

# Desiring the Kingdom

WORSHIP, WORLDVIEW,  
AND CULTURAL FORMATION

Volume 1 of Cultural Liturgies

James K. A. Smith

  
**Baker Academic**  
*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

# Contents

List of Sidebars and Figures	9
Preface	11
Acknowledgments	13
<b>Introduction: Beyond “Perspectives”: Faith and Learning Take Practice</b>	<b>17</b>
Making the Familiar Strange: A Phenomenology of Cultural Liturgies	
The End of Christian Education: From Worldview to Worship (and Back Again)	
Elements of a Theology of Culture: Pedagogy, Liturgy, and the Church	
<b>Part 1: Desiring, Imaginative Animals: We Are What We Love</b>	<b>37</b>
1. <i>Homo Liturgicus</i> : The Human Person as Lover	39
From Thinking Things to Liturgical Animals	
From Worldviews to Social Imaginaries	
From Spheres to Aims: Liturgical Institutions	
2. Love Takes Practice: Liturgy, Formation, and Counter-formation	75
<i>Thick</i> and <i>Thin</i> Practices: Ritual Forces of Cultural Formation	
Formation, <i>Mis</i> -formation, and <i>Counter</i> -formation: Liturgies Secular and Christian	
3. Lovers in a Dangerous Time: Cultural Exegesis of “Secular” Liturgies	89
“Reading” Culture through the Lens of Worship	
Consuming Transcendence: Worship at the Mall	
Sacrificial Violence: The “Military-Entertainment Complex”	

Excursus: On Patriotism  
 Cathedrals of Learning: Liturgies of the University  
 Apologetic Excursus: The Persisting Witness of Idolatry

**Part 2: Desiring the Kingdom: The Practiced Shape of the Christian Life 131**

**4. From Worship to Worldview: Christian Worship and the Formation of Desire 133**

The Primacy of Worship to Worldview  
 The Sacramental Imagination: Resisting Naturalism and Supernaturalism  
 Excursus: The Shape of Christian Worship

**5. Practicing (for) the Kingdom: An Exegesis of the Social Imaginary Embedded in Christian Worship 155**

Liturgical Time: Rhythms and Cadences of Hope  
 Call to Worship: An Invitation to Be Human  
 God's Greeting and Mutual Greetings: Hospitality, Community, and Graced Dependence  
 Song: Hymning the Language of the Kingdom  
 The Law: Order, Norms, and Freedom for the Good  
 Confession and Assurance of Pardon: Brokenness, Grace, Hope  
 Baptism: Initiation into a Royal Priesthood, Constitution of a New People  
 The Creed: Situating Belief  
 Prayer: Learning the Language of the Kingdom  
 Scripture and Sermon: Renarrating the World  
 Eucharist: Supper with the King  
 Offering: Kingdom Economics of Gratitude  
 Sending as Witnesses: The Cultural Mandate Meets the Great Commission  
 Worship, Discipleship, and Discipline: Practices beyond Sunday

**6. A Christian University Is for Lovers: The Education of Desire 215**

A New Monasticism for the University: Why Christian Colleges Should Corrupt the Youth  
 Christian Education Takes Practice: Three "Monastic" Opportunities  
 Christian Worship as Faculty Development: From Christian Scholars to Ecclesial Scholars

**Name Index 231**

**Subject Index 235**

## Preface

This book has a primary target, but it's also hoping for some collateral impact. The genesis of the project was a desire to communicate to students (and faculty) a vision of what authentic, integral Christian learning looks like, emphasizing how learning is connected to worship and how, together, these constitute practices of formation and discipleship. Instead of focusing on what Christians *think*, distilling Christian faith into an intellectual summary formula (a “worldview”), this book focuses on what Christians *do*, articulating the shape of a Christian “social imaginary” as it is embedded in the practices of Christian worship. (Alexander Schmemmann’s *For the Life of the World* was an inspiring, working model here—though I don’t pretend to have approached the compact majesty of that marvelous little book.) In short, the goal is to push down through worldview to worship as the matrix from which a Christian worldview is born—and to consider what that means for the task of Christian education and the shape of Christian worship. This doesn’t require rejecting worldview-talk, only situating it in relation to Christian practices, particularly the practices of Christian worship. Thus I envision the book as a companion volume to classroom texts on worldview such as Walsh and Middleton’s *Transforming Vision*, Wolters’s *Creation Regained*, or Plantinga’s *Engaging God’s World*.

As I was working on the project over the past several years and had opportunity to field-test the ideas in various contexts, it was suggested to me that the book’s argument might be of interest to a couple of further audiences. First, because it articulates the formative importance of worship and the vision of the world implicit in the practices of Christian worship, the book may be of interest to pastors, campus ministers, worship leaders, and others responsible for the shape of Christian worship in local congregations. It would be an honor and pleasure for me if this book could be a catalyst for inviting evangelical and Reformed communities to further intentional

reflection on what we do as a people gathered by worship. Second, fellow scholars who heard or read early drafts of the project suggested that some of the issues and themes engaged here might also be breaking new ground and striking some new paths for Christian thought, and so might be of interest to scholars (philosophers, theologians, social scientists, and others). However, I didn't want to abandon the pedagogical intentions of the project and write a scholarly book. So scholars might read this volume as a *précis* or abstract of a larger project—a bit of a promissory note.

I hope to keep those promises in two follow-up monographs that will constitute volumes 2 and 3 of *Cultural Liturgies*. The second volume will specifically focus on the philosophical anthropology sketched in chapters 1 and 2, with particular attention to the emerging dialogue between phenomenology, cognitive science, and social-scientific reflection on practiced formation. The third volume will address current debates in political theology, both in the particular orbit of the Reformed tradition (Mouw, Wolterstorff, and others) as well as the current debate between Jeffrey Stout's vision of a traditioned democracy and "new traditionalist" critiques of liberalism (MacIntyre, Hauerwas, Milbank). This first volume provides hints of the sorts of contributions I want to make to these discussions. But in order to keep the book focused on its core audience (students and teachers), I have kept these scholarly trajectories rather chastened, largely pushing those hints into footnotes.

# Introduction

## BEYOND “PERSPECTIVES”: FAITH AND LEARNING TAKE PRACTICE

What is education *for*? And more specifically, what is at stake in a distinctively Christian education? What does the qualifier *Christian* mean when appended to education? It is usually understood that education is about ideas and information (though it is also too often routinely reduced to credentialing for a career and viewed as a ticket to a job). And so distinctively *Christian* education is understood to be about Christian ideas—which usually requires a defense of the importance of “the life of the mind.”<sup>1</sup> On this account, the goal of a Christian education is the development of a Christian perspective, or more commonly now, a Christian *worldview*, which is taken to be a system of Christian beliefs, ideas, and doctrines.

But what if this line of thinking gets off on the wrong foot? What if education, including higher education, is not primarily<sup>2</sup> about the absorption

1. This defense is necessary because many North American Christians have an understanding of faith that prizes concern with eternity and personal salvation over “worldly” activities like engaging in research and gaining knowledge of this world. According to this dualistic picture, Christians should be spending their time and energy in missions and evangelism, not cancer research and art history. Thus many articulations of the ideals of Christian higher education begin back on their heels and have to first justify why Christians should be concerned with “the life of the mind.” See, for example, Clifford Williams, *The Life of the Mind: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

2. I ask the reader who might be worried that my proposal amounts to a newfangled form of anti-intellectualism to especially note the adverbial qualifiers in this paragraph (*primarily, fundamentally, first and foremost*, etc.). I am not advocating a new form of pious dichotomy that would force us to choose between *either* the heart *or* the mind. Rather, I will sketch an account of the priority of affectivity that undergirds and makes

of ideas and information, but about the *formation* of hearts and desires? What if we began by appreciating how education not only gets into our head but also (and more fundamentally) grabs us by the gut—what the New Testament refers to as *kardia*, “the heart”? What if education was primarily concerned with shaping our hopes and passions—our visions of “the good life”—and not merely about the dissemination of data and information as inputs to our thinking? What if the primary work of education was the transforming of our imagination rather than the saturation of our intellect? And what if this had as much to do with our bodies as with our minds?

What if education wasn’t first and foremost about what we know, but about what we love?

That actually is the wager of this book: It is an invitation to re-vision Christian education as a formative rather than just an informative project.<sup>3</sup> It is an invitation to what we’ll call an “adventure in philosophical anthropology”; its root conviction is that how we think about education is inextricably linked to how we think about human persons. Too much of our thinking about education (including much recent talk about world-views) sees education as a matter of disseminating information precisely because it assumes that human beings are primarily thinking things, or maybe believing animals. But I think both of these models give us a stunted, flattened picture of the rich complexity of being human.

There are (at least) two important implications that follow from this—such that the stakes of my argument spill beyond the walls of the school and university. On the one hand, this will obviously have implications for how we think about Christian education and, in particular, how we think about the mission and task of Christian schools, colleges, and universities. Based on the alternative model I will sketch in this book, how we think about distinctly Christian education would not be primarily a matter of sorting out which Christian ideas to drop into eager and willing mind-receptacles; rather, it would become a matter of thinking about how a Christian education shapes us, forms us, molds us to be a certain kind of people whose hearts and passions and desires are aimed at the kingdom of God. And that will require sustained attention to the practices that effect such transformation. In short, it’s going to require that Christian educa-

---

possible the work of the intellect. In short, I’m not arguing that we love, and therefore we need not know; rather, we love *in order to* know. In this respect I hope I’m echoing an ancient theme we find in Augustine and Maximus the Confessor. For related discussion, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Liberating Eros: Confession and Desire,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26 (2006): 115–36.

3. My primary focus in this book will be Christian higher education. However, I think almost everything I have to say here also has implications for Christian education at the K–12 level.

tion find its font and foundation in the practices of Christian worship. On the other hand, I think we'll also have to broaden our sense about the "spaces" of education. If education is primarily *formation*—and more specifically, the formation of our desires—then that means education is happening all over the place (for good and ill). Education as formation isn't the sort of thing that stays neatly within the walls of the school or college or university. If education is about formation, then we need to be attentive to all the formative work that is happening outside the university: in homes and at the mall; in football stadiums and at Fourth of July parades; in worship and at work.

Perhaps above all, this book is out to raise the stakes of Christian education, which will also mean raising the stakes of Christian worship. The goal is to get us to appreciate what's at stake in both—nothing less than the formation of radical disciples who desire the kingdom of God. But in order for this stake-raising to take place, we need to become attentive to our environment and our habits, to see them with new eyes, as if for the first time. To do that, let's consider a little case study.

### **Making the Familiar Strange: A Phenomenology of Cultural Liturgies**

I would like to invite you for a tour of one of the most important religious sites in our metropolitan area. It is the kind of place that may be quite familiar to many of you, but my task here is actually to try to make this place strange. I will try to invite you to see it with new eyes, which will require trying to shake off the scales of mundane familiarity. This will require focused attention to detail; like a Tarkovsky film, imagine your attention focused by the slow, patient, observant gaze of the camera frame. We'll turn that camera gaze and let it hang on something you see all the time, but perhaps without *seeing* it. So you might imagine that we are Martian anthropologists who have come to this strange world of twenty-first-century North America in order to gather data on the rituals and religious habits of its inhabitants. Having made our way from Mars, equipped with the tools of ethnographic description, we are going to venture to one of this culture's most common religious sites and observe it with eyes that are focused on the religious aspects of its rituals. So join me in the approach to this site.

As we're still off at a distance, I want you to notice the sheer popularity of the site as indicated by the colorful sea of parking that surrounds the building. The site is throbbing with pilgrims every day of the week as thousands and thousands make the pilgrimage. In order to provide a hospitable environment and absorb the daily influx of the faithful, the site provides an ocean of parking. But the monotony of black tarmac is cov-



ered by dots of color from cars and SUVs lined up, row by row, patiently waiting as the pilgrims devote themselves to the rituals inside. Indeed, the parking lot constitutes a kind of moat around the building since there are no sidewalks that lead to the site. Religious sites of this kind almost inevitably emerge on the suburban edges of cities—areas planned around the automobile and generally suspicious of pedestrians. The sacred building even provides a sanctuary from this incessant culture of automobility, as some pilgrims make their way to this sanctuary—especially in winter—just for the space to walk.

We've now made our way into this glistening sea of black and color and found a haven for our vehicle, still quite a distance from the sanctuary. However, already the hospitality of this community extends itself: waiting for us is a train-like cart to convey our family across the parking lot. Other pilgrims board the conveyance, and we begin to wend our way toward the building that sprawls in both directions and seems to be rising from the horizon—a dazzling array of glass and concrete with recognizable ornamentation. Indeed, because this particular religious site is part of an international, yea “catholic,” network of religious communities, the architecture of the building has a recognizable code that makes us feel at home in any city. The large glass atriums at the entrances are framed by banners and flags; familiar texts and symbols on the exterior walls help foreign faithful to quickly and easily identify what's inside; and the sprawling layout of the building is anchored by larger pavilions or sanctuaries akin to the vestibules of medieval cathedrals.

Our train ride has brought us to one of several grandiose entrees to the building, channeling us through a colonnade of chromed arches to the towering glass face, with doors lining its base. As we enter the space, we are ushered into a narthex of sorts intended for receiving, orienting, and channeling new seekers as well as providing a bit of a decompression space for the regular faithful to “enter in” to the spirit of the space. For the seeker, there is a large map—a kind of worship aid—to give the novice an orientation to the location of various spiritual offerings and provide direction into the labyrinth that organizes and channels the ritual observance of the pilgrims. (One can readily recognize the “regulars,” the faithful, who enter the space with a sense of achieved familiarity, who know the rhythms by heart because of habit-forming repetition.)

The design of the interior is inviting to an almost excessive degree, sucking us into the enclosed interior spaces, with windows on the ceiling open to the sky but none on the walls open to the surrounding automotive moat. This conveys a sense of vertical and transcendent openness that at the same time shuts off the clamor and distractions of the horizontal, mundane world. This architectural mode of enclosure and enfolding offers a feeling of sanctuary, retreat, and escape. From the narthex entry one

is invited to lose oneself in this space, which channels the pilgrim into a labyrinth of octagons and circles, inviting a wandering that seems to escape from the driven, goal-oriented ways we inhabit the “outside” world. The pilgrim is also invited to escape from mundane ticking and counting of clock time and to inhabit a space governed by a different time, one almost timeless. With few windows and a curious baroque manipulation of light, it almost seems as if the sun stands still in here, or we lose consciousness of time’s passing and so lose ourselves in the rituals for which we’ve come. However, while daily clock time is suspended, the worship space is very much governed by a kind of liturgical, festal calendar, variously draped in the colors, symbols, and images of an unending litany of holidays and festivals—to which new ones are regularly added, since the establishment of each new festival translates into greater numbers of pilgrims joining the processions to the sanctuary and engaging in worship.

The layout of this temple has architectural echoes that hark back to medieval cathedrals—mammoth religious spaces that can absorb all kinds of different religious activities all at one time. And so one might say that this religious building has a winding labyrinth for contemplation, alongside of which are innumerable chapels devoted to various saints. As we wander the labyrinth in contemplation, preparing to enter one of the chapels, we’ll be struck by the rich iconography that lines the walls and interior spaces. Unlike the flattened depictions of saints one might find in stained-glass windows, here is an array of three-dimensional icons adorned in garb that—as with all iconography—inspires us to be imitators of these exemplars. These statutes and icons embody for us concrete images of “the good life.” Here is a religious proclamation that does not traffic in abstracted ideals or rules or doctrines, but rather offers to the imagination pictures and statues and moving images. While other religions are promising salvation through the thin, dry media of books and messages, this new global religion is offering embodied pictures of the redeemed that invite us to imagine ourselves in their shoes—to imagine ourselves otherwise, and thus to willingly submit to the disciplines that produce the saints evoked in the icons.

Here again, we need to appreciate the catholicity of this iconography: these same icons of the good life are found in such temples across the country and around the world. The symbols and colors and images associated with their religious life are readily recognized the world over. The wide circulation of these icons through various mediums even outside the sanctuary invites us to make the pilgrimage in the first place. This temple—like countless others now emerging around the world—offers a rich, embodied visual mode of evangelism that attracts us. This is a gospel whose power is *beauty*, which speaks to our deepest desires and compels us to come not with dire moralisms but rather with a winsome invitation to share in this envisioned good life. (Yet one should note that it has its own modes

of exclusivity too; because of its overwhelming success in converting the nations, it is increasingly difficult to be an infidel.) And it is a mode of evangelism buoyed by a transnational network of evangelists and outreach, all speaking a kind of unified message that puts other, fractured religions to shame. If unity is a testimony to a religion's truth and power, it will be hard to find a more powerful religion than this catholic faith.

As we pause to reflect on some of the icons on the outside of one of the chapels, we are thereby invited to consider what's happening within the chapel—invited to enter into the act of worship more properly, invited to taste and see. We are greeted by a welcoming acolyte who offers to shepherd us through the experience, but also has the wisdom to allow us to explore on our own terms. Sometimes we will enter cautiously, curiously, tentatively making our way through this labyrinth within the labyrinth, having a vague sense of need but unsure of how it will be fulfilled, and so are open to surprise—to that moment when the spirit leads us to an experience we couldn't have anticipated. Having a sense of our need, we come looking, not sure what for, but expectant, knowing that what we need must be here. And then we hit upon it: combing through the racks, we find that experience and offering that will provide fulfillment. At other times our worship is intentional, directed, and resolute: we have come prepared for just this moment, knowing exactly why we're here, in search of exactly what we need.

In either case, after time spent focused and searching in what the faithful call “the racks,” with our newfound holy object in hand, we proceed to the altar, which is the consummation of worship. While acolytes and other worship assistants have helped us navigate our experience, behind the altar is the priest who presides over the consummating transaction. And this is a religion of transaction, of exchange and communion. When invited to worship here, we are not only invited to give; we are also invited to take. We don't leave this transformative experience with just good feelings or pious generalities, but rather with something concrete and tangible, with newly minted relics, as it were, that are themselves the means to the good life embodied in the icons who invited us into this participatory moment in the first place. And so we make our sacrifice, leave our donation, but in return receive something with solidity that is wrapped in the colors and symbols of the saints and the season. Released by the priest with a benediction, we make our way out of the chapel in a kind of denouement—not necessarily to leave (our awareness of time has been muted), but rather to continue contemplation and be invited into another chapel. Who could resist the tangible realities of the good life so abundantly and invitingly offered?



You've no doubt suspected that my phenomenology of this "religious" site is tongue in cheek, but I would resist the charge. Perhaps we need to confirm the identity of this religious site: as most of you have by now guessed, it is embodied in your local mall. Any generic, suburban mall will do, since the catholicity of this religion means that one will find an overwhelmingly uniform gospel preached at all of them. But I want to adamantly contend that describing the mall as a religious site is *not* merely a metaphor or an analogy. I'm not out to be merely playful or irreverent; rather, my goal is to try to make strange what is so familiar to us precisely in order to help us see what is at stake in formative practices that are part of the mall experience. The description is meant to be apocalyptic, in a sense, unveiling the real character of what presents itself as benign.<sup>4</sup> The description is meant to shift our attention and perspective in order for us to recognize the charged, *religious* nature of cultural institutions that we all tend to inhabit as if they were neutral sites. Looking at the mall through the eyes of worship and liturgy, with attention to the concrete material practices that are part of the experience, gives us an angle on this cultural institution such that we can see that the mall has its own pedagogy, an interest in the education of desire. If it's not quite *The Education of Henry Adams*, we might think of it as *The Education of Hannah Montana*.<sup>5</sup> So we can at once appreciate that the mall is a religious institution because it is a *liturgical* institution, and that it is a pedagogical institution because it is a *formative* institution.

Seeing the mall as a liturgical and pedagogical institution helps us to see what's at stake in its practices; at the same time, and for just this reason, I think this phenomenology of the mall's liturgy points out the limits of a worldview approach. It's hard to think of the mall in terms of worldview, as a place where ideas are proffered (quite the opposite!); but if we look at it from the perspective of love and practice, we become attentive to what's at stake and begin to notice things we hadn't seen before. Worldview approaches regularly (and rightly) make the claim that all human beings are inherently religious, that all human beings at root are *believers* who are committed to and oriented by a fundamental constellation of beliefs that,

4. This notion of an "apocalyptic" reading of culture will be pursued in more detail in chapter 3.

5. See Mark Schwehn's reflections on *The Education of Henry Adams* in *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94–126. There is an interesting literary history found in works concerned with "The Education of . . ." such as Erasmus's *Education of a Prince* (1516); Schiller's *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794); Marie, the Grand Duchess of Russia, in her memoir *The Education of a Princess* (1890); and most famously, *The Education of Henry Adams*. This literary tradition tends to exhibit a more holistic understanding of education as the formation of an identity and the forging of character—education as the creation of a *kind* of person.

even if not reflected upon, govern and control our being and our doing—what James Olthuis calls our “visions *of* and *for* life.”<sup>6</sup> Worldview-thinking also seeks to discern how such worldviews orient not just persons, but also communities, institutions, and systems.<sup>7</sup> However, while worldview-talk (which I don’t want to entirely abandon) is critical of rationalist accounts of the human person that would reduce us to thinking machines, it still tends to exhibit a fairly “heady” or cognitive picture of the human person, and thus still thinks that the site of contestation between worldviews or ground-motives is located in the realm of ideas.

But I think we run up against the limits of this approach when we try to make sense of the mall (to pick just one important cultural institution; we could also consider the university, the state, etc.). While with some hard work and some intellectual acrobatics one could make the case that what’s at stake at the mall is ideas or beliefs, I don’t think the faithful pilgrims to Hollister will find this very convincing. Indeed, the genius of mall religion is that actually it operates with a more holistic, affective, embodied anthropology (or theory of the human person) than the Christian church tends to assume! Because worldview-thinking still tends to focus on ideas and beliefs, the formative cultural impact of sites like the mall tends to not show up on our radar. Such a heady approach, focused on beliefs, is not really calibrated to see the quasi-liturgical practices at work in a site like the mall. An idea-centric or belief-centric approach will fail to see the pedagogy at work in the mall, and thus will also fail to articulate a critique and counter-pedagogy. In order to recognize the religious power and formative force of the mall, we need to adopt a paradigm of cultural critique and discernment that thinks even deeper than beliefs or worldviews and takes seriously the central role of formative practices—or what I’ll describe in this book as *liturgies*.

If many configurations of cultural practices function as quasi-liturgies, as formative pedagogies of desire that are trying to make us a certain kind of person, we need to ask ourselves: Is there a place that could form us otherwise—a space of counter-formation? Given the kinds of creatures we are—affective, desiring, liturgical animals—this can’t be addressed merely with new ideas or even Christian perspectives. The pedagogy of the mall does not primarily take hold of the head, so to speak; it aims for the heart, for our guts, our *kardia*. It is a pedagogy of desire that gets hold of us through the body. So what would it take to resist the alluring formation of our desire—and hence our identity—that is offered by the market and the mall? If the mall and its “parachurch” extensions in television and

6. James Olthuis, “On Worldviews,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 14.2 (1985): 153–64.

7. E.g., Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge, 1979).

advertising offer a daily liturgy for the formation of the heart, what might be the church's counter-measures? What if the church unwittingly adopts the same liturgical practices as the market and the mall? Will it then really be a site of counter-formation? What would the church's practices have to look like if they're going to form us as the kind of people who desire something entirely different—who desire the kingdom? What would be the shape of an alternative pedagogy of desire?

Because our hearts are oriented primarily by desire, by what we love, and because those desires are shaped and molded by the habit-forming practices in which we participate, it is the rituals and practices of the mall—the liturgies of mall and market—that shape our imaginations and how we orient ourselves to the world. Embedded in them is a common set of assumptions about the shape of human flourishing, which becomes an implicit *telos*, or goal, of our own desires and actions. That is, the visions of the good life embedded in these practices become surreptitiously embedded in us through our participation in the rituals and rhythms of these institutions. These quasi-liturgies effect an education of desire, a pedagogy of the heart. But if the church is complicit with this sort of formation, where could we look for an alternative education of desire?

The core claim of this book is that liturgies<sup>8</sup>—whether “sacred” or “secular”—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world. In short, liturgies make us certain kinds of people, and what defines us is what we *love*. They do this because we are the sorts of animals whose orientation to the world is shaped from the body up more than from the head down. Liturgies aim our love to different ends precisely by training our hearts through our bodies. They prime us to approach the world in a certain way, to value certain things, to aim for certain goals, to pursue certain dreams, to work together on certain projects. In short, every liturgy constitutes a pedagogy that teaches us, in all sorts of precognitive ways, to be a certain kind of person. Hence every liturgy is an education, and embedded in every liturgy is an implicit worldview or “understanding” of the world.<sup>9</sup> And by this I don't mean that implanted in the liturgies are all kind of ideas to be culled from them; rather, implicit in them is an understanding of the world that is pretheoretical, that is on a different register than ideas. That

8. Throughout this book, I simply use the term *liturgy* as a synonym for *worship*. In the word *liturgy*, readers should not hear the valorization of any particular form or style; at the same time, I hope those readers who associate negative connotations with the word *liturgy* will suspend judgment and simply hear the word as a shorthand for naming worship practices of all kinds. I discuss this further at the end of chapter 4.

9. In the next section, and chapters 1 and 2, we'll nuance this claim a bit, drawing on Heidegger's notion of “understanding” (*Verstehen*) as developed in Charles Taylor's notion of “social imaginaries.”

is why the education of desire requires a project that aims below the head; it requires the pedagogical formation of our imagination, which, we might say, lies closer to our gut (*kardia*) than our head.

Now, in the same way that I've tried to raise the stakes of what's going on in the mall, I also want to raise the stakes of what's happening in Christian worship, whether in the storefront chapel or the metropolitan cathedral. What sorts of habits are going to be fostered by these rhythms and rituals? What sort of education of desire is taking place for those immersed in these sorts of worship contexts? Can we exegete the worldview implicit in these practices—these liturgies? An exegesis of several secular liturgies is the focus of chapter 3; a full exegesis of the practices of Christian worship is the task of chapters 4 and 5.

But what does this have to do with Christian education? What does liturgy have to do with learning? What does the church have to do with the Christian college? In this introduction, our concern is merely to get some issues and questions on the table, to open a space to consider a couple of key themes that will orient the book: first, I have tried to get us thinking about education, or pedagogy, in terms of practices or even rituals. In particular, I've been suggesting that education is not primarily a heady project concerned with providing *information*; rather, education is most fundamentally a matter of *formation*, a task of shaping and creating a certain kind of people. What makes them a distinctive kind of people is what they love or desire—what they envision as “the good life” or the ideal picture of human flourishing. An education, then, is a constellation of practices, rituals, and routines that inculcates a particular vision of the good life by inscribing or infusing that vision into the heart (the gut) by means of material, embodied practices. And this will be true even of the most instrumentalist, pragmatic programs of education (such as those that now tend to dominate public schools and universities bent on churning out “skilled workers”) that see their task primarily as providing *information*, because behind this is a vision of the good life that understands human flourishing primarily in terms of production and consumption. Behind the veneer of a “value-free” education concerned with providing skills, knowledge, and information is an educational vision that remains formative. There is no neutral, nonformative education; in short, there is no such thing as a “secular” education.

This is why I have also suggested a second, related theme: that the sorts of practices that form us—that form our core or ultimate identities—constitute liturgies. While this claim will be further unpacked in chapters 1 and 2, here let me just briefly explain: Because I think that we are primarily desiring animals rather than merely thinking things, I also think that what constitutes our ultimate identities—what makes us who we are, the kind of people we are—is what we love. More specifically, our identity is shaped

by what we ultimately love or what we love *as* ultimate—what, at the end of the day, gives us a sense of meaning, purpose, understanding, and orientation to our being-in-the-world. What we desire or love ultimately is a (largely implicit) vision of what we hope for, what we think the good life looks like. This vision of the good life shapes all kinds of actions and decisions and habits that we undertake, often without our thinking about it. So when I say that love defines us, I don't mean our love for the Chicago Cubs or chocolate chip scones, but rather our desire for a way of life. This element of ultimacy, I'll suggest, is fundamentally *religious*. But *religion* here refers primarily not to a set of beliefs or doctrines but rather to a way of life. What's at stake is not primarily ideas but love, which functions on a different register. Our ultimate love/desire is shaped by practices, not ideas that are merely communicated to us. This is why I describe the formative "civic pedagogies" of both the church and the mall as liturgies. This is a way of raising the stakes of what's happening in both. Thinking about such formative pedagogies as liturgies will help us appreciate that these constitute an education that is primarily formative rather than merely informative, and that such formation is about matters of ultimate concern.

So, "What does this have to do with education?" I hear someone ask. What does the Christian college have to do with these worship contexts? Are you saying we should quit college and stick to church? I want to note, up front, that this has two important implications (we'll discuss further implications in chapter 6). First, this model should push us to ask: Just what is a "Christian" education *for*? What is the aim, or *telos*, of a Christian education? Second, this should prompt us to rethink a common mantra in Christian schools and colleges, namely, that a Christian education is concerned with providing a Christian worldview. If we think about learning in terms of liturgy—pedagogy *as* liturgy—then I think we need a rearticulation of the end of Christian education, which will require a reconsideration of worldview-talk<sup>10</sup> as it has come to dominate conceptions of Christian education.

### The End of Christian Education: From Worldview to Worship (and Back Again)

Let me suggest an axiom: behind every pedagogy is a philosophical anthropology. In more pedestrian terms, behind every constellation of educational practices is a set of assumptions about the nature of human persons—about

10. When I use this phrase throughout the book, I'm playing off Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Free Press, 1993).



the kinds of creatures we are. Thus a pedagogy that thinks about education as primarily a matter of disseminating information tends to assume that human beings are primarily “thinking things” and cognitive machines. Ideas and concepts are at the heart of such pedagogies because they are aimed primarily at the head. Because of the intellectualist philosophical anthropology that is operative here, the body tends to drop out of the picture. There is little attention to the nitty-gritty details of material practices and the role that they play in education. In contrast, a pedagogy that understands education as formation usually assumes that human beings are a different kind of animal. It’s not that we don’t think, but rather that our thinking and cognition arise from a more fundamental, precognitive orientation to the world.<sup>11</sup> And that precognitive or prerational orientation to the world is shaped and primed by very material, embodied practices. Thus such a pedagogy is much more attuned to the formative role of ritual.

### Picturing Education as Formation in Orwell’s *Road to Wigan Pier*

We are so prone to associating education with the cognitive stuff of ideas that it’s difficult for us to imagine education as a more formative, affective matter. Our imaginations get stuck in a rut, and it becomes difficult to get out of them to imagine things differently.<sup>12</sup> When that happens, theoretical dissertations aren’t effective in

11. I continue to find it difficult to come up with a lexicon that can address these distinctions in a neat and tidy way, particularly since the same terms can mean very different things in different disciplines. Wrestling with this challenge will be a core project of volume 2. To this point, I tend to use the word *cognitive* as a shorthand for describing a reflective, propositional way of intending the world that traffics in thinking and ideas. I will then tend to distinguish this from what I’ll call the *affective*, by which I mean a prereflective, imaginative “attunement” to the world that precedes the articulation of ideas and even beliefs. (Indeed, I have in mind something like Heidegger’s account of *Befindlichkeit*, “attunement” or “affectedness.”) If it’s not too cute, I would suggest this distinction (which is *not* an opposition) is akin to the distinction between reading the newspaper or a textbook and reading a poem or a novel. Both have content, but they activate very different comportments to the world, drawing on different parts of us, as it were.

12. This is an example of the way that particular configurations of the “social imaginary” can become so dominant that we fail to see them as a particular, contingent construal. Instead, these ingrained habits of perception are taken to just be “the way things are.” Thus Charles Taylor contends that the “modern” social imaginary “has now become so self-evident to us that we have trouble seeing it as one possible conception among others” (*Modern Social Imaginaries* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004], 2). In a similar way, Christian Smith suggests that the ubiquity of “liberal democratic capitalism” in the modern West is what also secures its transparency: “Its suppositional beliefs, its deeply trusted assumptions, its elemental cultural ontology have become nearly invisible to us precisely because it has become ubiquitous and dominant” (*Moral, Believing Animals* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 60). In short, the ubiquity and dominance of this social imaginary make it almost impossible to imagine anything other. Both education and

destabilizing these habits of imagination: providing an argument for education as formation—the sort of thing that targets our cognitive head—often fails to touch our more ingrained imagination, whose center of gravity is closer to our bodies. To jolt the imagination, we need more affective pictures. So throughout this book I will occasionally try to picture my claims by drawing on the imaginative reservoirs of literature and film. The goal is to draw on more affective modes of expression in order not only to convince us of these things at a cognitive level but also to persuade us of them at a more affective level.<sup>13</sup>

For instance, I have been claiming that an education—whether acknowledged or not—is a formation of the desires and imagination that creates a certain kind of person who is part of a certain kind of people. The facts and information learned as part of the process are always situated and embedded in something deeper that is being learned all along: a particular vision of the good life. A rather ugly instance of this is pictured in George Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier*, a work commissioned as a tract that would unveil the plight of the English working class in the coal-mining cities of the industrial North. To do so, Orwell spent time in the dilapidated slums that were so-called home to the underfed and underpaid miners and their families, whose work undergirded everything else that happened in the remnants of the British Empire. Orwell is particularly interested to remind his readers of this fact, readers from the South, members of the “intellectual Left” who would be reading Orwell's book in the comfort of heated homes with electric light and inside bathrooms—all things foreign to the miners' existence. How important to remember, then, that

our civilisation, *pace Chesterton*, is founded on coal, more completely than one realizes until one stops to think about it. The machines that keep us alive, and the machines that make the machines, are all directly or indirectly dependent upon coal. In the metabolism of the Western world the coal-miner is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil. He is a sort of grimy caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is *not* grimy is supported.<sup>14</sup>

The first half of the book is Orwell at his finest as an investigate journalist, filling in the picture of the plight of the working class from firsthand immersion. It is a harrowing account of malnutrition, illness, and the debilitating psychological effects of persistent unemployment and poverty. But in the second half of the book, Orwell takes a surprising turn: he takes on the supposed middle-class champions of the working

---

worship should be practices that precisely loosen up and stretch our imaginations such that we can begin to imagine things otherwise. We will discuss this further in chapters 1 and 2.

13. I have in mind here something like the account of “persuasion” at work in Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* and David Bentley Hart's *Beauty of the Infinite*. Persuasion is a more aesthetic mode than demonstration. For a discussion, see James K. A. Smith, “Questions about the Perception of ‘Christian Truth’: On the Affective Effects of Sin,” *New Blackfriars* 88 (September 2007): 585–93.

14. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin, 2001), 18.

class, the intellectual Left, and challenges their sympathies. In particular, he questions whether they're really ready to jettison the class structure that they renounce in the parlors and lecture halls of London.

It is in this context that he provides a powerful portrayal of the effects of education. Orwell captures the odious nature of this caste system by seizing upon an axiom that eludes simple propositional articulation. As he puts it, "The real secret of class distinctions in the West" can be "summed up in four frightful words" that are often left unuttered: *The lower classes smell*.<sup>15</sup> The statement itself is pungent to our ears (to mix senses). But Orwell's point is that the root of class distinctions in England is not intellectual; it's olfactory. The habits and rhythms of the system are not so much cerebral as visceral; they are rooted in a bodily orientation to the world that eludes theoretical articulation, which is why theoretical tirades also fail to displace it. Thus Orwell notes that we run up against "an impassable barrier": "For no feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a *physical* feeling." Almost every other kind of discrimination could be countered theoretically, with the weapons of facts, ideas, and information, "but physical repulsion cannot."<sup>16</sup>

But then, how does such a physical visceral stance get embedded in the middle and upper classes? It is a matter of formation ("in my childhood we were brought up to believe that they were dirty"), and more specifically, education. Thus Orwell recounts:

When I was fourteen or fifteen I was an odious little snob, but no worse than other boys of my own age and class. I suppose there is no place in the world where snobbery is quite so ever-present or where it is cultivated in such refined and subtle forms as in an English public school.<sup>17</sup> Here at least one cannot say that English "education" fails to do its job. You forget your Latin and Greek within a few months of leaving school—I studied Greek for eight or ten years, and now, at thirty-three, I cannot even repeat the Greek alphabet—but your snobbishness, unless you persistently root it out like the bindweed it is, sticks by you till your grave.<sup>18</sup>

The information that the public schools provided—like Latin and Greek—didn't really take root. What did get inscribed into the pupils, however, was an entire comportment to the world and society, a training in "snobbishness" that could not be easily overturned or undone by new facts or data or information. What would be required to "root out" such a visceral orientation is an equally visceral and physical education or counter-formation. Thus Orwell, somewhat in reverse, illustrates our core intuition that education is an embodied formation that captures our very being and shapes our orientation to the world. This may help us picture what it means to

15. Ibid., 119.

16. Ibid.

17. North American readers should note that "public" schools in Britain are elite "private" schools in American parlance.

18. Orwell, *Road to Wigan Pier*, 128.

talk about education as formation. But it might also be an occasion to ask whether a Christian education could have the same odious effects as a public school education. Could we offer a Christian education that is loaded with all sorts of Christian ideas and information—and yet be offering a formation that runs counter to that vision?



If we consider these two very different understandings of education (the informative and the formative), and the different understandings of the human person that are at work behind them, I suggest that, over the past decades, institutions of Christian education have unwittingly absorbed the former and eschewed the latter. Many Christian schools, colleges, and universities—particularly in the Protestant tradition—have taken on board a picture of the human person that owes more to modernity and the Enlightenment than it does to the holistic, biblical vision of human persons. In particular, Christian education has absorbed a philosophical anthropology that sees human persons as primarily thinking things. The result has been an understanding of education largely in terms of *information*; more specifically, the end of Christian education has been seen to be the dissemination and communication of Christian ideas rather than the formation of a peculiar people. This can be seen most acutely, I think, in how visions of Christian education have been articulated in terms of “a Christian worldview.”

Over the past couple of decades, the growth of Christian colleges and universities has been attended by expanded discussions of their mission as “the integration of faith and learning.”<sup>19</sup> It is then commonly claimed that students at Christian colleges and universities will learn a “Christian worldview”; or they will learn what everyone else learns but “from a Christian perspective” or a “Christian point of view.” However, “a Christian worldview” is identified primarily as a set of doctrines or a system of beliefs. Consider, for instance, Francis Beckwith’s definition of *worldview* in a recent collection:

What we mean is that the Christian faith is a philosophical tapestry of interdependent ideas, principles and metaphysical claims that are derived from the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures as well as the creeds, theologies, communities, ethical norms and institutions that have flourished under the authority of these writings. These beliefs are not mere utterances of private religious devotion but are propositions whose proponents claim accurately

19. I will not focus on “integration” talk here. For my criticisms, see James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 143–79.

instruct us on the nature of the universe, human persons, our relationship with God, human communities and the moral life.<sup>20</sup>

This is echoed in more popular usages of worldview that advocate “thinking ‘worldview-ishly’” and the importance of “worldview-thinking” by putting the Christian “belief-system” at the center of our cognition because “how a person *thinks* significantly influences his [*sic*] *actions*.”<sup>21</sup> A worldview is construed as a set of implicit ideas.

Such construals of worldview belie an understanding of Christian faith that is dualistic and thus reductionistic: It reduces Christian faith primarily to a set of ideas, principles, claims, and propositions that are known and believed. The goal of all this is “correct” thinking. But this makes it sound as if we are essentially the sorts of things that Descartes described us to be: thinking things that are containers for ideas. What if that is actually only a small slice of who we are? And what if that’s not even the most important part? In the rationalist picture, we are not only reduced to primarily thinking things; we are also seen as things whose bodies are nonessential (and rather regrettable) containers for our minds. This is why such construals of a Christian worldview are also dualistic: they tend to assume a distinction between our souls and our bodies—and then tend to ignore our embodiment (or wish it weren’t there). But what if our bodies are essential to our identities? Weren’t we created *as* embodied creatures? What if the core of our identity is located more in the body than the mind?

In chapter 1, I want to suggest that worldview-talk has misconstrued the nature and task of Christian education because the operative notion of worldview at work there has been tied to a stunted, rationalist picture of the human person; in short, “worldview” has gotten hitched to the wagon of a misguided philosophical anthropology. Granted, I think this represents a distortion of a richer, more nuanced understanding of worldview in the Reformed tradition; but given how worldview-talk is generally understood, the concern of chapters 1 and 2 is a retooling of our understanding of the human person in order to push us beyond and under worldview to consider the central, formative role of worship. Being a disciple of Jesus is not primarily a matter of getting the right ideas and doctrines and beliefs into your head in order to guarantee proper behavior; rather, it’s a matter of being the kind of person who *loves* rightly—who loves God

20. Francis Beckwith, introduction to *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*, ed. Francis Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 14.

21. Kenneth Richard Samples, *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 15. For other popular accounts along these rationalist lines, see “The Truth Project” from Focus on the Family ([www.thetruthproject.org](http://www.thetruthproject.org)).

### To Think About: The Shape of Christian Education

Consider the following as points for discussion:

- Because Christian education is conceived primarily in terms of *information*, assuming the philosophical anthropology behind that, it should be no surprise to find that Christian faith doesn't touch our pedagogical commitments. Instead, we adopt the pedagogies of rationalist modernity and drop Christian ideas into the machine. But that's a bit like taking a pizza crust, putting kidney and mushy peas on top, and then describing it as British cuisine. We need to think further about how a Christian understanding of human persons should also shape *how* we teach, not just *what* we teach.
- Further, we need to think more about how the Christian story should shape why we teach and why we want to learn. What is the goal of Christian education? To produce honest, cheerful, grateful, and pious producers and consumers? Or does the Christian story narrated in the practices of Christian worship paint a very different picture of human flourishing? Shouldn't Christian education be about that? And if so, how would our schools, colleges, and universities look different?
- Third, the distorted understanding of worldview that dominates current models assumes a rationalist, intellectualist, cognitivist model of the human person; as a result, it fails to honor the fact that we are embodied, material, fundamentally *desiring* animals who are, whether we recognize it or not (and perhaps most when we don't recognize it), every day being formed by the material liturgies of other pedagogies—at the mall, at the stadium, on television, and so forth. As such, Christian education becomes a missed opportunity because it fails to actually counter the cultural liturgies that are forming us every day. An important part of revisioning Christian education is to see it as a mode of counter-formation.
- Finally, dualistic models of Christian education are a missed opportunity in a second sense: they fail to form us for the kingdom precisely because they are inattentive to the centrality of embodied, material, liturgical practice for such formation. While Hollister and Starbucks have taken hold of our heart with tangible, material liturgies, Christian schools are “fighting back” by giving young people Christian *ideas*. We hand young people (and old people!) a “Christian worldview” and then tell them, “There, that should fix it.” But such strategies are aimed at the head and thus miss the real target: our hearts, our loves, our desires. Christian education as formation needs to be a pedagogy of *desire*.

and neighbor and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love. We are made to be such people by our immersion in the material practices of Christian worship—through affective impact, over time, of sights and smell in water and wine.

The liturgy is a “hearts and minds” strategy, a pedagogy that trains us as disciples precisely by putting our bodies through a regimen of repeated practices that get hold of our heart and “aim” our love toward the kingdom of God. Before we articulate a worldview, we worship. Before we put into words the lineaments of an ontology or an epistemology, we pray for God's

healing and illumination. Before we theorize the nature of God, we sing his praises. Before we express moral principles, we receive forgiveness. Before we codify the doctrine of Christ's two natures, we receive the body of Christ in the Eucharist. Before we think, we pray. That's the kind of animals we are, first and foremost: loving, desiring, affective, liturgical animals who, for the most part, don't inhabit the world as thinkers or cognitive machines. In chapter 4, I'll describe this as the primacy of worship to worldview or the priority of liturgy to doctrines. However, the point is fundamentally a reassertion and gloss on the classical axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi*: what the church prays is what the church believes. My contention is that given the sorts of animals we are, we pray *before* we believe, we worship before we know—or rather, we worship *in order to* know.

And this, I'm going to argue, should make a difference for how we think about the nature and task of Christian education—and thus what's at stake at a Christian college. The goal of chapter 6 is to rearticulate the *end* of Christian education by re-visioning both the *telos* and the practice of Christian education. With respect to its *telos*, or goal, in light of what we've suggested above about the nature of education as formative pedagogy, I will propose that the primary goal of Christian education is the formation of a peculiar people—a people who desire the kingdom of God and thus undertake their vocations as an expression of that desire. The task of a Christian school, college, or university is not to just provide a “safe” place for the dissemination of information that one can get at the public or state school down the street. Nor is it merely to provide a “Christian perspective” on what the world thinks counts as knowledge in order to become successful and productive citizens of a disordered society. Rather, the Christian college's mission is more radical than that: in some significant way, it involves the formation of disciples. In short, the Christian college is a *formative* institution that constitutes part of the teaching mission of the church.

With respect to practice, I will suggest that this vision of the mission of Christian education requires a correlate pedagogy that honors the formative role of material practices. Thus, I will argue that education at Christian colleges must be understood as liturgical in more than an analogical or metaphorical sense. Or perhaps to put it more starkly, I will suggest that we need to move from the model of “Christian universities,” identified as sites for transmitting Christian ideas, to “ecclesial colleges,” understood to be institutions intimately linked to the church and thus an extension of its practices. If Christian learning is nourished by a Christian worldview, and if that worldview is first and foremost embedded in the understanding that is implicit in the practices of Christian worship, then the Christian college classroom is parasitic upon the worship of the church—it lives off the capital of Christian worship.

## Elements of a Theology of Culture: Pedagogy, Liturgy, and the Church

Before moving from this overview of the project to a more substantive unpacking of its components in the chapters that follow, let me also note that much of what I'll articulate here is not only of concern for students and professors, but also for pastors and parishioners. Indeed, many of the failures that I have noted with respect to stunted, dualistic visions of Christian education apply equally to how, over the past decades, we have come to "do church." The core intuitions I'll unpack in this book are germane to the task of discipleship broadly conceived. In that sense, *Desiring the Kingdom* can be understood as a "theology of culture" (or, more generally, a Christian cultural theory) that

- Understands human persons as *embodied actors* rather than merely thinking things.
- Prioritizes *practices* rather than ideas as the site of challenge and resistance.
- Looks at cultural practices and institutions through the lens of worship or liturgy.
- Retains a robust sense of *antithesis* without being simply "anti-cultural."

My concern is to develop a cultural theory that has a radar, so to speak, attuned not primarily to ideas but to practices, and more specifically, to identity-forming practices that I'll describe as liturgies. The goal is a theology of culture that gives space to a certain ambivalence—a theological account of culture that is nimble, can recognize and account for complexity, but also has an ecclesial center of gravity, we might say. By looking at cultural institutions through the lens of worship and liturgy, I hope to raise the stakes of what it means for us to be immersed in such cultural rituals. And as a result, I also hope to give us a new appreciation for what is at stake in the practices of Christian worship as an alternative cultural formation.