particular rise to the fore in liturgical-theological reflection. The first is the role of experience in the gathered assembly and second is the role of testimony.¹⁰² It is my contention that the method of liturgical biography inasmuch as it articulates interstitial theologies of worship is particularly cogent for Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic communities as it accords with these two themes.

Experience is part and parcel of Pentecostal spirituality. Ritual scholar Daniel Albrecht’s groundbreaking work *Rites in the Spirit* offers a ritual approach to “Pentecostal/Charismatic” spirituality.¹⁰³ Drawing from participant-observation fieldwork and other qualitative data gathering methods, Albrecht extrapolates outwards and argues that the human experience of God is the foundation of Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality. He cites multiple dimensions of this experience, such as experiencing God mystically, experiencing God in the communal context, experiencing God “as

¹⁰¹ Pentecostal theologian Christopher Green, like Simon Chan, argues for a reclamation of the eucharist’s centrality in Pentecostal piety. See Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*.

¹⁰² Obviously, much more could be said here, particularly about the eschatological orientation of Pentecostal worship, the explicit focus on the charisms of the spirit, or the profoundly communal nature of worship. These facets of Pentecostal theology will resurface in the presentation and analysis of the qualitative interview data in Chapters Three and Four.

¹⁰³ Daniel Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

empowering Spirit and commissioning Lord,” and experiencing God as creative.¹⁰⁴ Yet, “experience” is a word rife with hermeneutical difficulties. Theologian Peter Althouse makes an important qualification about “experience” as it is sometimes used in Pentecostal theology. He argues that for Pentecostals articulating an experience of God, this experience is not philosophical, but confessional.¹⁰⁵ Philosophical understandings of experience have to do with individualism and the autonomy of reason,¹⁰⁶ whereas confessional understandings of experience articulate the encounters with God in a devotional manner.¹⁰⁷

Liturgical biography as a method for articulating interstitial liturgical theology is concerned with the confessional appeal to experience. The buoying of one ordinary interstitial liturgical theology is not to claim that the experiences of the primary theologian are completely unique or autonomous. It is to uplift that one voice whether her or his articulation of experience is in line with Christian orthodoxy, broadly conceived, or is avidly heterodox. On an autobiographical note, as a scholar writing from both an emic and etic perspective—insider and outsider—this reminds me of being in a Pentecostal worship service and encountering a parishioner who might make some heterodox claims. Simply because the claims are heterodox does not dismiss him or her as being any less a

¹⁰⁴ Albrecht, 237-250.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Althouse, “Toward a Theological Understanding of the Pentecostal Appeal to Experience,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38, no. 4 (2001): 399.

¹⁰⁶ Althouse, 405.

¹⁰⁷ Althouse, 411.

worshipper of that particular Pentecostal congregation. Liturgical biography thus amplifies the voices that often are not heard or even desired to be heard, especially among liturgical theologians.

Testimony is another key concept in understanding Pentecostal theology and spirituality. Drawing from the work of Robert Audi, Pentecostal theologian Mark Cartledge argues that the “individual aspects of knowing are integrated socially by the notion of testimony... We do not believe and know God in isolation; rather, we are part of a worshipping and witnessing community of faith.”¹⁰⁸ The knowing of the worshipping community is directly related to the sharing of testimonies. Put differently, testimony democratizes the shared knowing. This notion of democratization coheres with Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, who writes,

because the Spirit of God is no respecter of persons and has been poured out upon all flesh, the *rhema* word can be spoken at any moment and by any one. Thus the importance of the testimony and confessional praise in pentecostal liturgy as well as ordered moments for the manifestation of charisms, including the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and tongues and their interpretations.¹⁰⁹

The Spirit of God has been poured out upon all people, which means testimony is not reserved for those with specialized knowledge or experience, but for the non-specialist and ordinary worshipper alike.

For the method of liturgical biography, I conceive of testimony in two ways. The first is content of the biography—the actual testimony of the primary theologian, which is

¹⁰⁸ Mark J. Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2003), 53.

¹⁰⁹ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 162.

an articulation of his or her interstitial liturgical theology. This is something unique to the individual as it attempts to make known the rhizomatic intricacies of life and life in worship, but the testimony may also overlap with the insights of other ordinary worshippers or with secondary liturgical theological claims.¹¹⁰ Descriptions and articulations of worship and theology may be near the edge of chaos, but not without moments of emerging signification. The second way I understand testimony in liturgical biography is that the method itself functions to add a testimony to the voices of extant liturgical theologies—whether the interstitial liturgical theologies of the ordinary worshippers or the secondary liturgical theologies of the academic specialists. Rather than there being a Pentecostal liturgical theology, liturgical biography speaks of Pentecostal liturgical theologies—one voice amidst the cacophony and potential harmony of other voices and sounds, both official and unofficial, interstitial and secondary.

In order for liturgical biography to be successfully employed as a Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic liturgical theological method, it must be rooted in scripture. Because liturgical biography is functionally testimony-gathering about the experience of God in the gathered assembly, it must be grounded in the biblical themes of testimony and experience. In the Pentecost story of Acts 2, the democratized experience of God as tongues of fire allows all to communicate and to be understood in various languages as

¹¹⁰ Testimony in the Pentecostal tradition is a ritualized behavior wherein there are many shared patterns and vocabularies. While my research subjects and primary theologians Phoebe and Josiah were not “testifying” to me in the traditional sense, it is likely that some of their stories have been ritualized in a particular way by their respective socialization processes. For a discussion and examples of the socialization and ritualization of classic testimonies, see Arlene Sanchez Walsh, *Latino Pentecostal Identity: Evangelical Faith, Self, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 100-102.

the Spirit gave them ability. The many people who were healed by Jesus throughout the gospels had an experience with God incarnate. In the Emmaus narrative of Luke 24, the hearts of the Cleopas and the other disciple were burning within them as the risen Christ was made known and experienced in the breaking of the bread. Regarding testimony, the community described in Acts 23 is called to “bear witness” or to “testify” to the resurrection of the risen Christ in Rome. The apostle Paul too reflects on his testimony to the Thessalonians in its first chapter, which refers to his proclamation of the gospel rather than a judicial understanding of testimony. Mark Cartledge cites an abundance of scriptures in the Johannine literature, which he argues offers a central role to testimony.¹¹¹ Both experience and testimony are foundational concepts in the Bible and are practiced and embodied regularly within Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic worship services.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated that liturgical biography is rooted in the postmodern penchant of “doing” over “meaning” insofar as it tries to capture the rhizomatic nature of a Sunday morning worship service—a nexus of symbols, words, bodies, attitudes, emotions, and the action of God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, all of which are held in relation with one another. Liturgical biography occupies the interstice between primary and secondary theology, forging a new path that I have

¹¹¹ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 59.

termed “interstitial theology” wherein ordinary worshippers articulate their experiences of God, themselves, and the community of faith in the worship service. As such, it challenges the dominant discourse of secondary liturgical theologies by asserting that the demotic must be taken seriously and viewed as liturgical theology proper, regardless of how messy, chaotic, heterodox, or divergent it may be.¹¹² Furthermore, liturgical biography has particular resonance with Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic spiritualities insofar as it emphasizes testimony and the experience of God, both of which are biblically grounded principles. This method intentionally muddies the waters of liturgical theology not solely in an effort to disrupt, but to demonstrate the activity of God in the sacred, the mundane, the clean, and the messy.

On a closing note, I am reminded of the words of James White, who writes that if a particular form of worship survives more than its first generation, then “it must have some validity as a means of humans relating to God. We may dislike the Church-growth approach to worship, but if it is still flourishing a dozen years from now, we must concede it a certain validity.”¹¹³ White published the above quoted article twenty years ago, and indeed the Church-growth approach to worship continues to be an emulated model. Hillsong Church, in particular, offers a window into this thriving culture of worship which is also a global phenomenon. Hillsong Church as a denomination does not have an official secondary liturgical theology nor does its former denomination, The

¹¹² On the use of “dominant” and “demotic” discourses in the study of Christian worship, see Martin Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13-25.

¹¹³ White, “How Do We Know It Is Us?”, 63.

Australian Christian Churches, which is a part of the Pentecostal tradition. It is to this community of faith that we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORY AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY OF HILLSONG CHURCH

As a younger pastor, I placed little value on tradition, but as the years have rolled on, I've developed a greater appreciation for some traditions and can see how liturgy has its place among our worship. As a matter of fact, I believe that healthy contemporary churches can have their own liturgy, or order of service. But it's just a pity when the Holy Spirit is locked out of His own house because we are so stuck in our ways.

—Brian Houston, *There is More: When the World Says You Can't, God Says You Can.*

Introduction

Hillsong Church is a global megachurch and recently formed denomination based in Sydney, Australia, led by Senior Pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston. Hillsong Church was formerly a member of the Australian Christian Churches, a Pentecostal denomination with which Hillsong still maintains a close association.¹ Since its inception in 1983, Hillsong has transformed from a local Pentecostal church into a global multisite community, or as Bobbie Houston named it, “one house, many rooms.”² The rapid growth and increasing popularity of Hillsong Church is intimately tied to its musical exports, which are as far-reaching geographically as they are denominationally.³

¹ “What We Believe,” Hillsong Church, accessed June 29, 2018, <http://hillsong.com/what-we-believe/>. The Assemblies of God Australia was formed in 1937. In 2007, the Assemblies of God Australia renamed itself the “Australian Christian Churches.” As reported by their website, the ACC represents over 1,000 churches and more than 375,000 believers across Australia. See “About Us,” Australian Christian Churches, accessed June 29, 2018, <https://www.acc.org.au/about-us/>. As noted in the introduction, Hillsong Church became its own denomination in the second half of 2018 in order to maintain a more streamlined credentialing of their pastors across the world. See Brian Houston, “Has Hillsong Really Become Its Own Denomination?,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), October 4, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2018/10/has-hillsong-really-become-its-own-denomination/#.XDZM5M9KhT0>.

² Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood: How the Power of the Feminine Heart Can Become a Catalyst for Change and Make the World a Better Place* (New York: FaithWords, 2016), 184.

³ See Tom Wagner and Tanya Riches, “The Evolution of Hillsong Music: From Australian Pentecostal Congregation into Global Brand,” *Australian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (2012): 22.

According to recent estimates in church song reporting, over 50 million worshippers sing Hillsong songs in 60 languages on a weekly basis.⁴ In the realm of academia, Hillsong has received modest attention from sociologists, ethnomusicologists, and theologians, but has received no substantive engagement from liturgical scholars.⁵ Moreover, despite its burgeoning growth and influence over North American Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism over the past 30 years, the first academic book on Hillsong was not published until 2017.⁶ Hillsong as a church, denomination, movement, and global force deserves further study, especially with regard to the lacuna in liturgical theology.

Chapter One introduced the concept of interstitial liturgical theology, which uplifts the claims of ordinary worshippers as liturgical theology itself, thus occupying the space between primary and secondary theology. In order to understand better the interstitial theological claims from the qualitative research subjects, it is pertinent to have

⁴ “Hillsong Church Fact Sheet,” Hillsong Church, accessed June 29, 2018, <http://hillsong.com/fact-sheet/>; For more officially reported numbers, see “2017 Annual Report,” Hillsong Church, accessed July 1, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/policies/annual-report-australia/>; also Mark Evans, “Hillsong Abroad: Tracing the Songlines of Contemporary Pentecostal Music,” in *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 182. As a note, it is curious that the 2016 Annual Report reports songs being translated and sung in 100+ languages, whereas the most recent numbers suggest 60.

⁵ What follows is a limited sampling of articles from each discipline named. For Sociology of Religion, see Matthew Wade, “Seeker-friendly: The Hillsong Megachurch as an Enchanting Total Institution” *Journal of Sociology* 52, no. 4 (2016): 661-76; Gerardo Martí, “The Global Phenomenon of Hillsong Church: An Initial Assessment,” *Sociology of Religion* 78, no. 4 (2018): 377–386. For Ethnomusicology, see Mark Evans, *Open up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church* (Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing, 2006). For Theology, see Tanya Riches, “The Evolving Theological Emphasis of Hillsong Worship (1996-2007),” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 13 (2010); Nelson Cowan, “Heaven and Earth Collide: Hillsong’s Evolving Theological Emphases,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 39, no. 1-2 (2017): 78-104.

⁶ The book is interdisciplinary by design, but there is no liturgical theology present. See Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner, eds., *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You Call Me Out upon the Waters* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

a secondary theology with which to weigh it against. However, due to the lack of an official secondary liturgical theology of Hillsong Church, the aim of this chapter is to piece together a working understanding of Hillsong's major secondary liturgical-theological commitments. Methodologically, this chapter uses primary sources such as official books, blogs, song lyrics, and church statements, supplemented by sermon notes from qualitative research to give a synthetic rendering of the secondary liturgical theology of Hillsong Church. The chapter begins with a historical overview of Hillsong Church, culled from both primary and secondary sources, then continues with a thematic organization of Hillsong's secondary liturgical theology from primary sources. The chapter concludes by noting the complications of manufacturing a secondary theology of Hillsong Church and considering whether or not Hillsong's secondary theology is distinctly Pentecostal.

The history and liturgical theology provided here, as documented through Hillsong's primary sources, are both original contributions to the ongoing study of Hillsong Church. There is not an explicit argument made in either section one (history) or two (theology); however, the organization of the material itself reveals a theological and methodological bias. Writing as a liturgical scholar, I pay more attention to the written texts from book and blog sources than to speech communications (sermons, podcasts, etc.) or other embodied acts. Furthermore, familial and personal connections to Pentecostalism notwithstanding, as a scholar from a Mainline Protestant denomination—The United Methodist Church—I write mostly from an etic perspective. All of these negotiations inform the way I construct the history and theology as a researcher, so that

must be noted from the beginning. In the final section of the chapter, I take up whether or not my approach is an effective way to construct Hillsong’s secondary liturgical theology, or for that matter, any Pentecostal church’s secondary liturgical theology given the orality of Pentecostalism. Ultimately, I argue that my method works because the twenty-first century has ushered in a new era of orality, mediated in particular ways by Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic communities of faith. In this vein, Hillsong Church’s secondary liturgical theology is indeed distinctly Pentecostal, but shares similarities within the larger practical-theological milieu of Evangelical and Charismatic churches.

Hillsong Church – A Brief History

Hillsong Church, originally called the Hills Christian Life Centre, was formed in 1983 by Brian and Bobbie Houston as a “daughter church” of Frank and Hazel Houston’s Sydney Christian Life Centre.⁷ In his 2018 book *There is More*, Brian Houston describes his early life growing up in New Zealand, living in a working-class suburb, and his identity as the son of a successful Pentecostal pastor.⁸ He describes his theological upbringing as “Pentecostal on steroids,” where everyone called each other “Brother” or “Sister” and where the spiritual fervency was “on a whole other level.”⁹ Intentionally

⁷ Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood*, 18.

⁸ Brian Houston, *There is More: When the World Says You Can’t, God Says You Can* (New York: Waterbrook, 2018), 8-9.

⁹ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 206-207.

distancing himself from that strong Pentecostalism, Houston remarks that “spiritual activity is just not the same as spiritual life,” signaling that authenticity is of paramount importance.¹⁰ Following in the footsteps of his father (even though he did not intend to be a lead pastor), Brian went to Bible college in the early 1970s at the Christian Life Bible College in Wellington, New Zealand.¹¹ Shortly after his education, Brian met his future wife Bobbie on a beach in Papamoa at a Christian event.¹²

In the 1970s, Bobbie Houston recalls her time as a young adult listening to Maranatha! Music, as well as shopping for Jesus stickers to adorn her schoolbag. She writes, “it was the early seventies, and the Jesus Revolution sweeping America and different parts of the world was also being felt in New Zealand.”¹³ For Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic Christians in Australia and New Zealand, the 1970s were ripe for embracing the world-wide Church Growth Movement along with the more particular United States-based Jesus Movement.¹⁴ Theologian Shane Clifton remarks that New Zealand pastoral leaders, in particular—being quicker to embrace the charismatic

¹⁰ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 207. In this comment, Houston cites a lot of people who were exuberant in the worship service in praise to God, but afterwards would gossip and be stuck in their old ways. In nearly all of his autobiographical asides in every book, it is always a “set up” for a theological or spiritual claim. Houston writes like he preaches.

¹¹ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 66.

¹² “Brian and Bobbie: Global Senior Pastors of Hillsong Church,” Hillsong Church, accessed July 5, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/brian-bobbie/>.

¹³ Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood*, 11.

¹⁴ For the groundbreaking text regarding the Church Growth Movement, see Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed., revised and edited by C. Peter Wagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990). For a helpful overview of the Jesus Movement in the United States, see Larry Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

renewal brought about by the earlier 1950s Latter Rain revival¹⁵—were the leading voices that would shape much of Australian Pentecostalism in the decades that followed.¹⁶ Brian’s father, Frank Houston, was one such leader.

Frank and Hazel Houston moved to Australia in 1977 to plant the Eastern Suburbs Christian Life Centre in Sydney.¹⁷ Shortly after Brian and Bobbie married, they also moved to Australia to assist as leaders in the church. Sensing a calling to set out on their own, Bobbie writes, “six years into the adventure, we felt called to plant a daughter church and had moved from the city into the outer suburbs of the Hills District to do so.”¹⁸ In 1983, Brian and Bobbie planted the Hills Christian Life Centre in the Baulkham

¹⁵ The Latter Rain Revival can be traced to Canada in the late 1940s, which subsequently spread across the world in the 1950s. Mark Hutchinson describes the phenomenon thusly: “Highly typological, the movement drew upon Old Testament prophetic fulfillment (particularly with regard to the Feast of Tabernacles) and ‘the foundational truths’ of Hebrews 6:1–2 to shape its particular appropriation of early Pentecostal practices such as laying on of hands, singing in the Spirit, prostrations, etc. The ‘foundational truths,’ in particular, gave a sense of dispensational certainty and inevitability to the restorationism which had been basic to Pentecostalism right from its origins. Indeed, one might typify it as the realization of restoration—so much of its teachings and practice related to visible manifestation that, in its particular appropriation of the language of the Spirit, it held within it the potential to become the ideological basis for some of North America’s more materialist exports. The ‘manifest sons of God,’ the emphasis on restoration now, on evidences, signs and wonders, its mobile convention form (a variation on nineteenth-century brush arbour, ‘tabernacles in the wilderness’ which appropriated to themselves the sense of the wandering people of Israel), and particularly physical healing, all made this the natural interpretive framework for a renewed Pentecostalism emerging as a missiological program in the context of post-war, global consumerism.” See Mark Hutchinson, “The Latter Rain Movement and the Phenomenon of Global Return,” in *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement*, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 266.

¹⁶ Shane Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition: Analysing the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 141.

¹⁷ This would later become the Sydney Christian Life Centre, which would eventually merge with Hillsong Church as its City Campus. Historian Denise Austin writes that when Sydney CLC joined the Assemblies of God Australia (AGA), many AGA leaders were suspicious of the “latter rain vestiges” of Frank’s church. See Denise Austin, “‘Flowing Together’: The Origins and Early Development of Hillsong Church within Assemblies of God in Australia,” in Riches and Wagner, 26.

¹⁸ Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood*, 18.

Hills neighborhood of Sydney, which was not known for anything other than a large car dealership. Brian observes,

Driving by this dealership on the rural fringe of the city, I thought to myself, “If people are going to come out here in great numbers to buy a car...why wouldn’t they come out here to attend a church?” Despite the bewildered looks I got from others, I was determined to build a church in this community—by God’s grace, I could see what others couldn’t.¹⁹

This memory from Brian appears in a chapter titled “Pioneering,” where he frames the Hillsong success story within the theme of explorers pioneering terrain. The church began with 70 people on the first Sunday, then over the next few weeks decreased to 45. Houston then conceives the subsequent growth of Hills Christian Life Centre as a pioneering story, wherein a young adult invited his friends to church. In three weeks, thirty of the young adult’s friends had converted, which Brian notes, “started a revival of passion in our little school hall.”²⁰

“Passion” is a key word in Brian’s recounting of the early days of the Hills Christian Life Centre. He writes,

Hillsong has always been a worshipping church. Before there was Hillsong UNITED, before there was Hillsong Young & Free, before there was “Shout to the Lord,” “Mighty to Save,” or “Oceans,” there was worship. Passionate worship. It wasn’t always polished, there weren’t always lights, and in those early years, there wasn’t even a stage, but we worshipped. We sang and we began to take baby steps in writing songs that resounded in the hearts of the people in our community... Those were rough, raw, pioneering days, but the fruit of the labor of many faithful people early on began to give way to opportunities beyond our wildest dreams.²¹

¹⁹ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead: Your Best is Yet to Come!* (New York: FaithWords, 2015), 57.

²⁰ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 57.

²¹ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 13-14.

Passionate contemporary worship proved to be the cornerstone of Brian Houston's ministry, which both reflects his father's priorities and testifies to the vestiges of the charismatic renewal movement.²² However, unique to Brian's ministry is the notion of resourcing other local churches—with “words and music that would glorify our worthy God.”²³ Early on, Brian believed that Hillsong music was worth distributing, despite local churches not sharing that same excitement.²⁴ It is largely this passion for worship and championing the cause of the local church that transformed the Hills Christian Life Centre into the globally recognized Hillsong Church.²⁵

As noted earlier, the music of Hillsong Church and its influence upon global Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic (PEC) movements has been modestly documented, both from an ethnomusicological standpoint and from a theological one. Thus, rather than recapitulating how Hillsong's global success mirrors the success of its music label,²⁶ I offer two watershed moments in the early history of Hillsong Church that

²² Mark Hutchinson writes, “In all of these churches, contemporary worship music, a theology of Presence, and liturgical acts such as the laying on of hands, provide clues for those who know where to look for the historical influence of the Latter Rain.” See Hutchinson, “The Latter Rain Movement and the Phenomenon of Global Return,” 276.

²³ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 14.

²⁴ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 14.

²⁵ It must be noted that Hillsong was the name of the music team while Hills Christian Life Centre was the name of the church. It wasn't until 2001 that Brian, Bobbie and the church leaders renamed the church “Hillsong” out of convenience because others were already “voting with their feet” and referring to it as “that Hillsong church.” See Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 140.

²⁶ For example, Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner trace five phases for Hillsong: (1) 1985-1995, the tenure of Geoff Bullock as worship leader, where the music and lyrics more strongly reflected an Australian identity; (2) 1995-1997, the hiring of Darlene Zschech as worship leader and the global success of the song “Shout to the Lord”; (3) 1998-2002, the emergence of Hillsong UNITED as a youth band creating original songs; (4) 2003-2007, Hillsong has considerable global recognition; (5) 2008-2012,

paved the way for Hillsong's future global success. The first was the inaugural Hillsong Conference held in 1986, which had 150 delegates.²⁷ Originally, Hillsong Conference was dedicated to the role of music in worship and was a venue for the Hillsong band to present its original music. Steve McPherson, now the manager of Hillsong Music Publishing, recalls that Hillsong Conference was what built up the traction for distributing music more professionally:

When we started Hillsong Conference, the demand [for music] grew as more people heard our songs and responded, and we began to realise it was actually something that was blessed and God-breathed and that we had a responsibility to steward it well. So, we just had to get a little more professional about it all! Pastor Brian would say that it's part of the mandate and mantle of our church to resource the body of Christ with those songs.²⁸

As the Hillsong Conference grew in popularity in the subsequent years, it expanded its focus beyond music and into other realms of leadership development. The 1992 Hillsong Conference was called "A Conference for Contemporary Church Leadership" and was geared toward pastors, elders, music leaders, and creative ministry teams.²⁹ However, despite the widened focus, music still played a central role in the Hillsong Conference

Hillsong continues to grow and consolidate its communications, while also embracing itself as a brand that goes beyond music. See Riches and Wagner, "The Evolution of Hillsong Music," 22-34. For an abridged version, see Cowan, "Heaven and Earth Collide," 80-81.

²⁷ "2017 Annual Report," 12.

²⁸ Steve McPherson, "The Early Years," *Hillsong Collected* (blog), May 20, 2014, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2014/05/the-early-years/>.

²⁹ Wikipedia contributor Stephen Ollis posted a text version of the 1992 Conference Program. See "Hillsong 1992: A Conference for Contemporary Church Leadership," accessed July 10, 2018, <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/aus.religion/m13NQvbVCm8/HFUUGV8758QJ>.

because it served as the customary time of the year to release a new Hillsong Worship album.³⁰

The increasing professionalization of Hillsong Music signals the other watershed moment in its history. In 1995, Integrity Music offered to distribute Hillsong Music beyond Australia and into the global market, including the United States.³¹ With a penchant for storytelling drama, Brian recalls that joyous and tumultuous week:

[W]ithin one week of our scheduled recording [with Integrity Music], our nationally acclaimed worship leader [Geoff Bullock] abruptly and unexpectedly left, virtually overnight. As you can imagine, this was quite a disruption. Not wanting to delay or cancel the live worship night, we scrambled and asked a talented woman who has been a faithful part of our worship team behind the scenes, Darlene Zschech, if she would lead worship that night—something she has never done before that time... Just when we thought we had our problem solved, I realized we had to explain the situation to the producers and get them to approve our newest worship leader... they were a little concerned about how the audience would handle the fact that she was a woman in a leadership role—something that had never occurred to us and yet was quite revolutionary at the time! To their credit, they took a risk, the album was recorded, and the rest, as they say, is history. Darlene did the job very well. The album was titled *Shout to the Lord*, which was also the name of her phenomenal song that has become one of the most renowned and contemporary classics for Christians all over the globe.³²

The 1995 “turning point” with Integrity Music, along with the leadership of Darlene Zschech, would launch Hillsong into the global arena. Tanya Riches and Tom Wagner argue that Darlene’s persona “became iconic of the church’s identity” which manifested

³⁰ There have been exceptions to this trend. See Timothy Yap, “Why Haven’t Hillsong Worship Released a New Album This Year at the Hillsong Conference?,” *Hallels News*, accessed July 10, 2018, <http://www.hallels.com/articles/13277/20150712/why-havent-hillsong-worship-released-a-new-album-this-year-at-the-hillsong-conference.htm>.

³¹ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 39.

³² Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 39-40.

itself in the album artwork where Darlene was front and center.³³ As the reach of Hillsong Music and Hillsong Church became increasingly global, album artwork opted for global images rather than Australia-centric ones, and the prominent placement of the worship leader shifted to general Evangelical imagery, cementing Hillsong Music's status as a global brand and softer version of Pentecostalism.³⁴

As Hillsong and Hillsong Music (Hillsong Worship, Hillsong UNITED, Hillsong Young & Free, Hillsong Kids)³⁵ proliferated, there were notable theological shifts. Mark Evans argues that as Hillsong Music became increasingly globally focused, their song lyrics reflected a "generalist theological foundation" in order for multiple denominations and theological persuasions to feel comfortable singing these songs.³⁶ This claim has been corroborated by my own research into the theology of Hillsong lyrics between 2007 and 2015.³⁷ In Tanya Riches' study into the earlier years of Hillsong Music's theological evolution, she notes that as ecumenical relations were more prevalent, there was an

³³ Riches and Wagner, "The Evolution of Hillsong Music," 29.

³⁴ Riches and Wagner, 28-31. For the language of "generic evangelical," see Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 172.

³⁵ "Hillsong Worship" is Hillsong Church's annual live production worship album. "Hillsong UNITED," now often referred to as, simply, "UNITED," began as a youth worship movement and currently produces music that is often more studio-based and less overtly congregational in character. Hillsong "Young and Free" is the current youth movement of Hillsong Church. Hillsong "Kids" is the children's albums, which writes original songs, as well as incorporates songs from other Hillsong musical groups.

³⁶ Mark Evans, "Hillsong Abroad," 183.

³⁷ "Neither Hillsong Worship nor Hillsong UNITED has deemphasized any particular theological claim across the years; instead, new theological emphases (such as the kingdom of God, realized eschatology, and victor-themed atonement) are added or buttressed in a complementarian manner." See Cowan, "Heaven and Earth Collide," 93.

increased “softening” of views deemed controversial, such as prosperity themes in song lyrics.³⁸ Indeed, the theology of Hillsong Music appeals to a generalized Evangelicalism and is reflected as such in United States song reporting. According to the December 2018 report of the Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) Top 100 list, 18 out of the 100 most sung (and reported) songs in the United States were written by Hillsong worship artists.³⁹ This again speaks to Hillsong’s ecumenical sensitivity through its generalist theological foundation because Southern Baptists (20,000 CCLI subscribing churches), United Methodists (16,000 subscribing churches), and Assemblies of God (10,000 subscribing churches) comprise the top three denominations reporting to CCLI.⁴⁰

In the eyes of many, the success of Hillsong Church on the global stage and across denominations makes Hillsong an exemplar to be followed. Interestingly, when Brian or Bobbie Houston talk about the success of Hillsong Church over the years, there is a tension in the primary sources: the success is directly related to the music, but it is simultaneously not about the music. In 2001, Bobbie Houston argues that it’s not about the special music, nor the strong leadership, nor the “army” of passionate young people.

³⁸ Riches and Wagner, “The Evolution of Hillsong Music,” 26. See also Tanya Riches, “The Evolving Theological Emphasis,” 112-115.

³⁹ See “CCLI Top 100 List,” Christian Copyright Licensing International, December 1, 2018, <https://us.ccli.com/ccli-news/ccli-top-100/>.

⁴⁰ Taylor W. Burton-Edwards, “What’s in a Name? Pronouns and Titles for God in the 2017 CCLI Top 100” *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy, Vancouver, BC* (January 4-6, 2018): 95.

“I believe her (Hillsong Church’s) magnet is her heart and soul... The spirit of the house is what the Father is drawing attention to,” she writes.⁴¹ Brian equivocates similarly,

I had decided long before we ever planted a church that I wanted to build a community of worshippers that influenced other churches. I love music, but even as the profile of Hillsong Music began to grow, I always understood that it was only because of the favor of God that, through our music, we were able to draw people into the church, and then cause them to look beyond the music to the message of the gospel.⁴²

The notion of influencing other churches is a part of Brian’s church leadership philosophy, which can be tied the Church Growth theory’s directive to make “hard, bold plans” for congregational development.⁴³ At the same time, Brian and Bobbie understand the success of Hillsong Music as a direct result of God’s favor, grace, and blessing upon Hillsong Church. As Brian remarks and statistics confirm, Hillsong Music is a “phenomenal success that continues to show no signs of slowing down.”⁴⁴ Between the release of the first Hillsong live worship album in 1992 and the present day, Hillsong Music has released more than 90 albums with many more to come, most likely.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House* (Castle Hill, New South Wales: Maximised Leadership Incorporated, 2001), 17.

⁴² Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 38.

⁴³ McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 282-294. I will say more about the Church Growth Movement below.

⁴⁴ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 38.

⁴⁵ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 14.

Perhaps the momentum behind Hillsong Church and Hillsong Music is the reason for the limited historical reflection from the mid-1990s to present.⁴⁶ The primary sources produced by Hillsong Church tend to discuss the early “pioneering” years and the story of God’s favor and success that leads to the present, but not much in between.⁴⁷ In general, the history of Hillsong Church or Hillsong Music has not been documented in a centralized platform. Bobbie Houston remarks, “I am going to leave that honour to my husband to write one day.”⁴⁸ As such, there is only so much one can cobble together from primary sources, which is why this historical overview mirrors the early historical emphases of Brian and Bobbie Houston. In what follows, I analyze the common threads that have been woven into the Hillsong story as found in the primary sources.

Historical Themes and Emphases of Hillsong Church

There are four themes that come to the fore in the primary sources. The first is Hillsong’s tradition of novelty, where both “tradition” and “novelty” are intentional descriptors. The second is Brian’s complex relationship with the life and ministry of his father Frank Houston. The third is Hillsong’s theological identity as a “softened”

⁴⁶ The secondary sources document the growth from the mid-1990s to present, but are often presented from a particular analytical lens, whether it be geography or ethnomusicology. For the former, see Mark Hutchinson, “Up the Windsor Road: Social Complexity, Geographies of Emotion, and the Rise of Hillsong” in Riches and Wagner, 39-62; for the latter, see Mark Evans, “Creating the Hillsong Sound: How One Church Changed Australian Christian Music” in Riches and Wagner, 63-84.

⁴⁷ An exception to this is the story of Brian learning about his father Frank’s sexual exploitation of children. This will be discussed in the paragraphs to come.

⁴⁸ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 16.

Pentecostalism and an “elaboration” of Evangelicalism.⁴⁹ The fourth is Hillsong’s fixation with authenticity as a guiding principle for ministry as well as the springboard for their understanding of God’s favor and blessing toward Hillsong Church.

In its primary sources, Hillsong Church’s retelling of history presents what may be called a “tradition of novelty.” Hillsong celebrates the new things that it “pioneered,” then subsequently transforms them into well-oiled machines, or in other words, traditional mainstays of the church.⁵⁰ In what follows, I pull together five traditions of novelty that contributed to the growth and subsequent notoriety of Hillsong Church. Presented chronologically, they are: the intentional incorporation of youth into leadership, the notion of resourcing the local church with contemporary worship, the Colour conference and the global “Sisterhood,” the merger with Sydney Christian Life Centre yielding a multisite church, and the Hillsong Channel.

When the Hills Christian Life Centre was planted, Bobbie Houston writes that Brian and the leadership team “made a conscious decision to draw the youth into this arena of church life.”⁵¹ This was not novel at the time, but was a product of initiatives within the Assemblies of God in Australia and its transformation of the Christ’s

⁴⁹ On the use of “elaboration of Evangelicalism,” see Martí, “The Global Phenomenon,” 377.

⁵⁰ The word “pioneer,” both as a noun and a verb, is ubiquitous in the literature of Hillsong Church beginning in 2014. In 2013, Hillsong Church celebrated its thirtieth year of existence, in which Brian and Bobbie set their “eyes towards the future, recasting [their] focus for the season ahead.” This led to the 2014 Hillsong Conference theme called “Pioneer Again,” in which Brian updated the twenty-year-old “The Church I See” vision statement into the 2014 “The Church I Now See.” See the “2014 Hillsong Church Annual Report,” Hillsong Church, accessed June 12, 2018, <http://d9nqgwssctr8.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/15233735/AnnualReport14WEB.pdf>.

⁵¹ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 79.

Ambassadors youth program into the more event-oriented, professionally produced Youth Alive movement.⁵² Hills Christian Life Centre shared musicians with the Youth Alive movement, to whom it had a strong connection. It was the leveraging of this relationship where the novelty occurred. Denise Austin writes, “the mutually beneficial relationship between Hills CLC and Youth Alive helped propel Brian Houston to prominence across the AGA movement and fashioned the concept of a major annual conference to reach an audience of thousands.”⁵³ The success of Youth Alive and Hills CLC went hand-in-hand, with Youth Alive recording albums under the Hillsong label.⁵⁴ The strong attention to youth culture and leadership within Hills CLC paved the way for the formation of Hillsong UNITED, which was originally the church’s youth band formed in 1998, and for Hillsong Young & Free—the current youth band—many years later. The presence of youth and incorporating them into leadership has become a tradition of Hillsong Church.⁵⁵

A second tradition of novelty from Hillsong Church is taking contemporary worship music and resourcing other local congregations. As noted earlier, contemporary worship music had long been around before the planting of Hillsong Church and even Brian’s father Frank was an early adopter of Jesus songs and contemporary worship.

⁵² These initiatives are likely situated within the continuation of the Church Growth practices and the emerging third wave Pentecostalism. See Austin, “Flowing Together,” in Riches and Wagner, 29.

⁵³ Austin, 30.

⁵⁴ Austin, 30.

⁵⁵ Indeed, in my own fieldwork at Hillsong New York City, I noted that most people attending the 7:30PM service (which is skewed slightly younger) appeared to be in their early twenties to mid-thirties.

However, with the success of the Hillsong Conference over the years, Hillsong has made it its mission to “champion” the cause of the local church. Toward that end, Brian Houston asserts, “all we do—from our conferences to the music we write—is underpinned by our immovable belief that it is through local churches of all shapes, sizes, and denominations that God changes people’s lives and makes a difference in our communities.⁵⁶ Hillsong continues to release a live worship album on an annual basis, a Hillsong UNITED album every couple of years, with releases from Hillsong Young & Free and Hillsong Kids peppered in between. In addition to their music, Hillsong’s “Collected” blog contains supplemental resources such as backstories to anthemic songs, stage design tips, songwriting reflections, and even Advent Calendars.⁵⁷

A third tradition of novelty is the Colour conference, the annual women’s conference of Hillsong Church and beyond.⁵⁸ The idea for Colour came to Bobbie Houston as, she reports, a near-audible communication from God. It was July 1996 at the Hillsong Conference when Bobbie received a divine vision of “a large stadium filled with thousands and thousands and thousands of women,” with the directive to “create a conference for women...and tell them that there is a God in heaven and a company of others who believe in them.”⁵⁹ The inaugural Colour Conference of 1997 had 602 in

⁵⁶ Brian Houston, *For This I Was Born: Aligning Your Vision to God’s Cause* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 21.

⁵⁷ See *Hillsong Collected* (blog), accessed July 13, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/collected>.

⁵⁸ The name “Colour” was inspired by the Vogue Magazine campaign “Color Your World.” Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood*, 38.

⁵⁹ Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood*, 15-16.

attendance and over the next twenty years has expanded to 17,000 in attendance in Australia alone.⁶⁰ Though the Colour conference is an annual event, the Sisterhood of Hillsong Church—a weekly gathering of women with an average attendance of 2,481 in Australia—is the regular feminine heartbeat of Hillsong Church.⁶¹ Tanya Riches notes the Sisterhood’s strong connection to social justice:

Sisterhood women are active in addressing diverse global issues such as HIV, domestic violence, human trafficking, and government corruption. The Sisterhood’s cultural and humanitarian activities continue to grow, translating online concern into local initiatives that facilitate women’s political participation. Their action is marked by proximity to grassroots issues particularly via Hillsong’s campuses in Africa and Eastern Europe.⁶²

With regular meetings and conferences, justice initiatives and prayer guides for social concerns across the world,⁶³ the Colour Conference and the Hillsong Sisterhood is a critical component of Hillsong Church and a mainstay of Bobbie Houston’s leadership. Though the idea of a women’s conference is not novel itself, the worldwide success of this conference reflects novelty as it draws women from multiple denominations, united by the charismatic authority of Bobbie Houston.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood*, 49. For the “17,000” number, see “2017 Annual Report.”

⁶¹ “2017 Annual Report,” 22.

⁶² Tanya Riches, “The Sisterhood: Hillsong in a Feminine Key,” in Riches and Wagner, 93.

⁶³ See the prayer guides associated with the Sisterhood Fight Club, which is “all about letting prayer do the heavy lifting as we turn our attention to a world that is broken on many levels and in need of restoration.” See “#sisterhood Fight Club,” Hillsong Church, accessed July 13, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/colour/sisterhood/fightclub/>.

⁶⁴ Tanya Riches notes that some women attend Colour Conference in secret or “against the wishes of their [Anglican] diocese.” See Riches, “The Sisterhood,” in Riches and Wagner, 99.

The fourth tradition of novelty emanating from Hillsong Church is the notion of a multisite church. In 1999, Frank Houston retired from ministry at the Sydney Christian Life Centre and asked Brian and Bobbie to take on the leadership of this church in addition to the Hills Christian Life Centre. Brian again frames this as a pioneering act, saying, “although today there are countless models of incredible multisite churches, back in 1999 it was totally new territory, and we had no role models to look to for guidance. We were pioneers.”⁶⁵ That same year, the two churches merged, then in 2001 rebranded as Hillsong Church in order for the well-known band title to line up with the name of the church.⁶⁶ The expansion of Hillsong Church into a global, multisite movement—“one house, many rooms”—coincided with the 1999 merger as it designated its partner sites in London and Kiev as “Hillsong” churches. To date, Hillsong Church hosts 251 church services across the globe on six continents and 21 countries every week.⁶⁷

The fifth tradition of novelty from Hillsong Church is the Hillsong Channel, a television channel launched on June 1, 2016. It broadcasts 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and is “available to over 66 million homes in the US and another 164 million potential households around the globe. As of June 2018, people from 183 countries have watched the Hillsong Channel.”⁶⁸ The Hillsong Channel is accompanied by a vision

⁶⁵ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 63.

⁶⁶ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 140.

⁶⁷ “Hillsong Media Fact Sheet.” The reference for 251 church services per week comes from Brian Houston, “2018 Vision Sunday” Sermon, February 18, 2018. Field notes, researcher, New York, NY, February 18, 2018.

⁶⁸ “Hillsong Media Fact Sheet.”

statement that matches the grandiosity and tenor of Hillsong Church’s 2014 “The Church I Now See” general vision statement. Though the Hillsong Channel statement is long, the following segments draw from the familiar Hillsong vocabulary:

I see a channel that *champions local churches* everywhere...I see a channel that is constantly *pioneering*: one that leads the industry in revolutionary communication of an ancient message through media, film and technology...The channel I see *resources others with worship and songs*—reflecting such passion for Christ that people are impacted by His magnificence and power.⁶⁹

The language of “pioneering,” “championing the local church,” and the notion of resourcing others solidifies this enterprise as a Hillsong initiative. The Hillsong Channel has become a mainstay by tapping into the current trends from the consumer economy, leveraging its success as a global brand to sell subscription-model merchandise boxes. Viewers of Hillsong Channel are invited to “join the team” by subscribing to a “Team Box”—a “special collection of resources for the whole family including inspiring music, devotionals, apparel, downloads, books, encouraging messages and more—delivered to your door each month!”⁷⁰ Categorized as a part of the “outreach” and “mission” of Hillsong, the Hillsong Channel functions as an evangelistic tool, complementing Hillsong’s commitment to the “cause of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Brian Houston, “The Channel I See,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), June 1, 2016, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/06/the-channel-i-see/> (emphasis mine).

⁷⁰ “Hillsong Team,” Hillsong Church, accessed July 23, 2018, <https://hillsongteambox.com/about>. The boxes range from \$35 to \$39 (USD) per month, depending on the duration of the subscription.

⁷¹ Brian Houston, “The Church I Now See,” Vision, Hillsong Church, accessed July 23, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/vision>. The notion of the Hillsong Channel being a mission and outreach initiative lends support to the fact that Hillsong Channel regularly features allied pastors and leaders from the Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic milieu such as Joseph Prince, Jentzen Franklin, Stephen Furtick, and others.

Hillsong Church's "tradition of novelty" through the leadership of Brian and Bobbie Houston is connected to the influence of Frank Houston, the second historical emphasis in the primary sources. Brian's relationship with his father is autobiographically documented as a combination of idealization and sadness. Growing up, Brian looked up to his father as a great leader, communicator, and pioneer. Brian writes, "To give you some context, my father—William Francis "Frank" Houston—had always been my hero."⁷² Indeed, Frank served in high profile roles, including superintendent of Assemblies of God New Zealand in 1966, state superintendent of New South Wales in 1980, and worked alongside other prominent figures, most notably Yonggi Cho of South Korea.⁷³ Accordingly, he was heavily influenced by charismatic renewal movements and the Church Growth Movement, both of which participated in cultures of novelty. Frank Houston also left an ecclesiological legacy with the Assemblies of God Australia with his restructuring of church government and leadership. Houston "did not believe in congregational government and...had structured his church without formal congregational membership."⁷⁴ This was done primarily for the pragmatic purposes of

⁷² Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 70.

⁷³ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 152-156. David Yonggi Cho is the pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea, a Korean Assemblies of God megachurch with approximately 800,000 members. Cho was heavily influenced by Church Growth theory. For membership numbers see, Matthew Bell, "The Biggest Megachurch on Earth and South Korea's 'Crisis of Evangelism,'" Public Radio International, May 1, 2017, <https://www.pri.or/stories/2017-05-01/biggest-megachurch-earth-facing-crisis-evangelism>. For a brief history and analysis of the social dimensions of Cho's ministry, see Allan Anderson, "A 'Time to Share Love': Global Pentecostalism and the Social Ministry of David Yonggi Cho," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 21, no. 1 (2012): 152-167.

⁷⁴ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 56.

streamlined authority and control, a trend that was adopted by other newly formed churches, executive bodies, and later Brian's leadership style with Hillsong Church.⁷⁵

In addition to his executive leadership style, Frank Houston championed the Latter Rain emphasis of contemporary worship music, which was another harbinger for Brian Houston's future ministry emphasis. Denise Austin writes that Frank Houston announced a "grand vision" for the church (Sydney Christian Life Centre) that it would be attended by thousands and attract the top musicians throughout Australia.⁷⁶ Indeed, Sydney Christian Life Centre was known for its contemporary worship stylings and its musicianship, incorporating instrumentalists and vocalists from well-known bands.⁷⁷ The young Brian Houston idealized his father's charisma and executive leadership, which cast a long shadow over Brian's ministry until his own Hillsong Church flourished numerically and replicated globally. Brian's relationship with his father would soon change abruptly.

In late October of 1999, Brian received news indirectly from a woman who said, "Frank Houston sexually abused my son."⁷⁸ This was the first of multiple reports of

⁷⁵ Clifton, 156-171. Clifton also writes that Houston utilized scriptural precedent for his actions, citing the apostolic authority in the New Testament. Calling it the "Apostolic Revolution," Clifton traces this mindset to the leadership of David Cartledge within the Assemblies of God Australia. See also David Cartledge, *The Apostolic Revolution: The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Chester Hill, New South Wales: Paraclete Institute, 2000).

⁷⁶ Austin, "Flowing Together," in Riches and Wagner, 25.

⁷⁷ Austin, 26. Some notable members included Trevor King of the Andy Gibb Band, David Moyes from Air Supply (pop), Jeff Beacham from Black Feather (hardcore), Peter Kelly from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and George McArdle from the Little River Band.

⁷⁸ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 70.

sexual abuse attributed to Frank, many of which occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s. Upon hearing the news, Brian recalls, “While I’m sure it was only a matter of seconds, time seemed frozen as a riptide of painful emotions washed over me, wave after wave. Confusion. Anger. Incredulity. Fear. Hurt. Betrayal.”⁷⁹ At the time of the accusations, Brian was serving as the President of the Assemblies of God Australia and had to call his father into his office, suspend him from ministry, and ask for the stripping of Frank’s credentials.⁸⁰ Frank would not preach again, according to Brian, though other media outlets report differently.⁸¹ Frank died in 2004 from a fatal fall in the shower, caused by a stroke. “My disgraced hero was gone,” Brian recalls.⁸² Brian was later diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), from which “by the grace of God, [he] bounced back quickly.”⁸³ Overall, the tension between idealization, sadness, and disgrace in the relationship of Brian to Frank Houston is well-represented in Brian’s autobiographical recollections.

Subscribing to a “softer” version of Pentecostalism, Brian also sets intentional distance between himself, his father, and other Pentecostal and Charismatic ministry

⁷⁹ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 70.

⁸⁰ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 73.

⁸¹ See Helen Davidson, “Hillsong’s Brian Houston failed to report abuse and had conflict of interest – royal commission,” *The Guardian*, November 23, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/23/hillsongs-brian-houston-failed-to-report-abuse-and-had-conflict-of-interest-royal-commission>; see also Helen Davidson, “Hillsong leader’s father ‘still preached after suspension for sex abuse,’” *The Guardian*, October 7, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2014/oct/08/hillsong-leader-father-still-preached-after-suspension-for-sex-abuse>.

⁸² Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 78.

⁸³ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 85.

leaders and theologies. As mentioned earlier, Brian’s theological upbringing was “Pentecostal on steroids,” which is evident by the theological discussions and social location of his parents. In Hazel Houston’s biography of her husband Frank, the foreword written by Pastor Colin Whittaker reveals some of the couple’s theological commitments.

All those who are now entering into what Peter Wagner calls “The Third Wave,” with a strong desire to see the supernatural restored to the Church, will be helped by this book. And those Pentecostals and Charismatics who are in danger of settling down into a comfy, cosy, non-supernatural, respectable evangelicalism, will be suitably rebuked and challenged “to rekindle the flame.”⁸⁴

The “Third Wave” of Pentecostalism in tandem with the Church Growth Movement was in full swing by the late 1980s, emphasizing the signs and wonders associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the numerical growth of conversions through revivalistic activities.⁸⁵ Currently, Brian Houston is slightly removed from his roots, especially with regard to the signs and wonders of faith healing. He does not dismiss it outright, but believes in the compatibility of faith healing and medicinal healing.⁸⁶ On the one hand, Houston can say, “we believe through faith in God, people can be healed,” and on the other, still encourage people to go to the doctor.⁸⁷ This tension was also present in

⁸⁴ Colin Whittaker, foreword to *Being Frank: The Frank Houston Story*, by Hazel Houston, (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), 10.

⁸⁵ See C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1988).

⁸⁶ This is a theologically consistent, though not uniform, notion in global Pentecostalism. For a specific example, see Angela Tarango, “Jesus as the Great Physician: Pentecostal Native North Americans within the Assemblies of God and New Understandings of Pentecostal Healing,” in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunter Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112-114.

⁸⁷ For the former, see Brian Houston, *How to Live in Health and Wholeness: Principles for Health and Wholeness in Body, Soul and Spirit* (Castle Hill, New South Wales: Maximised Leadership, 2005), 19; for the latter, see Brian Houston, *There is More*, 68.

an April 2018 sermon from Carl Lentz, the lead pastor of Hillsong New York City, who proclaimed that “God can bring healing when you take those pills,” after he was just preaching about God not always healing people in stereotypically miraculous ways.⁸⁸ Houston’s softening of Pentecostalism was also a product of context. The theological discourse in the Assemblies of God Australia in the late 1970s and 1980s deemphasized the distinctive marks of Pentecostalism, namely baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues.⁸⁹

It stands to reason that as Hillsong Church became increasingly global, their Pentecostal theology “softened” into what sociologist Gerardo Martí calls “an elaboration of evangelicalism.”⁹⁰ While this was reflected in their song lyrics and substantiated by Tanya Riches and by my own research, the primary sources—mainly books—do not indicate such a shift. Brian and Bobbie’s theological orientation and pastoral catchphrases and motifs have changed minimally over the years. However, Brian and Bobbie do have to “walk back” or clarify their positions. In general, the historical trajectory is reflected in the following example: Brian writes a controversial book such as the 1999 manual, *You Need More Money: Discovering God’s Amazing Financial Plan for Your Life*, then upon critique, makes a statement later repudiating “the prosperity gospel” by saying “there is

⁸⁸ Field notes, researcher, New York, NY, April 15, 2018.

⁸⁹ Shane Clifton notes that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there was a “marked reduction in discussion about this doctrine (baptism in the Holy Spirit) and the gift of tongues.” See Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 166.

⁹⁰ Martí, “The Global Phenomenon,” 377.

one gospel alone—the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁹¹ This does not indicate a shift in theology, but rather a clarification of belief in effort to be more palatable for increasingly hybrid audiences.⁹² Brian and Bobbie have always maintained a softened Pentecostalism in their leadership of Hillsong Church.⁹³

Finally, authenticity is the cornerstone of how Brian, Bobbie, and other leaders communicate the ethos and success of Hillsong Church. This is directly related to the softening of Pentecostalism because Hillsong leadership regularly derides rules and regulations associated with more “stiff” religious movements and denominations. In discussing Hillsong’s guiding emphasis of championing the cause of the local church, Brian laments some of his observations from other local churches: “form and ritual have sometimes crept in, replacing the freedom to worship Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth...I believe churchgoers today do not want form; they want substance and authenticity. They want to express themselves in worship and receive Bible-based teaching that can be applied to their everyday lives.”⁹⁴ The disparagement of form and ritual is not denominationally pointed per se. The literature produced by Hillsong leadership resists the likes of “Pentecostalism on steroids” *and* the inauthentically rote nature of

⁹¹ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 105.

⁹² By “hybrid” audiences, I am referring to Evangelical and Pentecostal hybridity, but also not excluding the increasing ecumenical audience engaging with Hillsong’s media exports.

⁹³ It is critical to note here that Pentecostalism in all of its iterations and waves is not univocal vis-à-vis prosperity preaching. Historian Kate Bowler notes that Classic Pentecostals tried to separate themselves from prosperity preachers, while sometimes—such as the case with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel—entire churches rebuked the movement. See Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 93-94.

⁹⁴ Brian Houston, *For This I Was Born*, 18-19.

Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Mainline Protestantism. The resistance against rules in favor of authenticity is also present in the thought of acclaimed Hillsong worship leader Darlene Zschech, who writes, “What does a fully devoted heart look like? It certainly doesn’t look like religion, and it certainly doesn’t look like a life of rules and regulations.”⁹⁵ She maintains that a fully devoted heart is a new heart wrought through God’s salvation. In the primary sources overall, there is a consistent thread comparing religion—negatively associated with rules and regulations—with a positive biblical faith concerned with authenticity. Bobbie Houston argues that if the Body of Christ is going to be effective, then “we seriously need to get unified on the issues that matter,” namely authentic love for God and for the world.⁹⁶ She pushes back against churches overly concerned with doctrine.

Honestly, does the world really care about our doctrine? Do they really give a second thought to our theology? Sorry to burst anyone’s bubble, but no! The average person out there doing 21st Century life is not mesmerized by either of these. Nor are they interested in our eloquence and presentation, or our programs and events...I believe *they want to see, and need to see, a sense of honesty combined with genuine expressions of love.*⁹⁷ (emphasis original)

Shane Clifton argues that the rejection of dogmatism was the bailiwick of the Australian Assemblies of God from the 1970s onward, thus making Bobbie’s declarations par for the course.⁹⁸ However, this is the motif from which Hillsong leadership consistently draws. It

⁹⁵ Darlene Zschech, *The Kiss of Heaven: God’s Favor to Empower Your Life Dream* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 107.

⁹⁶ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 97.

⁹⁷ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 97-98.

⁹⁸ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 194.

is authenticity, honesty, and genuineness, in contradistinction to religion, rules, and regulations that makes church—particularly Hillsong Church—a successful enterprise.

Hillsong Church’s authenticity is also demonstrated by the consistency of their mission statement. Brian Houston proudly maintains that the Hillsong mission statement has stood unchanged since the beginning: “To reach and influence the world by building a large Christ-centered, Bible-based church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and impact in every sphere of life.”⁹⁹ Since day one, Hillsong’s “hard, bold dreams” have focused on reaching the expanses of the globe in addition to its local orientation. Theologically, the success of the local/global Hillsong Church is attributed to God’s blessing and favor. Brian writes that Hillsong does not seek out opportunities, and neither does God give them opportunities so that they can “build a bigger building or have another conference”; instead, God “gives us opportunities so we can love others as he loves us.”¹⁰⁰

Historically, Hillsong was poised for success from the very beginning. It was situated within a contextual confluence of the Church Growth Movement, the charismatic renewal movement, and the Jesus Movement. Brian and Bobbie Houston emerged from Frank Houston’s high-profile ministry and successful Sydney Church plant during a time when charismatic authority was streamlined with executive leadership principles. The musical success emerged from a successful partnership with a revamped AGA youth

⁹⁹ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 230.

¹⁰⁰ Brian Houston, *Live Love Lead*, 230.

ministry and Latter Rain emphasizes on contemporary worship and musical excellence.

Moreover, as Andrew McFarlane has argued, New South Wales was a prime location for Pentecostalism to flourish because it was the epicenter of conservative Anglicanism.¹⁰¹

The flourishing of Hillsong Church—whether it be the work of God, a convenient contextual climate, or a combination of both—is a theological, historical, and sociological treasure trove. Undoubtedly, Hillsong would not be the church and movement that it is today without the success of its music program and global distribution of its resources. The charismatic renewal movement’s focus on worship set Hillsong up for success; however, what makes Hillsong’s theological contributions distinct, if any? How does Hillsong understand worship, both in terms of a general understanding of the worship service, and more specifically music’s role therein? Moving away from history, I turn now to constructing a tentative secondary liturgical theology of Hillsong Church as construed by the primary sources.

Hillsong’s Secondary Liturgical Theology

Similar to many other Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic churches and denominations, Hillsong Church does not have an official manual of worship nor does its former denomination, the Australian Christian Churches. Aside from the standard “What We Believe” section on the church website, Hillsong’s liturgical-theological claims

¹⁰¹ Andrew MacFarlane, “Houston, William Francis (1922–2004),” in *Australasian Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (2004) <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/ojs/index.php/ADPCM/article/view/213/210> (accessed July 25, 2018).

appear in multiple media outlets: official books, blogs, song lyrics, and sermons.¹⁰² One notable exception to this is Robert Fergusson’s “Theology of Worship” chapter appearing in his wife Amanda Fergusson’s book, *Songs of Heaven: Writing Songs for Contemporary Worship*.¹⁰³

Both Robert and Amanda are frequently described as the theological gatekeepers of Hillsong’s lyrics, where they evaluate the lyrics of a song prior to them being sung in the congregation. Fergusson’s theology of worship, he argues, is analogous to the role of music in the gathered assembly: it is both an art and a science, and can only be described by immersion. Though he does not explicitly equate worship with music, the notion of worship being equated with music is reflected in all of Hillsong’s primary sources. Indeed, the coalescence of the terms “music” and “worship” reflects the historical trajectory of the contemporary worship genre in which Hillsong participates. Although the understanding of “contemporary” worship in the first half of the twentieth century was squarely concerned with liturgical language, the term “contemporary worship” began to be associated solely with a musical genre in the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹⁰⁴ During this time, Pentecostal “song leaders” embraced the new musical presider title “worship

¹⁰² See “What We Believe,” Hillsong Church, accessed July 27, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/what-we-believe/>.

¹⁰³ See Robert Fergusson, “A Theology of Worship,” in Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven: Writing Songs for Contemporary Worship*, 2nd ed. (Castle Hill, New South Wales: Shout! Publishing, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ See Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017)

leader.”¹⁰⁵ This music-centric notion of a worship leader became commonplace and is currently a widely embraced term in the Protestant spectrum and across racial and ethnic lines.¹⁰⁶ To mention “worship” is to bring to mind “music,” and vice versa.

In a similar manner to the previous section’s historical overview—which reflected the primary source material’s emphasis upon the early years—my construction of Hillsong’s theology of worship will also reflect the primary sources, which focus on worship as music. In what follows, I organize Hillsong’s secondary liturgical-theological claims by the following themes: worship and scripture, the primacy and power of music, and the notion that “God does not need our worship.”

Worship and Scripture

Throughout the canon of Hillsong’s primary sources—books, blogs, song lyrics, and sermons—the connection between worship and scripture is not simply foundational, but part and parcel of Hillsong’s epistemological framework. The songs, the sermons, the books, the mission and vision statements, the images, the analogies: they only make sense, are validated, and have purpose if tied directly to the scriptures. As their “Statement of Beliefs” indicates, “We believe that the Bible is God’s Word. It is accurate,

¹⁰⁵ See Nelson Cowan, “Lay-Prophet-Priest: The Not-So Fledgling ‘Office’ of the Worship Leader,” *Liturgy* 32, No. 1 (2017): 24-31.

¹⁰⁶ See Gerardo Martí, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multicultural Congregation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

authoritative and applicable to our everyday lives.”¹⁰⁷ While accuracy and authoritativeness are discussed and demonstrated throughout Hillsong’s primary sources, it is the applicability of the Bible that serves as the guiding framework for this discussion of worship and scripture. The Bible is frequently applied as the justification for Hillsong’s secondary liturgical-theological claims, which is consistent with their claim of being a “Bible-based church.”¹⁰⁸ Beginning with Robert Fergusson’s biblically-based theology of worship, this section also highlights Hillsong’s other key scriptural foundations of worship, the worship “experience,” and the order of Christian worship. In each subsection, I draw attention to a recurrent underpinning of these scriptural understandings of worship: worship is something that is *done*,¹⁰⁹ and even though the liturgical-theological claims are explained, Hillsong always leaves room for mystery.

Robert Fergusson’s Biblical Theology of Worship

Contrary to many musically-oriented discussions of the term “worship” throughout the Hillsong primary sources, Robert Fergusson begins his “Theology of Worship” chapter by arguing that worship is more than music and more than “our

¹⁰⁷ “What We Believe,” Hillsong Church.

¹⁰⁸ See “Our Mission Statement,” Hillsong Church, accessed January 18, 2019, <https://hillsong.com/about/>.

¹⁰⁹ This ties back to Chapter One’s notion of liturgy being more concerned with “doing” over “meaning.”

corporate expression and adoration of God.”¹¹⁰ As the “Teaching Pastor” for Hillsong Church, Fergusson’s insights carry a significant amount of clout. He argues that the mystery of worship must be rooted in the Bible, from which there are numerous examples. He begins with the Genesis story of Abraham offering his son Isaac to God.

Abraham says to his servant, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will *worship* and then we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5) (Italics mine). There is no mention here of music. No gathered congregation. No songs. It is a story of single-minded obedience, a sacrifice, and the intervention of God.¹¹¹

By eschewing music and the gathered community as a part of the biblical paradigm for worship, Fergusson is disrupting the inherited assumptions of many Pentecostal worship leaders and other “creatives” who may be reading this book.¹¹² Fergusson incorporates another nonmusical reference to the meaning of worship, this time coming from the mouth of Jesus in John 4:23, who says “a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks” (NIV). Fergusson points to the Greek verb *proskuneo*, which means “To kiss the hand to (toward) one, in token of reverence,” after which he maintains, “once again, there is no mention here of music, songs or song-writing.”¹¹³ For

¹¹⁰ Robert Fergusson, “A Theology of Worship,” 23.

¹¹¹ Robert Fergusson, 24.

¹¹² Hillsong refers to anyone involved in creative arts ministries as “creatives.” As an example, see Cass Langton, “Calling All Creatives,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), June 7, 2016, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/06/calling-all-creatives/#.W18VcNgzocg>.

¹¹³ Robert Fergusson, “A Theology of Worship,” 24.

Fergusson, true worship is more concerned with a reverential attitude and an act of service than with a song.¹¹⁴

In addition to reverence and service, Fergusson argues that worship is the “necessary response of the created for the Creator.”¹¹⁵ Rather than providing a scriptural foundation for this view, Fergusson provides scriptural foundations for its antithesis: idolatry. He contends that “if we don’t have a God, we will make one,” citing the carpenter in Isaiah 44:15-17 who makes an idol for himself, and Paul in Romans 1:20-25 who advises humanity to worship the Creator rather than the created. To worship the created realm runs contrary to God’s desires for humankind; instead, “like a violin in the hands of its maker, we are created to make an ordered and beautiful sound for the use and pleasure of our Creator.”¹¹⁶ This response of the created for the Creator, Fergusson argues, involves awe and adoration. Given Hillsong’s strong connection between worship and music, it is no mistake that Fergusson cites Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18-20 and their mandate to sing or speak with one another “with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” as the paradigm for awe and adoration.¹¹⁷

Fergusson’s theology of worship balances the tension between theological prescription and mystery. He makes the theological claim that worship is an act of

¹¹⁴ Robert Fergusson, 25.

¹¹⁵ Robert Fergusson, 25. This is an echo of former Hillsong worship leader Darlene Zschech’s thoughts when she writes, “Inside every human being is a desire to worship.” See Darlene Zschech, *The Kiss of Heaven*, 141.

¹¹⁶ Robert Fergusson, 27.

¹¹⁷ Robert Fergusson, 28.

reverence in which worshippers acknowledge God's worth, usually through an act of service. Fergusson then supports this claim by arguing that humanity's very created purpose is to worship God. The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has enabled humanity "to approach God with confidence (Hebrews 4:16)," which means we must approach God with adoration and awe, because God is both a "Loving Father (John 16:27) and also One to be feared (Luke 12:5)."¹¹⁸ Fergusson's prescriptive claims end here, balancing the rest of his theology of worship with mystery: "Clearly, some aspects of worship can be defined, explained and taught but there are other aspects which are beyond understanding and defy description. True worship involves both priest and prophet, the predictable and the unpredictable, the expected and the unexpected, the rejected and the respectable."¹¹⁹ Fergusson's liturgical theology is simultaneously broad and narrow. By focusing on the experiential dimension of worship and the mystery therein, he does not qualify his claims with arguments related to the gathered community of faith, the read and proclaimed Word, and the sacraments. This experiential dimension can be applied to a variety of settings, but it delimits his theological claims to the domain of affect.¹²⁰ The strongest theoretical tie Fergusson makes to worship is music, which

¹¹⁸ Robert Fergusson, 27.

¹¹⁹ Robert Fergusson, 28.

¹²⁰ When I write of "affect," I have the following definition in mind: "the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations." See Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University

serves as an analogy for the balance of theological explanation with mystery. Fergusson closes his theology of worship chapter thusly, “the only way to understand [worship] is to worship God.” His concluding words uplift pragmatism and mystery: to learn about worship, one must be *doing* worship.

Extravagant Worship: A Feminine Biblical Motif

Three prominent Hillsong leaders—Darlene Zschech, Amanda Fergusson, and Cassandra Langton—in three separate primary sources, all discuss the same scriptural pericope: the woman with the alabaster jar of perfume anointing the feet of Jesus with her unbound hair. Darlene Zschech’s 2004 book, *Extravagant Worship*, recalls a time in the year 2000 when Darlene felt the Holy Spirit give her the phrase “Extravagant Worshipers” as a motto for the worship department of Hillsong Church.¹²¹ At the time, she questioned whether she was an extravagant worshipper herself, arguing that extravagance is to love Jesus in “excessive, abundant, expensive, superfluous, lavish, costly, precious, rich, priceless, valuable” ways.¹²² The woman with the alabaster jar, she argues, is an exemplar for humanity’s life of worship and relationship with Jesus.

Press, 2010), 1, quoted in James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 31.

¹²¹ Darlene Zschech, *Extravagant Worship: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty Who Was and Is, and Is to Come...*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 24.

¹²² Zschech, *Extravagant Worship*, 25.

Amanda Fergusson uses Darlene’s language of extravagant worship, but presses the biblical motif even further. She asserts that many people gathered at Bethany had the opportunity to worship Jesus, but the woman (who she names “Mary,” taking cues from the gospel of John) seized the moment and worshipped extravagantly.¹²³ Mary is one to be learned from because she opened herself up to criticism as she loosened her hair, risking being known as an immoral woman. After she poured out the perfume extravagantly, Jesus “valued her gift,” for he too would soon “pour out his own life for us” in an extravagant way.¹²⁴ Fergusson points out that Mary’s perfume anointed Jesus for his burial, positing that “this may have been the last lovely fragrance that he would smell as he went to the cross. What a gift to give him.”¹²⁵

Cassandra Langton, the global worship and creative pastor of Hillsong Church, uses the synonymous language of “wasteful worship.” She is writing to other worship leaders, musicians, and creatives, offering pastoral advice to those who may question, “is our worship ever a waste of time?”¹²⁶ The answer is “no,” for “if it’s unto God, then it’s worship,” she argues.¹²⁷ As global worship and creative pastor, Langton is often addressing rooms full of songwriters, of which this blog post fits the scheme. Because

¹²³ Amanda Fergusson, “Extravagant Worshippers,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), August 2, 2013, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2013/08/extravagant-worshippers/>.

¹²⁴ Amanda Fergusson, “Extravagant Worshippers.”

¹²⁵ Amanda Fergusson, “Extravagant Worshippers.”

¹²⁶ Cass Langton, “Wasteful Worship,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), August 28, 2017, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2017/08/wasteful-worship/>.

¹²⁷ Langton, “Wasteful Worship.”

many songs or other creative efforts may seem to fall flat, Langton contends that our worship is a broken alabaster jar, poured out at the feet of Jesus; and because it is “unto God” (in Christ), then it is worship. All three authors—Zschech, Fergusson, and Langton—draw upon that same biblical source as a paradigm for worship. Consonant with Robert Fergusson’s theology of worship, this biblical paradigm also reflects the affective and experiential dimension to worship. In Hillsong’s primary sources, this biblical motif is only written about by female authors, who all draw and elaborate upon each other’s liturgical-theological claims. This indicates both a shared vocabulary and a uniquely feminine approach to understanding worship at Hillsong Church.

The Worship Experience

The notion of liturgical theology being tied to affect, experience, and mystery in the thought of Robert and Amanda Fergusson, Darlene Zschech, and Cassandra Langton is further illuminated by Brian and Bobbie’s understanding of worship. In Brian and Bobbie’s writings, worship is something that is felt, visceral, and mysterious. Bobbie Houston recalls an experience of the scriptural image of the throne room of God:

A handful of years ago, I found myself in what you might call a Holy Spirit ministry service. As we worshipped and embraced the luxury of lingering in His presence, I felt as though I was at the door of the Throne Room of God. It wasn’t a ‘full-on, Panasonic colour type’ vision, but it was a very strong impression that changed not only me, but many others who I have shared it with. It was as though I was on the threshold of the Throne Room, my toes on the edge and I was peeking in. I then sensed the Holy Spirit come alongside (as He does) and nudge me. He very gently said, “You can go in, you know. You can go in. Sit at His feet.

Sit on His knee if you want...and He will tell you everything you need to know.”¹²⁸

The language here reflects a balance of sensory language (“felt,” “impression,” “nudge”), intimacy (“the luxury of lingering in His presence”), and mystery (“I was peeking in”).

The biblical “throne room” imagery that Bobbie experienced is a known and documented motif in Pentecostal and Evangelical discourse.¹²⁹ As such, this experience of worship in the throne room is not only understood as a sensory phenomenon, but consonant with the biblical witness, which gives it validation.

In general, Brian Houston does not speak of biblical visions as much as he does biblically-supported feelings when worshipping God.¹³⁰ In his blog post, “Creating a Worshipful Environment,” he contends that worship is something that can change the atmosphere of life. Citing David’s many “night seasons” of lament and anguish, Brian uses Psalm 142 as an example of how “David changes the very atmosphere of his life by praising God.”¹³¹

Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,

¹²⁸ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 167.

¹²⁹ Tanya Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 331, ePUB edition.

¹³⁰ This is not surprising given the strong historical record that ties experiences of mystical visions with feminine Christian spirituality. See Elizabeth Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); see also Patricia Dailey, *Promised Bodies: Time, Language, & Corporeality in Medieval Women’s Mystical Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

¹³¹ Brian Houston, “Creating a Worshipful Environment,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), June 7, 2013, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2013/06/creating-a-worshipful-environment/>.

for they are too strong for me.
 Set me free from my prison,
 that I may praise your name.
 Then the righteous will surround me
 because of your goodness to me.¹³²

In this psalm, Brian understands worship as something that changed David's affective dimension, and worship bears that same power today.¹³³ The notion of the "righteous" surrounding David parallels the environment of the gathered assembly at a service of worship. Being surrounded by other worshippers who are worshipping in spirit and in truth yields for tangible embodied changes. Consequently, Brian advises, "one of the best things you can do when you are in a stressful, hurtful, or desperate situation is WORSHIP!"¹³⁴ Both Brian and Bobbie's notion of "felt" worship ties to Robert Fergusson's liturgical-theological claims: worship involves *doing*, it effects affect and experience, and lends to mystery.

A final recurrent scriptural justification for a "felt" worship experience is the gospel of John's injunction to worship in spirit and in truth.¹³⁵ Though the phrase worshipping "in spirit and truth" is employed throughout Hillsong's primary sources, Darlene Zschech gives it the most attention. After meditating "on that scripture for many

¹³² Psalm 142:6-7 (NIV, modified)

¹³³ It is important to note that affect does not just mean an emotional response, but rather a disposition or "way of being" in the world. See Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 184.

¹³⁴ Brian Houston, "Creating a Worshipful Environment."

¹³⁵ "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24 [NRSV]).

hours...the core of worship is when one's heart and soul, and all that is within, adores and connects with the Spirit of God."¹³⁶ Further, when one worships in spirit and truth, "the very core of one's being is found *loving Him, lost in Him.*"¹³⁷ John 4 is used as a clarifier for the felt experience of worship. To be a true worshipper who worships "in spirit and in truth" means to encounter the Spirit of God as directed love, but also the mystery of being "lost" in God's very self. Like the other Hillsong leaders mentioned before, Zschech's liturgical-theological claims reflect the balance of explanation with the mystery of the worship event.

The Bible and the Order of Worship

Brian Houston defines the term "liturgy" as an "order of service."¹³⁸ He argues that "healthy" contemporary churches can have a liturgy, but it is a "pity when the Holy Spirit is locked out of His own house because we are so stuck in our ways."¹³⁹ Interestingly, Hillsong Church has maintained a fixed order of service for many years, even to the specificity of song-tempo order. Psalm 100 is the most frequently cited scriptural justification for the Hillsong liturgy.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Zschech, *Extravagant Worship*, 27.

¹³⁷ Zschech, *Extravagant Worship*, 27.

¹³⁸ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 191.

¹³⁹ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 191.

¹⁴⁰ In the context of this chapter, I employ the term "liturgy" in Hillsong's own terms: an order of service. Other chapters reflect a broader notion of the term.

There is a reason our church begins every church service with praise and thanksgiving. I once heard someone write off the faster praise songs at the beginning of a service as the cocktails before the meal. But there is a whole lot more to the songs of praise that we commence every service with than simply giving the latecomers a chance to arrive. Praise is always an entry point and often precedes the miracle: Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise (Psalm 100:4, NIVII).¹⁴¹

Notice here the connection between “faster” songs associated with praise and the implication that slower songs are “worship.”¹⁴² Darlene Zschech writes that faster songs, praise songs, “fill the house with joy. Praise brings heaven’s dominion on earth. James 5:13 says, ‘Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.’”¹⁴³ Hillsong’s penchant for fast “praise” songs beginning the liturgy is documented in Tanya Riches’ research, who is also a longtime Hillsong Church worshipper.¹⁴⁴ Entering God’s gates with “praise” is shared across the Hillsong campuses. During my fieldwork at Hillsong Church New York City, each week the opening song was typically drawn from the Hillsong Young and Free repertory, which tends to be more up-tempo and influenced by electronic dance music (EDM).¹⁴⁵ When looking for scriptural cues or foundations of the Hillsong liturgy beyond the praise and worship opening, there are none to be found.

¹⁴¹ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 70.

¹⁴² This distinction has been well-documented in Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic worship leadership literature, beginning as early as the late 1970s. See Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus*, 14.

¹⁴³ Zschech, *The Kiss of Heaven*, 151.

¹⁴⁴ Riches, “The Evolving Theological Emphasis,” 92-93.

¹⁴⁵ Mark Evans, “Creating the Hillsong Sound: How One Church Changed Australian Christian Music,” in *The Hillsong Movement Examined*, ed. Riches and Wagner, 73.

In the teaching document, “The 4 Pillars of a Sunday Service,” Hillsong outlines its liturgy, the rationale for each pillar, and practical tips for how to execute it well.¹⁴⁶ The four pillars of a Hillsong service, in order, are: worship, emcee, message, and ministry. “Praise and worship typically goes for approximately 20 minutes,” in which the songs are not randomly chosen, but are “taking people on a journey...to be able to fix their full attention on Jesus.”¹⁴⁷ This is followed by the “emcee” time,¹⁴⁸ where prayer requests and “praise reports” are prayed for congregationally. After this, there is a “two-minute fellowship,”¹⁴⁹ and the receiving of weekly tithes and offerings. During this time, leaders are encouraged to “keep this segment of the service fun,” lest newcomers think that this is about “begging or trying to manipulate people to give.”¹⁵⁰ The close of the emcee time introduces the third pillar, the message, before which a worship song is usually done. The message ought to be “biblically based,” “helpful,” and “applicable,”

¹⁴⁶ The teaching document was written by the Hillsong Leadership Network, based on the “Online Open Week” from the Hillsong Stockholm team. Online Open Week “is your opportunity to receive impartation and training direct from the Hillsong team through live webinars.” See Hillsong Leadership Network, “The 4 Pillars of a Sunday Service,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), June 28, 2016, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/06/the-4-pillars-of-a-sunday-service/>.

¹⁴⁷ “The 4 Pillars.” Also note here the grammatical intentionality of the quotation: “praise and worship” is understood as a singular name, rather than two related ideas, which is why the author employs the verb “goes” rather than “go.”

¹⁴⁸ There are usually one or two emcees leading this moment. Based on field observations, the emcee is never the preacher, but usually on the pastoral staff.

¹⁴⁹ This is called the “two-minute turnaround time” in New York City, even though the Hillsong literature calls it the “Two Minute Fellowship.” For a quirky insider take on the two minute fellowship, see Hillsong Los Angeles, “How to Survive the 2 Minute Fellowship (for introverts),” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), March 29, 2017, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2017/03/how-to-survive-2-minute-fellowship-for-introverts-2/>.

¹⁵⁰ “The 4 Pillars.”

meaning the sermons should be “speaking to peoples Mondays and not just their Sundays.”¹⁵¹

The fourth and final pillar is ministry, which is given the most weight: “this is the final part of the service that everything has been building towards.”¹⁵² This pillar is about creating “room” for the Holy Spirit to move:

Sometimes it might be a song of worship to confirm and reinforce the message, while other times we might pray for different situations (for example: healing, breakthrough) and speak over people’s lives. As a church, we always offer an invitation for anyone present in the service to make a decision to give their life to Jesus.¹⁵³

This pillar of Hillsong’s service allows for the most contextualization insofar as the pastor or emcee can “read the room” and lead the congregation as the Spirit moves. Every week, an offer for salvation is extended, where congregants are invited to confess their sins and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, which is often done with “every head bowed and eyes closed.”¹⁵⁴ Those praying the prayer for the first time are invited to lift their hands indicating they prayed the prayer, and after the service are invited to visit the welcome table where they can learn “next steps” in their Christian faith.

The liturgy of Hillsong Church, particularly the fourth pillar, functions as an evangelistic tool. However, it is not as much of a numbers game as it is rooted in Hillsong’s desire to champion the “cause of Christ” in the world. Bobbie Houston

¹⁵¹ “The 4 Pillars.”

¹⁵² “The 4 Pillars.”

¹⁵³ “The 4 Pillars.”

¹⁵⁴ Field notes, researcher, New York, NY, February 18, 2018.

reflects, “some respond immediately to Him, others will process the experience, and some will say ‘no thank you.’ While we cannot legislate a person’s acceptance of God, what we can do is love, encourage and exhort them to respond to His love. Should they refuse, we are commanded not to cease loving them.”¹⁵⁵ The weight attached to the altar call is why she argues that preparation is key to executing a well-done worship set.

Speaking metaphorically, she writes, “healthy houses feed the hungry, because they make a choice to ‘prepare for the hungry.’” Each week in its liturgy, Hillsong prepares for the spiritually hungry through the praise and worship, message, and time of ministry.

The one regular element in the worship service not discussed in the four pillars is the “item.” Hillsong worship pastor Tarryn Stokes describes an item as

the songs and creative moments that are performed in our church services. It might be a special opener to a worship night, a reflective song during the taking of communion, or just a fun moment to celebrate a particular event (Mother’s Day, etc.). You might call them something different, but what we mean by it is the songs that are presented outside of the praise and worship setlist, but still serve a specific purpose in the service.¹⁵⁶

Items are done in service to the liturgy. For example, at Hillsong New York City in the month of February, the item each week reflected Black History month. On February 25th, the item was a monologue drama, a window into the life of Kenneth Clarke, a famous African American psychologist known for creating the “white and brown doll”

¹⁵⁵ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 164.

¹⁵⁶ Tarryn Stokes, “Items in Church Settings,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), May 20, 2016, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/05/items-in-church-settings/>.

experiment with children as research subjects.¹⁵⁷ Following this was a commentary by Hillsong Church member Andrew McGill, who used this time to talk about how African Americans, like the black children in the experiment, often “take lies and internalize them,” after which he encouraged the church by saying “you are not alone” and you are “not unknown.”¹⁵⁸ Musically, this was followed by the Hillsong refrain, “and I know you’re with me / Your love will light the way.”¹⁵⁹ Items are intentional songs or performances to enhance the theme of the service. Though Hillsong does not communicate a scriptural basis for them, their liturgical function can be likened to that of a choral anthem or the tropes in the medieval Western liturgy.

While not every component within the Hillsong liturgy has a scriptural basis, the relationship between worship and scripture in the liturgical theology of Hillsong Church is inextricable. The Bible is the epistemological basis for *doing* worship rather than a rulebook to be followed. To worship is a concrete, embodied activity. Worship is not music, but the two are analogous insofar as they are both a science and an art. Worship is science because some things can be known about worship, especially in terms of scripture (the Psalm 100 typology for the order of worship, for example). However, worship is an art because it does not fit neatly into prepackaged boxes—there is room for mystery (the sensory language for worship, for example). Importantly, Hillsong’s language about the

¹⁵⁷ Field notes, February 25, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Field notes, February 25, 2018.

¹⁵⁹ Field notes, February 25, 2018. The refrain comes from the Hillsong UNITED song “Aftermath.” See Joel Houston, “Aftermath,” on *Aftermath*, Hillsong Music Publishing, 2010.

mystery of worship indicates more than a cerebral *knowing* of worship; true understanding can only come about through immersion in the *doing* of worship.

The Primacy and Power of Musical Worship

It is a common Evangelical trope to speak interchangeably of music and worship, even though there are plenty of qualifications as to why they are different. As an example, Robb Redman’s book *The Great Worship Awakening*—though a volume on contemporary liturgical reforms, including topics of renewed eucharistic piety among Protestants and discussions of contemporary language—still features the subtitle “Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church” while a guitar-playing musical worship leader adorns the front cover.¹⁶⁰ Hillsong’s discussion of music is no different. While Robert Fergusson, Darlene Zschech, and Brian Houston decidedly claim that music is not to be equated with worship, the books, blog posts, and sermons indicate otherwise.¹⁶¹ This is not surprising given music’s synonymous status with the Hillsong brand. Furthermore, in Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic church subcultures, contemporary worship music is the primary locus of encounter with the divine, giving it near-sacramental status.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ See Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a new Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

¹⁶¹ This is yet another demonstration of the “gap” between quasi-official theologies and the “lived” status of religion and of the “secondary” versus the “primary” liturgical theology.

¹⁶² See Sarah Koenig, “This is My Daily Bread: Toward a Sacramental Theology of Evangelical Praise and Worship,” *Worship* 82, no. 2 (2008): 141-161.

While Hillsong gives high regard to music in worship, arguing for its music as “sacrament” would be misdirected. The term “music” must be clarified for the purposes of this section. When Hillsong speaks of “music,” they are talking about worship songs, which are a synthesis of text and tune.¹⁶³ In the primary sources of Hillsong Church, not only is the term “sacrament” absent,¹⁶⁴ but their language about music would not give it status as a sacrament even if they upheld an Augustinian understanding.¹⁶⁵ The music itself, while a container of divine presence, does not mediate the divine presence strictly. Hillsong’s emphasis is on the worshipper herself being “open” to God’s presence in and through the music, mediating God’s presence through her sacrifice of praise. The impetus for divine mediation is always on the worshipper and a God who delights in humanity’s praises, not the container—the music—itself.¹⁶⁶ Rather than sacrament, Hillsong’s language of music’s role in worship is *sacramental* and more consonant with assisting

¹⁶³ This stands in contradistinction to a “hymn,” which at its core is a text and can stand independently of the “tune” as devotional poetry.

¹⁶⁴ Although Hillsong as a denomination does not have a book of worship articulating a theology of “sacraments” or “ordinances,” Hillsong likely stands in continuity with the Australian Christian Churches and the World of Assemblies of God Fellowship, who regard eucharist and baptism as “ordinances.” See World Assemblies of God Fellowship Membership Documents, particularly the “Statement of Faith,” accessed August 6, 2018, <http://worldagfellowship.org/fellowship/bylaws/>; see also, “Doctrinal Basis,” Australian Christian Churches, accessed August 6, 2018, <https://www.acc.org.au/about-us/doctrinal-basis/>.

¹⁶⁵ An Augustinian understanding of sacrament is that of an outward sign revealing an inward grace. In “Questions on the Heptateuch,” Augustine writes, “How, then, do both Moses and the Lord sanctify?...Moses, by the visible sacraments through his ministry; God by invisible grace through the Holy Spirit, wherein the whole fruit of the visible sacraments; for without that sanctification of invisible grace, what use are visible sacraments?” See Augustine, “Questions on the Heptateuch, III, 84 (ca. 410),” trans. Bernard Leeming, in *Sacraments and Worship: The Sources of Christian Theology*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 3.

¹⁶⁶ Whether or not God *also* mediates God’s presence is not discussed in the extant Hillsong literature. If I were to conjecture, this is likely an implicit understanding of God’s activity through the Holy Spirit.

with sacrifice. Put differently, music is the incense that sweetens and carries the sacrifice of praise offering. Throughout the primary sources, Hillsong's main emphases in discussing musical worship are (1) the connection between music and the presence of God, (2) music's relationship to doctrine, (3) the notion of musical excellence, and (4) the various typologies of musical worship songs.

Musical Worship and the Presence of God

In Hillsong's primary sources, musical worship is the method *par excellence* of encountering God's presence. Brian and Bobbie's original "The Church I See" vision statement calls for a church whose "heartfelt praise and worship touches Heaven and changes earth...exalting Christ with powerful songs of faith and hope."¹⁶⁷ Here again is the recurrent theme of the "felt" nature of worship, this time through congregational song in particular. Brian Houston expands on that theme thusly: "Singing and speaking the Word of God can actually bring a felt shift to the atmosphere of a church service. Worship brings a tangible sense of joy and peace, power and awe, into the room as we confess with our lips the greatness of who God is."¹⁶⁸ The felt nature of musical worship is expressed both in the corporate and personal spheres. Corporately, the "atmosphere" of the church service changes, evincing the communal nature of the worship event. At the same time, there is a personal experience of joy and peace, power and awe, as God's

¹⁶⁷ "The Church I See (1993)," Vision, Hillsong Church, accessed August 6, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/vision/>.

¹⁶⁸ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 70.

greatness is declared through song. It is the embodied *doing* of worship itself—the singing or speaking of worship songs—rather than the songs alone that mediate the presence of God.

In the Hillsong literature, there is an expectation of God’s presence linked with musical worship, an expectation built upon the notion of a God who delights in the praises of humanity. Bobbie Houston writes that it is the task of the leadership (including worship leaders) to “create an environment that will draw the presence of God,” and similarly phrased, “create an environment that will attract Heaven.”¹⁶⁹ She continues,

Our songs and hymns are for no other reason than to love and lavish God with the adoration that He is worthy of. In the process of magnifying Him, His Presence will draw near – the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (if invited) invades our space, and when ‘outsiders’ encounter this, they are forever affected. As Marilyn Hickey says, “Exalt Jesus and God will turn up and show off.”¹⁷⁰

The songs are not the mediating factors; it is the embodied worship that draws the presence of God and “attracts Heaven.” Scripturally, this understanding of God’s presence in the midst of the musical worship is rooted in Psalm 22:3: “Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel” (NRSV). More frequently, worship leaders translate it something like “You are holy; you inhabit the praises of Israel,” providing a vernacular update to the King James’ translation of “But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the

¹⁶⁹ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 163-164.

¹⁷⁰ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 164. Although this quotation may suggest that music seemingly functions as a divine remote control to “bring in” God’s presence, the implicit assumption is that the God—in the Spirit—is immanently present. See Tanya Riches, “Can We Still Sing the Lyrics ‘Come Holy Spirit’: Spirit and Place in Australian Pentecostal Worship,” *Pneuma: The Journal for the Society of Pentecostal Studies* 38, no. 3 (2016): 289.

praises of Israel.”¹⁷¹ Rather than “inhabits,” Bobbie opts for a more dramatic term vis-à-vis God’s role in musical worship: God, more specifically Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit “invades” the gathered assembly. In Hillsong’s understanding, the presence of God in musical worship is dramatic, life-altering, and lavish—and even though implicitly God is *already here*, God descends or even “invades” our musical worship, *especially when we ask*.

Worship Music and Doctrine

In Hillsong’s understanding, worship music communicates doctrine. Citing Martin Luther’s axiom, “Nothing could be more closely connected with the Word of God than music,”¹⁷² Amanda Fergusson understands and communicates the responsibility worship leaders have in writing songs “that may be sung in our own church and even around the world.”¹⁷³ As the gatekeepers for lyrical-theological integrity of songs at Hillsong Church, Amanda and Robert Fergusson contend that because worship songs are

¹⁷¹ The 2008 Hillsong Worship song “The Wonder of Your Love” begins with a paraphrase of this scripture: “You inhabit the praises of your people / You delight in the glory of your son.” See Jack Mooring, Leeland Mooring, Marty Sampson, “The Wonder of Your Love,” on *Faith + Hope + Love*, Hillsong Music Publishing, Jack Mooring Music, Meaux Jeux Music, Meaux Mercy, The Devil is a Liar! Publishing, 2008.

¹⁷² Fergusson’s translation can be linked to a quotation found in Richard Viladesau, *The Triumph of the Cross: The Passion on Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 171. Viladesau cites the translation as Martin Luther, “Vorrede auf die Gesänge vom Leiden Christi,” in Luther, *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 14, ed. Johann Georg Walch (St. Louis: Concordia, 1898), 430.

¹⁷³ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 100.

so memorable, they must be “theologically sound.”¹⁷⁴ However, worship songs must also achieve a balance of artistry and theological truth, lest they devolve into “theological lectures.”¹⁷⁵ The words and melodies of worship songs are sung on Sunday morning and throughout the week. Cassandra Langton contends that they “give us insight and wisdom for our everyday reality and are vehicles for navigating the good and the bad times,” which means they must communicate doctrine, be scripturally faithful, and be applicable to daily life.¹⁷⁶

When Hillsong speaks of “doctrine,” they are more concerned with being scripturally faithful than with espousing the teachings of the church fathers and mothers, or a theological or denominational stance. Brian Houston argues that “worship is filling the human spirit with the content of God’s Word, which is why we take such great care when approving the lyrics of our songs. We know that songs can shape theology and that theology builds faith.”¹⁷⁷ In Hillsong’s understanding, worship must be rooted in scripture. Accordingly, it is the treatment of the scriptures that merits the most concern in songwriting. Amanda Fergusson advises songwriters to “tell the truth exegetically” by choosing Bible translations carefully, keeping scriptural citations in context, and to keep original meaning intact. However, Hillsong’s biblical emphasis does not mean it eschews traditional doctrinal commitments in song. Citing the second stanza of Charles Wesley’s

¹⁷⁴ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 101.

¹⁷⁵ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 102.

¹⁷⁶ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 20.

¹⁷⁷ Brian Houston, *There is More*, 70.

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing” for its orthodox theology and perdurance in church music, Amanda Fergusson lauds this hymn for its commitment to “traditional” theological claims, namely the divinity of Christ, Christ’s historical appearance on earth, the virgin birth, and Christ’s nature as fully God and fully man.¹⁷⁸

As Hillsong’s music became more globally prominent, the songwriters have paid more attention to traditional doctrine communicated in the songs. While this claim is not directly verifiable in the primary sources, it is corroborated by a small difference between the 2005 and 2017 edition of Amanda Fergusson’s *Songs of Heaven: Writing Songs for Contemporary Worship*. In her chapter “Tell the Truth,” the 2017 edition adds a new subsection entitled, “Our songs should reflect the breadth of doctrinal truth.” Fergusson writes:

Although we cannot and should not try to put all of our doctrine into one song we do need to reflect the breadth of what we believe as a church over a period of time. This includes the nature and character of God, salvation, the incarnation, the life of Jesus and the message of the kingdom; the cross, the resurrection, Pentecost, the church and beyond including social responsibility and evangelism.¹⁷⁹

By speaking to the breadth of Christian doctrine and not emphasizing a particular theological orientation, more worshippers across the globe are able to sing Hillsong worship songs. In the earlier years of Hillsong Worship, the doctrinal emphases were

¹⁷⁸ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 109-110. By using the term “traditional” theological claims, I am referring to things that are biblically attested to (such as the divinity of Christ), but were not doctrinally confirmed for centuries later.

¹⁷⁹ Darlene Zschech, quoted in Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 103.

more focused on the local church, particularly with regard to a song’s liturgical function.

Darlene Zschech asserts,

I’m always looking and listening for a subject that needs to be expressed in song. I’m asking questions such as, “What does our church need to be singing at the moment?” Where is the gap in our theology of worship at the moment? Are we focusing too much on us? Are we focusing too much on one area of our expression of worship?¹⁸⁰

This does not mean that Hillsong no longer pays attention to liturgical and doctrinal utility in the local congregation, but that their focus has broadened to encompass the millions of worshippers who sing their songs every day of the week.

Musical Excellence

Having theologically sound doctrine is not enough for a Hillsong worship song to be effective in the context of a worship service. Across the board of the creative department—including worship leaders, musicians, audio/visual engineers, and production managers—the principle of “excellence” is a recurring motif in the Hillsong primary sources. To write a song, lead worship, or run technology with excellence does not mean perfection; rather it is a “journey to become better” than before.¹⁸¹ The “not perfection” line is oft repeated, perhaps as a reminder to the high-caliber musicians and creatives that the glorification of God, not their technical prowess, is the end goal.

Hillsong Hills Campus Worship Pastor Gabriel Kelly maintains,

¹⁸⁰ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 47.

¹⁸¹ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 56.

One thing we care about on our creative team is our level of excellence. We take great joy in bringing our absolute best when we serve. Not for the sake of excellence itself, but because we believe what we're doing is worth us playing, singing, and creating to the best of our ability. Our purpose, our mission, implores us to be diligent with our gifts.¹⁸²

In terms of musicianship, being diligent with gifts looks like being prepared and well-rehearsed, according to Hillsong Music Director Nigel Hendroff. In a 2016 interview with Autumn Hardman (another Hillsong musician), Hendroff provides a scriptural foundation for musical excellence: Psalm 33, “where the Bible says sing to the Lord a new song; play skillfully and shout with joy.”¹⁸³ To play skillfully is applicable to excellence whether in a low-tech gathering of 300 people or a Hills Campus worship service with 3500.¹⁸⁴

Playing skillfully is connected to excellence, but there is also a strong thematic current of reducing “distractions” in worship services. To be excellent, in addition to being a better version of yourself, means to minimize distractions so that worshippers may encounter God in an easier manner. Worship Pastor Tarryn Stokes advises all vocalists to warm up before singing so that there will be “less limitations and less distractions from the main thing: leading people into the presence of God.”¹⁸⁵ Similarly,

¹⁸² Gabriel Kelly, “Growing your Gift from the Inside Out,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), January 26, 2016, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/01/growing-your-gift-from-the-inside-out/#.W2roJdgzocg>.

¹⁸³ Nigel Hendroff, “Musicians 101: Excellence in Different Band Settings,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), June 9, 2016, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/06/musicians-101-excellence-in-different-band-settings/#.W2roGtgzocg>.

¹⁸⁴ By “low-tech,” Hendroff mentions unplugged instruments and no in-ear monitors.

¹⁸⁵ Tarryn Stokes, “Vocal Warm-Up Exercises,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), January 28, 2015, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2015/01/vocal-warm-up-exercises/#.W2r4Dtgzocg>.

the audio department has a similar guiding goal of removing distractions and creating “atmospheres that invite those that walk through the door to connect with our God.”¹⁸⁶ Realistically, this does not always play out. Despite Hillsong’s culture of excellence, they are also humans prone to error.¹⁸⁷ During my site visits to Hillsong New York City, there was at least one major error each week, usually an audio glitch, a couple of wrong chords, or an off-pitch worship leader. Usually, the musicians and tech team handled the mistakes with humility, continuing on as if nothing happened so as to not emphasize the distraction. As Matt Hann writes, excellence “goes hand-in-hand with humility, not counter to it.”¹⁸⁸ In the Hillsong literature, minimizing distractions is essential for excellence. Excellence is an offering to God, and excellence must be pursued in order to facilitate the worshipping body’s encounter with Jesus Christ.

Songwriting Techniques and Implicit Theology

This chapter’s discussion of the role of music in worship thus far has organized and analyzed the explicit theological claims Hillsong makes about music; however, there are myriad implicit claims particularly in the way Hillsong offers advice for songwriting.

¹⁸⁶ Hillsong Team, “The Inner Workings of Our Production Team,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), June 19, 2015, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2015/06/behind-the-scenes-with-our-conference-production-team/#.W2r38Ngzocg>.

¹⁸⁷ As an example of Hillsong poking fun of itself, see Hillsong Worship, “Sometimes Things Go Wrong in Worship,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), June 16, 2015, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2015/06/when-things-go-wrong-in-worship/#.W2r-wNgzocg>.

¹⁸⁸ Matt Hann, “What is Excellence?” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), November 20, 2014, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2014/11/what-is-excellence/#.W2r47Ngzocg>.

The first of such claims is the notion of “singability” in constructing worship songs, hymns, and anthems, which implicitly reveals a communal theology of song. Amanda Fergusson urges songwriters to write melodies that the congregation can sing with a “vocal range and structure that can be sung by an inexperienced singer.”¹⁸⁹ Hillsong worship leader Ben Fielding echoes this advice, adding specificity by calling for a narrow range and pitching it correctly, making it comfortable for both male and female voices.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, these simple melodies must have an even simpler “melodic hook,” which is a motif that “stays in the listener’s mind when everything else has gone,” usually involving “two or three notes...put together in a distinctive and memorable way.”¹⁹¹ The intentional corporateness in writing worship song melodies is not only for the gathered Sunday assembly, but for every day in between.

Another implicit theological claim is that worship music ought to be theologically balanced. In her chapter “Find the Balance in the Creative Process,” Amanda Fergusson uses the analogy of early church heresy to illustrate imbalance. She writes, “many of the early Christian heresies were related either to stressing Jesus’ humanity at the expense of His divinity or vice versa.”¹⁹² Applying this to songwriting, she argues that songs must balance Word and Spirit, mind and emotions, objectivity and subjectivity, and words and

¹⁸⁹ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 202.

¹⁹⁰ Ben Fielding, “5 Things to Have in Mind When Writing a Congregational Song,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), March 5, 2015, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2015/03/5-things-to-have-in-mind-when-writing-a-congregational-song/#.W2tMnNgzocg>.

¹⁹¹ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 203.

¹⁹² Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 88.

music. For Word and Spirit, songs must be rooted in the scriptures, but also speak to “the church’s current situation.”¹⁹³ To achieve balance between mind and emotions means that emotion in songs must be linked to content. For objectivity and subjectivity, songwriters are called to “embrace the subjective experiences that come our way and then move to the objective expression of them.”¹⁹⁴ Finally, for words and music, excellence in both areas must be applied equally. Fergusson argues that theologically, it is God who grants the songwriters this balance: “we need to depend on the whisper of the One Who stands outside time and human limitations and Who can guide us safely through.”¹⁹⁵ Worship music is a theological balancing act and must be approached with caution, reverence, and humility.

A final implicit theological claim in songwriting is that worship is contextual. With the frequency of its musical output and its guiding principle of resourcing local churches across the world with worship songs, Hillsong Church is well-aware that many of its songs are geared for particular times and seasons. In advising songwriters, Amanda Fergusson claims, “the more specialised the musical style of a song, the more quickly it will date.”¹⁹⁶ She continues by saying that this is not a problem for worship choruses, which are intended to have a shorter shelf life. Short shelf lives are not something to be lamented. She and other leaders frequently cite Psalm 33’s command to “sing to the Lord

¹⁹³ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 89.

¹⁹⁴ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 91.

¹⁹⁵ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 92.

¹⁹⁶ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 63.

a new song,” with a literal understanding of “new song.” However, there is tension between Fergusson’s recontextualization of “sing to the Lord a new song” and the fact that many of Hillsong’s songwriters *do* want their songs and hymns to echo the timelessness of older songs, such as “How Great Thou Art” and “Amazing Grace.”¹⁹⁷ Perhaps this is why Fergusson includes a new section about experimenting with “contemporary hymns” in the 2017 edition of *Songs of Heaven*. This is also a contextual move insofar as retuning old hymns and writing new hymns is a Christian songwriting trend in the Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic worship movements.¹⁹⁸ Ultimately, Fergusson urges songwriters to “stay true to yourself” in the writing process, writing lyrics that are sincere and contextual, even if not “commercially viable at the time.”¹⁹⁹

The church and global brand of Hillsong is inseparable from its musical exports which is why such a significant amount of ink has been spilled by Hillsong pastors, worship leaders, musicians, and other creatives to voice the theological dimensions of worship through music. Though their literature is extensive, the most recurrent explicit theological themes are musical worship’s strong linkage to the presence of God and the notion that worship music is a singing of doctrine. Implicitly, their writing about music’s role in worship reveals worship’s communal nature, the necessity for theological balance,

¹⁹⁷ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 66. This is yet another instance of the lived reality not always aligning with what is proposed and suggested by official church communicators.

¹⁹⁸ See Greg Scheer, “Retune My Heart to Sing Thy Grace: How Old Hymn Texts Found a New Home among Evangelicals,” *The Hymn* 65, no. 4 (2014): 19-27; Bruce Benedict, “Refurbished Hymns in an Age of Vintage Faith: Millennials and the Returned Hymn Movement,” *Liturgy* 32, no. 1 (2017): 54-61.

¹⁹⁹ Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 69.

and worship music’s contextuality. The performance of these theological claims is equally important. Both songwriting and musical performance must be done with excellence because everything—every song lyric, every melodic hook, every audio-visual cue—is done in service to God in Christ. As Ben Fielding succinctly summarizes, “true Christian worship must involve the reality and centrality of Jesus.”²⁰⁰

God Doesn’t Need Our Worship

The third and final organizing theme for Hillsong’s secondary liturgical-theological claims is the notion that God does not need our worship. Hillsong creative pastor Brad Kohring sums up the theological position candidly:

A mystery of worship is that it isn’t about us, but about God. But, God doesn’t need our worship; we do. God isn’t some insecure cosmic being, who waits for His worshippers to remind Him how awesome He is and how desperately they need Him before He decides to intervene. God never changes. But when we worship, we change.²⁰¹

Worship is not about humanity, for worship is directed to God. Yet, humanity needs worship because it desires change that only God can bring about. Put simply, worship is *for* us, but *about* God. However, lest worship be reduced to a type of moral therapeutic deism, Hillsong also emphasizes the cosmic dimension of worship. Darlene Zschech writes that worship “at every level always means God, and the priority of God the Father, the precious Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ. Through worship, humanity enters into that

²⁰⁰ Fielding, “5 Things to Keep in Mind.”

²⁰¹ Brad Kohring, “Why Do We Worship?” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), May 10, 2017, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2017/05/why-do-we-worship/#.W2yjB9gzoch>.

great life of the spiritual universe which consists in the ceaseless proclamation of the glory of God.”²⁰² Through worship, humanity joins with the heavenly realm in the adoration of God’s glory and satisfies its created purpose. God, in the midst of this worship, is not conceived of as a narcissist, but instead one who delights and inhabits the praises of God’s people.

Hillsong’s financial investment in worship services reveals the theological priority of worship. According to the 2017 Hillsong Church Annual Report, 40 percent of Hillsong’s proceeds are spent on church services, which includes pastor and leader support, campus operating costs, children and youth ministries, worship and creative programs, community awareness, and events.²⁰³ Sixteen percent of Hillsong’s proceeds are spent on “construction and financing of facilities,” twelve percent is spent on “venue operating costs,” and nine percent is spent on “arts, media and conferences,” all of which are ostensibly related to corporate worship services.²⁰⁴ Adding those percentages reveals that 77 percent of Hillsong’s expenses are used in some way to facilitate worship. The remaining percent is split between corporate services (eleven percent), global and local benevolent (eight percent), and missions (four percent).²⁰⁵ Worship is at the core of Hillsong’s identity, both theologically and financially.

²⁰² Darlene Zschech, quoted in Amanda Fergusson, *Songs of Heaven*, 3.

²⁰³ “2017 Annual Report,” 77.

²⁰⁴ “2017 Annual Report.”

²⁰⁵ “2017 Annual Report.”

Hillsong’s theological emphasis is that worshippers would encounter the living God and join in the heavenly chorus that “touches heaven and changes earth.”²⁰⁶ Indeed, worship is *about* God and *for* us. Brian Houston writes, “it’s easy to approach the throne in worship when you are focusing on the character of God. He IS good, He IS kind, He IS worthy of all our praise.”²⁰⁷ God is the one to be praised and encountered. However, that encounter with God is something facilitated through a type of worship leadership that is imbued with excellence because worship, again, is for the benefit of humanity. The following subsections will organize Hillsong’s thoughts on the subject: the notion that worship must be “led” and the requisite authenticity therein; the theological claim that worship realizes the church; and the understanding of worship [in]forming ethics.

Worship is Led

Brian Houston cites Psalm 42:4 as an example of David fulfilling the role of a worship leader. Using The Message Bible paraphrase, Brian draws attention to David as the “head of the worshipping crowd...leading them all...shouting praises, singing thanksgiving.”²⁰⁸ In this blog entry, Brian is addressing worship leaders and other creatives who may fall into the temptation of thinking that worship is something that is only led “up front.” Rather, he argues, worship “cannot and must not be led just from the

²⁰⁶ “The Church I See (1993).”

²⁰⁷ Brian Houston, “Creating a Worshipful Environment.”

²⁰⁸ Brian Houston, “Creating a Worshipful Environment.”

platform” because all Christians should be “head of the worshipping crowd.”²⁰⁹ While this is intended to be a helpful pastoral directive, the idea that all are “worship leaders” is contrary to the nature of the primary sources. Worship leaders are, in fact, a particular group of people who follow established principles and guidelines.

A worship leader is one who sings, perhaps plays a supporting instrument, but most importantly is one who has “the ability to engage and capture a congregation and lead them toward God.”²¹⁰ Worship leaders are the ones tasked with gathering, focusing, and unifying a congregation in congregational song. It is a position of high importance within Hillsong leadership with many people waiting years to lead, but some never get the chance to serve in this capacity.²¹¹ Worship leading is a gift that must be honed, and it begins “on your knees” in acts of personal devotion.²¹² The rationale is that it would be difficult for a worship leader to lead her fellow worshippers to an emotional or spiritual place that she, herself, has never been before.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Brian Houston, “Creating a Worshipful Environment.”

²¹⁰ Jad Gillies, “Worship Leader Training with Jad Gillies,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), September 7, 2012, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2012/09/worship-leader-training-with-jad-gillies/>.

²¹¹ At Hillsong New York City, my informant Phoebe (pseudonym) spoke about choir members who have been waiting years to get a chance to lead worship on the platform and who most likely never will. Phoebe, interview with researcher, New York, NY, February 26, 2018.

²¹² Hillsong Worship, “Worship Starts on Your Knees,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), May 6, 2013, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2013/05/worship-starts-on-your-knees/>.

²¹³ Elsewhere, I have argued that Evangelical worship leaders function as “ethical” and “exemplary” prophets, in line with Max Weber’s typology. See Cowan, “Lay-Prophet-Priest,” 27-28. This embodied modeling also brings to mind Erving Goffman’s notion of employing a “front” as it relates to the performance of self. See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 22.

To lead worship effectively requires a building of trust between the worship leader and the congregation. Worship Pastor Annie Garratt suggests, “when it comes to leading a congregation in worship, how the church responds to you has a lot to do with the church trusting you. This relationship can’t be rushed or forced. It’s comes [*sic*] through time as they watch you be consistent on and off platform.”²¹⁴ By “consistent,” Annie is referring to the consistency of the worship leader’s personality. She advises, “When leading, open your eyes and engage people, smile, don’t be too intense and when you speak, speak with confidence. Speak in a normal voice, there’s no need to put on a different persona, you don’t have to use fancy words or clever phrases, just be you and bring what only you can bring.”²¹⁵ Part of what Annie is speaking to in this quotation is the celebrity worship leader culture that has been fostered at Hillsong Church.²¹⁶ As of August 2018, the Instagram handles of Hillsong, Hillsong UNITED, and Hillsong Worship all boast more than one million followers, while many individual worship leaders like Joel Houston and Brooke Ligertwood have at least 500,000. These celebrity worship leaders have shaped the worship culture of Hillsong Church, with many hopeful worship leaders mimicking their style—actions that Annie Garratt is advising against.

²¹⁴ Annie Garratt, “Worship Leader Training with Annie Garratt,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), September 20, 2012, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2012/09/worship-leader-training-with-annie-garratt/>.

²¹⁵ Garratt, “Worship Leader Training.”

²¹⁶ “Celebrity culture” with regard to pastors and worship leaders is a common phenomenon in Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic worshipping communities. For example, see The Gospel Coalition’s (an Evangelical news source) repudiation of it. Mike Cospo, “Kill Your (Celebrity Culture) Worship,” The Gospel Coalition, January 29, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/kill-your-celebrity-culture-worship/>.

What matters most in worship leadership is authenticity. In Hillsong’s primary sources, the metric of authenticity is applied to worship leadership, but also to preaching, to songwriting, and to the experience of worship itself.

Authenticity is the currency of our time — being you is a beautiful thing... And people can spot fakes a mile away. Even more so on the platform. The minute you put yourself out in front of people, we become tempted to role-play and emulate. But God... He hand-selects, He creates, He fashions according to what He needs. So who you are, what you are, and how you are is part of His plan and you are created for purpose.²¹⁷

The emphasis on authenticity at all levels of the church is directly related to Hillsong’s encouragement of leadership to be deeply invested in their devotional life. In order for authenticity to shine through on the platform or even in the “pews,” one must grow in holiness through personal devotion. In the blog “Worship Starts on Your Knees,” Hillsong Worship recommends reading the Bible, listening to worship music, “fervent intercession,” and reading Christian devotional literature.²¹⁸ This is done to strengthen a relationship with God, but also carries with it the practical purpose of leading others. Hillsong Young & Free worship leader Alex Pappas asserts that the younger generations want to be led in worship and that they are “hungry for someone to teach them how to

²¹⁷ Cass Langton, “Diversity on the Platform,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), October 7, 2015, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2015/10/diversity-on-the-platform/#.W22t-tgzocg>.

²¹⁸ Hillsong Worship, “Worship Starts on Your Knees”

worship.”²¹⁹ Pappas puts the onus on the worship leaders’ authenticity, because “if we aren’t teaching them what it means to worship, who will?”²²⁰

Worship Makes the Church

In Hillsong’s written sources, the connection between ecclesiology and worship is strong, but minimally documented because the connection between the two is largely an experiential one. Hillsong subscribes to the idea that the church is not a building, but the body of Christ. However, the Church is not a loose conglomeration of people; it is the physical gathering together of the body of Christ that *makes* the church. Bobbie Houston writes, “YOU AND I constitute ‘the Church.’ The Church is definitely not a building, but when we (flesh and blood) gather to the building, the building suddenly becomes ‘the House of God.’ When we leave and the lights go out, it is merely a building again, but while we are there it BECOMES THE HOUSE OF GOD.”²²¹ Between the beginning to the end of the worship service, the church is formed, active, and overtly being itself, which is the house of God. Bobbie continues, echoing the language of John of Patmos in Revelation 21, by claiming that the House of God “exists for this purpose and this purpose alone – that we might present God’s children as a Bride perfected for their

²¹⁹ Alex Pappas, “Leading a Young & Free Generation in Worship,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), February 5, 2015, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2015/02/leading-a-young-free-generation-in-worship/>.

²²⁰ Pappas, “Leading a Young & Free Generation.”

²²¹ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 26-27.

groom”²²² In Bobbie’s liturgical theology, worship that makes the church (House of God) also has a restorative function: the weak are strengthened, the sick are healed, the broken are bound up, the lost are found.²²³ That is what it means for worshippers to be presented to God as a bride perfected for their groom.

In the liturgical theology of Hillsong, if worship realizes the Church, then the Church is about unity and transformation. Hillsong London pastor Gary Clarke writes that the Church is the “community of God” in which no need goes unmet and where the worshipping body is united in “heart and mind.”²²⁴ Through the act of worship, the Church is realized in the symbol of a “healthy, unified church.”²²⁵ Indeed, Hillsong intentionally brands itself as a church of unity, especially as demonstrated through its “one house, many rooms” mantra, as well as the large banners across all Hillsong campuses that display the words “Welcome Home.” Additionally, worship is about transformation “into the likeness of Christ,” as worshippers begin to live out their “new nature” as justified ones working out their salvation with fear and trembling.²²⁶ The Church is the unified and transformed family of God on earth, but also “the house of

²²² Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 26-27.

²²³ Bobbie Houston, *Heaven is in This House*, 26-27.

²²⁴ Gary Clarke, “The Church,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), February 12, 2013, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2013/02/the-church/>.

²²⁵ Brian Houston, “Creating a Worshipful Environment.”

²²⁶ Clarke, “The Church.” cf. Philippians 2:12 (NRSV)

heaven on earth,” in which worshippers are “called out to serve the world.”²²⁷ The unity and transformation of the Church is both an interior and exterior reality.

Worship as Lifestyle (Worship and Ethics)

Worship is more than the gathered assembly on Sunday morning, but is also conceived of as a lifestyle. An Evangelical motif expressed since the early 1980s,²²⁸ “worship as a lifestyle” still holds true for Hillsong’s theology of worship. Given Hillsong’s heavy emphasis on music in worship, they have a vested interest in balance by teaching that worship is more than singing songs of praise. In 2004, Darlene Zschech wrote, “Singing magnificent songs about the Lord is fantastic, but it’s not enough. True worship is a daily lifestyle that honors God.”²²⁹ Current Hillsong worship leader Taya Smith expands this, saying worship is “a lifestyle where you’re constantly going after God, learning who He is and who He says that you are. We learn all that through a personal relationship with Jesus and we learn that through reading the Bible, and then we have to align our life with the Word of God.”²³⁰ A life of worship is a life of personal

²²⁷ Robert Fergusson, “The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ [A Poem],” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), February 1, 2013, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2013/02/the-church-of-the-lord-jesus-christ-a-poem/>.

²²⁸ Using Google’s NGram feature (which searches Google’s extensive database of searchable books), the earliest hits for “worship is/as a lifestyle” are in the 1980s. For example, see Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Press, 1982), 39.

²²⁹ Zschech, *The Kiss of Heaven*, 157.

²³⁰ Taya Smith, quoted in Mervyn Lim, “Worship is a Lifestyle: Hillsong’s Taya Smith,” City News, June 10, 2018, <https://www.citynews.sg/2018/06/worship-is-a-lifestyle-hillsongs-taya-smith/>.

relationship with Jesus and following his commands. Put differently by Brian Houston, worship is humanity's "salvation being worked out."²³¹ He continues, "salvation is God's restorative work—and our worship is a partnership with God in that work."²³² While Hillsong may prioritize the inward and "felt" aspect of worship's connection to ethics, or a "lifestyle of worship," this does not exclude worship's connection to outward manifestations of social engagement.

The exterior dimension of worship's connection with ethics is exemplified in both the writings of Brian and Bobbie Houston. Between Brian and Bobbie, Bobbie is more overt in her theological writings about worship's connection with mission efforts and justice initiatives. Throughout her 2016 book *The Sisterhood*, Bobbie issues a call to action to pray for and protest the injustice of human trafficking across the world. Among the myriad life stories, Bible examples, and other illustrations she inserts, Bobbie also regularly quotes Hillsong song lyrics as justifications for a life of living out the *missio dei* in the world. Here are the lyrics from the song "Relentless" and Bobbie's brief reflection:

Salvation sounds a new beginning
 As distant hearts begin believing
 Redemption's bid is unrelenting...
 Tearing through the veil of darkness
 Breaking every chain, You set us free
 Fighting for the furthest heart
 You gave Your life
 Your love is relentless

MATT CROCKER AND JOEL HOUSTON, "RELENTLESS," 2014

²³¹ Brian Houston, "Creating a Worshipful Environment."

²³² Brian Houston, "Creating a Worshipful Environment."

“Fighting for the furthest heart” is the challenge. Remaining mindful and caring of those *desperately lost in the farthest and darkest corners of the field*, while managing our everyday and oftentimes blessed lives, is the endless commission before us.²³³

The call to care for the least of these, the “furthest heart,” is understood as an embodiment of the *missio dei*. Thus, because Jesus—the incarnational mission of God in the world—came to seek and save the lost, so too must humanity be engaged in opportunities “that move people from ‘lost’ to ‘found.’”²³⁴ Brian Houston’s theological reflections on worship’s connection with mission are more sporadic, appearing when pastoral guidance is needed. In response to the 2014 violence in Syria, Brian writes, “You see, the kind of worship God desires is one that not only kneels before the Father in adoration but that also kneels to love those in need.”²³⁵ Though no longer active, this blog post had an “action button” connected to it, where readers could donate money to help Syrians in need.

While the written connection between worship and social engagement (be it mission, social justice, or evangelism) is limited, the actual work of ministry is well-documented on the Hillsong website. Under the “ministries” tab of the website is the subheading “Because We Can,” which is the umbrella term for the “Local and Global

²³³ Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood*, 178 (italics original).

²³⁴ Bobbie Houston, *The Sisterhood*, 179.

²³⁵ Brian Houston, “Worship & Justice,” *Hillsong Collected* (blog), November 12, 2014, <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2014/11/worship-justice/>.

Social Justice Initiatives of Hillsong Church.”²³⁶ Hillsong has formed a global network of mission-oriented partnerships, such as the A21 Campaign against human trafficking, Refugee Response, Compassion International, and World Vision, among others. Locally, each Hillsong location has a city-specific type of ministry. CityCare of the main Hills campus of Hillsong Church, for example, was established in 1986 and is well-developed, well-funded, and sophisticated in scope.²³⁷ The newer locations of Hillsong Church do not have as extensive of programming. Even the 2010 established Hillsong New York City campus only runs a few initiatives, many of which are not well-attended, as attested to by a colleague.²³⁸ Perhaps this is because the connection between worship and social engagement may be more implicit than explicit.

Theologian Andrew Davies argues that Hillsong’s theology of social engagement is embedded within its worship song lyrics, particularly under the auspices of “hope.” Noting the Christological and soteriological connections to hope, Davies avers that hope also has a practical dimension that resonates with social engagement.

²³⁶ See “Because We Can,” Hillsong Church, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/bwc/>.

²³⁷ Andrew Davies writes, “CityCare, founded in 1986 just three short years after the establishment of the original congregation in Baulkham Hills, provides a huge variety of services to the local community, including advocacy and personal development programs; counseling services (with professional as well as volunteer staff) and a health center; community engagement work including street teams who care for, feed, and clothe the homeless (including a mobile shower unit); nursing home visitation teams; youth mentoring and personal development projects; prisons and immigration detention support services, which include chaplaincy, cultural mediation, and transition support programs; and “strengthening families” playgroups. See Andrew Davies, “Because They Can: Hillsong and Social Transformation,” in Riches and Wagner, 203.

²³⁸ Miranda Klaver, message to author, June 5, 2018.

Read in the light of the broader theology of hope we can identify in Hillsong lyrics, I think the emphasis on divine capacity, universal applicability, and individual responsibility are crucial themes, along with the message that hope for the world is found in an experience of the presence of God alone (“Touching Heaven, Changing Earth”; “God of Ages”).²³⁹

Living a life of social engagement is living a life of practical, embodied hope. It is a life to which all are called, and a life that is called forth from singing worship songs, preaching, and the other primary communications of Hillsong Church. As Brian Houston writes in the concluding stanza of “The Church I Now See” Vision Statement, “the church that I see is committed to bringing the love and hope of Christ to impossible situations through the preaching of the gospel and a mandate that drives us to do all we can to bring help and solution to a needy world.”²⁴⁰ Worship and the work of the Church are both intimately connected to social engagement. The same church that in 1993 envisioned a church whose worship “touches heaven,” equally believed that worship “changes earth.” Rooted in a theology of hope, Hillsong Church’s social engagement programs corroborate that original vision.

In the liturgical theology of Hillsong Church, worship is *to* and *about* God, but for the sake of humanity. In order for worshippers to encounter Jesus in the gathering of worship, worship is something that must be led. It is typically led from the platform, but as Brian Houston teaches, all ought to be leading worship. The pastors and worship leaders must themselves be worshipping by spending time in private devotion so that authenticity is communicated from the platform to the pews. Through humanity’s

²³⁹ Davies, “Because They Can,” in Riches and Wagner, 210.

²⁴⁰ Brian Houston, “The Church I Now See.”

authentic worship, worship realizes the Church, and through gathered worship, the Church is most overtly being itself. However, authentic worship in church is not a weekly performance, but a lifestyle rooted in private devotion. A lifestyle of worship, in addition to the interior dimension, manifests outwardly in the realm of social engagement. Though Hillsong's written connection to social engagement is sparing, the implicit connections through a worshipping theology of hope and Hillsong's various social engagement programs verifies their theological predilections.

Methodological Musings and Hillsong's Pentecostal Distinctiveness

As a researcher socially located outside of Pentecostalism, and further, as a scholar of liturgy—"liturgy" being a seldom used term in the Hillsong primary sources—my contribution is but a testimony within the chorus of voices studying Hillsong and Pentecostalism, broadly conceived. The concept of testimony is the first of two theoretical justifications for why the combination of an etic perspective (Mainline Protestant) and an etic discipline (Liturgical Studies) is appropriate for understanding Pentecostalism and particular Pentecostal communities of faith. Mark Cartledge argues that testimony is part and parcel of Pentecostal epistemological foundations. He argues, "We do not believe and know God in isolation rather, we are part of a worshipping and witnessing community of faith."²⁴¹ Knowledge comes through encounter, of which I have had many with the Hillsong New York City community of faith. My intent as a

²⁴¹ Mark J. Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2003), 53.

researcher is to add to the knowledge of Hillsong Church and Pentecostalism rather than cast critiques or aspersions on liturgical-theological reflections that may not match my own. Cartledge also applies the concept of testimony to Pentecostal academic discourse, arguing, “While testimony provides a cohering function at popular levels[,] it also functions in an academic context as the community of scholars share their own stories of reality.”²⁴² My historical and theological organization of the Hillsong primary sources is testimony to the larger truth of Hillsong Church, liturgical theology, and Pentecostalism. Just as church testimonies are heard and evaluated by the corporate body, so too do my contributions warrant discernment among allied scholars and disciplines, both emic and etic.

The other theoretical metaphor pertinent to incorporating different voices is the act of glossolalia. Theological ethicist Nimi Wariboko points to the decentering phenomenon of glossolalia, arguing that the Day of Pentecost “points to information dispersal: that is, the development, distribution, and decentralization of information as the key to human creativity and productivity in the age of the Spirit or of the Pentecostal era.”²⁴³ Wariboko then applies this image of speaking in tongues to his ethical methodology. When considering Pentecostal theology’s ethical contributions to public policy debates, he argues—incorporating the thought of Amos Yong—that “the perspective of many tongues invites us to think...not from one normative paradigm, ‘but

²⁴² Cartledge, 61.

²⁴³ Nimi Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 29. The quotation inside the quotation belongs to Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 257.

a multiplicity of...models and modes of exchanges, each potentially making a distinct contribution to the kind of [polity] of shalom that our world needs.”²⁴⁴ This principle of many tongues also has resonance with the multiplicity of liturgical-theological contributions to Pentecostalism and Hillsong Church. Pentecostal theologies of worship in particular emphasize the priesthood of all believers, which results in a democratization of liturgy and worship.²⁴⁵ Consequently, if worship in the Pentecostal tradition is decentralized and democratized, then liturgical history and theology should also reflect that impulse.

Hillsong, Pentecostalism, and Orality

Another objection to a largely text-based historical and theological treatment of a Pentecostal congregation is the notion of Pentecostalism’s culture of orality. Of the many roots for modern Pentecostalism, Walter Hollenweger ties Pentecostalism’s orality to the “black oral root,” which is connected to both the slave religious experience, but also the explosion of contemporary independent and charismatic churches in western and sub-Saharan Africa.²⁴⁶ Though not without critique in terms of Pentecostal history,²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Wariboko, 126.

²⁴⁵ Marius Nel, “Attempting to Develop a Pentecostal Theology of Worship,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (2016): 2. Importantly, the democratization of liturgy and worship is not envisaged as equal liturgical roles. Nel, incorporating the work of Hans Küng, references the pastor as the one who bears the “charisma of oversight.” See Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Steel and Ward, 1967), 363.

²⁴⁶ See Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

Hollenweger's theological emphasis on the orality of Pentecostalism is widely accepted, especially with regard to worship. By "orality," Hollenweger is pointing to the singing, dancing, and speaking in tongues that is a regular feature of Pentecostal worship.²⁴⁸

While Hillsong Church is not as overt in a characteristic performance of its Pentecostal identity,²⁴⁹ orality is key to its theology and practice of worship. Hillsong has no theological treatises in book form; there is no "Book of Worship" in their current or former denomination; there are neither bulletins with an order of service, nor rubrics therein. However, when looking beyond traditional understandings of "orality," Hillsong's liturgical-theological reflections are well-documented.

Orality in the 21st century has taken different forms with the ubiquitous nature of social media, websites, and blogging platforms. Walter Ong famously distinguishes between primary and secondary orality, arguing that the "electronic age" is an age of secondary orality.²⁵⁰ Communications scholar Catherine Knight Steele builds upon this

²⁴⁷ For instance, some scholars repudiate Hollweger's oversimplification of Pentecostalism as black oral spirituality fused with "Catholic spirituality as it was handed down in the American holiness tradition." See Cornelis van der Laan, "Historical Approaches," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories + Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson et al. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 206.

²⁴⁸ See Geoff Waugh, "Pentecostalism's Global Language, interview with Walter Hollenweger," *A Chronicle of Renewal and Revival* (blog), *Renewal Journal*, March 19, 2012 <https://renewaljournal.blog/2012/03/19/pentecostalisms-global-language-interview-with-walter-hollenweger/>.

²⁴⁹ By this, I mean, the leadership from the platform does not sing or speak in tongues in front of the congregation (as opposed to Pentecostal congregations such as Bethel Church in Redding, California). If glossolalia occurs, it is within the worshipping assembly.

²⁵⁰ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

by arguing that blogs are a reimagining of oral tradition.²⁵¹ Writing for the African-American community, Steele likens the Black blogosphere's orality to that of a barber or beauty shop, thus giving space and empowering African Americans to negotiate their identity, power, and belonging. When speaking of new forms of orality, in general, she states,

Many new online platforms allow users to replicate features of oral culture, creating a more natural process of explanation and storytelling. On SNSs (Social Network Sites), blogs, and other online media, there is a shift away from elite notions of knowledge, definitive "correctness" in writing, and notions of traditionally conceived privacy that reflect the community-building priorities of orality more than hierarchical priorities of literacy.²⁵²

In conceiving of blogging as a form of secondary orality, the *Hillsong Collected* blog site replicates the oral culture of Hillsong Church insofar as it is a shift away from "elite notions of knowledge" and "correctness" in writing, while also functioning as a community-building priority due to its social media integration. Moreover, the Hillsong blogs are written for interaction as evidenced by the option for public comments, with many blogs receiving significant interaction from pastors and laity alike.

The secondary orality of Hillsong Church also appears through other forms of social media. The online sharing of blogs, songs, and sermons in social media outlets—both vertically through Hillsong's self-distribution and horizontally through organic sharing—reinforces the shared discourse and orality of Hillsong Church. In a project about Evangelical worship, ethnomusicologist Monique Ingalls highlights "the role of

²⁵¹ Catherine Knight Steele, "The Digital Barbershop: Blogs and Online Oral Culture Within the African American Community," *Social Media + Society* 2, no. 4 (2016): 1-10.

²⁵² Steele, 9.

mass media in forming shared discourse among members of large social groups.”²⁵³

Incorporating Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined community,” Ingalls applies this theoretical frame to Evangelical conference worship, arguing that participants—who are from different geographic locations and denominations—participate in a shared discourse of worship and music. Hillsong’s interdenominational global reach and online presence also participate in its own imagined community, mediated by its culture of orality.

Through online platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, Apple Music and Hillsong’s own Hillsong Channel, millions of viewers are able to listen to teachings, access worship music, and share them through other social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Through the distribution of its resources and its globally accessible secondary orality (in particular, the *Hillsong Collected* blog), Hillsong Church participates in the imagined community of Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic churches. In addition, many of these resources reinforce the Hillsong vocabulary—words already discussed in the earlier parts in the chapter such as “pioneering,” “flourishing,” and leading from the “platform,” thus contributing to an even broader distribution of Hillsong’s particular orality.

Hillsong Church’s status as an oral community is not mutually exclusive from its textual sources, as both participate in its secondary orality. The history and liturgical theology of Hillsong Church as I have documented has been textual, but as I have argued,

²⁵³ Monique Ingalls, “Awesome in this Place: Sound, Space, and Identity in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 12; see also Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

many of the written sources incorporated participate in the local and global orality of Hillsong Church. Toward that end, until Hillsong Church writes for itself (or narrates, preaches) a thorough history of its origins and its liturgical-theological commitments, my organization of the material is at best provisional.

Hillsong's [Pentecostal] Liturgical Theology

Hillsong New York City's pastor Carl Lentz regularly (and jokingly) refers to his church's Sunday evening 7:30PM service as the "Pentecostal revival" service, while the Sunday morning 10:00AM service is "Presbyterian."²⁵⁴ Implicit in this joke is the notion that the 7:30PM "Pentecostal" service is more expressive through bodily participation in the worship service, while the morning service is more reserved. As an attendee of the 7:30PM service during my time of fieldwork, the insider rationale was that the 7:30PM service attracted a significantly younger crowd (i.e., single youth and young adults with less inhibition), while the morning services attracted [stodgy] traditional family units with two parents and children. Phoebe—who will be fully introduced in Chapter Three—attends both services, spending the morning service with her family, then returning alone at night for further devotion. When I asked her why she comes back, she remarked, "there's a little bit more freedom to the Spirit to be able to move and for Carl to go longer, for worship to go longer, for there to be a little...go left, stay off the script."²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Field notes, researcher, March 25, 2018.

²⁵⁵ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

Because it is the final service of the day, there are no rigid time constraints and Phoebe senses the Spirit's movement more significantly when the leadership is more "free." Put jokingly, Phoebe is both a "Presbyterian" and a "Pentecostal revivalist" simply by the worship services within Hillsong Church that she chooses to attend.

I offer this example of Phoebe and the "Pentecostal revival" 7:30PM service of Hillsong New York City to illustrate the breadth of liturgical and theological representation within a single Hillsong campus. Though I am being moderately tongue-in-cheek by asking this, I wonder which service is the true "Pentecostal" one? Further, if Hillsong New York City is a liturgical-theological bricolage, what does that make other local campuses of Hillsong Church, or Hillsong Church in general? Given Hillsong's mission of "championing the cause of the local church," attracting²⁵⁶ worshippers from various theological traditions, and resourcing communities with doctrinally-informed worship songs, to what extent does Hillsong's liturgical theology reflect a Pentecostal framework? In what follows, I argue that the role of pragmatism in Pentecostal practice both reifies and challenges Hillsong's Pentecostal identity.²⁵⁷

Aside from the prominent role of the Spirit, if there is one unifying thing that can be said about the variety of perspectives on Pentecostal theology and practice, it is the prevalence of the "pragmatic" dimension. In discussing Pentecostal ecclesiology, Shane

²⁵⁶ Local churches who have lost worshippers may not employ as generous a term.

²⁵⁷ It must be noted that I am not intending to be overly reductionistic in solely using "pragmatism" as a defining category for Pentecostal thought. Chapters Three and Four will incorporate other perspectives on Pentecostal liturgical theology, in particular. Pragmatism is being used as an umbrella category that applies both to Pentecostal historiography and Pentecostal theology. It is also heavily present thematically in the primary sources of Hillsong Church.

Clifton argues that given Pentecostalism's penchant for "individualist conceptions of spirituality, as well as premillennial urgency," it is not surprising that "ecclesiological reflection has tended to be *ad-hoc* and pragmatically oriented."²⁵⁸ The influence of the Church Growth Movement upon Pentecostal congregations worldwide has "led to a tendency toward materialistic, anti-intellectual and, if not nihilistic, pragmatic rather than idealistic, ecclesial structures."²⁵⁹ As discussed earlier, Brian, following in the footsteps of Frank Houston, was influenced by the Church Growth Movement and is arguably still driven by its ideology today. Hillsong's obsessive number reporting combined with its entrepreneurial music publishing arm, its well-branded conferences, and catalog of books, studies, blog posts yields an impressive harvest of worshippers across the globe. When analyzed historically, Hillsong Church reflects this pragmatic bent.

Additionally, Hillsong's liturgical theology reflects this pragmatic orientation. Allan Anderson argues that Pentecostal spirituality is "pragmatic, practical, and 'this worldly' rather than esoteric and reflective."²⁶⁰ Within a worship service, this spirituality gives primacy to embodied experience as opposed to philosophical or theological musings. Put differently, worship in the Pentecostal understanding is more related to *doing* than to *meaning*. This is not to say cognitive, formative processes do not happen in Pentecostal congregations; nor am I claiming that meaning-making is not part of the

²⁵⁸ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 7.

²⁵⁹ Clifton, 197.

²⁶⁰ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200.

Pentecostal worship experience. Rather, these processes are tied to embodied experience, understood to be mediated by the Spirit. Hillsong's liturgical theology communicates this spirituality through its emphases on practical Bible-based teaching and doctrinal grounding, the heightened role of music (given their practical expertise), and the notion that worship is for humanity (but *about* God).

Hillsong's liturgical-theological pragmatism is also expressed through its oral culture. Amos Yong argues that the Pentecostal and Charismatic experience "demands interpretation of the *experiential* dimension of spirituality over and against an emphasis on *textuality* in religious life."²⁶¹ In other words, orality is significantly more formative for Pentecostal worshippers as compared with reading or interpreting written texts. This is consonant with Hillsong's approach, especially when orality is expanded to include social media and other online interaction-based modalities such as blogs and websites like YouTube. In addition to the overtly textual books, Hillsong's liturgical theology is mediated through embodied practice, sermons (and sermon sharing), worship music (and sharing), and blog posts. Hillsong Church's orality, as well as Pentecostalism's orality, in general, is part and parcel of pragmatism.

Ritual scholar Daniel Albrecht argues for Pentecostalism's pragmatic orientation in terms of ritual modes of being. He argues that particular rites maintain a "transcendental efficacy," and a type of instrumentalism characterizes them.²⁶² Citing the

²⁶¹ Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal/Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 134.

²⁶² Daniel Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 204.

example of the altar call, Albrecht argues there is a ritual sensibility about it that instrumentalizes expectancy and a tangible response.²⁶³ With altar calls on a weekly basis, Hillsong Church participates in this pragmatic “ritual sensibility” on a global level. According to Hillsong New York attendee Phoebe, altar calls happen every week in church, but also in church leadership team meetings.²⁶⁴ Hillsong Church’s evangelistic desire for all to encounter the saving love of Christ underpins this pragmatic aspect of their liturgical theology. Hillsong’s liturgical-theological identity is pragmatic, thus reifying its thoroughly Pentecostal identity.

At the same time, Hillsong’s pragmatism challenges its Pentecostal identity. Hillsong’s global emphasis on resourcing the local church through music, conferences, and other resources allows for a cross-pollination of practices and theologies. The practical-theological wisdom that Hillsong imparts was not formed in a vacuum, nor conceived of unilaterally. Rather, Hillsong’s discourse and orality participates in the “imagined community” of broader conceptions of Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism, and Charismatic movements. A meager example of this appeared in Brian Houston’s 2018 book *There is More*, where one of the chapter subheadings is entitled “Good Good Father,” which is a prominent song title of a United States-based Evangelical worship band.²⁶⁵ The larger examples are multiform. The discourse surrounding the role of the

²⁶³ Albrecht, 182.

²⁶⁴ Phoebe, interview, March 12, 2018.

²⁶⁵ See Anthony Brown and Pat Barrett, “Good Good Father” on *Housefires II*, Capitol CMG Publishing, 2014.

“worship leader” and worship leadership mechanics, for example, is not Hillsong-specific, nor specific to Pentecostalism. Similarly, the “Hillsong Channel” and the use of broadcast media was an import from Evangelical and even fundamentalist contexts. The biblical basis and biblical typologies of Hillsong’s liturgical theology participate in a shared discourse with Mainline denominations, Evangelicalism, and Charismatic movements. So too does Hillsong’s emphasis on music’s transcendentally efficacious role in the gathered assembly. Ultimately, Hillsong Church is uniquely Pentecostal, but to borrow a phrase from Brian Houston’s recent teachings, “there is more.”

Conclusion

The global church, brand, and movement of Hillsong Church is a fast-growing “elaboration” of Pentecostalism that has influenced the shared discourse of worship, music, and leadership among many denominations and traditions of Christianity in the United States and abroad. It was planted as a Pentecostal church, but an even further elaboration of Frank Houston’s already nonconformist articulation and practice of classical Pentecostalism. Influenced by Frank’s executive leadership style, the Latter Rain emphasis on contemporary worship, and Frank’s vision to incorporate top quality musicians in church, Brian Houston carried his father’s vision to fruition and furthered it by pioneering new territory (both metaphorically and quite literally) in ways that neither dreamed possible. Hillsong’s theology is both Pentecostal and more, given the twenty-first century’s rapid sharing of resources among Pentecostal, Evangelical, and

Charismatic churches, all of which are embedded within Pentecostalism's culture of orality.

Pentecostal liturgical theology as a subfield is not unified in its understanding of what constitutes the distinctiveness of its theology. However, I do not see this as a deficit, but rather as fundamental to Pentecostal liturgical-theological methodology. Employing Wariboko's metaphor of "many tongues" for the work of Pentecostal liturgical theology is fitting insofar as there is one voice in the chorus of others. Put differently, there is one testimony to which other Pentecostal liturgical theologies may give a hearty "amen." The Pentecost event was a decentralizing event—a reversal of Babel.²⁶⁶ As such, given the concept of testimony and the orality of Pentecostalism, it is reasonable to use "many tongues" as a guiding metaphor for the variety of Pentecostal liturgical theologies. My research informant Phoebe, for example, would take great issue with Pentecostal theologian Simon Chan's reclamation of the eucharist's centrality in the gathered assembly.²⁶⁷ For her, Holy Communion is great as a church-wide event, but she more regularly practices it as a private family event. Is Phoebe less Pentecostal for this? I say, "no."

In the following chapters are two testimonies to Pentecostal liturgical theology from "ordinary" participants at Hillsong Church in New York City. "Phoebe" and "Josiah" are primary theologians who articulate their understanding of worship through

²⁶⁶ Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle*, 28.

²⁶⁷ See Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 72.

extensive oral interviews, which I subsequently organize and disclose. Methodologically, their insights will be honored as distinct contributions and testimonies (“many tongues”) to Pentecostal liturgical theology; however, their theological articulations will also be viewed in light of Hillsong’s secondary liturgical theology, as well as more formal secondary liturgical theologies from Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic scholars.

CHAPTER THREE: “PHOEBE,” THE HILLSONG LITURGICAL THEOLOGIAN

At 6:45PM on January 28, 2018, I turned the corner of 8th Avenue and 34th Street in the Manhattan borough of New York City and proceeded to the Manhattan Center, an event, production, and performance venue, which houses the weekly worship services of Hillsong Church. In preparation for the 7:30PM service, I was advised by various Yelp.com reviewers to arrive at least thirty minutes early in order to get through security and find a good seat.¹ By 6:50PM, there was a line out the door approximately thirty people deep,² replete with young adults waiting to be analyzed by metal detectors just before entering the foyer. While I waited in line, I was greeted by various Hillsong volunteers, all of whom smiled and proclaimed effusively, “Welcome to church!” After making it through security, I entered the bustling foyer which had about 200 people inside. Skimming the room, I observed that most people were between 18 and 35 years old, with a somewhat equal balance of folks presenting as male and female. The room was racially and ethnically diverse, with large populations of Asian, Black, Latinx, and White people. The style of clothing was uniformly casual with a chic and trendy edge to it. As more people entered the foyer, ushers encouraged us to cram together and

¹ Security checks are standard at Hillsong Church in New York City, their satellite campuses in the area, and in a multitude of other large churches in the city. Phoebe, personal communication with researcher, January 14, 2019.

² At a later site visit, I learned that this line was nothing in comparison to the 300+ person line I waited in when arriving 10 minutes prior to the service.

maximize space for incoming foot-traffic. At 7:05PM, the doors to the “sanctuary” were still closed yet throbbing with the bass-notes of the band’s last-minute rehearsal.

Promptly at 7:10PM, the doors opened and church attendees rushed to the seats closest to the front and began saving seats with scarves, jackets, and other clothing items. Though the balcony seating was to remain closed until the floor filled up, people bucked the rules and used various unguarded staircases to make their way upstairs. Most people who arrived early came in groups, saving seats for more people within their friend-circles. The two young Black women next to me placed their Dunkin Donuts food and beverage orders to their friends “on the outside,” as if this were a regular part of their evening church routine. Feeling slightly uncomfortable that I did not know anyone, I mostly kept to myself, taking my seat in the “floor” seating, and gathering myself as I adjusted to the surroundings.

Growing up an insider in Evangelical and Pentecostal worship communities, this physical space “felt” like a church to me, despite it being a secular venue and not knowing anyone. The loud background music, the dim lights, the preoccupied volunteers, and the obvious differential between regular attendees and guests gave me a sense of familiarity as I straddled the participant-observer dynamic. Despite feeling like a guest, a sense of warmth came over me as I saw the balconies on both sides boasting “Welcome Home” signs with the Hillsong logo affixed to them. Continuing my gaze upward to the 75-foot ceiling, I noticed that this ballroom was adorned with a hand-painted fresco of

various angels and instrumentalists looking down from the celestial expanse.³ As I adjusted to the surroundings, recorded original music by the various Hillsong groups played in the background while approximately thirty announcement slides cycled through the movie-theater sized screen. I noticed that individuals associated with larger groups did not pay attention to the slides, while worshippers who presumably came alone were watching with intent, myself included. The slides announced various resources, conferences, and ministry initiatives across the global Hillsong Church network, as well as more locally specific information about age-related ministries, “connect groups,” baptism, infant dedications, and follow-up procedures for new believers.⁴

At 7:25PM, the lights dimmed, and a couple of minutes later the production team queued up the “pre-roll” video, which displayed a collection of overtly Christian words, phrases, and images set to intense electronic music and beats that continuously crescendoed while the worship team assembled on the platform.⁵ The pre-roll resolved on a major chord that corresponded to the key signature of the opening song, making the

³ Built in 1906 by Oscar Hammerstein, the Hammerstein Ballroom of the Manhattan Center is a 12,000 square foot performance venue that can seat up to 3,500 people. See “The Manhattan Center,” Manhattan Center, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://mc34.com/events-venue/>.

⁴ For example, the slide that referred to baptism encouraged those who are interested to visit the church welcome table in the back of the room or to sign up on the website. I visited the website, which said the following regarding baptism: “If you have recently decided to follow Jesus, water baptism is a great next step in your faith journey. As an outward declaration of the decision you have made to surrender your heart to Jesus, it’s a significant moment that will serve as a reminder that the old is gone. God has saved you and will be faithful to continue what He has started in your life.” See “Get Baptized,” Hillsong NYC, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/nyc/get-baptized/>. The website also suggested that baptisms were held each month at church, but I did not witness any during my three months of fieldwork.

⁵ I learned the term “pre-roll” from Phoebe, who described this moment as the signal to the beginning of worship. Phoebe, interview by author, New York, NY, February 5, 2018.

transition to the opening of worship seamless. On the platform were six vocalists with two lead vocalists near the front—one of whom played acoustic guitar and the other solely a vocalist—while the four supporting vocalists were staggered behind them. In addition to the acoustic guitarist, the band included two electric guitarists, one bass player, two keyboardists and/or synthesizer players, and one drummer. The worship leaders and band members reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of the congregation, while all of them dressed in a similar fashion aesthetic best described as casual, urban, and trendy. I recognized the opening song as “Wake” by Hillsong Young & Free, a high energy song of praise proclaiming “You will never fade away / Your love is here to stay / by my side in my life / shining through me ev’ry day.”⁶ Stage lights flashed chaotically, mirroring the intensity of the song as young adults jumped up and down in the floor-seating closest to the lip of the platform.

After the first song ended, the worship team transitioned to a more reflective song that I also recognized; however, this time, it was a popular non-Hillsong contemporary worship song. Based on the congregational participation, I observed an assumed familiarity with the song, which was titled “Great Are You Lord” by the musical artist All Sons and Daughters. As a worship leader who has led this song corporately many times, I inhabited my insider identity for a moment as I was immersed into the sonic resplendence of the band, the top-notch quality of the vocalists, and the professional audio-visual production efforts. The darkness of the physical space, the loudness of the

⁶ See Alexander Pappas, Hannah Hobbs, Joel Davies, “Wake,” on *We Are Young and Free*, Hillsong Music Publishing, 2013.

music, and the personal piety of the song lyrics afforded me the opportunity to worship God with a sense of abandon; however, at the same time, I was keenly aware of my neighbors because of our close proximity in seating and their loud singing voices⁷ that matched the intensity of the worship team.⁸ The third song was unfamiliar, which I assumed was a new Hillsong song being introduced to the congregation. My ears perked up as I heard the first two stanzas describe the restorative nature of the eucharist (“I take the bread of life...to make me whole again”) and how, as Christians, we ought to live in anamnetic witness (I’ll live my life in remembrance”) to Christ’s ongoing grace (“As far as heights reach from the depths / as far as east is from the west / so far Your grace has carried me”) and restorative work in the world.⁹

At the end of the final song in the opening set, a Black pastor in his late twenties or early thirties exhorted the congregation with themes related to the last song, read aloud a few prayer requests, then encouraged us to extend our arms in prayer toward the platform as he led us in extemporaneous prayer for approximately two minutes. Following the prayer, another pastor, a White male in his thirties, joined him on the platform and spoke about tithing as an act of gratitude because “it’s not about what you

⁷ For the duration of the study, loud voices surrounding me was the norm, except when I sat in an area of the balcony in which the projection screen was not visible. During these moments, the worshippers around me had their eyes closed, but were not necessarily singing along to the entire song (though they usually participated in the repetitious chorus).

⁸ “Team” language for worship vocalists and musicians is a common Evangelical moniker and is used widely at Hillsong Church as well.

⁹ Lyrics from the song “Remembrance.” See Benjamin Hastings and Chris Davenport, “Remembrance,” (Hillsong Music Publishing, 2017).

need, but about the One who gives us what we need.”¹⁰ A promotional video about an upcoming Hillsong book “There is More” by Global Senior Pastor Brian Houston played while ushers passed plastic buckets to collect the financial tithes and offerings. I observed a young man in front of me giving financially on the Hillsong USA iPhone application, while others around me grasped for loose bills and pocket change. The worship team again took the stage during this video and afterwards led us in a worship song that seemed to function as a preparatory song for the sermon. “What a Beautiful Name,” Hillsong’s first Grammy award-winning song was the song of choice. In this moment, Hillsong’s status as a global denomination became apparent to me as the woman to my left sang along in French.

When the song ended, Pastor Carl Lentz approached the platform while the synth player undergirded his entire sermon with the chord progression from “What a Beautiful Name.” Lentz wore black, ripped skinny jeans, a long black t-shirt, black shoes, and glasses with clear frames. An excellent storyteller and communicator, Lentz preached for 45 minutes on the importance of getting from “here” to “there,” which requires true surrender to the lordship of Jesus and being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Of the many analogies, stories, and illustrations he used throughout the sermon, Lentz’s chiropractor analogy stood out the most. He likened sanctification to visiting a chiropractor: we must visit one regularly in order to stay in *alignment*. Audible “ohs” and “mmhm” affirmations were offered around the church as worshippers made the connection that we must visit

¹⁰ Field notes, researcher, New York, NY, January 28, 2018. Both pastors in the recollection above referred to themselves as “pastor” at some point in their speaking role.

with God regularly in order to stay in alignment and be sanctified. At 8:55PM, Lentz announced “Almost done, I promise,” invited the band forward at 9:02PM by saying “Come on up here, team,” and ended his sermon with a prayer at 9:08PM.¹¹ The worship team reprised “What a Beautiful Name,” during which hundreds of people exited the building, especially those in the balcony seats. After the service ended, the house lights came up, and thousands of young adults fled to the streets, with some of them stopping by the resource table for t-shirts, books, and CDs on their way out.

The description above is a typical 7:30PM service at Hillsong Church in New York City, a service which I attended as a participant-observer from mid-January through mid-April of 2018. Immediately following the service, I would meet up with Josiah, the subject of Chapter Four. The following morning, I would meet with Phoebe at 8am at a local coffeeshop in her neighborhood of residence. With each of my informants, we would sit down for 45 minutes to work through the core weekly questions, the supplementary questions, as well as spontaneous questions that arose from the worship service. Our conversations ran the gamut of topical explorations, including discussions of pop culture, biblical studies, family histories, politics, parenting, liturgical theology, marriage, and other things pertaining to the intersection of spirituality and quotidian life.

This chapter, as well as Chapter Four, will be organized in the following way: beginning with a personal history of the primary theologian, I will then present summative insights from the weekly core questions, followed by the key interstitial

¹¹ Field notes, January 28, 2018.

theological claims. After sharing some brief reflexive observations, I will then situate the primary theologian's claims within secondary liturgical-theological literature, Pentecostal and Evangelical sources, and other pertinent analytical angles such as race, gender, and relevant allied scholarly discourses. The chapter concludes by analyzing the gap between the informants' interstitial theological claims with Hillsong's secondary theology, the rhizomatic nature of their experiences and observations, and offering other final reflections on the subject.

In interviewing, reporting, organizing, and synthesizing the material, there is no such thing as pure impartiality or objectivity. My own predilections and biases inform my presentation of Phoebe and the organization of her liturgical-theological claims. In effort to make my presentation of Phoebe more equitable and charitable, I solicited the help of ten women who fit Phoebe's demographic to advise in the preliminary coding of the interview transcripts.¹² Participants were invited to "interact with the document," noting reactions they have to the primary theologian, similar resonances within their own life experience, and the identification of themes that stand out to them.¹³ By inviting coding co-participants who likely share more "primary" liturgical-theological familiarity with Phoebe than myself, this coding method allows me to get "closer" to Phoebe's primary claims and dispositions. Many of these themes and observations are incorporated into my

¹² The parameters were as follows: female, Christian (and even more specifically: familiarity with Evangelical and/or Pentecostal Christianity), between 40 and 50 years old, and a parent of at least one child. Eighty percent of the participants possessed a Master of Divinity or a PhD in a theological discipline. I chose ten women because there were ten transcripts to analyze, one for each "coding partner."

¹³ I engaged in a similar process for the preliminary analysis of Josiah's transcripts, which will be further highlighted in Chapter Four.

organization of Phoebe’s interstitial liturgical theology. As a part of my research methodology rooted in emancipatory qualitative practices, I also invited Phoebe to read this chapter and discuss my presentation of her liturgical-theological claims. While her suggestions are few, I have incorporated them into the historical and liturgical-theological account that follows.¹⁴

Phoebe: Personal History

Phoebe is a 45-year-old White woman, who was born in south Florida and self-describes her religious affiliation as “Evangelical, Pentecostal.”¹⁵ Quick to distance herself from the President Trump-supporting Evangelical political movement, Phoebe still embraces the term “Evangelical” because she believes “it’s not supposed to be political.”¹⁶ In addition to claiming the term “Evangelical,” she also recognizes her identity and denominational formation as being within the Church of God (Cleveland, TN)—a Pentecostal denomination. Phoebe considers herself as having grown up in the

¹⁴ It was my original intention to include Phoebe’s comments, questions, observations, agreements, and disagreements throughout the chapter. However, as I partly expected, Phoebe leads a busy life and was unable to provide substantive feedback within the one-and-a-half-month window of time I allotted to her. In one email communication with me, she requested that I anonymize the institutional names I cited of former churches and universities. In that same email, she also wanted to reinforce the notion that these are my categorizations of her claims and not necessarily how she would organize them (but did not offer any organizational recommendations when I asked). Finally, she mentioned that some direct quotations of her include language that is “not usual” to her “vocabulary.” Phoebe did not point out which quotations sounded unusual. Upon double-checking the audio files and transcriptions, I could not find any discrepancies. Phoebe, email message to author, December 8, 2018.

¹⁵ At my invitation to choose a pseudonym for the chapter, “Phoebe” self-selected her name because of its biblical import. “Josiah” received the same invitation and—independently from Phoebe—also decided upon a biblical name.

¹⁶ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

church, joking that she slept under the pews on Sunday nights. Her hometown church was an early adopter of “contemporary worship,” a style of worship that continues to be formative for Phoebe to this day.¹⁷ She recalls singing along to Hillsong worship music in the early 1990s, which is around the time when their musical notoriety began to spread across the globe. At the same time, Phoebe has a deep appreciation for “old hymns,” especially because many of them bring back positive memories of time spent with her grandmother.¹⁸

Just before Phoebe was born, her parents divorced, and she was raised in a one-parent household—a parent who lived with bipolar disorder and was “very abusive.”¹⁹ She has a brother who is nine years her elder, who has distanced himself completely from both parents.²⁰ Despite living in a “shattered home,”²¹ church was a safe place for Phoebe, even though she attended with her abusive mother. In her adolescence, Phoebe was firmly situated in her Christian identity, going to Christian schools for education and to church camps over the summer. In particular, she has fond memories of her hometown pastor, who taught her how to think “biblically-minded” at a young age. She recounts,

I had a pastor who was very progressive even in his thinking. It was shocking. The best thing my pastor ever said to me as a child was, “Don’t believe a word I

¹⁷ For an overview of the genre, see Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017).

¹⁸ Phoebe, interview, March 19, 2018.

¹⁹ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

²⁰ Her older brother currently attends their childhood church in south Florida, even though Phoebe is unsure if he has a “personal relationship with Jesus.” See Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018.

²¹ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

say.” Which most pastors would never dream of telling you that. But what he meant was basically... He would expound on it. He’s like, “You know you have to test everything. Go back to the Bible. And everything you hear from this pulpit, if it doesn’t ring true with you, go back and test it. Go back and read. Because people come up with crazy ideas. I could have a mental moment, or I could have a crazy idea, and I just ran with it. Test it, your whole life.” And I thought that was a gift that I’ve been able to ride out my whole [life]...Because most pastors are not secure enough in themselves to say that.²²

The advice to test the pastor’s teaching with the claims of the biblical witness reverberated throughout my interviews with Phoebe.²³ Multiple times during our interviews, Phoebe recalled her childhood pastor’s sage advice as she answered questions about biblical authority, pastoral authority, and working with other Christian leaders.²⁴

Growing up in Evangelical Pentecostal Christianity, Phoebe understood herself from a very young age as “saved” by God. She could not pin down the age, but she spoke about how “you know you probably raise your hand twenty times when you’re a little kid somewhere.”²⁵ Phoebe is alluding to the various altar calls of her youth when the pastors at churches would ask people to raise their hands if they prayed the sinner’s prayer and gave their life to Christ. Although her childhood church was a comfortable and safe place, Phoebe felt the need to leave her toxic home environment and opted to graduate high school early by obtaining her G.E.D. She applied to college and enrolled at a private

²² Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

²³ Historian David Bebbington speaks of “biblicism” as one of four foundational principles for defining Evangelicalism. The three others are conversionism, activism, and “crucicentrism” (stress on Christ’s sacrifice). See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989).

²⁴ At one point in our interviews, Phoebe—knowing that I am a pastor—expressed a desire to “sit under” my “teaching,” presumably so she could hold it under the same litmus test.

²⁵ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

Christian university in the southern United States. She describes the institution as “very, very, very old school” due to its restrictive dress code for women, who had recently been granted the permission to wear pants instead of a long skirt.²⁶

As Phoebe was psychologically “working out” her earlier life “issues”—namely her relationship to her abusive, bipolar mother and her absent father—she was hit with more painful news, which challenged her Evangelical upbringing’s ideal of womanhood.

I had found out in my early twenties the doctors told me that I had a thing called Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome. And when they told me this they said the words cancer and infertility in the same sentence. . . Really set me on a weird trajectory of I just didn’t care about my own life. Like, why? What the purpose? Because I grew up in a society where if you were not a wife and a mother, you know, your worth is very little. Which is totally messed up. But that’s, you know, you’re from the South, you know.²⁷

This part of her life-story would later be juxtaposed with the unexpected miracle of her pregnancy. Throughout our interviews, Phoebe demonstrated self-awareness of her Evangelical Pentecostal upbringing and how that shaped her views over the years—some for the better and others for the worse.²⁸

After she received her Bachelor of Vocal Performance degree, Phoebe continued her education at the masters-level at two different institutions: a northern music school for vocal performance and a southern research university for a Master of

²⁶ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

²⁷ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

²⁸ Knowing that I grew up with a similar religious identity, she would often assume insider knowledge on my part, which was correct in this situation and in most others. The times where there was not shared knowledge can be attributed to the sixteen-year age difference between us.

Communications degree.²⁹ Though these happened at separate times of her life, Phoebe’s career path in the music industry offered a clear convergence between the two. She worked high profile jobs with celebrity clientele and lived a “bicoastal” life—one apartment on the East coast, one on the West—years that she described as difficult, even though this is when she met her future husband. It was during this time that Phoebe did not attend church, but still held a close connection to worship music as an act of personal devotion, especially when she was “having a bad day.”³⁰

Describing their early relationship and marriage as a “cautionary tale,” Phoebe and her husband Alex³¹ live as a testimony that “God can redeem anything.”³² Alex grew up Roman Catholic, but more so in a cultural sense than a religious one, describes Phoebe. At the time, Phoebe had reconnected with church by attending a charismatic nondenominational megachurch in southern California. Alex eventually joined her there, even though charismatic Christianity was foreign to him. Phoebe and Alex found a spiritual home at Synergy Church³³ and the two were married during this time. Despite

²⁹ After Phoebe reviewed the first draft of this chapter—where I named her institutions—she requested that I replace the names with geographic designations.

³⁰ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

³¹ This is a pseudonym.

³² Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

³³ At Phoebe’s request, I have pseudonymized the name of their California church.

earlier medical reports related to fertility, Phoebe became pregnant and gave birth to a son, whom they had dedicated at Synergy Church.³⁴

While attending that church, Phoebe and Alex learned from their pastoral leadership that Hillsong Church would be planting a church in New York City. Having lived in New York City before, Phoebe recalls, “We moved back...in 2010...with the sole purpose...no jobs, neither one of us had a job to come back to, but really to help plant Hillsong New York City.”³⁵ Phoebe reminisces about the early days of Hillsong Church meeting in an apartment living room, which they outgrew quickly. As volunteers who were heavily invested since its start, Phoebe and Alex have served in a variety of capacities over the years. With her educational and professional background, Phoebe has always been drawn to Hillsong’s creative team.³⁶ For the past eight years, she has served in leadership roles with significant responsibility but has never been a paid staff member of Hillsong Church. Both Phoebe and Alex were baptized at Hillsong Church, despite having been baptized at prior moments in their life—Phoebe twice in her younger years and Alex once as an infant.

Phoebe and Alex attend Hillsong Church every week. As a family, they attend with their son at the 10:00am service. In the evening, Phoebe returns alone to worship at

³⁴ Their son was also baptized in the Catholic church due to the insistence of Alex’s family, much to Phoebe’s dismay.

³⁵ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

³⁶ Hillsong’s creative department is broadly conceived. Hillsong’s website describes it in the following manner: “Led by Cass and Rich Langton, Hillsong Creative encompasses the worship leaders, musicians, singers, audio engineers, stage managers, TV editors, photographers, dancers, and artists of Hillsong Church around the globe.” See “Hillsong Creative,” Contributors, *Hillsong Collected* (blog), accessed October 23, 2018, <https://hillsong.com/contributor/hillsong-creative/>.

the 7:30PM service.³⁷ The main reason for returning alone, she says, is because there are “not all these other distractions of stuff, so I’m able to just go and worship and be engaged without worrying about what’s going on.”³⁸ The 7:30PM service is also unique for Phoebe insofar as it has a “different atmosphere” than the other services, largely because there is less of a time limit. Phoebe remarks,

There’s a little bit more freedom to the Spirit to be able to move and for Carl to go longer, for worship to go longer, for there to be a little...go left, stay off the script. Everything else we are trying to accommodate the most amount of people, and so it has to stay a little bit more contained. I love that service because it’s a little bit more towards the freedom that I love. So you get a little bit more Bethel in the evening, and a little bit more traditional in the morning just because of time constraint.³⁹

Phoebe draws upon insider Evangelical and Pentecostal vocabulary here in invoking the worship style of Bethel Church, which is known for its spontaneity in musical worship. There is a sense of freedom Phoebe describes in worshipping in this style while also not being accompanied by other members of her family.

On a final note about Phoebe: it must be mentioned that during our initial conversations, she was very curious and borderline suspicious of the study. Phoebe feels a strong sense of allegiance to the identity and public opinion of Hillsong Church. When she responded to my online advertisement for the study, she mentioned that she sent it to the leadership of Hillsong for them to vet. She asked their permission to participate in the

³⁷ Since my time of fieldwork, Hillsong has added a Sunday mid-afternoon service and moved their 7:30PM service up to 8:00PM, which Phoebe now “sometimes” attends. Phoebe, personal communication with author, October 15, 2018.

³⁸ Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

³⁹ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

study, which they granted. During my time of participant recruitment, I noticed that my advertisements kept getting “flagged for removal” on the networking site I was using. When I asked Phoebe why that was happening, she responded that it was various leaders of Hillsong doing so, in order to keep Hillsong’s image safe from potentially predatory journalists and researchers. Once Phoebe learned that I did not have any ill intent toward Hillsong Church, she felt safe speaking with me.

Phoebe: Key Weekly Questions

Each week during the period of study, I would work with the same core questions, which are as follows: (1) How did you experience God today, if at all? Describe that. (2) What was God like? (3) What was the high point of the service? The low point? (4) What else was on your mind during the service? Were there any distractions? If so, what were they? (5) Did God say or reveal anything to you today? If so, what? (6) What did you learn about God? About yourself? When did this learning/insight occur? Depending on how our conversation was going, I would try to work in these questions naturally, following the ebbs and flows of a conversation. Because I utilized an active interviewing approach, sometimes more time was spent answering particular core questions, while others received a perfunctory nod.⁴⁰ Toward the end of our interviews together, Phoebe

⁴⁰ See James A. Holstein and Jaber F Gubrium, *The Active Interview*, Qualitative Research Methods Series 37 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995).

had memorized the core questions.⁴¹ In what follows, I present some of her key, recurring insights in response to these six core questions.

The opening question of “How did you experience God today, if at all?” produced surprisingly consistent results: it was all about the worship. By “worship,” Phoebe is referring to the musical portion of the service in the beginning of the service. A typical answer to my question looked like the following: “I definitely feel like...worship was good. I think I told you that I was waiting for them to do this one song. I said that there was one coming out, out of the one album that I knew that would be good for you, ‘cause it’s a little bit more liturgical in its style.”⁴² Phoebe is referring to the song “For God So Loved,” a new release from Hillsong Worship’s 2018 album *There is More* based on the scripture passage John 3:16. As a self-described “music person,” there were multiple times when Phoebe would point to a particular song that facilitated an encounter with God. Another powerful song for Phoebe is called “New Wine,” which she describes as a “personal song,” meaning it has a strong first-person lyrical focus. Consequently, she reports that it has the effect of making “a corporate situation feel very personal.”⁴³

Throughout the period of study, there were some weeks when “worship” was not the time

⁴¹ Indeed, the weekly presentation of the same questions interposes new variables into how Phoebe enters and participates in weekly worship at Hillsong Church. Whether intentional or not, Phoebe became more aware of her own reflections during the worship service simply because she knows she will be asked questions related to her experience of worship.

⁴² Phoebe, interview, March 19, 2018. This quotation is also interesting insofar as Phoebe is, in some ways, “performing” for the interviewer. She knows my context of worshipping in a more “traditional” church and thinks that this particular song would be fitting for my ecclesial setting. Her response demonstrates that my outsider presence, no matter how non-threatening and agreeable, conditions her experience of worship and/or the way she articulates that experience in the interview setting.

⁴³ Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

of encounter with God, but instead was the sermon or another service component such as a film. During Hillsong’s annual “Vision Sunday,”⁴⁴ Phoebe reported that the film was the moment of encounter with God because it was hard perceiving the worship as authentic. There was too much anticipation for all that Hillsong would reveal in the Vision Sunday presentation. Aside from one or two weeks, it was the music that facilitated an encounter with God for Phoebe.

When asked “What was God like,” Phoebe’s chosen word of response was “present.” God being “present” is not just an idea or a concept for Phoebe, but a *felt* reality. In other weeks, she described that felt reality as “happy” or “warm.” At the same time, Phoebe reported experiencing God “like a parent.” During one of the weeks where she experienced God during the sermon, she reflects,

What was God like? Again you know...like a teacher, a parent, [saying] “This is you.” I feel like God can be that way. You know your parent who says, “Hey, that means you.” And I think that’s what God was saying to me in both [services]. I feel like that’s often how God speaks to me when it comes to sermons. “What about this applies to you? What are you supposed to do?” But it was more in a correctional way last night of like, “He means you.”⁴⁵

Being convicted, drawn to repentance, or “corrected” by God figures prominently into Phoebe’s understanding of encountering God. This stands in distinction to Phoebe’s earlier spiritual life, where she mentions being conditioned to “chase experiences” of

⁴⁴ Vision Sunday is a yearly tradition of Hillsong Church when all of Hillsong’s campuses watch a creative film of some kind, paired with a sermon and presentation from Global Senior Pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston. Vision Sunday is basically a “state of the church” report, which also includes the announcements of new expansions and campuses. Phoebe and Alex (her husband), interview by researcher, New York, NY, February 19, 2018.

⁴⁵ Phoebe, interview, March 26, 2018.

“mountaintop” intimacy with the Holy Spirit. She postulates that adulthood and growing in her Christian “walk” has taught her to relish the “still, small, quiet moments” with God. To those who still “chase” those spiritual highs, Phoebe offers these foreboding words, “And if you feel like that’s the only time God’s moving in your life, I’m sorry for you because you’re missing out on God speaking to you like in the driveway.”⁴⁶ A felt presence of God, whether in corporate worship or in the comfort of her driveway while listening to Hillsong music, is part and parcel of what God is like for Phoebe.

Phoebe’s responses about the “high point” and “low point” of the services were typically rooted in her interpersonal experiences with various Hillsong leaders. One Sunday worship service during Black History Month, there was a forty to fifty-person choir, all of whom wore the same outfits and their voices were amplified by microphones.⁴⁷ Reflecting on her strong personal connection to the choir, Phoebe said that the high point of the worship service was “watching faces of people [in the choir because] I know their journey [and] stuff like that.”⁴⁸ Other high points were seeing young adults (to whom she had a personal connection) leading worship, a former choir member preaching a sermon for the first time, and experiencing the reactions of other Hillsong church friends when Brian Houston announced the new Hillsong campus sites. The low points reflected Phoebe’s interpersonal relationships insofar as she felt a strong

⁴⁶ Phoebe, interview, March 26, 2018.

⁴⁷ This is significant for three reasons. First, the choir does not dress uniformly; second, it is typically much smaller with ten to twenty members; and third, the choir is not typically given a microphone because, according to Phoebe, there are not enough channels on the sound board.

⁴⁸ Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018.

sense of separation from her former leadership role in the church. She reflected about how her high points of being “proud” of her friends also brought the low points of coming to terms with being disconnected from that ministry. Other low points were seemingly more trivial, especially as Phoebe typically struggled to answer the “low points” question. These low points include technical difficulties, as well as being annoyed by a pastor who consistently tells the same bad joke. In a joint interview session with Phoebe and her husband Alex, Alex stated candidly, “We’ve been there from the beginning so we’ve heard that joke when it was funny and it was great. But six years later it’s not funny anymore.”⁴⁹

The “low points” and the next questions, “What else was on your mind” and “Were there any distractions,” often had overlapping results. Phoebe’s responses were consistent with her musical and audio-visual competencies, meaning the majority of distractions took place during the time of musical worship. Whether it be pitchy moments from the vocal team, a strike of an incorrect chord, or the loud off-pitch singing from other worshippers sitting behind her, Phoebe is easily distracted by a lack of musical excellence.⁵⁰ I asked Phoebe how she feels when encountering a technical error in the middle of worship, to which she replied,

Oh, it’s jarring for me. I hate that it does that, ‘cause I’m such a technical person. Like if the mix is wrong...’cause it’s often my job to be looking for those [errors], that when it’s not [my job], it’s hard to shut that off. Especially with vocals it’s

⁴⁹ Phoebe and Alex, interview, February 19, 2018.

⁵⁰ Phoebe talks about musical excellence in terms of having good preparation. She remarks, “having that preparation, having that well-oiled machine happen, allows you then to be all about worship.” Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

very hard for me to turn off that like, “Oh yeah, this is off.” I have to consciously tell myself, “This is your worship time.” And, I do. And I’ve gotten better at it over the years. In the beginning it was really difficult because it was always in my head like, “Ugh. I gotta fix this. Oh that’s wrong.”

Phoebe’s response to the distractions is consciously to remind herself that “this is your worship time” and to re-focus on her worship and adoration of God. As she has matured in age and spiritual formation, Phoebe has learned how to refocus her attention on God more quickly. She especially does this when she is carrying stressful situations from her life. One week, she reported being annoyed with her husband, which led her to “leave it at the door and walk in,” and then to “offer it to God.”⁵¹ The final recurrent distraction for Phoebe was related to her “low point” of feeling removed from the creative department leadership team. At the time of our interviews, this was still a fresh wound for Phoebe, so it is likely this distraction will remain in place for a longer period of time.

“Did God say or reveal anything to you today? If so, what?” This line of questioning was not very effective for direct answers because Phoebe understood this question to be addressing something “specific to myself,” in contradistinction to what God revealed to the corporate assembly. However, there were answers to this question that appeared in other moments during our conversations. In response to a sermon about having perspective and being satisfied in God, Phoebe reflects,

I think that’s a misnomer of Christianity that we’re just supposed to live in this like content existence of mediocrity. Like I don’t... You just be content, I guess. But to always say you know there’s more. That there’s more. But to say, there’s more to you than what you have right now. God’s always... It’s always from glory

⁵¹ Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018. She also mentioned that earlier on in her marriage and “walk” with Christ, this could have posed a distraction for the entire worship service.

to glory. That it's not... You're not supposed to stay still. I think we miss that as Christians a lot. You know, just achieve something and they just coast the rest of the time. I don't think that's true.⁵²

One of the undercurrents in Phoebe's thought—that we also discussed at other times—is the notion of sanctification. In our conversations, she has communicated that one could attend Hillsong for a long time and not grow spiritually because Hillsong has a strong emphasis on the justifying, conversionistic aspect of faith. In Phoebe's understanding, one must invest in one's own spiritual growth through study, prayer, and getting plugged into the community for discipleship and mission. As such, Phoebe reports being hungry for “deeper” sermons and spiritual growth events like Hillsong's “Colour” and “The Sisterhood” gatherings.

There was supposed to be a final core question, asking, “What did you learn about God? About yourself? When did this learning/insight occur?” Based on my understanding of the dynamics between myself and Phoebe, I chose not to ask this question on a weekly basis because I felt that it lacked authenticity.⁵³ Phoebe is drawn to authenticity—whether in a worship service or hanging out in a coffee shop with a researcher. Although I withheld this question, Phoebe tended to report more learning about herself as a result of the worship service. For example, there was one Sunday when Carl gave a sermon about the foundational teachings of Jesus, which are to love God and

⁵² Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018.

⁵³ I did not feel the same way in my conversations with Josiah. The context and relationship dynamic between myself and Josiah seemed more conducive to the question. I believe I viewed the question with Phoebe as “inauthentic” because of the age difference between us. I did not want to come off as pedantic or condescending.

love neighbor. Phoebe heard this sermon, and despite having heard the core teaching time and time again, she received this as “fresh” insight. Based on the current “season” of her life, Phoebe felt like God was calling her to go “back to the basics,” lest she misses “the forest for the trees.”⁵⁴ New learning about herself was always facilitated by God in the worship service or during private devotion through epiphanic moments.

Phoebe: Key Liturgical-Theological Themes

My approach in introducing weekly core questions was a helpful active interviewing method that paved the way for further questions and subsequent responses that would shape Phoebe’s core liturgical-theological articulations. In what follows, I present my curation of Phoebe’s interstitial liturgical theology according to the following claims: (1) worship is relationship, (2) worship enacts the priesthood of all believers, and (3) worship is/as mothering. It is important to note that these are not Phoebe’s words, but my organizing phrases based on her responses. It must also be noted that this is a thematic exploration of Phoebe’s liturgical theology rather than a systematic approach because there is only so much that can be discussed over the course of ten weeks.

⁵⁴ Phoebe, interview, March 12, 2018. A “season” is a common phrase in Evangelical parlance, indicating a length of spiritual time.

Worship Fosters Relationship

In his book *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology*, Nicholas Wolterstorff discusses the distinction between explicit and implicit liturgical theology. One of his primary arguments is that the work of liturgical theology is to make explicit the implicit assumptions of the liturgy. As an example, a God who hears our confession yields a God who is vulnerable to being wronged.⁵⁵ Similarly, upon reviewing the transcripts from Phoebe’s interviews, there were only a few recorded times when she explicitly used the word “relationship” to talk about the worship of God. However, there are two consistent threads in Phoebe’s liturgical theology of relationship. First is the notion of minimizing distractions *inside* the worship service. The implicit reason she wants to minimize distractions is to focus her attention on God and to grow in her relationship with Jesus.⁵⁶ In what follows, I make this explicit through Phoebe’s discussion of seat selection, audio-visual issues, and the role of “freedom” in worship. The second thread is growing in relationship with God *outside* of the Sunday worship service, which Phoebe does by listening to other sermons, conducting family devotions, and listening to worship music as a devotional act.

⁵⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 41-52.

⁵⁶ Here she specifically names “Jesus” as the object in the growing relationship. In our conversations, I did not ascertain whether or not Phoebe was exposed to any “Oneness” Pentecostal teachings, wherein Jesus’ *one name* was understood as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For a brief historical overview of the theological rift in Pentecostalism between Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals, see Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 204-213.

Since Phoebe comes to two different services on any given Sunday—one in the morning with her husband and son, and one in the evening alone—her choice in seating reveals the goal of minimizing distractions in order to foster a relationship with God.⁵⁷ When she comes with her husband and son, Phoebe sits in the area of the church (the front right section) where her friends on the creative team typically sit. When asking her where within the row of seats she sits, Phoebe replied,

I'm an end of the row girl. I mean if you look, I have the longest arms ever. And you know with worship, I like to be able to feel like I can worship and not be like, "Oh I'm gonna hit this person with my arm." Or like encumbered and stuff like that. I even make my husband sit on the inside of me, which gender wise is not usually what people do. It's like a thing usually the man sits on the outside. Well in any other circumstance I would totally just naturally do that, 'cause it just feels normal. But when it comes to wor[ship], he goes on the inside 'cause I need space. And he doesn't. He's not that guy. So, I like wingspan. I need room. I need room to have worship. I miss the days when we had a lot more space by the chairs where you could really have room to worship.⁵⁸

Phoebe chooses the seat that allows her the most freedom to worship God unencumbered, even though it challenges her perception of gendered norms. Phoebe self-describes as more expressive in worship, and having that extra physical space affords her that expression. When she comes to the 7:30PM service alone, Phoebe sits somewhere else on the floor-level, typically near the soundboard because "it sounds the best right there."⁵⁹ Yet, sitting by the soundboard also has its downsides because if there is an instrumental, vocal, or other technological error, this location is where it will be amplified the most.

⁵⁷ I give thanks to Nancy Ammerman for suggesting this question.

⁵⁸ Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

⁵⁹ Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

According to Phoebe, the goal of a Hillsong service is to reduce distractions for the gathered worshippers, that they may encounter God.⁶⁰ Whether this is through excellent preparation in worship leadership or serving on the tech team, the implicit assumption is that distractions take away from fostering a relationship with God. When I asked Phoebe why the physical space was so dark for worship, she replied,

We (Hillsong) will darken parts of the stage or darken parts of the room or stuff like that, so that you're not distracted by people coming in and out. You're not distracted by someone who has a crying baby or... We're kind of optically allowing you to have a tunnel vision into something that—in a giant room—can be very distracting. So, it can make a big church feel very small and allow you to engage better.⁶¹

Through the lighting design, the eyes of the worshippers are directed forward to the worship leaders, choir, musicians, and the pastors, most of whom also come similarly well-prepared for worship. Lest the pressure for liturgical leaders seem too high, Phoebe offers these words of assurance: “It’s not about, ‘Oh my gosh we’re going for perfection.’ It’s going for having everything together so that you then allow God to do what He needs to do.”⁶² Distractions are minimized in order to allow God to “move” in the space, and consequently in the hearts of the worshippers.

When Phoebe is unencumbered by distractions, she feels like she can open up to God and encounter God in a “free” way. Phoebe often spoke of admiring the “freedom” and “spontaneity” of worship groups like Bethel Music, but also how her favorite

⁶⁰ Phoebe talks about how Hillsong leaders must honor the role of preparation so that “you don't leave space for there to be any kind of distraction.” Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

⁶¹ Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

⁶² Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

Hillsong worship leader Brooke Fraser embodies that “free” ethos in her musical leadership. Part of the reason why she attends the 7:30PM service is to encounter this freedom, since this service is not bound by strict time regulations. When Phoebe feels truly “free” in worship, she engages in two practices that are characteristically Pentecostal: singing in the spirit and speaking in tongues. Phoebe’s term for singing in the spirit is “free worship,” which usually takes place during an instrumental interlude of a song.⁶³ She contends that this is a time to “sing a new song to the Lord... whatever is in your heart to sing.”⁶⁴ She also prays in tongues quietly, but this could take place in the worship service or outside of it, depending on the Holy Spirit’s internal prompting. Phoebe’s draw to freedom in worship emphasizes worship’s role in fostering a relationship with God. Perhaps “encounter” is a better word than “relationship” at first; however, for Phoebe, this is where the role of liturgical formation outside of the church enters.

Worship outside of the church is also about fostering a relationship with God, which Phoebe finds to be critical since one could attend Hillsong week-by-week and still only “scratch the surface.”⁶⁵ Reflecting on the youth subculture of the Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, and specifically at Hillsong, Phoebe offers,

Most people I think want to be entertained now. Like on a Sunday morning, they want to be spoon-fed. Which I don’t... Which is a problem with this generation but

⁶³ The term “free worship” is a part of the larger insider Evangelical vocabulary, encoded by a cross-pollination of worship conferences, literature, and embodied performance.

⁶⁴ Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

⁶⁵ Phoebe, interview, March 12, 2018.

that's commentary of my own. They want to be spoon-fed their theology on Sundays. And if they want to be engaged more, then a class is usually something they'll go to. Whereas, I think you and I probably grew up, where you had straight up theology teaching on Sunday mornings.⁶⁶

Although I did not grow up with the “straight up theology” teaching as she assumed, I am familiar with churches that engage in deep study within the context of a sermon on Sunday mornings. While Phoebe laments that Hillsong’s worship services might not yield much spiritual depth for her, she knows where to search for that within the global Hillsong structure and the larger community of megachurch Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. At Hillsong, Phoebe spoke regularly about Robert Fergusson, the global teaching pastor and theological gatekeeper of Hillsong worship songs. Fergusson brings a depth—or as Phoebe calls them, sermons “with meat”— that is intimidating to many people at Hillsong. She remarks, “I could listen to Robert Fergusson every single day of my life, and do quite often because he’s on Hillsong channel a lot,” while for others, “their eyes roll back in their head...and they hear nothing.”⁶⁷ Phoebe and her family watch a lot of the Hillsong Channel as evidenced by the fact that her DVR is “half Hillsong Channel,” with recordings of Hillsong services all across the world. Phoebe also supplements her faith by listening to other Evangelical and Pentecostal pastors, such as John Gray of Relentless Church (Greenville, South Carolina), Alex Seeley of The Belonging Company (Nashville, TN), and Holly Wagner from Oasis Church (Los

⁶⁶ Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁶⁷ Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

Angeles, CA), among others.⁶⁸ Sitting under other pastors' teaching is critical for Phoebe's ongoing liturgical formation, as she finds that worship services at Hillsong are insufficient for significant spiritual growth in her life.

Another way Phoebe fosters her relationship with God outside of the worship service proper is family devotions. In addition to having their son do his morning "devotions" through various apps on his tablet device, the family periodically engages in Holy Communion at home. In the context of a full meal, Phoebe, Alex, or sometimes their son reads the institution narrative while they share the bread and wine (grape juice) with one another. According to Phoebe, the family does this either on Good Friday or Easter, depending on the year.⁶⁹ She also reports that her family of three had a footwashing ceremony together in addition to celebrating communion, and that it was an emotional and meaningful event.⁷⁰ In years past, they have also hosted a Christian Seder meal at Passover, though they opted not to do so in 2018 because the Passover began the same day as Good Friday. Phoebe comments, "but because it (the Passover) coincides properly, we of course give Good Friday the leading role in that situation," even though "it all ties together so beautifully in our house."⁷¹ Whether through family devotions,

⁶⁸ Phoebe also reported having a difficult time sitting under the teaching of Jentezen Franklin because of his strong endorsement of the Trump administration.

⁶⁹ Phoebe did not communicate any rationale for doing Holy Communion, footwashings, or seder meals at her home other than the fact that these are *meaningful* events for her family.

⁷⁰ Phoebe, interview, March 26, 2018.

⁷¹ Phoebe, interview, March 26, 2018.

Holy communion, footwashing, or Seders, worshipping as a family outside of church is paramount to Phoebe's understanding of growing in a relationship with God.

Worship music is another method of fostering a relationship with God. When I interviewed Phoebe at her home, she had various Christian worship artists and bands playing in the background. Phoebe states,

I mean there's generally music on in my house twenty-four hours a day. (laughs) I am a music person. I mean that is...I mean that is...You know, I have a music degree that's just...I'm a worshipper at, by nature. That's just who I am, so my house is filled with that. And you know, when I get up in the morning, I get up about an hour before the rest of my family, so that I can have my own personal devotion time and worship time. So, you know, it can be anything from a simple just playing worship music in the background that I'm singing along to, or things like while I'm making breakfast, and things. You can engage and have that spirit of worship no matter what your activity is. But then, later on during the day, I try, it's actually part of my goals for this year is spending at least a good ten minutes, I know that sounds like nothing, but when you're really busy it's a lot, of literally sitting at the piano and just playing and worshipping like you know just whatever is in my heart, like on my own. I used to do that a lot when I used to have lots of time in my life, and I don't get to do it anymore and it really is something I miss. So I try to do that. And then, as far as a family, I mean again we have music on constantly. My son has a playlist on Spotify that I created for him that's all worship songs that are really geared toward kids. Now I won't say it's necessarily kid's music, it's just stuff that kids can really identify with.⁷²

Phoebe both listens to and plays worship music in order to spend time with God. Worship music also functions therapeutically. During Phoebe's time away from weekly church attendance, worship music is what kept her feeling connected to her Christian faith.

When she had bad days, worship music would give her a sense of calm. She is teaching her son the same benefits of worship music through his curated Spotify playlist and on their daily commute to school. Worship music is played in the car so that he can get the

⁷² Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

music in his “spirit” before starting a school day.⁷³ For Phoebe, worship music is at once devotional, therapeutic, and part of her quotidian existence in which she nurtures her relationship with God.

Worship Enacts the Priesthood of All Believers

At Hillsong Church in New York City, the line between secular and sacred is intentionally blurred. The stage lighting, the theatrical projection images and videos, and the concert-quality sound mixing makes an outsider participant wonder if they are in church or at a production. The answer to that is, of course, “yes.” Similarly, the lines between laity and clergy are blurred. Some of the worship leaders have ordained credentials in various denominations,⁷⁴ some of the pastoral staff does as well, and the senior pastor Carl Lentz carries some kind of credentials—whether it is an ordination or a “consecration” as his Wikipedia article suggests, no one can be sure.⁷⁵ Ultimately, what is fascinating about Phoebe’s opinion is that the official status of one’s ordination does not matter.⁷⁶

⁷³ Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁷⁴ It is unclear which denominations have credentialed current Hillsong pastors. Hillsong’s shift to a denomination will likely rectify this problem by centralizing the credentialing process.

⁷⁵ See “Carl Lentz,” Wikipedia, accessed February 25, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Carl_Lentz&oldid=885052116.

⁷⁶ When I asked Phoebe about various pastors on the staff and their ordination status, Phoebe did not have any insider information; however, the conversation did pique her curiosity. The fact that she has attended there for eight years and has not considered the credentialing of the pastoral leadership indicates its peripheral status in her liturgical theology.

Phoebe believes strongly in pastoral authority not because of denominational credentialing, but because God is the one who approves pastoral authority, whether a lay or ordained pastor. Phoebe demonstrates a curiosity in knowing where the pastors received their ordination, but that is not the main concern as it relates to authority. Whereas with worship leaders Phoebe corroborates authority in light of them presenting an authentic self, with pastors she verifies authority based on their integrity to the Bible.⁷⁷ The time of “teaching” in a worship service—rather than functioning as a top-down, hierarchical communication event from pastor to people—is ripe for discerning the character, biblical authenticity, and will of God in the pastor’s words. Since Phoebe has been told from a young age to question pastoral teaching, her response to my question, “have you ever disagreed with a pastor?” was no surprise:

I disagree all the time with all kind of pastors that I respect. Because they are human beings. They’re not God. And some days, they are reading the scripture through a filter of something that happened in their life. All of it is gonna be through someone’s life experience. So you have to take that and you have to bring it back to the Word and say, “does that speak to me? Does that feel [like] what God is saying to me through His word?”⁷⁸

Phoebe views the preaching event as something that she participates in through recording notes and observations, then studying them later in the week for further follow-up. She contends that if one is going to take notes and *not* follow-up with them, then “what is the

⁷⁷ Phoebe remarked several times about her love of Robert Fergusson’s preaching style, which many others view as “boring.” She appreciates the content rich nature of his sermons vis-à-vis the scriptures.

⁷⁸ Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

point?”⁷⁹ Phoebe understands that their “authentic communication” be held in scrutiny and checked against the Bible, lest the Bible be “bent towards their purpose.”⁸⁰ The pastor is thus an authority figure, a friend, and ultimately another voice in the priesthood of all believers.

Phoebe’s understanding of baptism is another area that demonstrates worship’s enactment of the priesthood of all believers. Her emphasis on baptism’s role in the life of the believer is less about joining a community of faith and more directly related to God’s saving work through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit baptism, typically followed by a water baptism, is what marks one’s entrance into the priesthood of all believers.⁸¹ Thus, the priesthood of all believers is not as much a physical reality as it is a spiritual reality.

When I asked how she would explain baptism to her son, Phoebe responded,

I said, “It’s basically like being, to me, anointed into the next phase of your [life],” which a lot of people don’t see it that way. That’s how I see it. That you are basically taking that ritual mikvah bath that they do in Judaism, where you leave behind, what’s before you, to enter into a marriage covenant or any kind of covenant like you have to do that in Judaism. That’s what baptism is to me. It’s taking that ritual bath, to wash what is behind. [It’s] say[ing], “I’m gonna leave this part behind, and I’m gonna step into something new.” I think you can be baptized a couple times in your life if you really want to. I’ve been baptized twice as a child and as an adult. Again, because I feel you can do it more than once.⁸²

For Phoebe, water baptism signifies a spiritual reality that marks an important transition in one’s life, which may happen a multitude of times. Put differently, she said, “it’s an

⁷⁹ Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁸⁰ Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁸¹ Phoebe also remarks that water and spirit baptism can happen at the same time. Phoebe, interview, April 16, 2018.

⁸² Phoebe, interview, April 16, 2018.

outward expression of an inward faith.”⁸³ This is the line of thinking that grounded Phoebe’s comments about how her son had not been baptized, even though he was physically baptized in the Catholic Church as an infant.⁸⁴ Yet, regardless of his physical baptism, it did not *mean* anything for Phoebe because for water baptism, that is a “decision you make on your own.” The baptism by the Spirit, however, could happen at any time because Phoebe asserts that God is in charge of that. She remarks, “I’ve seen kids be baptized in the Holy Spirit, start speaking in tongues and be walking in that long before they’re baptized [in water]. So, I think it’s when God feels like it. You know?”⁸⁵ Ultimately, God is in control of both water and Spirit baptisms, but each of them signifies an entrance into the priesthood of all believers—a spiritual body.

Worship enacts the priesthood of all believers through the inherent corporateness of the gathered assembly. Typically, critiques of megachurch worship—whether of the Pentecostal, Evangelical, or Charismatic variety—focus on the “personal” nature of the worship service at the expense of the corporate. However, Phoebe reports of the immense corporateness in Hillsong’s services, particularly the time of weekly prayers for the community. She describes the moment when prayer concerns are read by the pastor or emcee in church,

⁸³ My ears perked up when I heard the quasi-Augustinian definition being put forth by Phoebe. I was a little disarmed by her response, so I remember laughing a little bit, to which Phoebe smiled back. I clarified my laughter to her, saying “That was like a textbook answer...not that I’m looking for textbook answers, but that definitely was one.” She laughed, smiling with what I perceived as a sense of accomplishment, and said “thank you.” Phoebe, interview, April 16, 2018.

⁸⁴ Phoebe intentionally rolled her eyes about how her parents-in-law pressured her and Alex into having their son baptized.

⁸⁵ Phoebe, interview, April 16, 2018.

You stretch forth your hands toward [the front]. You're joining in physically by stretching forth your hand in agreement, touching anything that in reference to that scripture, over those prayer requests...a symbolic or you know spiritual way to do that without being able to physically touch the person...Again, it's also not a passive...You're not watching this play out in front of you. You're engaged in this situation of what's going on.⁸⁶

Reaching her hands out in prayer for her community is a sign of solidarity in addition to accomplishing the scriptural axiom, "when two or more are gathered in my name."⁸⁷

Corporateness is also actualized in worship during the opening worship set, where Phoebe is surrounding herself with others, occasionally observing them. She recalls a time when the song "Aftermath" was sung at church and the person next to her was weeping. The guest next to the person crying was supplying him with tissues and consoling him in his weeping. For Phoebe, worship is simultaneously a personal and corporate event, enacting the priesthood of all believers. While God may be speaking personally to her through a song, and even though she may be singing in the Spirit or praying in tongues, the corporateness of the gathered assembly is never lost on her.

Worship is/as Mothering

Ever since her childhood, Phoebe has wanted to be a mother. Despite being given the news that her medical condition would make it difficult for her to conceive, Phoebe claimed ownership of her identity as a mother, even when she was young and single. She

⁸⁶ Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁸⁷ The scriptural allusion is to Matthew 18:20, where Jesus says, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (NIV). Phoebe references this scripture in her analysis of the prayer request time. Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018.

recounts of her younger years, “I was everybody’s mother. Everybody hung out at my house. You know I cooked for [everyone]. That’s just who I was, even in my single days.”⁸⁸ When Phoebe and Alex moved to New York City to help plant Hillsong Church, they were already in their 30s, which is on the older side of the age spectrum at this campus of Hillsong. Now that Phoebe and Alex are in their 40s, they often joke that they are the Hillsong “elders.” Most of the pastors, staff members, leaders, and volunteers are significantly younger than Phoebe, which has reified and reconditioned her self-understanding as a mother, particularly as it relates to worship. For Phoebe, mothering is/as worship manifests itself in the way she views familiar pastors and leaders engaging in liturgical leadership, in the way that she approaches her son’s faith, and in the manner that she prays for her family, as taught to her by her own spiritual parents.⁸⁹

Worship fosters a personal relationship with God, enacts the priesthood of all believers, but is also a mothering act insofar as Phoebe gets to witness many of her former volunteers and colleagues shine in the spotlight—literally. In our conversations, Phoebe reported many “high points” of the service as being related to worship leadership, but especially that of the choir. When I asked her what it feels like to witness someone from the choir preaching or leading her in worship, she declares

⁸⁸ Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

⁸⁹ Admittedly, “mothering” is a loaded term that I would have avoided had it not been for Phoebe’s consistent use of the term. As such, clarification is needed here. “Mothering” is used as a synonym for “nurturing.” Recognizing that not all mothers are nurturing, that men and others can also be nurturing, and that mothering itself is neither an exclusive enterprise of nurturing or womanhood, I have chosen to stick with the term because it is central to Phoebe’s articulated identity. For a brief literature review of mothering as it relates to first and second wave feminism, see Lori Beaman, *Shared Beliefs, Different Lives: Women’s Identities in Evangelical Context* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 76-77.

I'm like a mom. I'm their mom. Even with [Pastor] it's so funny he like...I texted him in the middle of his message, and when he got home he sent me a text. And you know, it was great because he was really sweet back to me like, "Thank you for believing in me from the first day." And I think that goes a long way... believing in someone and supporting them before you see it. [Regarding choir members,] watching that person who came in so quiet, and so "I just want to be a part of it," then flourish into this amazing beautiful worshipper and be their first time was like, "I don't know what to do with myself." You know like, so that was cool. I've watched those faces do that over time. So, I'm like a mom. Those are like my babies.⁹⁰

Phoebe sees other people worshipping as an inspiration to her own life of faith, as well as the spiritual investment she has made in Hillsong Church. Worship is a time to celebrate the joy and leadership of others even as they lead her in worship.

Worship also brings to mind how Phoebe mothers her son. Multiple times, she referenced the power of the new Hillsong song "Who You Say I Am," which bears the titular bridge proclaiming, "I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who You say I am / You are for me, not against me, I am who You say I am."⁹¹ For Phoebe, the lyrics of this song exemplify what her and Alex have been trying to instill within their son, namely that he is a child of God. She reflects,

I believe is our job is to instill in him who God says he is, so he knows who he is. And, so for him, he had a connection with that song right away when it says, "I am who you say I am." Because we've talked to him about that and that's a big part of our house. Like we have a book that's the ABCs of Who [God Says] I Am.⁹²

⁹⁰ Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018.

⁹¹ Ben Fielding and Reuben Morgan, "Who You Say I Am," on *There Is More*, Hillsong Music Publishing, 2017.

⁹² Phoebe, interview, February 12, 2018. See also Kolleen Lucariello, *The ABC's of Who God Says I Am* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2013).

Again, just as Phoebe takes delight when her former volunteers are worshipping God, she is immensely proud of her son when he connects to God through that particular song. For Phoebe, worship is not just a time for her personal connection with God or a corporate connection with the gathered community; it is also a highly specific connection to those whom she mothers—whether her biological son or Hillsong colleagues.

Worship’s connection to mothering is also evidenced by Phoebe’s prayer practices at home, which were heavily influenced by her own “spiritual parents” who live in Nashville, TN. Phoebe’s spiritual parents are her best friend’s biological parents and pastors of a Pentecostal church. Phoebe speaks fondly of their gift of hospitality and how their living room was a sacred space where even the simplest question would bring her to tears. Her spiritual mother, Deborah, was a “prayer warrior” and role model for interceding for one’s family. Deborah wrote extensive Microsoft Word documents called “Scripture Prayers for Husbands” and “Scripture Prayers for Children,” which Phoebe prays regularly over her family and distributes to her friends.⁹³ Phoebe describes it thusly,

She takes a scripture, and she forms it into a prayer. It brings the Word into your heart in a very personal way. And you learn these things like you know, praying for the “radical abandonment of the purposes of God.” I’m like, “Where is [this found]?” And then she puts the scripture reference on every one so you can go look it up. And you pray over your child. You know that they will know, the good and perfect will, that they will walk in His presence, they will...And you say all this, and you. And you start saying this, day after day after day after day, it becomes your own language.⁹⁴

⁹³ Phoebe, interview, April 16, 2018. Deborah has also written a document called, “Scripture Prayers for People with Addictions.” All of them are unpublished because Deborah does not want to receive any money for them. Phoebe wants to create an app for it, but there has not been enough traction gained at the moment to do so.

⁹⁴ Phoebe, interview, April 16, 2018.

When Phoebe passed the document to me, it was well-worn with coffee stains and crinkles spread throughout the forty-plus page manuscript. By praying these prayers regularly over her son, Phoebe brings her mothering lens from the corporate worship service into her private devotional life.

On a concluding note for Phoebe's liturgical-theological claims, there were a variety of other themes I could have highlighted, including but not limited to worship and politics, the notion of novelty in worship, gender stereotyping, celebrity culture, and women in ministry. However, I tried to be faithful to the interview transcripts and develop the most recurrent themes related to worship as revealed by Phoebe. Indeed, the categorization nomenclature of the interview themes did not emerge from Phoebe's own vocabulary; however, it is my hope that her theological articulations therein are well-situated within the relevant categories. Before I put Phoebe's liturgical theology in conversation with formal, academic voices in the realms of liturgical theology, Evangelical and Pentecostal studies, musicology, and gender studies, I now offer a reflexive account of my conversations with Phoebe.

Fieldwork at Hillsong Church, New York City: "Reflexions"

Reflexivity is integral to ethnographic methods in qualitative research. I have cheekily named my reflexive reflections "reflexions" for the following thoughts. First, many of these conversations were painful to listen to, knowing that it would be inappropriate for me to intervene and "correct" theological, biblical, and political commitments that are different than my own. As an example, both of my informants were

opposed to a “homosexual lifestyle” insofar as it is “against the scriptures,” which is a statement I do not affirm. In these moments, it was difficult to abstain from offering alternative biblical and theological avenues for their exploration; however, remaining neutral was a key priority for me in the rapport-building process. In other moments of disagreement, I would offer neutral phrases like “I hear you,” and “I understand what you’re saying,” when the informants were looking for some kind of response—either agreement or disagreement—with what they were saying. In hindsight, I believe Phoebe and Josiah interpreted my neutral responses as affirmative agreements, which had the positive effects of rapport-building and notions of providing safe space, yet had the negative effect of inducing inauthentic feelings within me. It was difficult terrain to traverse, but I believe my interviewing ethics were appropriate and consistent during the months of research.

Second, attending the services was initially novel and exciting, but became painstaking as I had to listen to what I perceived as long, rambling sermons. There were many sermons that I wish could have been shortened to a stereotypical Mainline Protestant sermon length of twelve to fifteen minutes (rather than 45 minutes). Additionally, there were many “bad” sermons that I listened to over the course of these three months from which Phoebe and Josiah received great insight and profound spiritual encounter. One of the sermons was given by Pastor Darnell, a worship team member who preached for the first time at Hillsong in February. It was the least cohesive sermon I have ever heard, filled with disconnected stories, images, mixed with a wide swath of scripture references. Yet, I received a dose of humility when both Josiah and Phoebe

recounted the “main points” with surprising cohesion. Josiah reflects, “what he was preachin,’ it was really strong as far as you know *perspective* and you know taking courage and that you know, *God is on our side*. Like, he’s not angry. *He’s for us.*”⁹⁵ Phoebe recounts, “It’s really about your own *perspective*. Like listen, you know, *God’s there with you*. He will be with you. He will, you know, will reveal to you at your pace.”⁹⁶ Throughout the fieldwork, my own biases and assumptions were challenged by the conversations I had with my informants.

Finally, I was pleasantly surprised by how many mistakes the Hillsong New York City worship team made on a weekly basis. Prior to my fieldwork at this site, I had only experienced Hillsong Church in Sydney Australia, the Hillsong Conference in Sydney Australia, and various concerts throughout the United States. These events from my past were well-executed with no errors that I could remember. On the other hand, Hillsong in New York City had a great level of technical execution and excellence, but there were many weeks when the vocalists were off-pitch, when musicians played incorrect chords, when lighting cues went awry, and when audio technical distractions abounded. I had expected near-perfection, but it was comforting to know that even the most “successful” churches have their issues as well.

⁹⁵ Josiah, interview by author, New York, NY, February 25, 2018 (emphasis mine).

⁹⁶ Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018 (emphasis mine).

Situating Phoebe's Liturgical Theology

Phoebe's understanding of worship as fostering a relationship with God, enacting the priesthood of all believers, and worship is/as mothering is nothing with which most liturgical theologians would take issue. However, the method and style of worship that facilitated these liturgical-theological understandings would be viewed as questionable, especially to fellow Pentecostal and theologian Simon Chan. Chan writes his book *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* with the intent of correcting Evangelical and Pentecostal liturgical theology and worship practices that are operating from a "false" primary theology.⁹⁷ As an insider to this world, he derides Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic churches that "arbitrarily construct their worship to cater to human needs and whims," which demonstrates a failure to "reveal God in his holiness and love, transcendence and immanence, as *fascinans et tremendum*."⁹⁸ In an effort to counteract this false primary theology, Chan proposes that Evangelicals reclaim the centrality of Word and Table in order to actualize the church as a worshipping community.

The largest critique from Chan is the notion of rampant individualism in the contemporary worship practices of Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. Because Phoebe is a self-described "music person," Chan's comments about congregational song are most pertinent. He argues that the role of singing has been diminished over the years

⁹⁷ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 61.

⁹⁸ Chan, 61.

and limited in scope. Chan writes, “all too often in the ‘contemporary’ service, modeled on the entertainment world, singing is turned into a means of individual self-expression.”⁹⁹ For Chan, he alludes to the thinking of Robert Webber by arguing that music is one of various components that retells the Christian story.¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, Pentecostals and Evangelicals are missing out on the didactic and objective function of hymns. Theologian Pete Ward argues that this is beside the point. Charismatic churches are not as concerned with didactic songs or emphasizing the communal nature of the assembly, though they might do those very things on occasion.¹⁰¹ Personal encounter with God is the end goal. However, Ward sees a steady diet of these songs as potentially problematic, observing that worshippers may be worshipping the idea of worship more so than Jesus, who is the intended object of worship.¹⁰² Both of these critiques from Chan and Ward find representation in Phoebe’s interviews, as well as notable refutation.

To Chan’s credit, the notion of individualism in contemporary worship has been exemplified many times in my discussions with Phoebe. She speaks constantly about worship’s (the music) role in facilitating an encounter with God, about songs that are intentionally personal, and about shutting out the problems and distractions of the world so that she can grow in her relationship with Jesus. At the same time, she speaks of

⁹⁹ Chan, 157.

¹⁰⁰ On worship as the enactment of God’s story, see Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).

¹⁰¹ Pete Ward, *Selling Worship: How What We Sing Has Changed the Church* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster Press, 2005), 198.

¹⁰² Ward, 210.

profoundly corporate expressions of worship as she encounters the faces of others demonstrating passionate worship, hearing other voices singing around her, and singing songs that have corporate lyrics and “feel” communal. The corporate dimension of worship is also actualized in the prayers for the individuals in the church, as well as local and global concerns. Pete Ward’s comment about worshipping worship, or in other words, giving too much credence to human experience also resonates with Phoebe’s liturgical theology. “Worshipper” is at the core of how she defines herself, and she is consistently chasing after that identity, whether by attending church twice on Sundays, by praying over her family, or spending quiet devotional and “personal worship” time with God. However, Phoebe’s liturgical theology consistently presents the direction of her worship as Christocentric.

For Chan, the goal or *telos* of worship is the actualization of the Church as the worshipping community. His inspiration and key interlocutor is Alexander Schmemmann, who views worship as an ascent to the Triune God—embodied and actualized by the Church in the eucharist—that worshippers may see the deep reality of the world as Christ truly sees it, then be sent out to serve it.¹⁰³ Other liturgical theologians view the *telos* of worship through lenses such as meaning, worship as performance, or worship as play.¹⁰⁴ Yet for Phoebe, the goal of worship is far simpler: to meet Jesus. Put differently, worship

¹⁰³ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 23-46.

¹⁰⁴ From former to latter, see Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Richard McCall, *Do This: Liturgy as Performance* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); and Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953).

serves and fulfills the purposes of evangelism. While Phoebe would say that worship on a Sunday might not nourish the Christian life in its fullness (this is what personal devotion, communal study, and continuing growth and study are for), it does have the potential to start the Christian life for a neophyte. She reflects,

Everything that Hillsong does from worship to the people who are at the front door is all so people can meet Jesus. Are they gonna meet Jesus when they meet you at the front door as a greeter? Or are they going to meet Jesus in worship in that moment? Are they gonna meet Jesus by the Word? Are they gonna meet Jesus in that moment of Communion? It's all—every aspect of it—to point people to Jesus. Everything. I mean even from what gets left on your seat, it all has that in mind. Like at the end of the day that's what all of this is about. It's not about loud music. It's not about lights. It's not about leather pants someone has on on-stage. It's you know (laughs), It's so distracting for some people. So it's really funny. But it's not about all that. So it's really to be able to take this crazy chaos of this world that you walk in from, especially in New York City, and put you in that kind of cocoon where you can draw in and meet Jesus where you can.¹⁰⁵

Worship is about meeting Jesus where you can. Phoebe describes New York as a bustling city full of young adults—students and young professionals—looking for community and trying to find meaning. Worship is about making the space, music, and atmosphere accessible for this population, minimizing distractions, and preaching practical life lessons so that new worshippers can encounter the saving love of Jesus. Worship at its core is evangelism.

Simon Chan and most liturgical theologians with ecumenical commitments propose a eucharistic orientation to liturgical theology. Regardless of how one understands Christ's presence as it relates to eucharist, or the sequence of baptism and eucharist, the centrality of the eucharist, balanced with Word, is key. As *Lumen Gentium*

¹⁰⁵ Phoebe, interview, February 5, 2018.

declares, the eucharist is the “source and summit” of the Christian life.¹⁰⁶ Chan, even as a Pentecostal, would argue similarly, albeit with a stronger emphasis on balancing it with the proclaimed Word. Yet, this is one of many areas that directly contradicts Phoebe’s liturgical theology, as well as my understanding of Hillsong’s practice. For Phoebe, communion is personal; it is holy; it has restorative power; and it does not matter who presides—be it in a corporate worship service or at home privately communing with her family. Further, her theological understanding of communion is profoundly personal. She contends that Christ’s broken body heals us of our brokenness and that the blood washes away our sin. Moreover, what is significant for Phoebe is that Christ did this “joyously,” knowing “that all this was for our good.”¹⁰⁷ Communion is thus Christ’s joyous act extended toward us personally, and in receiving it we experience the mending of our brokenness and the forgiveness of our sins. For Phoebe, the presider’s credentialing does not matter because it is Christ who is the primary actor in communion.

In sum, Phoebe’s liturgical theology would be problematic for most secondary theologies among liturgical theologians. It would present as overly individualistic. It understands “worship” and “devotion” as two sides of the same coin, because the purpose of both is relationship with God. It does not check the boxes of liturgical-theological “orthodoxy,” ecumenically conceived. It is not classically sacramental, even though

¹⁰⁶ *Lumen Gentium*: “Dogmatic constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, on November 21, 1964,” paragraph 11; see also “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, on December 4, 1963.”

¹⁰⁷ Phoebe, interview, March 26, 2018.

baptism and eucharist are important to Phoebe. Baptism is a repeatable ordinance and eucharist can be a private familial devotional act. Ordination, frankly, does not matter. Credentialing may set pastors apart, but the functions of the ordained are no different than the laity. At the same time, Phoebe’s liturgical theology offers new avenues for secondary liturgical-theological reflection. For Phoebe, worship actualizes the priesthood of all believers, although “priesthood” would not be her word of choice.¹⁰⁸ Worship fosters a personal relationship with God. Even more specifically, music is the locus of encounter with God and continues to foster that relationship whether through corporate worship at church or “personal” worship by the piano at home, on the Amazon Alexa smart-speaker, or on the commute to school with a child in tow. Worship is a mothering act insofar as it activates one’s identity as a parent. Through worship, Phoebe finds joy in her “children”—whether her younger colleagues or her biological son—growing in relationship with God and with one another. Phoebe’s liturgical theology is not derivative, but a true reflection of the work of the people.

Worship as Relationship

A key feature of Phoebe’s liturgical theology is the notion of relationship. Pentecostal ritual scholar Daniel Albrecht’s groundbreaking study, *Rites in the Spirit*, expounds on his ethnographic field research in three Pentecostal/Charismatic

¹⁰⁸ This is because the word “priest” would likely make a mental connection to Catholicism. Phoebe does not hold Catholicism in high regard, especially because of her husband’s former Catholic identity. She views many Catholics (but not all) as practicing a religion that simply “goes through the motions” without having a personal piety to match it.

congregations in Northern California, in which he discusses relationship as the cornerstone of worship.¹⁰⁹ He argues theologically that worship is a triadic expression of relationship: relationship with God, relationship as a community, and relationship to the world. While Phoebe's liturgical theology is strongly connected to the first two, worship's relationship to the world differs from Albrecht's conclusions. In discussing worship's expression of relationship to God, Albrecht argues that Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality enters into "a ritual dimension specifically set apart for the experiencing of the divine presence."¹¹⁰ Not only does this resonate with Phoebe's understanding of worship during the service proper, but also the preparation in arriving for worship. She takes a moment to breathe and gather herself upon moving from the lobby (narthex) to the house (sanctuary) in order to prepare for worship. The fact that she distinguishes the spaces means there is something distinct about the "sanctuary" space. Even though it is a secular building, worship realizes the sacrality of the venue. The threshold between the lobby and the house symbolizes and enacts a stripping of distractions, so that Phoebe can more fully focus on her relationship with God.

Yet, Phoebe does not worship alone because Pentecostal worship has a strong social orientation. Albrecht avers, "the Pentecostal practices, the enactment of the rites, specifically help to raise the shared sense of community, a community that believes that

¹⁰⁹ The three congregations are associated with the Assemblies of God, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and the Association of Vineyard Churches.

¹¹⁰ Daniel Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 204.

its communion is as immediate with the Spirit as it is with the sisters and brothers.”¹¹¹ Whether through visual perceptions of the gathered community, the experience of congregational song and worshipping in the Spirit, or her self-described role of effusive “mother” with volunteers, Phoebe feels connected to her fellow worshippers. Albrecht continues to argue that Pentecostal ritual expression in corporate worship “teaches what it means to live and behave as Christians in a faith community.”¹¹² While this may have been true for Albrecht’s three churches, Phoebe’s Christian formation is more prominent in her own home and in small groups. If Phoebe were to only attend worship on Sundays at Hillsong, she expresses concern that she might still be a “baby Christian.”¹¹³ Phoebe seeks out her own catechesis through personal devotion and study, drawing from the vast online network of resources within the Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic milieu, including many of Hillsong’s own resources.¹¹⁴

Albrecht’s final contention is that worship points beyond itself in service to the world.¹¹⁵ While addressing social concerns are foundational to Pentecostal theology—

¹¹¹ Albrecht, 205.

¹¹² Albrecht, 205.

¹¹³ Phoebe, interview, March 12, 2018.

¹¹⁴ A salient corollary to this is Heidi Campbell and Stephen Garner’s assertion that this reflects “a shift in some church cultures toward professionalized ministry, so that ministry leaders are seen as service providers and worshippers are seen as spiritual consumers.” See Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in a Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 140.

¹¹⁵ Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 207.

including Phoebe's childhood denomination, Church of God (Cleveland)¹¹⁶—Phoebe's understanding of worship is more connected to evangelism and holiness of life.¹¹⁷

Worship is an act of evangelism because its purpose is to make people feel welcome and facilitate an encounter with God so that they can “meet Jesus” and respond to the weekly altar-call. Phoebe's embrace of this understanding is tied to her years of formation at Hillsong Church. At the same time, she believes that worship is more than “grace,” but also “righteousness” and holiness. She argues that through an authentic encounter and relationship with God “you can't help but be a blessing to other people and love other people.”¹¹⁸ This is where the missional element of her liturgical-theology springs forth, directly related to her upbringing in the Church of God rather than her liturgical formation at Hillsong.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Under the “social obligation” section of its belief statements, The Church of God writes, “it should be our objective to fulfill our obligations to society by being good citizens, by correcting social injustices, and by protecting the sanctity of life.” See “Social Obligation,” Church of God, accessed October 29, 2018, <http://www.churchofgod.org/practical-commitments/social-obligation>.

¹¹⁷ This is not meant to be cast in negative light. In terms of the interview questions and structures, there was little time spent on worship's connection to mission (other than the fact that there is a strong one).

¹¹⁸ Phoebe, interview, March 12, 2018.

¹¹⁹ Phoebe's discussion of this is worth noting in its fullness. She states, “[a theology of grace] was needed for a lot of people. Like it's so much of what happens on a Sunday at Hillsong is evangelistic. Is reaching the lost. And that grace and salvation part has to come before the holiness. Like you have to have that acceptance and that grace I feel to even have people glimpse Jesus because for so long it was just holiness. It was just the law, the law, the law. Then you...There's no way to approach Jesus. There's nothing. It's not approachable. It's not friendly. It's not loving. So, I feel like, yes, on a Sunday we are all about grace because our job is to seek and save the lost on a Sunday. I really do feel like that's our...[job]...you know as a house. So, yeah there's not a lot of holiness. And there's not a lot of practically taught on a Sunday. So if you're just attending our church on a Sunday, you just scratch the surface.” Phoebe, interview, March 12, 2018.

Music and the Priesthood of All Believers

In discussing the annual Colour Conference—Hillsong’s global women’s event—Phoebe’s friend Martha¹²⁰ reflects on a powerful, Holy Spirit-filled moment one night:

Good Good Father was the song, and so it began with [the worship leader] singing it. But within a chorus, people are already singing and about five seconds later the entire fifteen thousand women were singing. And I never felt the power of God, like genuinely, I never felt the power of God in a service in the same way. And people were wrecked, like wrecked because of the Holy Spirit and what He was doing in that situation.¹²¹

As Martha recounted this story, Phoebe nodded her head in agreement even though she was not present for the event herself. Recognizing the power of events like this, Phoebe remembers singing this same song at another Colour conference. Yet for her, the song alone was powerful. Phoebe asserts, “I too have been through a lot of stuff especially with my dad and like abandonment issues with that whole thing. So that song will wreck you on its own.”¹²² Under the auspices of “worship,” Phoebe understands music as the primary enactor of the priesthood of believers, both corporately in the gathered assembly and at home for personal worship and devotion.

A theme that has consistently arisen in my conversations with Phoebe is that music has the power to order—to order the community of faith, to order one’s life personally. In addressing the former, sociologist of music Tia DeNora speaks of music as

¹²⁰ Martha is a pseudonym. Shortly before our scheduled interview, Phoebe asked if her friend Martha could participate. Phoebe believed Martha would add a unique voice to this project insofar as Martha has served in similar leadership capacities as Phoebe, except internationally at Hillsong London, Hillsong Stockholm, and Hillsong Paris.

¹²¹ Phoebe and Martha, interview by author, New York, NY, April 9, 2018.

¹²² Phoebe and Martha, interview, April 9, 2018.

a device of social ordering. She contends, “Music may serve as a model of where one is, is going, or where one ‘ought’ to be emotionally (“it gets you in the mood”), such that an individual may say to him or herself something on the order of, ‘as this music is, so I should or wish to be.’”¹²³ While emotions do play a role in Phoebe and Martha’s experiences, they each make an additional theological ascription to the Spirit’s power to “wreck” worshippers. To be “wrecked” in worship is to be at a loss for words due to the overwhelming power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they have theologized the affective dimension of worship music.

Theologian Clive Marsh offers similar reflections on music’s social and theological role: “Where music enables people, affectively first and cognitively second, to plumb the depths, and soar to the heights, and to reflect on those experiences, then, in the affective space where this happens, it is at least beginning to do important, life-enhancing salvific work.”¹²⁴ Marsh sees the salvific potential of music, especially when one is musicking in community.¹²⁵ Phoebe has articulated the salvific nature of worship, particularly in the way she understands repentance. One Sunday a few years ago, she recalls being among the choir, singing along with a song, when “God literally spoke to

¹²³ Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 158.

¹²⁴ Clive Marsh, “Music and Happiness: Salvific Practice in a Feelgood Age,” in *Congregational Music-Making and Community in a Mediated Age*, ed. Anna Nekola and Tom Wagner (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 227.

¹²⁵ Marsh, 225. Marsh does not use the word “musicking” in his chapter. I am borrowing Christopher Small’s definition of the term: “to music is to take part, in any capacity in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.” See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 6.

my heart.”¹²⁶ She recalls, “it definitely took me out of a corporate set...Like God brought up a separate situation in my life, where I was like, ‘Wow!’ And I had to go home and literally like, get alone with God. And be like, ‘I repent from it.’”¹²⁷ This moment of corporate worship of singing a worship song brought her to a state of repentance, with which she states that God did something “even more beautiful.”¹²⁸ Music in worship thus enacts the priesthood of all believers by participating in the transformation of the believers themselves.

Phoebe also sees the role of private devotion—which she calls “personal worship”—as part and parcel of living a Christian life, wherein music plays a leading role. Religion scholar Courtney Tepera conducted a qualitative research study about the role of devotional listening and contemporary worship music. In analyzing her results, she maintains,

The respondents allow the music to permeate their daily lives, creating access to God that eases their religious practices, regulates emotions, and provides access to powerful spiritual memories. Woven throughout this practice of listening are a set of assertions about the power of music to shape children and to ward off evil, and God’s ability to speak through music that overpowers the quotidian.¹²⁹

Notions of music permeating daily life, creating access to God, regulating emotions, shaping children, and God’s ability to speak through music were all central to Phoebe’s understanding of personal worship. In Phoebe’s liturgical theology, this personal worship

¹²⁶ Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018.

¹²⁷ Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018.

¹²⁸ Phoebe, interview, February 26, 2018.

¹²⁹ Courtney Tepera, “Created to Worship: The Practice of Devotional Listening and Christian Contemporary Music,” *Artistic Theologian* 6 (2018): 37.

is an extension of corporate worship and necessary for the ongoing formation and sanctification of the believer. Just as music enacts the priesthood of all believers in the public arena, so too is the priesthood enacted in the private.¹³⁰

Evangelical Womanhood

While Phoebe and I did not explicitly sit down to discuss how her faith and worship practices intersect with her identity as a woman and a mother, our conversations revealed how integrated they are. Discourses around the role of Pentecostal, Evangelical, or Charismatic women in ecclesiastical worship settings often point toward issues of agency, justice, and power, using gender as an analytical lens.¹³¹ Phoebe speaks of the positive emotional aspect of her gender identity. She contends, “I think women are more intentional with their worship. I think that there’s less posturing. We’re emotional creatures; we kinda tap into that a little easier. So, to go down to an altar call to let that go, to be like, ‘I need something. I need this.’ To engage in worship, I think is easier for

¹³⁰ Two additional studies are of note here. The first is Monique Ingalls’ online ethnography of the YouTube contemporary worship video community. See Monique Ingalls, “Worship on the Web: Broadcasting Devotion through Worship Music Videos on YouTube,” in *Music and the Broadcast Experience: Performance, Production, and Audiences*, ed. Christina Baade and James A. Deaville (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). In the Catholic sphere, see Teresa Berger’s brief description of a similar fad in Catholicism in Teresa Berger, @ *Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2018): 67-69.

¹³¹ For a limited sampling of the literature, see Nancy Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987); see Beaman, *Shared Beliefs*; see R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); see also Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

women.”¹³² While Phoebe follows a stereotypical gendered line of thinking that men are closed off and women are more emotional, she also recognizes that she is generalizing. Phoebe’s friend Martha agrees with Phoebe on both accounts, asserting that women have the ability to be “unguarded” in front of each other and with God, even though it’s “unfortunate” that this is gendered.¹³³ Tanya Luhrmann’s groundbreaking psychological ethnography of Evangelical women in the Vineyard movement discusses similar themes of vulnerability and emotionalism among women.¹³⁴ In Luhrmann’s Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* group at the Vineyard, she discovered that the emotionality of prayer opened up participants to better hear and feel the presence of God.¹³⁵ Like many of the participants in Luhrmann’s group, Phoebe views her emotional connection to God as a strength and a vital aspect of her womanhood.

As noted previously, mothering was also a key integrative theme in my interviews with Phoebe. The narration of her life story was cast like a faith healing story. The prognosis of infertility in her early 20s was coupled with a cancer scare, all of which took place while Phoebe had distanced herself from church life. Despite the obstacles, the miracles of marriage, a viable pregnancy, and a new spiritual awakening for both Phoebe and her husband Alex at a Los Angeles church left an indelible mark of God’s

¹³² Phoebe, interview, April 9, 2018.

¹³³ Phoebe and Martha, interview, April 9, 2018.

¹³⁴ Tanya Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Random House, 2012), ePUB edition.

¹³⁵ Luhrmann, 454.

faithfulness, as well as a call upon their lives to serve the church. Phoebe then lived out her identity as a mother not only to her biological child, but to the Hillsong New York City volunteers and staff. Church became her life, which is not uncommon for Pentecostal and Evangelical women. Sociologist Lori Beaman writes of dedicated Evangelical women who “mother” the church,

Not only do [Evangelical women] get up each Sunday morning and attend church and Sunday school, they may share Sunday dinner with Christian friends, their children may watch a Christian video in the afternoon, and then the family is off to church again for the Sunday evening service. For most women, an evangelical Christian worldview incorporates not only private daily devotional practices, but includes a lifestyle that involves a variety of activities in a pervasive evangelical culture.¹³⁶

Central to Beaman’s study is an argument for scholars of Evangelicalism to reexamine and reconceptualize power for women in Evangelical settings. For Evangelical women, she argues that power is often harnessed in church groups. Phoebe’s mothering power is exemplified in her past creative team leadership. Since she no longer serves in the creative department, Phoebe feels a sense of disconnection from her former “children.” Yet she finds strength and inspiration in seeing them live out their callings on the platform. She also keeps up with them and prays for them, living out the “mantle” that was passed to her as an intercessor. Multiple times during our interviews, Phoebe would receive self-set reminders to pray for particular people in the congregation. Additionally, Phoebe interceded for local church events, local and global issues, and Hillsong

¹³⁶ Beaman, *Shared Beliefs*, 84-85.

programming, including the Colour conference. Phoebe’s mothering is central to her womanhood, indicative of her power, and revelatory of her life of worship.

The Gap, the Rhizome, in/and Phoebe’s Liturgical Theology

A guiding theoretical claim of this dissertation has been that a gap exists between the primary theological experiences of the worshippers and the more formalized secondary theology of liturgical theologians, denominational worship books, and official church resources. Phoebe’s liturgical theological articulations occupy the gap between primary and secondary theology—a place I have named interstitial theology. As tentatively demonstrated above, Phoebe’s interstitial theology is a complex intersection of her childhood denominational upbringing, her life experience as a woman, mother, and wife, and her eight years of liturgical formation at Hillsong Church in New York City, among other factors. Her liturgical-theological assertions differ from that of formally trained academic theologians, and while they resonate with my constructed version of Hillsong’s “secondary theology,” they also differ in profound ways.

In terms of similarities, Phoebe’s liturgical theology supports many of Hillsong’s secondary theological claims. At Hillsong, worship is understood as a felt experience of the power and presence of God, an experience that changes worshippers in some way. Phoebe consistently uses the language of experience and ties the notion of “felt” experience to a positive change in her emotions. Hillsong speaks of music’s centrality in their understanding of worship, a notion that Phoebe also communicates. Like Hillsong leadership, Phoebe sees the need for musical excellence because as a worshipper, she

does not want to be distracted by mediocre musicianship. Other liturgical-theological similarities are that worship is simultaneously personal and corporate; through worship, the church becomes more overtly itself; worship is a lifestyle. Even Phoebe's understanding of a worship set moving from "praise" to "worship" reflects Hillsong's use of Psalm 100 on the subject. At the same time, it can be easily and rightly argued that none of these liturgical-theological claims are unique to Hillsong Church, but are situated in the milieu of Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic discourses that Hillsong leadership is built upon. Yet, for the purposes of this study, uniqueness is not the operative issue, so I believe it is possible to tease it out objectively. What is of note is that similarities between Hillsong's secondary theology and Phoebe's interstitial theology abound, whether they be attributed to Phoebe's Pentecostal upbringing, her eight years with Hillsong Church, or a symbiotic coherence of both.

However, there are also areas of discord between Phoebe's observations and Hillsong's secondary theology, which is why her contribution as an interstitial liturgical theologian is needed. Hillsong speaks of the didactic potential of hymns, which is why their songs go through a lyric approval process. Phoebe is aware of the didactic nature of hymns and even the vetting done by Robert and Amanda Fergusson, but her discussion of hymns and songs is overwhelmingly tied to their function in experiencing God. The one exception to this was the song "Who You Say I Am," which has done a great job of *teaching* her son about his identity as a "child of God" in Christ. Another area of difference is Hillsong's cosmic emphasis in worship. Through worship, humanity joins its voice with the cosmic dimension, the heavenly realm, in proclaiming the praises of

God. While Phoebe has expressed the awe, wonder, and adoration associated with the worship of God, her articulation of worship has largely to do with the corporate body of Christ on earth. A final difference is Hillsong's discussion of worship's connection to mission and justice, the notion of "touching heaven, changing earth." Phoebe's emphasis is on worship's connection to evangelism, although worship and justice ministries do play a role in her faith expression.

Phoebe's interstitial liturgical theology also demonstrates the rhizomatic nature of the liturgy. At any one moment in a service of worship, there are multiple negotiations taking place that influence the experience and interpretation of the event in real-time.

Musicologist Mark Porter writes similarly of congregational musicking practices:

Within a congregation there are always fractures, subgroupings, different patterns of engagement with the act of singing that refuse to cohere completely into a single, wholly unitary act. Different bodies participate in their own particular manner, particular factions have their own shared understandings of how to participate and evaluate the act of worship, different patterns of sound and engagement around a large space of worship create alternative centers of focus and regionalized responses within the larger interplay of sound and worship. These differentiations are as important to processes of resonance as any blurring of boundaries that occurs through interaction, and the temptation must be resisted of idealizing ritual participants and spaces as a unified, homogenized whole.¹³⁷

Everyone participates in worship differently, even if their bodies are "behaving" in the same way at the same time. Phoebe stretches her hands out in solidarity with thousands of others to pray for prayer requests, but she might be dealing with other issues that may

¹³⁷ Mark Porter, "Sounding Back and Forth: Dimensions and Directions of Resonance in Congregational Musicking," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2017): 462-463.

block the intended perlocutionary effect of the ritual. On March 18, 2018, Phoebe reflected on an issue that arose in worship:

Well I literally thought about going home in the beginning because I just felt so bad physically that literally I was so nauseous before it started I could have gone home. And I was like, “No. I’m here. I want to be here. Let’s just push through it and deal.” So that was definitely the difficult thing on my mind of having to push through. I just physically felt bad.¹³⁸

Physical pain was on Phoebe’s mind throughout the service and was something she intentionally decided to “push through.” This is an example of just one of many junctures within the rhizomatic nature of the worship service. As such, Phoebe’s understanding of the sermon, for instance, will be differently colored than Josiah’s experience, who also brings his own intricacies and particularities to the worship event. What happens in worship is never uniform—it is always complex, messy, and in constant negotiation, even when moments of beauty and mutual signification among worshippers occur.

In sum, Phoebe’s understanding of worship is simultaneously more expansive and limited than Hillsong’s secondary theology. Her liturgical theology is unique insofar as it presents new insights that neither relate directly to Hillsong Church nor to Pentecostal, Evangelical, or Charismatic liturgical theologies. From her family-based services of Holy Communion, footwashing, and Seder dinners, to her indifference toward clergy ordination and credentialing, to her “mothering” tendencies in worship, or to her prayers passed down from her spiritual mother, Phoebe’s liturgical theology stands within and beyond the gap of primary and secondary theology. Regardless of “rightness” or

¹³⁸ Phoebe, interview, March 19, 2018.

“wrongness,”—orthodoxy or heterodoxy—Phoebe brings a unique perspective that cannot be replicated due to the interaction and nexus of her life experience, psychosocial predispositions, and liturgical-theological formation. Moreover, her interstitial liturgical theology is informed by the rhizomatic nature of the liturgy, meaning it is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. Her contributions demonstrate the reality that all secondary liturgical theology is, at best, a testimony—a topic that will be further explored in Chapter Five. Until then, we turn to the insights of another liturgical theologian, Josiah.

CHAPTER FOUR: “JOSIAH,” THE HILLSONG LITURGICAL THEOLOGIAN

On January 21, 2018, at 9:05PM, I waited outside of the Hammerstein Ballroom at the Manhattan Center to meet Josiah, a twenty-five-year-old African American man. He exited the building, we introduced ourselves to one another, then walked to the local convenience store that features a quiet second-floor seating area. After ordering our drinks, we sat down for our initial interview. As is custom for first interviews in my experience, Josiah appeared a little uncomfortable and answered my questions as if they were an exam, rather than a conversation. He would use florid and dramatic language to describe his experiences. He would cite scripture to me that corresponded to his feelings, typically a verbatim rendering of the King James Version of the Bible. He did all of this while maintaining a demeanor of humility and nonchalance. Josiah’s initial “performance”¹ notwithstanding, I would come to learn that this is authentically Josiah, a recently born-again Christian who I observed to be passionate about discussing his faith, whether to a person on the subway, to his friends in Queens, or to a theological researcher.

The first word that came to mind when sitting down with Josiah was “passion.” He is passionate about his career as a professional basketball player, about his family and fiancée, and about his recently invigorated faith in Jesus Christ. To my surprise, Josiah even demonstrated passion for these interview sessions, largely because he saw them

¹ See Douglas Ezzy, “Qualitative Interviewing as an Embodied Emotional Performance,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (March 2010): 163–70.

with an evangelistic angle. On March 25, 2018, he opened our interview session with these words of prayer:

Father God, in the name of Jesus, thank you for allowing us to come together. You said when two or more come in your name that you are in the midst. We pray that you allow this session to be the upliftin' of your kingdom. That whoever may listen, or come by, or when the book or whatever this is comin' to be is read, that they come to you, Jesus. And we pray in your name, Amen.

I had told Josiah that this dissertation would one day be revised into a book, which made him excited that potential readers could “come to Jesus” by reading his testimony in the book. I assured him that this would be published as an academic text rather than a devotional book, but he was excited for its evangelistic potential nonetheless.²

Phoebe is the one who referred me to Josiah, whom she met while they spent time at the same physical therapy practice. Throughout the course of the interviews, Phoebe and Josiah knew that they were both participants in the study, but outside of that, they were not regularly acquainted with one another. Phoebe’s husband Alex, however, had closer contact with Josiah and would regularly communicate with him via text message as a part of a larger men’s group conversation. I was not privy to those conversations, but I knew from Phoebe that they mostly concerned biblical and theological debate, as well as mutual support and accountability. On a personal note of disclosure, the one instance I spent time with Phoebe and Josiah together occurred by happenstance after a church

² In Josiah’s mind, a potential theological book could even be evangelistic for students of theological schools. He once made a comment about theological and divinity schools not preaching or teaching about the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. He was citing a teaching of the late Dr. Myles Munroe, a Bahamian evangelist, who frequently spoke about the Kingdom of God. Josiah contends, “And [Dr. Munroe] even said that he went to school and all his theologian classes and his divinity school, yeah they preach everything else, but they did not preach...He did not learn about the Kingdom of God.” Josiah, interview by author, New York, NY, February 25, 2018.

service when Josiah offered to walk Phoebe to her car, which was parked on a dark street. They invited me to walk with them and we made casual conversation. Other than that, there were no instances of collaboration, and to my knowledge there was no discussion of the interviews between Josiah and Phoebe.

As I did with Phoebe in the previous chapter, I solicited help in reading and thematically coding Josiah's interview transcripts from colleagues who matched similar demographics. These colleagues were African-American males and females, with most of them in their twenties and thirties.³ They were invited to "interact" with the document, noting resonances with their own lives, potential themes, and observations related to the multiform Black religious experience. Their insightful comments are present in Josiah's history, interstitial liturgical theology, and they heavily inform the section in which Josiah's interstitial theology is situated within complementary discourses.

Josiah: Personal History

Josiah was born in 1992 in the Queens borough of New York City. A lot of the details in his early life were not focused upon, largely because Josiah chooses to recount his life history in a theological fashion, rather than a chronological one. What I learned of his "pre-saved" life is not insignificant, but sparing in details. He grew up in a two-parent household until his "earthly father" passed away unexpectedly when he was "11 or 12

³ Unlike Josiah, these colleagues possess graduate theological degrees, so as to assist in detecting preliminary theological themes.

years old.”⁴ He has two older brothers, but they “were out doin’ their own things” when Josiah was growing up.⁵ As such, after the death of his father, Josiah was raised by women, including his mother, his older sister, and his aunts, all of whom have had a large influence upon his life. Basketball was integral to his identity growing up and later allowed him to attend college on a sports scholarship, but he did not spend much time discussing it.⁶ Rather, he used his college basketball experience as a launching point for a more important story he wanted to tell: his salvation history.

Josiah sets up a stark dichotomy in his life history that hinges upon his conversion experience. Prior to his conversion, Josiah speaks of his life as growing up in a mostly unchurched family. However, he equivocates on this point. When asking him if he grew up in church, he replied,

No...[well]...actually, my family did a long time ago. But it just...I don’t know. My mom went when she was younger, then she actually kind of stopped and stuff like that. So, I would go, but I wouldn’t go all the time. You know, not to say I didn’t have any interest in it. But we believed in God, but it wasn’t a church home base...I knew God. I knew who God was, but I didn’t know who Jesus was.⁷

What Josiah is implying is that his experience of God prior to his salvation was more culturally conditioned rather than being an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ.

Growing up in a Black community where church was in many ways the societal glue, it was hard for Josiah to escape the church completely. He equivocates about not “growing

⁴ Josiah, interview, March 25, 2018.

⁵ Josiah, interview, March 25, 2018.

⁶ Josiah attended four different universities as a basketball player. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies from a university in New York.

⁷ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

up in church” because he knew *of* God from sporadically attending church, but did not *know* God personally through the saving love of Jesus.

This all changed in 2012. Josiah spent a brief time playing basketball for a university in California, which is where he was invited to church by a friend. Josiah recalls this emotional night:

And the night that I got saved, I was actually...in California. And the pastor actually prayed...I forget the name of the church I was at, but I went with a former classmate. And she was like, “You wanna go to church?” And I was like, “Yeah, why not?” And then he (the pastor) was just sayin’ so much that I was goin’ through and I just kept crying, and then he prayed over me. And then, he asked me if you know, I wanted to take the next step and things of that nature. And I was like, “Yeah.” And then, it then take me until...I got saved in 2012. I didn’t really get to know Jesus until what? Five years later. 2017/2018. I was saved, but it takes...It took me time to actually get to know what Jesus did for me. And you know who he is and who I am in him.

Josiah was saved that night by surrendering his life to follow Christ. Yet later in our interviews, he also spoke of the inseparable connection between his salvation and baptism. His full-immersion baptism did not occur until he returned to New York City the following summer. Josiah remembers the baptism to be a powerful event where he felt “light on his feet,” freed of his burdens, and stepping further in his faith by “being obedient.”⁸ His baptism was a response of obedience to a rebirth that already occurred at that California church. Yet, as Josiah notes, even after his baptism he slipped back into his “old ways” and still did not truly “know Jesus” until 2017 and 2018.

Now that Josiah regards his faith as more firmly planted, Josiah worships at two different churches each week. On Sunday mornings, he attends the church where he was

⁸ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

baptized—Mt. Olivet Baptist Church—and on Sunday evenings attends Hillsong Church.⁹ According to Phoebe, it is common for many Hillsong worshippers to attend other congregations, especially because Hillsong functions as a liturgical “tourist” destination.¹⁰ Thus, Josiah’s multiple church belongings is not rare among Hillsong worshippers. His church, Mt. Olivet, is an African American congregation with an older worshipping population, averaging about 200 people per week. As one of the younger members, Josiah was invited by the pastor to volunteer with the youth ministry. This has become a passion for Josiah because he wants the youth to succeed in life, much like he did by going to college and through his basketball career. Further, he does not want the youth to make the same mistakes as he did with his spiritual life, though those “mistakes” were not elaborated upon by Josiah. Mt. Olivet is certainly his church home, even though he is passionate about attending Hillsong Church in the evenings.

Josiah was invited by Phoebe to attend Hillsong Church, which he did for the first time in December of 2017. By the time of our initial interview, Josiah had only been attending Hillsong regularly for one and a half months. Here he shares his story of how he learned about Hillsong, which I will cite at length.

I actually didn’t know Hillsong was in New York. And someone was telling me, like, “Yo man have you ever been to Hillsong?” and I was like, “Nah. I know that band though. I know...” and they was like, “Hey man, it’s right there on Times Square by 34th.” And he was like, “It doesn’t feel like church. It feels like a worship concert.” I’m like, “Really?” So I’m like, “You know, let me go, let me

⁹ To protect the identity of his home congregation, I have employed “Mt. Olivet” as a pseudonym.

¹⁰ She estimates that twenty percent of any given worship service might be comprised of tourists, whether it be tourists to New York City, or visitors from other local churches. Phoebe, interview, January 22, 2018.

go check it out.” And I went to check it out...it was everything and more than I expected. It’s just...to see kids from 17 to 25... doesn’t matter the age, to see young kids raise their arms for God it’s just...that set me on fire. That’s like, “Hey man, this is bigger than what you think it is. It’s huge.” ‘Cause normally like when I go to church, I’m used to seeing older people. You know people who have been in the church. Just because you’ve been in the church, doesn’t mean you actually know who God is. You can go as a member and not know who He is. You’re just going just to go. When I see younger people, it just really, it just really warms my heart. Like people say, “This generation is going down. This generation is going bad.” But I actually think this generation is gonna get better. Someway, somehow God is going to get glory to use all of us that’s in the ministries to help the people that don’t know who Christ is. So I feel like the more we can go and fellowship and spend time with Him personally, intimately, the more we’ll be able to share and help our friends in our schools and workplaces to see who God is.¹¹

While he was initially drawn to the church because of its reputation as a “worship concert,” Josiah was more struck by the throng of young people worshipping authentically and passionately. The notion of “fellowshipping” figures prominently into Josiah’s continued return to the church and why he has made Hillsong his second church home. At Hillsong, he is surrounded by people his age, which gives him hope that God will restore this generation and that more people will get “to see who God is.”

Before attending to Josiah’s liturgical theology, there are two other key aspects of his life that must be uplifted. The first is his relationship with his older sister Hannah, who has served as his spiritual guide and mentor. A Pentecostal Christian who attends a nondenominational Black charismatic community, Josiah calls her a “God-fearing woman”—meaning she takes her faith seriously—and mentions that they often “fellowship” over the phone. Hannah has helped Josiah with reading the Bible,

¹¹ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

encouraging him to put scriptures in their cultural context rather than reading them at face-value. She also encouraged Josiah to read from the King James Bible translation because of how “differently” things are worded.¹² Hannah urged him to not be discouraged if he comes across an unfamiliar word, advising him, “even if it takes you a long time to read five verses, you wanna know those words you’re reading and to get an understanding of those words.”¹³ It is largely from his sister’s support that Josiah has become a proficient memorizer of scripture. Even though Hannah attends church with Josiah’s mom and one of his older brothers at a different congregation in Queens, Josiah has her consistent support and guidance.

Another key aspect of Josiah’s life is his belief in God’s miraculous intervention. As a child, he was riding his bicycle and was nearly hit by a car. After falling off his bicycle, he remembers seeing the wheel of the car tire stop inches before his neck. He reflects, “God had so much grace on me before I even knew who He was.”¹⁴ Josiah believes that the Holy Spirit must have stopped that car, which contributes to Josiah’s understanding of his own life as a gift and miracle from God—a God who deserves his gratitude. More recently, Josiah was in a car crash that happened shortly after attending Hillsong. Josiah calls his survival a miracle, especially since the accident involved a truck slamming into the side door of the car—the same side where Josiah was sitting. He recounts the spiritualized story,

¹² Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

¹³ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

¹⁴ Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018.

My side of the car got hit by a truck. And I didn't see it, and I just felt the Spirit of the Lord telling me to put my seatbelt on. So, we was driving and then my seatbelt wasn't on yet, so I was like, "You know what. Yeah I'm gonna put my seatbelt on." I looked down on my phone. Next thing you know, boom! And everything was so slow but I felt confident. I don't know why I felt so confident. And I looked at her (Josiah's future sister-in-law) and she's in awe. She's in shock. And everything movin' slow and I just looked at myself. So I told her, I tapped her, I was like, "Are you okay?" I said, "Get out of the car." And then, I'm lookin', I'm lookin' to see if anything is bloody, broken, or anything. And the airbag deployed and my eyes were burning, but I'm like, "I'm okay." So I got out of the car and I immediately looked up and I lifted my hands. And I said, "Thank you." Because that could've been...It was on my side, the front part of the car. It could've been worse.¹⁵

Like his childhood bicycle incident, Josiah believes that God had a direct hand in saving his life. Again, it is these moments and experiences that give Josiah a great sense of gratitude to God because God has allowed him to continue unharmed in his professional basketball career. The fact is never lost on Josiah that he could "not be here right now."¹⁶ It is in worship services where Josiah expresses this gratitude of God's saving activity in his life.

Josiah is a relatively new Christian who grew up in an unchurched, culturally Christian family. He is very new to Hillsong Church. Some would argue that he is still new to life as a twenty-five-year-old young adult. He is Black. Though he may be affiliated with a Baptist church and Hillsong Church, his denominational stance is: whoever "believes in Jesus Christ, that's all that matters."¹⁷ Josiah is a professional

¹⁵ Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018. One of my coding partners indicated that the line "it could have been worse" is a common refrain in Black church-related testimonial stories.

¹⁶ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

¹⁷ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

athlete. He is engaged to be married. He has experienced miracles. He volunteers with underprivileged youth. He reads the King James Bible daily. He takes notes and talks back at the preacher in both of his churches. He intentionally avoids the news because of all the negativity.¹⁸ And yet he is a worshipper at Hillsong Church. Moreover, he is a liturgical theologian of Hillsong Church. His history, identity, politics, values, family-structure, in addition to a variety of other factors, shape the way he experiences God in worship and the way he articulates those experiences. We now turn to these insights.

Josiah: Key Weekly Questions

For the first weekly question, “How did you experience God today, if at all,” Josiah’s responses were not concerned with a particular component in the order of worship as much as they expressed personal feelings of conviction. Although Josiah largely confines the centrality of “worship” to the preaching event, his experiences of God are scattered throughout the service and are largely in tune with his emotions for that day. More often than not, the emotion expressed is a feeling of conviction. In response to a sermon given on March 11, 2018, where the pastor was talking about “comparison,” Josiah felt convicted that he compares himself with other people too often. He mentioned that this was a symptom of his basketball career with its overarching focus on player statistics and benchmarks, but it convicted him nonetheless. Josiah’s response to the convicting feeling from God was to repent, but also to give God thanks, saying “thank

¹⁸ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

you for what you have done for me.”¹⁹ Josiah has also been convicted by lyrics in worship songs. During the Hillsong song “What a Beautiful Name,” Josiah felt a sense of unworthiness of Christ’s excellency and love. Upon singing the song, Josiah felt himself “fighting flesh and spirit” because if he were “in Christ,” he would not have been “having these problems.”²⁰

Lest Josiah’s portrait of God connote a cosmic being who engenders feelings of disappointment, he actually speaks of *feeling* God in terms of nurture rather than castigation. When I asked Josiah what God “felt” like, he replied,

Love. A change of mind. Because it says, “Be transformed by renewing your mind.” And I think about something that he done for me. And then once I start thinkin’ about that, whatever I did or whatever I was repenting about, that goes away. Because in Hebrews it says, “I will remember your sins no more.” So and then we know, what God says, it comes to pass. His word does not come back void.²¹

This type of love, Josiah says, is a love that goes deep to the “bones and marrow,” a love that is overwhelming with joy.²² He uses words like “warm,” “not judging,” and “genuine” as modifiers for God’s love. Sometimes, he has visceral, bodily reactions to feeling the love of God. After a service on March 25, 2018, Josiah said “I get real deep chills. I get goosebumps. And my stomach...I get a feeling in my belly.”²³ God’s love also comes to him in the form of reassurance, knowing that he “was in the right place at

¹⁹ Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018.

²⁰ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

²¹ Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018.

²² Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

²³ Josiah, interview, March 25, 2018.

the right time.”²⁴ Overall, this was one of the most consistent responses from Josiah: the experience of God in worship generates a feeling, and that feeling is love.

The high point of each service was the same thing each week: a particular insight from the sermon. Importantly, the high point was never simply a “good line,” a “clever illustration,” or a “call to action,” but it was always something, as Josiah would say, “that was exactly for me.”²⁵ Josiah believes that God uses sermons to speak directly to him, where God allows certain points and illustrations to align with Josiah’s life to a remarkable degree of accuracy. Whether that is God telling him to “calm down” because he overthinks things too much, or God showing him that his life has meaning and purpose, Josiah clings to these moments as fuel for his faith. One week, Josiah noted that the music was an additional high point for him because he was “already emotional” when walking in to the service.²⁶ Josiah understands music to help him “let go” of things that have been on his mind and to focus his energy on praising and thanking God. Week after week, it seems that the music served as a helpful primer and facilitator for Josiah’s “high points” in encountering God through the sermons.

Josiah struggled with determining a “low point” each week because he tends to tune out the distractions of the world and focus on praising and worshipping God in the music and in the sermon. However, the two times during our ten interviews together that

²⁴ Josiah, interview, April 8, 2018.

²⁵ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

²⁶ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

he mentioned a low point, it had to do with the shame of taking too long “to get into it.”²⁷

When I asked him what was the reason behind this, Josiah responded,

[I was] thinking about what I could have did better. Just stuff like that. Just those small things. I like to convict myself. Like the Holy Spirit convicts me. But, it’s a conviction out of love. But I have to learn that...not to be so hard on myself. Not guilty, but don’t be so hard on yourself. But I’m learning how to get better at it. I’ve just always been hard on myself.²⁸

In this scenario, the recurrent theme of conviction was a low point rather than experiencing conviction as a gift from God.²⁹ Josiah believes that this low point was a combination of “thinking too much” alongside his perfectionist tendencies that have the ability to trigger self-doubt. Josiah suggests these characteristics of overthinking and self-doubt are the work of Satan, whom he refers to as “the Enemy.” Josiah believes that the Enemy tries to distract him in worship by bringing to mind his “past sins,” by telling him that he is “not forgiven,” or by attempting to “confuse him.”³⁰ Whether it is self-conviction or the work of the Enemy, Josiah’s low points are most significant when he senses a distance from or lack of connection with God.³¹

²⁷ Josiah, interview, April 8, 2018.

²⁸ Josiah, interview, April 8, 2018.

²⁹ To add nuance to this tension, it must be noted that Josiah exhibits a love-hate relationship with conviction. Conviction, while it may not be desirable in the beginning, leads to desirable results in his life of faith.

³⁰ Josiah, interview, March 25, 2018.

³¹ One of my coding partners linked Josiah’s lack of focus with bad worship etiquette in the Black church: “We (worshippers in majority Black churches) are taught as children that all of our attention should be on God when we are at church. It’s difficult to reconcile healthy mind-wandering and not giving God ‘our all’ in church.” Perhaps this is why Josiah presents a sense of shame related to not being able to focus.

“When you come to church, come to come for God. Come to get something.”³² Josiah articulated this thought after commenting upon worshippers filming and taking pictures in the worship service, which he views as a distraction. His concern is not with the overuse of technology, but for the fear of others missing out. Josiah remarks, “the second that you’re watching that video you might actually miss something that you need to help someone.”³³ Unlike Phoebe, most of the distractions that Josiah noted throughout our interviews had nothing to do with external technical glitches or atmospheric issues. Even with the few external distractions he encounters, he speaks of them as barriers to overcome. One Sunday, Josiah was standing in an area of the sanctuary where he could not see the projected lyrics on the screen. Instead of allowing himself to be distracted in the moment, Josiah assured himself, saying, “let me just listen to the song instead of tryin’ to read it.”³⁴ Josiah comes to church with the intention of focusing completely on what God might reveal to him.

While Josiah’s comments reflect an individualist orientation to his experience and articulation of worship, he is constantly aware of other worshippers surrounding him. Even in the midst of trying to “lock in” and connect with God, he is physically aware, and it would seem spiritually aware, of others and their authentic (or lack thereof) engagement with God. Just as the example of Josiah being distracted by others using technology illumines a sensitivity to inauthentic engagement, he also demonstrates the

³² Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

³³ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

³⁴ Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018.

converse. On a Sunday in March, Josiah recalls, “I was surrounded by a few people that I actually felt they was worshipping. [I] mean you could tell...the Spirit can tell. And then it actually picked up my worship a little bit more. I knew it was authentic because I got deeper into it.”³⁵ During worship, Josiah maintained an awareness of the bodies surrounding him, bodies whose authentic worship carried Josiah deeper into his personal devotion with God. Put simply, Josiah is drawn to and invigorated by authenticity in worship—whether his own, the pastor’s, or the other worshippers around him. Repeatedly, he would decry notions of “ritual” and “going through the motions” in worship for their lack of apparent authenticity. Therefore, when he encounters what he perceives as true authenticity, he clings to it and is energized by it.

The final weekly core questions—what did God reveal to you and what did you learn—revealed consistent answers related to assurance. In Josiah’s understanding, God speaks to him through the worship service and gives him both assurance of personal acceptance and assurance of God’s presence in his life. The assurance from God transcends a felt experience insofar as Josiah is able to recount the words God uses. On our first Sunday meeting together, Josiah conveyed these assurances from God: “Be still and know that I am God. Be still. Everything is taken care of. You don’t got to worry about it. Do what you can do. Keep your faith. And I’m always with you. Just do what you can do, and I’ll handle the rest.”³⁶ Josiah understands these words as a direct

³⁵ Josiah, interview, March 25, 2018. One of my coding partners noted related key phrases in Black worship contexts such as “the Holy Spirit is contagious,” “the Holy Spirit spreads like fire,” and “they (other worshipper[s]) set the church on fire.”

³⁶ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

revelation from God that speak to his life circumstances in a personal and loving way. Josiah also experiences assurance indirectly through others' words. On February 25, 2018, Josiah was crying tears of concern for his basketball career when Phoebe approached him, grabbed him, and said, "You are really better than what you think you are."³⁷ Even though Phoebe did not know why Josiah was crying, he held her words in high regard, believing that God providentially used her to speak necessary assurance to him.³⁸ Josiah professes, "I love what Phoebe said to me...and I pray that it stays with me for the rest of my life."³⁹ For Josiah, God reveals God's self in the form of assurance, providing a constant, but necessary teaching to Josiah that he can be assured of his acceptance by God and assured of God's enduring love and presence.

Josiah: Key Liturgical-Theological Themes

Josiah's interstitial liturgical theology is organized according to the following claims: (1) worship is preaching, (2) worship as tears, and (3) worship unlocks divine revelation. Paralleling the presentation of Phoebe's liturgical theology in Chapter Three, this section operates thematically rather than systematically. Again, while the categorizations and organization of the material are synthetic secondary theological

³⁷ Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

³⁸ Here Phoebe is engaging in a type of ritualized Pentecostal communication style known as sharing "words of knowledge." This is where one person believes to have divine knowledge about a situation going on in someone else's life and subsequently shares comforting words as a charismatic sign from God. For an example of this behavior in the Pentecostal context of the International House of Prayer (IHOP), see Brad Christerson and Richard Flory, *The Rise of Network Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 83.

³⁹ Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

contributions of the researcher, the words themselves are Josiah's own. As done in Phoebe's chapter, Josiah is an invited participant in providing feedback and suggestions for how he is presented. Upon reading the chapter, Josiah did not have any edits or changes to make. He only offered one reflection: he wants readers to know that has grown spiritually since our interview sessions in early 2018. With that in mind, let us now turn to Josiah's interstitial theology as articulated at an earlier stage in his spiritual development.

Worship is Preaching

While Phoebe emphasized a heavy correlation between worship and music, Josiah associated worship with preaching. Josiah understands that the term "worship" extends beyond the preaching act, but the majority of our interview sessions discussed what "the pastor said" in the worship service. During our first interview, my opening question "what did you do this morning in church" yielded the response, "I love what our pastor says, he said, 'This is not a perfect ministry. I am not a perfect pastor, but we serve a perfect God.'"⁴⁰ Similarly the following week, I asked "How was church," to which Josiah replied "Pastor went into the book of Matthews [sic]...and he was talking about how we are supposed to be...the light of the world."⁴¹ Week after week, Josiah focused on preaching as the centrality of the worship service and his experience of worship

⁴⁰ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

⁴¹ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

therein. Josiah is drawn to preaching in the following ways: it bears a strong practical connection to daily life, it provides a stockpile of clichés to absorb, it strengthens his own devotional practice of scripture reading and memorization, it is interactional, and it can be viewed in-person or in the comforts of his apartment.

Whether he's attending Mt. Olivet Baptist Church or Hillsong Church, Josiah listens attentively to sermons in order to gain practical wisdom for daily life. When I asked Josiah about his predilection for sermons, he expressed amusement about the close sermonic connection between his two churches:

And a lot of times, often enough, it's (the sermon) almost the same thing. Like, my pastor preached something about, let's just say, water, and then I'll come to Hillsong and I'll hear ice. So it's the same thing. I feel like it's definitely a divine connection. And a lot of what I get from Hillsong and from my church at [Mt. Olivet] is practical. "Gratitude." "Love like you've never been hurt." Like stuff [that] is really big. It's the stuff that my pastor preaches at the church as well. Like you know, "we need to be in relationship." "Don't be religious."⁴²

Themes of gratitude, love, and "anti-religious" sentiment⁴³ are common occurrences in my discussions with Josiah. Gratitude, in particular, is a recurrent trope in Josiah's response to sermons. Sermons remind him to be thankful not only for what God has done through Christ's death and resurrection, but also for how God has blessed him with a basketball career, a great family, and a loving fiancée. The dichotomy of biblical

⁴² Josiah, interview, March 25, 2018.

⁴³ By "anti-religious," I am referring to sermonic tropes in Evangelical discourses that emphasize a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ" instead of a "religion." In Evangelical culture, "religious" is associated with "empty ritualism" and notions of "going through the motions." *Relevant*, an Evangelical magazine, published an article that was written to counter this trope, which indicates the trope's prevalence in the Evangelical culture. See Bonnie Kristian, "Yes, Christianity is a Religion, Not Just a Relationship," *Relevant Magazine*, October 5, 2017, <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/yes-christianity-religion-not-just-relationship2>.

(Christ's death and resurrection) and practical (Josiah's gratitude for career and family) emphases matches the homiletical style of Hillsong pastors. Hillsong sermons are a dialectic of Bible teaching and daily life, wherein pastors deftly move back and forth between a biblical story and its quotidian implications, often attaching pithy clichéd lines that are easy to remember throughout the week.

These neatly packaged phrases and clichés in Hillsong sermons figure prominently into why Josiah calls sermons “practical.” Josiah takes sermon notes on his cell phone, which allows him to revisit the insights and revelations he received from God throughout the week. I asked Josiah if he would share his sermon notes with me, to which he complied. The following sermon notes match the same worship service—March 25, 2018—as the block quotation in the preceding paragraph.

Palm Sunday- Hillsong
 -Love like you never been hurt...
 -Matthew 26:50
 -Psalm 91
 -Greatest temptation is the one you can justify
 -If you see something say something
 -Gratitude
 -Enemy of gratitude = entitlement, complaining, comparison

When I referred to my sermon notes on the same Sunday, there was a lot of crossover between our notes, including the scripture references and the phrases “love like you’ve never been hurt” and “see something, say something.”⁴⁴ However, I did not find any references to the final line “enemy of gratitude = entitlement, complaining, comparison”

⁴⁴ Field notes, researcher, New York, NY, March 25, 2018. “See something, say something” is a riff on a popular phrase in the New York City subway system.

in my own sermon notes. From my conversations with Josiah, I know that complaining and comparison are particularly large concerns for him in his basketball career, which is why he likely gravitated toward writing it down.⁴⁵

I received Josiah's sermon notes from other weeks during our study and they all follow the same format: short, memorable lines with scripture references. Similarly, our interview sessions revealed that Josiah communicates with clichés and memorable phrases that participate in a shared Evangelical vocabulary. Aphorisms such as “everything happens for a reason,” “God won't give you more than you can handle,” “You can have all the knowledge in the world, but no wisdom,” “the Church is not a building,” and “Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship” all appeared in our conversations. Josiah's conversational style is not unlike that of Hillsong communicators and likely that of his pastor at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church.⁴⁶ This is not to suggest direct causality between sermons and Josiah's conversational style, but that their complementary nature should not go unnoticed.

Sermons and sermon notes are also integral to worship insofar as they give Josiah more scripture references to study and potentially memorize. Josiah cites scripture passages regularly as a part of his communication style, affirming his sister's words that

⁴⁵ One of my coding partners commented that “not comparing yourself to others” is a prominent teaching motif among Black churches in the United States.

⁴⁶ Homiletician Cleophus LaRue suggests that “oral formulas” form one part (of many) of the distinctiveness of Black preaching. See Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 10.

this gift comes from the Holy Spirit’s “revelations.”⁴⁷ Josiah’s favorite verse is Romans 8:28, which he recites as “For we know all the things work together for the good of those who love God according to his purpose.”⁴⁸ However, the verse he cited most frequently (four times) during our interviews was Romans 8:1, which Josiah articulates as “There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁹ It is the freedom from condemnation—more specifically the Enemy’s condemnation—to which Josiah clings:

God is omnipresent. He’s always with me. Sometimes when I feel like you know he’s not with me, or you know, he’s there. He’s there. And the Enemy is tryin’ to make it seem like I’m a bad person, that God is not for me, that you know...that you know bad things are happening because I’m a bad person. But that’s not the case...I like what Pastor said, “That nothing will separate us from his love.” Like I don’t know about anyone else, but Romans 8 is a go-to for me. Romans 8. When I’m goin’ through anything, Romans 8 picks me up from Romans 8:1, I believe it goes to 40 or 39. Whatever it goes to...it starts from “There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”⁵⁰

Josiah frequently cited scriptures that gave him a sense of reassurance of God’s love, presence, and blessing upon his life. He quoted scripture directly and with great accuracy thirty-three times over the course of nine interviews and one journal entry. For Josiah, the “word of God is practical.”⁵¹ His memorization and internalization of the scriptures is

⁴⁷ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

⁴⁸ This seems to be a hybrid recitation of Romans 8:28, New International Version (NIV), and the King James Version (KJV). The NIV states, “and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” The KJV reads, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Josiah uses the NIV and the KJV regularly as a part of his personal devotion, so it makes sense why there would be a hybrid recitation.

⁴⁹ This most closely resembles the New International Version (NIV) of Romans 8:1, which states, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

⁵⁰ Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

⁵¹ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

emblematic of his communication style, which is supported and strengthened by weekly sermons and supplementary notes.

Josiah understands preaching to be interactional. In addition to his daily scriptural devotions and ongoing scripture memorization, which are both interactional, Josiah treats the sermonic event itself as an interaction.

Every now and then, like you know I'll give a nice little "amen" shout or a nice little "hallelujah." 'Cause normally when a pastor says something, a lot of people say "hallelujah" or "amen" because that's revelation—like, confirmation—that they needed or something like that. Or man, I'll clap my hands because of something I needed to hear and stuff like that.⁵²

Although Josiah's interactional style during the sermon fulfills a key characteristic related to black preaching,⁵³ he is also participating in the homiletical culture at Hillsong Church. Any given week at Hillsong Church in New York City, one can hear worshippers interacting with the sermon—whether through "mmhmms," "amens," or loud shouts of "hallelujah." Josiah emphasizes interacting authentically with the sermon because "you don't worship for people to see you."⁵⁴ Instead, he argues that one's motives for interaction must be pure so that "God gets the glory" and that others may "pick their worship up."⁵⁵ Sermons are meant to be interacted with, but only with authentic motivations.

⁵² Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁵³ Frank A. Thomas speaks of the "call and response" collaborative dynamic between the preacher and the congregation as integral to the preaching event. See Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2013), 9-14.

⁵⁴ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁵⁵ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

Finally, Josiah is an avid consumer of sermons on television and the internet, saying that he could easily watch a sermon like he could watch a basketball game.⁵⁶ At his devotional life at home, sermons have mellowing and humbling functions: sermons “let me know what I’m doing wrong, that I can fix it. [They] let me know what I’m doing right so I can continue to get better. [They] keep me connected to God.”⁵⁷ In particular, Josiah likes to watch sermons delivered by Myles Munroe and Charles Stanley, even though their delivery styles are much different from that of Hillsong Church. Josiah describes Hillsong sermons thusly: “Hillsong has a ‘never say die’ attitude to it...[a] ‘never give up’ type of attitude...always trying to find the good in something.”⁵⁸ Whether Josiah is watching lively sermons at Hillsong Church or engaging in devotional activity at home by watching Charles Stanley, it is clear that preaching constitutes the focus of worship for him. As Josiah remarks, “If I don’t get the message, then I can’t go out and use it as food.”⁵⁹

Worship as Tears

“I’m really like Jeremiah. I’m always crying about something,”⁶⁰ Josiah uttered lightheartedly during our final interview session. His statement indeed matches the

⁵⁶ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

⁵⁷ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

⁵⁸ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

⁵⁹ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

⁶⁰ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

trajectory of our interviews. Josiah mentioned crying or shared a story about crying for six out of our nine conversations together. Josiah never explicitly referred to his tears as a form of worship, but tears were constitutive of many of his experiences of God and high points in the worship service.⁶¹ Importantly, Josiah mentions that his tears were never related to sadness. Josiah's tears are activated by worship in the following ways: worship presents God's calling upon his life in overwhelming ways, worship makes him susceptible to attacks from the Enemy, and worship features music and lyrics that stir his emotions.

On February 25, 2018, Darnell, a young African American pastor and worship leader at Hillsong Church, preached on the topic of having a godly perspective and being courageous. For the last fifteen minutes of the service—which was approximately the final ten minutes of preaching and five minutes of music—Josiah reported that he was crying uncontrollably.

I'm dealing with something right now that's much bigger than me, and I don't want to disappoint God. So when he (Pastor Darnell) was like, you know, "Have courage." And you know, that the perspective of when Jesus was on the cross and he embraced it. And he said, what he believed Jesus was thinking about was us. Our joy. And that, right there, that resonated somethin' in my spirit, and I couldn't control it. And I just, I just started cryin'. I didn't care who's watchin'. I didn't care who's next to me. I just couldn't hold it in anymore.⁶²

⁶¹ The section, "worship as tears," is one of the areas where Josiah's interstitial theology is leaning closer to the secondary theology of the researcher. The tears themselves and Josiah's narrativization of tears are his own actions and words, but the synthetic formation of tears as a theological theme is my own construction. The "worship as tears" section therefore highlights an implicit interstitial theology rather than an explicit one. Consequently, this section must be treated more tentatively than others as it tests the limits of liturgical biography.

⁶² Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

Josiah believes that God has a plan for his life that involves him playing a role in the National Basketball Association (NBA). Whether that role is a “superstar,” a “role player,” or a “minister,” Josiah confidently declares “I know I will be there...and it won’t be off of the talents He blessed me with, but because of his favor.”⁶³ Worship, and in particular, Darnell’s sermon, reminded Josiah to have courage in the face of his own doubt and uncertainty. When he became overwhelmed by God’s calling on his life in worship, Josiah’s response was to cry—both in the service and during his time of devotion at home. Josiah told me, “man, I cry every night. I don’t know how it’s gonna happen. And it’s not my job to know how, but to have the faith, to have the trust that it’s gonna happen when God sees fit.”⁶⁴ When the circumstances in his life seem lofty and weighty, Josiah’s response in worship is to offer tears.

Josiah also believes that his emotional vulnerability, particularly through crying, leaves him open to the work of the Enemy. On April 15, 2018, Josiah was already having an “emotional” day due to his “overthinking” when he came to Hillsong Church and began to cry during the Hillsong song “What a Beautiful Name.”⁶⁵ He recalls the moment:

I was upset with myself because I want to do right, but I’m fighting flesh and spirit, and he (the pastor) said that. He was like, “You’re gonna forever have to you know cast down subconscious thoughts that come to you. That’s gonna be forever until Jesus come back.” So that’s why I know, I’m really in faith right now. I’m really like I know, like I’m really in Christ because if I wasn’t I

⁶³ Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

⁶⁴ Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

⁶⁵ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

wouldn't be having these problems. I wouldn't be thinkin' the way I'm thinkin'. You know, so the Enemy is really trying to get me and it's not gonna happen.⁶⁶

Josiah believes that the Enemy is trying to undo the progress he has made in his growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Some of his “subconscious thoughts” that night had to do with feeling a sense of separation from God, which Josiah believes is a “trick that the Enemy is trying to use.”⁶⁷ Be it preaching or music, Josiah understands worship to be an emotional enterprise. While worship allows his emotions—specifically, tears—to be uplifting, they also open Josiah up to harm from the Enemy, who he believes is also vying for power.

Josiah has a strong emotional connection to sermons, but he is also easily moved to tears by contemporary worship songs and hymns because of music's inherent emotionality. Over our weeks together, he said things such as, “sometimes certain songs really capture people...like today I just started crying,”⁶⁸ and “when it's a song I really know, and it speaks to me...sometimes I just start boohooing and crying,”⁶⁹ and “the melody and the words of the song, it put me in the state to where I couldn't help myself but to start crying.”⁷⁰ King David of the Hebrew Bible is the exemplar for Josiah's understanding of musical worship. Josiah believes that David constructed and sang songs of praise to God with complete abandon, songs that erupted from the recognition that

⁶⁶ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

⁶⁷ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

⁶⁸ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

⁶⁹ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

⁷⁰ Josiah, interview, March 25, 2018.

God “still loved him” even though he “fell short.”⁷¹ It is the words of the songs that Josiah is most drawn to. Even though Josiah typically says “music” as a blanket term for inducing his tears, our interview sessions revealed that this is better qualified as lyrics *set to music*. In particular, songs that paraphrase scripture have more import to Josiah because they allow him to internalize scripture. Further, Josiah argues that repetitive scriptural songs are particularly compelling because “the Bible says that [the] engrafted word can change your soul.”⁷² God’s Word in the Bible takes precedence over the human word in songs. The tears Josiah cries are an expression of him worshipping with complete abandon in the likeness of King David, all due to the emotionality of the music when it is set to a pertinent text.

Worship Unlocks Divine Revelations

Josiah’s final liturgical-theological theme is that worship unlocks divine revelations in the visual plane, resulting in an interactive personal relationship with God. I am using the term “unlocking” intentionally. Josiah consistently refers to the notion of “locking in” in worship so that he can focus his attention on experiencing God and receiving the insights and revelations that come from God by means of the sermons and the music. By *locking in* during worship, Josiah is *unlocking* divine revelations from God.

⁷¹ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

⁷² Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018. In this quotation, Josiah is paraphrasing the King James Version of James 1:21 which states, “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

In the context of our interviews, Josiah's "revelations" from God are envisaged as peaceful scenarios where he encounters Jesus, while also seeing friends and family members, both living and deceased. These occur during corporate worship, but also when he is home alone during evening prayer. Josiah's revelations are also experienced in the form of dialogue, wherein Jesus speaks to him directly and assures Josiah that he is loved.

Josiah describes himself as a mentally visual worshipper when he has his eyes closed. He has a couple of "places" where he "goes" sometimes when "locked in" during worship. The first place he describes is similar to the throne room of God as depicted in Revelation 4.⁷³ Josiah feels that his spirit gets "lifted so far up...that [he doesn't] know how far or how fast [he's] going."⁷⁴

I'm sitting in this chair, and I can see God and I can see the Son of God. I can see Jesus sittin' right there on His right side. And I can see a Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is in the form of a dove. And I'm sittin' in this huge chair where the chair's so big—I think everybody in the world could fit in it...And I'm just talking to [God], sayin' everything I was sorry for. And he was just telling me, "You know man. Don't worry. I love you. You know, you make mistakes, but...it wasn't about that. It was about your purpose that you had for me. That the purpose that I have for you to do, and you did it and I'm proud of you." And afterwards, there's like a big hug. Like all three of us hug, and then I come back to where I am.⁷⁵

⁷³ John of Patmos writes, "After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!" Revelation 4:1-2 (NRSV)

⁷⁴ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁷⁵ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

Josiah's revelation from God borrows from biblical imagery, including the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, as well as the "chair" that alludes to the throne room in Revelation 4. At the same time, this revelation from God is highly personal wherein God reassures Josiah of God's love in spite of his mistakes.⁷⁶ These visual revelations of God are visions that Josiah prays for, calling them a "gift" wherein God transports Josiah "there."⁷⁷ Worship and evening prayer with "meditation" function as the promptings to get him from here to there.

Josiah's visions are also places where he likes to "dwell." He cites Psalm 91's language of "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty"⁷⁸ as the precedent. Josiah's other recurring vision is as follows, which I will cite at length:

I have a room and I come out of this room. And I look down to my right and the hallway goes forever. It looks like it never ends. Then I look to my left, the hallway looks like it never ends. And then I look forward. As soon as I come out

⁷⁶ To those with training in religion and psychology, Josiah's divine revelations would provide fruitful avenues of exploration. However, I am not a trained psychotherapist and will not try to "connect the dots" between Josiah's visions and his life history, as this would be irresponsible. However, I will include another salient excerpt from Josiah discussing the topic of gendered language for God. Josiah remarks, "Sometimes we have trouble with father-figures...Let's say someone's father is abusive, you'll have a hard time really grasping God as a father because your earthly father has been abusive to you, so God will come as a brother. He'll come as a son. He'll come as...He'll use a woman, a daughter. He'll come as...a mother, a sister, a brother. He'll come as many different forms to let you know that He loves you. And I think that's the beauty of God that He'll come in so many different forms just to let you know, 'Hey don't fault your earthly father for doing that to you.' Because you never know, his father may have done that to him and his father may have done, and his father. And it's just so much. And that's why I believe, God rest his soul, my earthly father passed at an early age. I thought I never had a father. I'm like, 'I don't have no father.' But, God was always there for me. But then when I realized God was always there, I'm like, 'I always had a father.' I just didn't know it." Josiah, interview, March 25, 2018.

⁷⁷ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁷⁸ Psalm 91:1 (New King James Version). This is the closest translation to Josiah's recitation. Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

of my room, it's like a glass. It's like a big window. It's like a glass and it's a garden. And the garden is so colorful and is nice. And then I can see kids. Like this kid playing in a garden with a lion. Like, literally playing with a lion, a real live lion. And they just playin' and havin' fun. And then I go outside...and I see a lot of kids and stuff and I sit on a stoop and then I see Jesus and he comes to talk to me. And he was like, and he says to me, "Who..." It says in the Bible, "Who the son sets free is free indeed." And then I get wings. And then, I start flyin' all over heaven and I see my fiancée. I see my mom. I see my family. And I'm just, we just greetin'. Everybody havin' fun. And I'm on the basketball court playin' with my friends and stuff. It was so peaceful. And, when I go to that place nothing harms me. Sometimes I dwell for five minutes. Sometimes I dwell for fifteen minutes. Sometimes it's for three minutes. Sometimes it's for thirty seconds. But it's a place where I go and like I'm literally happy.⁷⁹

Like the earlier mentioned revelation, this one also balances biblical motifs with a highly personalized experience. The lion playing with children evokes images of "The Lion of Judah," Isaiah's prophetic imagery of the lion and the lamb, as well as Daniel's stint in the lion's den.⁸⁰ Josiah's scriptural reference in his vision comes from John 8:36: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."⁸¹ What is fascinating about his reference is that it does not cite the Bible verbatim; instead, it matches word-for-word the chorus of Hillsong's popular song "I Am Who You Say I Am," which asserts "Who the son sets free [oh] is free indeed, I'm a child of God, yes I am."⁸² This song was played nearly every week during my fieldwork at Hillsong Church. In a tentative way, this attests to Josiah's liturgical formation at Hillsong Church, even during his short time of attendance there.

⁷⁹ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁸⁰ Revelation 5:5 for the "Lion of Judah"; Daniel 6 for the story of Daniel in the lion pit.

⁸¹ John 8:36 (New International Version).

⁸² Ben Fielding and Reuben Morgan, "Who You Say I Am," on *There is More*, Hillsong Music Publishing, 2017.

In addition to the biblical and lyrical references, Josiah's vision is also personalized insofar as he sees his living fiancée, his living mother, and his deceased aunt all experiencing happiness together. These revelations from God are therapeutic and restorative for Josiah. They are places where he can experience happiness when the world does not afford that same opportunity. However, it must be noted that Josiah does not "dwell" in these revelations in order to escape the world. He contends, "I just want to experience the love so I can share that same love... while I'm here on earth."⁸³ Worship thus unlocks these revelations to Josiah for a missional purpose: to spread the "peace and love" of Christ.

For Josiah, worship in the form of music is the final way in which worship unlocks divine revelations from God. On February 25, 2018, Hillsong played the song "Aftermath," which features the following lyrics:

[Chorus 1] In a moment of glorious surrender
 You were broken for all the world to see
 Lifted out of the ashes
 I am found in the aftermath

[Chorus 3] And in that moment You opened up the heavens
 To the broken the beggar and the thief
 Lifted out the wreckage
 I find hope in the aftermath⁸⁴

During this song, Josiah's mind visualized the thief on the cross next to Jesus, the one to whom Jesus "opened up the heavens." The song brought to Josiah's mind the larger

⁸³ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

⁸⁴ Joel Houston, "Aftermath," on *Aftermath*, Hillsong Music Publishing, 2010.

scriptural narrative, and in particular, the dialogue where Jesus says to the thief “you will be with me in paradise.”⁸⁵ Josiah claims that this revelation “puts everything in perspective for me,” as he continues to reflect:

That man’s life, that thief, whatever he did, his whole life, that one split second before he died, he got saved. So, that lets me know, man, that you never know who is God’s chosen people. You never know. So we should be nice, and loving, and caring to every single person because we all go through seasons. And, the Bible said, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” Now I don’t want to take that out of context. But, we are to love each and every person. At that point of time, that man gave his...On the last moment...The thief on the...and Jesus said, “You will be with me in paradise.” Aw man, that part of the song was just...[amazing].⁸⁶

The narrative nature of the worship lyrics afforded Josiah the opportunity to visualize the scenario on the cross and to understand more deeply the depth of God’s love. Moreover, the song reified his ethical perspective of treating everyone in “nice, loving, and caring” ways because one does not know who is “chosen” by God or not. For Josiah, worship in the form of music supports the sermon insofar as it is another method to “unlock” divine revelations.

There were a number of other themes that could have been explored in Josiah’s interstitial theology, including his consistent refrains about God’s “omnipresence” as a recurring motif in worship, his negative views of Catholicism, or his understanding of music’s preparatory function for receiving the sermon. However, the centrality of preaching, tears, and revelatory visions were the most salient to explore due to the expansive references in the transcriptions. Similar to Phoebe’s interstitial theology, Josiah

⁸⁵ Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018. The scriptural reference is Luke 23:43 (NRSV).

⁸⁶ Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

never directly called worship “preaching,” he did not claim that “worship is tears,” nor did he explicitly mention his divine revelations as a form of worship. These are secondary formulations. Indeed, these categorizations attest to the limits of this project insofar as the organization and categorization of materials pertain to the secondary theological dispositions of the researcher. At the same time, by allowing the content and quantity of recurring themes in the interviews guide the categorizations, I am not tempted to redirect Phoebe’s or Josiah’s peripheral thoughts to the central focus.⁸⁷ Before situating Josiah’s claims in a nexus of liturgical-theological discourse, sacramental theology, and Black Church studies, in what follows, I now offer my own thoughts on my conversations with Josiah.

Reflexions

As a researcher with my own embedded assumptions about what Pentecostal and Evangelical theologies of worship are *supposed* to emphasize, the interview process was initially difficult for me. In a perfect world, I wanted Josiah’s responses to reflect Phoebe’s insofar as they would have a heavy emphasis on the role of music facilitating an experience with God as the core of what worship *should* be. However, that was clearly not the case as discussed above. Josiah’s understanding of God’s presence within the gathered assembly was directly tied to preaching. There were multiple times when my own biases and assumptions would try to redirect Josiah’s liturgical-theological

⁸⁷ For instance, both Phoebe and Josiah talked about baptism and eucharist, which are tempting areas for further exploration. However, their comments on the subjects were peripheral to the overall thrust of their interstitial theological claims.

reflections. For example, at the beginning of our interview on April 8, 2018, Josiah immediately spoke about the sermon, after which I interjected,

When I'm asking these [weekly questions], in the past few weeks you've kinda gone right into the sermon [and] your thoughts on the sermon. I want to encourage you to think broader than just sermon. But if the sermon is the only place you encounter God, talk about that. But, you know, if there are other places, I want to hear that too.⁸⁸

It is with an attitude of humor and humility I must note that immediately following this remark, I asked Josiah to reflect on his experience of God in worship, to which he discussed “what the pastor said” in church. My attempts at redirection were futile, which I believe is exactly how it should have been. For Josiah, worship is about preaching. My own relegation of the liturgical-theological role of preaching in addition to my music-centric understanding of Pentecostal and Evangelical liturgical theology were biases that were directly confronted and challenged through my conversations with Josiah.

The rapport-building process took longer with Josiah than it did with Phoebe. Initially, Josiah called me “Mr. Nelson” and “sir,” which he implied had to do more with communication culture to coaches in basketball culture. There were also racial and power dynamics present in discussing topics related to race and diversity regarding theology and worship.⁸⁹ Eventually, we were on a first-name basis. I had also disclosed to Josiah that I

⁸⁸ Researcher, interview with Josiah, New York, NY, April 8, 2018.

⁸⁹ Josiah and I had a conversation in which Josiah mentioned he “saw” Jesus. I asked him if he could describe what Jesus looked like to him, which he replied “like light.” One of my coding partners read this portion of the transcript, noting that Josiah’s tone seemed to shift in this section of the interview. The coding partner suggested that his [written] tone became less authentic because of the racial dynamic in the room. Indeed, my Whiteness was a variable that had an impact not just in that conversation, but throughout our conversations, and in ways that I might not ever perceive.

was a pastor, which I believe was helpful in terms of comfort and creating safe space for conversation. However, I am concerned that it engendered a problem related to Josiah initially “performing” for the interview with scriptural citations and theological jargon. Our interviews also took a spiritual turn. It was our sixth interview on March 11, 2018, when Josiah asked if he could open our interview with a time of prayer. This was a turning point in the rapport-building process, because our remaining three interviews also began with prayer. Josiah prayed, “Lord Jesus, thank you for allowing us to get together in your name to talk about you. Father, now we are very thankful, and I’m so glad that we’re connecting and fellowshiping, one body in Christ. Thank you for the service that we just had and we continue to bless your name. In Jesus name, Amen.”⁹⁰ It was in this moment where my identity as a researcher and identity as a Christian enmeshed. Whether I wanted to believe it or not, Josiah viewed our interviews as holy conversation, an extension of the worship service in the form of connecting and fellowshiping.

Finally, I must note a limitation in the research design, namely that I cannot be in two places at once. Josiah’s reflections were recorded within an hour of the worship service, whereas Phoebe’s interviews were held the following morning. Josiah carried with him the excitement of the worship services directly into the interviews. Phoebe, on the other hand, had to recall the day before. Moreover, she had to determine whether she was recalling events that occurred at the 7:30PM service or the morning service.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018.

⁹¹ Hillsong’s morning and evening services have different sets of volunteers, which means the band is composed differently with a different song list. Sometimes, two different sermons are preached.

Phoebe's insights were not as "fresh" as Josiah's, which does not take away from their credibility, but there was a longer amount of time for them to be processed and distilled. The original research design included a rotating schedule for the informants—one in the evening, one in the morning—but that did not work out for either Josiah's or Phoebe's schedules.

Situating Josiah's Liturgical Theology

Josiah's liturgical-theological claims of worship as preaching, worship as tears, and worship's ability to unlock divine revelations all find resonance with what liturgical scholar Melva Wilson Costen calls the "empowerment" dimension of worship in the African American experience.⁹² For Josiah, worship is about showing appreciation to God for all that God has empowered him to be and do. Josiah asserts, "It's in my DNA to worship Him. To show Him that I know Him and that I love Him and that I'm thankful for all that He has done."⁹³ Josiah's consistent refrains about God's love, [re]assurance of salvation, and gratitude demonstrate the empowerment that worship services provide, whether at Hillsong Church or at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. Further, the strong personal connection Josiah draws between worship—mostly, the preaching—and practical daily living exemplifies this empowerment. Costen notes, "empowerment enables one to be all

⁹² Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 105-126.

⁹³ Josiah, journal entry, New York, NY, May 8, 2018.

that God wants one to be and to do what is divinely fitting and edifying.”⁹⁴ Josiah wants nothing more than to live in accordance with God’s plan and purpose, so that one day God might say to him, “well done, good and faithful servant.”⁹⁵

Historically, Costen situates the empowerment dimension of worship in the Black experience of slavery. She argues that worship empowered slaves to be spiritually free and transcend “the laws of bondage” by continuing African traditional religions and epistemologies, by claiming the “old ways of Judeo-Christianity,” and by transforming them “both into something new.”⁹⁶ Costen holds to the idea that African American Christians today possess a “primordial” world view—a worldview that negates the Western distinction between secular and sacred—which undergirds African American theologies of worship.⁹⁷ Liturgical theologian Mary McGann makes the same claim, based on her liturgical ethnography of an African American Roman Catholic parish. She writes that the Lourdes community embodies a non-dualistic spirituality, wherein “what

⁹⁴ Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 105.

⁹⁵ Josiah, interview, February 22, 2018.

⁹⁶ Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 107.

⁹⁷ Costen, 5. Here too I want to point out the connection between this primordial worldview and its vestiges in Pentecostal liturgical theology. James K. A. Smith argues that Pentecostal worship “assumes a holistic understanding of personhood and agency—that the essence of the human animal cannot be reduced to reason or intellect...[R]ather than seeing human action and behavior as entirely driven by conscious, cognitive, deliberative processes, pentecostal worship implicitly appreciates that our being-in-the-world is significantly shaped and primed by all sorts of precognitive, non-deliberative ‘modular operations’...And if our most basic comportment to the world is pre-cognitive and affective, then such transformation has to be channeled through affective, embodied means.” James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 204-205, ePUB edition.

are often deemed the sacred and secular domains of life infuse and enspirit each other.”⁹⁸ In Josiah’s case, I cannot determine through our interviews whether or not he embodies this primordial world view, but I do corroborate the notion that Josiah’s understanding of worship lends itself to, as Costen says, “helping individuals and communities realize their maximum potential.”⁹⁹ Worship maximizes Josiah’s potential, which is the empowerment he intentionally looks for when worshipping at Hillsong Church. Costen articulates two dimensions of empowerment: the psychological, and the ministry and mission aspects.

The psychological dimension of empowerment has a strong presence in the interviews with Josiah insofar as worship—in the form of preaching—functions therapeutically. When I asked Josiah why he worshipped, he maintained, “Well I’m coming straight for God because I need that *refreshing spirit* as far as being around other believers because I know I’m not the only person that’s going through tough times.”¹⁰⁰ Josiah wants to be refreshed by the sermon and by others who are equally in need of encouragement through the preaching. This psychological empowerment dimension of worship is both individual and communal, which is confirmed in Josiah’s theology. Josiah comes to worship *for* God as an individual, but he also gets to be around others who are here for God:

I remember the last time I was at Hillsong a guy was taking notes and he was really into it and, you know, that was really good. I see people follow the scripture

⁹⁸ Mary McGann, *A Precious Fountain: Music in the Worship of an African American Catholic Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 261.

⁹⁹ Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 108.

¹⁰⁰ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018 (emphasis mine).

from their phones as well sometimes. It's cool. I just feel like people, like we all get the message different. Like, some people would rather physically take notes with their hand, writing down with a pen, and some rather type it and stuff like that so...but I feel like everyone, you know, is pretty much in sync.¹⁰¹

Josiah expresses genuine excitement about being around others because they are taking part in the sermon together. The sermon is therapeutic and empowering for all people, a demonstration of how everyone is “in sync.” At the same time, the sermon is relevant to whatever “tough times” others are experiencing.

Another part of the psychological empowerment model, as Costen argues, is that through worship, Black worshippers are “enabled to see, feel, and know God objectively.”¹⁰² Seeing, feeling, and knowing God objectively involves an acknowledgement that “God *is*”, and “does not depend on humans for existence,” which “affirms emphatically that there is a God who loves and intervenes in the lives of humans.”¹⁰³ Josiah’s liturgical theology reflects this objective dimension of acknowledging God and it is at the core of why he worships:

We worship God because God is almighty. God can't worship Himself. You can't worship anything that's higher than you, and there's nothing above God. So God cannot worship Himself. So that's why we are created in His image to worship him. And, worshipping God...it's a love thing 'cause He saved us. He saved all of us. So, it's showing our appreciation to Him. Like you know, “God we love you. We acknowledge you. We recognize who you are and what you have done in our lives.” Even if it's a simple “thank you, man.” Like saying thank you to God...goes a long way.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

¹⁰² Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 110.

¹⁰³ Costen, 110.

¹⁰⁴ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

Costen argues that the objective dimension enables worshippers to “envision themselves as vital and necessary actors in God’s story.”¹⁰⁵ For Josiah, the concern is slightly different. He knows he is a “vital and necessary actor” because of God’s radical intervention in his life, which culminated in his baptism, but worship is helping him *discern* in what capacity he will serve as this actor. Put differently, Josiah knows that God has saved him, but worship is helping him figure out the question: toward what end? This is the psychological dimension of empowerment clearly expressed.

The ministry and mission dimension of empowerment is less discernable in Josiah’s liturgical theology. Costen argues that the result of worship is a mission that engages in “efforts to reconstruct an unjust society,” exercising “compassion in works of reconciliation, justice, and peace.”¹⁰⁶ However, in my weeks of discussion with Josiah, the topic of worship’s connection to acts of mission and justice did not surface. Although the related theological notion of the kingdom of God holds a prominent place in Josiah’s theology, he associates the kingdom of God more with a future event rather than realized in the present.¹⁰⁷ Josiah’s liturgical theology, like Phoebe’s, maintains a stronger connection to conversionistic evangelism instead of mission or justice. Upon asking Josiah what the most intimate part of the worship service is, he replied,

The part when the pastor...when the music is playing softly and then the pastors asks, he’s like “Everyone close your eyes. And if anyone don’t know Jesus I want

¹⁰⁵ Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 111.

¹⁰⁶ Costen, 112-113.

¹⁰⁷ Josiah’s consistent theme of “peace” could be construed as a theological connection to the realized Kingdom of God, but he did not make that explicit connection.

you to raise your hand.” And then he starts prayin’ for those people that being saved. That is the most...That is the most important part of church, right there. People...Because heaven rejoice over one soul that is saved. So, I feel like when people are getting saved that is, that’s the key. That’s the meat and potatoes, if you wish to say it, is the greatest part, the most important part to me for church.¹⁰⁸

Josiah is describing Hillsong’s weekly ritual of the altar call,¹⁰⁹ a practice he is abundantly familiar with at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church.¹¹⁰ This is a component of the service where Josiah amplifies his participation by praying that more people would experience salvation. He justifies this scripturally, alluding to the notion that God wills all to be saved, as found in 1 Timothy 2:4.

In Josiah’s liturgical theology, it is the altar call that is linked firmly with remembrance of baptism. When other people at Hillsong make the commitment to follow Jesus, Josiah recalls the “big step” he had to make. He asserts, “I know how it feels. Every time I see somebody being saved I think about my baptism, the day I was baptized...and, you know, how much the Lord has done for me. It’s a sacred moment.”¹¹¹ Josiah’s experience with altar calls is not unlike Baptist understandings of the communality in baptism. British Baptist theologian Christopher Ellis highlights the

¹⁰⁸ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Historian David Malcolm Bennett offers a helpful definition of an altar call that is harmonious with Josiah’s recollection. He defines it thusly, “A method of evangelism, within which a regular or frequent, planned invitation is given to ‘unbelievers’ to respond to Jesus Christ publicly at the conclusion of a sermon or other gospel presentation, in such ways as: calling out a response, raising a hand, standing, or walking to a designated spot in the evangelistic setting. A response to such an invitation would normally be followed by immediate counseling and later by some form of follow up. It often incorporates an appeal to Christians for such issues as rededication and call to mission. It is not a theology, though it does reflect and support particular theologies.” See David Malcolm Bennett, *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), xvi.

¹¹⁰ Josiah, personal communication with author, January 16, 2019.

¹¹¹ Josiah, interview, February 12, 2018.

communal function of baptism insofar as “the mystery of salvation in Christ is represented and...the nature of the Christian life as immersion into Christ is re-enacted.”¹¹² As a response to witnessing this act, members present in the assembly may “relive their own baptism through the baptism of another.”¹¹³ Josiah’s process of linking the conversion moments of others to his own salvation is a testament to this baptismal dynamic. Thus, the intimate moment of the altar call functions to accentuate liturgically the central nature of Josiah’s evangelical priorities, of which conversion stands at the forefront.

Josiah’s liturgical theology is Evangelical insofar as he stresses biblicism, crucicentrism, and conversionism.¹¹⁴ It is Baptist because his “home church” is the Baptist church in which he was baptized and it is a church that shares a similar “free church” *ordo* and evangelistic fervor with Hillsong. It is Pentecostal by association with his regular worship at Hillsong Church, as well as his sister’s deep-seated Pentecostal faith. Finally, his liturgical theology bears distinctive marks of the African American worshipping tradition, which evinces theological hybridity and cannot be confined to a particular style, convention, or denomination.¹¹⁵ All of these identities are at play and

¹¹² Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 219.

¹¹³ Ellis, 219.

¹¹⁴ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2. Of note, I left out the “activism” component of Bebbington’s quadrilateral because—as discussed earlier—this is not made explicit in Josiah’s theology.

¹¹⁵ Melva Costen speaks of the limitless “borrowing” that takes place among African American congregations across denominational and geographic lines, arguing that Black ecumenicism was “in vogue” long before the Ecumenical Movement. See Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 77.

enmeshed in Josiah's liturgical-theological claims. In what follows, I situate these main claims within relevant literature related to homiletics in the African American tradition, the emotionality of worship, and the mystical dimensions of spirituality.

The Centrality of Preaching

As discussed earlier, Josiah equates worship with preaching. He appreciates the preaching at Hillsong Church because of its practical nature, but also the pastors' ability to preach in "another way that it can grab younger people that actually don't know who Christ is."¹¹⁶ Indeed, Pentecostalism itself is influenced by and participates in the African American tradition,¹¹⁷ so it also stands to reason that because Hillsong is a Pentecostal church, Josiah detects familiarity with the preaching style. Josiah believes that Hillsong pastors can "grab" the attention of people because they do great job of storytelling in their preaching. An effect of this is Josiah's desire to inhabit the "shoes" of the biblical characters. For example, he remarks, "Paul did this this way, so now I feel like I'm in the same situation Paul is in. Let me do what Paul did, when he got saved."¹¹⁸ While this may be a homiletical tool for Hillsong communicators, it also finds resonance in the African American tradition of preaching. Homiletician Frank A. Thomas argues for the

¹¹⁶ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

¹¹⁷ See Cecil Robeck Jr., "The Azusa Street Mission and Historic Black Churches: Two Worlds in Conflict in Los Angeles' African American Community," in *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture*, ed. Amos Yong and Estrelida Y. Alexander (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 21-42.

¹¹⁸ Josiah, interview, January 21, 2018.

importance of experiential preaching as one of six distinctive marks of African American preaching:

The Bible comes alive by means of an eyewitness style of picture painting and narration. The preacher stirs the five senses, and, as a result, the hearer does not just hear about John the Baptist in past biblical times; rather, John the Baptist is present in the room, seen, heard, touched, and felt by all...The African American sermon is experiential.¹¹⁹

While Josiah never verbally expressed the “five senses” when recalling sermons, he frequently communicated the experiential dimension, especially in sermons about the sacrifice of Christ. When Josiah thinks of Christ’s sacrifice, he feels the magnitude and emotional depth of the situation deep within him. Josiah’s experience of preaching is embodied, anamnetic, and consonant with Thomas’ claims.

Another area wherein Josiah’s liturgical priority of preaching resonates with the larger African American tradition is the importance of the Bible as the Word of God—words that take priority over human words and constructs. Josiah’s reading and memorization of the Bible began in the summer of 2015. He did not read the Bible in a particular order, and noted that he was in the middle of Genesis during the time of our March interviews.¹²⁰ Josiah summarizes his view of the Bible:

We are supposed to preach the Kingdom of God and I feel like the Bible is our rights, our constitution, what we have, what we possess, what God says who we are and what we are and who are we called to be. So I feel like the Bible is the life that I should live because Jesus is the Word. And I feel like I need to read it to imitate him, to know who I am, to not be distracted by the Enemy. So the Bible is

¹¹⁹ Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit*, 2-3. The other five marks of African American preaching are the centrality of the Bible, existential exegesis, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, suspense that leads to celebration, and the performative nature of the sermon.

¹²⁰ Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018.

literally everything to me. It's everything. And whether I understand it fully or not, I might not ever understand it fully, that's when Jesus you know, when it's my time to go face to face with him, and he's...He'll reveal it to me. I'm only supposed to know what's revealed to me.¹²¹

The Bible is thus a guidebook for right living, protection from the Enemy, it proclaims Josiah's identity in the Kingdom of God—both present and future—and it might not be understood completely until God reveals more to him. Josiah believes that the Bible is without error, noting that there are some things that are not “meant for us to understand.”¹²² Relatedly, Frank Thomas maintains that for African American Christians, the Bible's centrality must not be confused with biblical literalism; rather, it is “*the* inspired and dynamic source for understanding the world and *the* wise guide for life's decisions.”¹²³ Josiah reflects this contention. He comes to worship—whether at Hillsong Church or at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church—to be inspired by a biblically-oriented sermon and to apply the inspiration and biblical principles for practical, daily living.

One area in which Josiah's preaching emphasis diverges from African American homiletical literature is the notion of pastoral authority. Noting the caveat that there will always be exceptions to this, Cleophus LaRue contends that “typically, African American congregations view their preachers as special representatives of God, or, even more, as manifestations of the divine presence and thus worthy of great reverence and

¹²¹ Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018.

¹²² Josiah, interview, March 11, 2018.

¹²³ Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit*, 2. Emphasis original.

admiration.”¹²⁴ Josiah holds a high regard for preachers because of the inherent responsibility in communicating the gospel message, but he does not put them on a pedestal. Pastors are spiritual leaders, “kingdom citizens,” and friends from whom to receive advice.¹²⁵ For Josiah, they must be relatable, noting, “If I can’t relate to you, then how am I gonna talk to you?”¹²⁶ LaRue’s notion of preachers as “special representatives of God” is too far-reaching in terms of authority for Josiah’s understanding. However, Josiah respects the standing of preaching insofar as he has a zero-tolerance policy for pastors who function as false prophets.¹²⁷ He did not hesitate to say “yes” when I asked him if he has disagreed with a pastor’s teaching in the past. Josiah mentions that if a pastor preaches falsehoods, then that discredits him or her in Josiah’s eyes. Josiah would still listen to the pastor preach, but would not offer a verbal “amen” to the teaching.¹²⁸

On April 15, 2018, Josiah spoke with a Hillsong pastor for the first time, an encounter that reinforced the notion of pastor-as-friend. After the service, Josiah conversed with pastor Todd Crews about some of the areas in his life where he needs prayer. Josiah recounts the interaction:

¹²⁴ LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 12.

¹²⁵ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

¹²⁶ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

¹²⁷ An example of a “false prophet” is a pastor who does not teach sound doctrine, especially a pastor who “just say things to get a shout or...giving worldly advice in the church.” For Josiah, faithfulness to scripture is the litmus test for a true prophet versus a false one. Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

¹²⁸ It is here that Josiah seems to be critiquing the culture of churches—multicultural churches such as Hillsong and majority-Black churches such as Mt. Olivet—that say “amen” without thinking deeply about what was proclaimed and by whom. Josiah believes a verbal “amen” is a very powerful statement and should be used with greater intentionality. Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

I just spoke to him (Pastor Todd). He gave me his phone number. He said, “Text me anytime.” And he wanted to pray for me and I took off my hat. And he said, “Nah man, you don’t have to take off your hat. That’s religious stuff. God hears you whether you got your hat on, or not.” And I said, “He’s absolutely right. He’s absolutely right.”¹²⁹

As Josiah was telling this story to me, a smile appeared when he told me that Crews was “absolutely right.” This was an epiphanic moment for Josiah, wherein the cultural norm of removing a hat for prayer—a custom he was familiar with as a professional athlete—was challenged pastorally by Crews, who associates the act with “religious stuff.” In this sense, “religious” is understood to be negative because it is an action associated with cultural Christianity. To Josiah, Crews functioned as both an authentic friend by exchanging numbers and as a relatable spiritual authority who taught something new and practical to Josiah. While Pastor Crews was likely not a “manifestation of the divine presence” in Josiah’s opinion, he was an important spiritual guide, kingdom citizen, and friend nonetheless.

The Emotionality of Worship

Josiah cries frequently in the presence of God during worship services. This emotionality in worship is neither a category exclusive to Black Christians nor to Pentecostal denominations, but maintains strong connections to each. Religion scholar Anthony Pinn argues that the crux of Black religion is a “quest for complex subjectivity,”

¹²⁹ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

which can be understood as a “push or desire for ‘fullness’” or more “life meaning.”¹³⁰ Part and parcel of the quest for complex subjectivity is religious experience. Pinn contends that religious experience “entails a human response to a crisis of identity, and it is the crisis of identity that constitutes the dilemma of ultimacy and meaning.”¹³¹ As a religious historian, when Pinn speaks of crisis of identity, he is referring to the centuries of oppression in which African Americans were not treated as equals. In my conversations with Josiah, he did not explicitly speak of oppression nor did he speak of race. However, the way in which he cast his salvation story was indicative of this quest for complex subjectivity wherein his “identity crisis” was likened to the first twenty-two years of his life.

Josiah characterized his life history as a rescue mission of God bringing him from *there to here*, from a life of sin to a life of holiness, from death and many near-death experiences to the miraculous nature of life and second-chances. The tears Josiah cries during worship are not tears of sadness, but tears of fulfillment. They are tears of loving acknowledgment, of awe and wonder, of thankfulness that God has redeemed his life. Josiah is emotional because his life has meaning and purpose, and sometimes the weight of that purpose can seem too much for him. He reflects, “Basically God has put so much into me, and it scares me sometimes. Because it’s so much. It’s so much. And it really

¹³⁰ Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 173.

¹³¹ Pinn, 173.

scares me ‘cause I don’t want to disappoint Him.”¹³² Josiah’s emotionality in worship is inextricably tied to his quest for complex subjectivity. He wants to live a life of meaning and his tears are shed as he looks to God to fulfill that meaning.

Josiah’s tears and worship are also tied to the inherent emotionality in Pentecostal worship. Here again “Pentecostal” cannot stand alone as a modifier due to the symbiotic relationship between the Pentecostal, Baptist, and African American milieu of identities that Josiah inhabits. While Josiah eschews denominational labels, his worship at Hillsong Church and the charismatic nature of worship at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church places him within this milieu. Pentecostal theologian Peter Althouse avers, “the sermon and worship service function as ritual intended to encourage transformative and reconstructive experience among the congregants, particularly in terms of conversion and Spirit baptism, but in other charismatic experiences as well.”¹³³ Josiah’s tears fall under the umbrella term “other charismatic experiences,” since he did not speak of them in terms of conversion or Spirit baptism. According to Josiah, Hillsong creates an environment and atmosphere in which it is hard *not* to worship experientially:

When you [are] in that kind of surrounding, you can’t help but to worship at Hillsong. You can’t. You can’t. If you can’t worship at Hillsong, I think you’re coming for the wrong reasons ‘cause it puts you in a mood to worship. That’s like, going out to eat and you don’t eat anything. Like, “Man we’ve got this great restaurant, what are you not eating for?”¹³⁴

¹³² Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

¹³³ Peter Althouse, “Toward a Theological Understanding of the Pentecostal Appeal to Experience,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38, no. 4 (2001): 410.

¹³⁴ Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

The worship services at Hillsong Church encourage worshippers to encounter God in multiform ways. As Daniel Albrecht suggests of all Pentecostal and Charismatic liturgies, worship services “become a medium for personal, sincere, genuinely open expressions.”¹³⁵ Josiah often reiterates that he does not care “who’s watching” when he is crying in Hillsong worship services, attesting to the genuine openness that worship affords for him to express himself.

Worship is Mystical

Whether worshipping at Hillsong Church, Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, or in his own bedroom, Josiah is occasionally transported to a different visual plane. In these visions, he interacts with the Triune God, he sees friends, family members, and his fiancée. In the history of Christianity, this visual mystical orientation to worship is, as the author of Ecclesiastes writes, “nothing new under the sun.”¹³⁶ From John of Patmos’ visions of the heavenly throne room in the book of Revelation, to Teresa de Avila’s *Interior Castle*, to Todd Burpo’s 2010 book *Heaven is for Real*, visually oriented mystical worship experiences are woven into the fabric of Christian devotional practice. However, Josiah’s visions do not only emerge from contemplative spirituality, but are spurred on publicly and corporately as songs are being sung and as words are being preached from the pulpit. These visions are a component of the worship service in

¹³⁵ Daniel Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 199.

¹³⁶ Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NRSV).

addition to his in-home devotional experiences. Toward that end, Josiah's visual worship can be likened to an "ascent."

Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann argues that worship is an ascent wherein humanity sees "the ultimate reality of life," arriving "at a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world."¹³⁷ Inextricably tied to Schmemmann's notion of worship and ascent is its eucharistic orientation, a perspective that would not be shared by Josiah. Moreover, Schmemmann's understanding of ascent is communal in its understanding. Josiah's visual ascent, however, has a deeply personal quality to it, wherein God speaks words of comfort and assurance to him. Visual moments such as these assist Josiah in figuring out the nature of his salvation. Rather than seeing "deeply into the reality of the world," Josiah's ascent helps him see, hear, and feel the love and forgiveness of God. At the same time, Josiah's ascent gives him a sense of safety from the mounting career uncertainty in his quotidian life. His visual worship allows him to "dwell" in the safety of the "secret place," as Psalm 91 attests.

Josiah is also visually oriented in areas that are not related to detailed visions of heaven. When Hillsong pastor Darnell preached about having "perspective," Josiah felt a closeness with Jesus in which he visualized Jesus declaring his love for the world while upon the cross. When I asked Josiah "what was God like in that moment" of hearing the sermon, he replied,

¹³⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 27.

Love. Complete love. Complete love that He gave His only son for each and every one, Everybody. I'm talkin' 'bout...Jesus' problem was never with sinners. It was with religious people. People that try to put themselves above the law, or create the law, or add to the law, or subtract from the law. It was never with individuals that needed a savior. 'Cause we all need him. But that very moment, you could just picture Christ on the cross and that he's just sayin', "You know what? I love them. I'm gonna do this for them." Oh my goodness.¹³⁸

The biblical moment of Christ on the cross was visually and verbally portrayed in Josiah's mind. The story "came to life" in Josiah's imagination, which Melva Costen argues is a key component in the African American reception of preaching.¹³⁹ She argues that the descriptive imagery worshippers envisage occurs "so that hope is portrayed in the bleakest of circumstances."¹⁴⁰ Josiah's visions in worship indeed "come to life," thereby deepening his personal relationship with Jesus and calming his anxieties.¹⁴¹

The Gap, the Rhizome, in/and Josiah's Liturgical Theology

Even though Josiah has been attending Hillsong Church for less than one year, he is one of their many liturgical theologians, carrying within him intersectional identities that mold and shape his experience and interpretation of worship. While he has not gone through eight years of liturgical inculturation and formation as has Phoebe, his interstitial liturgical theology both accords with and detracts from Hillsong's secondary liturgical

¹³⁸ Josiah, interview, February 25, 2018.

¹³⁹ Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 92.

¹⁴⁰ Costen, 92.

¹⁴¹ I do not believe that Josiah would describe his present circumstances as "bleak." He would likely call his past experiences bleak—a bleakness that God delivered him from through his conversion, baptism, and continued spiritual growth.

theology in key ways. On a general level, Josiah's liturgical theology is in alignment with Hillsong's insofar as worship is a felt reality, deeply personal and communal, and pragmatic. Regarding specific similarities, the first is Josiah's use of scripture to justify his experience of worship. While Hillsong frequently uses the woman with the jar of perfume anointing the feet of Jesus as an act of "extravagant worship," Josiah uplifts King David's freedom of expression in worship. David's worship is extravagant and a role model to Josiah because he did not care what others thought of him as he devoted himself freely to God.

Another similarity is the understood "movement" of the worship service, namely that of "praise" to "worship." While Josiah does not cite the scriptural precedent of Psalm 100, he articulates that "praise and thank you," which is more upbeat, then leads to "worship."¹⁴² Josiah's visually oriented worship experiences also find resonance with the Hillsong literature. As discussed in Chapter Two, both Brian and Bobbie Houston spoke of divine visions as a result of personal devotion. A final similarity is the implicit connection between Josiah's understanding of God's objectivity with Hillsong's notion that God does not *need* our worship. Josiah believes that worship is for us to express our gratitude and thankfulness to God, a *eucharistia* that God does not *need*, but delights in.

The "gap" between Josiah's liturgical theology and Hillsong's is more pronounced. The liturgical-theological weight Josiah gives to preaching is proportionally unmatched in Hillsong's explicit secondary theology. As discussed in the Chapter Two,

¹⁴² Josiah, interview, February 4, 2018.

while Hillsong does not equate worship with music intentionally, the various authors typically use music and corporate songs as exemplars of worship. Discussions of preaching are limited, but this is unsurprising given Hillsong's main "export" as a global brand is congregational song. Josiah's interview responses confine worship to the act of preaching, almost as if Hillsong's music did not matter to him. I can corroborate this to a certain extent. During my time of fieldwork at Hillsong Church, they promoted their upcoming musical album "There is More" on a weekly basis, weeks during which Josiah attended. One week after they released the album, I asked Josiah if he had listened to it. Interestingly, he had not heard of the album whatsoever. Perhaps this is an indictment of Hillsong's non-scripturally aligned marketing tactics, or, more innocently, an indication of ignoring announcement communications. Either way, it may also confirm his unspoken contention that music is secondary.

While Hillsong's secondary theology is not explicit about the centrality of preaching, there is implicit support within the order of service and the authorship of book publications. Hillsong may have gained notoriety for their musical excellence across the globe, but it is the act of preaching that utilizes the largest segment of time in the worship service—usually forty-five minutes or longer. Musical worship is usually allotted between twenty-five to thirty-five minutes. Another area that supports Hillsong's emphasis on preaching is the fact that lead pastors—not worship leaders, who may also be credentialed as pastors—are the ones writing most of the published books. There are notable exceptions such as Darlene Zschech and Amanda Fergusson, but the vast majority of the books are written by Brian Houston, Bobbie Houston, and, related to

Hillsong New York City, Carl Lentz. Although Hillsong's explicit and implicit liturgical theology of preaching's importance may not be in alignment, Josiah is unequivocal: worship is preaching.

Another area of significant contrast between Hillsong's secondary theology and Josiah's is the connection between worship and ethics. Josiah sees the connection, but his understanding of ethics is tied to holy living and evangelism. Josiah wants worship to enhance his relationship with God so that he may be empowered to live a life of purpose and fulfillment. This life of purpose in God would then be used as an evangelistic tool to spread the good news of Christ's saving love, telling and showing others just how far God has brought him from "there" to "here." While Hillsong also highlights the importance of worship as a lifestyle—which has implications for evangelism—they also communicate worship's connection to mission and justice initiatives. This link to mission was not a concern for Josiah during our conversations.

As with Phoebe, my conversations with Josiah also revealed the rhizomatic nature of worship at Hillsong Church. Josiah comes to Hillsong Church in order to "lock in" on his relationship with God, but sometimes he "overthinks" and his mind wanders. As a man engaged to be married, many of the sermons caused him to think about his fiancée and how he could be a good and faithful husband to her. During worship, Josiah sometimes sees famous basketball players, which momentarily distracts him. There is also the variable of sermons at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church that are juxtaposed with Hillsong's sermons, even though the sermons from the two churches are often related. In addition to these intricacies and variables that affect Josiah's hermeneutical task in the

interstitial theology, Josiah is African American, a Queens-born New Yorker, a basketball player, and a youth ministry worker, among many other particularities.

Josiah's interstitial liturgical theology is borne from these rhizomatic identities and experiences within the worship service. To Josiah, worship is preaching because of its grounding in scripture and pragmatic implications for quotidian life. His implicit claim of "worship as tears" brings to mind worship's strong connection to the emotions—emotions related to life being hard on its own or related to whether or not the "Enemy" amplifies life's difficulties. Finally, worship is mystical insofar as it transports Josiah to experience elaborate visions and to interact with the Triune God dialogically. Some of Josiah's interstitial theology is rooted in the African American tradition of worship; some of it is related to practices at Hillsong Church; some of it is situated in the history of Christianity as it relates to popular piety. His worship is Pentecostal. Moreover, Pentecostalism itself demonstrates hybridity and retains a certain indebtedness to the African American tradition. It is Evangelical. It is Baptist. It is nondenominational. It inhabits the spaces between the aforementioned categories and beyond them as well. Josiah's contributions to liturgical theology are unique and worthwhile to the study of liturgy, as well as to Hillsong Church.

CHAPTER FIVE: A CASE FOR LITURGICAL BIOGRAPHY

In his groundbreaking book *Biography as Theology*, James McClendon Jr. pithily writes, “the point of this book is to show *one way* in which theologians may do better work.”¹ McClendon did not believe that introducing the new method of biography as theology would solve the various problems among academicians in theology. However, he believed it would provide a fruitful avenue for further exploration. By utilizing biographies as sources for theological reflection, McClendon sought to communicate the experiences of “compelling” people such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Dag Hammarskjöld by using various themes within their life histories as signposts for further theological development.² While McClendon’s disciplinary priorities and methodologies differ from my own, our intentions coalesce insofar as our projects offer “one way” in which theologians may engage in “better work.” Similar to McClendon, I do not view liturgical biography as *the* solution to the shortcomings of liturgical theology. Rather, it is one avenue in which liturgical theologians may do “better work” by taking seriously the claims of ordinary worshippers not only as *sources* of liturgical-theological reflection, but also as liturgical theology itself. This final chapter reviews the claims made thus far in the dissertation and concludes by offering reflections on liturgical biography’s viability for

¹ James William McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 89 (emphasis mine).

² McClendon, 89-91.

liturgical-theological methodology, as well as discussing its import as it relates to ecumenically-minded liturgical theologians making normative claims about worship.³

A guiding claim of this dissertation has been that worship is wild! Whether one is kneeling for silent prayer inside of a cavernous, neo-Gothic inspired edifice, or jumping up and down to rhythmic electronic dance music beats coupled with feel-good Christian lyrics in a storefront church, the act of worship itself is chaos. This claim alone makes it seem as though Aidan Kavanagh's bold contention that worship leads us to the "edge of chaos" is not daring enough.⁴ Worship is wild because at any given moment in a worship service, there is a nexus of negotiations taking place, all of which shape the interpretations and articulations of the primary theological activity. In Chapter One, I introduced Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome as a pertinent metaphor for exemplifying these negotiations. A rhizome is characterized by its asymmetrical orientation, its chaotic shoots, multiple entryways, junctures, and its egalitarian proclivities. Relatedly, a worshipper's bricolage of identities, demographics, biological intricacies, psychosocial complexities, embedded theologies, and a variety of other factors intertwine and interact with the multiform negotiations taking place in an act of worship. An act of worship is never a simple one, but is embedded within and expressed through a rhizomatic nexus of negotiations.

³ By "ecumenically-minded" liturgical theologians, I am referring to individual scholars who seek to make ecumenically wide-reaching normative claims in their liturgical theologies. Lutheran liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop is an obvious example of this, who claims that liturgy—ecumenically conceived—revolves around the "primary matters" or the "things" of bath, table, prayer, word. See Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 224.

⁴ Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984), 73.

An undergirding assumption to this rhizomatic complexity is that a gulf exists between the theological prescriptivism inherent in many liturgical theologies and the embodied and articulated liturgical theologies of ordinary worshippers. In other words, what scholars say “happens” in worship or what scholars argue worship “means” does not always align with the very worshippers on behalf of whom they seek to speak. Liturgical theologians in the line of Schmemmann-Kavanagh-Fagerberg-Lathrop introduced and developed the category of “primary theology,” expressing the notion that liturgical theology in its purest form is embodied. They distinguish primary from secondary theology, which is more characteristically academic in nature. Yet, as discussed earlier, many of these liturgical theologians use liturgical subjects as *sources for secondary theological reflection*—whether empirical studies with physical bodies and worshipping communities or through a hypothetical muse such as Kavanagh’s “Mrs. Murphy.” While this shift in liturgical theology is certainly representative of the anthropological turn, I have argued that this “turn” has not traversed quite enough. What would liturgical theology look like if it were to take seriously the articulated claims of ordinary worshippers—with all of their past and present complexity—as liturgical theology itself?

To answer this, I have named the interstice between primary theological activity and secondary theology as “interstitial liturgical theology,” an interstice in which rhizomatic complexity can be expressed. Interstitial liturgical theology is not a neatly defined category, but more of a “catch-all” between primary and secondary theology. In this project, I have chosen the method of liturgical biography as a pertinent way to

capture vignettes of this interstitial liturgical theology. Liturgical biography employs a longitudinal active interviewing method to develop rapport with an ordinary worshipper, gain an understanding of his or her life history, and hear his or her liturgical-theological claims based on the guiding questions of the interviewer. Liturgical biography recognizes the complexity in these interviewing interactions, understanding that the presence of the researcher, the questions asked (and the order and manner in which they are asked), and a multitude of other factors shape the final presentation of an interstitial liturgical theology. This final product is more interested in description as the content of liturgical theology than normative prescription.

Although the method of liturgical biography may be employed with any church or denominational context, I chose to use Hillsong Church in New York City as a case study because of my personal research interests and to add another witness to Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic liturgical theology. Neither Hillsong nor its previous denomination—the Australian Christian Churches—have an “official” book of worship, therefore Chapter Two provided an avenue for a synthetic rendering of that secondary liturgical theology through Hillsong’s primary sources. Therein, I argued that Hillsong’s secondary liturgical theology centered upon the reciprocal relationship between worship and scripture, the primacy and power of musical worship, and the notion that God does not “need” humanity’s worship because worship is *about* God, but *for* humanity.

The theoretical foundations in Chapter One coupled with the historical and liturgical-theological interpretation of Hillsong Church in Chapter Two paved the way for the liturgical biographies in Chapters Three and Four. Phoebe and Josiah are very

different individuals in terms of demographics, years worshipping at Hillsong Church, ecclesial backgrounds, and a variety of other cultural, biological, and psychosocial factors. It is therefore no surprise that their liturgical theologies not only differed from each other, but also from Hillsong's secondary theology. While there were obvious areas of overlap between their interstitial theologies and Hillsong's secondary theology, their liturgical biographies also demonstrate the "gap" between primary and secondary theology. At the same time, their interstitial liturgical theologies are unique contributions to the study of liturgical theology, but also more specifically to Hillsong's liturgical theology.

Phoebe's liturgical theology emphasized worship as a relationship, worship as a mothering act, and worship as something that enacts the priesthood of all believers. The words "worship" and "music" were basically synonymous throughout our interviews. On the other hand, Josiah's liturgical theology spoke of worship and preaching synonymously, he emphasized the mystical nature of worship, and he communicated the emotionality of worship as understood through tears. Phoebe and Josiah's biographies also demonstrated the rhizomatic nature of worship. These primary theologians bring with them different life histories, liturgical formation[s], and other biological, psychosocial, and sociocultural backgrounds. At any given point in the worship service, their bodies were processing, interpreting, organizing, distilling a variety of factors both related and unrelated to the current moment. Whether it was Josiah's tendency to overthink the weight of life's circumstances or Phoebe's predilection for detecting off-pitch vocalists, worship is a wild nexus of negotiations. Despite the moments of seeming

chaos, their worship was not without moments of emerging signification. Moreover, these diverse liturgical theologies emerged from the same worshipping community—and even the same worship service at Hillsong Church. What, then, is the role of normativity in liturgical theology? Moreover, should normativity even be a guiding goal?

The method of liturgical biography takes the anthropological turn to the extreme by proposing liturgical theology as a descriptive act—though not devoid of analytical work—focused on the observations of ordinary worshippers. Liturgical biography exposes the liturgical-theological pitfalls in overprescribing what worship means or does and instead testifies to what worship means and does for one worshipper. Liturgical biography communicates an interstitial liturgical theology, which is liturgical theology proper, and gives witness to this theology as one tongue in a chorus of many. It is a viable method in liturgical theology because of the complexity and nuance it brings in disrupting secondary theology's proclivity for making catch-all normativity statements. In addition to being applicable across the denominational spectrum, liturgical biography resonates thematically with the Pentecostal theological emphases of “testimony” and “many tongues,” while also making space for other peripheral voices within the Evangelical umbrella. Though liturgical biography may prove viable for liturgical theology, it remains to be known if liturgical biography would be a helpful tool to ecumenically-minded liturgical theologians seeking to make normative claims.

Liturgical Biography and Ecumenically-Minded Liturgical Theology

The final chapter of Maxwell Johnson’s book *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in Ecumenical Conversation* asks the question, “what shall we do now,” in relation to the future of ecumenism. He responds,

The good news is that there is no turning back. The ecumenical spirit (Spirit?) unleashed by the World Council of Churches, the Second Vatican Council, and the modern liturgical reforms will not easily be silenced. . . . One might claim, in fact, that ecumenism is no longer the exception but the rule, that it has actually and become simply a part of the way most contemporary Christians live in the world and in our churches today.⁵

Ecumenism is indeed a reality and even present—though unacknowledged—in the secondary liturgical theology of Hillsong Church. For example, although it may be seemingly trivial, Hillsong songwriters are engaging in a *ressourcement* of traditional hymn texts and they are borrowing musical forms from strophic Evangelical hymns.⁶ Even the casual reference to Palm Sunday at Hillsong Church in New York City—or any mention of the liturgical year that is not Christmas or Easter—is a testament to this ecumenical reality. Moreover, Hillsong’s intentional plan to distribute its music globally further substantiates their ecumenical commitment. At the same time, however, my conversations with Hillsong’s primary theologians, Phoebe and Josiah, reveal that ecumenism is less of a priority.

Phoebe and Josiah’s liturgical biographies speak of ecumenism as a “heart” issue rather than something to act upon tangibly. While neither use any iteration of the word

⁵ Maxwell Johnson, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in Ecumenical Conversation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2015), 253-254.

⁶ See Chapter Two’s discussion of this in the subsection “Worship Music and Doctrine.”

“ecumenical,” they acknowledge an ecumenical reality insofar as they bring an awareness of multiple denominational traditions coexisting in a divided state. Yet, rather than discussing approaches to unity, they are more content to stay in their lane and just be “kingdom citizens,” putting faith in Jesus first.⁷ Phoebe feels at home in nondenominational churches that she describes as “charismatic, pentecostal, and evangelical” and does not pay much attention to other expressions of Protestantism. Josiah views denominations as “religious” human constructions—portrayed negatively—that can be stumbling blocks to unbelievers:

That’s the part that unbelievers don’t understand because they think that [a denomination is] a religion, right? And a lot of people [and denominations] have monopolized [on this]... There should be no Pentecostal. There should be no Methodist, no Seventh Day... God knows nothing about that. That’s man-created. We are all one body in Christ. Whether you like it or not. It shouldn’t be, “Oh you go to Baptist church, okay. Oh yeah, I go to a Pentecostal church.” It shouldn’t be like that. It should be preachin’ the kingdom of God and that’s it.⁸

Despite the “man-created” institutions, Josiah believes that heaven will be replete with people across the denominational spectrum. For Josiah, the denomination does not matter; what is of central concern is preaching the kingdom of God. Both Phoebe and Josiah acknowledge the existence of other traditions and denominations, but an active coming-together in terms of liturgical-theological unity is not on their radar. To them, what matters is an authentic relationship of the heart with Jesus. Whenever notions of “religion” and “ritual” creep in, that is when they voiced concern.

⁷ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

⁸ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

Both Phoebe and Josiah are highly critical of Catholicism as a “religion” filled with “rituals” as opposed to an authentic relationship with Christ. Phoebe understands herself to be a “harsh critic” of Catholicism because of her assumption that adults leave the church before they turn 30 and do not return until their children need to go through “ritualistic milestones of life.”⁹ Josiah too is suspicious of Catholicism insofar as they “believe in the saints,” which is “different” in his opinion.¹⁰ Moreover, Josiah expressed excitement about Hillsong planting a new church in Milan because of its proximity to Rome, which might help Roman Catholic “people [who] still believe in those rituals and stuff like that.”¹¹ Josiah and Phoebe do not focus singularly on Catholicism as being “ritualistic,” but also allude to worshippers who are inauthentic at Hillsong Church or Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. Inauthenticity is inextricably tied to negative notions of “religion” and “ritual,” which they view as hindering “true” Christianity’s proselytic impulse.¹² For Phoebe and Josiah, embodied ecumenism is not a vital part of Christianity; what matters is the ecumenicity of one’s heart.

Given Hillsong’s cursory nod to ecumenism and Phoebe and Josiah’s spiritualized indifference, what are the implications of this for liturgical theologians with an ecumenical orientation? For scholars with ecumenical sensibilities interested in making

⁹ Phoebe, interview, April 16, 2018.

¹⁰ Josiah, interview, April 15, 2018.

¹¹ Josiah, interview, February 23, 2018.

¹² Here I employed “true” as a synonym to “authentic,” since the two go hand-in-hand with both Phoebe and Josiah’s perspectives, as well as that of Hillsong Church.

normative claims about worship, what value is there to using the biographies of people who have no regard for ecumenism or “normative” claims? Is the best path forward to ignore these liturgical theologies?¹³ Or if we are to engage them, do we make liturgical-theological claims that put dis-orthodox¹⁴ liturgical theologies on the same playing field as ones we have deemed “orthodox?” Toward that end, would everything be relative to the point of meaninglessness? What may be obvious is that my answer to these questions is a resounding “no.” It is my contention that the method of liturgical biography is helpful for the discipline of liturgical theology insofar as it destabilizes, it complexifies, and it testifies.

Following in the wake of Vatican II, ecumenically sensitive liturgical theologies and liturgical revisions have naturally tended toward a eucharistic orientation. At the risk of oversimplification, Mainline Protestant denominations produced revisions inspired by a shared ecumenical vision of a “shape” that [re]prioritized the balance of Word and Table in the liturgical assembly.¹⁵ As Geoffrey Wainwright has noted, Protestants gave more liturgical-theological weight to the celebration of the eucharist while Roman Catholics—who were already eucharistic in orientation—understood the homily to be

¹³ Paul Bradshaw argued twenty years ago along similar lines that this was the *modus operandi* of liturgical theology. Bradshaw’s article refers to the “discontinuities in practice introduced at the time of the Reformation and afterwards in churches of the Protestant traditions” as something either ignored or denigrated by liturgical theologians. See Paul Bradshaw, “Difficulties in Doing Liturgical Theology,” *Pacifica* 11 (1998): 185.

¹⁴ The Latin prefix “dis” is more fitting for my argument, since “dis” can be rendered as “apart” or “away.” Dis-orthodoxy is therefore translated as “apart or away from right (*ortha*) praise (*doxa*).” “Unorthodox” implies “not” orthodox, which is not consistent with Phoebe and Josiah’s claims.

¹⁵ “Shape” is an allusion to Gregory Dix’s influential book, *The Shape of the Liturgy*. See Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: A&C Black, 1945).

more integral to the liturgy itself.¹⁶ While there are many liturgical, theological, and social differences still in need of reconciliation, it must be acknowledged that strides have been made at greater unity. At the same time, there are many Protestants for whom the eucharist does not figure into their normative paradigm for liturgical celebrations and liturgical theologies. Many Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Charismatics fit that description.¹⁷ By offering alternative liturgical-theological accounts such as these, liturgical biography as a method in liturgical theology offers what I believe to be a helpful destabilizing force concerning “normative” claims, “deep structures” to the liturgy, or conformist “shapes,” by appealing for a robust liturgical-theological ecumenism within and beyond Mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.

Liturgical biography destabilizes liturgical theology by complexifying it. For example, Gordon Lathrop’s argument that an “ecumenical” pattern or *ordo* centers upon the primary symbols of word, bath, and table does not match the liturgical theologies of Josiah or Phoebe.¹⁸ Neither Josiah nor Phoebe have a bath-centric or a table-centric liturgical theology, even though they understand both symbols to be important. Regarding communion, Josiah believes it to be a “sacred” means of grace, remarking,

¹⁶ Geoffrey Wainwright, “Ecumenical Convergences,” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 742.

¹⁷ While trained Pentecostal theologians such as Simon Chan and Christopher Green are trying to rectify this by reclaiming the centrality of the eucharist, their theological prescriptions do not align with popular practice. See Chapter One for a fuller discussion of Chan and Green’s perspectives.

¹⁸ Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 59.

“You can appreciate grace when you know that you was on your way to hell.”¹⁹ As Phoebe discussed in Chapter Three, she leads holy communion as a home family ritual, which indicates its importance. Yet, in Josiah and Phoebe’s liturgical-theological accounts, communion and baptism were rarely discussed; instead, “worship” as a term was equated with preaching and music, respectively. Importantly, their liturgical biographies offer “minority reports” that might, in fact, not be so minority. The thematic vignettes I have offered in Chapters Three and Four have challenged claims understood as normative among liturgical theologians—theologians both confessionally and ecumenically inclined.²⁰

Liturgical biography also complexifies the “meaning” often attached to liturgical-theological claims by conceiving of liturgy as a rhizomatic act. While music may be a central facilitator of God’s presence in Phoebe’s understanding, and while it may also corroborate Hillsong’s secondary theological claims of music’s importance, the embodied performance of the music occasionally triggers psychosocial pain for her. As mentioned in Chapter Three, one of Phoebe’s low points revolves around her not being in a creative department leadership role anymore. Thus, music can simultaneously be a vessel for the glorification of God and the cause of personal pain. In other words, the secondary theologically prescribed role of music does not always match Phoebe’s reception of it. Likewise, Josiah’s high regard for preaching and learning the Word of God far outweighs

¹⁹ Josiah, interview, April 8, 2018.

²⁰ Here I am referring to Josiah and Phoebe’s relegation of the eucharist to other acts of worship, such as preaching and music. Also of note is Phoebe’s lack of regard for ordination as it relates to eucharistic presidential authority.

the importance he attaches to worship songs. Hillsong’s main “export” and its most discussed liturgical-theological topic—worship music—is not as *meaning-full* to Josiah as compared with his liturgical-theological emphases. When real bodies, life experiences, testimonies, and other rhizomatic acts are considered, this complexifies the task of *meaning*. Liturgical biography as a method helps to capture this complexity.

Liturgical biography destabilizes and complexifies not in effort to be a thorn in the side of the liturgical-theological task, but to imbue honesty within the enterprise of theological writing.²¹ Liturgical-theological writing could benefit from a *descriptive* turn in order to capture the insights of embodied Mrs. Murphys. Further, in the midst of the beauty and order of liturgy, it must also be acknowledged that liturgy is wild, chaotic, messy, and sometimes does not make sense. This rhizomatic complexity that I have introduced as a theoretical image for liturgical biography also resonates with what theologians Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan Shaw call “intersectional theology.”²² As I have done for liturgical theology, they argue for biography as a pathway for capturing the complexity in practical theological methodology:

The value of narrative as intersectional theology is that it opens the space for us to see, examine, and value the complexities, intricacies, contradictions, and individuality of each person’s experiences in a way that more linear and systematic theologies do not. Rather than subordinating distinctions or outliers in favor of majority or dominant group expressions, intersectional theology makes room for the specific, the idiosyncratic, the overlooked and marginalized that may be speaking in God’s still, small voice. By attending to differences and commonalities across all stories, intersectional theology disrupts the dominance of

²¹ Ok, perhaps a small thorn, then.

²² See Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2018).

the theologies of the mythical norm and makes visible the operations of power at the center of traditional theologies.²³

It is the “specific,” the “idiosyncratic,” the “overlooked,” and the “marginalized” liturgical theologies that my project has attended to via the method of liturgical biography. Phoebe and Josiah’s voices were magnified in order that their liturgical theologies would not be conveniently overlooked or ignored. Liturgical biography as a method honors the complexity of these primary liturgical theologians and does not seek to “correct” or to “tradition,” but to listen.

Liturgical biography as a method for ecumenically-minded liturgical theology *destabilizes* notions of normativity and *complexifies* liturgical-theological claims in order that it may *testify* to liturgical-theological claims as one voice—one tongue—in a chorus of many. Put simply, testimony requires listening to the stories of others. More importantly, it requires listening with intention. Theologian Mark Cartledge employs the work of Australian philosopher C. A. J. Coady when he suggests that testimonies “naturally begin with an inevitable commitment to some degree of reliability.”²⁴ Liturgical biography as a method considers the testimonies—which are the liturgical-theological reflections of ordinary worshippers—with “some degree of reliability,” recognizing that *lex orandi* informs *lex credendi* as *lex credendi* informs *lex orandi*.

To this point, I have spoken of liturgical biography’s implications for liturgical theology in theoretical terms, but how would it take shape *practically*, especially to

²³ Kim and Shaw, *Intersectional Theology*, 19-20.

²⁴ Mark Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2003), 57.

secondary liturgical theologians with ecumenical sensibilities? The short answer is that I am not completely sure, but please allow me to *testify* personally. What I have learned from this methodology is that a greater awareness of the complex, rhizomatic, and at times dis-orthodox nature of worship makes constructing liturgical theology much more difficult. Liturgical scholars, for example, love to speak of the *formative* role of “the liturgy,” but parishioners—primary theologians—who have been well-formed by the liturgy are increasingly few and far between. We are the ones who have been well-formed, which is why we enjoy writing about, talking about, and researching the formative dimension of worship! But that is not the case universally. The reality on the ground among our primary theologians is quite different, but this does not negate the academic work of liturgical scholars seeking to make normative or prescriptive claims. However, it *should* inject a sense of humility into the task of liturgical-theological writing and “prescribing.” On a very basic level, liturgical biography teaches secondary liturgical theologians that their notions of “normativity” are at best tentative, even within their own denomination or confession, much less ecumenically speaking.

As alluded to before, liturgical biography also has a strong listening component to it. For theologians attempting to construct “normative” liturgical theologies with ecumenical concerns, there is immense value to deep listening across the ever-widening ecumenical spectrum. Listening within a denomination or a confession is also valuable, because this may then inform and be determinative of what claims confessional theologians can bring to the ecumenical table. Deeply listening to Phoebe and Josiah week after week has taught me that worship in Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Charismatic

communities is far more communal than I have imagined. Yet, most liturgical-theological accounts and popular musings about the nature of Pentecostal worship, especially in the “contemporary worship” vein speak negatively of its overemphasis on individuality. Phoebe and Josiah’s liturgical theologies challenged my own preformed biases, as well as the biases within my field. Liturgical biography as a deep-listening method is to thank for this.

If taken to the extreme and widened to the denominational level—where each denomination or tradition is a liturgical-theological testimony—liturgical biography could prompt academic liturgical theologians and denominations to rethink paths of ecumenical liturgical-theological convergence. Rather than producing liturgical-theological documents full of fine-tuned vagueness, what if an “ecumenical approach” to liturgical theology were to cherish the notion of liturgical-theological difference as a point of convergence? Or, perhaps the convergence is not related to doctrine or practice, but to a shared experience.²⁵ Would these suggestions undo the progress of the Ecumenical Movement or envisage a new path forward toward greater unity? While indeed an interesting thought experiment, this is an area in need of further development and outside the scope of the present project.

Liturgical biography also carries with it a variety of weaknesses. First, one could argue that destabilizing normativity leads to liturgical-theological relativism. While I

²⁵ This idea is not my own, but was inspired by liturgical theologian Kim Belcher’s forthcoming book project related to an ecumenical and Catholic phenomenology of the eucharist. Kimberly Hope Belcher, email message to author, November 20, 2018.

agree that this could happen in theory, it would only lead to relativism if every secondary liturgical theologian abandoned normativity in favor of the descriptive, liturgical-biographical method. This is precisely why I am not recommending liturgical biography as *the* method for liturgical theology, but one of many. Relatedly, it can be argued that liturgical biography as I have employed it is not *descriptive enough*. As demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, liturgical biography still privileges the work of the secondary liturgical theologian as the principal voice. Though I was “behind the scenes” in my presentation of Phoebe and Josiah, I thematically coded their liturgical-theological claims,²⁶ organized these claims with familiar nomenclature both to myself and the academic liturgical-theological community, and situated them within the context of a chapter with an argument that I constructed. Liturgical biography is far from a completely descriptive enterprise. Finally, I suspect that if liturgical biography were to be overly employed as a methodology, the novelty of it would quickly wear off. Liturgical biography runs the risk of being fashionable for a period of time. At the same time, just as Hillsong writes praise choruses with “short shelf life” intentionality, perhaps liturgical biography is a short shelf life method that the discipline of liturgical theology needs in this contextual moment.

At best, and most consistent with the work of this project, liturgical biography reveals ecumenically-minded liturgical theology to be an enterprise of testimony, listening with intention to voices that have long been on the periphery: ordinary

²⁶ With the help of twenty volunteers who I personally selected. See the Introduction for an explanation of the parameters and rationale.

worshippers in the pews, or I suppose, stackable chairs, movie theater seats, or on a boat.²⁷ In his discussion about incorporating feminist liturgical theology into the ecumenical fold, United Methodist liturgical theologian Ron Anderson argues that the “burden of proof” falls on the ecumenical liturgical movement. He writes,

If we are to continue to make normative and constitutive claims about particular liturgical and sacramental practices, we must demonstrate how these practices contribute to the death-defying, life-giving, emancipating, egalitarian vision and practice of the church in and for the world... We can continue to make normative and constitutive claims about liturgical and sacramental practices, but such claims must be carefully qualified by the ongoing practice of the churches.²⁸

Although “the ongoing practice of the churches” as expressed within the liturgical theologies of Phoebe and Josiah at Hillsong Church may be troubling to some, the method of liturgical biography elevates their voices as testimonies within the chorus of other ecumenical voices. Indeed, the burden of proof is on secondary liturgical theologians to listen with intention to these liturgical biographies, lest attempts at theologizing become a competition of florid liturgical-theological prosody detached from the lived reality of ordinary worshippers.

Josiah and Phoebe are ordinary worshippers and they are primary liturgical theologians at Hillsong Church. They are embodied “Mrs. Murphys” with real backgrounds, real jobs, and real liturgical-theological claims that I have argued must be attended to by secondary liturgical theologians. Phoebe and Josiah’s liturgical

²⁷ See “Boat Church,” The United Methodist Church, September 6, 2007, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/boat-church1>.

²⁸ E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 57-58.

biographies attest to the wild nature of worship and the heavily contextual basis of their experiences. Moreover, their interstitial liturgical theologies provide testimonies and counter-testimonies to the assumed normativity at Hillsong Church, in Pentecostal Evangelical, and Charismatic liturgical-theological discourse, as well as that of liturgical theology across the ecumenical spectrum.

Ultimately, it is my hope that liturgical theology as a discipline would do “better work” by becoming more *real*, more *authentic*, and more *attentive* to the voices of ordinary worshippers. Although this thought may be attributed to my brief liturgical formation at Hillsong Church, I believe that the discipline of liturgical theology could benefit from more *authenticity* corroborated by the *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* of ordinary worshippers. Perhaps Phoebe or Josiah will one day pick up a work of secondary liturgical theology, read a few chapters, and think, “this kind of sounds like me.” That, indeed, is my hope as well.

APPENDIX

Sample Interview Questions

Hillsong New York City Oral Interviews

Preface:

These questions are organized by theme, but each interview will be conducted with a sampling from two or three thematic categories, in addition to the weekly core questions as outlined below. Interviews will be conducted inductively, so if the participant desires to dwell upon a particular theme at length, the interview will adjust accordingly. These questions are not exhaustive, but neither is it likely that this number of questions will be answered in a ten-week period. The data between the two participants will not be used for generalizable comparative purposes, so the participants will likely answer questions according to their personal predilections and liturgical-theological proclivities.

Introduction Questions – First Interview

How old are you?

What is your hometown and/or where did you grow up?

How do you describe your race? Your ethnic background? Your gender identity? Your sexual orientation (if comfortable sharing)?

What do you do for work and/or school?

How long have you been a Christian?

-Talk about your faith journey, including but not limited to:

-Church/Denominational religious history

-Worship “styles” and traditions of comfort

-History of church participation and/or commitment

-Conversion story (or stories)

Why do you attend Hillsong Church?

What drew you to this community in the first place?

What keeps you coming back?

Why do you attend the ___ service as opposed to the others?

Describe the people who attend Hillsong Church in NYC.

Do the people stick around or is it a transient congregation?

How are you connected to the Hillsong community outside of Sunday services?

Weekly Core Questions:

How did you experience God today, if at all? Describe that.

-What was God like?

What was the high point of the service? The low point?
 What else was on your mind during the service?
 Were there any distractions? If so, what were they?
 Did God say or reveal anything to you today? If so, what?
 What did you learn about God? About yourself?
 -When did this learning/insight occur?

Questions Organized by Theme:

*Note: The categorical themes listed below will not be revealed to the interviewee because they are written in a vernacular more typical in the field of liturgical studies.

Liturgical Space

What kind of feelings (if any) are within you when you first enter Hillsong's church entrance?
 Does that feeling change at all when you enter the sanctuary/auditorium/theater? If so, in what ways?
 How do you select your seat? What decisions go into that process?
 What catches your eye about the worship space?
 Is there an area that's more sacred than another?
 What do you make of the level of light in the space?
 What role does it play in worship?
 What would you call the focal point or center of the space? Why?
 Do you feel comfortable in this worship space?
 -Are there moments when you are more comfortable than other moments?

Liturgical Music

What matters more to you – the music or the lyrics?
 ---or are they hard to separate?
 What was your favorite song from today's worship set? Why is that the case?
 What lyrics resonated with you the most? Why?
 —and/or—what part of the song resonated with you the most? Why?
 Who is your favorite worship leader and why?
 What is the role of music in worship? What's the point?
 Describe the flow of the music:
 Does it change week after week or does it appear the same?
 Why do you think the flow of songs structured in this particular way?
 Is the music loud, soft? Why is this the case?

Do you keep your eyes open during the music or closed? Why?
 What do you do during music interludes?
 Do you sing in the Spirit? What does that mean to you? Why do you do it? (or not?)
 What do you do with your body during music? Why?
 Is it easy to sing along? Why so? Or if not, why not?
 What is the point of playing music underneath prayer and exhortation?

Leadership of Worship

Who is a leader in the worship service?
 What makes them a leader?
 Is there anything that distinguishes them from others in the church?
 What makes a good worship leader?
 Would you characterize the leadership as formal or informal?
 Is that significant to you or not? Why?
 When is scripture read during the service?
 How is the scripture read?
 When does prayer happen during the service?
 When does communion happen during the service?
 How is it conducted?
 When are baptisms during the service?
 How are they conducted?
 How do you connect with pastoral leadership here?

Role of Worshipper & Community

What is your role in the worship service?
 In what ways do you participate?
 How do you dress for worship? Why?
 How does the congregation participate in worship?
 Describe the logistics of communion. Do people move or do they stay in place?
 When you pray, how do you address God? (i.e. Father, Jesus, Spirit, etc.)
 What do you find yourself praying for most during the worship service?

Preaching / Teaching

What did you think about today's sermon? What parts resonated with you?
 How do you feel about a sermon preached in-person versus a simulcast?
 What is the point of sermons?
 What makes a good preacher?

What makes a good sermon?
 What type of sermons do you hear the most at Hillsong? (i.e. inspirational, teaching, prophetic, generosity-oriented, etc.)
 Do you view the pastor as a peer? If not, how do you view the pastor?
 Is the pastor an authority figure in your life? If so, in what ways?
 Have you ever disagreed with the pastor's teaching? If so, in what ways?

Theological-Reflective

What is the point of worship?
 Why worship?
 Does worship prepare you for anything?
 Who benefits from worship?
 Is worship about humanity or God? Both? Why?
 What did this service say about the nature of God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit?
 Why did Jesus die?
 What does resurrection mean to you?
 What does the kingdom of God mean to you?
 What does eternal life mean to you?
 What is the role of the Holy Spirit?
 What is the point of the Bible? Is it infallible? Inerrant?
 Does God hear prayer? Why pray?
 What does communion mean to you?
 How do you feel when you receive communion?
 What does baptism mean to you?
 What was your own baptism like?
 What about others' baptisms? What feelings, thoughts, emotions come to the fore?
 Do you believe in miracles?
 What is the role of the universal Church?
 Is the church supposed to be distinct from the culture or engage the culture? Or both?
 Are denominations good things or bad? Or neutral?

Liturgical Time

When does the worship service start? What signals the start of worship?
 When does the worship service end? What signals the end of worship?
 How long does the service last?
 Do you wish it were longer? Shorter? Why?
 What holidays does the church celebrate and/or liturgical seasons? (i.e. Advent, Christmas, Lent, Mother's Day)

Do you take Sabbath rest? Why or why not? If so, what does Sabbath mean to you and/or do for you?

Liturgical Formation

How have you changed since you started coming to Hillsong Church?

In what ways have you spiritually matured? (if you think you have)

What new understandings have you gained over the last year, 2-3 years, 5+ years?

What role has the community played in your formation?

What role has leadership played in your formation?

Do you purchase Hillsong resources? If so, which ones?

How do they benefit you?

What seems to be missing from your spiritual life?

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