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“It’s Your Breath in Our Lungs”: Sean Feucht’s Praise and Worship Music Protests and the Theological Problem of Pandemic Response in the U.S.

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Abstract: In response to U.S. government restrictions imposed as part of a nationwide response to the COVID-19 pandemic, charismatic worship leader Sean Feucht began a series of worship concerts. Feucht positioned these protests as expressions of Christian religious freedom in opposition to mandated church closings and a perceived double-standard regarding the large gatherings of protesters over police violence against Black and Brown persons. Government restrictions challenged the sine qua non liturgical act of encounter with God for evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics: congregational singing in Praise and Worship. However, as Feucht’s itinerant worship concerts traversed urban spaces across the U.S. to protest these restrictions, the events gained a double valence. Feucht and event attendees sought to channel God’s power through musical worship to overturn government mandates and, along the way, they invoked longstanding social and racial prejudices toward urban spaces. In this essay, I argue that Feucht’s events reveal complex theological motivations that weave together liturgical-theological, social, and political concerns. Deciphering this complex tapestry requires a review of both the history of evangelical engagement with urban spaces and the theological history of Praise and Worship. Together, these two sets of historical resources generate a useful frame for considering how Feucht, as a charismatic musical worship leader, attempts to wield spiritual power through musical praise to change political situations and the social conditions.



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1. Introduction

Since midsummer 2020, contemporary praise and worship music leader Sean Feucht has been making news headlines for a series of public worship events held in cities across the U.S. He has branded the events by fusing religious and political language under the social media-friendly hashtag #letusworship. These public, ad-hoc, contemporary praise and worship music events in cities across the U.S. have also provided the occasion for Feucht’s live worship music recordings, social media posts, and the sale of various kinds of merchandise.¹ His efforts have been met with strong praise by some (including by some from Bill Johnson’s Bethel Church, a prominent megachurch in Redding, CA with which he has been affiliated) and deep ire by other Christians and by public officials. Given these religious affiliations and connections, it is somewhat surprising that the media coverage and public discourse around Feucht’s events have not considered the worship theology of Praise and Worship as a primary motivating factor. When viewed through the lens of Praise and Worship liturgical theology, the problem that pandemic closures and public protests pose for Pentecostals—and other Praise and Worship practitioners among Charismatic and Evangelical Christians (Ingalls 2018)—comes into clearer focus.

Feucht has billed the events as a Christian response to the “spirit of fear” that has caused many churches to temporarily shut their doors. The events are also an avenue for Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical Christians² to publicly voice and embody their

dissent to the perceived targeting and silencing of Christian religious freedom through COVID19-related government ordinances. Feucht's website describes the impetus for the movement, saying,

The fervor to worship God free from government edict and societal persecution drove America's earliest settlers across oceans and wild frontiers. But our freedom to worship God and obey His Word has come under unprecedented attack. Powerful politicians and social media giants have engaged in uncharted abuses of religious liberty, silencing the faithful, banning our voices, and outright attacking our God-given right to declare His goodness. States across America, including right here in California, have shut down church services and even outlawed singing in church. It's time for the Church to rise up with one voice and tell our government leaders and the rulers of big tech that we refuse to be silenced! ("[Let Us Worship](#)" n.d.)

To that end, many of his events have been hosted at or near official public buildings (such as the Nashville Courthouse) or the sites of prominent U.S. monuments (such as on the Washington Mall). The political element of his protests is an especially salient feature for Feucht in his home state of California, where he lost a campaign bid for the 3rd congressional district in March 2020—a campaign expressly aimed at combatting the actions of Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom.³ His first #letusworship events began just a few months after his failed campaign. Though some of his events have skirted public health guidelines and local permit requirements, he has highlighted public baptisms as markers of God's blessing on the events such his New Year's Eve 2020 event on Skid Row in Los Angeles ([Mayfield 2020](#); [Spera 2020](#); [Duin 2020](#)).⁴ All the while, Feucht has continued to build a digital brand, social media presence, and commercial success in the overlapping communities of American Evangelicals, anti-mask proponents, and #AllLivesMatter pundits.

This essay explores the question of why a Pentecostal musical worship leader has joined the national political conflict over mask mandates and limitations on public gatherings through worship music gatherings. I suggest that the answer to that question cannot be found solely in sociological descriptions of Pentecostals and their political preferences. It is not simply in counter-protests and public speeches that this community of Christians has responded to the pandemic crises. Instead, I propose that understanding Sean Feucht's worship protest events requires insight into the theology of Praise and Worship as a liturgical phenomenon. In looking to the theology of Praise and Worship, we see that music is not incidental to the protests but is part of a theological vision for responding to the present national crises.

I begin by addressing the recent historical context of urban engagement among Pentecostals, treating Pentecostals under the larger "evangelical" umbrella. This discussion is necessary for understanding the complexity of missional attitudes among evangelicals toward the urban settings where Feucht's events have been held, including Washington D.C. I also review the ways liturgical studies has traditionally considered the relationship between public liturgical gatherings and urban spaces and I suggest that these well-worn paths are perhaps insufficient for understanding contemporary instantiations of urban public worship rituals among Pentecostals and evangelicals. Turning to the core of the essay, I describe how historical sources in the development of Praise and Worship theology can illuminate our understanding of the significance of Feucht's public gatherings for those gathered. In making this connection, I show how the theology of music in worship is operationalized toward apparent political ends ways and is not merely incidental to the broader connection between political views and evangelical worship practices. Doing so suggests that the theology of Praise and Worship music is a particularly important driving force and avenue for political and social engagement among Pentecostals.

2. Evangelical Urban Engagement

The setting of urban spaces as sites for theological and political contestation via worship is not new to liturgical history. The academic study of the intersection between public worship and urban spaces has often focused on stational liturgies and the relationship between local churches as they become sites for city-wide processional celebrations on important feast days. John Baldovin's work on stational liturgies in Rome illuminates the way stational liturgies have functioned to demonstrate (and enact) the social and political legitimacy of Christianity within major urban centers of regional political power (Baldovin 1987).

However, the kinship between the political and the liturgical in urban spaces takes on an entirely new dimension in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. Before discussing more recent examples, it is important to briefly situate acts of public worship within the broader discourse of evangelical postures toward urban settings.

Evangelicalism (and its worship) has had a unique relationship with urban spaces. For evangelicals, urban spaces have been centers for the large evangelistic events and revivals that have come to characterize the tradition as a whole. In an essay on the multifarious ways conservative white Evangelicals have related to the city over the last century, Elisha summarizes this evangelical posture saying,

[C]ities are stages—literally and figuratively—from which the Christian gospel of sin and redemption can be proclaimed to national and global audiences, and the tenets of conservative Protestantism projected upon secular society. As a result of these ambiguities, contemporary white evangelicals tend to regard the city as both Devil's playground and a key battleground in their struggles for cultural hegemony. For popular revivalists like Billy Graham, and influential parachurch organizations like the Promise Keepers, the great American city provides an ideal space for massive spectacles of public religiosity and the formation of powerful institutional networks which are used to revitalize the spiritual climate of the entire nation. (Omri 2010, pp. 235–36)

In this way, Feucht's narrative of nationwide revival through itinerant worship-evangelism events is hardly unique in their positioning or their aspirations. As Emily Snider Andrews has noted, "Renewalist" evangelicals like Bethel Church (and its affiliates like Feucht) actively attempt to instantiate a "kingdom culture" in the world through their daily lives (Snider Andrews 2020). Indeed, quoting Elisha again, "Their moral ambitions are infused with the spiritual and cultural aspirations of transforming urban social and institutional networks so that the values that become dominant are in accordance with the principles of God's kingdom" (Omri 2010, p. 236) Related rhetoric around this issue has also tended toward militant language of (spiritual) warfare for God's kingdom (Payne 2021). As we will see, public musical worship gatherings are, for this new era of Praise and Worship, an extension of a similar process of extending spiritual and political influence.

Of course, the religious and political conflicts over COVID-19 were not the only features of public discourse in mid-2020. The early summer saw a groundswell of activism in response to the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. It was a flashpoint in the uproar related to other contemporaneous, police-involved shootings of Black and African American persons across the U.S. Just as churches were being told to cease indoor public worship services because of COVID-19 concerns, outdoor gatherings for protests over racism were ramping up and were (mostly) not prohibited by government officials. It is important to note here that for many evangelical political conservatives, protests and protesters are generally viewed with an air of suspicion. Add to that the problematic fact that these were protests against police officers, a class of service persons who have long been heralded in public discourse as heroes of American (Christian) society (Du Mez 2020). Thus the particular relationship to the city is marked both by evangelistic efforts that assume a spiritual depravity of urban spaces (i.e., a "Devil's playground") and,

as a result of the processes of “white flight” from urban spaces into the suburbs since the 1950s, also encodes a racial dynamic into the pandemic tension (Mulder 2015).

In effect, multiple layers of the politics of race and religion created a strong cocktail of white American Christian nationalism that have fueled national debates over governance. To many politically conservative Christians (often generalized in media outlets as the monolith of “American Evangelicals”), the comparison of limitations on public worship versus the freedom of public protest were portrayed as a prejudicial incongruence against Christians and the practice of the freedom of Christian religion in America.

Of course, the elements I’ve just outlined are not true for all who describe themselves using the language of American Evangelicalism, or even for Pentecostalism. The network is too diffused and diverse for a single description to possibly encompass them. Admittedly, my short summary risks generalizing and simplifying in ways that this essay aims to make more complex, namely the networked political theology attendant to Christians in American who practice contemporary Praise and Worship. Nevertheless, it is important to attempt to describe them because it is from within these religious and liturgical contexts that the above-mentioned political positions have emerged and have continued to wield significance in public political and religious discourse.

With this geographic and political context in hand, we return to the question of this essay: why use musical worship events to engage in these political protests? Though Feucht’s events follow the well-worn path of urban evangelical proselytizers, something different is happening in Feucht’s events from characteristic approaches in American Evangelicalism’s past: the worship music itself is the main event, not the “warm-up act” to the headlining preacher. The performance of music does spiritual and political work.

3. Worship Music in the Public Plaza

Liturgical history testifies to a long precedent of worship gatherings outside the doors of the church, from riverside baptisms to stational liturgies, liturgical dramas to public theater and more. Consequently, scholars have begun to consider the role of liturgy in public spaces (such as the urban context) through the broader discourse on “public theology.” Foley has suggested that “considering liturgy as an act of public theology presupposed that many, if not most, of those who will interpret the meaning of the worship event will be from outside the faith community.” (Foley 2008, p. 31) Therefore, a discussion of meaning (and who constructs it) is central. Likewise, Klomp and Marchand have suggested that because rituals of Christian worship have extended into extra-ecclesial spaces, new modes and methods are required for studying these “sacro-soundscapes” that extend both beyond liturgical studies, ecclesiology, and congregational music studies (Klomp and Barnard 2017). However, such a description has already been provided in part by Ingalls (2018) using the language of “modes of congregating”, a framework developed to expand the scope of ecclesiology. Ingalls accounts for public worship gatherings such as Feucht’s as one “mode” in this expanded frame of religious musical practices among practitioners of evangelical worship (including charismatics and Pentecostals).

The question of the meaning(s) of Feucht’s events has been a challenge in the reception of Feucht’s gatherings between and beyond discrete communities of practice (as described in the introduction). It is important to note, however, that given the pervasiveness of Praise and Worship practices across the globe (Ingalls and Yong 2015), more may be understood publicly than is understood in the related academic discourse on public liturgical practices. This study thus employs multiple sources and points of analysis for (re)constructing possible meaning(s) among Pentecostals practicing their religious commitments in the public square. Importantly, my study here diverges from “public theology” proper in that it is an attempt to describe to an academic liturgical studies audience how the practitioners themselves understand the meaning of their practices, not to provide an account of Feucht’s events as interpreted by various publics.

Within recent Evangelical, Charismatic, and Pentecostal contexts, public worship music gatherings (or “worship concerts”, as some prefer) have become somewhat com-

monplace at least since Graham Kendrick's Praise March movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Though Kendrick is from the U.K., his published books on Praise marches became standard material amongst U.S. Evangelicals. Many will remember the song that takes its name from its iconic chorus by Kendrick: "Shine Jesus Shine." The Praise March Movement took Praise and Worship into the streets in the form of a parade. These marches were an expression both of the Lordship of Christ and a mechanism for spiritual warfare in the city as the practice of Praise and Worship became visible and mainstream (Ingalls 2018, pp. 142–71). Beyond local events, it has become commonplace for worship leaders to wield an increasingly influential level of celebrity within Christian media networks through megachurch platforms and mega-conferences like the annual Passion conference in Atlanta, Georgia or the Hillsong Conference in Sydney, Australia (Busman 2015). These conferences have made worship leaders like Chris Tomlin and David Crowder (Passion) and Darlene Zschech and Joel Houston (Hillsong) household names. These worship music mega-conferences have only grown in significance especially since the early 2000s. Thus worship leaders have played an increasingly important role as public religious figures alongside well-known pastors and other cultural commentators (Ward 2020).

Yet there is something new and distinct happening here with #letusworship. It is more than just the public or urban settings that make Feucht's events noteworthy. Unlike public liturgical practices of the past, why is it that Feucht has chosen worship music in particular as the tool with which he rages against what he perceives to be the politically-motivated repression of Christian worship in America? Though the motivation for his events have stirred up confusion among those who have seen them as a negligent risk to public health at best and willful "superspreader" events at worst (Hudak 2020), his response is intelligible (if still objectionable) when you understand his theology of worship.

4. Feucht's Worship Theology

To understand why worship music is understood as the appropriate response for these Pentecostals to perceived religious oppression requires that I outline a theology of worship that enjoys widespread popularity today. I'll simply call it "Praise and Worship theology" even though it is not monolithic. Ingalls and Yong estimate that nearly one-quarter of the world's Christians practice some form of Praise and Worship (Ingalls and Yong 2015). One very prominent stream of this theology emerged out of the Latter Rain Revival movement of the late 1940s.

The core of this theology is that Praise and Worship manifests God's presence. Liturgical historian Lester Ruth has traced this theology back to a Pentecostal preacher named Reg Layzell in 1946 who popularized the idea that "God inhabits praise", based on Psalm 22:3 (Ruth and Lim 2021). By the late 1970s, a rich and diverse biblical theology had developed around this and other teachings as they became understood through the theological prism of the present-day Restoration of the Tabernacle of David (Perez 2021). Two key verses helped center this scripture. First, Acts 15:16 (quoting Amos 9:11) and the prophecy of the restoration of the Tabernacle of David (read as a restoration of the worship practices associated therein). Second, Hebrews 13:15 on offering a 'sacrifice of praise with our lips,' bringing together the sense that an ongoing sacrifice was still required by God and that the sacrifice was of audible (sung) praise.

Thus, the restoration of the Tabernacle of David centered sung, musical praise as the primary liturgical act restored by King David (see also 1 Chronicles 15). Consequently, in Praise and Worship circles, Praise and Worship practice became synonymous with music-making. Binders of new songs based on the Psalms and Old Testament prophets were written or 'received' by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Though music had been a primary feature in Latter Rain worship since the late 1940s, the wave of theological reflection on the Tabernacle of David in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to the emphasis on music as the quintessential expression over and above spoken praise or prayer—two other prominent features associated with early Latter Rain worship practices. As Latter Rain theologians continued to search for scripture's witness on worship, they found that praise's multiple

meanings were associated with access to God's power in the life of Israel, a power that could be also be accessed in the present day.⁵ The emphasis on music-making continued to move into the mainstream as it coincided with other streams of theological emphasis on music in worship; echoes of Praise and Worship's theological themes can still be heard across a wide range of musical artists and songs.

This theology and worship practice came of age in the late 1970s and 1980s as it was mainstreamed and mixed with other Pentecostal movements like the Word of Faith movement and the Vineyard Church movement (Park et al. 2016). The worship theology of the movement became mainstream in other evangelical, charismatic, and Pentecostal groups through conferences, missionary support networks, and the popularity of Integrity's Hosanna! Music, among other features (Perez 2020). Many of the large churches and church-based worship music groups that are popular today (and/or music labels) have been directly or indirectly influenced by the Latter Rain network and its theologians: Bethel Church (Redding, CA, USA), Gateway Church (Southlake, TX, USA), Hillsong (Sydney, Australia), International House of Prayer (IHOP; Kansas City, MO, USA), and others.

When Feucht says #letusworship, he doesn't mean a simple gathering where Christians pray, read the Bible, and hear a sermon—though that could be part of a larger worship gathering. He means a musical event in particular where Christians sing praises to God. These gatherings are important because Praise and Worship, as the tradition built on Psalm 22:3 teaches, is the normal way Christians encounter God's presence (Snider Andrews 2020). This has become the mainstream assumption of a vast majority of Pentecostals, charismatics, and evangelicals worldwide (Ingalls and Yong 2015; Ruth and Lim 2021).

5. Worshiping at the Seat of Power

If, for Pentecostals, Praise and Worship is about accessing or encountering God's presence, it is also about accessing God's power. When God is present, God acts powerfully and responds to our prayers. Psalm 22:3 is seen as a promise, read as: 'if you praise me, I will come.' Many Pentecostal preachers, teachers, and theologians over the years have highlighted this theme. The sense of God's powerful presence is also magnified through one of the dominant images invoked in Praise and Worship: an enthroned, Kingly God. That is, God has (or should have) political power above all.

Consider this historical example of a representative teaching by Barry Griffing, a Pentecostal pastor and conference leader at the International Worship Symposium. The Symposium was the largest annual worship-focused conference in the U.S. of its era and functioned as a key node in disseminating teachings on Praise and Worship throughout the broader network of Pentecostal, charismatic, and evangelical Christians. At the 1982 conference in Detroit, Michigan, Griffing taught that when ancient Israel restored the practice of Praise and Worship as modeled in David's tabernacle, the nation experienced "spiritual, moral, and military blessing." The direct implication here was that if we too restore Praise and Worship here in the United States in the present day, we can receive those same national blessings today. Of course, Washington D.C. is both an urban space and the political center of the U.S. Indeed, the Symposium took the conference to Constitution Hall and the Washington Mall in 1986 (and saw the highest numbers of attendees) to seek God's national blessings through their Praise and Worship (Perez 2021, pp. 123–30).

In the present day, when Feucht brought his events to places like the steps of the courthouse in Nashville (after a local ordinance banned some types of public gatherings) and culminated the series of events on the Washington Mall in Washington D.C., he was foregrounding this sense of accessing God's presence and power to change the political climate. Indeed, the prominent Pentecostal preacher at Feucht's event on the Washington Mall (25 October 2020), Jentezen Franklin, invoked a theology of praise to rationalize the potential power of the event. Beginning his sermon by telling the gathered crowd, "I don't know if you understand how powerful what we're doing is right now." Franklin invoked the Tabernacle (of David) using Job 36 and the text's use of the water cycle as a metaphor.

If you want to know what the noise of the Tabernacle, or Praise and Worship, is all about, you have to understand [that] it's about rain. No worship? No rain. Little worship? Little Rain. Rain represents the Holy Spirit. Rain represents righteousness. Rain presents revival. Rain represents miracles, signs, and wonders. Rain is what we need in America and in this world. There are nine expressions in worship the Bible that are invisible vapors that create clouds. Three of them are done with your mouth. You don't just think about it and love him in your heart, but you're supposed to open your mouth and vocalize, verbalize. (Feucht 2020)

Though he emphasized the verbal expressions at greater length, Franklin went on to lead the crowd in short acts encompassing all nine of the verbal and bodily expressions of praise he alluded to. The object of offering God these praises, Franklin told the crowd, was to cause a precipitation God's presence and blessings. Their acts of praise are like water vapors going up into the heavens until "the cloud gets thick and the rain falls."

Accessing God's power in this way is important for doing spiritual work in both individuals and communities. Franklin begins the setup to his closing saying that "demons can't swim" and that the "devil likes dry places." At the climax of his short sermon, Franklin powerfully exhorts the cheering crowd, "American needs a washing! American needs a river! American needs rain! So send up the worship! Send up the praise. Send up the shouts and give him glory!" By coming to the Capitol for this worship music event, Franklin is suggesting that worshippers are preparing for the release of God's power that focuses on the symbolic center of power at the U.S. capitol and extends across the U.S.⁶ A very similar message is encoded in Feucht's song "When We Praise" performed at the same event. The song's chorus says, "When we praise/every stronghold breaks/prison doors will shake/the gates of Hell will not prevail."

For Pentecostals, the impulse to go to the halls of power and invoke change has enjoyed renewed theological attention through a concept called the "Seven Mountain Mandate." This scripturally-derived mandate organizes culture and society—including government—into seven areas over which Christians are intended to exercise dominion and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. As a primary liturgical act and spiritual tool, Praise and Worship has become a concrete avenue for pursuing the fulfillment of this mandate. A prominent book within Pentecostal circles on the subject and details of this theology of dominion has been co-written by Bethel Church pastor Bill Johnson and Lance Wallnau (conservative media personality and author) (Wallnau and Johnson 2013). Thus, Praise and Worship does more than build in-group cohesion around political issues among worshippers but is understood to have concrete power to exercise dominion over government and ultimately overturning the laws and policies like the mask mandates that prevent Christian religious expression (read: congregational singing)—legislation that can only be attributed to evil forces and people at the level of state and federal government.

Feucht's #letusworship campaign itinerary planned to culminate at the 25 October 2020 event in Washington, D.C. described above, though he has continued to host events since then (Jenkins 2020). This is not just a show of political power like any other demonstration in Washington D.C., it also has spiritual—even "end-times"—significance as they believe Praise and Worship releases God's power in the spiritual, physical, and political realms. It is why Feucht, as with many Pentecostal revivalists, reports healings and conversions as signs of God's presence in his events and relies on these as the Holy Spirit's validation of his whole movement. In both Franklin's preaching and Feucht's music the legacy of a theology built on Psalm 22:3 remains clear as the link between sung praise and God's powerful presence is direct and consequential means for accomplishing political ends.

6. Worshiping at the Site of Conflict

While Feucht highlights that his worship gatherings are primarily protests against restrictions on church gatherings, his rallies have been also held in places like Portland, OR, Minneapolis, MN, and Kenosha, WI—sites of prominent BLM protests that often turned into showdowns with police. These urban settings are important to Feucht because

they reveal a spiritual disturbance at work prompting the protests (not to mention the greater saturation of media attention already focused there). As above, the urban context of Feucht's events are important contexts for the implicit and explicit work that Praise and Worship is meant to accomplish. Notably, Feucht's early description of his worship protests used the tag line, "riots to revivals." The tagline here suggests that "riots" (an overt escalation of the word "protests") themselves are spiritually depraved sites in need of a "revival." Thus, Feucht's gatherings gain a double-valence concerning who the spiritual enemies are: both (the spiritual forces behind) governmental leaders who would place restrictions on church gatherings and those protesting racism and police brutality.

For Feucht, Praise and Worship is the weapon for defeating those spiritual/political enemies just as it was for ancient Israel. Turning again to the archives of Praise and Worship theological teachings, this perspective has been referred to as "The Jehoshaphat Principle" (Griffing 1989). That is, just as in the case with King Jehoshaphat, the worshippers (read: musicians) go out ahead of the army to secure its spiritual victory by bringing about God's presence through praise. More than just urban contexts in general as sites for waging spiritual combat, the particular locations are significant. Powers and principalities (such as those referenced in the Jentezen Franklin sermon above) are understood to be associated with particular geographic locations, a teaching known as "spiritual mapping." C. Peter Wagner has been a loud voice in articulating this now-common Pentecostal theology of place through his writing in books like *Breaking Strongholds in Your City: How to Use Spiritual Mapping to Make Your Prayers More Strategic, Effective, and Targeted*, one volume in a series dedicated to prayer and spiritual warfare (Wagner 1993). This rationale brings to the forefront the theological importance for Feucht to go to the places where prominent protests (and potentially strong demonic activities) are happening. In using Praise and Worship as spiritual warfare, the songs of Feucht's gatherings are anthemic and the overall tone is joyful and unrelentingly positive in the belief that the worship changes the emotional atmosphere as it changes the spiritual and political situation (Payne 2021).

Because God's spiritual power is released through musical worship in general, song choice is quite powerful. Songs like Feucht's "When We Praise" (quoted above) are relatively forward in describing their political connections, as are other songs used at his gatherings. Martin Smith's "Did you Feel the Mountains Tremble" and the line in its chorus "Open up the doors and let the music play" and Feucht's other song "Let Everything (Praise the Lord)" both clearly identify the desired ends in their lyrics. Other sources have been coopted into Feucht's service as well. One popular anthem being sung at Feucht's and other recent gatherings (Boorstein and Bailey 2020) is "Great Are You Lord", a song by the group All Sons and Daughters. In the worship protest context, the line from the chorus, "It's your breath in our lungs, so we pour out your praise" becomes a clear and defiant cry against governmental restrictions on congregational singing and mask requirements while it also signals a veiled reference to George Floyd's famous "I can't breathe" statement.

7. Concluding Remarks

Feucht is just one node in a long line of Christians engaged in public political demonstrations in urban contexts. Though the tactics of his response to pandemic restrictions appear novel, they build on a theological and musical tradition going back many decades. It is important to note, too, that this theology of Praise and Worship is not simply a "white evangelical" practice. His tactics and ends may be unique, but shared theologies of worship are operationalized in Black Churches and Latinx Churches. See, for example, the work of early Praise and Worship pioneers like Judith McAllister and her album "Send Judah First" or Marcos Witt's song "Sana Nuestra Tierra" ("Heal Our Land"), popular throughout Latin America. Therefore, we can say that this Pentecostal, musicalized theology of worship has become entangled in white Christian Nationalist discourses around religious freedom for Feucht in ways that are not entirely due to their common root of worship theology.

Looking into the backdrop of Feucht's worship theology provides another lens for making sense of the present pandemic and the weaving together of liturgical-theological

and political commitments. Together with other analyses, we can gain a clearer sense of how history, the politics of pandemic response, social unrest, and theology have come together in novel ways to form liturgical practices. What is at stake in addressing the problem of the pandemic is more than political and ideological differences but complex and deeply rooted theological commitments that have long been practiced in worshipping communities and forming Christian identities. It would be dangerous to undervalue either the liturgical-theological nature of what is at stake for these Pentecostals or how Christian worshippers are wielding theology to powerfully shape the way justice and social action are imagined and enacted.

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Notes

- ¹ Perhaps the most scandalous was a t-shirt design created in response to a headline about Feucht's events by Rolling Stone Magazine, suggesting that his events were potentially COVID-19 "superspreader" events. The t-shirts read "Jesus Christ: Super-Spreader." See "Well, Sean Feucht Is Now Selling 'Jesus Christ: Super-Spreader' T-Shirts, Apparently" *Relevant Magazine* (20 November 2020) <https://www.relevantmagazine.com/current/well-sean-feucht-is-now-selling-jesus-christ-super-spreader-t-shirts-apparently/> (accessed 23 November 2021).
- ² In this essay, I treat Pentecostals as a subset of evangelicals in the broadest sense. Following Monique Ingalls, I suggest that there is a shared social imaginary between within and between evangelicals, Pentecostals, and charismatics that is constituted by worship music and its various "modes of congregating" (Ingalls 2018).
- ³ In positioning his protests against Gov. Newsom's policies, Feucht is hardly unique. See also Sam Kestenbaum's reporting in *The Washington Post* on other evangelical churches in California that have positioned their worship service policies in direct opposition to Gov. Newsom (Kestenbaum 2021).
- ⁴ For descriptions of some of these events see Mayfield 2020 on Feucht's event in Portland, Spera 2020 on the Mayor of New Orleans publicly condemning Feucht's event there, and Duin 2020 on Feucht sidestepping a ban on his concert by calling it a "protest."
- ⁵ In particular, the interpretation of the seven primary Hebrew words that have been translated into English as "praise" in (Ottaway Forthcoming)
- ⁶ This isn't the only time Feucht has partnered with Franklin. In a different video of a sermon preached at Franklin's church when they hosted Feucht in October of 2021 Franklin praises Feucht and his team for "going all over the nation and some of the most troubled cities in America and declaring the name of Jesus." His sermon opens by making a direct connection between worship, God's presence, and receiving healing and help. See "Let Us Worship | Jentezen Franklin" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AC5N88IDvGQ> (accessed 23 November 2021).

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