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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Religious Studies***Prophetic liturgical imaginaries: Reimagining worship as public witness for religious freedom in Indonesia**Fitry Hanna¹, Jimmy M. Tambunan^{1*}, Maruhum Simangunsong¹, Darna Situmorang¹, Reni Tiar Linda Purba¹ & Halomoan Marpaung¹¹Department of Missiology, Sekolah Tinggi Bibelvrouw, Indonesia*Correspondence: tambunanjimmymarshal@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Despite Indonesia's constitutional commitment to religious freedom, restrictions on Christian worship continue to occur in several regions, particularly through the closure of churches, opposition to worship in private homes, and interference with religious gatherings. These recurring incidents reveal that worship has become a contested public practice rather than merely an internal ecclesial ritual. While existing studies on public theology and religious freedom have examined legal, political, and sociological dimensions of these challenges, less attention has been given to worship as a form of public witness that embodies justice within a religiously plural society. This article addresses that gap by proposing the concept of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries as a constructive theological framework for reimagining worship as both sacred liturgy and prophetic public action. Employing a qualitative constructive theological approach, the study integrates Charles Taylor's theory of social imaginaries with Tércio Bretnha Junker's concept of prophetic liturgy, while engaging contemporary discussions on religious pluralism and public theology. The framework is further illustrated through the experiences of Christian communities facing restrictions on worship in Indonesia, including the continuing challenges encountered by churches such as GKI Yasmin and HKBP Filadelfia and more recent incidents involving the obstruction of Christian worship. The article argues that worship should be understood not only as participation in the life of God but also as a public theological practice that witnesses to justice, human dignity, solidarity, and the constitutional right to religious freedom. By developing the concept of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries, this study contributes to contemporary liturgical theology and public theology by offering a constructive framework through which Christian worship can cultivate prophetic consciousness and foster peaceful coexistence in religiously plural societies.

KEYWORDS: Prophetic liturgical imaginaries, public theology, worship, religious freedom, social imaginaries, religious pluralism, Indonesia

Research Journal in Advanced Humanities

Volume 6, Issue 4, 2025

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 07 October 2025

Accepted: 25 November 2025

Published: 14 December, 2025

HOW TO CITE

Hanna, F., Tambunan, J. M., Simangunsong, M., Situmorang, D., Purba, R. T. L., & Marpaung, H. (2025). Prophetic liturgical imaginaries: Reimagining worship as public witness for religious freedom in Indonesia. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.58256/3cmy4198>



Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global, an imprint of Royallite Publishers Limited

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Introduction

Religious plurality is an inescapable reality of contemporary Indonesia. People of different religions, ethnicities, cultures, and political convictions inhabit the same public spaces and participate in a shared democratic life. This diversity is often regarded as one of Indonesia's greatest strengths. Yet it also reveals unresolved tensions concerning religious freedom, minority rights, and the meaning of living together amidst difference.

Although the 1945 Constitution guarantees every citizen the freedom to profess and practice religion, this constitutional commitment is not always realized in everyday life. In several regions, particularly in West Java, Christian communities continue to encounter resistance to the establishment of churches and, increasingly, to worship gatherings held in private homes. More recently, even funeral and memorial services have been disrupted by protests from local residents, while local authorities have frequently failed to provide adequate protection for those exercising their constitutional right to worship. Annual reports published by the SETARA Institute, the Wahid Foundation, Komnas HAM, and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) suggest that these incidents are not isolated cases but part of a broader pattern in which freedom of religion and belief remains vulnerable, especially at the local level.

These realities invite a theological question that extends beyond legal debates about religious liberty: What does it mean to worship when worship itself becomes a contested practice in the public sphere? Christian theology has long understood worship as the gathered community's response to God's grace through prayer, proclamation, sacrament, and praise. This understanding remains indispensable, yet it can also encourage the perception that worship belongs primarily within the internal life of the church. Such a view leaves insufficient room to consider the public significance of worship when the very act of gathering becomes subject to social resistance or political contestation. The experiences of many Christian communities in Indonesia indicate that worship is never merely a private or ecclesial activity. It is also a public practice through which believers express identity, nurture hope, and bear witness to God's justice within society.

The relationship between Christian worship and religious plurality has been explored from a variety of perspectives. Discussions of religious diversity have generally centred on paradigms such as exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and comparative theology, while recent developments in public theology have emphasized the church's vocation within democratic societies. Liturgical theologians, for their part, have drawn attention to the formative and transformative character of worship. These conversations have made significant contributions, but they have seldom been brought into dialogue to explain how worship itself may function as a public theological response to restrictions on religious freedom. Likewise, Charles Taylor's notion of social imaginaries has illuminated the ways communities imagine and organize their common life, while Tércio Bretanha Junker has argued that Christian liturgy possesses an inherently prophetic orientation. Bringing these perspectives into conversation offers a constructive way of understanding worship that is attentive both to its liturgical depth and to its public responsibility.

Against this background, this study proposes the concept of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries as a theological framework for understanding worship as both participation in the life of God and public witness within a religiously plural society. The argument developed here is that worship forms a prophetic imagination through which the church learns to engage questions of justice, human dignity, and religious freedom. Rather than treating liturgy and public life as separate spheres, the article contends that worship itself nurtures the practices, dispositions, and moral vision required for faithful Christian participation in society.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative constructive theological approach. It brings Charles Taylor's theory of social imaginaries into conversation with Tércio Bretanha Junker's understanding of prophetic liturgy while engaging recent discussions in public theology and contemporary reports on religious freedom in Indonesia. The purpose is not to offer a legal or political evaluation of religious freedom but to develop a theological interpretation of worship that responds constructively to Indonesia's plural religious context.

The discussion begins by examining theological approaches to religious plurality and their implications for public life. It then explores the concepts of social imaginaries and prophetic liturgy before developing the proposal of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries as the article's central theological contribution. The final part of the article considers how this framework illuminates recent experiences of Christian communities whose worship has been restricted in Indonesia and reflects on its implications for liturgical theology, public theology, and the pursuit of religious freedom.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative constructive theological approach. Constructive theology is used here not simply to restate established doctrines, but to bring different theological and social concepts into conversation in order to formulate a framework that responds to a concrete contemporary problem (Derradji & Oudihat, 2025). In this case, the problem concerns the restriction of Christian worship and the continuing vulnerability of religious freedom in Indonesia.

The analysis proceeds through three related steps. First, the study undertakes a conceptual reading of Charles Taylor's account of social imaginaries. Taylor defines the social imaginary as the way people imagine their social existence, their relationships with others, the expectations that shape communal life, and the normative images that underlie those expectations (Taylor 2004). This concept is important because it shifts attention from abstract theories to the shared narratives, practices, and moral visions through which communities understand social reality.

Second, the study engages Tércio Bretanha Junker's concept of prophetic liturgy. Junker's account of total sacramental rituality presents worship as an active and transformative practice through which the Christian community is formed for reconciliation, equality, and social engagement (Junker, 2014). His argument that sacramental life should be directed toward the restoration of life as a whole provides the theological basis for interpreting worship as more than an internal ecclesial activity (Junker, 2014).

Third, the article brings these two conceptual strands into conversation with selected works in liturgical theology and public theology. James K. A. Smith's account of worship as the formation of desire and social imagination is especially important for understanding how ritual practices shape moral perception and communal action (Smith, 2009). Don E. Saliers' threefold account of participation in worship further supports the connection between communion with God, participation in the church, and service in the world (Saliers, 1994). Aleksander Schmemmann's claim that worship is not an escape from the world but a way of seeing the world more truthfully also informs the argument developed here (Schmemmann, 1973). The works of Claudio Carvalhaes and Nathan D. Mitchell likewise reinforce the public and transformative character of liturgy (Carvalhaes, 2015; Carvalhaes, 2018).

These sources are interpreted through a constructive and synthetic procedure. The purpose is not to compare Taylor and Junker in a strictly historical or textual manner, nor to provide a comprehensive account of their entire theological projects. Rather, the study identifies conceptual elements that can be brought together to address the central research question: How can Christian worship be understood as a form of public witness that cultivates justice and religious freedom in Indonesia's religiously plural society?

The Indonesian cases discussed in this article function as illustrative cases rather than as the basis for a fully developed empirical study. The experiences of GKI Yasmin and HKBP Filadelfia, especially their worship in front of the Presidential Palace, are interpreted as liturgical actions that make visible the relationship between worship, public space, and the struggle for justice. In the original manuscript, these cases serve as examples of worship becoming a prophetic action beyond the physical boundaries of the church building. Contemporary reports on restrictions affecting churches, worship in private homes, and funeral or memorial services may be used to extend this analysis, but such reports must be cited directly and examined carefully in the final version of the article.

The methodological contribution of this approach lies in its integration of conceptual theology and contextual interpretation. It does not attempt to replace legal, political, or sociological studies of religious freedom. Instead, it asks what theological meaning emerges when worship itself becomes contested. By reading social imaginaries, prophetic liturgy, and public witness together, the study develops the category of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries as a constructive theological response to the Indonesian context.

The reliability of the argument depends on transparency in the use of sources and on the distinction between conceptual claims and contextual illustration. Direct quotations and specific claims are therefore accompanied by page references where these are available in the source material. Where the original manuscript does not provide a verifiable page number, no page number is supplied. This is necessary to avoid unsupported citation and to preserve academic integrity.

Results

Religious Pluralism and the Limits of Doctrinal Approaches

Religious pluralism has long occupied an important place in Christian theology. Much of the discussion has centred on how Christianity understands the relationship between its own truth claims and those of other religions. Classical typologies such as exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism have provided significant theological frameworks for addressing religious diversity, yet they have also revealed important limitations when confronted with the lived realities of plural societies.

Within the exclusivist tradition, Karl Barth maintains that salvation is found uniquely in Jesus Christ, emphasizing Christianity's distinctive revelation. Hendrik Kraemer similarly upholds the uniqueness of Christian revelation while acknowledging that other religions possess their own claims to truth (Aslan, 1998). As Eka Darmaputera observes, however, theological exclusivism may encourage patterns of social separation that make constructive relationships within religiously plural societies increasingly difficult (Darmaputera, 2005). Rather than fostering dialogue, exclusive truth claims often reinforce boundaries between religious communities.

Pluralist theology emerged partly as a response to these limitations. John Hick argues that the world's religions represent different responses to the same ultimate Reality, thereby challenging the assumption that one religious tradition possesses an exclusive monopoly on truth (Hick, 1985). Paul F. Knitter develops this discussion further through a correlational approach, proposing that God's saving activity cannot be confined to a single religious tradition. Instead of absolute certainty, Knitter advocates theological humility and dialogue, preferring the language of probability to that of exclusivist certainty (Knitter, 2008). While these approaches have encouraged greater openness toward religious diversity, they continue to focus primarily on doctrinal questions concerning truth and salvation.

Joas Adiprasetya offers an important corrective by shifting theological attention from doctrinal competition toward ethical encounter. Rather than asking which religion possesses the truth, he argues that interreligious engagement should begin with shared ethical responsibility and the common pursuit of human flourishing (Adiprasetya, 2002). This perspective moves theological reflection beyond abstract doctrinal comparison toward concrete practices of coexistence within plural societies.

Worship Beyond Ecclesial Boundaries

Alongside these discussions on religious pluralism, liturgical theology has increasingly emphasized that worship is not confined to ecclesial ritual but shapes the church's engagement with the world. Don E. Saliers understands worship as participation in the life of God that simultaneously forms participation in the life of the church and active service within society (Saliers, 1994). Worship therefore cannot be reduced to ritual performance; it forms Christian identity and vocation.

Aleksander Schmemmann similarly rejects any understanding of worship as withdrawal from the world. Instead, worship provides the perspective from which believers perceive the world as God's creation and participate in God's redemptive work (Schmemmann, 1973). James K. A. Smith extends this liturgical insight by arguing that worship primarily shapes human desire rather than merely communicating theological information. Christian formation occurs through embodied liturgical practices that cultivate a vision of the good life before they produce doctrinal reflection (Smith 2009).

Building upon this liturgical tradition, Nathan D. Mitchell argues that Christian liturgy is always celebrated "for the life of the world." Worship therefore extends beyond ecclesial boundaries toward responsibility for neighbours and society. Claudio Carvalhaes develops a similar argument by interpreting liturgy as a practice that not only organizes religious life but also interprets the social world and shapes ethical participation within it (Carvalhaes, 2015; Carvalhaes, 2018). Together, these scholars demonstrate that worship possesses an inherently public dimension, although they do not explicitly examine worship in contexts where religious freedom itself becomes contested.

Social Imaginaries and Prophetic Liturgy

Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginaries offers a complementary perspective for understanding religious life within plural societies. Taylor argues that social imaginaries are not abstract theories but shared understandings through which communities imagine their social existence, organize relationships, and develop expectations

concerning life together (Taylor, 2004). James K. A. Smith appropriates Taylor's insight by emphasizing that social imaginaries operate largely through embodied practices rather than intellectual systems alone (Smith, 2009). Human beings are formed not simply by ideas but by habits, rituals, and communal practices that shape their moral imagination.

Within liturgical theology, Tércio Bretanha Junker develops the concept of prophetic liturgy, arguing that Christian worship is fundamentally oriented toward justice, reconciliation, and the transformation of society. Through his notion of total sacramental rituality, Junker understands liturgy as a prophetic participation in God's mission that forms communities committed to equality, reconciliation, and the flourishing of life (Junker, 2014). Worship, therefore, is neither merely symbolic nor confined to ecclesial ritual; it is a sacramental practice that generates prophetic action in the world.

Research Gap

The literature reviewed above demonstrates significant advances in the study of religious pluralism, public theology, and liturgical theology. Studies of religious pluralism have largely concentrated on theological responses to religious difference, while liturgical theology has increasingly emphasized worship's formative and public dimensions. Likewise, scholarship on social imaginaries has illuminated the ways communities imagine social life, and prophetic liturgy has highlighted worship's transformative vocation.

Nevertheless, these conversations have generally remained separate. Little attention has been given to how social imaginaries and prophetic liturgy might be integrated into a constructive theological framework for interpreting worship as public witness within contexts where religious freedom remains contested. This gap is particularly evident in Indonesia, where restrictions on Christian worship continue to challenge both ecclesial life and democratic citizenship.

This article addresses that gap by proposing the concept of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries. Rather than treating worship as either an internal ecclesial ritual or a form of political activism, the framework developed here understands worship as a liturgical practice that forms prophetic imagination, enabling the church to bear public witness to justice, human dignity, and peaceful coexistence within Indonesia's religiously plural society.

Religious Pluralism and the Public Challenge of Worship

Religious plurality is not simply one characteristic of Indonesian society; it is the social context within which Christian faith is lived and expressed. Diversity of religion, ethnicity, culture, and political identity constitutes the everyday reality of public life. Such plurality cannot be dismissed as a temporary condition to be overcome. Rather, it forms the horizon within which communities negotiate identity, belonging, and social responsibility. Nevertheless, plurality has often become a source of tension rather than mutual enrichment. Differences in religious belief are frequently interpreted through competing truth claims that distinguish sharply between those who belong and those who do not. As Eka Darmaputera observes, theological claims to absolute truth can easily develop into exclusive social attitudes that weaken dialogue and threaten the integrity of plural society (Darmaputera, 2005). When theological certainty becomes detached from ethical responsibility, religious identity risks becoming a justification for exclusion rather than a witness to God's love.

The history of Christian theology reflects continuing attempts to respond to this challenge. Exclusivist approaches, represented by theologians such as Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer, emphasize the uniqueness of Christ and Christian revelation. While these perspectives safeguard central Christian convictions, they often leave unresolved the practical question of how Christians should relate to people of other faiths in shared public life. At the other end of the spectrum, pluralist theologians such as John Hick seek common ground among religions by arguing that different traditions respond to the same transcendent reality. Paul F. Knitter further develops this discussion by proposing a correlational theology that replaces claims of absolute certainty with humility, dialogue, and shared responsibility (Knitter, 2008).

These theological models have made important contributions to the theology of religions, yet they remain primarily concerned with doctrinal questions of truth, revelation, and salvation. Their principal concern is theological interpretation rather than the formation of everyday practices through which Christians inhabit religiously plural societies. Consequently, they offer only limited resources for understanding worship itself as a public practice that shapes relationships with religious others.

Joas Adiprasetya points toward a different direction by shifting theological attention from doctrinal competition to ethical encounter. Rather than asking which religion possesses the fullness of truth, he argues that dialogue begins with shared human responsibility and the pursuit of the common good (Adiprasetya, 2002). This proposal is significant because it relocates theological reflection within the lived realities of human coexistence. Religious diversity is approached not first as an intellectual problem but as a social reality that calls for hospitality, solidarity, and mutual responsibility.

A similar shift can be found in James K. A. Smith's understanding of Christian formation. Smith argues that human beings are shaped fundamentally by love and desire rather than by abstract ideas alone (Smith, 2009). Christian faith therefore cannot be reduced to the acceptance of doctrinal propositions. It is cultivated through embodied practices that direct human desire toward what Augustine describes as the *summum bonum*, the highest good. Worship occupies a central place within this process because it forms the imagination through which believers perceive both God and the world (Smith, 2009).

This insight has important implications for religious plurality. If worship forms the imagination through which Christians perceive reality, then worship also shapes the way Christians encounter people of other faiths. Liturgy is therefore not confined to the internal life of the church. It participates in the formation of public virtues such as justice, compassion, reconciliation, and hospitality. Conversely, when worship is understood merely as the preservation of religious identity, it may unintentionally reinforce social boundaries that isolate the church from the wider community.

The continuing restrictions on Christian worship in Indonesia demonstrate why this theological shift is necessary. Opposition to church buildings, resistance to worship gatherings in private homes, and disruptions of religious services reveal that worship has become one of the places where competing social imaginaries are negotiated. The issue is therefore not simply whether Christians possess the legal right to worship. The deeper question concerns the kind of public imagination that worship itself cultivates. Does worship merely strengthen the internal identity of the church, or does it also form communities capable of witnessing to justice, peace, and reconciliation within a religiously plural society?

These questions suggest that theological reflection on worship requires a conceptual framework capable of connecting liturgy, public life, and social imagination. Such a framework begins by recognising that worship is not only directed toward God but also forms the moral vision through which believers inhabit the world. The following section therefore turns to Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginaries and Tércio Bretanha Junker's understanding of prophetic liturgy in order to develop a theological account of worship as public witness.

Social Imaginaries and Prophetic Liturgy: Toward Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries

Charles Taylor's discussion of the social imaginary offers a helpful starting point for reconsidering the relationship between worship and public life. Taylor is less interested in formal theories of society than in the ways ordinary people imagine the world they inhabit. A social imaginary consists of the shared expectations, stories, practices, and moral assumptions through which people understand their place among others. It is this shared understanding that makes common life possible before it is ever articulated as theory (Taylor, 2004). Taylor's insight is particularly relevant for religious communities. Churches do not exist only because they confess particular doctrines. They also live from an imagination of who they are, how they relate to God, and what kind of presence they are called to embody in the world. Worship occupies a central place within this process because it is in worship that the church repeatedly rehearses its understanding of God, humanity, and creation. The liturgy not only proclaims faith but also shapes the imagination through which believers learn to inhabit the world.

James K. A. Smith develops this insight by arguing that Christian worship forms desire before it forms ideas. Human beings are not simply thinking creatures who occasionally worship. They are worshipping creatures whose loves are gradually directed through repeated practices (Smith, 2009). Consequently, the primary work of worship is not the transfer of theological information but the formation of a way of seeing and desiring the world. The rhythms of prayer, proclamation, confession, thanksgiving, and Eucharist cultivate dispositions that cannot be reduced to doctrinal instruction alone (Smith, 2009).

This understanding has important consequences for the theology of religious plurality. If worship shapes imagination, then it inevitably shapes the church's perception of religious others. A community whose worship

consistently nurtures fear, superiority, or isolation will reproduce those dispositions in public life. Conversely, worship that directs believers toward God's reconciling work forms a different imagination, one that is capable of recognising the dignity of others without abandoning Christian conviction. The question is therefore not simply whether worship is public or private. The more fundamental question concerns the kind of public imagination that worship cultivates.

The same concern appears, although from a different direction, in Tércio Bretanha Junker's account of prophetic liturgy. Writing from the tradition of liberation theology, Junker refuses to separate sacramental celebration from the realities of injustice. For him, liturgy reaches its fullness when it participates in God's work of restoring life. His notion of total sacramental rituality describes worship as an event through which the community is continually formed for reconciliation, equality, and social transformation (Junker, 2014). Sacramental life is therefore inseparable from prophetic responsibility.

Junker's contribution is significant because it moves beyond understanding prophecy merely as verbal criticism of injustice. The prophetic character of worship is already present within the liturgical act itself. The proclamation of Scripture, the celebration of the Eucharist, communal prayer, and the exchange of peace are not preparatory activities before the church enters society. They are practices through which the church is constituted as a community capable of participating in God's mission. Worship does not produce prophetic action as an external consequence; prophetic action grows from the very imagination that worship forms.

This perspective resonates with Aleksander Schmemmann's insistence that worship is not an escape from the world but the place from which the world is perceived truthfully (Schmemmann, 1973). The liturgy reveals creation as God's gift and humanity as called into communion with God and neighbour. Likewise, Don Saliers understands participation in worship as inseparable from participation in the life of the world. Communion with God is realised not in withdrawal from society but in faithful engagement with it (Saliers, 1994). These liturgical theologians differ in emphasis, yet they share a common conviction: worship forms a people whose vocation extends beyond the walls of the church.

At this point, however, an important question remains unanswered. Taylor explains how social imaginaries shape communal life, while Junker explains how liturgy forms prophetic communities. Neither, however, explicitly asks how Christian worship functions when the right to worship itself becomes contested. Their work provides indispensable resources, but neither addresses contexts in which liturgy is performed under pressure, where the act of gathering becomes a public negotiation of citizenship, dignity, and religious freedom. It is precisely at this point that the present study proposes the notion of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries. The expression does not refer to a new liturgical model or an additional theological doctrine. Rather, it describes the imaginative horizon formed through Christian worship in which God's reconciling mission and the church's public vocation become inseparable. Worship shapes a way of imagining the world before it generates particular actions within the world.

Seen from this perspective, prophecy is not simply something that follows worship. It is already embedded within the liturgical imagination itself. Every prayer for peace, every proclamation of the Gospel, every Eucharistic celebration, and every blessing sends the congregation into the world with a renewed perception of God's justice. The church learns not only what to believe but also how to recognise suffering, how to encounter difference, and how to remain faithful within situations marked by conflict and exclusion.

Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries therefore describes a process of formation rather than a programme of activism. Its concern is not to transform worship into political demonstration, nor to reduce liturgy to social ethics. Instead, it insists that faithful worship inevitably forms communities whose public life reflects the God whom they worship. Justice, hospitality, reconciliation, and compassion are not external additions to Christian liturgy; they emerge from the liturgical imagination itself.

This proposal becomes especially meaningful within the Indonesian context. When Christian communities experience restrictions on worship, the question is no longer whether liturgy has a public dimension. The public character of worship has already become evident through the realities that believers face. The more pressing theological task is to understand how worship enables the church to respond faithfully without surrendering either its sacramental identity or its commitment to justice. It is to this concrete context that the discussion now turns.

Worship as Public Witness: The Indonesian Experience

The public character of Christian worship becomes particularly visible when the freedom to worship is challenged. In such situations, liturgy is no longer perceived merely as the internal life of the church. It becomes a visible expression of identity, hope, and resistance against injustice. Worship occupies public space not because the church seeks political visibility, but because the ordinary practice of gathering before God has itself become contested.

The Indonesian experience illustrates this reality with particular clarity. Although the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and belief, the exercise of that freedom often depends upon local political dynamics and the attitudes of surrounding communities. The long-standing disputes concerning GKI Yasmin in Bogor and HKBP Filadelfia in Bekasi remain among the clearest examples. In both cases, judicial decisions affirming the churches' rights were not fully implemented, and congregations continued to experience restrictions in exercising their freedom to worship. Faced with this situation, members of both churches chose to celebrate Sunday worship in front of the Presidential Palace. Their decision was not simply an act of protest. It was an act of worship that publicly testified to the inseparable relationship between faith, justice, and human dignity.

The significance of these events does not lie only in their political symbolism. More fundamentally, they challenge inherited assumptions concerning the location of Christian worship. Worship is often associated with church buildings, sacred architecture, and spaces set apart from everyday life. Yet the experience of GKI Yasmin and HKBP Filadelfia demonstrates that the holiness of worship cannot be reduced to physical structures. As Aleksander Schmemmann argues, worship is the action through which the people of God become the Body of Christ; its meaning cannot be confined to a particular building or location (Schmemmann, 1973). The congregation gathered before God remains the primary locus of worship.

This theological insight becomes increasingly significant in contemporary Indonesia. In recent years, reports have continued to document opposition to the construction of churches, resistance to Christian worship held in private homes, and even disruptions of funeral and memorial services conducted by Christian families. These developments indicate that restrictions on worship are no longer limited to disputes over church buildings. The very act of gathering for prayer has become vulnerable to social contestation in certain local contexts. Before publication, these developments should be documented with recent reports from the SETARA Institute, Komnas HAM, the Wahid Foundation, and USCIRF to ensure that the analysis rests upon verifiable evidence. Seen through the lens of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries, these events reveal more than violations of constitutional rights. They disclose a conflict between competing social imaginaries. One imagination understands religious difference as a threat requiring control or exclusion. Another imagines society as a shared space in which justice, dignity, and religious freedom belong equally to all citizens. Worship inevitably participates in the formation of one of these imaginaries. It either reinforces fear and separation or cultivates hospitality and reconciliation. The worship conducted before the Presidential Palace illustrates this alternative imagination. The congregation did not abandon worship in order to pursue justice through political activism. Rather, worship itself became the language through which justice was sought. Prayer, Scripture, preaching, hymns, and the celebration of God's presence constituted a public witness that refused to separate devotion from responsibility. Liturgy became the place where Christian hope was enacted rather than merely proclaimed.

Such a perspective also helps explain why the prophetic character of worship should not be identified simply with public protest. Prophetic witness does not begin when believers leave the sanctuary. It begins within the liturgical gathering itself, where the church learns to see the world through the narrative of God's reconciling work. The practices of confession, forgiveness, intercession, thanksgiving, and Eucharistic communion reshape the moral imagination of the congregation. They form communities capable of recognising suffering, refusing hatred, and seeking reconciliation even within situations marked by discrimination.

For this reason, Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries should not be interpreted as a strategy for politicising worship. The purpose is neither to transform every liturgy into a demonstration nor to subordinate Christian worship to political agendas. The prophetic quality of worship emerges from its fidelity to the Triune God, whose redemptive work embraces the whole creation. Precisely because worship is directed toward God, it cannot remain indifferent to injustice experienced by God's creatures.

The continuing challenges faced by Christian communities in Indonesia therefore call the church to recover a richer understanding of worship. Worship is not an escape from public life but one of the primary

ways in which the church learns to inhabit public life faithfully. The question is no longer whether worship has political consequences. Every act of worship already participates in shaping the moral imagination of those who celebrate it. The more important question concerns what kind of imagination is being formed. Does worship prepare the church to withdraw from a plural society, or does it cultivate communities that bear witness to justice, peace, and reconciliation?

The concept of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries answers this question by insisting that Christian worship forms a public imagination grounded in God's reconciling mission. It is this imagination that enables the church to respond to religious plurality not with fear or domination, but with faithfulness, hospitality, and hope.

Discussion

Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries and the Public Vocation of Worship

The concept of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries proposed in this article emerges from the conviction that worship is fundamentally formative. Christian worship does more than communicate theological truths or preserve ecclesial tradition. Through repeated liturgical practices, it forms a way of seeing God, humanity, and the world. The argument developed here suggests that the public significance of worship lies precisely in this formative character. Worship shapes the imagination through which Christians perceive social reality and discern their vocation within it.

This perspective contributes to contemporary liturgical theology by moving beyond the familiar distinction between worship inside the church and Christian service outside the church. Such a distinction has often implied that worship prepares believers for mission, while mission itself takes place elsewhere. The present study proposes a closer relationship. Worship is already participation in God's mission because it forms a community whose imagination has been reoriented toward God's reconciliation of the world. Public witness, therefore, is not simply the consequence of worship; it is intrinsic to worship itself.

This argument also extends Charles Taylor's understanding of social imaginaries. Taylor demonstrates that communities are shaped by shared narratives and practices before they are shaped by formal theories (Taylor, 2004). The present study suggests that Christian liturgy is one of the most significant practices through which the church's social imaginary is continually formed. Every gathering around Scripture, prayer, baptism, and Eucharist renews a particular vision of reality. Worship teaches believers not only who God is but also how neighbours, strangers, and even opponents are to be perceived within God's continuing work of creation and reconciliation.

James K. A. Smith develops Taylor's insight by arguing that worship directs human desire toward the kingdom of God (Smith, 2009). The concept of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries builds upon this argument but places it within the concrete context of religious plurality. The question is no longer only how worship forms Christian identity. The question becomes how worship forms Christians who inhabit societies marked by religious diversity, social tension, and unequal access to religious freedom. Worship is understood here as the place where Christians learn to respond to difference without abandoning conviction, and to pursue justice without reducing the gospel to political ideology.

The dialogue with Tércio Bretanha Junker further clarifies this proposal. Junker's notion of total sacramental rituality insists that sacramental celebration always participates in the restoration of life (Junker, 2014). The present article shares this conviction but emphasizes another dimension that remains implicit within Junker's work. Where worship itself becomes restricted, contested, or displaced from conventional ecclesial space, prophetic witness is expressed not only through social action after worship but also through the act of worship itself. The congregation gathered before God already embodies an alternative vision of public life grounded in reconciliation rather than exclusion.

The Indonesian context illustrates this theological claim with particular clarity. Worship celebrated before the Presidential Palace by members of GKI Yasmin and HKBP Filadelfia was not merely symbolic resistance against discrimination. It represented another way of imagining public life. Instead of responding to exclusion through hostility, the congregations continued to pray, proclaim Scripture, sing hymns, and celebrate God's faithfulness in the midst of public space. Their worship became a visible confession that justice belongs not only to the church but to society as a whole.

The same theological framework remains relevant as restrictions on Christian worship continue to appear

in different forms. Opposition to church buildings, resistance to worship in private homes, and interference with funeral or memorial services reveal that the question of religious freedom is not limited to legal regulation. These events also expose competing moral imaginations concerning who belongs within public space and whose religious practices are considered legitimate. Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries therefore invites the church to respond not by mirroring exclusion but by cultivating practices that embody hospitality, reconciliation, and justice.

This understanding also contributes to public theology. Public theology frequently asks how Christian faith should engage democratic society. The present study approaches this question from the perspective of worship. Before the church speaks in public, advocates public policy, or participates in civic debate, it gathers around Word and Sacrament. These liturgical practices are not detached from public responsibility. They are the practices through which the church learns the moral grammar of public life. Worship forms the habits of listening, confession, reconciliation, thanksgiving, and hope that make responsible public engagement possible. Accordingly, the contribution of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries is not to redefine worship as political activism. Such a reading would misunderstand both prophecy and liturgy. Prophetic witness arises because worship remains centred upon God. The church bears public witness precisely by remaining faithful to its liturgical identity. Prayer does not become less theological when it intercedes for justice. Eucharistic communion does not become less sacramental when it forms communities committed to reconciliation. On the contrary, the public character of worship emerges from the very heart of Christian worship itself.

This proposal also has implications for churches living within religiously plural societies beyond Indonesia. Wherever worship is celebrated amid social division, discrimination, or conflict, the church is called to imagine public life through God's reconciling work rather than through fear or hostility. The prophetic imagination cultivated in worship does not erase theological difference. Instead, it enables Christians to inhabit those differences faithfully while recognising the dignity of every human person as one created in the image of God.

Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries therefore should be understood not simply as a theological concept but as a hermeneutical lens. It provides a way of interpreting Christian worship that refuses to separate liturgy from justice, sacramental life from public responsibility, or devotion from human solidarity. Within this horizon, worship becomes one of the primary places where the church learns to participate in God's mission for the life of the world.

Conclusion

The continuing restrictions on Christian worship in Indonesia reveal that religious freedom remains more than a constitutional or legal concern. They expose deeper questions about how religious communities imagine their place within a plural society and how public space is negotiated through everyday religious practices. In such circumstances, worship cannot be understood merely as an ecclesial activity carried out within the boundaries of church buildings. Rather, it becomes a public practice through which the church embodies its faith, affirms human dignity, and bears witness to God's justice in the midst of social contestation.

This article has argued that existing discussions on religious pluralism, public theology, and liturgical theology, while valuable, have rarely been brought into conversation in ways that explain worship itself as a form of public witness. By placing Charles Taylor's account of social imaginaries in dialogue with Tércio Bretnha Junker's understanding of prophetic liturgy, the study has proposed Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries as a constructive theological framework for interpreting Christian worship within contexts where religious freedom remains contested. The concept suggests that worship is not only a response to God's grace but also a formative practice that shapes the church's imagination for justice, reconciliation, hospitality, and peaceful coexistence.

The Indonesian experience demonstrates the significance of this proposal. The witness of congregations such as GKI Yasmin and HKBP Filadelfia, together with the continuing challenges faced by Christian communities in exercising their freedom to worship, shows that liturgy may itself become a public testimony to justice. When worship is celebrated in situations of exclusion or discrimination, it does more than preserve ecclesial identity. It makes visible an alternative imagination of public life grounded in God's reconciling work. Worship, in this sense, does not abandon its liturgical character when it enters public space; rather, it fulfils its vocation as

participation in the *missio Dei*.

The contribution of Prophetic Liturgical Imaginaries therefore lies not in proposing a new liturgical model, but in offering a different way of interpreting the relationship between worship and public life. It challenges the tendency to separate liturgy from questions of justice, or to regard prophetic engagement as an activity that begins only after worship has ended. Instead, the prophetic vocation of the church is understood as emerging from the liturgical imagination continually formed through prayer, proclamation, sacrament, and communal participation in the life of God.

This framework also opens new possibilities for public theology. It invites further reflection on how Christian worship contributes to democratic life, interreligious coexistence, and the protection of religious freedom without reducing liturgy to political activism. The church's public witness is most credible when it grows out of faithful worship rather than ideological confrontation. In this way, liturgy becomes a school of public discipleship, forming communities capable of responding to religious diversity with conviction, humility, and hope.

Finally, this study should be understood as an initial constructive proposal rather than a final account. Future research may extend the framework developed here through empirical studies of congregational worship in contexts of religious plurality, comparative analyses of different Christian traditions, or dialogue with other religious communities whose experiences of public worship also shape the moral imagination of plural societies. Such work would deepen our understanding of how worship continues to form communities that seek justice while remaining faithful to the God whom they worship.

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