

A REVIEW OF JAMES K. A. SMITH'S
CULTURAL LITURGIES SERIES

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Perhaps, like me, you enjoy a challenging read. All too easily those of us in the trenches of ministry get stuck reaching for the latest, greatest, trendy publication in whatever field of ministry we happen to be in. After a while the repackaged, rebranded, re-cycled ideas become so familiar that it is not worth the time to read. And worse, you become skeptical that anything fresh might be published anytime soon. So, it was with pleasure and gratitude that I read James K. A. Smith's *Cultural Liturgies* series. His writing brims with insight and scratches just where many of us feel the itch—a first-class thinker who is concerned with the day-to-day realities of practical Christian ministry. While Smith's sights are set on reforming the Christian college, his proposal covers all of us who walk into church offices each morning.

Based on findings in the fields of anthropology, neurology and philosophy, Smith makes the case that the church misunderstands critical aspects of the human person. These misunderstandings then cause the church to miss the mark in discipleship, which leave Christians unformed and vulnerable to being unwittingly seduced by counterfeit kingdoms. The heart of *Cultural Liturgies* is to address these misunderstandings and prescribe a way forward with Smith's corrected vision of the human person.

There is, however, a drawback: for all of his intellectual, theological and philosophical vigor, I am uncertain if his thesis can be supported biblically. I am principally concerned that he draws more from David Brooks,¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty,² and Pierre Bourdieu³ than from any discernible biblical framework, and I am left with the impression that even though his proposal has an Augustinian hue, and says many true things, it needs to be worked through a biblical grid *before* we take his grid and read Scripture through it. I believe this must happen if his thesis is to be received wholeheartedly as a solution to the church's ills. Indeed,

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¹ David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011).

² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962).

³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, transl. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

I have rarely read a series as simultaneously brilliant and exacerbating as Smith's *Desiring the Kingdom*⁴ and *Imagining the Kingdom*.⁵ I have read both volumes twice, interacted with Smith personally, and as I write this review I am still conflicted about his fundamental claim. I have had the impression that his thesis would lead the church astray and I have had the sense that his proposal is exactly what the church needs if it is to fulfill its fundamental mission. Such is the nature of his work, which has all the markings of coming from a mind of a luminary.⁶

To begin this review, I will start with a basic summary of Smith's overall project and reflect on some of the practical implications. Next, I will highlight two methodological concerns that emerged in reading this series. The remainder of the review will focus on four aspects of his thesis that I believe need to be challenged: anthropology, evangelism, Jesus and religious forms, and the *Missio Dei*.

1. OVERVIEW

In both *DTK* and *ITK* Smith makes a highly intellectual case that the church should quit aiming for the intellect in discipleship. Instead of focusing on precepts and concepts and ideas, the church must target the "guts" instead (*DTK*, 57). He argues that the center of gravity in the human person is much lower than the mind; it is in the bowels. He pleads that the church must reclaim the erotic and recover our sensual roots.⁷ The individual is won or lost in the lower pre-cognitive emotional center of the person, and, more importantly, the world *already* knows this. If the church does not recover its ability to instill a pre-cognitive "know how" in its disciples, then the world's "liturgies" will be what forms a Christian.

⁴ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* [Volume 1 of Cultural Liturgies] (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). Henceforth cited as *DTK*.

⁵ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* [Volume 2 of Cultural Liturgies] (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013). Henceforth cited as *ITK*.

⁶ I fully acknowledge that much of my caution comes of my lack of understanding. I have never been an early adopter and I'm a methodical (slow!) learner. However, I can say with a clear conscience that any pastor-theologian that hopes to do discipleship in the twenty-first century would benefit greatly from reading Smith and taking time to reflect on the implications of his thesis.

⁷ Cf. his extensive sidebar "Why Victoria's in on the Secret: Picturing Discipleship at the Moulin Rouge" (*DTK*, 75-79). In it he makes the case that the marketing industry understands humans better than the church. He says, "I suggest that, on one level, Victoria's Secret is right just where the church has been wrong. More specifically, I think we should first recognize and admit that the marketing industry—which promises an erotically charged transcendence through media that connects to our heart and imagination—is operating with a better, more creational, more incarnational, more holistic anthropology than much of the (evangelical) church...What if we didn't see passion and desire as such as the problem, but rather sought to redirect it? What if we honored what the marketing industry has got right—that we are creatures primarily of love and desire—and then responded in kind with counter-measures that focus on our passions, not primarily on our thoughts or beliefs (*DTK*, 76-77). Cf. also his chapter "Erotic Comprehension" (*ITK*, 31-73).

When the battle for our love is fought between the mind and the body, the body gets to the heart faster. Hence, if the church continues with a vision of discipleship that focuses mostly on the mind it will produce unformed, top-heavy, and vulnerable Christians. Even if these disciples are taught all the “answers” and know all the pertinent “doctrines,” the common practices of going the mall, going to the coffee shop, attending university, and going to football games will be what actually shapes a person’s vision of the kingdom. Cultural forces like these function as a sort of liturgy and direct what we actually worship. The world offers embodied practices that shape our desires and provide a compelling vision of what the good life is. Furthermore, it shows us a clear path to attain it.

Perhaps Smith’s most powerful illustration of cultural liturgy is his description of the typical suburban shopping mall. He leads the reader through an experience of the mall and shows it to be a place *not* to buy things as much as it is a functional temple. The mall is not a place that offers us clothing to meet basic needs; rather it is a place that tells a story of what is wrong with us. It tells us that if we are fat, ugly, or uncool, we are unacceptable in the world and hence broken. It also offers a kind of redemption; if we buy the products they offer then we can become skinny, pretty, and hip. The mall offers—only to those willing to pay the price—a kind of Shalom. As Smith says, “I am broken therefore I shop” (*DTK*, 96).

Seeing the mall as a liturgical and pedagogical institution helps us to see what is at stake in its practices; at the same time, and for just this reason, this phenomenology of the mall’s liturgy points out the limits of a worldview approach. It is hard to think of the mall in terms of worldview, as a place where ideas are proffered (quite the opposite!); but if we look at it from the perspective of love and practice, we become attentive to what’s at stake and begin to notice things we hadn’t seen before (*DTK*, 23).

After establishing that point, Smith then goes on to argue that humans cannot help experiencing the mall in this liturgical way. Part of his proposal is that the human person cannot just exist as a stationary being, but rather is confined to a future orientation in which it is always heading towards some ideal picture of the future (*DTK*, 47-48).

What does the human being aim at? We are pre-loaded with a “kingdom” orientation in which we have a picture of the “good life” that actually directs our decisions in life. Smith explains it this way, “Our ultimate love is oriented by and to a picture of what we think it looks like for us to live well, and that picture then governs, shapes, and motivates our decisions and actions” (*DTK*, 53). He elaborates further:

It is important to emphasize that this is a *picture*. This is why I have emphasized that we are fundamentally noncognitive, affective creatures. The *telos* to which our love is aimed is not a list of ideas or propositions or doctrines; it is not a list of abstract, disembodied concepts or values. Rather, the reason that this vision of the good life moves us is because it is more affective, sensible, even aesthetic picture of what the good life looks like. A vision of the good life captures our hearts and imaginations not by providing a set of rules

or ideas, but by painting a picture of what it looks like for us to flourish and live well (*DTK*, 53).

If we are non-cognitive creatures, whose orientation in the world is always “aiming at” a vision of the good life, how is that vision of the good life shaped? Here, Smith introduces the importance of practice. “Good habits, for instance, are ‘virtues’, whereas bad habits are ‘vices’. These habits constitute a kind of ‘second nature’: while they are learned (and thus not simply biological instincts), they can become so intricately woven into the fiber of our being that they function as if they were natural or biological” (*DTK*, 56).

Once we have a number of these habits in place, they work together towards shaping the “end” of our human endeavors. “Our habits thus constitute the *fulcrum* of our desire: they are the hinge that ‘turns’ our heart, our love, such that it is predisposed to be aimed in certain directions. For the most part this takes place under the radar, so to speak” (*DTK*, 56). Hence, in order to shape the actual direction of one’s life one must have certain practices in place that will eventually teach the non-cognitive self to desire the right things. Therefore, “Our worldview is more a matter of the imagination than the intellect, and the imagination runs off the fuel of images that are channeled by the senses ... Hence, it should be no surprise that the way to our hearts is our stomach; or, if not specifically our stomachs, the way to our hearts is through our bodies” (*DTK*, 57-58).

What, then, is the church to do? How could the church match the visceral experience offered by the world? Can she provide an embodied experience that seeps into the bones? To these questions, Smith gives a resounding yes. The church needs only to look at her own worship practices and “double down” on these embodied exercises as a way to counteract secular rituals. The church does not need to look hard for innovative practices; she is filled with liturgies of the past that are jam-packed with embodied experiences. And here the church can offer an alternative way of being that is as visceral as the worldly alternates. It is time she begin to discharge her ancient “countermeasures” in response to the embedded cultural liturgies of today. The end of *DTK* (155-214) gives a beautiful description of what is really going on in the normal liturgy of a church service. Each step of the way, all aspects of the liturgy counteract the secular liturgies of the mall, the university, and other institutions.

Smith’s project reminds us that, like it or not, we are indeed shaped by what we do. We humans are *not* just thinkers. We are lovers and our habits have a formative impact on what we love. Of course our minds are important too (I will get to that below), but for Christians who desire to grow, the key is likely *not* to just read more books or only to refine their “worldview,” but rather to engage in regular embodied patterns of worship that will over time shape their intuitive know how in the world and will sharpen the picture of the kingdom of God to which their whole lives will be directed. In this way, we pastor-theologians are called to be not simply personal resources centers, but, rather, practitioners who summon disciples into a pattern of life so that the gospel bleeds into their whole selves—bodies and all.

At Fellowship Denver Church where I serve as teaching pastor, Smith's thesis has helped to refine our small groups ministry. In particular, it helped to galvanize our decision to move our small groups away from being merely "study-centered" meetings to being a more holistic experience in which eating together and "life together" is understood to be as vital for discipleship as is our formalized times of study. Of course, no change is possible without the Word; the Bible is the necessary starting point and the Holy Spirit's use of the Word is the only power strong enough for the transformation described in Romans 12:2. But even for this to have its full effect we have observed it must be done in the context of a communal liturgy of regular practices.

On a personal level, Smith's work has helped highlight the liturgical nature of my own humanity and led me to ask uncomfortable questions about how what I do on a regular basis shapes what I love. The need I feel to check my iPhone constantly or visit Facebook is not just something I do; with every regular visit my heart is being influenced by the powers of social media and drawn towards a counterfeit kingdom.⁸ For that insight, I am profoundly thankful to Smith.

However, Smith's project is not without problems and some of them are serious enough that the remaining portion of this short essay is dedicated to highlight them. I do this not to be overly critical but because the overall power of Smith's project is likely to overshadow cracks in the foundation.

2. METHODOLOGY

Much to my surprise, liturgy is now trendy. There is something of a liturgical movement in evangelicalism thanks, at least in part, to Smith's work. Church plants across the United States of both "high" and "low" traditions are weaving various forms of liturgy in creative expressions. And, in an ironic twist, the most uncool place to be is in a suburban mall. There is a broader social trend in which Christians and non-Christians alike are moving away from the suburban social experiment and looking elsewhere for meaning. It is precisely because Smith's argument—and his extensive reliance on secular thinkers—seems to be on the forefront of a broader societal movement that we must not be uncritical in our reception of it.

For all of his insight, in the course of reading, two methodological issues caught my attention. First, Smith's overall approach was to make something that is by nature extremely difficult to define—pre-cognition—

⁸ "Consider, for example, the pervasive role that certain technologies now play in everyday life of a middle-class North American. Every technology is attended by a mode of bodily practice. So even if the computer is primarily an information processor, it can never completely reduce us to just 'thinking things' because it requires some mode of bodily interface: whether we're hunched over a desk, glued to a screen; looking downward at a smartphone, our attention directed away from others at the table; or curled up on a couch touching a tablet screen, in every case there are bodily comportments that each sort of device invites and demands. Apple has long understood the nature of this interface... The technology affords and invites rituals of interaction" (*ITK*, 142).

and then to use conclusions from that to push the church to make decisions about some of its basic practices—including the role of and aim of teaching towards cognition itself—which I would argue are very clearly mandated in Scripture. Taking what is unclear and then using it to make decisions on what is clear is problematic. In John V. Taylor's *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, Taylor makes the case that the realm of the Holy Spirit is actually in the pre-conscious and subconscious.⁹ However the work of the Spirit is to move our minds and hearts from that which is utterly mysterious and unknown to that which is knowable. The Spirit directs us out of hazy and misty realms towards that which is known, namely the incarnate Word. The very notion of the incarnation of God, who up to that point was wrapped in profound mystery, was to make himself know. The Word is the direction to which the Spirit of God is always directing our pre-conscious/sub-conscious.

Second, Smith doesn't aim his argument at anyone in particular. There are no scholars or pastors or worldview advocates whose views are considered. He argues against a view that has no real representatives. This weakens the forces of his thesis because he doesn't have to interact with actual people who hold the view he opposes. Thus, he deals with generalities and stereotypes of churches, not actual people and actual churches. There are only broad descriptions of what worldviews advocates actually believe about the human person (*DTK*, 41-46), and while he mentions Alvin Plantinga and Christian Smith, he doesn't interact with them in any meaningful way. Hence, I got the sense that Smith ended up assuming the very thing he needed to prove. He takes it as fact that humans are what we love and that our willful intellectual aims are only secondary, our unseen pre-cognitive "imaginary."

With these methodological issues out of the way, I will now turn my attention to four aspects of Smith's thesis that I believe need to be closely evaluated through a biblical framework. I hope doing this will help the pastor-theologian receive Smith's work with appreciation and sobriety.

3. ANTHROPOLOGY

Smith suggests that the evangelical church has fallen prey to an intellectualized vision of the human person, which views humans as primarily thinkers. As such the church has overemphasized the role of the mind by placing too much weight on cognitive aspects of the person as if we were "brains on a stick." While I do not really know anyone in evangelicalism that actually has a "bobble-head" vision of the human person (*DTK*, 42), I see where his description of rationalism could be very problematic. Yet, in the crucible of ministry, this picture of humanity is quickly crushed. Anyone who has experience in pastoral counseling understands that people are not brains on a stick. Quick fix solutions do not exist and even when individuals agree that certain principles and propositions are true it takes a lot of time and holistic care to actually see lives redirected. People are complex and just "telling them the truth"

⁹ John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

and engaging in “knowledge” transfer doesn’t work to enact change. I also think that anyone who has taught for long also knows this to be true.

So, I agree totally with this basic understanding of the human person. However, Smith takes things too far—and, I’m afraid, out of the realm of a biblical framework—when he begins to call humans “animals” (*DTK*, 37). In personal dialogue with Smith, he assured me that the language of “human animal” is in step with the nomenclature common among philosophical writing. By it he simply means that we are “animated” living things in contrast with things that do not move on their own. However, even upon that explanation, I still was left with the feeling that using this term was giving away too much.

I have the impression that the common philosophical meaning of the human animal is different than the animated living creature made in God’s image. Nevertheless, Smith’s use of human animal terminology helps his thesis in many ways—we are largely controlled by pre-cognitive emotions like many other lower form animals. Indeed, his argument that many of our decisions and actions are the result of pre-cognitive automation, shaped by cultural-liturgical forces, is persuasive. However, in making that argument he downplays the part of our human experience that is not pre-cognitive. Even if we grant that part of us is only 5 percent (*DTK*, 81), that 5 percent separates us from animal kingdom. In fact, I am pretty sure we are not animals at all! According to the Genesis narrative, humans were created categorically different from animals. We named them, we were called on to govern them, and we were given God’s image and they were not. It is in that 5 percent that Adam and Eve had a choice and were held responsible for it.¹⁰ If we grant that 5 percent of the human experience is not pre-cognitive, it must be said that in that percent we are moral agents with an ability to make choices *apart* from our desires.

In *Mere Christianity* C. S. Lewis reminded his readers that we all have a sense of what we ought to do which stands above our “herd instinct”.¹¹ Even when we do not do it we still have an ingrained “know how” that stands above our longings and is *distinct* from our cultural liturgies. This is what makes us humans extraordinary in the universe: we can resist the impulse and desires that control all of the other creatures with whom we share the earth. It may only be 5 percent of our experience, but it is disproportionately influential.

Since most of our human experience isn’t in this 5 percent, it is wise to broaden our vision of human shaping (discipleship) that accounts for

¹⁰ There is a mediating concept between the humans-as-desirers and humans-as-thinkers that might be a pathway forward in understanding the human: humans are trusters. If we are thinkers and lovers, the bit of the human that mediates between the two is that we are trusters (this is slightly different from the “humans-as-believers” take that Smith attributes to the reformers, *DTK* 43-46). Going back to the story of Adam and Eve, if their desires led them astray and yet they “knew better”, why did they disobey? I think it was an issue of trust. “Is God’s word trustworthy or not? Did God really say this or not?” is what seems to have been streaming through Eve’s mind. And God’s expectation of Eve was not just that she would “know better” but that she would trust God even though her desires were telling her not to.

¹¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan Publishers, 1952).

the 95 percent and I think Smith carves out a path to do that. However, to appeal to the 5 percent is to remind the human that he is not an animal; it is to summon the shared memory we humans have of the divine imprint that separates us from them.

There is a second aspect of Smith's anthropology that is cause for concern in regard to the relationship and relative importance of the "mind" compared to the "heart." Consider the block quote below in which Smith compares his "Augustinian" anthropology with other models:

This Augustinian model of human persons resists the rationalism and quasi-rationalism of the earlier models by shifting the center of gravity of human identity, as it were, down from the heady regions of the mind closer to the central regions of our bodies, in particular, our *kardia*—our gut or heart. The point is to emphasize that the way we inhabit the world is not primarily as thinkers, or even believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it. Like the blind men pictured in Rembrandt's sketches, for the most part we make our way in the world with hands outstretched, in an almost tactile groping with our bodies (*DTK*, 47).

Interestingly, Smith alludes to an image of "groping" in the dark. This is the same image that Paul provides for the Athenians in which they were looking for God but *without* the revelation of God. Then through Paul's description of Jesus, their groping in the dark changed. They were not meant to grope in the dark, they are meant to see clearly in the light (Acts 17:27-31).

So while it may be true that, "Discipleship and formation are less about erecting an edifice of Christian knowledge than they are a matter of developing a Christian know-how that intuitively 'understands' the world in the light of the fullness of the gospel" (*DTK*, 68), it is also true that understanding the gospel cannot be understood without clear "Christian knowledge."

Indeed, propositional truth to be first received through the mind is the way to anchor our "social imaginary" (*DTK*, 66). Conversely, the biblical witness points to the propensity of our hearts to be tainted. It is not that our minds cannot be corrupted—of course they can be—but it is in the heart that we are most easily deceived and corrupted. Eve's heart/desire led her to the forbidden fruit; "it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be *desired* to make one wise" (Gen 3:6). Jeremiah warned Israel that "The heart is deceitful *above all things*, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). Jesus reminded his disciples that our hearts corrupt our minds: "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:20-23). So while we should not ignore our desires in discipleship, it makes sense that many Christians would be cautious with elevating "desire" language over that of "heady" language. We have a long history of our desires leading us

away from God's desires. Additionally, the call for discernment among leaders in the early church was for them to *raise* their center of gravity because their desires were easily twisted. Note this dynamic in Jude 3-4: "I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into *sensuality* and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (cf. Rom 12).

Hence, it is not to be easily dismissed that the overwhelming concern in the New Testament is regarding the teaching and the role of the mind as a means of protecting the heart. For example, in Paul's personal letters to Timothy he was concerned with his teaching (2 Tim 3:10, 4:3) and warned him of the dangers of the heart. In James we see it is the heart that is easily deceived (James 1:26) and therefore he emphasizes the importance of teaching in the community (James 3:1). And it was in the very center of Jesus' instruction that his apostles were to make disciples by "teaching" them to obey all that he commanded. The word illuminates and shapes our hearts. The word protects our hearts. It has the power to redirect and reform the heart.¹²

It seems to me that it is not a matter of if we shift the center of gravity from the head to the heart but rather the expectation of scripture is that this shift happens whether we want it to or not. The call of the church is to utilize the unique ability of the mind to inform and enlighten the heart.

4. EVANGELISM

If it is true that we are primarily liturgical creatures and that Christians and non-Christians alike are entrenched in them (for better or for worse), we need to ask how to appeal to someone to switch liturgies.

Mere invitation into the church's liturgy is not effective for many non-Christians. Relying on the centripetal force of church practice to woo in non-Christians just doesn't work because Christianity is metaphysically impossible for many outside of the church (*DTK*, 207). A space is needed for them to understand its plausibility *before* they would ever trust it with their hearts. Of course this can (and should!) happen at the same time as being welcomed into the life and rhythms of the church. But the issues of the mind have to be addressed for many non-Christians to trust their hearts with it. I believe this is the reality on the ground for many Christians; it is certainly my experience in ministry. For many non-Christians to switch liturgies they need to have a big picture of why a different liturgy is better than the one they are currently in. Switching liturgies is not automated.

In the body of Christ, helping people switch liturgies is precisely what the evangelist does and this is where the intellectualist worldview, which is a target of Smith's criticism, is most important. Worldview apologetics was never meant to be the home of the Christian life. Rather, it is a map

¹² Smith argues that Scripture is the primary way our desire gets "aimed" at the kingdom of God (*DTK*, 196). However Scripture itself is concerned with true and false teaching not just a re-narration of our lives.

to show why this destination is a better place to go than wherever the unbeliever currently stands.¹³

In biblical accounts of individuals switching liturgies we see this tension at play. The interaction between Paul and King Agrippa illustrates this. Paul assured the king that, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words” (Acts 26:25). And after Paul’s articulation of the gospel, Agrippa responded, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? (Acts 26:28).” In this attempt to get Agrippa to switch liturgies the heady words “true,” “rational,” and “persuasion” are employed. Similarly, after Paul preached in Athens, a group of listeners neither mocked him nor did they believe him, rather they said, “we will hear you again about this” (Acts 17:32). There was more persuading to be done and it evidently worked, because “some men joined him and believed” (17:34).

The most famous story of liturgy switching is seen in Jesus’ telling of the prodigal son. First we see that the younger brother’s bodily desires guide him away from his father and to the point of utter ruin. Second, we see that he “came to his senses” and it is at this point that the narrative changed (Luke 15:17). It was when he thought through his situation in his mind (“came to his senses” is a way of saying just that) that he changed his course of action. To be sure when he was welcomed back to the father it was *not* just a mental exercise; it was a full-bodied experience filled with great clothes, delicious food, and dancing. Yet, on the whole, it was that little part of the story—“coming to his senses”—that was the transition that led to repentance and reconciliation. Coming to his senses was when the center of gravity was raised, not lowered.¹⁴

5. JESUS AND LITURGICAL FORMS

What would Jesus think about Smith’s thesis? How would he respond to the trend of the church towards repetition and habitual practices? I

¹³ In Smith’s criticism of worldview/intellectualist evangelicalism, I get the impression that what we have here is a new manifestation of an age-old tension in the church: the natural conflict between a gifted teacher and a gifted evangelist. Worldview/intellectualism was not meant to be the heart of the gospel but a road map for those who have settled for another gospel. Smith’s criticism is a necessary reminder that discipleship must not remain in the mind but must seep into the bones. Smith (and deep discipleship advocates) needs worldview apologists and worldview apologists need Smith (and deep discipleship advocates). We must recall that Augustine was persuaded *first* by the logic of Ambrose’s sermons long before he could articulate insights to the human heart. We need logic/apologetics/worldview and a pathway to deep discipleship that gets at our affections. Remember the words of Paul in 1 Cor 12:21, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’”

¹⁴ This process is a key part of conversion and serves as a reference point to which Christians can look back as an encouragement for whatever present struggles they are going through. Paul rejoiced that the gospel, “has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, *since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth*” (Col 1:16). Also in Eph 1:13, “In him you also, *when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*”

think answering these questions honestly is vital in our assessment. “I recognize that some might be uncomfortable with this claim, since it seems to suggest that there can be some sort of virtue in ‘going through the motions’. On this point I’m afraid I have to confess that I do indeed think this is true” (*DTK*, 167, n. 29).

I believe Jesus’ interaction with the woman at the well in John 4 shows his take on forms in worship. The woman said that her people worship at Gerizim, which referred to the site and practices of their worship to God. But to her surprise Jesus refused to prescribe for her an improved *form* of worship. Jesus said, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when *neither* on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (John 4:21). This statement is shocking in that it is subversive to both Jewish and Samaritan forms of worship. Instead, what Jesus gives her is the non-formulaic statement, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

Instead of a form, Jesus says that worship is done in spirit—meaning that it is *not* tied to a particular place or action. But that worship is to be done in truth (that is, Jesus needs to be at the center of it, John 1:14). When Jesus talks about worship he downplays form and location and instead points us to the opposite of physical form—spirit.

There was no lack of meaningful religious forms in Jesus’ day; there was no lack of powerful stories that were woven into daily rituals and yearly rhythms in Jesus day, and yet they proved to be inadequate in helping people understand Jesus. The reason is that the human heart is more comfortable with the familiar patterns of religion than with the invasive nature of the gospel. That is, whenever the heart can put it on autopilot in a ritual it will, and, after a while, hearts drift far from the message to which the form being practiced actually points. Human hearts prefer to rely on practices instead of on God. Jesus warned against prayers that are *battologia* (vain repetitions) because our bodies can engage in an automation that causes us to drift from God.

At a certain level, I agree that the patterns of Christians worship are vital for formation so that “I ‘get’ worship in ways that will exceed what I’m ‘thinking’ about *when* I worship” (*ITK*, 173). I agree that there is a story in worship that is caught more than it is taught and that repeating it is key to doing this.¹⁵ I also see how repeating the logic of the story via various religious forms can help transfer the meaning of the gospel in ways that simply explaining it cannot. However, too much reliance on religious forms to communicate the message of the gospel leads to trouble. We need not look any further than the relationship Jesus had with the religious forms of his day to discover why. Indeed, I think Smith’s chapter on the church liturgy, “Practicing (for) the Kingdom” (*DTK*, 155-214),

¹⁵ In particular, the importance of re-narration of the body is a profound insight Smith makes. He highlights this principle by telling the story of the film *The Kings Speech*, which shows the physical and psychological interconnections in a person, and that a “break-through” is possible when one “re-narrates” the body (*ITK*, 66-69).

was powerful precisely because he explained it so well! It is his testimony and description that resonated with me. It was the spoken word that created a picture in my heart that touched on my desires.

6. *MISSIO DEI*

Smith understands the *Missio Dei* as a call to the church to provide a faithful witness for the sake of the world (*ITK*, 151-191). But that is not what the *Missio Dei* is about. Rather, the *Missio Dei* refers to the work of the Holy Spirit *outside* of the normative patterns of the church. It refers to the work of the Spirit to *break* old forms of worship and to create new ones that are inclusive to different types of people. Karl Barth, whose writings the phrase *Missio Dei* was coined to describe, explains it like this:

The continuance and victory of the cause of God, which the Christian Church is to serve with her witness, is not unconditionally linked with the forms of existence which it has had until now. Yes, the hour may strike and perhaps has already struck, when God, to our discomfiture, but to his glory and for the salvation of mankind, will put an end to this mode of existence because it lacks integrity.¹⁶

Consider the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. The Spirit comes to Peter and tells him that his form of connecting with God through his dietary restrictions is going to have to change (even though this form was in the Bible). And this change was for the purpose of including the gentile Cornelius and his household into the people of God. It was the Spirit of God who initiated the entire mission encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10:19) and the key was Peter's willingness to break an old form in order to welcome in this outsider. This is the *Missio Dei* at work.

There is a scandal of the *Missio Dei* that works against the foundations of Smith's argument. For the *Missio Dei* says that the Spirit of God is actually already at work in the institutions and movements of the secular liturgies. It says that the Spirit works ahead of the church in secular cultures and then leads the church to the people in whom the Spirit is working in those cultures (cf. Acts 9:10-19). Thus, as it relates to modern innovations of worship, I do not think Smith gives us the full account of the "mall" church and the "coffee shop" church. Perhaps these churches are mirroring cultural liturgical forms to the detriment of the church. But perhaps many of these churches are being sensitive to the Spirit's work outside of the church. Perhaps these forms are not attempts to be cool but attempts to explain the gospel in ways people can understand.¹⁷

¹⁶ Karl Barth, "Letter to a Pastor in the German Democratic Republic," in *How to Serve God in a Marxist Land* (New York: Association Press, 1959).

¹⁷ Ironically, in the final section of *ITK*, "Redeeming Reflection," Smith describes the critical importance of *explaining* the forms of worship. This is ironic because I think this is at the heart of much of what these other low-church models are actually trying to do.

CONCLUSION

Even though I have expressed concern in this review regarding Smith's work, I am profoundly thankful for him and his contribution to the church. I think he gets many things right, some of which are critical if the church is going to be serious about discipleship in the twenty-first century. Like many luminaries, he perhaps overplays his fundamental insight, but that ought not take away from the insight itself. We are more than minds trapped in bodies; we are whole people who engage the world as whole bodily selves. It will weaken the church if we do not lead people in discipleship with that reality in mind.