Toward an Indigenous Pentecostal Theology of Worship

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CONTENTS

I. Introduction ................................................................. 1

II. Developing a Functional Theology ........................................... 2
   A Theological Approach is Subjective .................................. 2
   A Theological Approach requires Faith and Certain Assumptions ... 3
   A Theological Approach is Culturally Bound ......................... 4
   A Theological Approach Never Remains Static ....................... 7
   A Theological Approach is Dependent on the Holy Spirit .......... 7
   A Theological Approach is Dependent on the Inspiration of Scripture ...... 9
   A Theological Approach Must Become Functional ................... 11

III. A Need for Indigenous Worship Theology .......................... 13

IV. Key Considerations in Developing an Indigenous Worship Theology ... 16
   Understanding How People Celebrate ................................ 18
   Understanding How People Mourn .................................... 18
   Consider Folk Understanding ....................................... 19
   Encourage Native Song Writing .................................... 20
   “New Victories Require New Songs” ................................ 22

V. Identifying the Nature of Pentecostal Worship Practice ............ 23

VI. Essential Elements of a Pentecostal Worship Theology ............ 26
   Pentecostal Worship is Audible .................................... 27
   Pentecostal Worship is Demonstrative in Form ................... 28
Pentecostal Worship is a Participatory Event .............................. 31
Pentecostal Worship is Best Expressed in a Corporate Environment .... 31

VII. The Function of Worship .............................................. 32

VIII. Development and Implementation .................................. 35

IX. Conclusion ................................................................. 35

Bibliography ................................................................. 37
Introduction

"Christianity is a vernacular faith."¹ The chief means of expressing any religion is through a process of worship. Expressions of worship must reflect the victories, sufferings, and longings of the people who offer it as worship to God. So much contemporary worship teaching is Western in nature. Unfortunately, an attempt is being made to bring the musical influence and theology of Western worship into other cultures without cultivating the process from within the local context. It is critical that any expression of worship be an expression of those within a cultural setting, not something imported. Worship must flow from within a people’s understanding of who God is, what His intentions for their lives may be, what His Word teaches regarding proper indigenous worship, and how a people might best express that understanding.

The following research is a culmination and further development of an ongoing study and will include some material gleaned and adapted from previous unpublished papers.² It will not be possible in this research project to answer all the questions posed when considering an indigenous approach to worship theology. In fact, it is not possible to know all the questions that may arise. However, an honest attempt is made to stimulate serious dialogue and further research.


This study will approach a worship theology process from two broad perspectives. First, a general consideration will be given to a meaningful development of theological process. All theology should be practical. Gordon Fee refers to this as “worthwhile theology.” I call this functional theology. After outlining this process, I will consider several aspects vital to developing a practical indigenous teaching of Pentecostal worship theology and practice in a cross-cultural setting.

*Developing a Functional Theological Process*

In the course of any biblical study, it is important to remember that a theological approach (1) is subjective, (2) requires faith and certain assumptions, (3) is culturally bound, (4) never remains completely static, (5) is dependent on the Holy Spirit, (6) is dependent on a belief in the inspiration and trustworthiness of the canonicity of the Scriptures, and (7) must become functional.

A Theological Approach is Subjective

A person’s worldview ultimately affects his understanding of the scriptures. It is not possible to be purely objective when interpreting the Bible. For this reason a person must approach a study of the scriptures cautiously. “All of us bring to the Bible pre-understandings and pre-dispositions which affect what we make of what we read.” For good biblical theology, “the primary goal of exegesis is not objectivity [per se] but to

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hear Scripture as the word of God.” Our theology is often shaped by our ideology. However, the opposite must occur. “The task of biblical theology is to present the teaching of the Bible about God and his relations to the world in a way that lets the biblical texts set the agenda.” This kind of study will lead a person to understand God’s intention for the biblical text. Although all theologians are subjective to one degree or another, simply being aware of this fact—and accepting it—can serve to safeguard single-focused thinking in the extreme.

A Theological Approach Requires Faith and Certain Assumptions

A written text assumes a certain kind of audience will read it. This person or group is best disposed to make sense of the writing. In literature, this recipient is the implied reader. In the case of the Bible, the implied or model readers are those who care about what the texts assert and affirm. Such readers approach the witness of God’s work in Jesus Christ, even though they “have not seen” (1 Pet 1:8), with an openness to believe. The best approach in theological study is to read the Bible as a Christian, that is, one who welcomes the witness of Scripture to what God was and is doing in Christ. It is not only right, but also essential, to approach the Scriptures with “eyes of faith.”

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 All Scripture quotations will be from the NIV unless otherwise noted.
9 David S. Dockery, Biblical Interpretation: Then and Now (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker book House, 1992), 178. “[The interpreter] must approach the text with right presuppositions, which Augustine identified as faith.”
No attempt is made in Scripture to prove the reality of God. The Bible simply begins with this statement, “In the beginning, God....” (Gen 1:1) Throughout its pages, the narrative assumes the reader accepts that God is real and that its pages reveal Divine truth. “The biblical theologian makes no apology for his or her explicitly theological assumptions about the nature and identity of God.”

A Theological Approach is Culturally Bound

The culture in which we live determines the manner in which we interpret Scriptures. It is surprising how few Western theologians are willing to admit this. Having traveled abroad several times, I am constantly reminded that non-Westerners do not process information (i.e., think) like Westerners. In fact, not all Western cultures think in similar terms, nor do Middle Easterners reason in the same fashion as people who live further east on the Asian continent or south on the African continent. Ironically, it seems as though this truth is accepted in every respect of learning except in theological and exegetical concerns.

For example, many Western (German, British, and North American) theologians insist that a text may only have one meaning and that the meaning is explicitly restricted

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10 George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, Revised edition, 1993), 20. “Since biblical theology is concerned with self-revelation of God and with redemption of women and men, the very idea of revelation and redemption involves certain presuppositions that are everywhere implicit and often explicit in the Bible. These presuppositions are God, humanity, and sin. The reality of God is everywhere assumed. The Bible is not concerned to prove God or to discuss theism in a philosophical manner. It assumes a personal powerful, self-existent being who is creator of the world and of humankind, and who is concerned about humanity.”

11 Rosner, 5.

to the author's original intention. They attempt to cover any obvious discrepancies 13 by
drawing a fine distinction between the words "meaning," "application," and
"significance." 14 However, what one meaning would be selected? Could it be a meaning
determined by one specific language group over the interpretation of another? Or, stated
in another way, would it be a meaning determined by an African person reading a Middle
Eastern author or a European/Western person reading a Middle Eastern author?

From a cultural perspective the biblical writers would have accepted that what
they were writing might very well possess more than one meaning. One method of
appropriating Scripture for some Jews, particularly Jews from Qumran, was the concept
of pesher. The presupposition is that the text contains a mystery known by an inspired
interpreter (i.e., someone later would have the information necessary to understand the
full meaning of a prophetic utterance). A classic example of this is Peter's interpretation
of Joel 2:28 in Acts 2:17, when he declares "...this is that...." Another common cultural
understanding among Jewish rabbis and writers is that of Midrash (e.g., the bringing of
texts together—proof text-ing—to provide explanation). An example of this is Paul's
linking of several Old Testament verses in Galatians 3:8-14 for one common point. 15
Each of these examples would be common to the first-century thinker but not necessarily
obvious centuries later.

13 Such as the numerous instances in which NT writers re-interpret an OT text. For example,
Matthew's (2:18) use of Jeremiah 31:15 as a prophecy of Herod's slaying of the innocent babies, while
Jeremiah's words relate to the Babylonian invasion of Judea.

14 E.D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), xi, 8;
quoted in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward Exegetical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House,
1981), 32.

15 Klyne Snodgrass, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," in Interpreting the New
Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues, eds. David A. Black and David S. Dockery, (Nashville, TN:
I have read numerous non-Western theologians. In contrast to European and North American culture, with its emphasis on individualism, the rest of the world approaches theological concepts from a relational perspective. This fundamental difference in perspective alters the manner in which theological premise is determined.

Theological understanding must take into consideration the impact other worldviews might have on a correct understanding of a passage and it is important to acknowledge that a cultural mindset affects interpretation. Theologians must not only understand the differences in culture between first-century and twenty-first century thinkers and the affect that difference plays on interpretation, but they must also strive to understand the differences between cultures within the same century and the affect that plays on a global understanding of a biblical text.

I believe it is possible for theologians from different cultures to derive a similar

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17 David Rhoads, et al., Mark as Story (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 113. Rhoads explains how first century people could more readily believe in both human responsibility and divine causation. “As moderns, we tend to think that either God or humans should be considered responsible, but not both. For the ancients, it was both.”
meaning from a text. Nevertheless, I endeavor to keep in mind that my mid-western background rarely works in my favor when interpreting a portion of Scripture written “a long, long time ago in a place far, far away.”

A Theological Approach Never Remains Static

A theological approach never remains static because revelation is progressive in nature. The canon of Scripture is complete but the revelation of God is an on-going process because our understanding is progressive. It is progressive for individuals, people groups, and the Church. As an individual, I am growing and maturing in my understanding of God. People groups develop and “times change.” The Church grows in its understanding of God. It builds upon the theological discoveries of previous generations and, at times, makes a quantum leap in biblical understanding. E. N. Bell, the first superintendent of the Assemblies of God, said, “We must keep our skylights open so as not to reject any new light God may throw upon the old Word. We must not fail to keep pace in life or teaching with light from heaven.”

I possessed “good” study skills when I graduated from Bible college twenty years ago. However, as I have matured I have learned new and more challenging techniques of study that I have added to my study approach. These skills have continued to improve and develop as I learn new and exciting things pertaining to the Christ, His Word, and His church. The theological approach of any honest scholar never remains static. It is

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always maturing.

A Theological Approach is Dependent on the Holy Spirit

The acquisition of dynamic spiritual knowledge is not a human process; rather it
is a Divine process.\textsuperscript{20} Spiritual knowledge is knowledge imparted by the Holy Spirit.

This knowledge is not acquired through, though it may accompany, mental discipline. It
is a \textit{eureka} moment, the “I’ve found it!” or the “that’s it!” moment when someone
discovers truth. In theological matters, it is the discovery of spiritual truth. It is dynamic
in that it is alive or real. This is living truth exploding into a person’s life. It is truth that
changes the way a person lives; a life-altering revelation. Perhaps the lack of this
dynamic is why many scholars seem to lose their faith in the trustworthiness of the
Scriptures, belief in miracles, the authenticity of Jesus’ words, or the biblical claim of
who Jesus is. They are learning with their minds; however, their spirit man is unfruitful.
They are “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth” (2 Tim 3:7).

The Holy Spirit reveals spiritual truth with spiritual words to the human spirit (1
Cor 2:10-16). It is not a mental process. Failure to grasp and accept this fundamental
concept dooms the process of theological understanding.\textsuperscript{21} The mind can learn facts and
assimilate information. It can put those facts into a logical and useful format. But the
discovery of \textit{spiritual} truth—understanding the biblical concepts of salvation,

\textsuperscript{20} A careful study of 1 Cor 2:10-16 has proved invaluable to my understanding in this matter.

\textsuperscript{21} Dockery, 181. “The idea of illumination as enablement for understanding the text in this
manner (see 1 Cor 2:10-16) has at times disappeared from the contemporary discussion. We are suggesting
that discovering Scripture’s meaning involves not only examining the author’s result in the written text, but
also the Holy Spirit’s work of illuminating the reader’s mind to interpret the text. With the enablement of
the Spirit, discerning a text’s meaning and significance is not only possible but plausible. That a text may
have deeper meanings, especially in genres like parables and poetry, is implied, but objective meaning is
nevertheless present and discoverable.”
regeneration, sanctification, resurrection, worship, etc.—is a spiritual process. Only after the spirit comes to accept spiritual truth can the mind begin to understand and process it.22

Very few theological “how-to” books even mention this critical role of the Holy Spirit in the discovery of theological truth. Many scholars claim that spiritual discovery is not subject to established criteria of learning or study and it lacks safeguards. However, this is absolutely the missing link in all theological studies. Knowledge of any subject related to theology occurs in the spirit of man, not the mind. There is a difference between knowledge and understanding. With our minds we come to understand (although this process often occurs much later) what we have come to know in our spirit (1 Cor 2:11-12, 16; 1 John 3:20, 27).

A Theological Approach is Dependent on the Inspiration of the Scriptures

There is a widespread view that the decision of certain theologians and bishops of the earliest Christian centuries created the canon of Scripture. Because of that, some scholars hold that their decision cannot be binding upon later generations.23 Such a claim challenges the focus of biblical theology on the canonical writings. In response to this challenge, “arguments may be advanced for an early beginning to the process of ‘canonization’, and for a ‘canonical awareness’ on the part of the early Christians long before the fourth century, even if they did not use the term ‘canon’ to refer to a list of


23 That is, decisions based upon the agenda of fourth century theologians.
sacred writings until then.”

24 It would be a fabrication of facts to suggest that the fourth-century Church invented the Bible to satisfy its own agenda.

The Church did not create the canon but it did officially recognize the authority of the New Testament writings in a process that began in the first century. The focus of New Testament theology on the canonical writings can be justified historically. The Bible is the written Word of God. The conviction that Scripture is the word of God was the undisputed tradition of the church until the seventeenth century. There have always been doubters of the inspiration of God’s word. To attack the reliability or value of the canonization process is a common occurrence in higher critical methodology. It is vital to accept the inspiration of the Scriptures and to accept the canonization process as part of God’s process to produce the Divine text. It is a living Word and its truth continues to remain relevant “yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8).

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24 Rosner, 3.

25 The Scriptures are a “creation of the Church” only in the sense of organizing the apostolic and OT texts into a single cohesive book. Authentic writings were determined and spurious writings (or forgeries) were eliminated. The process of canonization is itself miraculous and should be considered part of the inspiration process.

26 Rosner, 28. “The earliest Christian lists of the OT and NT, those of Melito and the Muratorian Fragment respectively, both date from the second century A.D., and the earliest Jewish list of the Hebrew Scriptures, found in a primitive tradition or baraita quoted in the Babylonian Talmud (Bab Bathra 14b), is probably older still.”

27 Ibid., 24.

28 There is an inclination to focus attention on the editorial process when interpretive questions arise. Few scholars are prepared to attack the credibility of any prophet or apostle directly. Instead, they discredit his writings by attacking the editor(s) or the canonization process. This is a compelling observation and not without meaning for our own time. However, the tactic has been around since the time of the biblical writings. Walter Brueggemann, when addressing the attack on Baruch in Jer 43:1-3 states, “Since there are losers and outsiders to the canonical verdict, they [anyone who may possess an issue with the text] do what they can to discredit both the process and the outcome.” (To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52 [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991], 186.)
A Theological Approach Must Become Functional

The study of the Scriptures is best when it results in telling others the message learned. It is not enough to know the biblical stories. All stories in the Scripture are profitable for teaching. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). To show the unreliability—or out-right falsehood—of a text is an abuse of theological study and process. It belies the very function of theology. Whatever theological approach a person uses—be it Biblical, Systematic, Exegetical, Historical, etc.—it must fulfill the Divine function of theological study.

The Scriptures communicate God's message to a dying world. The stories of the Bible not only enable the reader to learn about an ancient people's experiences but to learn from them. "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (2 Cor 10:11). Every story in the Scriptures serves both as a history lesson (what God did to or for them) and as a model (what God will do to or for us). The very commission of Christ—the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)—is one of "learn and teach." One should never conduct a study of biblical truths in which the conclusion is to discredit what the text or topic intends. On the contrary, one must study the Bible to learn how to live and teach its truth to others.

As one understands the truth revealed in the text, that truth begins shaping one's worldview and as the truth is discovered "it inflames the heart and constrains one to live a new life and to pass this new truth on to others."29 This is a functional theology. It is a

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process that takes what a text meant and communicates what it means today.

Walter Kaiser, in his work *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, believes the very crisis in hermeneutics (and theological study) today is the inability of the preacher and church teacher to “bridge the yawning chasm between understanding the content of Scripture as it was given in the past and proclaiming it with such relevance in the present as to produce faith, life, and bona fide works.”\(^{30}\) James Smart draws a similar conclusion in his book *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*.\(^{31}\) It is essential that the theological process “move from the original meaning to the contemporary meaning.”\(^{32}\)

Kaiser goes on to state, “The Achilles’ heel for many among the trained clergy is the failure to bring the biblical text from its B.C. or first first-century A.D. context and to relate it directly and legitimately to the present day.”\(^{33}\) I heard Professor Kaiser speak in my early days of ministry (not long after he wrote the aforementioned book) and was very impressed with his passion on this subject. Although I differ with him in two key areas, I think he has “hit the nail right on the head” in this regard.\(^{34}\) The function of the

\(^{30}\) Kaiser, 18.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 34

\(^{33}\) Kaiser, 131.

\(^{34}\) Kaiser is dogmatic when it comes to insisting that “the author’s intended meaning is what a text means [*i.e. its only meaning]*” (Kaiser, p. 32-33). I believe there are some instances in which the writer (or the original audience) may not have fully comprehended the full extent of his utterance. (Daniel 10-12 is a good case in point, however there are numerous examples in the NT in which the writer *reinterprets* or broadens the original utterance.) Who is to say if the prophet/writer fully understood everything he was writing? Second, Kaiser is insistent that a proper theological development of a text requires that “...[under] no [circumstance may] later teaching be used exegetically (or in any other way) to unpack the meaning or to enhance the usability of the individual text which is the object of...study” (Kaiser, p. 140). I think Kaiser goes too far in this insistence. He does assent to subsequent revelation being used in the “conclusions or summaries” of a lesson. However, I maintain that the biblical “author” is ultimately the Holy Spirit. His introduction and development of biblical concepts, though measured, is always consistent
theological process is to understand what a text means and then relate it to the present 
day. Jeffrey Camery-Hoggatt demonstrates a similar process in his work *Speaking of 
God*. He speaks of the necessity of taking a text from exegesis to exposition.35

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The purpose of a functional theological process is practical in nature. No process 
is necessary without application. Having presented a guided but flexible foundation to 
theological study, focus will now shift to establishing an indigenous Pentecostal theology 
of worship.

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**A Need for Indigenous Worship Theology**

There are many methods and forms of worship within the body of Christ. 
Methods involving music, singing, dance, and other aspects of the arts are only *some* of 
the ways in which Christians express worship to God. Time will not permit a detailed 
analysis of each method. In this section (and the section on *Essentials*), my examples and 
thought will center primarily on music, singing, and accompanying expressions of 
Pentecostal worship.

It is the urge of many missionaries in a cross-cultural setting to teach worship 
from a subjective perspective. It seems only natural. We want this new body of believers 
to have songs to sing. Therefore, we teach them our songs. We want them to physically 
express worship to God. Therefore, we teach them our method of physical expression. 
However, worship becomes worship when it is a reflection of someone’s heart. After all,

35 Jeffrey Camery-Hoggatt, *Speaking of God: Reading and Preaching the Word of God* (Peabody, 
it is their worship expressed to God, and not our worship of God through them, that matters.

I have long maintained that worship is either a witness of my heart (i.e., reflective of my relationship with God) or it is a witness against my heart (i.e., the message of the song testifies against me). People may learn songs or methods of worship. However, until these become contextualized they remain forms and not genuine expressions of worship. “Genuine contextualization is contextualization from within, not from without. It is the kind that begins with...the [present] culture, and constructs a message that will make sense from within the culture. [Unfortunately], the latest massive translation of what the gospel means is American.”36

As the Gospel message is preached in a new society, it is imperative that a missionary challenges the new converts to develop songs and expressions of worship that, while not contradicting the nature of God or compromising the message of the Gospel, are genuinely native. “Missionaries will have to allow new converts to develop a form of Christian belief and worship style appropriate and effective in their own culture.”37

The challenge of making Christian teaching indigenous without allowing it to become syncretistic is a continual struggle. Obviously, the indigenous process does pose serious difficulties. The missionary must safeguard the fundamental dogmas contained within Scripture and, at the same time, enable the local people to develop appropriate

36 Melba Padilla Maggay, 38, 39.
methods of worshiping a holy God. Hwa Yung, in Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Theology, states:

The [most] basic consideration concerning contextualization, which A. F. Walls calls the ‘pilgrim’ principle, must always be held in tension with the ‘indigenizing’ principle. Both belong to the essence of the gospel. Together they point to the fact that God does not merely take us as we are and where we are, and leaves us there. He also seeks to transform us into what He wants us to be. Thus, along with the indigenizing principle, the Christian takes seriously the pilgrim principle, which whispers to him that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society; for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system.\(^{38}\)

Contextualization is never an easy process. However, if we recognize that contextualization is a process then we can better assist the local people in developing an appropriate method of worship. The most promising safeguard throughout this difficult process is the ongoing teaching and training of the Scriptures.\(^{39}\) Charles van Engen noted that one critical hermeneutical principle involves the “church reading the Scriptures in community.”\(^{40}\) Through this process, the body of believers learns corporately what God expects and how they must behave as Christians. The people must have the Scriptures available in the local dialect and taught (or encouraged) to read them.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{38}\) Hwa Yung, Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Theology (Irvine, CA: Regnum Books International, 1997), 63.

\(^{39}\) G. C. Oosthuizen, Theological Battleground in Asia and Africa, (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 11. “The church which is rooted in the Word of God is eo ipso indigenous, for genuine loyalty to the national community is conditioned by the Word of God itself. After all, true loyalty is already presupposed in the Ten Commandments. It is the gospel which through its inherent creative power molds the potential forms of the people. The Holy Spirit will lead an indigenous people to create an indigenous Church.


\(^{41}\) "As Lamin Sanneh points out (1993), no other act of the missionary empowers people and dignifies their culture more than Bible translation. It takes people seriously and says to them that God speaks their language." (from Paul G. Heibert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, Incarnational Ministry [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995], 371.)
Key Considerations in Developing an Indigenous Worship Theology

Teaching an indigenous Pentecostal worship theology must begin with the missionary’s careful understanding of the Scriptures and an informed understanding of the culture of the worshippers. Paul Heibert defines culture as a people’s mental map of their world. ⁴² This map includes the physical world but is more a guide for how they determine their actions.

Without a good understanding of a people’s point-of-view (worldview), any effort to teach proper worship theology and practice will be extremely difficult. Not only will the people fail to grasp a biblically appropriate manner of worship but the missionary may likely interpret some worship activities as syncretistic or idolatrous in nature when, in fact, that might not necessarily be the case. ⁴³ “Misunderstandings are based on ignorance of the beliefs, feelings, and values of another culture. The solution is to learn how the other culture works. Our first task in entering a new culture is to be a student of its ways. Whenever a culture ‘makes no sense’ to us, we must assume that the problem is ours, because the people’s behavior makes sense to them.” ⁴⁴

The fact of Christ’s incarnation into a society and moment in time demonstrates the desire of God to be known and experienced within a local culture. “When God became man, Christ took flesh in a particular family, as a member of a particular nation,

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⁴³ For example, in America we celebrate Christmas with decorated trees, stockings by the fireplace, and yard ornamentation. We celebrate Easter with Easter egg hunts. Many of the rituals utilized to celebrate otherwise holy occasions may be pagan in origin but are American in culture.

⁴⁴ Heibert, 378.
with the tradition of customs associated with that nation. All that was not evil He sanctified.”^45 Consequently, when introducing Christ to someone or to a people He enters their culture and sanctifies all that is capable of sanctification by His presence.

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, a proper understanding of this subject is an ongoing process that I have by no means mastered. However, I believe there may be several key considerations that should be contemplated in developing any theology of worship. As worship teachers, my wife and I have had several opportunities to teach worship practices and theology overseas. Most of our experience has been in Guam and the Philippines. In this very cosmopolitan Asian setting, we have observed several principles that have proved helpful and require further contemplation. In fact, because of the mix of Asian cultures in the Philippines, Melba Padilla Maggay states, “It appears that the Philippines is a good case study on the failure and success of Christianity in Asia.”^46

These concepts include (but are not limited to): (1) Understanding how the people celebrate; (2) Understanding how the people mourn; (3) Considering the folk understanding of the nature of deity, the afterlife, sin, judgment, blessing, and relationship; (4) Encouraging the writing of worship songs in the native tongue; and (5) Conceptually teaching the principle that “new victories require new songs.” Each concept will be briefly surveyed as more deliberate study is in order.

^45 Hwa Yung, 62.

^46 Melba Padilla Maggay, 37.
Understanding How People Celebrate

Cultural understandings regarding celebration will deeply affect the manner and method in which a people worship God. Within many Asian cultures (particularly the Island nations and southern Asia) the festival or feast occasions occupy a prominent place in society and occur frequently. It would be unusual (not to mention rude) to be invited to a festive occasion and not attend. Celebration is an integral part of society because it builds relationship, fosters inclusion, and provides an opportunity to experience another person’s joy.

This aspect of culture continues to remain prominent once the church has formed. Julie Ma notes the importance of bringing this cultural element into the church body when she states, “Gathering together in the name of Christ [to celebrate] is perhaps one of their favorite spiritual activities.”47 The missionary should spend considerable time understanding the various festivals and occasions of celebration to develop an indigenous worship theology.

Understanding How People Mourn

Funeral proceedings and other occasions in which people gather to mourn are an important consideration for worship development. Much of worship practice involves humility, mourning, and contrition. The ancestor veneration found in all Asian cultures may involve prayer for the dead (to enter the afterlife) or praying to the departed ancestors. The funeral proceedings often lasts for one week. These practices would not be conducive within the Christian faith but the occasion should not necessarily be

prohibited. Once a church is formed the process takes on new meaning. Believers are taught to honor the person’s life, show respect for the family, and reflect on the transition of the deceased to the afterlife. It is not usually necessary to discontinue the event; only to provide new meaning for the gathering.\(^{48}\)

Consider Folk Understanding

It is important to realize that all theological understandings are human interpretations of biblical revelations within particular contexts.\(^{49}\) For certain, native conceptual understandings of the nature of deity, an understanding of the afterlife, sin, judgment, blessing, and relationships (to name a few) are not always conducive to biblical teaching. However, this is true of any culture in which the light of the Gospel breaks through (or even in cultures that have already embraced the Gospel!). What is important is to begin with what people currently understand and build towards (sometimes “line upon line”) an understanding true to the Scriptures.

Western understandings of primary biblical concepts are not the “bottom line” in every theological instance. “Universal moral principles may seem clear enough on the surface, but the actual realization of them is determined partly by each culture’s distinctions.”\(^{50}\) Western understanding is Western understanding. An Asian’s understanding of the same concept may be different and at the same time true to biblical teaching, albeit from another perspective.

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\(^{49}\) Hwa Yung, 64.

\(^{50}\) Dey, 470. “It seems that while the essence of each commandment is clear, the edges are defined differently by different cultures” (471).
For example, the Western concept of sin involves an understanding of corruption, wickedness, and guilt. Westerners preach against sinful acts because they are “bad.” However, a Filipino mindset does not view sin in this regard. In fact, in much of Asia, sin is understood from a perspective of relationship. Sin is a state of disharmony (this is true whether speaking of a relationship between elders, ancestors, or with the gods). If a person commits sin (a mistake), God is disappointed. The fact that God is disappointed brings shame to the individual because the relationship is broken or wounded.

Many other theological concepts could be considered as well. Suffice it to say many Asian cultural practices are true to biblical teaching but vastly different from Western thought. Relationships are deeply affected by ancestor veneration. Many traditions are rooted in community rather than individuality. The afterlife and spirit world is much more real. Asians do not separate the body and the spirit as is typical in Western thought. Consequently, encounters with the supernatural are more prevalent and are generally required for true conversion to occur. Natural disasters are seen as judgments rather than random natural events. Blessing from a deity is something to be greatly desired rather than “just another choice,” as in Western ideology. In every event, these concepts must be understood in order to develop meaningful anthems and actions of worship.

Encourage Native Song Writing

It is crucial that people be able to express worship to God in their native tongue.

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51 Melba Padilla Maggay, 35.

52 This understanding of sin seems apparent in Joseph’s mind when he refuses relations with Potiphar’s wife. He refuses her advances because he considers his relationship with Potiphar and with God. He realizes that both relationships will be broken if he sins (Gen 39:8-9).
“The mother tongue is the language people learn first at their mother’s knee; in which they learn to think and talk about the world around them, to interact with people closest to them, to acquire and express their values, the language which becomes part of their personality and identity, and which expresses ethnicity and solidarity with their people.”

Many great worship songs have enjoyed worldwide appeal. To date, all were written in English. I know of no transcontinental worship songs written or preserved in any other language. English may very well be the “new Greek” of modern society. It crosses many borders and unites many people. However, most people in the world do not speak English, and of those who do, it is not their primary language.

There is nothing wrong with any English language song being sung cross-culturally if the people want to sing in English. However, it must never be assumed that the meaning or the depth of expression is the same. I am not suggesting that they are not meaningful or heart-felt in some way. Rather, I am suggesting that it would be more meaningful and more heart-felt if the same or similar concept were penned in the vernacular. Paul Heibert said, “We must recognize that forms of worship vary from culture to culture. We like to sing hymns and choruses. Others like monotonic chants and dancing. Each of us identifies most with songs in our own languages and music styles. One sign of a healthy church is that it writes songs and creates its own worship

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54 Of course, there are many great traditional hymns including “A Mighty Fortress is our God,” by Martin Luther (1529) and “Silent Night,” (1818) that were written in German; “Be Thou My Vision,” (eighth century Irish Hymn); “All Creatures of our God and King,” written by St. Francis of Assisi (1225); and “O Come All Ye Faithful,” written in Latin (1751). However, these great hymns (and others) enjoy longevity and cross-cultural appeal because they were translated into English and adopted into Western culture.
forms.  

It is an injustice to import the music of the missionary without encouraging and cultivating indigenous songwriting. Without doubt, there are occasions in which English language worship songs are embraced because they are Western and represent opportunity, wealth, and superiority. We must guard against pride serving as the motive for singing any song. Heibert goes on to say, “Songs, in fact, are one good measure of the extent to which people have made the gospel their own. Many sing foreign hymns translated into their language. For them the gospel is often something they have added onto their lives. Others, out of their living experiences with Christ, write songs from the core of their being.”

My wife and I have taught a workshop entitled “Native Song Writing” in Panama, Mexico, Guam, and the Philippines. In every instance, the response was overwhelming often resulting in spontaneous songwriting. One church in the Philippines planned a follow-up symposium to highlight these new songs to their satellite churches. Tremendous enthusiasm has followed. However, this process would require cultivation and development to continue the inspiration and overcome the incessant desire to import and merely transliterate Western music.

“New Victories Require New Songs”

The Scriptures call for people “to sing to the Lord a new song.” (Ps 98:1) It is God’s desire to touch members of a new society (individually or corporately) and receive

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56 Ibid., 371.
from them songs of worship and expressions of praise reflective of that new relationship. Perhaps He does not mind hearing them using the expressions of praise of another people. However, the very nature of a living relationship with the Lord God Almighty presupposes that the explosion of worship that resounds from a people should be reflective of what great things God has done in their lives.

Several years ago a missionary mentor-friend of mine remarked, “New victories require new songs.” He said this to me in a cross-cultural setting where we were serving and teaching worship. It inspired us to write many new worship songs of what God was doing in our midst. It taught me a valuable lesson. Encouraging people to sing of their victories in God opens the door for a flood of new songs and enables the Body of Christ to respond to the command to “sing a new song.”

Identifying the Nature of Pentecostal Worship Practice

It is not possible in the scope of this paper to discuss all facets of worship. Neither will attention be focused on the purpose or reason for worship. What is under consideration in this work is the nature of biblical worship practice—specifically Pentecostal worship practice. Expressions of worship from one people group to another will vary. However, the minister or missionary is obligated to guide the people’s development of worship in a manner consistent with the examples contained within Scripture. Again, variety of methodology and practice may occur but the nature of the experience must remain consistent with the biblical record.

The Church was “born” Pentecostal.57 Ronald Kydd has done an extensive

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57 The term Pentecostal (or charismatic) is not intended to identify one denomination over another or one particular worship methodology. The use of the term is to identify a Christian people whose
scholarly survey of the first four centuries of Christianity. He concluded “first century Christians were a dynamic group of people…they were people of the Spirit.” The worship and practice of the early church was Pentecostal in nature. Citing evidence from Scripture, the Apostolic Fathers, and other early Christian writings, Kydd’s conclusion is tragic. Although the New Testament worship experience was charismatic in nature, by the start of the fourth century the Pentecostal fire prevalent in the early years faded away into obscurity.

The common thread within revival movements—whether Montanism, German Pietism, Moravianism, or Revivalism (Methodism, First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, or the Pentecostal outpouring of the twentieth century)—is the profound manner in which worship expression was affected. A thorough study of this phenomenon is not within the scope of this study. However, Pentecostal worship, though historically regarded as an aberration and maligned in mainstream Christian

worship practice is Spirit-led, dynamic, accompanied by spiritual gift manifestations, and alive in the power of the Holy Spirit baptism tradition.


59 Ibid., 57, 87.

60 Roger E. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 477.

61 Ibid., 484.


63 Cf., David Cartledge, The Apostolic Revolution: The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God in Australia (Chester Hill, NSW, AU: Paraclete Institute, 2000), 126. “A freer worship and ministry characterized by singing in the Spirit, dancing before the Lord, prostration, deliverance, personal prophecy and numerous other manifestations such as shaking, visions and holy laughter began to occur in many of the churches. It is noteworthy that most of these things had occurred freely in the churches of older leaders who now strongly resisted them” (commenting on the polarizing characteristics of the Assemblies of God revival in Australia).
scholarship,⁶⁴ is biblically and historically justifiable as the mode presupposed in the biblical text as “normal” authentic Christian worship practice.

Pentecostal worship theology is unique in that it is not centered on the rituals of Eucharist (communion) or water baptism. Robert Webber⁶⁵ and David Peterson⁶⁶ have produced two of the most prominent theologies of worship in recent years. Their contributions to this field of study are invaluable and are utilized as resources for this paper. Whereas Webber recognizes the centrality of the communion experience⁶⁷ and Peterson sees the edification of the church body as the primary purpose of the corporate worship gathering,⁶⁸ it is my supposition that Pentecostal worship experience is primarily centered in the gathering of the body of Christ to celebrate and grow in God’s presence. Pentecostal worship occurs in community.⁶⁹ In this sense, worship is not a single ritual act; rather it is an experiential corporate event.

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⁶⁴ The use of the term “ecstatic” to define Pentecostal worship is common among scholarship. The use of the term “ecstatic” is rarely used in any flattering sense and usually denotes “uncontrolled frenzy.”


⁶⁷ Webber, 62. “The content of Christian worship was Jesus Christ…The structure of Christian worship was Word and sacrament…The context in which worship took place was the Christian church called by God to worship. This worship was highlighted by sign-acts (baptism and Eucharist).”

⁶⁸ Peterson, 219. “People who emphasize that they are ‘going to church to worship God’ tend to disregard what the New Testament says about the purpose of the Christian assembly. If Christians are meant to worship God in every sphere of life, it cannot be worship as such that brings them to church. ‘Corporate worship’ may express more accurately what is involved, but Paul’s emphasis is on coming together to participate in the edification of the church.” Although Peterson is careful to note that, “edification and worship are different sides of the same coin” (215).

⁶⁹ This is not to suggest that Pentecostals do not celebrate communion or baptism, rather it is to say that neither is the central feature of Pentecostal worship experience.
At the center of all worship experience is a common event.\textsuperscript{70} Worship is an event centered on a Person. The event is the reason for and the purpose of worship. For the Old Testament believer, the event was the Exodus from Egypt. For the New Testament believer, the event is the resurrection of Jesus. The Lord sent Moses to deliver the people from Egypt and bring them to Mt. Sinai where they could meet the Lord (the event) and worship (the response). The Lord sent Jesus to bring salvation to mankind so that he might meet the Lord (the event) and worship (the response). In both examples, God calls people to Himself. He is the event and the center.

Pentecostal worship occurs in response to God’s divine act. A response presupposes action and requires demonstration. It is not possible to respond without some level of physical action. “Faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:26). Genuine faith is an internal quality; it is a quality of the spirit. However, its expression is demonstrative and, in Pentecostal worship, generally accompanied by some physical movement symbolizing the desire of the heart. Pentecostal worship is by nature audible, demonstrative in form, a participatory event, and best expressed in a corporate environment. With this in mind, attention will now shift to essential elements within Pentecostal worship expression.

\textit{Essential Elements of a Pentecostal Worship Theology}

As noted in the previous section, Pentecostal worship is by nature audible, demonstrative in form, a participatory event, and best expressed in a corporate environment. It is not the scope of this study to identify all elements within a biblical theology of worship. Notwithstanding, each of the aforementioned areas are essential to

\textsuperscript{70} Webber, 20.
Pentecostal worship theology. The Scriptures contain numerous examples of each element. The essence of each biblical example is transferable from culture to culture. It is not my intention to prescriptively mandate specific elements (or actions) that must be included in all worship practice. However, the biblical examples that follow do set forward a reliable precedence and are profitable for guiding worship development.

Pentecostal Worship is by Nature Audible

A primary defining characteristic of Pentecostal worship is its audibility.

Pentecostal worship is heard. The congregation is called upon to sing,\textsuperscript{71} shout, clap,\textsuperscript{72} play musical instruments,\textsuperscript{73} testify, and vocalize spiritual gifts. As Paul states in 1 Cor 14:26, “What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.” The examples cited by Paul are

\textsuperscript{71} Singing is the predominant form of Pentecostal worship. A substantial portion of the worship service involves both congregational and performance (special) singing. The first reference to singing in the Scriptures occurs in Exodus 15. The song of Moses (v. 1-18) follows the victorious passing through the Red Sea. Exod 15:21 tells of Miriam’s (Moses’ sister) song. “Sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted....” Singing is God’s gift to us for expressing our feelings. The Scriptures exhort believers to sing to the Lord: “Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise Him” (Ps 33:1); “Sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious!” (Ps 66:2); “Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts” (Ps 105:2). There is no command to be a great (or even good) singer, just to sing with all one’s heart.

\textsuperscript{72} The clapping of the hands signifies many things. In the worship setting, it generally means delight (ovation), gratitude (thanks), and rhythm participation (keeping time). In other words, the hands are clapped to express praise to the Lord (we applaud Him), to show appreciation (an expression of thanks), and to the beat of the song (participating with the instrumentalists). Ps 47:1 declares, “Oh, clap your hands all you peoples!” This includes ovation and thanksgiving (appreciation). The clapping of hands to the rhythm of a song is cultural in nature, but practiced the world over. In my opinion, there is nothing sacrilegious or inappropriate about it, so long as it is done in an effort to compliment the natural rhythm of the song. Clapping with the rhythm is each person’s opportunity to play an instrument of praise.

\textsuperscript{73} Cf., Ps 150. The absence of reference to musical instruments in the New Testament worship is not a stumbling block to Pentecostal worship theology. An “argument of silence” does not justify the exclusion of musical instrumentation in Pentecostal worship.
expressed audibly in the congregation.\textsuperscript{74} Peterson notes, “Paul actually expects Christ to be encountered as his people share with one another a whole range of verbal ministries in the congregational gathering.”\textsuperscript{75}

Pentecostal Worship is Demonstrative in Form

It is not possible to worship without some form of demonstration. The word in the Greek Bible most commonly translated “to worship” is \textit{proskynein}. Various definitions are, “to bow,” “to kiss,” “to serve,” and “to worship.”\textsuperscript{76} In each case, the implication is a demonstrative act of homage. It is an attitude expressed by an action. David Peterson notes the occurrence of this verb sixty times in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{77} “It is a compound of \textit{pros} (towards) and \textit{kynein} (to kiss), and it has been argued that the compound originally referred to a kiss of respect or adoration blown towards one of a higher rank.\textsuperscript{78}

The corresponding Hebrew word (which the LXX usually translated with \textit{proskynein}) is \textit{histahwa}, or \textit{hishtahawa} (literally, to curl up). This verb is translated “to bend oneself over at the waist” and is used one hundred and seventy times in the Hebrew

\textsuperscript{74} The emphasis of Paul in 1Corinthians 12–14 is for the congregational meeting to be conducted in an orderly fashion for clarity’s sake, not that the meeting be conducted in silence.

\textsuperscript{75} Peterson, 197. “For example, as they ‘sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,’ with gratitude in their hearts to God, they will fulfill the apostolic injunction, ‘Let the word of Christ dwell among you richly’ (Col 3:16; cf. Eph 5:19–2). As the gospel or ‘the word of Christ’ is \textit{proclaimed} (emphasis mine) and applied in the congregation, so Christ himself makes his character and presence know and impresses his will on his people.”


\textsuperscript{77} Peterson, 57, 75.

\textsuperscript{78} Greeven.
Bible. These verbs communicate the root essence of required action when worshiping within Greek and Hebrew speaking cultures. Other languages may translate these words with a different corresponding action but all would need to be, of necessity, demonstrative in nature to correctly communicate the biblical connotation of worship. 

Pentecostal worship involves interaction with the living God on terms established by Him. Worship is not a unilateral event in which God and man are on equal terms. He is supreme and His subjects (the worshipers) are expressing His greatness. A subject of a king cannot “pay” homage without action. Consequently, Pentecostal worship theology requires a demonstration of homage.

An unfortunate casualty of the Protestant Reformation and western culture is the practice of kneeling (and bowing) during times of worship and prayer. Perhaps it is due to a desire to move away from the traditions of Catholicism and/or a general ignorance of how to act around royalty. Whatever the case, a very important form of worship has been de-emphasized and lost in many Christian circles.

Kneeling and bowing should not be understood as a cultural matter. The act of obeisance demonstrates humility and the breaking of pride. Simply put, contemporary believers (American Protestants included) are supposed to utilize kneeling during worship and prayer just as any other people group at any other time in history. 

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79 Peterson, 57-8, 75.

80 It will not be possible in this limited study to survey all the various root translations of the verb “to worship.” It is likely that a study of this nature would yield valuable and interesting conclusions.

81 Consider the following Scriptures: “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God…” (Ps 95:6-7). “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” Phil 2:10 (also Isa 45:23 and Rom 14:11). “The Lord...raises up all who are bowed down.” (Ps 145:14 ) Abraham bowed (Gen 18:1-2). Moses bowed (Exod 34:8). David bowed (1 Kgs 1:47). Solomon knelt (1
Pentecostal worship theology does not require bowing or kneeling specifically. It does require, however, some comparable cultural expression. Pride may never be used as an excuse to alter the essence of biblical worship practice.

The Scriptures reveal other methods of demonstrative worship. For example, the lifting of hands is an appropriate response in worship. Pentecostals lift their hands as a sign of surrender and truthfulness (honest declaration), to express thankfulness, praise, and reverence to the Lord, as a means of drawing closer to the Lord, and to seek an audience with the King of Kings.\footnote{Kgs 8:54. Daniel knelt (Dan 6:10). A leper knelt before Jesus to worship and petition Him (Matt 8:2; Mark 1:40).}

The lifting of hands is a sacred, holy act of worship.\footnote{Cf., Ps 63:3-4 declares, “Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name (emphasis mine).” When a member of the congregation lifts their hands, it is not to praise or celebrate a person (pastor, worship leader, special singer, drama member, etc.), rather it is in reverence to the Lord and the truth of God as presented by the person. In a sporting event, people lift their hands in celebration of man. However, believers lift their hands in response to the Lord and His acts. Consider Neh 8:1-6, “…So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly…then he read from it…and Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands (emphasis mine). And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” The lifting of hands during worship is generally done spontaneously, as the believer feels appropriate. However, there are times when the congregation is enjoined to lift their hands unto the Lord corporately. Ps 134:2 declares, “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord.”} Ps 142:2 states, “Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” The Apostle Paul wrote, “I desire therefore that [believers] pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim 2:8). In each event, as with bowing and
kneeling, the lifting of the hands demonstrates the act of worship.  

Pentecostal Worship is a Participatory Event

Pentecostal worship expression involves group participation. Pentecostal forms of worship expression are rarely spectator events. The congregational members are active participants in the worship process. Throughout the worship gathering, the congregational members may be called upon as a group to stand, bow, kneel, lie prostrate, rejoice, sing along, pray or praise while others are actively engaged in the same process, or join in a solemn moment of quiet reverence. Even on occasions when one member or a sub-group of members (e.g., choir) is engaged in a performance expression of worship, the body of Christ is encouraged to participate with accolades of praise to God, the complimentary use of clapping, or a suitable demonstration of emotional response.

Pentecostal Worship is Best Expressed within a Corporate Environment

For worship encounters in the Old Testament, the presence and glory of God inhabited a location. Jesus is now the center of worship and the presence and glory of God—in the Person of the Holy Spirit—abides within the believer. 

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84 Other demonstrative expressions of worship may include dancing, waving of the arms, and jumping (or hopping) to a rhythm.

85 Or, one may substitute another culturally accepted means of expressing appreciation or thanksgiving to God for another's gift.

86 For example, the congregation member may stand in reverence to God, weep because they are "touched" by the performance, rejoice with the performers by dancing or swaying to the music, etc. In every case, the response must not distract from the performance or draw undue attention to the member.

87 For example, Sinai, the tabernacle, the Temple, or Jerusalem.

88 Peterson, 201.
Testament teaches that God’s dwelling on earth is no special building or sanctuary within a building: it is the people of God themselves. We are the temple of Lord.”

Paul reveals a mystery to the Corinthian church. He informs them that they are individually “a temple of the Lord” (1 Cor 6:19-20), however when gathered together they are collectively the temple of the Lord (1 Cor 3:16-17). In a unique manner, God’s presence is manifested in greater ways when believers unite corporately. Jesus said, “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matt 18:20). My point is not to suggest that Jesus is not present when a believer is alone but to suggest that His presence is more profoundly experienced when the body of Christ is corporately united. This is a mystery. However, Pentecostal worship occurs within the dynamic framework of the corporate gathering in ways that may not be experienced otherwise. On a divine level, synergy is at work. Paul repeatedly demonstrates in 1 Corinthians 14 the manner in which the body of Christ is strengthened and edified during times of worship. Believers must continually seek out times of corporate gathering and they must do it even more in light of the imminent return the Lord (Heb 10:24-25).

*The Function of Worship*

Within the framework of the preceding guidelines, the act of worship satisfies three foundational principles: (1) Remembering—looking backward; (2) Anticipating—

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89 Ibid.

90 The context of Paul’s issue in 1 Corinthians 3 is corporate in nature (he is addressing division within the church body) whereas the context of 1 Corinthians 6 focuses on the individual (i.e., the individual Corinthian believer).

91 Stephen Covey defines synergy as the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. “It means that the relationship which the parts have to each other is...the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying, and the most exciting part.” (from *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* [New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Publishers, 1989], 263.)
looking forward; and (3) Celebrating—rejoicing. Worship is more than singing a song or attending a church service. It is an act in which (1) the heart (remembering and anticipating) expresses gratitude and fear, and (2) the body (in celebrating) joins in the recognition of God’s greatness.

Worship, therefore, is the act of physically expressing the spiritual condition of the heart. Jesus told the woman at the well, “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). Usually truth is interpreted in a philosophical sense. However, it is unlikely that the woman would have understood Jesus’ assertion in any philosophical sense, recognized His statement as a metaphor, or somehow understood that the water in the well served as a symbol for the Holy Spirit. She recognized that each of His responses in the narrative exposed the hypocrisy between her actions and her heart. In a vain and final attempt, the woman sought to justify worship with procedural matters by saying, “We worship on this mountain.” However, Jesus countered her

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92 Webber, 27-28, 62. When we worship, we remember what God has done (what He has brought us from or through), we anticipate what is to come (answers to prayer, His second coming), and we celebrate by rejoicing in the faith that we have in God. We celebrate what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do.

93 Cf., Burge identifies “the spirit” with the Holy Spirit and the water motif of John 4 but believes the meaning refers to the inner experience of the believer. He notes that the truth may refer to “worship that is genuine and grounded in reality” but prefers to equate its meaning with Christological and philosophical nuances. (Gary M. Burge, The Anointed Community [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987], 193.; Peterson sees the attention of “spirit and truth” as revealing Jesus as the center of worship experience. “The true worshipers will be those who relate to God through Jesus Christ.” (David Peterson, Engaging with God, 97-100); Tasker explains spirit and truth worship as worship centered in Jesus (R. V. G. Tasker, John [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960], 77.); Tenney avoids the philosophical dimension of spirit and truth and is closest to the meaning when he suggests that the phrase means “that worship must deal honestly and openly with God.” (Merrill C. Tenney, The Gospel of John, Expositors Bible Commentary, vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981], 56.).
argument by directly linking the spirit (heart of worship) with truth (righteousness; righteous actions). Actions are only righteous when they flow from a heart devoted to the holy character of God.

In a similar conflict over “correct procedure,” the prophet Amos contends with the people over their worship when he said, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream” (Amos 5:21, 23-24). Right living is directly associated with acceptable worship. The people of Amos’ day were not worshiping in spirit and in truth. The procedural process of worship may have been correct. However, their actions did not correspond to a heart truly devoted to the Lord. There was no truth in the spirit of their worship.

Jesus contended with the Pharisees over the same circumstance. On one occasion, Jesus quoted the words of Isaiah to demonstrate the Father’s grief over the worship of the people. “These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me” (Matt 15:8-9). By quoting this passage, Jesus showed the fundamental correlation between “what is in the heart and what comes out the mouth” (Matt 15:10). In this sense, His meaning is, “What is in your heart (spirit of the matter) and what is expressed by your body (true actions; righteousness) is not the same thing.”

It seems reasonable to conclude that the true worship of John 4 is a reference to the righteous reflection of the worshiper’s heart. The actions of a person are true when the worship expressed corresponds honestly to the spirit of their heart. The call of Amos 5, Matthew 15, and John 4 is for worship in spirit and in truth. The function of worship is the genuine demonstration of the heart.
Development and Implementation

As noted earlier, this study of indigenous Pentecostal worship theology is an ongoing project. It seems appropriate, since theological study must be functional, to briefly outline a process for further development and implementation. I have had several occasions to teach Pentecostal worship theology in domestic and foreign settings. Conducted in a church setting (whether with a single church or multiple churches), these seminars are effective in a one to three-day format.

The one to three-day seminar format is effective in challenging local worship teams and leaders in understanding a proper worship theology. This type of event must include practical matters (e.g., leadership skills, vocal technique, instrument technique, group dynamic skills, the proper use of sound equipment, etc.) and works particularly well as a module within a pastor’s leadership conference. It is my hope to develop a comprehensive weeklong seminar for Bible college level students. In time, a standard college level course should be developed and considered for inclusion within any pastoral or missionary degree requirements.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented a functional approach to theological study. A theological process must provide sound hermeneutical guidelines without hindering the Holy Spirit’s work in deepening the understanding. All theological process must move the student from exegesis to exposition. Process without practical application hinders proper biblical understanding. Therefore, the function of the theological process is to understand what a text means and then relate it to the present day.

Utilizing the foundation of a functional theological process, a practical application
regarding indigenous Pentecostal worship theology followed. The challenge of making Christian worship teaching indigenous without allowing it to become syncretistic is a continual struggle. Wherever the gospel message is introduced, it is imperative that a missionary challenge the new converts to develop songs and expressions of worship that, while not contradicting the nature of God or compromising the message of the Gospel, are genuinely native. Teaching an indigenous Pentecostal worship theology must begin with the missionary’s careful understanding of the Scriptures and an informed understanding of the culture of the worshipers.

The result of this study defines a “worthwhile theology”\(^{94}\) of worship. The method of worship presupposed in Scripture is Pentecostal. Pentecostal worship is by nature audible, demonstrative in form, a participatory event, and best expressed in a corporate environment. Worship is more than singing a song or attending a church service, rather it is an act in which the heart and body expresses gratitude and fear and recognizes God’s greatness. Therefore, the act of worship is the genuine physical demonstration of the heart; it is worship in spirit and in truth.

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This is an introductory consideration for developing an indigenous Pentecostal worship theology. It is my hope that the Lord will further enable me to “flesh this out” in an attempt to help the Body of Christ—in whatever cultural setting—to grow in a proper understanding of worship.

\(^{94}\) Fee, 2.
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