THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORSHIP*

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I. Overview

Worship stands as the central act of congregational life. Some have described congregations as organizations whose primary product is the worship service. While churches may have various programs and missions throughout the week, nothing trumps the appointed hour (or hours) when attenders and members gather for worship. That one- to three-hour service functions as the space where the congregation most fully expresses who they are and what they believe. The significance of the worship service remains the same whether it be a house church with a guitar in a living room, a night club atmosphere with swirling spotlights and pulsing music, or a more traditional ceremony in a gothic cathedral with stained glass windows and a mighty pipe organ. Regardless of venue or scale, it has even been noted by sociologists that if a congregation failed to produce a regular worship service, it would cease to be considered a congregation—even if it remained religiously active in other ways.

During worship, the church offers its most conscientious presentation of itself through its most dramatic rituals. And, yes, all congregations engage in rituals. While we tend to associate "ritual" with churches that practice a high liturgy or feel more formal, all congregations have worship rituals. These include a routine (an order of songs, prayers, announcements, and sermon), costumes (expected and appropriate dress from both participants and attenders), places (sanctuaries, pews, chairs, tables), and props (Bibles, hymnals, bulletins, prayer books). Rituals ultimately have significance in the way that they offer an apparatus to both *express* and to be *formed*. As an event full of ritual, then, the worship service creates and reinforces the community that has gathered. Sociologists have reported that worship offers a venue for a congregation to express who it is—both to itself and also to others. In short, the rituals reveal what the participants value and care about. They communicate what is worthy of praise and what should be avoided and critiqued. For all these reasons, sociologists view understanding worship as crucial for a broader assessment of congregational life (Ammerman 1997).

Historically, sociologists have displayed varied and keen interest in the worship service as an event. A father of the discipline, Emile Durkheim, described worship as the experience of "collective effervescence." That is, those gathered for worship feel a transformation in the fact that they are experiencing the same emotions at the same time in close physical proximity with others. Durkheim elaborates that when these rituals are enacted week after week, worship works to build boundaries between the "sacred" world that exists within the particular faith community and the "profane" world outside of the service.

More recently, sociologists have focused on the emotional religious experience that attenders seek. These sociologists assume that humans function as seekers of "Emotional Energy" (EE), "a socially derived . . . feeling of confidence, courage to take action, [and] boldness in taking initiative" (Collins 2004, 39). Social action (including worship), then, has the goal of generating and spreading EE. The effective production of EE makes people, activities, and groups (like

*This project benefitted from the careful work of our student research assistant, Alyssa Muehmel (Calvin College, Department of Sociology and Social Work).

churches) more attractive and thus more successful. Some have argued that megachurches' effective production of EE explains their attractiveness and relative success. In the end, the strength of a sociologically-informed understanding of worship rests in the ability to frame the event with concepts and analytical categories that help make sense of the social phenomena that draw people to that experience on a weekly basis.

Helpful Concepts

Perhaps one of sociology's strongest contributions in reflecting on worship is conceptual categories and metaphors that help to illuminate the social processes of liturgy and ritual. As we know, worship varies widely. Even when congregations inhabit the same city block or belong to the same denomination, the likelihood that they engage in worship differently remains high. One reason for these discrepancies in worship routines is that congregations in the United States enjoy a great degree of autonomy. Sociologists have described this dominant-form local church authority as ***de facto congregationalism***. That is, no matter the polity, the hierarchy, or claims made by the church order, churches tend to operate with a tremendous amount of local control. Some scholars have seen de facto congregationalism as a strength of religion in America in that it allows for worship to be accommodated to local attenders' tastes and preferences (Warner 1994).

Despite the independence of de facto congregationalism, churches still operate in relationship to each other. Broadly speaking, churches exist with a ***congregational ecology***. The metaphor of ecology, or a natural environment, illuminates the life of congregations by casting them as organisms bent on survival. With that in mind, we see that congregations need to have access to nutrients (attenders, typically). They either need to be located in an area where they find themselves surrounded by a large population of potential and loyal attenders or they need to offer something compelling enough to draw attenders past other churches to their sanctuary on Sunday mornings (Ammerman *et al.* 1998).

Thus, congregations do not perform worship in vacuums; they negotiate the effects of broader socioeconomic trends and the presence of other churches. As they jockey with other faith communities, congregations also have a tendency toward ***isomorphism***. That is, congregational worship occurs within a context where leaders feel pressure to offer patterns and rituals that resemble those of similar congregations (these could be neighboring churches, churches with a similar theological tradition, or churches from within the same denomination). In other words, if they stray too far from the dominant worship practices of the similar congregations, it may raise legitimacy questions. The safe route, then, for maintaining legitimacy inevitably means maintaining a worship style that potential attenders recognize as somewhat familiar (Ammerman 2005).

All that being said, though, congregations also feel a concurrent tension of developing some type of worship ***niche*** that establishes a unique identity. After all, if you are offering the same song selection and liturgy as the congregation down the street, why would anyone drive by that church to come to yours? Thus, sociologists have noted that congregations that nurture a specialization or identity within their worship tend to be more successful. They have a distinguishable worship that resonates and creates loyal attenders. An especially attractive specialization or niche will help a congregation to draw from beyond perceived geographical boundaries (Dougherty and Mulder 2009).

That concept of niche also lends itself to the idea that congregations actually compete in a ***religious marketplace***. Although many sociologists of religion hesitate to use an economic model/metaphor to discuss congregational life, some find it useful to describe the competitive religious market in which suppliers (churches) feel incentive to meet consumers' (attenders') needs and expectations. The utility of the economic metaphor rests in its ability to explain how energetic church plants can grow quickly when they offer an innovation that no other congregation in that market has cornered. On the other hand, if a church simply mimics a worship practice/identity that has been successfully implemented down the street by another congregation, chance of success remains limited. In the religious marketplace, niche overlap and competition among comparable congregations can undermine church health and vitality (Roof 2001).

In thinking about the variety of worship practices that exist in North America, the notion of ***repertoire*** has been useful in understanding the discrete elements that appear in congregations from coast-to-coast. That is, worship tends to be constructed from a repertoire of elements—"specific practices such as organ music, choir singing, communion, reciting creeds, kneeling, sermons, Bible reading, speaking in tongues, and so on—that are available for deployment in worship services" (Chaves 2004, 130). Repertoires of worship elements do not remain static; new elements become legitimated and enter the repertoire while other elements might be deemed less relevant and dropped from the repertoire. With this in mind, the National Congregations Study lists a repertoire of 29 worship elements. These range from congregational singing (reported in 96 percent of congregations) and sermons (reported in 95 percent of congregations) to people raising their hands in praise (reported in 45 percent of congregations) to the use of incense (reported in 4 percent of congregations). Whatever elements a congregation deploys, they tend to be chosen from a repertoire that is influenced by time, place, culture, and religious tradition.

Recent Trends in Worship

Beyond conceptual categories, though, sociologists also contribute by implementing surveys that track trends within the repertoire of worship. These studies illuminate what has actually been happening during worship services. The adoption of innovations has held particular interest. Though individual experience may create a perception that worship changes in recent years have been radical and sweeping, surveys actually demonstrate that worship change tends to be fairly deliberate and slow. Moreover, congregations and traditions have distinct attitudes toward modification. Some worshipping communities readily implement innovations as soon as they appear, some do so hesitantly, others grudgingly, and some refuse to innovate altogether. It seems clear that different worship styles satisfy various people.

The majority of congregations hold one Sunday morning worship service (54 percent) and almost half (47 percent) report no changes in their repertoire in the last few years. Moreover, those who did attempt changes indicated that these remained small or incremental—very few reported major changes (6 percent) or the addition of another service (7 percent). During the decade from 2000 to 2010, the overall percentage of churches engaging in contemporary worship (which includes drums and electric guitar or bass) grew from 29 percent to 43 percent. However, a closer look reveals varied growth in contemporary worship among religious traditions: Old-line Protestants seemed more reticent, with the percentage expanding from 13 to 25 percent, while evangelical Protestants seemed more embracing, with the percentage growing from 35 to 51 percent. Disparities among religious traditions also exist regarding technology: While 62 percent

of nondenominational congregations always use projection systems, only 6 percent of Catholic churches do as regularly (Royle 2012).

Though it might be easy to allow these numbers and statistics to wash over us, these studies have value in the way they illustrate the fact that these varied worship repertoires tend to have similar goals and purposes. That is, there continues to be an extremely wide bandwidth in which congregations engage in worship rituals every single week. And whether the worship includes drums, kneeling, incense, or projection, leaders and attenders understand the service as inspiring and an opportunity to experience the presence of God. The trends in worship also remain important in what they tell us about the unifying vision of the congregation.

Theoretical Lenses

The ability to create concepts and identify trends rests on the foundations of sociology's paradigms. Sociology is a "multiple paradigm science" (Ritzer 1975), one that employs several lenses through which to observe, contemplate, and offer explanations of the world. More precisely, these lenses or paradigms comprise social theory. These explanatory frameworks offer disciplined and systematic ways for thinking about any phenomenon, including worship. While sociologists may lean toward one perspective or another, most will agree that the world in which we live is so complex that no single theory is capable of explaining all of social life. In fact, we are in good company in suggesting that we need these multiple perspectives—even when they may seem discordant—in order to appreciate fully the wonderful complexity of human experience. Sociology invites people to step back from the taken-for-granted world in which we live and to examine it from a new perspective.

Social theory offers multiple vantage points from which to view worship. In what follows, we introduce four theories central to sociology: structural functionalism, conflict theory, feminist theory, and symbolic interactionism. To do so we offer examples of how each perspective could be used as a lens through which to view congregational worship by exploring the photograph below.

Structural functionalism was the dominant theory of the mid-20th century. And although it has fallen out of fashion, functionalism nonetheless may prove useful in thinking about worship. As the name suggests, structural functionalism pays attention to how the structures of the social world—for example, economic, educational, and legal systems—work together (function) to maintain stable conditions for social life. A functionalist perspective is curious about how the social machine adapts to changing cultural conditions, defines and achieves its goals, integrates its component parts, and maintains the cultural patterns that motivate individuals. This theoretical perspective holds that each part of the social system possesses an important or necessary role—like an analog watch, all of the springs, gears, and pinions are required to make the watch tick. Likewise, the functionalist is especially interested in how the system influences the people in it—or, extending the watch metaphor, how the concept of time represented by a wristwatch influences the people who wear, maintain, and created them.

A functionalist lens raises questions that help one think about what worship does. On the surface, the function of corporate worship includes focusing attention on God, celebrating who God is and what God has done, and expressing and experiencing one's relationship with God together with fellow worshippers. In this context, one also learns theology, history, and how to relate one's faith to one's circumstances. Worship cultivates relationships, instills a sense of shared identity, and records important life transitions through rituals such as baptism, first communion, and confirmation. Worship structures our time at various points in the week, compelling the faithful to be present. Participation regulates behavior by conforming participants' actions to the order of the service and the expectations of the group. Worship also socializes people into group membership, through it we learn to speak and think and act with a specific theological inflection (e.g., Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Reformed, etc.).

When we turn our attention to the specific worship service shown in the photo above, a more detailed analysis is possible. We are able to think about the ways that art and architecture function in worship. The banner showing a dove may signal the time of year according to the church calendar, and the stained glass windows seem to have a role in telling the biblical, church, and congregational story. The function of the procession to mark the beginning of the service also reinforces the centrality of the cross and the Bible. And the hymnals being used are not simply an aide to singing; they also help to get everyone on the same page theologically. After all, one important function of worship music (of whatever style) is to smuggle theology into the soul of the worshipper.

The functions of worship are manifold. The abbreviated discussion above only scratches the surface of what worship does and mostly focuses on the more obvious and positive functions of worship. There are also latent functions operating beneath the surface, ones with which sociology invites students of worship to wrestle. Returning to the photo above, notice that with rare exception the participants are white and dressed in formal attire, and there is an abundance of gray hair in the sanctuary. This is no coincidence; if one were to take similar photos in any number of churches a demographic pattern would become more visible. As the saying goes, "Birds of a feather flock together." This flock of Christians happens to be racially white, wealthy, and older. This observation is central to the church growth movement that popularized the homogeneous unit principle. If numerical growth is central to a congregation's mission, then finding the mix of ingredients to attract a specific group of people is central to worship. In other words, one could argue that the function of worship is to attract a specific type of person as part of a strategy for growing a church around a homogeneous group of people.

Conflict theory focuses attention on power dynamics and human relationships. This perspective is concerned with who controls the limited resources available and the consequences of decisions about how those resources are deployed for those without a say in the decision-making process. One concept important to conflict theory is alienation—the sense of exclusion due to the absence of social power. For example, a conflict theorist might examine how workers are alienated from the means of production (someone else decides what is manufactured and how), from the products they generate (in many cases the worker cannot afford the products they create or the services they offer), or from other people in the workplace (workers at opposite ends of the assembly line do not have personal relationships with one another, and office workers may only know one another through email). Ultimately these conditions place limits on people and alienate them from achieving the fullness of human flourishing (creativity, relationships, community, fulfillment, meaningful work, etc.).

Every congregation has a limited set of resources and must decide how those resources are used for worship and other needs in congregational life, ministry, and the world beyond the walls of the church. What that decision-making process entails, who ultimately makes decisions, and the implications of those choices for members of the congregation matter. Conflict theory invites us to think about issues of equity, inclusion, and empowerment. More than simply examining competing interests around worship, the conflict theorist will question, for example, the conditions that underpin the decision making process, how these conditions reinforce the positions of the powerful, and the ways people are alienated as a result. A motivating factor behind this line of thinking is a deep concern for social justice—what some might identify as the pursuit of shalom.

Applying conflict theory to our photograph of worship would raise questions about social arrangements that inhibit people from experiencing God. Note that there is no visual evidence of meaningful diversity among those assembled. It is largely a congregation of white and wealthy people who are well along in age (gray hair). While a functionalist lens might encourage one to see the success of worship formulated to attract people from a similar background, the conflict perspective would see the homogeneity as the tip of a problematic iceberg. You see, not only does worship provide an opportunity for people with similar backgrounds to flock together, it also reinforces their racial and social class tastes and preferences. Art, architecture, music, instruments, rituals, interpretations of scripture, etc., operate in a way that undermine attempts to nurture diversity and unity in the body of Christ. The implications of these divisions for the church are profound: The reconciling work of the Christian message and mission is unwittingly undermined by the facts that none of the participants sees her/himself as racist, that this population of Christians does not always recognize the power of the social system to shape opportunities or life outcomes, and that very few have meaningful interactions with people of another race, much less worship or serve together with them (see Emerson and Smith 2000). Just as concerning is the fact that those gathered to worship are part of the dominant class—the ones who reinforce and guard the social structures that produce institutional racism—and may be unaware that worship in an all-white upper-middle/upper class congregation might work in this way. These conditions alienate people from one another and ultimately from the object of their worship. Research could provide a detailed description of how this happens in a congregation, identify and explain the causes of this divide, and propose ways that corporate worship could address the concerns raised by the conflict perspective.

Gender plays a central role in behavior and social organization. From an early age—in fact, even before a child is born—society is concerned with assigning its gender. People ask an expecting

parent if they know if they will have a boy or girl. Some friends and family will give gender-specific gifts: a blue onesie for a boy, pink for a girl. Children are directed toward what are seen as gender-appropriate roles, activities, and identities. A society's ideas about gender shape the ways in which males and females act and interact, structure daily life, and influence life outcomes and opportunities. In the process, a society's dominant expectations about gender set up inequalities. For example, historically girls were not encouraged to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and math. As a result, fewer women are employed in these fields that tend to be higher-paying professions. Today women in those positions may find it hard to break through the glass ceiling or tend to be paid less when compared to their male counterparts. On the other hand, men inclined toward one of the so-called "pink-collar" careers such as nursing or early childhood education may have been discouraged by their high school guidance counselors or through the teasing of their peers. For those who do enter traditionally female professions, it is not uncommon for men to be promoted to positions of authority and leadership more frequently than women in what is known as "riding the glass escalator." These kinds of issues and inequalities are in the purview of feminist theory.

Like the rest of social life, gender is present in worship. God is the Father. Jesus is the Son. Priests are male; so are most pastors and elders and quite a few deacons, too. Most congregations are comfortable with women leading praise songs, directing choirs, or running youth programs, but quite a few will not permit a woman to preach or teach the Bible in mixed company. We do not wish to wander into a theological debate about whether or not these tendencies are good are bad from a theological standpoint. Our task is simply to point out ways feminist theory could be productive in thinking about worship, so first and foremost we need to recognize that gender and theology inform one another in ways that enable certain kinds of behavior and constrain others. Some of the ways gender operates within a worship context seem to have more to do with cultural mores than solid theology. The student of worship should pay attention to these contours, examine the extent to which culture is at play in worship, and identify the consequences of gender in worship, especially consequences that create conditions of inequality.

In the worship service pictured above, women were involved in different points of the service: Two female violinists played during the prelude and offertory; women carried the cross and the Bible during the procession (pictured); and a female elder stood by during an infant baptism as a reminder of the congregation's commitment to help nurture the child in the faith. The rest of the service was led by men: A male sang the introit—Mendelssohn's "How Beautiful on the Mountains," in case you were wondering—and an anthem prior to the offertory; a male liturgist officiated the service; and a man delivered the sermon. One would need to observe more than this one service before drawing conclusions about gender roles—or anything else, for that matter. If one did, it would become apparent that women do have important roles in congregational life and worship: Two women are on staff (one of them preaches on occasion and both lead worship as liturgists); women serve as elders and deacons; and women hold positions of leadership on church committees. In many ways the structure of the church and opportunities in ministry for women are quite progressive. Below the surface, however, a keen observer will notice differences in how the congregation responds to women. For example, on Sundays when the female pastor is scheduled to preach, attendance is thin. Further research would do well to uncover the ways that gender expectations operate in settings like this to produce responses that may limit participation or blunt the prophetic edge of a sermon.

People have constructed a world full of symbolic meaning. Throughout their lives people learn these meanings and behave based on the information the meanings convey. One learns that a red

light means "stop," that the bad cowboy wears a black hat, that driving a Mercedes Benz signals status and some measure of wealth, and that a diamond ring on a certain finger signifies someone is engaged to be married. Our interpretations of these symbols guide our actions: we stop at red lights, we anticipate dastardly deeds from certain cowboys, the valet expects a bigger tip from the drivers of certain cars, and diamonds ward off unwelcomed romantic advances. Symbolic interactionists look to shared meanings to understand the motivations that underlie human relationships, identities, and action.

A key orientation within symbolic interactionism is known as dramaturgy. This way of thinking about human interactions is inspired by the famous lines from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players" (2.7). This understanding suggests that in any given situation we perform certain roles based on a script provided to us by our culture. We use props and costumes to help us perform more convincingly. We rehearse through play, by watching the performances of others, and through trial and error. We have a backstage where we are out of character and life may be a little messy or complicated, somewhere we do things all but a select few are permitted to see, a place where we retreat from our front-stage performances. And we are not limited to any single role; we perform different selves depending on the set and other characters present. That is to say, we act differently while interacting with a client than with one's boss, with one's spouse versus one's parent, as a Little League baseball umpire or as person pulled over for an expired license plate.

Viewing congregational worship spaces and practices through the symbolic interactionist lens brings a universe of symbols, meanings, and performances into view. It is a rich environment in which shared meanings are imputed to symbols such as crosses, doves, bread and wine, candles, and colors, which are all visible in the photograph above. Below the surface other meanings are present—ones to which people respond but may never reflect upon or recognize the importance of: the congregation's style of dress, the way one pronounces certain words or names, whether or not one knows the words of the creed or prayer or song by heart, whether or not one knows to pass the record of attendance during the offering, or whether one knows when to sit or stand or say "Amen"—or how to say "Amen" (AH-men or AY-men). Likewise, the presence or absence of these markers of belief and belonging say something about one's relationship to those gathered, to the faith, and to God. They present information about the degree to which one is an insider or an outsider. The performances, too, and all that comes with them (costumes, props, a stage, lighting, etc.) raise additional questions about worship, as do those occasions when someone acts out of character, misses a cue, or goes off script.

Even though our focus is on the formal locations and activities for corporate worship, these lenses are just as productive in thinking about the myriad of less formal occasions and places in which individuals and groups engage in worship or worship-like activities. We could just as well gaze upon a contemporary worship service in a renovated storefront or warehouse through these lenses. Likewise, space has only permitted a discussion of four broad theoretical traditions. Like theology, social theory has many different divisions, traditions, and schools of thought. Sociologists parse the social world and the nuances of meaning like an exegete plying their skills on the sacred text.

Theory is one part of the toolkit for thinking about the social world. In the next section, tools for conducting research are discussed.

The Sociological Toolkit: Research Methods for Studying Worship

Traditionally, social scientific research methods focus on numbers and words. Numbers-driven research (quantitative sociology) uses surveys to collect data from a subset of a population in a way that ensures the information is as reliable and representative as possible. The responses to survey questions are quantified, the numbers are crunched using statistics, and findings are reported with the aid of charts, graphs, and tables. The aim of this kind of work is to map out the broad contours of the social landscape. When repeated over time, quantitative studies are able to identify trends. Good examples of this kind of work include Mark Chaves' chapter on worship in *Congregations in America* and the Pew Research Center's more recent religious landscape survey that helps us understand the religious beliefs, behaviors, and affiliations of Americans (http://www.pewforum.org/).

Words-driven techniques (qualitative sociology or ethnography) use a researcher's personal observations (recorded as field notes) and interviews to describe and explain social life. Where quantitative approaches offer a broad view of a population (e.g., attitudes toward drums in worship nationally), qualitative studies focus on a particular context to provide a deep level of detail (e.g., what happened when First Church introduced drums in worship). Examples of qualitative studies of worship include Korie Edwards' *The Elusive Dream,* Gerardo Martí's *Worship across the Racial Divide,* and Timothy Nelson's *Every Time I Feel the Spirit* (all discussed below).

We live in a visual age, and in recent years researchers have turned to images to engage in a form of research called visual sociology. Visual sociologists treat images (photos, videos, drawings, maps, print advertisements, etc.) as data that can be collected, analyzed, and used to explain social phenomena. The role of images extends beyond an eye-catching illustration of an idea; they are treated as a form of evidence akin to a numeric chart or interview quotation that is integral to the research process and reporting of findings. Visual techniques range from documentary photography or videography to the use of photographs as prompts in interviews. Visual research is gaining traction in the sociology of religion and in congregational studies, where researchers are developing ways not only to use these techniques to further our knowledge about religion, congregations, and worship, but also to engage congregations through workshops and exercises that engage congregations in the process of self-understanding, program evaluation, community action, and change (see visual methods blogs at http://studyingcongregations.org/). Nancy Ammerman's *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes* (discussed below) incorporates a visual technique.

Several books introduce the more popular tools in the sociological toolkit for studying congregations and worship. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* is foundational to congregational research. It provides four frames useful for thinking about worship: (1) ecology (social environment), (2) culture, (3) resources, and (4) process. *Studying Congregations* is also a practical handbook for doing research and offers a how-to overview of tools including interactive exercises, interviewing, participant observation, and surveys. The conceptual framework and many of the research methods found in *Studying Congregations* also are available at http://studyingcongregations.org/. A similar handbook titled *Studying Local Churches* (Cameron et al. 2005) offers perspectives and tools from anthropology, sociology, organizational studies, and theology. It includes a thoughtful treatment of worship showing what each discipline brings to its study. *Seeing Religion: Toward a Visual Sociology of Religion* (Williams 2015) provides an overview of visual research techniques that may be adapted to congregations and worship.

These techniques are being adapted for use in congregational settings, and some are available at http://studyingcongregations.org/.

II. Significant Publications

Ammerman, Nancy T. 2014. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes.* New York: Oxford University Press. An important current in the sociology of religion is the study of faith and spirituality in everyday life (also known as lived religion, see McGuire below). Ammerman is at the forefront of this conversation and offers insights about the connection between one's individual spiritual life and involvement in collective worship. How does the practice of worship shape faith in everyday life? How do congregational worship "scripts" play out at home, at work, or during leisure time? And in what ways do the "sacred stories" encountered and reinforced by worshipping with one's "spiritual tribe" shape a sense of identity and inform action beyond the walls of the church? Ammerman does not answer these questions for us; instead, her work equips us to begin answering them ourselves.

Chaves, Mark. 2004. *Congregations in America.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Within a larger discussion of congregational life, Chaves describes various elements of worship (speaking in tongues, singing by choir, silent prayer, organ, drums, etc.) and the percentage of congregations that engage or utilize certain elements. Moreover, he explains how worship patterns are derived from denominational history, social class, demographics, and location. Finally, Chaves offers the terms "enthusiasm" and "ceremony" as two independent dimensions of worship practice.

DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Though not necessarily just about worship music, DeNora's book helpfully offers deeper insights as to why music has such a powerful effect on humans. She argues that music has significance in "ordering the consciousness" or priming the worshipper's mind to think about God. DeNora describes music as being employed to tune the spirit, enabling worshippers to picture their relationship to God and to religious values. Finally, music plays a crucial role in catalyzing imagination and memory.

Edwards, Korie L. 2008. *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*. New York: Oxford University Press. In an ethnography primarily about the difficulties of creating and maintaining multiracial congregations, Edwards discusses some aspects of worship preference. These include timeliness, length of service, verbal affirmation, hand raising, and spontaneity. She finds that in an interracial context, the worship structures, practices, and preferences of the dominant group (typically white) tend to be most thoroughly implemented. In these instances, then, the minority group bears the burden of maintaining a racially mixed worship experience.

Ellingson, Stephen. 2007. *The Megachurch and the Mainline: Remaking Religious Tradition in the Twenty-First Century.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. In an ethnography of nine Lutheran churches from the San Francisco Bay area, Ellingson analyzes how congregations reconcile denominational tradition and adaptation. He argues that religious traditions tend to be in constant flux, never as static as they might seem. In the early twenty-first century, that has meant Protestant congregations have had to respond to the seeming dominance of the megachurch model that tends to hinge less on formal liturgy.

Emerson, Michael and Christian Smith. 2000. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press. Emerson and Smith

investigate why Christianity in the United States continues to be haunted by segregated congregations and, subsequently, segregated worship. Their discussion of internally similar (i.e., homogeneous) congregations offers insight as to why integrated worship communities remain so elusive. Moreover, we see that though many Christians see multiracial worshipping communities as a noble goal, many refuse to suffer the costs that might be associated with that effort.

Garces-Foley, Kathleen. 2007. *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission.* New York: Oxford University Press. Garces-Foley begins by noting how many congregations desire to be multiethnic. She then argues that since the Sunday worship service serves as the focal point and main gathering time of a congregation, it should serve as an arena to make a commitment to racial and ethnic inclusion highly visible. Garces-Foley also notes that while it may be easy to hire worship leaders or involve laity who demonstrate the congregation's diversity, it remains much more difficult to reflect inclusion through the content and form of the worship service.

Martí, Gerardo. 2012. *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation*. New York: Oxford University Press. A study of how music may or may not help congregations become more multiracial in their worship. Perhaps counterintuitively, Martí reports that buffet-style music (for instance, playing Hillsong for whites, gospel for African Americans, and salsa for Latinos) simply does not work. Moreover, we see that such practices actually exploit ill-conceived stereotypes. Martí, in response, suggests integrated choirs and worship leaders who build relationships through practicing and worshipping together.

McGuire, Meredith B. 2008. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life.* New York: Oxford University Press. McGuire asserts that "important parts of people's religious lives are invisible" (44) to researchers; perhaps this may be true for some clergy and congregational leaders too. While not specifically about worship, *Lived Religion* points to locations, practices, objects, and ideas in/through which religion and spirituality are practiced. Artwork, architecture, objects, and symbols set apart a church as sacred, create a context for worship, and situate that context within a tradition. People also use artifacts and strategies to make space for God in everyday life and to create conditions capable of evoking worship beyond the walls of a church building. McGuire underscores the importance of materiality, not just of the natural world or human-made objects, but also of people's embodied spiritual practices. These embodied practices, supported and maintained by religious artifacts, shape the ways people think of themselves and others—identity—and practice their faith.

Miller, Donald and Tetsunao Yamamori. 2007. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Miller and Yamamori argue that "some of the most innovative social programs in the world are being initiated by fast-growing Pentecostal churches" in the global south (6). Research sites and case studies range from serving children and youth in South Africa to drug addiction in Hong Kong and street children in Brazil. While this book is about local ministries using their resources to address social and spiritual problems, Chapter 5 makes the case that the Pentecostal experience of collective worship is foundational to this form of Christian social engagement. A DVD that accompanies the book includes short clips of worship from around the world.

Nelson, Timothy. 2005. *Every Time I Feel the Spirit: Religious Experience and Ritual in an African American Church*. New York: New York University Press. An engaging discussion

of “emotional worship.” Nelson argues that even in seemingly spontaneous and emotional worship, “feeling rules” inform how the service unfolds. That is, worship services that might to an outsider look ungoverned and chaotic actually have elaborate expectations about how congregants should respond to certain stimuli. These feelings are evoked through the discourse of the liturgy, prayers, songs, sermons, and testimonies.

Smith, Christian and Michael O. Emerson. 2008. *Passing the Plate: Why Americans Don’t Give Away More Money.* New York: Oxford University Press. American Christians are one of the wealthiest groups in history, yet despite the many opportunities in worship to give, they are not the most generous. If they were to give to their full potential, billions of additional dollars would become available to impact the world. Among the reasons why, Smith and Emerson identify consumerism, leaders’ aversion to discussing money, unclear expectations for giving, distrust of organizations, and resistance to planned giving. Since giving is integral to many (if not most) worship services—not to mention essential to paying CCLI or staff or utility bills—this book explains why American Christians do not give, and helps one to imagine what might be done to encourage generosity.

Vergara, Camilo José. 2005. *How the Other Half Worships*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. In this photographic survey of houses of worship in inner city contexts, the author explores the “socioeconomic conditions and religious practices that shape these churches and give them meaning” (ix). It is a journey though time and space, a work in progress that began in the 1970s in numerous cities throughout the United States and promises to continue. Vergara’s insightful photographs and descriptions offer a window into the ways the built environment shapes and is shaped by congregations’ architecture, art, and activities. It underscores the important relationship between local ecologies and contexts of worship.

Wuthnow, Robert. 2003. *All in Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalizing American Religion.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. At first blush, Wuthnow admits, his thesis may seem a bit of a stretch: “Vitality of America’s churches may depend significantly on the public’s growing interest in artistic activities” (20). As one considers his argument and the evidence he uses, one quickly warms to the idea that “artistic activities help to nurture interest in spiritual growth” (77). He reminds readers that arts have always been an important part of church history in America. Music, dance, and visual arts are an asset to the Church for revitalizing congregations and reaching their community by striking the chord of spirituality that runs through secular and sacred arts and music.

III. Classic Resources

In his praise for Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Stanley Aronowitz offers a helpful definition of a classic text: “it has outlived its own time and its author’s” (Macedo 2000,11). This certainly holds true for the resources discussed below. While only two of the authors are alive today (Peter Berger and George Ritzer), their works have taken on lives of their own. We selected a narrow set of concepts applicable to worship from a short list of thinkers with broad influence in sociology of religion.

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.* New York, NY: Anchor Books. This text is foundational to thinking about the ways we build culture (systems, organizations, meanings, etc.) and how each new generation is socialized into the worlds we build. Some will find the work helpful

in thinking about the creative process, how to make ideas and practices sticky, or how to socialize new generations or believers into the faith. Likewise, if one can better understand the ways in which this broken world is constructed, one is well on the way to greater effectiveness in the eschatological mandate of renewing the world, a project that not only culminates in worship but one that is in fact an act of worship.

Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Bellah and his co-authors present their study of the beliefs and practices that shape individuals and society—the substance of the American character, if you will. Religion, of course, is known to play an important role in the U.S., and this book underscores its enduring importance. The tension between the rise of individualism throughout the twentieth century, a shared commitment to the separation of church and state, and the recognition that religion has an important role to play in public life are taken up in Chapter Five. In it, they document the curious way some people piece together their own system of belief as though making selections in a cafeteria serving religions. The discussion is helpful for thinking about the myth of America, the role of religion and worship in public life, and religious individualism.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984 (1979). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Translated by Routledge, Kegan & Paul. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Bourdieu offers insights into how one's tastes—for food, music, films, books, art, etc.—are cultivated within particular cultural contexts. Central to his argument is the importance of social class in producing a sense of taste, an insight that is certainly true for many congregations. A church's architecture, art (or the lack thereof), liturgy (traditional versus contemporary versus blended), and behaviors (movements and emotion) primarily appeal to a certain social class. By thinking about worship through the lens of taste, one can begin to navigate changes to a congregation's "worship menu," reinvent worship styles to appeal to different types of people, and make strides toward making people of all stripes feel welcome in their midst.

Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Collins argues that humans seek "Emotional Energy" (EE), a socially derived sense of confidence that leads to courage to take action and being bold. Worship stands as an obvious venue for the creation of EE. Rituals create EE through the assembly of participants, a singular focus of attention among the participants, barriers that exclude outsiders, and a shared emotional mood. Successful production of EE has a relationship to the presence of "energy stars"—individuals who increase the EE of the other participants. These concepts have been used to explain the magnetism of megachurch worship patterns.

Durkheim, Emile. 1995 (1912). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* Translated by Karen E. Fields. New York: The Free Press. Durkheim offers the first sociological lens on rituals. His persuasive argument that rituals function as a mechanisms of social solidarity has maintained a longstanding resonance. Many scholars have since elaborated on his concept of "collective effervescence"— when people gather for a sacred event (like worship), the unity of their thought and experience leads to a collective excitement which, in turn, enhances feelings of solidarity and unity.

Flanagan, Kieran. 1991. *Sociology and Liturgy: Re-presentations of the Holy.* Basingstroke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. An attempt to avoid a reductionist approach to studying liturgy and rituals, cautioning sociologists against oversimplifying “the holy.” Flanagan insists that sociology and theology must be negotiated to make sense of sacred rituals. Sociology should be wary of simple causal explanations of rites, and theology must question explanations of liturgy that ignore its social aspects.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life.* New York: Doubleday Anchor. Goffman’s notion that dramaturgical analysis has significant utility for explaining social life offers profound insights for understanding worship. That is, humans in social situations can be understood as actors who play roles, wear costumes, and use props. Moreover, we have “front stage” selves where we undertake impression management. With this in mind, a worship service stands as a robust site to be better understood through dramaturgical analysis.

Oldenburg, Ray. 1999. *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community.* New York: Marlowe & Company. Though the volume offers no direct inquiry about churches and worship, Oldenburg’s notion of a “Third Place”—a location distinguished from one’s first place (home) and second place (work) as a neutral, level public place where one is known and comfortable (cue the theme song from the TV sitcom *Cheers*)—has had a profound influence within sociology and urban planning. Worship practitioners might find much to borrow from the notion of making the church service a type of third place.

Park, Robert Ezra and Ernest W. Burgess. 1921. *Introduction to the Science of Sociology.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. One of the first instances where scholars developed the idea of human ecology and, later, urban ecology, is found in this book. These concepts would eventually be utilized by congregational studies scholars to develop congregational ecology—the notion that congregations could be understood as organisms that survive, thrive, or die in relation to one another. For worship, that has often meant offering some niche or style that offers something different from the other congregations in the area.

Ritzer, George. 1993. *The McDonaldization of Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Ritzer argues that the logic of the fast food industry, exemplified by McDonald’s restaurants, has spilled over into other areas of life. He discusses how the fast food industry’s principles of efficiency (optimization of processes), calculability (portions, size, costs), predictability (the food and restaurants are practically the same around the world), and control through technology permeate contemporary culture. His ideas invite congregations to consider whether or not McDonaldization is compatible with church life and worship, how McDonaldization may provide a set of conditions and expectations for those who gather to worship, and how to respond.

Weber, Max. 2001(1905).*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Stephen Kalberg. New Ed edition, London, UK: Routledge. Among Weber’s key insights is the power and unintended consequences of ideas. He maintains that ideas from the Reformation about the priesthood of all believers and the possibility of pursuing a vocational calling in a this-worldly profession produced success in the marketplace among Calvinists. The theological commitments of Puritans, for example—exemplified by disciplines such as

frugality, hard work, duty, and reinvestment—generated rewards in the economic system *and* helped to establish capitalism. Ultimately success (personal or systemic) did not rely on being religious but on frugality, hard work, etc. Anyone (religious or not) could practice these disciplines and become successful. Ironically, the economic system solidified by religious commitments no longer needed or celebrated them. We suggest that a similar analysis could be made of worship—and we wonder if Weber's argument could be taken as a caution about adopting the practices of others before considering the implications.

IV. Prospects

Moving forward, a sociological perspective will likely offer robust insights on a multitude of issues and will enhance both the academy's and the church's understanding about the social significance of worship. The strength of sociology resides in its ability to make the familiar seem unfamiliar. In other words, sociology offers the tools to see worship with "fresh eyes." Moreover, the disciplinary toolkit offers instruments to refine what we know about worship. To illustrate the potential future of sociological analysis of worship, we offer an example of recent research on worship as it relates to Latino Protestants and an introduction to a compelling new methodology for congregational studies. We see these issues as significant because (1) the refinement of methodologies will allow for new perspectives and analysis and (2) continued interest in issues of race and ethnicity will translate into more vivid and accurate discussions about inclusive worship.

As we have already seen, more and more congregations have a desire to be attractive and inclusive to outsiders. Because worship functions as the central event of the week, churches see it as the linchpin for numerical growth and the development of a diverse congregation. Indeed, supposed "diversity experts" have developed a cottage industry in offering steps and systems toward becoming a more integrated and inclusive worshipping community. There seem to be dominant assumptions that certain groups of people worship in certain ways and have preferences for certain types of music, liturgy, or atmosphere. These experts tend to offer untested folk theories that have little evidence beyond their own experience in one or two congregations.

The sociological lens, though, subverts many assumptions about how certain groups of people supposedly always prefer to worship. By way of example, we know that Latino Protestants have been an understudied—and growing—segment of the religious demographic in the United States. Because of that, we actually remain fairly ignorant about Latino Protestant worship practices. That blind spot has allowed for scholars to confidently announce that Latino Protestant worship resembles a fiesta, that they prefer salsa music, and that they read the Bible using resonant metaphors such as borderlands and exile. Close ethnographic studies, though, have challenged these gross stereotypes. For instance, a Latino Pentecostal congregation in the Pacific Northwest has instituted a very disciplined, ordered worship. No running or dancing occurs during the service. All elements of worship run on a rigid time constraint that is signaled by the coordinator in the rear of the sanctuary. In short, there exists little to no resonance with the idea of fiesta. In other cases, Latino megachurches utilize state-of-the-art sound and lighting equipment that creates a club atmosphere while the musicians play Hillsong choruses. The atmosphere would not remind anyone of salsa music. Finally, recent research has uncovered the fact that although Latinos from places like Cuba or Mexico may read the Bible as a borderlands or exilic text, Latinos from countries in Central and South America demonstrate a tendency to use Abrahamic

metaphors in their reading: They have been called to a new place to be a blessing. In essence, then, it is likely that a significant amount of heterogeneity is present in Latino Protestant worship and we should not depend on assumptions and hunches.

As the United States continues to become more diverse and churches attempt to adapt (or not), the insights of sociology will help to debunk anecdotal assumptions about worship patterns and help to make sense of both the static and shifting patterns of these religious rituals. Beyond survey data and ethnographic research, an emerging methodology of visual sociology offers promising insights into worship practices. Houses of worship are an important feature of the social landscape. Their architecture and many of the artifacts they contain encapsulate meanings and preserve the memory of those who gather in them for worship. Their shapes, colors, materials, and symbols help to tell their story and create a context for gathering, worship, service, and outreach. The images found in church buildings are known to "operate as vehicles of communication between the human and the divine, . . . visualize the parameters of individual and communal identity, . . . embody recollection, . . . [and] construct and posit worlds of meaning" (Morgan and Promey 2001, 14). Nothing in this abbreviated inventory of the material culture and context of worship is capable of completing a survey or responding to a researcher's questions. These cultural artifacts are meant to be seen, and our research methods should reflect that fact.

Research should also reflect the fact that we live in a visual culture. More than passive consumers of media who take in thousands of still and motion pictures every day, we are active participants who help make this visual culture. We use our smartphones to take selfies and use Snapchat. We broadcast videos using Periscope and YouTube. We upload and share and tag and like millions of photographs every day. Think about it: It is likely that more people took a camera to worship last weekend than took a Bible—although some had both a camera and a Bible on the same device. Instead of only being annoyed at the occasional intrusion of a ringtone during a worship service, we need to embrace the potential of these devices for the visual sociology of worship.

Visual techniques are growing in their popularity among sociologists, and their application in the social scientific study of worship holds great potential. Some researchers carry cameras along with them as they conduct ethnographic observations of congregations. Their photographs complement their field notes by preserving details of their fieldwork for later analysis, and they provide a window through which a researcher's audience may peer (Day 2014). Other researchers use their own or participants' photographs as prompts in interviews. This technique is known as photo elicitation (PE) and is the most widely employed of all. When the participants provide the photos in PE, they lead the researcher in directions that may not have been anticipated. Instead of having a face-to-face interview, a researcher and their participant sit shoulder-to-shoulder as the researcher learns from the participant and their photographs (Richter 2015). Some sociologists of religion are using a participatory action research tool called photovoice to spark conversations about congregational and community needs and issues, to raise awareness, and to facilitate change (Williams 2016).

In the end, sociological tools for the study of worship continue to shift, evolve, and offer new insights on previously ignored subjects such as Latino Protestants. The value of sociology resides in its ability to offer fresh perspectives on worship that help congregational leaders and attenders better understand this central act of church life. Sociology challenges conventional wisdom and assumptions about worship by building arguments based on evidence (data), allowing leaders to innovate in ministry in informed and practical ways that lead to vitality.

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