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## REFORMATION & REVIVAL JOURNAL

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### A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

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1. To encourage *reformation* in the local Christian churches worldwide,
2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.

## INFORMATION

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The conviction of the staff and editors of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* is that awakening, of the kind seen in the First Great Awakening in America, wedded to the doctrinal concerns of the historic Protestant Reformation as expressed in the terms *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*, is needed in our generation.

The views expressed in this publication should be considered as the personal opinions of the authors and are not to be taken as an official editorial perspective.

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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*John H. Armstrong*

For nearly nine years I have traveled across North America, preaching and visiting churches of various styles, sizes and affiliations. My sojourn has brought me face-to-face with a wide variety of worship services, musical tastes and liturgical expressions. I have to confess that what I have seen, on the whole, distresses me.

First, it seems that very few evangelicals think deeply or profoundly about worship at all. We argue about drums and guitars, casual dress or formal attire, and choirs versus praise bands. At the same time we give little or no attention to the actual meaning and purpose of congregational worship. I suspect the reason for this state of affairs is not hard to locate—theology is currently held in very low esteem. As a result we also hold the relationship of theology to what we actually do in worship in even *lower* esteem. Simply put, when pragmatism reigns theology loses. And when theology loses what the culture wants is what we are ready to provide. I cannot tell you how many times I have asked pastors the question: “What connection does the theology of your congregation (or staff, elders, deacons, etc.) have to do with what your people do in worship each Lord’s Day?” More times than not the answer I get is either a blank stare or a shrug of the shoulders.

Second, preaching, though still alive to some extent, has been reduced in both time and content. Few pastors in large churches want to talk about preaching. This response sends signals to the whole church scene. And pastors, if they do care about preaching, find it harder and harder to compete with the visual arts. People have shorter and shorter attention spans and demand more than ever that the preacher give them a lot more in a much shorter period

of time. What people want is "feeling" communicators (that's the *in* word for preachers now) who tell lots of personal stories about how to "fix" family problems, make their marriage sizzle, or just get more out of life in general. Doctrinal preaching is out, lifestyle experience is in. We have created what one minister has called "the homiletics of consensus."<sup>1</sup> The problem, of course, is that sound doctrine is absolutely essential for an authentic *Christian* lifestyle. With a theology focused on self-fulfillment the results will always be therapeutic, not biblical.

My friend, Kent Hughes, once put it this way: "People worship at their work, work at their play and play at their worship!"<sup>2</sup> How sadly true.

Third, we want to feel something when we go to worship. We will tolerate almost anything as long as we are encouraged to feel something in our worship services. We are a sensate culture! Once again the world has overflowed into the average congregation's life like a deluge. We begin with human needs, and our unspoken distinctive is to take away every element of the congregational experience of worship that is unacceptable to those who might be offended. Hymns are out and anonymity is in. Liturgy is bad and language rooted in the Bible and theology can't be understood so we have to replace it sooner than later. The question that drives most churches is really very simple: "What did you (we) get out of it?"

But the prophets Amos and Isaiah saw the turning of religion into personal fulfillment and human pageantry as clear evidence that something was amiss. God's people had disobeyed him, and the result was the absence of his blessing upon their gatherings. Idolatry, greed, injustice, sexual sin and incivility to one another prevailed. God judged his people and thus removed his Spirit from their gatherings. Their response was to seek even more frantically to create a *sense* of his presence. Ritualism was the result. True worship was lost.

But modern evangelicals are confused at precisely this point. We equate ritualism with liturgy. We think that because we do not "feel" something it has to be bad. Liturgy, however, comes from the biblical word for an "offering." What liturgy really amounts to is a form that we agree to follow in our worship. Every tradition has a liturgy of some sort, more or less. The real question is this: Is the liturgy we follow based upon an understanding of the revelation of God in Holy Scripture? If our services are simple, why are they simple? If they have dramatic and expressive elements, why? If they include prayers (written or extemporaneous), why? If they have a major portion of time devoted to preaching, why? All of these questions, and many more like them, involve us in theology, whether we understand it or not.

So, it is imperative that a publication such as this, given to helping the church think about reformation and revival, should devote considerable attention to the subject of worship. For this reason we present another theme issue based upon "Restoring True Worship." In this issue we offer articles, book reviews, extensive quotations and a major annotated bibliography. Our goal is to provide a valuable resource (with Volume 9, Number 2) for the contemporary church leader who cares about restoring Christ-centered worship to the local church. At the end of the day this is where real reformation takes place, in one particular church at a time.

EDITOR

### Notes

1. Spoken by Kent Hughes in a lecture given several years ago at a Whitefield Ministerial Fellowship held in Wheaton, Illinois, sponsored by Reformation & Revival Ministries. He cited four distinctives of this new homiletics: (1) Sermons must not be information-laden, (2) Sermons must be topical, not textual, (3) Sermons must be short, and; (4) Sermons must give people an abundance of stories and illustrations.
2. Whitefield Lecture.