

# Presidential Address

## Why Should You Study Worship?

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What is the essence of Christian worship and why does it matter? I would like to start with two questions. 1. Are you a chicken, or are you a pig? 2. What does that question have to do with the study of worship?

The famous first line of the Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly exclaims, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”<sup>1</sup> Glorifying God is not a passive posture, but an active one in which we ascribe appropriate glory (ultimate truth, goodness, and beauty) to God. St. Irenaeus stated that “The glory of God is a human fully alive.” Note the active sense of being alive in God. When we are fully alive with the truth, goodness, and beauty of God, God is glorified. Then, perhaps counterintuitively, enjoying God is also not a passive posture, like watching a football game or a movie on TV. Rather, truly enjoying something or someone (in this case, God himself) is actually an active posture in which we ascribe joy (blessing, beatitude) to the object of our joy. And God is the One most deserving of such ascription. Ascribing glory and joy to God is the essence of Christian worship, and the renewal of Christian worship is something to which all of humanity is summoned. And that is why IWS exists: to study worship that catalyzes our union with God and his mission.



For the past few years, I have been emphasizing the formational (or catechetical) quality of worship that is biblically and theologically grounded, historically rooted, and culturally and missionally relevant. Taken together, these qualities of worship renewal conduce to worship that is formational, forming all worshippers into Christlikeness and sending us out to be the ongoing incarnation of Christ, broken and poured out for the life of the world. IWS is a school of theology, specifically emphasizing the theology of worship. That theology is, as theologian David

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed on January 1, 2023 at at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-larger-catechism>

Fagerberg states, “The Logos revealing the Theos,”<sup>2</sup> or, “The Son revealing the Father.”

Worship theology is primary theology. It calls for full, active, and conscious participation in summing up all theological disciplines. Worship applies, or actualizes, or animates all of these theological disciplines to the worship life and formation of all of God’s people, especially those who are not formally trained in theology.

In light of this, the Board of Trustees added formation to the list of foundational reflections. But, “formation” was already in the mission statement. The statement begins, “[IWS] forms servant leaders.” Why add it to the other areas of reflection? In the perspective of IWS Dean Dr. Dinelle Frankland, “If we don’t explicitly state what we are doing, we are not accountable to do that thing.” The Institute for Worship Studies wants to be accountable to this most critical task of formation in worship, so stating this specifically helps with that public accountability. But how do we measure formation? That question is in the process of being worked out. In the meantime, the high value that the board and faculty of IWS place on formation is now in writing as a sixth area of reflection in the coursework of IWS.

## **Formation in Worship Studies**

There is at least one more place that formation can be excavated from the mission statement: “[IWS] forms servant leaders in Christian worship renewal and education through graduate academic praxis.” According to Wikipedia, praxis is “the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, or realized. ‘Praxis’ may also refer to the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, or practicing ideas.” At IWS we emphasize the truth of God’s self-revelation in worship through biblical, historical, and theological methodologies, and we emphasize the application of that knowledge through formation within the contexts of culture and mission. The philosopher Aristotle divided the knowledge derived from praxis into ethics, economics, and politics. This could be oversimplified to how we treat ourselves, how we treat others, and how we treat the poor. Aristotle also distinguished between eupraxia (εὐπραξία, "good praxis") and dyspraxia (δυσπραξία, "bad praxis"). Likewise, in the emphasis we place on praxis, or appropriate enacting, embodying, applying, and practicing worship, is reviewed

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<sup>2</sup> David Fagerberg, “Liturgical Dogmatics: How Catholic Beliefs Flow from Liturgical Prayer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2021), 23.

and critiqued so that our praxis can be eupraxia, or good. We who are artists can find that process to be vulnerable at times. But that is why we are here in a supportive community, to learn from each other and sharpen our skills.

### **Are you a chicken or are you a pig?**

In his essay titled, “The Idea of the University,” John Henry Newman contrasted the academy, or the university, with the Church and the life of grace. In his 19th-century style, he wrote that the mission of the university is to produce “gentlemen,” which of course includes “gentlewomen.” These are students who have been shaped as sophisticated thinkers, reasoned scholars, especially critical thinkers, who can use reason well to make the world a better place. Gentlemen and gentlewomen develop the “philosophical habit” (through a liberal education) which has the ability to lift the student from the merely sensual to the higher and broader intellectual dimension. Additionally, the academic pursuit can provide tools for moral and ethical improvements of the individual. These ideas comprise the “academic” reference in our mission statement. Are these bad ideas? Not at all. Are they guarantees that students will move toward Godliness? Obviously, no. Newman had in mind a faith-based kind of educational institution which would help students to think Christianly about the world. Sadly, however, when scholarship is bifurcated from spiritual formation, the resultant “brain-on-a-stick” doesn’t always act, or even think, Christianly. This is especially true with the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries’ secularization of the academy. There can be a naturalizing of academics that ejects the reality of the supernatural, the very essence of the God who is other than us.

But, the Church and the worship of the Church, exists to create not so much sophisticated scholars, but saints. Newman rightly contrasts the gentleperson scholar with the person shaped by the mission of the Church—a saint. A saint is one who is wholly given to serving God by loving him and drawing others into that same love. Saints transcend the natural and participate in the supernatural. They go beyond the refined and sophisticated academic to being a friend with God, in union with the transcendent God who is the untamed Lion of Judah, the unsafe Aslan from Narnia, and the wild goose of the Celts. This is the strange God whom we are called to love and we are called to serve. Really, we have no other choice.

So, we are beckoned to study diligently and enter into the philosophical habit of the academic as we study worship. We should learn to think Christianly about ourselves, our neighbor, the poor, and creation, and especially about the worship of

God for the life of the world. But we should do it as a saint in training, one who is willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of God and his Kingdom.

Are you a chicken, or are you a pig? There once was a farmer who was well-loved by the animals he cared for. He was so loved that one day the animals wanted to make him a special breakfast. So, the chicken said to the pig, “Say! I have a great idea! Let’s give the farmer a breakfast of eggs and bacon!” The pig was understandably hesitant. He said, “I’m not sure about your level of commitment. You would make a donation, but I would make a sacrifice.” Be a pig for Christ. Be willing to sacrifice everything to be a saint, not just a sophisticated scholar.

In corporate worship we reach the chief end of all humanity—to glorify God as the ultimate truth, goodness, and beauty, and to enjoy him, or ascribe ultimate joy and blessing and beatitude, to God, so we may become fully alive in the life of God, for the sake of all of creation.

***The Institute for Worship Studies exists to study worship that catalyzes our union with God and his mission.***

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