

## Editorial

# As We Worship, So We Believe

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Imagine a dense forest separating two cities. In order to engage in commerce between these cities, merchants must pass through the forest. For the earliest of these merchants, this was a very difficult task, wrought with many mistakes and casualties. Eventually, though, over time and with experience, the merchants discovered the safest, quickest route through the forest. Once they did, they began to carefully mark the path so that they would remember the best way to go. Even then, each of these early journeys required careful attention to the markers so that they would not stray from the best way. Over time, however, their regular trips along that same route began to form a much more visible path to the degree that years later merchants hardly pay attention; they doze peacefully as their horses casually follow the heavily trod road. Here now is a well-worn path cut through the wood upon which travelers mindlessly pass from one city to the other. This path may seem mundane, but in reality it is embedded with values such as desire for safety, protection from the dangers of the forest, and conviction that this is the quickest way through. The snoozing merchants do not give thought to these values any longer, but the values are there nonetheless, and whether they know it or not, their journey has been shaped by those values. Those values are, as it were, worn into the shape of the path itself.

This fictional story represents the liturgical story of the Christian faith, well illustrating the dynamic, formative nature of the relationship between religion and worship. Christian religion is like a path through the forest that was formed long ago, but along which God's people travel through life every day. Sometimes this formation occurs consciously, but most of the time the journey of

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God's people has been shaped by values imbedded in their worship practices in ways Christian pilgrims rarely recognize.

Yet, I think it's safe to say that most evangelical Christians don't realize this about their worship. Worship is what we do when we gather for church on Sunday – we sing some songs and listen to a sermon that hopefully will give us some practical advice for the week. Worship for most evangelicals tends to focus on methodology: How many songs will we sing? What instrumentation will we use? In what order will we organize the service? How we worship is based on cultural conventions, preferences of the people, or tradition. What matters is what we believe and the sincerity of our hearts; how we worship is simply the authentic overflow of our hearts toward God.

However, it is important to recognize that corporate worship does something far more significant than many Christians recognize – worship forms our religion; and the reverse is equally true – religion forms our worship. It's the age-old chicken-and-egg question: which comes first? The answer depends on from which perspective we're looking. From the perspective of leaders among God's people who have given intentional considerations to these matters, religion forms worship. But for most Christians who have not thought much about it – leaders and laity alike – worship has formed their religion without them even knowing it. I am convinced that a central solution to problems we face today in evangelical Christianity is to recover a lost understanding that worship involves more than simply expressing devotion to God through songs we enjoy; rather, worship forms the very core of who we are as Christians.

This interaction between religion and worship characterizes the formation of the Christian faith throughout history, captured in the Latin phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi* – "the law of prayer, the law of belief." This ancient concept recognized the fundamental relationship between acts of worship and belief. *Lex credendi* is another way to describe religion; *lex orandi* designates worship. The relationship between the two, as I have already mentioned, involves both reflection and formation. In other words, public worship both *reveals* belief and *forms* belief. How a community worships – its content, its liturgy, and its forms of expression – reveals the underlying religious commitments of those who plan and lead the worship.

This may not always be intentional, either. Often church leadership inherits certain ways of worshiping and employs them without ascertaining exactly what kinds of beliefs the worship practices embody, sometimes resulting in worship that does not reflect the church's stated theological convictions.

This is significant exactly because of the second half of the premise—corporate worship *forms* the beliefs of the worshipers. Public worship is not simply about authentic expression of the worshipers; rather, how a church worships week after week progressively shapes their beliefs since those worship practices were cultivated by and embody certain beliefs. This happens whether or not the worshipers consciously recognize it, and therefore if church leadership has not given consideration to how the way they worship is shaping the theology of the congregation, it is quite possible that worshipers are being formed in ways the leadership does not intend.

For these reasons, it is so important for church leaders, and indeed all Christians, to carefully identify what kinds of beliefs have shaped their various worship practices so that they will choose to worship in ways that best form their minds and hearts consistent with their theological convictions.

One of the central purposes of this journal is to explore this formative relationship between worship and religion, and each of the articles in this volume contributes to the conversation significantly. Matthew Sikes demonstrates the impact of a particular interpretation of Psalm 22:3 on contemporary worship theology and practice. Ryan J. Martin discusses how love for Christ will compel Christians to worship that is regulated by Scripture. Holly M. Farrow compares the hymns of British writer Anne Dutton to American theologian Jonathan Edwards with an eye toward the relationship between theology and doxology. David de Bruyn compares that same theologian's theology of beauty to traditional definitions, demonstrating the impact of Edwards's theology on his understanding of beauty. Finally, David J. Calvert details the formative power of one particular aspect of liturgy—the Lord's Supper.

We pray that this volume will help church leaders, educators, and musicians to recognize and evaluate the formational relationship between what they believe and how they worship.