

# Imagining the Kingdom

HOW WORSHIP WORKS

Volume 2 of Cultural Liturgies

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# Preface

Novelists often attest that their characters take on a life of their own. So while the writer begins with a plan—a story line, character sketches, a sense of the ending to which all of it is headed—the creative process is full of surprises. Not until the novelist is mired in the mess of production could she have known that the protagonist should go *there*, should meet *him*, should say *that*. Creators are not masters of the universe they create; they, too, are recipients of that world and need to follow the path on which they are taken, even if they might have invented it to begin with.

In my preface to *Desiring the Kingdom*, I sketched a program for the Cultural Liturgies trilogy in which volumes 2 and 3 would be scholarly monographs aimed at a narrower, more specialized audience of scholars. The idea was for volume 1 to provide an accessible overview of the model and argument, and then for volumes 2 and 3 to be narrow, deep explorations of particular aspects of the argument (philosophical anthropology in volume 2 and politics in volume 3). In the three years since I completed *Desiring the Kingdom*, during which I have had a number of opportunities to share and discuss my core argument with a wide range of audiences, I have decided to revise that original plan for a couple of related reasons.

First, as it turns out, *Desiring the Kingdom* was not as “accessible” as I thought it was! While that first volume may have seemed to me like a relatively popular sketch, as is often the case, scholars are not very good judges of what counts as accessibility. Many of the readers of *Desiring the Kingdom* perceived it as a challenging academic book, though obviously scholarly colleagues in philosophy and theology saw it differently—a bit whimsical in places, a little imprecise in others. Such is the fate of a hybrid book: too many footnotes and references to German philosophers to qualify as “popular”; not enough footnotes and too many creative asides to be properly “academic.” Now, as I revise, I am trying to find a way to live in that between

space—to inhabit that hybridity—and ultimately to continue in that vein for all of the volumes of the Cultural Liturgies trilogy.

I recognize that there is a sense in which *Desiring the Kingdom* is a hypocritical book, or at least a book at risk of performative contradiction.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, the book argues that we are, primarily and at root, *affective* animals whose worlds are made more by the imagination than by the intellect—that humans are those desiring creatures who live off of stories, narratives, images, and the stuff of *poiesis*. On the other hand, the book tries to make this case in a didactic way, on a theoretical register, articulating a philosophical anthropology. *Desiring the Kingdom* recognized the limits of such a project and tried to navigate its internal tensions by including a number of forays into the arts and literature, with long digressions in which all of this is “pictured” in novels, films, and poetry. But still.

While it might seem ludicrous to even breathe about this in the same sentence with Marcel Proust, I was intrigued to discover that the young Proust faced a similar challenge. In one of his earliest writing projects, before *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), Proust was up against a similar challenge in terms of genre, working in the cracks between them. In his notebooks around the time he was working on the manuscript that we now know as *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Proust would write: “Should I make it a novel, or a philosophical study—am I a novelist?” While it is hard for us to imagine him as anything *but* a novelist (indeed, Proust is perhaps the quintessential novelist), it’s interesting to see Proust’s vacillation in this regard. He was a writer in search of a *form*.

The themes of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* show us why, since the work opens with a jarring claim: “Every day I set less store on intellect.”<sup>2</sup> Proust’s particular concern is the limits of intellect with respect to memory (a theme that would dominate *In Search of Lost Time*): on this account, “intellectual” reconstructions of the past strip the past of its irreducible “poetry.”<sup>3</sup> So honoring the past, and the uniqueness of memory, requires something different, something other than a didactic rehearsal of past “facts.” But here Proust runs up against an irony and a tension:

1. That it is *not* a performative contradiction should be a signal to some critics of *Desiring the Kingdom*: obviously my argument and model do not denigrate intellectual or theoretical reflection in favor of some unthinking, uncritical practice. *Desiring the Kingdom* is itself a *theoretical* reflection on pretheoretical realities—it is an invitation to *reflect* on our embodied being-in-the-world as an impetus both to appreciate the power of affective formation and to re-enter practice differently, even with a new intentionality. I return to these matters in the final section of chap. 4, “Redeeming Reflection.”

2. Marcel Proust, *On Art and Literature, 1896–1919*, trans. Sylvia Townsend Warner (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1997), 19.

3. *Ibid.*, 22. “Compared with this past [i.e., the past evoked by the scent of a madeleine dipped in tea], this private essence of ourselves,” Proust continues, “the truths of intellect seem scarcely real at all” (24). James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*

Perhaps it will cause surprise that I, who make light of the intellect, should have devoted the following few pages precisely to some of those considerations that intellect, in contradiction to the platitudes that we hear said or read in books, suggests to us. At a time when my days may be numbered (and besides, are we not all in the same case?) it is perhaps very frivolous of me to undertake an intellectual exercise. But if the truths of intellect are less precious than those secrets of feeling that I was talking about just now, yet in one way they too have their interest.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the reflective artist finds himself in this bind. “But perhaps in the course of these pages we may be led,” Proust hopes, “to realize that it touches on very important intellectual problems, and on what is perhaps for an artist the greatest of all: this relative inferiority of the intellect which I spoke of at the beginning. Yet all the same, *it is intellect we must call on to establish this inferiority.*”<sup>5</sup>

*Desiring the Kingdom* found itself in a similar jam, putting me in the strange position of making a philosophical argument for relativizing the importance of the intellect—a theoretical argument for delimiting the role of the theoretical attitude. But again, Proust owns up to a productive catch-22 in this regard: “If intellect does not deserve the crown of crowns, only intellect is able to award it. And if intellect only ranks second in the hierarchy of virtues, intellect alone is able to proclaim that the first place must be given to instinct.”<sup>6</sup>

Proust ultimately resolved this tension by writing a novel. While I hope such a project might be in my future, it is not the task of this book. Nonetheless, I do feel compelled to write this volume and the next in a way that is consistent with the central argument of *Cultural Liturgies*—and in a form that at least somewhat attests to the centrality of the imagination in my model and argument. As a small gesture in this direction, I have decided to retain the voice and format of *Desiring the Kingdom* for volumes 2 and 3. Thus the reader will continue to find exercises that attempt to “picture” the argument through engagements with literature, film, and poetry, and I have tried generally to retain a voice that has a little more verve than one usually hears in the dreaded scholarly monograph.

The second reason for revising the original plan—not consigning volumes 2 and 3 to the narrow irrelevance of scholarly monographs—is simply that there are wider audiences who are now looking for the sequel(s)

4. *Ibid.*, 25. I should note that Proust is criticizing the literary critic Sainte-Beuve, whom we might now describe anachronistically, following Charles Taylor, as an “intellectualist” critic guilty of the “heresy of paraphrase.” Much more on this in the chapters below. I discuss the “heresy of paraphrase” in more detail in chap. 4 below, in the section titled “Redeeming Ritual.”

5. *Ibid.*, 25 (emphasis added).

6. *Ibid.*, 25–26. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*  
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to *Desiring the Kingdom*. So retooling the plan for this volume (and the subsequent third volume) is largely a matter of gratitude. *Desiring the Kingdom* found friends in places I wouldn't have anticipated: while it has been widely discussed in Christian higher education and regions of the theological academy, I am also grateful that my argument and model have been enthusiastically received by pastors, worship leaders, artists, and Christian educators at the K–12 level. Conversations with these audiences over the past few years have honed my instincts and helped me refine my argument in ways I otherwise would not have. These readers and conversation partners have also helped me to see just how and where the argument of *Desiring the Kingdom* hits the ground in ecclesial and pedagogical practice. Indeed, these practitioners are often able to concretize the argument in ways that I cannot. So out of gratitude, and in hopes of keeping them in the conversation, I have decided to retain the format and voice of volume 1 for the entire trilogy. Because of this, I've provided below a brief "how to" for readers from different audiences, with the hope of providing an angle of entry for each.

# How to Read This Book

Like *Desiring the Kingdom*, this book is something of a hybrid, pitched between the academy and the church, since its argument is aimed at both. That means, of course, that it's also doomed to fall between the cracks and end up disappointing both: too scholastic for practitioners and too colloquial for scholars. I've decided that I'm willing to risk the ire of both in order to not give up on either. But given that this will pose different challenges for different readers, permit me to offer a little instructional guide for different (though related) audiences.

## For Practitioners

The ultimate *telos* of the Cultural Liturgies project is the renewal of practice, so in many ways practitioners are my ultimate audience. You are Christian educators, pastors, worship leaders, campus ministers, and those involved in worship arts. You are reflective about your ministry and teaching and are open to new models and metaphors and theories. But you are not looking for “theory for theory’s sake.” So in some ways, this book asks a lot of you. In particular, the first half of the book asks you to wade through expositions of French theorists (Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu) while I lay the foundations for a liturgical anthropology. I can completely understand if you find yourself at times impatient in this section of the book. However, I do believe the heavy lifting in part 1 is essential for the more tangible discussion in part 2. You might look at part 1 as digging a theoretical well from which we’ll then drink in part 2. Or think of part 1 as furnishing a theoretical toolbox for reconsidering and reappreciating the *how* and the *why* of worship and liturgical formation—and, more generally, the implications for Christian education and liturgical formation. Both



Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu offer theoretical models of habituation and formation that are suggestive, provocative, and at some points poetic. Rather than simply plunder them for juicy quotes, I have provided an exposition of their work that develops the context and “big picture” of their proposals, which should help you see just how and why I think their work has implications for a vision of Christian formation and education. But feel free to skip the footnotes.

I have tried to do a couple of things to help earn your patience in part 1. First, at various points I have paused to raise some questions about the implications of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu for how we think about the practices of Christian worship. I hope you’ll find these to be little rest stops on a long road of theoretical reflection—contemplative pauses for thinking about how a phenomenology of embodiment begins to hit the ground for worship planning and liturgical formation. Consider them promissory notes that are then more fully explored in part 2. Second, I have continued to employ various creative asides to help illustrate their arguments and theories, drawing on film and literature. I hope these are interspersed such that just as your eyes begin to glaze over from absorbing the intricacies of phenomenology, you’ll hit upon a reflection on *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* that refreshes your energy and attention.

Part 2 should then be “your” section of the book—the place where we’ll explore the specific implications of a liturgical anthropology for an understanding of Christian worship and formation. Granted, part 2 is no how-to manual. While I hope it hews closer to practical concerns, it does so in a reflective mode and with big-picture concerns in mind. My goal in part 2 is to suggest how the philosophical analyses of “being-in-the-world” in part 1 reframes how we look at matters of formation and generate a new appreciation of how worship works. This should encourage a new kind of critical concern about the force and formative power of secular liturgies. But it should also encourage a new intentionality about Christian worship and worship planning. In turn, it should generate new intentionality about the shape of a distinctly Christian pedagogy in education. In both cases, I hope the argument and analyses of *Imagining the Kingdom* provide further depth and nuance to the central argument of *Desiring the Kingdom*.

## For Scholars

This book is decidedly *not* a scholarly monograph—because of both its tone and its *telos* (which is ultimately the renewal of Christian practice). Nonetheless, I do think embedded in here are some original, constructive proposals that might help shape the philosophy of religion.

Indeed, implicit in my argument is a research agenda for both philosophy of religion and sociology of religion.

In particular, I would invite scholars to read my engagement with Merleau-Ponty as a foray into the continuing conversation between French phenomenology and philosophy of religion. That conversation, which has drawn on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, and others, has largely been a philosophy of God—concerned with themes of revelation, alterity, transcendence, “appearance,” and so forth. This is a robust and important trajectory of research. However, it has not fostered a phenomenology of *religion*—a phenomenological analysis of religious *practice*. I hope the model sketched here contributes to a growing conversation at the intersection of philosophy and liturgy, perhaps even to the emergence of a philosophy of liturgy.<sup>1</sup> The liturgical anthropology sketched here also has implications for the social sciences, particularly social-scientific accounts of religion and religious phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the arguments and analyses here in *Imagining the Kingdom* could have been distilled in scholarly articles for relevant journals in the guild—and I may still pursue some trajectories of research in more

1. This is part of what Nicholas Wolterstorff sees as the “prospect” for philosophy of religion in “Analytic Philosophy of Religion: Retrospect and Prospect,” in *Inquiring about God: Selected Essays*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1:17–34. Consider also Steven Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), or Terence Cuneo’s philosophical analysis of icons in worship in “If These Walls Could Only Speak,” *Faith and Philosophy* 27 (2010): 123–41. For a consideration of trajectories in philosophy of religion that take liturgical practice seriously, see James K. A. Smith, “Philosophy of Religion Takes Practice: Liturgy as Source and Method in Philosophy of Religion,” in *Contemporary Practice and Method in the Philosophy of Religion: New Essays*, ed. David Cheetham and Rolfe King (London: Continuum, 2008), 133–47. See also Jean-Yves Lacoste’s parallel development of a kind of liturgical phenomenology as seen, for instance, in *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2004). Or consider Lacoste’s phenomenology of prayer in “Liturgy and Coaffection,” trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, in *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response*, ed. Kevin Hart and Barbara Wall (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), 93–103. For a helpful introduction to Lacoste’s project, see Joseph Rivera, “Toward a Liturgical Existentialism,” *New Blackfriars* (2012): 1–18.

2. For a sketch of the implications for sociology of religion, see James K. A. Smith, “Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a ‘Post-Secular’ Sociology of Religion,” in *The Post-Secular in Question*, ed. Philip Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 159–84. I also think there is a conversation to be staged between my liturgical phenomenology—which includes an analysis of “secular liturgies”—and British discussions of “implicit religion” and “secular faith.” See Edward Bailey, *Implicit Religion: An Introduction* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998); Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society* (1996; repr., Leuven: Peeters, 2006), and Bailey, *The Secular Faith Controversy: Religion in Three Dimensions* (London: Continuum, 2001). On a more popular level, consider Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A Non-believer’s Guide to the Uses of Religion* (London: James K. A. Smith, Imagining the Kingdom, Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

specialized conversations. But for now I have chosen to embed the scholarly proposals in this hybrid book. So to my scholarly colleagues, I ask for your patience with some of the asides that follow. I would also appreciate your attention to the footnotes: I've pushed down some matters of detail into a sort of parallel conversation on the bottom of the page. I'd ask you to remember that, at points, I have had to forgo some qualifications and nuance for the sake of a wider audience. Significant literatures that I have engaged do not appear in the footnotes below—including, no doubt, some works you consider “essential.” I'd like to invite you to read this book as a phenomenological exercise in returning to “the things themselves” and ask that you evaluate the argument on the basis of what it says rather than what it leaves out.

# Introduction

## A SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION: ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Following Calvin, then, Protestants may insist that ecclesial practices have nothing to do with effecting human justification, everything to do with human sanctification, and—most important—everything to do with divine agency and power.<sup>1</sup>

### Picturing the End of Worship

As a child he couldn't *wait* for church to be over. The beginning of worship was, for Andrew, merely a T-minus-sixty countdown to the end. Indeed, more than once, Walter Mitty-like, he launched into his own reverie as the pastor summoned the congregation with the call to worship. The old, tired formulas of the pastor—"The psalmist reminds us of our purpose, calling us to worship . . ."—would be replaced in Andrew's imagination with the crackly static of rocket launch transmissions that seemed to be conducted inside tin cans:

*Ccccuschk.* "Apollo, we are all systems go, over?" *Ccccuschk.*

*Tttschd.* "Uh, roger that, Houston. All systems operational. We are go for launch, over." *Tttschd.*

*Ccccuschk.* "T minus three minutes to launch. Firing main engines, over?" *Ccccuschk.*

"Roger that, Houston. We are all systems go, over."

"T minus one minute to launch. Stand by for ignition."

1. Matthew Myer Boulton, *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Smith, 2013), 226.  
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"T minus ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one . . . we have ignition. We have lift off!"

If he was lucky, Andrew would emerge from his NASA fantasy around the time of the offering. All too often he came back to earth just before the moment of confession—which meant he was still T minus forty-five till the end. Ugh.

The bulletin would then become a checklist, a way to mark the droning passage of time. Confession? Check. Assurance of pardon? Check. Reading of the law? Check. Creed? Check. Pastoral prayer and prayers of the people? *Long* wait to be able to check that off, as an elder seems to be praying for the entire world. Bible reading? Check. Sermon? Wait for it . . . wait for it . . . still waiting. . . . Finally: check! We're getting close! Offering? Check! Wait—second offering for benevolence? Ugh, check (finally). Doxology (we're getting tantalizingly close now): check! Another prayer: check! Andrew can now taste it. A hymn (*seven* verses!?): finally, check. Here we are, the finish line, T minus thirty seconds, everyone stands, the end of worship is in sight. Benediction: yes! Freedom!

Andrew now smirks to himself as he recognizes that caged eagerness in his own eight-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, who practically catapults over him to reach the cookies and juice downstairs. But he himself sees the end of worship very differently now. Far from seeing it as the bursting moment of release into some unfettered freedom, Andrew now realizes that the end of worship is a *sending*, that the blessing at the conclusion of worship is also a commissioning, and that the "end" of worship, in terms of its *telos* and goal, is bound up with what they'll do next: head out the door into the world. We are not released at the conclusion of worship, Andrew thinks to himself; we are not merely "free to go," dismissed from some appointment or event. Having been drawn into the life of the triune God through our union with Christ, we are *sent*. The end of Christian worship comes with a responsibility. Like all those prophetic encounters with the living God, this encounter with the Triune God sends one away with a commission and a charge: "Go and *do*," in the power of the Spirit, as a witness to the risen Christ, inviting your neighbors to become citizens of the coming kingdom. What we've just done in worship is both a rehearsal of the entire history of the world and a rehearsal for kingdom come. The end of Christian worship brings us back to the beginning of creation, to our commissioning in the Garden and our deputizing as God's image-bearers, those responsible for tending and tilling God's good—but now broken—creation.

The end of worship, Andrew now realizes, is the *end* of worship. The culmination of Christian worship is its *s/ending*. In this time of already-not yet, the end and goal and *telos* of worship is being sent from this transformational encounter as God's witnesses and image-bearers. Christian worship is not some religious silo for our private refueling that replenishes our "inner" life. It is not merely some duty we observe in order to keep our eternal ducks in a row; nor is it some special sequestered "experience" that fills up a "religious" compartment in our souls, unhooked from what we do in the world

Monday through Friday. Worship Isn't So Boring after All: Kingdom Reality into some escapist Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

enclave; it is our induction into “the real world.”<sup>2</sup> Worship is the space in which we learn to take the right things for granted<sup>3</sup> precisely so we can bear witness to the world that is to come and, in the power of the Spirit’s transformation,<sup>4</sup> labor to make and remake God’s world in accord with his desires for creation. We could never hope to entertain such a commission without the empowering work of the Spirit who tangibly meets us in worship.

This is why Andrew sees Elizabeth’s eagerness for worship to end—and remembers his own youthful eagerness for the same—as an understandable naïveté about the burdens of this encounter. In contrast to Elizabeth’s sense of sheer liberation from the doldrums, Andrew now experiences the end of worship with a certain sanctified ambivalence—a sort of holy ambiguity. On the one hand, he hungrily receives the gracious announcement of blessing; on the other hand, he senses the responsibility of the commission. This is no cheap grace. This is a space of Spirit-filled transformation for the sake of being sent: to go and make disciples; to be witnesses to Jerusalem and Samaria and to the ends of the earth; to take up once again our creational mandate to be God’s image-bearers by being culture-makers. When worship ends on Sunday, it spills over into our cultural labor on Monday. And Andrew’s only hope and prayer is that, by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit, everything that has preceded this sending has, over time, empowered him to be the witness he’s sent to be.



## The End of Christian Education and/as the End of Worship

The renewal of the church *and* the Christian university—a renewal of both Christian worship and Christian education—hinges on an understanding of human beings as “liturgical animals,” creatures who can’t *not* worship and who are fundamentally formed by worship practices. The reason such

2. As Rodney Clapp notes, “The grace of God is not something we naturally recognize. It is not a theory pieced together from naturally observed phenomena. It is instead the result of God’s reaching out to us in mercy. It is through our acceptance and participation in that mercy that we are given the categories of creation, world, sin, reconciliation, and kingdom of God—the categories by which we claim to see ‘reality’ as it really is.” “The Church as Worshiping Community: Welcome to the (Real) World,” in *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 97.

3. “Through worship God trains his people to take the right things for granted.” Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, “The Gift of the Church and the Gifts God Gives It,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 25.

4. See John D. Witvliet, “The Cumulative Power of Transformation in Public Worship: Cultivating Gratitude and Expectancy for the Holy Spirit’s Work,” in *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation*, ed. Alexis Abernathy (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 200–211. © 2013. Used by permission.

liturgies are so formative is precisely because it is these liturgies, whether Christian or “secular,”<sup>5</sup> that shape what we *love*. And we are what we love.<sup>6</sup>

The reason for articulating this model of the human person is ultimately to provide an adequate account of Christian *action*. This begins with grinding a new lens for cultural analysis: such a liturgical anthropology recalibrates cultural analysis and critique by recognizing the (de- and trans-) formative power of *practices*—communal, embodied rhythms, rituals, and routines that over time quietly and unconsciously prime and shape our desires and most fundamental longings. And it is recognition of this formative power of liturgical practices that then drives my constructive concern to encourage intentionality about Christian liturgical formation in two key institutions: the church and the Christian university—not because these are the only institutions that matter but because they are unique sites for intentional Christian formation and because they both exist for *sending*. Students leave a school via “commencement,” and worshipers leave worship with a blessing and charge, sent into the world *for* the world. In both cases, we are sent from formation *for* mission. The focus on the church and the university is strategic, not exclusive: both are crucial institutions in the *missio Dei*.

A Christian university is a hybrid institution; it is simultaneously embedded in two quite different ecosystems. On the one hand, the Christian university is a *university*, an institution of higher education that is part of a network of colleges and universities engaged in teaching and research. Much of the shape and life of a Christian university reflects this wider sense of what higher education should look like (and accreditation agencies reinforce this aspect of our ecological situation). On the other hand, a Christian university is a *Christian* institution, which situates it in the ecosystem of the church and various other institutions of Christian mission. So the Christian university is located at the intersection of (at least) these two ecosystems, and it is precisely this hybridity that generates the unique mission and task of Christian higher education.

This is why, in *Desiring the Kingdom*, I argued that the mission of the Christian university should be conceived not just in terms of dissemination of *information* but also, and more fundamentally, as an exercise in *formation*. The Christian university does not simply deposit ideas into mind-receptacles, thereby providing just enough education to enable credentialing for a job. No, the Christian university offers an education that is *formative*—a holistic education that not only provides knowledge but

5. On the seemingly paradoxical notion of “secular liturgies,” see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 88n20.

6. While I will very briefly rehearse the argument of *Desiring the Kingdom* in this introduction, for the most part this book is from James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* volume. Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

also shapes our fundamental orientation to the world. It is what I'll call, in a slight tweak of Flaubert, a "sentimental education."

The alumni of Christian universities are sent into God's good (but broken) world equipped with new intellectual reservoirs and skills for thinking; but ideally they are also sent out from the Christian university with new habits and desires and virtues. They will have been habituated to love God and his kingdom—to love God and desire what he wants for creation—and thus engage the world. Indeed, if we are going to teach students rigorously and critically, we must also form them in what Augustine calls "the right order of love." In other words, the end (*telos*) of Christian education is *action*: the Christian university is a place from which students are *sent* as ambassadors of the coming kingdom of God. They are commissioned to undertake cultural labor that is redemptive and reconciling, reflecting Christ's work of reconciliation. It is in this way that Christian colleges are caught up in the *missio Dei*.<sup>7</sup> The alumni of Christian universities are primed and shaped to take up our task as God's image-bearers, cultivating God's good creation, working to renew a fallen world, bearing witness to how the world can be otherwise, bearing fresh olives to a world battered by the floodwaters of injustice.<sup>8</sup> We aren't just educating spectators or observers; we are educating *actors*—what Andy Crouch, echoing a long Reformed tradition, describes as "culture-makers."<sup>9</sup>

This end (*telos*) of Christian education in action is exactly the same as the end of Christian worship because both are expressions of mission. What happens at the end of historic Christian worship is a benediction—a blessing—which is also a commission: go in peace to love and serve the Lord. The blessing is also a charge, and it echoes the blessings and the commission originally given to humanity in the Garden: to be fruitful and fill the earth, to compassionately rule over creation, and to cultivate the garden of creation (Gen. 1:27–31; 2:15).

The ending of Christian worship, then, is a *sending*. Having encountered God in Word and sacrament, we are transformed and renewed and empowered by the Spirit to take up once again the original vocation of humanity: to be God's image-bearers *by* cultivating all the possibilities latent in God's creation, now renewing and restoring a broken, fallen world. Drawn into union with Christ, the "end" of Christian worship is bound up with our sending for Christian *action*, rightly ordered cultural

7. See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

8. Cf. Calvin Seerveld, *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves* (Toronto: Tuppence, 2000).

9. Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008). Of course, thinking is also a kind of doing, and reflection is crucial to intentional action. My point is not that we should do less thinking but rather that our action and "culture-making" is always *thinking*.  
James Keady Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, "think."  
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labor, the creational task of making and remaking God's world.<sup>10</sup> We are (re)made to be *makers*.<sup>11</sup> This is why I believe the mission and task of the Christian university are bound up with the practices of Christian worship. While the Christian university and the church are different institutions, they have the same end, the same goal: to draw the people of God into union with Christ in order to thereby shape, form, equip, and prime actors—doers of the Word.<sup>12</sup>

So a robust account of Christian education and formation requires an adequate philosophy of action—something little thought about in contemporary discussions that are fixated on “the Christian mind.” We have spent a generation thinking about thinking. But despite our “folk” accounts and (deluded) self-perception, we don't *think* our way through to action; much of our action is not the outcome of rational deliberation and conscious choice.<sup>13</sup> Much of our action is not “pushed” by ideas or conclusions; rather, it grows out of our character and is in a sense “pulled” out of us by our attraction to a *telos*. If we—and if the alumni of Christian universities—are going to be “prime citizens of the kingdom of God”<sup>14</sup> who *act* in the world as agents of renewal and redemptive culture-making, then it is not enough to equip our intellects to merely *think* rightly about the world. We also need to recruit our imaginations. Our hearts need to be captured by a vision of a *telos* that “pulls” out of us action that is directed toward the kingdom of God. That is why in *Desiring the Kingdom* I argued that providing people with a Christian

10. As J. Todd Billings well summarizes, “To act in communion with God—to obey the law—is to be truly and fully human.” Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Mission for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 110.

11. See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 205–7.

12. Note the directionality here: Christian action is predicated on Christian communion. So Christian action is not “our” independent, heroic effort. Billings gets at this in the context of a discussion of Franciscus Junius's discussion of different “degrees, or dimensions, of divine grace in regeneration.” Both justification and sanctification are “received as gifts in ‘communion with Christ’: it is not that justification is a gift and sanctification is an achievement. However, a distinct yet inseparable dimension of this union with Christ is ‘the action emanating from the new creation,’ the Spirit-empowered activation of our lives for love of God and neighbor” (*ibid.*, 108, citing Franciscus Junius, *De libero hominis arbitrio, ante et post lapsum*, in W. J. van Asselt, J. M. Bac, and R. T. te Velde, eds., *Reformed Thought on Freedom* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], 106). My project in this book is to build on this claim by showing *how* the Spirit empowers us to so act, through an account of liturgically-formed habituation.

13. For an accessible overview of the issues here, see Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011). For a more detailed exploration, see John A. Bargh, “Bypassing the Will: Toward Demystifying the Nonconscious Control of Social Behavior,” in *The New Unconscious*, ed. Ran R. Hassin, James S. Uleman, and John A. Bargh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37–58.

14. Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Reformed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).  
 James K. O. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*  
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### To Think About: Longing Leads to Action

Action and creative cultural labor are generated more by visions than maxims, more by a *telos* than a rule. This intuition is captured in a saying attributed to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the author of *The Little Prince*: “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

“worldview” is inadequate for the mission of both the church and the Christian university.<sup>15</sup>

The argument is not that worldview approaches and intellectual reflection are wrong but only that they are inadequate, and this inadequacy stems from the stunted anthropology they assume. Such a picture of education is insufficiently radical because it doesn’t get to the root of our identity. By fixating on the intellectual aspect, such a model of the person—and its corresponding picture of education—undervalues and underestimates the importance of the affective; by focusing on what we think and believe, such a model misses the centrality and primacy of what we *love*; by focusing on education as the dissemination of *information*, we have missed the ways in which Christian education is really a project of *formation*. In other words, at the heart of the argument is an antireductionism and the affirmation of a more holistic understanding of human persons and Christian education (and Christian formation more broadly).

Thus I make three intertwined proposals in *Desiring the Kingdom* that are at the heart of the Cultural Liturgies project and are all indebted to Saint Augustine, that patron saint of the Reformers: First, I sketch an alternative anthropology that emphasizes the primacy of love and the priority of the imagination in shaping our identity and governing our orientation to the world. Second, I emphasize that education is also about the formation (“aiming”) of our love and desire, and that such formation happens through embodied, communal rituals we might call “liturgies”—including a range of “secular” liturgies that are pedagogies of desire. Third, given the formative priority of liturgical practices, I argue that the task of Christian education needs to be resituated within the ecclesial practices of Christian worship and liturgical formation. In other words, we need to reconnect worship and worldview, church and college.

15. For a more direct response to some concerns and criticisms of my argument in *Desiring the Kingdom*, see James K. A. Smith, “Worldview, Sphere Sovereignty, and *Desiring the Kingdom*: A Guide for (Perplexed) Reformed Folk,” *Pro Rege* 39, no. 4 (June 2011): 15–24; Smith, “From Christian Scholarship to Christian Education [Response to a Review Symposium on *Desiring the Kingdom*],” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 39 (2010): 229–32; and Smith, “Two Cheers for Worldview: A Response to Thomas C. O’Meara,” *Imagining the Kingdom: An Anglican Belief* 14 (2010): 55–58. Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

To be very clear, this does not constitute a rejection of worldview per se.<sup>16</sup> Think of my argument as “two cheers” for this paradigm. However, I think there remain legitimate concerns with even the best rendition of worldview approaches insofar as these approaches tend to still conceive the task of Christian education as the dissemination of a *perspective*, a way to *see* the world. My criticism here is not that worldview is wrong but only that it is inadequate. It is an approach that imagines us (and our students) as primarily *spectators* of the world rather than as *actors* in the world. But if one of the goals of Christian education is to form what Neal Plantinga describes as “prime citizens of the kingdom,” then we need to appreciate that our actions as citizens are based, not primarily on cognitive deliberation or even on our “perspectives,” but for the most part on acquired habits, unconscious desires, and pre-intellectual dispositions. And so our education has to be attuned to how those desires and dispositions are formed. We might have a highly developed, articulate “worldview” and yet *act* in ways that are remarkably inconsistent with such a “perspective.”



### **Picturing the Limitations of Worldview: Reading Wendell Berry in Costco**

Let me try to make sense of this with an example. Over the past several years, through the steady evangelism of my wife, Deanna, I have become more and more convinced about the injustice and unhealthiness of our dominant systems of food production and consumption. For Deanna, this is expressed in a commitment to “good” eating—eating that is both healthy and just, enjoying foods that are the fruit of local gardens and farms, and eating foods that contribute to our flourishing. This finds expression both in her devotion to her gardens and her recruitment of the entire family in a kitchen that is always producing culinary delights (for which I’m incredibly grateful!). And through the influence of authors like Barbara Kingsolver, Michael Pollan, and especially Wendell Berry, I have become intellectually convinced that they offer the best perspective for thinking about these issues. Indeed, in many ways I’ve tried to own their perspective as my own.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the grocery store: I discovered a significant gap between my thought and my action. This hit home to me one day while I was immersed in reading Wendell Berry’s delightful anthology, *Bringing It to the Table*. As I paused to reflect on a key point, and thus briefly took my nose out of the book, I was suddenly struck by an ugly irony: here I was reading Wendell Berry in the food court at Costco. There are so many things wrong with that sentence that I don’t even know where to begin. Indeed, “the food court at Costco” might be a kind of shorthand for Berry’s picture of the sixth circle of hell.

So how might one account for this gap between my thought and my action—between my passionate intellectual assent to these ideas and my status quo action?

16. I explicitly affirm the helpfulness of “worldview” in *Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed* James K. A. Smith, *Bringing It to the Table* Wendell Berry, Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

Why do I *believe* Michael Pollan but still pull into the drive-through at McDonald's? This is exactly the intuition at the heart of this book. While Pollan and Berry may have successfully recruited my intellect, they have not been successful in converting my habits. Nor could they be, for so much of my action in and orientation to the world is governed by dispositions that are shaped by *practice*.

Implicit in the anthropology of *Desiring the Kingdom* is a philosophy of action—a tacit assumption about what drives or causes human behavior and action—and such a philosophy of action is germane to the goal and task of both Christian education and Christian formation more broadly. Such an account of the formative power of both “secular liturgies” and intentional Christian worship has a certain urgency precisely because it assumes that so much of our orientation to—and action in—the world is governed by preconscious habits and patterns of behavior, and those habits are formed by *environments* of practice. This stands in contrast to what Charles Taylor calls “intellectualist”<sup>17</sup> or “decisionist” models, which tend to overestimate “thinking” as the cause of action. This does not entail a crass determinism; nor does it exclude a role for reflective, deliberative, conscious “choice.” However, such a model—shored up by recent research in cognitive science—does relativize the role of ratiocinative deliberation in action. More positively, it highlights the significant impact of environment (and attendant practices) in shaping our “adaptive unconscious,” which then steers/drives action at a preconscious level. As such, we should be increasingly attentive to the formative role of environment and practice in shaping our desires while also recognizing our habitual orientation to the world that undergirds so much of our action.

The response to such a situation is not simply pressing people to *think more* about what they're doing. If I am intellectually convinced by Michael Pollan but still have the default disposition to pull into the drive-through at McDonald's, the solution is not to be constantly *thinking*—that approach is unsustainable and thus, ultimately, inadequate. It's not a matter of thinking trumping dispositions; it's a matter of acquiring new habits.

This can be illustrated with a related example from practices associated with food and eating.<sup>18</sup> In his book *Mindless Eating*, Cornell nutritionist Brian Wansink accounts for the American obesity epidemic in terms of the habits and practices that unconsciously shape our tastes and eating patterns.<sup>19</sup> We are trained to orient ourselves to food and food systems by practices and environments that shape our orientation at a preconscious level—and then we regularly act on the basis of those malformed desires and deep-seated habits. We eat “mindlessly” in the sense that we eat “without thinking

17. On such accounts, our action is thought to be the outcome of conscious, mental deliberation—the outcome of *thinking about it*. This is further explained in the next section.

18. While I am using practices of eating merely as a case study for a larger point about habituation, the specific concern with food is germane to the vision of the kingdom articulated in Scripture. For an incisive analysis, see Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

19. Brian Wansink, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* (New York: Bantam, 2007).

James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*  
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about it.” So one might guess that the solution to this problem is to acquire knowledge—to encourage critical *thinking* so that reason trumps desire and so that critical reflection trumps unreflective habits. But that’s not Wansink’s antidote. In fact, he explicitly argues that the solution is not just a matter of mindful eating. “Thinking about it” will always be inadequate, like reading Wendell Berry in Costco, simply because so much of our action is not the outcome of a conscious, deliberative thought process. Drawing on extensive psychological research, Wansink demonstrates that we simply are not the sorts of animals who can be deliberately “on” all the time. So the proper response to unhealthy mindless eating is not *mindful* eating but rather *healthy* mindless eating, changing environments and practices in order to form different (unconscious) habits. This doesn’t mean there is no role for critical reflection. Indeed, Wansink offers an *argument* to press people to change their practices, and that approach is only going to work if they are, to some degree, *convinced* by his argument. But the upshot or consequence is not that they will then *think* about every meal but rather that they will be propelled to change their environment and practices, thereby absorbing different habits and undoing old ones. As a result, even their “mindless” eating will be healthy; they will eat well (and justly) “without thinking about it”—though if you ask them, they can articulate why. Their new eating habits will have become “second nature.”

A worldview approach would assume that the proper response to disordered mindless eating is *mindful* eating, as if simply getting the right perspective on eating is sufficient. Similarly, an intellectualist model of education would assume that the proper response to the unconscious formation of “secular liturgies” would be critical reflection: thinking about it more, thinking about what we’re doing. Of course such reflection and thinking are important and helpful; indeed, as Wansink would note, reflection is precisely what might lead us to immerse ourselves in different environments and commit ourselves to different practices, with the goal of ultimately acquiring different habits and dispositions. Similarly, the articulation of a Christian worldview is helpful, just as thinking about practices can be a reflective opportunity to take stock of our routines and rituals. Indeed, the entire Cultural Liturgies project is itself an invitation to reflect on our practices—to gain a Christian “perspective” on our immersion in cultural practices. The argument of *Desiring the Kingdom* is not that we need *less* than worldview, but *more*: Christian education will only be fully an education to the extent that it is also a formation of our habits. And such formation happens not only, or even primarily, by equipping the intellect but through the repetitive formation of embodied, communal practices. And the “core” of those formative practices is centered in the practices of Christian worship.



## Situating Intellect: Educating for Action

The liturgical anthropology at the heart of my project entails a critique of worldview because James K. A. Smith, *Thinking the Kingdom*, situates “intellect.” Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

But the critique of worldview-talk is not a critique of worldview per se, nor is it a rejection of thinking per se. The point, rather, is that we have a tendency, in Christian higher education and even in the church, to overestimate the importance of thinking.<sup>20</sup> Now, many of those toiling in the not-so-ivory halls of Christian colleges and universities would be quite surprised to hear that thinking is being overvalued in North American Christianity. Indeed, quite the opposite seems to be true: evangelical piety tends to intensify a general anti-intellectual malaise that besets our culture. The response to such a situation would be to encourage more thinking, not less—to emphasize the importance of the mind rather than fall back into the sappy mushiness of “the heart” and its affections. In short, with its critique of rationalist or intellectualist models of the human person, it would seem that *Desiring the Kingdom* plays right into the hands of anti-intellectualism.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, some seem to worry that my model would simply have us spending all day in chapel or turning the Christian college into a glorified Sunday school. But such worries stem from a misunderstanding of my emphasis on worship with respect to worldview.<sup>22</sup> In particular, such a worry seems to read my claim that worship is a necessary and important condition for integral Christian education as if I were claiming that it is a *sufficient* condition for Christian education (and this includes Christian education in the wider sense of discipleship, even though my focus tends to be on Christian higher education). But I’m not suggesting we raze the physics labs and expand the chapel. I’m not suggesting we demolish the literature classroom and just stay in church all week. Nor do I anywhere suggest that a Christian university is not about the business of *ideas!* Of

20. I think this is exactly the import of Tom Wolfe’s account of American higher education in his novel *I Am Charlotte Simmons*. See *Desiring the Kingdom*, 118–21, for discussion.

21. In this context, it’s odd to be charged with some kind of anti-intellectualism, not only because I explicitly reject this on the first page of *Desiring the Kingdom* (17n2), but also because the book itself is not exactly a walk in the park. The entire argument of the book is a pretty rigorous engagement with a whole host of ideas, inviting the reader to think through complex theories from the likes of Heidegger, Augustine, Taylor, and Bourdieu, all in order to articulate a unique, integral Christian “perspective” on education. If the critic’s reading of *Desiring the Kingdom* were correct, you’d wonder why I’d ever spend time on such a venture. Perhaps that’s a clue that this is not the best way to read the book.

22. I grant that I’m making strong claims about primacy that might almost give the impression of a dichotomous relationship between worship and worldview; but I don’t think I ever actually make the relation dichotomous, precisely for reasons I’ve already cited. In this respect, I see the (mis)impression as analogous to one that Iain McGilchrist notes in *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 6–7: “Because I am involved in redressing a balance, I may at times seem to be sceptical of the tools of analytical discourse. I hope, however, it will be obvious from what I say that I hold absolutely no brief for those who wish to abandon reason or traduce language. . . . My quarrel is only with an excessive and misplaced rationalism which has never been subjected to the judgment of reason.” James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*

course it is. The issue is whether it is *just* trafficking in ideas. It's the latter that I'm rejecting.

Let's remember the heart of the argument here: because we are liturgical animals who are defined by what we love, and because our loves and desires are primed and shaped by formative practices, then a holistic model of Christian education—whether in the church, school, or university—needs to involve a *pedagogy of desire*. Such a pedagogy is not merely a conduit for disseminating *information*; a pedagogy of desire is a strategy for *formation*. Christian education, in this model, is not merely about dispensing Christian ideas or providing Christian “perspectives.” It is more invasive than that, precisely because it is not just an education for observers or spectators—it should be an education for *actors*, for doers. A Christian education cannot be content to produce thinkers; it should aim to produce *agents*. Such formation not only offers content for minds; it also impinges on the nexus of habits and desires that functions as the activity center of the human person. The driving center of human action and behavior is a nexus of loves, longings, and habits that hums along under the hood, so to speak, *without needing to be thought about*.<sup>23</sup> These loves, longings, and habits orient and propel our being-in-the-world. The focus on formation is holistic because its end is Christian *action*: what's at stake here is not just how we think about the world but how we inhabit the world—how we *act*. We are what we love precisely because we *do* what we love.

It is this ultimate goal of shaping actors that creates misunderstandings. Reflecting the “thinking-thing”-ism of modernity, many models of Christian higher education (and many accounts of discipleship) are fixated on epistemic matters. Seeing Christianity as primarily a set of doctrines, beliefs, and ideas, they implicitly and functionally reduce Christian education to the acquisition of knowledge. They also tend to assume a stunted, misguided philosophy of action that mistakenly sees action as the outcome of rational deliberation. Hence most Christian accounts of education and pedagogy end up being covert epistemologies focused on what and how we know. But as I already sketched in *Desiring the Kingdom*, this is both a dated account of human action and a rationalistic reduction of Christian faith. Because my primary concern is not merely an epistemology but also a philosophy of action, critics react to the decentralization and relativization of knowing in my account as if this entailed a rejection of knowledge. But the goal is not to denigrate the intellect; rather, it is to situate theoretical reflection within the wider

23. But as we'll see in chap. 1 below, that doesn't mean they're not *intentional*. Nor are we merely talking about hardwired biological reflexes. Such habits are acquired and intentional; as Merleau-Ponty shows, they are. James K. Bevel, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

purview of our fundamental pretheoretical orientation to the world.<sup>24</sup> On the basis of this, those who are fixated on an epistemic construal of Christian faith too hastily conclude that relativizing the intellect is somehow a rejection of the intellect, but that clearly doesn't follow. Rather, the project is to consider the significance of our non- and pre-intellectual orientation to the world; to appreciate all of the ways in which this shapes and governs our being in the world; and to therefore expand what we consider as falling within the purview of education. To situate (and relativize) the intellect is not anti-intellectual; it is to emphasize that even rationality needs to be *faithful*, needs to be disciplined and trained and habituated.<sup>25</sup>

Education operates on this pretheoretical register whether we recognize it or not. Pedagogies of desire form our habits, affections, and imaginations, thus shaping and priming our very orientation to the world. So if a Christian education is going to be holistic and formative, it needs to attend to much more than the intellect—which is why I emphasize that there is a unique “understanding” that is “carried” in Christian practices, particularly the practices of Christian worship. It is in such practices that our love is trained, disciplined, shaped, and formed. And it is, to some extent, *only* in such practices that this can happen. Attention to intellect is insufficient precisely because there is an irreducible, unique understanding that is only carried in practices and only absorbed through our immersion (over time) in those practices—and it is this nonconscious understanding that drives our action. My focus is on this “nonconscious understanding,” not because I think “conscious” knowledge is unimportant but because I think we've spent most of our time focused on the latter and neglected attention to the former.

The focus of this second volume is to home in on these themes, further exploring the shape of a liturgical anthropology in order to articulate a Christian philosophy of action that (1) recognizes the nonconscious, pretheoretical “drivers” of our action and behavior, centered in what I'll call the imagination; (2) accounts for the bodily formation of our habituated orientation to the world; and thus (3) appreciates the centrality

24. Philosophically I locate my project in the vein of Charles Taylor's call to “overcome epistemology” and Hubert Dreyfus's critique of “the myth of the mental.” See Charles Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1–19; Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 79 (2005): 47–65. We will return to these themes in more detail below.

25. Which is precisely why we can also speak of “intellectual virtues.” For a relevant discussion, consider Ernest Sosa's account of what he calls “two levels of knowledge, the animal and the reflective,” both of which are “a distinctive human accomplishment,” in *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 11–12. I am using the Kingdom Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.



### To Think About: Learning the Hard Way When It's the Only Way

Mark Twain, that American master of the quip and homespun wisdom, provides a rather stark image that illustrates this point about the sort of irreducible understanding acquired only by practice, unable to be articulated otherwise: “A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Quoted in Garrison Keillor, review of *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. 1, ed. Harriet Elinor Smith (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), in *New York Times*, December 19, 2010, Sunday Book Review, 6.

of story as rooted in this “bodily basis of meaning” and as a kind of pretheoretical compass that guides and generates human action. In short, the way to the heart is through the body, and the way into the body is through story.<sup>26</sup> And this is how worship works: Christian formation is a conversion of the imagination effected by the Spirit, who recruits our most fundamental desires by a kind of narrative enchantment—by inviting us narrative animals into a story that seeps into our bones and becomes the

26. It won't do to dismiss this claim as “narrative theology” and thus trot out epistemic worries about realism (per Francesca Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007]). Such dismissals usually traffic in a false dichotomy: *either* story *or* “reality.” My claim about the centrality of story here is not primarily an epistemic claim, nor is it an evasion of ontological import (when I talk about “story” I'm not identifying that with “fiction”). The point is not that what we know is sequestered in a story that may or may not touch upon “reality”; rather, the point is that we know reality *storiedly*—and that we are wired (created) to navigate our way through the world in this way. We need to resist being distracted by worries about “reference.” Here (and, indeed, *passim*) I have been influenced by James Woods's account of the novel in *How Fiction Works* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007). Discussing issues of “realism,” he notes: “Brigid Lowe argues that the question of fiction's referentiality—does fiction make true statements about the world?—is the wrong one, because fiction does not ask us to *believe* things (in a philosophical sense) but to *imagine* them (in an artistic sense): ‘Imagining the heat of the sun on your back is about as different an activity as can be from believing that tomorrow it will be sunny. One experience is all but sensual, the other wholly abstract. When we tell a story, although we may hope to teach a lesson, our primary objective is to produce an imaginative experience’” (237, citing Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy* [London: Anthem, 2007], emphasis original). What's at issue here is the shaping and activation of plausibility structures: “Hypothetical plausibility—probability—is the important and neglected idea here: probability involves the defense of the credible *imagination* against the incredible. . . . It is the artist's task to convince us that this could have happened” (238, emphasis original). Those fixated on the epistemic will worry about such language in connection with Christian worship; but my point is that Christian worship shapes our orientation to the world precisely by priming and calibrating our imagination. As Stanley Hauerwas and Sam Wells have put it, “It is in worship that we learn to take the right things for granted” (“The Gift of the Church”). Thus I might suggest, with Woods, that “‘realism’ and the technical or philosophical squabbles it has engendered seem like a school of bright red herrings” (*How Fiction Works*, James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

orienting background of our being-in-the-world. Our incarnating God continues to meet us where we are: as imaginative creatures of habit. So we are invited into the life of the Triune God by being invited to inhabit concrete rituals and practices that are “habitations of the Spirit.”<sup>27</sup> As the Son is incarnate—the Word made flesh meeting we who are flesh—so the Spirit meets us in tangible, embodied practices that are conduits of the Spirit’s transformative power. The Spirit marshals our embodiment in order to rehabituate us to the kingdom of God. The material practices of Christian worship are not exercises in spiritual self-management but rather the creational means that our gracious God deigns to inhabit for our sanctification. So while liturgical formation sanctifies our perception for Christian action, Christian worship is primarily a site of divine action. As Matthew Boulton observes, commenting on John Calvin’s vision of Christian formation, “the church’s practices are fundamentally divine works of descent and accommodation, not human works of ascent and transcendence.”<sup>28</sup> And yet our incarnating God descends to inhabit these practices precisely in order to lift us up into union with Christ.<sup>29</sup> This is *how* our hearts are lifted up to the Lord and recalibrated to be aimed at the kingdom of God: through material practices that shape the imaginative core of our being-in-the-world.

But we also need to recognize that this is how *secular* liturgies work: they, too, recruit our unconscious drives and desires through embodied stories that fuel our imagination and thus ultimately govern our action. And while Christian worship practices are distinguished by the presence of the Spirit and a very different story, not even secular liturgies are merely “natural”; they can be fueled by the “principalities and powers.”<sup>30</sup> Precisely because of the need for *counter*-formation, it is crucial to see that intentional Christian formation—and hence intentional Christian worship—rests on both a kinaesthetics and a poetics because of the sorts of creatures we are.

It is this intertwining of embodiment, imagination, and story that shapes what follows. Drawing on work in French philosophy (Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu), social psychology, and cognitive science of literature, my goal

27. Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 63–64.

28. Boulton, *Life in God*, 227.

29. For further discussion of themes of ascension and union with Christ, see Laura Smit, “‘The Depth Behind Things’: Toward a Calvinist Sacramental Theology,” in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant and Participation*, ed. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 205–28; Julie Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); and J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

30. See *Desiring the Kingdom*, 93–95. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

is to articulate a liturgical anthropology that accounts for the importance of the kinaesthetic and the poetic—that recognizes and explains the intertwinement of the body and story as the nexus of formation that ultimately generates *action*. To do so, we need to supplement *Desiring the Kingdom*'s account of desire with an account of the imagination.

## Imagining the Kingdom

“How does a provincial farm boy become persuaded that he must travel as a soldier to another part of the world to kill people he knows nothing about?”<sup>31</sup> He is not merely *convinced*. He does not enlist for an idea, though he certainly signs up for an ideal—but the ideal to which he is devoted (the nation, freedom, a god) is not something he *knows*; it is something he *loves*. It is not a matter of having acquired some new bit of knowledge that tips the scale and makes it seem “rational” to become a soldier. No, the provincial farm boy is primed to be a soldier—fighting unknown enemies in distant lands for interests that are not his—because he has been conscripted into a mythology: he identifies himself within a story that has seeped into his bones at levels not even he is aware of. His being “persuaded” is not so much a conclusion he has reached as a sensibility he has imbibed.<sup>32</sup> He is the product of a sentimental education.<sup>33</sup>

William Cavanaugh raises this jarring question to get at something that is the focus of this book: the provincial farm boy is “persuaded,” not in the regions of the intellect, but rather on the register of the imagination.<sup>34</sup> The dynamics of conscription—of our identities, our desires, our loves, our longings—operate more on the imagination than the intellect. By “imagination” here I don’t mean something merely inventive or fantastic—the stuff of make-believe creativity—nor do I have in mind some romantic sense

31. William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 1.

32. Which is precisely why we’ll learn more about these dynamics from Jane Austen than from A. J. Ayer. On Austen, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 181–87, 239–43; and Peter Leithart, *Jane Austen* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010). Given the themes I’m pressing here, it is worth noting resonance with the titles of two Austen classics: *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

33. This does indeed seem to be the import of Flaubert’s account of the young, impressionable Frederic Moreau, who has become someone quite different than he had intended, not because he was taught in *les grand écoles* but simply because he was immersed in all the sensual spaces of Parisian life. In this sense, Tom Wolfe’s *I Am Charlotte Simmons* is a more contemporary *Sentimental Education*.

34. Cavanaugh, in ways similar to (but predating) Charles Taylor, appeals to Benedict Anderson’s account of “social imaginaries” in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). For a discussion of social imaginaries drawing on Taylor’s debt to Andersson, see James K. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

of Creator-like “invention”<sup>35</sup> or merely an act of “pretense,”<sup>36</sup> whereby we imagine something that is a fiction, something “pretend,” as when we tell children, “Use your imagination!” I mean it more as a quasi-faculty whereby we construe the world on a precognitive level, on a register that is fundamentally *aesthetic* precisely because it is so closely tied to the *body*.<sup>37</sup> As embodied creatures, our orientation to the world begins from, and lives off of, the fuel of our bodies, including the “images” of the world that are absorbed by our bodies.<sup>38</sup> On this picture, the imagination is a kind

35. My concern here is that the imagination not be thought of primarily in terms of *our* autonomous abilities—an expression of what *we* can “come up with.” In this regard William Desmond’s critique of the modern conception of the imagination (vs. what he calls the “sacramental imagination”) is instructive: “In both Enlightenment and Romanticism we find a culture of autonomy, granting that imaginative autonomy seems more ecstatic, rational autonomy more prosaic and domestic. Nevertheless, both autonomies have to do primarily with ourselves and our powers: *auto-nomos*—self-law. This situation is itself equivocal. There can be an aesthetic will to power in Romantic imagination, as there can be a rationalistic will to power in Enlightenment reason.” William Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), 137. While I don’t want to consider imagination as entirely “passive” or “receptive” (I do think it is crucial that we be able to imagine the world otherwise than how we “receive” it), I do think it is important to recognize a certain *responsive* character of the imagination. For an account of imagination as both “synthesizer” and “innovator,” see Frank Schalow, “Methodological Elements in Heidegger’s Employment of Imagination,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 23 (1998): 113–28.

36. I’m also rejecting the cognitivism that still plagues much of (especially analytic) philosophical accounts of the imagination as “pretense.” In particular, I reject what Shaun Nichols describes as the “single code hypothesis,” namely, the representationalist approach to imagination, which construes imagination as simply a different mode of propositional thinking. On this account, “propositional imagining involves ‘pretense representations,’” and such representations “can have exactly the same content as a belief.” The “crucial difference” between such pretense representations (of the imagination) and belief “is not given by the *content* of the representation. Rather, contemporary accounts of the imagination maintain that pretense representations differ from belief representations by their *function*” (“Just the Imagination: Why Imagining Doesn’t Behave Like Believing,” *Mind & Language* 21 [2006]: 460, emphasis original). On this model, imagination is still considered a primarily representational phenomenon, on the same order as “beliefs.” For a classic statement, see Gregory Currie, “Pretence, Pretending, and Metarepresenting,” *Mind & Language* 13 (1998): 35–55. More recently, see the studies collected in *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretence, Possibility, and Fiction*, ed. Shaun Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). In contrast to such propositionalizing of the imagination (a cognitivist reductionism), I’m suggesting that the imagination is a primarily affective “faculty” or mode of intentionality.

37. In the sense that Mark Johnson uses the term in *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); hereafter cited as *MB*. Johnson argues that “reason and logic grow out of our interactions in and with our environment,” navigated by our bodies, and that the imagination is tied to that embodiment (13).

38. I grant that this picture is a kind of empiricism, basically rearticulating the empiricist maxim *nihil in intellectu nisi prius fuerit in sensu* (nothing is in the intellect unless it has first been in the senses). However, this axiom is at least as old as Aristotle (on the imagination in *De anima*). Perhaps most interesting is Augustine’s allusion to this principle in *Sermo Dolbeau* 25: “Whatever has not entered through the senses, the Kingdom of God cannot be thought about by your mind.”

of midlevel organizing or synthesizing faculty that constitutes the world for us in a primarily affective mode—what Gaston Bachelard calls, in his “phenomenology of the imagination,” “the poetic register.”<sup>39</sup> There is a kind of precognitive perception that is to be distinguished from perception proper—that is, from perception as being cognizant of and attentive to an “object” in front of me. So if we are in a classroom and I direct your attention to the chair you are sitting in as an example of an aesthetic object, you’re now perceiving the chair as an object. But up to that point, you had nonetheless construed this thing *as* a chair because you’d been sitting on it this whole time. As soon as you entered the room there was an automatic construal of the space that simply “happened” without your thinking about it, and at a level that was preconscious. Likewise, there is a difference between being *in* your bedroom and being conscious *of* your bedroom when you are having trouble falling asleep. In the latter instance, the room has sort of kicked into your conscious awareness in ways that it usually doesn’t. Most of the time, it is “there,” but in the background; your orientation to it is functioning at a different level. I’m suggesting that “the imagination” is a way to name this everyday capacity for such unconscious “understanding” of the world.<sup>40</sup>

In a similar way, John Kaag has tried to unhook the narrow association of imagination with the arts by defining the imagination more broadly as “the dynamic process by which organisms (and more particularly humans) negotiate their ever-changing circumstances by way of the creative powers of mind” and as “the creative and embodied processes of mind that are

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mind” (glossing 1 Cor. 2:9). In *Sermons, The Works of Saint Augustine*, part 3, vol. 11, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 367.

39. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. John R. Stigloe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969): “The poetic register that corresponds to the soul must therefore remain open to our phenomenological investigations” (xx). What I’m calling “imagination” here seems most akin to what Bachelard describes as the “material imagination” (distinguished from “formal imagination”).

40. For a related discussion, see Frank Schalow, “Imagination and Embodiment: The Task of Reincarnating the Self from a Heideggerian Perspective,” *International Studies in Philosophy* 36 (2004): 161–75. I’m here trying to articulate something like Francisco Varela’s notion of “enaction,” which, I take it, rejects the narrow representationalism that still tends to “regard the cognitive life of an organism as a ‘representational’ coping, where perception is primary and the main source and drive for any valid cognition.” Francisco Varela and Natalie Depraz, “Imagining: Embodiment, Phenomenology, and Transformation,” in *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground*, ed. B. Allan Wallace (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 200. Such a picture reduces us to information processors. In contrast, “enaction implies that sensorimotor coupling modulates but does not determine an ongoing endogenous activity that it configures into meaningful world items in an unceasing flow” (*ibid.*). This points to the *primacy* of the imagination: “Ordinary perception is, to an essential degree, sensorimotor constrained imagination. Imagination is central to life itself, not a marginal or epiphenomenal side-effect of perception” (202). James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*

common to human beings on the whole and that are necessary to ‘get on with our business’ in our social and natural surroundings.”<sup>41</sup>

So we’ll heuristically employ “imagination” to name a kind of faculty by which we navigate and make sense of our world, but in ways and on a register that flies below the radar of conscious reflection, and specifically in ways that are fundamentally aesthetic in nature. As Phil Kenneson has described it, the imagination is “productive” rather than merely inventive: it is “that complex human social capacity to receive and construct an intelligible ‘whole.’”<sup>42</sup> For the provincial farm boy, dying in a far-flung trench for the nation or freedom or the flag “makes sense,” not because this is a valid conclusion to reach on the basis of the evidence, but rather because he has absorbed a fundamental orientation to the world that has a more visceral “logic” to it: he “knows” this is what he should do in the same way one “knows” that tears indicate sadness, or in the way one “knows” how to “make sense” of a poem or a painting.

We could say that the provincial farm boy’s imagination has been conscripted by a secular liturgy.<sup>43</sup> Becoming a soldier—like being a Christian—takes practice. The formation of the imagination is a liturgical effect. The focus of this volume is to consider more carefully and deeply the dynamics of *how* that happens—to appreciate the dynamics of “persuasion” as an operation that works on the body by means of story, thereby affecting the whole person—including thinking and reflection. Any adequate account of liturgical formation—whether Christian or secular—will need to attend to the centrality of the imagination. That, I will show, requires attending to complex features of our embodiment. And it is precisely this embodiment, in turn, that makes us narrative animals.<sup>44</sup> So accounting for the dynamics

41. John Kaag, “The Neurological Dynamics of the Imagination,” *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* 8 (2009): 184–85.

42. Phil Kenneson, “Gathering: Worship, Formation, Imagination,” in Hauerwas and Wells, *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 56.

43. There is, of course, a Christian analogue to this: How does a provincial farm boy become persuaded to die as a martyr for the Christian faith? The answer is the same.

44. To speak of humans as liturgical or narrative “animals” is a philosophical shorthand for emphasizing our embodied, material nature (as in Aristotle’s description of human beings as “rational animals”). In this respect, Alasdair MacIntyre’s observation regarding the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas is germane to our project here. Some commentators, he notes, “have failed to ask the relevant questions about the relationship between our rationality and our animality. They have underestimated the importance of the fact that our bodies are animal bodies with the identity and continuities of animal bodies, and they have failed to recognize adequately that in this present life it is true of us that we do not merely have, but are our bodies” (*Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* [Chicago: Open Court, 1999], 6). On the same page, MacIntyre extols Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology as a prompt to help philosophy remember our animality.

I am deeply appreciative of Eleonore Stump’s brief on behalf of the irreducibility of narrative knowledge: “The Problem of James K. A. Smith: Imagining the Kingdom,” in *Analytic Theology*: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

of liturgical formation—the dynamics implicit in Cavanaugh’s account of the “theopolitical imagination”—requires recognizing and understanding this intertwinement of embodiment and story, of kinaesthetics and poetics.

We might formulate this as something of an axiom: an adequate liturgics must assume a kinaesthetics and a poetics, precisely because liturgies are compressed, performed narratives that recruit the imagination through the body. So if we are going to account for how the provincial farm boy is “persuaded,” or how the martyr is “convinced,” or how so many of us are quietly conscripted into the armies of consumerism and nationalism and narcissism—or how Christians are “made” by the banal, even boring, practices of being the body of Christ—then we need an account of how worship works. Such an account will need to appreciate the force and dynamics of the aesthetic and the narrativ in shaping our imagination, which will require drilling down to the bodily basis of our narrativity. So a liturgical anthropology requires a Christian<sup>45</sup> phenomenology of our embodiment (a kinaesthetics), which will then be the platform for a Christian phenomenology of our aesthetic nature (a poetics).

But why is this important? How might it be helpful? What is the upshot of such an account of “how worship works”? Is this just an academic exercise, an attempt to explain what is a mystery? Or worse: Does such an account end up naturalizing the work of the Spirit and effectively marginalizing God? Does such a project really have implications for discipleship and the nitty-gritty realities of Christian formation? What do kinaesthetics and poetics have to do with the on-the-ground challenges of Christian education and spiritual formation?

There are very important practical implications of such philosophical reflection. Carefully thinking about how worship works has two concrete effects that constructively help the body of Christ. First, by displacing our naive “intellectualism” (whereby we mistakenly assume that we *think* our way into action) and recognizing how secular liturgies work, we will be able to appreciate the dynamics of *de*-formation and the subterranean mechanics of temptation—and thereby be better equipped to resist assimilation. Second, appreciating the bodily basis of worship and its entwinement with the

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*New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 251–64. However, I think her account can be deepened and assisted by making the sort of connection between narrative and embodiment that is noted by Merleau-Ponty, which is my task below.

45. Just because this is a philosophical account does not mean that it is a naturalistic account. We are simply attending to the features and conditions of our embodiment, which are the conditions of our creaturehood that are also gifts of the Creator. To speak of *creaturehood* is to speak in categories of Christian theology and confession. However, this does mean that the conditions of creaturehood that make us liturgical animals are the same conditions that can make us idolatrous animals—which is precisely why Christian worship and secular liturgies both marshal the same “structure of imagination” in very different directions.

### To Think About: Shaping a Worldview in *Downton Abbey*

The British drama *Downton Abbey* invokes two worlds foreign to many of us: the “upstairs” world of early twentieth-century British aristocracy and the “downstairs” world of the servants who attend to their every need. Each of these worlds has rigorous disciplines and rituals—one set of rituals bent on shaping “ladies” and “gentlemen” who are characterized by *noblesse oblige*; the other intended to mold docile servants who embody ideals of order and civility. These different worlds of formative ritual also have their own vestments and attire that both express and shape a mode of comportment to the world. A still-feudal vision of “England” is inscribed on their bodies. This link between vestments and social visions, between bodies and worldviews, was wryly noted by the actress Michelle Dockery, who plays Lady Mary Crawley. Noting that her posture had permanently changed because of the costumes for *Downton Abbey*, she commented: “It really helps you understand how a corset shapes your worldview—the way you breathe, and eat. I think it is the single reason that women are less accomplished historically than men. They couldn’t actually breathe!”<sup>1</sup>

1. Rebecca Mead, “Downton Fever,” *New Yorker*, January 16, 2012, 21. While this is offered as a witty aside, it should remind us that those same dynamics of formation that can shape us into who and what we’re meant to be can also be marshaled to *de*-form and oppress. The antidote to such *de*-formation, however, is not a rejection of formation *per se* but the fostering of practices that form us well, practices that form us for flourishing.

aesthetic or narratival aspect of worship should foster a new intentionality about the shape of Christian worship. We should reappraise the implicit (narrative) wisdom in historic Christian worship practices and approach the renewal of worship with an appreciation for the bodily basis of meaning and the fundamental aesthetics of human understanding. A significant implication of my argument is the importance of the arts for the witness of the church, the announcement of the gospel, and the formation of the body of Christ. While I will employ the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu as resources for articulating this phenomenology of embodiment, we shouldn’t be surprised to find it even more vividly “pictured” for us in literature, given the intertwinement of embodiment and story. So before turning to an exposition of Merleau-Ponty’s account of “erotic comprehension,” let me provocatively prime the pump of our imaginations with a reflection on these themes in the work of novelist David Foster Wallace.<sup>46</sup>

46. Wallace himself describes the powerful effect of literature more colorfully. For example, in a conversation with David Lipsky about Wallace’s early novel *The Broom of the System*, Wallace laments the novel’s fixation on theory (“It was all about the *head*, you know?”), which leads to a broader critique of contemporary experimental fiction as “hellaciously unfun to read.” David Lipsky, *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), 36. But then he goes on to contrast such “heavy” fiction with engaging novels like James Kincaid Smith’s *Imagining the Kingdom* of, “God damn, it’s fun to Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.





## Picturing Love and Worship in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*

David Foster Wallace, author of the sprawling *Infinite Jest*, is usually lumped with “post-modern” novelists such as Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon. The world of Wallace’s fiction is remorselessly disenchanting: a drug-addled world of addiction and suicide backgrounded by the banality of American entertainment and consumer culture. And yet the author had this to say to a graduating class at Kenyon College in 2005:

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it JC or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It’s the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. On one level, we all know this stuff already—it’s been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, bromides, epigrams, parables: the skeleton of every great story. The trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness. Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.

The insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they’re evil or sinful; it is that they are unconscious. They are default settings. They’re the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that’s what you’re doing.<sup>47</sup>

The “world” according to Wallace’s novels is no sacramental universe; *Infinite Jest* is a long way from the enchanted, haunted worlds of Flannery O’Connor and Walker Percy. Indeed, the “immanentism” of Wallace’s world is almost suffocating. And yet he suggests that not even our radical immanence escapes worship. Rather, we are immersed in rituals that shape us and determine, unconsciously, what we value. In *Infinite Jest*, this is constantly illustrated by the sort of formation that is effected at Enfield Tennis

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read. I’d rather read right now than *eat*.” To see the effect of literature as a kind of “stomach magic” attests to the visceral nature of how fiction works. In fact, later in the conversation the metaphor shifts a little lower: noting that “aesthetic experience” is ultimately “erotic,” Wallace praises a Barthelme story because it gave him “an erection of the heart” (72).

47. “Plain Old Untrendy Troubles and Emotions,” *The Guardian*, September 20, 2008, 2. A version of this has since been published as *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about James K. A. Smith, Imagining the Kingdom* (Little, Brown, 2009). Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

Academy, through intense bodily regimens that shape adolescents into veritable tennis machines. Elite tennis players are made, not born, and they're created through ritual that automates a "feel for the game" that is nothing short of a sense of the world. Key to this is "repetition," as one of the upperclassmen, Troeltsch (!), tells the younger players:

First last always. It's hearing the same motivational stuff over and over till sheer repetitive weight makes it sink down into the gut. It's making the same pivots and lunges and strokes over and over and over again. . . . It's repetitive movements and motions for their own sake, over and over until the accretive weight of the reps sinks the movements themselves down under your like consciousness into the more nether regions, through repetition they sink and soak into the hardware, the C.P.S. The machine-language. The autonomical part that makes you breathe and sweat. . . . Until you can do it without thinking about it, play.<sup>48</sup>

In fact Troeltsch compares this ritual, bodily automation to "age-of-manhood rituals in various cultures" (*IJ* 118). And Schtitt, one of the drill sergeant instructors, indicates that there's more than just tennis involved: "athletics was basically just training for citizenship" (*IJ* 82). This will be an important observation: tennis is not just about tennis.

The "secret" of this bodily formation is unveiled in a soliloquy given by an inebriated James Incandenza Sr. to his ten-year-old son, Jim Jr.:

Son, you're ten, and this is hard news for somebody ten, even if you're almost five-eleven, a possible pituitary freak. Son, you're a body, son. That quick little scientific-prodigy's mind she's so proud of and won't quit twittering about: son, it's just neural spasms, those thoughts in your mind are just the sound of your head revving, and head is still just body, Jim. Commit this to memory. Head is body. (*IJ* 167)

After recounting his own failed attempts to inhabit his body well, his inability to bring it under the discipline of a tennis regimen, he recounts a final scene of failure on the court and can't refrain from invoking the religious:

A rude whip-lashing shove square in the back and my promising body with all its webs of nerves pulsing and firing was in full airborne flight and came down on my knees . . . right down on my knees with all my weight and inertia on that scabrous hot sandpaper surface forced into what was an exact parody of an imitation of contemplative prayer, sliding forward. . . . My racquet had gone pinwheeling off Jim and my racquetless arms out before me sliding Jim in the attitude of a mortified monk in total prayer. . . . It was a religious moment. I learned what it

48. David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (1996; repr., New York: Back Bay Books, 2006), 117–18; hereafter cited as *IJ*. (Note that grammatical idiosyncracies are Wallace's.) Troeltsch goes on to note what psychologist Timothy Wilson would attribute to "automation": namely, once tasks are automated, this frees up space within consciousness (i.e., it counters "ego depletion") for more intentional acts: "Wait until it soaks into the hardware," he exhorts, "and then see the way this frees up your head. A whole shitload of head-space you don't need for the mechanics anymore, after they've sunk James Incandenza Sr. into the Kingdom."  
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means to be a body, Jim, just meat wrapped in a sort of flimsy nylon stocking. (*IJ* 168–69)

One might be tempted to think that this is the antithesis of the religious—a thoroughly disenchanting materialism without any hint of a “soul.” And yet this picture of bodily discipline is, as James hints, almost monastic.<sup>49</sup> The liturgical formation of lived religion is not, generally, the sort of intellectualist gnosticism we associate with Enlightenment Protestantism (and its progeny, evangelical Protestantism): it exhibits none of the allergy to embodiment and materiality, nor does it reduce religion to the cognitive realm of beliefs and propositions. Indeed, the implicit wisdom of historic religious liturgies resonates with James Sr.’s “religious” epiphany that we *are* our bodies (even if we are also *more* than bodies).

The other site of ritual formation and transformation in the novel is the rehab center, Ennet House, home to various “Anonymous” programs: AA, NA, CA, and so on. Granted, this is also the place where an explicit spirituality emerges in the world of the novel.<sup>50</sup> As the narrator notes from experience: “In none of these Anonymous fellowships anywhere is it possible to avoid confronting the God stuff, eventually” (*IJ* 998n69). But what’s of interest here is not just *that* “God” shows up, but *how*. The “religious impulse”<sup>51</sup> that Wallace is naming here is the fact that “we’re absolutely dying to give ourselves away to something.” In the world of the novel, that can either take the form of giving ourselves *up* to various addictions and diversions (drugs and various entertainments), or it can take the form of giving ourselves *over* to various disciplines (tennis, AA).<sup>52</sup>

It is in the disciplines of AA that God emerges in the story—which signals a kind of implicit liturgical anthropology at work in AA’s practices and indirectly at work in *Infinite Jest* insofar as the “religious” appears in the novel in conjunction with embodied, incarnate practices. For instance, the narrator notes several times that “AA and NA and

49. The “almost” is important. While monastic formation, contrary to gnosticism, takes embodiment very seriously, it also resists the reductionistic materialism of James Incandenza Sr. (“just meat”). In the next chapter we’ll see that Merleau-Ponty has similar concerns.

50. In a conversation about the book with David Lipsky, Wallace is explicit about AA functioning as a stand-in for religion: “A lot of the AA stuff in the book was mostly an excuse, was to try to have—it’s very hard to talk about people’s relationship with any kind of God, in any book later than like Dostoyevsky.” But he concedes that *Infinite Jest* is trying to grapple with a “kind of distorted religious impulse.” *Although of Course*, 82.

51. *Ibid.*

52. In his conversation with Lipsky we get some of Wallace’s own commentary on this point: “So I think it’s got something to do with, that we’re just—we’re absolutely dying to give ourselves away to something. To run, to escape, somehow.” (Let’s note that this is a pretty good paraphrase of the opening of Augustine’s *Confessions*: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”) But Wallace continues: “And there’s some kinds of escape—in a sort of Flannery O’Connorish way—that end up, in a twist, making you confront yourself even more. And then there are *other* kinds that say, ‘Give me seven dollars, and in return I will make you forget your name is David Wallace, that you have a pimple on your cheek, and that your gas bill is due’” (Lipsky, *Although of Course*, 81). The former sorts of “giveaways” are *disciplines*; the latter are *diversions*. And interestingly enough, Wallace goes on to describe the latter as the “Turkish delights of James C. S. Smith’s *Imagining the Kingdom*” (84).

CA's 'God' does not apparently require that you believe in Him/Her/It before He/She/It will help you" (IJ 201).<sup>53</sup> The quasi spirituality of AA, then, is not an intellectualist project; it's not so much a matter of knowledge (what one believes) as it is a matter of *practice* (what one *does*). In fact, it is precisely the non-intellectualist shape of the regimen that is a scandal to those addicts who think salvation is a matter of the right information. This scandal is exemplified by Geoffrey Day, an intellectual poser (reminiscent of Daniel Harding in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*) who is contemptuous about the rituals of AA. "So then at forty-six years of age I came here to learn to live by clichés," he whines. "To turn my will and life over to the care of clichés. Easy does it. First things first," etc. (IJ 270). What's most maddening for him is that his supposedly superior intellect is not prized in this environment, because the intellect isn't the primary site of (trans)formation. Day wants this to be something he has to *figure out*, something he just needs to *comprehend*; he wants to be liberated from the addiction by *knowledge*. Just tell me what I need to know, he basically says. Let's drop the monotony of meetings and the daily regimen; just give me the information, the knowledge I need. "As if, I mean, what's supposedly going to be communicated at these *future* meetings I'm exhorted to trudge to that cannot simply be communicated *now*, at *this* meeting, instead of the glazed recitation of exhortations to attend these vague future revelatory meetings?" (IJ 1001). Day thinks the meetings are a means of dispensing the requisite information, a site of some propositional revelation; he misses the fact that what's redemptive is *the going*, not what he *gets*.

But when he goes, his intellectualism is further scandalized by the litany of clichés, and he protests that he just can't believe it, even if he wants to. However, this concern about the inability to *believe* still has a lingering intellectualism about it. Thus Don Gately, an Ennet House mentor, warns Day that the AA regimen eludes conceptual articulation:

"The slogan I've heard that might work here is the slogan, *Analysis-Paralysis*," [Gately responds].

"Oh lovely. Oh very nice. By all means don't *think* about the validity of what they're claiming your life hinges on. Oh do not ask what *is* it. Do not ask not whether it's not insane. Simply open wide for the spoon."

"For me, the slogan means there's no set way to argue intellectual-type stuff about the Program. Surrender To Win, Give It Away to Keep It. God As You Understand Him. You can't think about it like an intellectual thing. Trust me because I been there, man. You can analyze it til you're breaking tables with your forehead

53. Cf. one of his later observations during his time in rehab: "That God might regard the issue of whether you believe there's a God or not as fairly low on his/her/its list of things s/he/it's interested in re you" (IJ 205). This can seem scandalous to Christian ears, and it is not unproblematic. However, one could also hear this as a way of saying that we "belong before we believe." In this respect, it's not so far from Pascal who, in his famous Wager, suggested that if you couldn't come to propositional assent about God's existence, then you could at least attend Mass to "grow" the belief in you. (I'm also reminded of the Peirce Pettis song, "God Believes in You": "[when] you swear you believe in God, He believes in you.")

and find a cause to walk away, back Out There, where the Disease is. Or you can stay and hang in and do the best you can." (IJ 1002)

The narrator even sympathizes with Day on this point, but has been through the ringer just enough to know otherwise:

Simple advice like this does seem like a lot of clichés—Day's right about how it seems. Yes, and if Geoffrey Day keeps on steering by the way things seem to him then he's a dead man for sure. Gately's already watched dozens come through here and leave early and go back Out There and then go to jail or die. If Day ever gets lucky and breaks down, finally, and comes to the front office at night to scream that he can't take it anymore and clutch at Gately's pantcuff and blubber and beg for help at any cost, Gately'll get to tell Day the thing is that the clichéd directives are a lot more deep and hard to actually *do*. To try and live by instead of just say" (IJ 273, emphasis original).<sup>54</sup>

Analysis does not effect a transformation in the person because the intellect is not the "driver" of human desire and action. Wallace's philosophical anthropology is much more affective than that. As noted in his Kenyon College address, it's not so much what we think as what we *worship*. And in *Infinite Jest*, worship is linked to love. In an early, surreal exchange between Steeply, a government agent, and Marathe, a member of the Wheelchair Assassins of southern Quebec, the two are wrangling about whether *love*—particularly love for a woman—was the source of recent warfare. In the course of the conversation, Steeply refers to the "fanatically patriotic Wheelchair Assassins." After a pause, Marathe responds to this remark:

"Your U.S.A. word for fanatic, 'fanatic,' do they teach you it comes from the Latin for 'temple'? It is meaning, literally, 'worshipper at the temple.'"

"Oh Jesus now here we go again," Steeply said.

"As, if you will give the permission, does this *love* you speak of, M. Tine's grand love. It means only the *attachment*. Tine is attached, fanatically. Our attachments are our temple, what we worship, no? What we give ourselves to, what we invest with faith. . . . Are we not all of us fanatics? . . . Choose your attachments carefully. Choose your temple of fanaticism with great care." (IJ 106–7)

On Marathe's accounting, it is not a question of *whether* we worship, but *what*; this is precisely because worship is bound up with love. The two terms are basically convertible. "You are what you love," he continues. And so this raises the question of formation, of the pedagogy of desire: "Who teaches your U.S.A. children how to choose their temple? What to love enough not to think two times? . . . For this choice determines all else. No? All other of our you say *free* choices follow from this: what is your temple?" (IJ 107).

54. From an interview Wallace gave *Salon*, we know that Day is, in fact, a character based on his own experience in a halfway house. And Wallace was particularly perplexed by the effectiveness of this clichéd regimen. See D.K.A. Smith, "Imagining the Kingdom Worker," *Salon*, March 9, 2009, 54. Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2013. Used by permission.

Wallace's *Infinite Jest* affectively portrays several intuitions that resonate with my proposal: an anthropology that displaces “intellectualism,” an attention to the formative power of embodied rituals, and the centrality of worship—particularly as linked to love. “We are what we love” amounts to “we are what we worship”—a thesis that has a long Augustinian pedigree.<sup>55</sup> And that love/worship shapes our so-called free choices; our “temple” determines all else. It is that intuition that I’m after when I claim that we are *liturgical* animals: in some fundamental way, we construct our world and act within it on the basis of what we worship.



55. One could do a bit of triangulation here to unpack my earlier suggestion that “worship” is akin to “care” in Heidegger’s account. We know from his pre-*Being and Time* lectures that Heidegger’s analysis of “care” owes much to Augustine’s account of love or *caritas*. For Augustine, love and worship are intimately connected (see *City of God* 19.24–26). Thus it’s not too much of a stretch to see a link between care and worship.

James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*  
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