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Reading the Gospels Smithly: Thinking Upon and Loving the Gospels in Dialogue with James K.A. Smith's *Desiring the Kingdom* and *Imagining the Kingdom*¹

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Introduction

James K. A. Smith is a remarkable scholar. From technical articles in philosophy to paradigm-shifting work on worship and Christian education, from an analysis of the massive work of Charles Taylor to spearheading editorial work for the Church and Postmodern Culture series, Smith has produced both quantity and quality. Moreover, he is a fine and creative writer, making his important ideas very accessible.

One of the projects Smith has been working on is his Cultural Liturgies series, a sequence of books in which he is unpacking his understanding of a philosophical anthropology for the purpose of helping theological educators. The first two books in this series of at least three planned are *Desiring the Kingdom* and *Imagining the Kingdom*.² These two books are different in argumentation and topics covered, but with an overlap in purpose and a shared foundation of understanding. It is appropriate then, and helpful, to treat them together as the (hitherto produced) two parts of the Smith canon on this subject.

The purpose of this essay is to engage with Smith's philosophical work in these two books from the perspective of NT studies, specifically my own area of interest in the Gospels. I will suggest that Smith's philosophical anthropology is paradigm-shifting and of great value even though ultimately it is in need of more balance

¹ This essay is a revision of a paper I read at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Ph.D. Colloquium in July 2014. I am grateful for the many in attendance and the stimulating environment and dialogue.

² James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

from a biblical and theological perspective. To explore this thesis I will present my argument in three steps. First, I will give significant space to hearing Smith's voice and seeking to understand his thoughts, loves, and concerns. Second, I will take several of the summarized points and put them in dialogue with some of my own thoughts regarding the nature and function of the Gospels. Third, I will offer some dialogical critiques about Smith's project and raise some questions for further discussion.

Hearing Smith's Thoughts and Loves

While *Desiring the Kingdom* (DTK) and *Imagining the Kingdom* (ITK) are not Smith's first books nor his last, they are a significant part of his overall, developing corpus and the place where he is unpacking at the broadest level, it seems to me, his way of thinking and acting Christianly.

The first volume, DTK, has the subtitle, "Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation." The second volume, ITK, continues in the same vein with the descriptor, "How Worship Works." Neither these titles nor subtitles are particularly clear at this point in relation to what Smith is going to actually argue, however, as the issues of worship and cultural formation as we typically think of these do not appear woven throughout or even explicated very much. Nor does he end up giving much by way of practical application to Christian education, which is one of his stated goals. Nonetheless, despite these rather generic subtitles, what Smith does offer is significant.

Smith is, as I noticed especially on my second reading of both books, a rather circuitous writer. He strikes me as a good teacher, one who says very insightful things, repeating himself, but not exactly in the same way each time. So too with these books. One can easily find a statement at the beginning or the end where Smith says, in grand summarizing form, "The point of this book is..." or "what I'm suggesting in these volumes is..." or "the goal to what I'm suggesting is..." These are always good and appreciated as a reader. I was struck at the same time, however, that I actually ended up finding several of these statements throughout the books, not just at the beginning and the end, but sometimes in the middle too! This is not a criticism; indeed, as noted, Smith strikes me as a great teacher, doing what a great teacher does: he puts the same sentiment and idea in different turns of phrase and different appli-

cation contexts. I like that and it works. It makes summarizing his point succinctly, while at the same time, a bit more difficult.

Smith says that his goal for the Cultural Liturgies project concerns both worship and Christian education, which are intimately interwoven and really have the same purpose, the *missio Dei*. As a philosophy professor at Calvin College and part of the great Dutch Reformed heritage, he is well aware of and indeed cut his intellectual and spiritual teeth on the notion of worldview. He wants, however, to “push down through worldview to worship as the matrix from which a Christian worldview is born” and then to consider what this means for both Christian education and Christian worship. (DTK, 9)

As Smith notes, typically (particularly in the Modern period) education is viewed as the imparting of *ideas*. Correspondingly, then, Christian education is typically approached as the imparting of Christian ideas, or the development of a Christian worldview, understood as a system of Christian beliefs, ideas, and doctrines. It is a way of understanding the world, not just with human knowledge, but also with faith, informed by Holy Scripture and the Church. (DTK, 18) Who would fault that?

But, Smith asks, what if Christian education is not actually primarily about ideas and *information* but primarily about the *formation* of hearts and desires? What if, Smith asks, Christian education was primarily concerned with shaping our hopes and passions—our visions of ‘the good life’ or the kingdom—and not merely about the dissemination of data and information as inputs to our thinking, even Christian worldview thinking? What if education wasn’t first and foremost about what we *know* by reason or by faith, but about what we *love*? (DTK, 18)

Smith believes in and is involved in Christian education and understands that a biblically-based, theologically-informed, ecclesially-practiced *worldview* is important. Knowledge matters, both broad understanding and micro-details. Any Christian educator worth his or her salt knows that we are not just training believers with a skill set / vocational training that happens to be for the church, especially not at the undergraduate level. Rather, we are seeking to bring Christians to a greater understanding of the world and their faith. But even this, Smith argues convincingly, is inadequate; even the best education toward a Christian worldview as an understanding of the world is insufficient.

Why? Because typical Christian worldview education is reductionistic—speaking as if the goal is to train Christians to *think* a certain way and therefore act a certain way. But, Smith argues, such construals of worldview “believe an understanding of Christian faith that is dualistic and thus reductionistic: It reduces Christian faith primarily to a set of ideas, principles, claims, and propositions that are known and believed. The goal of all of this is ‘correct’ thinking.” This is fine if we are merely what Descartes described us to be—thinking things. But what if, Smith asks, that is only a slice of who we are and not even the most important part of humans as creatures of God? What if we are instead created as *embodied* creatures and our identity is located more in the body than the mind? (DTK, 32) If so, and he spends two books making an incredibly convincing case for this, then Christian education has got to be more than about training Christians how to think.

As Smith rightly notes, “Being a disciple of Jesus is not primarily a matter of getting the right ideas and doctrines and beliefs into your head in order to guarantee proper behavior” (DTK, 32). Anyone who has ever tried to raise children, disciplined another Christian, been friends with a Christian who went off the rails, or has just tried to be a Christian themselves and seen that knowledge is not enough for transformation knows this to *not* be the case! Right beliefs do not guarantee proper behavior. “Rather,” Smith notes, being a disciple of Jesus is “a matter of being the kind of person who *loves* rightly—who loves God and neighbor and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love.” (DTK, 32-33)

This is very good. And this fits very well with the older, pre-Modern, pre-rationalist view of education that was dominant throughout all of antiquity and the West—Christian and not—that education is about *paideia*, the formation of the person to have virtue, resulting in full human flourishing.

But here is where Smith’s genius shines through and where he is powerfully provocative and transformative in what he offers. He argues not just in a grenade-throwing or in a shrill-cried, foot-stomping way that: “We need better Christian education!!” Rather, he presses into this and argues that the real problem with even the best Christian worldview-based education is that it rests on a faulty philosophical anthropology.

This faulty philosophical anthropology – or way of understanding the human being – is at least as old as Plato but finds its dominant and ultimately domineering form in the Modern period, espe-

cially with Descartes. The “Human Person as Thinker” gets its big boost through Descartes’ famous existential crisis resulting finally in his only assured basis for knowledge, “I think therefore I am.” Smith notes that this model of humanity as fundamentally a thinking thing—though note, radically different than the great heritage of the Church via Augustine—was cultivated throughout Modernity. The notion becomes that *what* humanity is is an immaterial mind or consciousness, occasionally and temporarily embodied, but not essentially so. (DTK, 41) (As an aside, I may note that this same issue engendered a large debate between Aquinas and his contemporaries, whom Thomas saw as neo-Platonists.³) As Smith cleverly says, “This is a broadly intellectualist or rationalist account of the human person, fed on a diet of ideas, intravenously into the mind through the lines of propositions and information.” (DTK, 42)

While this model of humanity assumed different forms throughout Modernity (Kant, Hegel, etc.), unfortunately, “this rationalist picture was absorbed particularly by Protestant Christianity (whether liberal or conservative), which tends to operate with an overly cognitivist (and individualistic) picture of the human person and thus tends to foster an overly intellectualist account of what it means to be or become a Christian.” This does much to explain the rationalist distortions of “worldview” that he mentioned earlier. (DTK, 42)

The result of this reductionistic, rationalistic understanding human nature is a Christianity that is fixated on doctrines and ideas, even while ironically often being allied with a certain kind of anti-intellectualism. This looks like a bobble-head Christianity: “mammoth heads that dwarf an almost nonexistent body.” (DTK, 43)

As Smith rightly notes, this overly rationalist view of humanity has been critiqued already by Christians, especially by Reformed tradition. The criticism one will find in great Christian philosophers and theologians such as Alvin Plantinga or John Frame is that we need to recognize how much of our thinking actually operates on the basis of faith, not a neutral, objectivity activity, but a particular way of seeing the world. This is where worldview comes in, noting that our primary orientation to the world is not thinking but believing. Beliefs are more basic than ideas. In this model, humans are not understood as fundamentally thinking machines but believing

³ For discussion of this See Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

animals, or essentially religious creatures. We are defined, it is observed, not by what we think but by what we believe. This generates the line of worldview thinking common in the Reformed tradition, developed precisely as a critique of more rationalistic constructions of Christianity. (DTK, 43)

But while this is commendable and helpful, Smith has two reservations about this improvement over bald Cartesian rationalistic anthropology:

- 1) This model of humanity really just moves the clash of ideas down a level to a clash of beliefs—beliefs which still often look like the propositions and ideas of the rationalist model, only they’ve been given the status of Ur-ideas.
- 2) This “person as believer” model still tends to operate with a very disembodied, individualistic picture of the human person. (DTK, 44) My beliefs are still quite detached from my body and from what I *do* as an embodied creature. While this model is better than the “brain in a vat” rationalism, it seems still like a person as an isolated, disembodied island of beliefs; the believer is a chastened rationalist, certainly. But beliefs in this improved Christian model still seem to be the sorts of things are more commensurate with thinking rather than doing and loving. (DTK, 45)

So Smith here is not rejecting worldview models; they are a step in the right direction, he says. But ultimately they are insufficient and insufficiently Augustinian. “We still get a somewhat stunted anthropology that fails to appreciate that our primordial orientation to the world is not knowledge, or even belief, but *love*.” Smith wants to offer a robustly Augustinian anthropology that sees humans as most fundamentally oriented and identified by love, as manifested through embodiment. (DTK, 46)

This is the big idea—or big desire—that undergirds both *Desiring the Kingdom* and *Imagining the Kingdom*. Smith then spends the rest of DTK and most of ITK unpacking and developing this love/desire-based philosophical anthropology from a number of different angles. And it is all very fascinating and well done, brimming with insights on nearly every page.

In DTK he begins constructing an alternative philosophical anthropology by arguing that we are creatures motivated by loves before and more deeply than by thoughts. This is not to say we are non-rational or that a proposition (such as this sentence) is nonsensical, but rather that primarily we are affective, imaginative in

nature and that propositions don't get into our bones in the same way. (DTK, 53) We are actually motivated in our lives by a *picture* of the good life that "captures our hearts and imaginations not by providing a set of rules or ideas, but by painting a picture of what it looks like to flourish and live well. This is why such pictures are communicated most powerfully in stories, legends, myths, plays, novels, and films rather than dissertations, messages, and monographs." (DTK, 53) Again, we are lovers before and more profoundly than we are thinkers.

The question, then, is *how* do we develop, affect, and change our loves/desires, which can obviously be disordered and perverted. The answer is *habits*, or better, *habitus*, learned dispositions. Habits/Dispositions are, Smith says, "love's fulcrum" – the hinge that turns our heart/loves/desires to be predisposed in certain directions (DTK, 56). *Habitus* is our "precognitive tendencies to act in certain ways and toward certain ends" (DTK, 55). Habits are a kind of second nature; while they are learned, they become so intricately woven into the fabric of our being that they function as if they were natural or biological. "They represent our default tendencies and our quasi-automatic dispositions to act in certain ways, to pursue certain goods, to value certain things, to cherish certain relationships, and so forth." (DTK, 56) "Our habits incline us to act in certain ways without having to kick into a mode of reflection ... this precognitive engine is the product of long development and formation—it's *made*, not some kind of 'hard wiring'—but it functions in a way that doesn't require our reflection or cognition." (DTK, 56)

Smith goes on to explore more deeply how this happens and what it looks like, but I will skip ahead to a comment he makes near the end. The big bang for the buck comes when he ties this anthropology to worship:

The practices of Christian worship *do* this work nonetheless because of the kind of creatures we are. The practices carry their own understanding that is implicit within them (*pace* Taylor), and that understanding can be absorbed and imbibed in our imaginations without having to kick into a mode of cerebral reflection.... A way of construing of the world becomes 'automated,' and this will affect our actions and behaviors outside the context of gathered worship in ways we don't always 'think' about. (DTK, 166-167)

Or even more succinctly, “I worship in order to understand.” (223) Worship is “the crucial incubator for hatching Christian accounts of the world.” (224)

In the subsequent volume *ITK* Smith revisits this same philosophical anthropology and both deepens it through another angle of insight, the work of two French thinkers, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu. Smith’s goal, using philosophy, social psychology, and cognitive science of literature, is “to articulate a liturgical anthropology that accounts for the importance of the kinesthetic and the poetic—that recognizes and explains the intertwinement of the body and story as the nexus of formation that ultimately generates *action*.” (*ITK*, 16)

This second volume supplements *DTK*’s account of desire with an account of the imagination, because Christian formation is a conversion of the imagination effected by the Spirit. (*ITK*, 15-16) Smith observes that imagination is the way in which we make sense of the world; it is the orientation to the world and vision that motivates what we do even though it is visceral and bodily more than cognitive. (*ITK*, 19)

Using the work on perception by Merleau-Ponty Smith develops the idea of *praktognosia*, that mysterious kind of knowledge that we have that is acquired over time by habit and hands-on experience, a how-to knowledge that is non-rational. This might be best summed up with the brilliant Mark Twain quote: “A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way.”

Coming at it from another angle, chapter 2 of *ITK* explores the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a very influential 20th century French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher. Bourdieu observed the great problem that marks the work of anthropologists and sociologists—that their supposed objectivity and their objectification of what they are studying is precisely what prevents them from truly understanding it! By removing themselves from the real sense of the *practices* of the community they insert an “epistemological break” into their ability to truly understand those they are studying. Wisely, Bourdieu didn’t give up on the science itself or castigate theoretical reflection as inherently problematic. There is a virtue to theoretical reflection on practice and the attempt to understand what’s at stake in communities of practice. It’s not a matter of choosing theory *or* practice. Rather, Bourdieu promotes an adequate understanding of the practice as its own irreducible know-how as well as theoretical reflection on the practice. (*ITK*, 76)

In chapters three and four Smith delves more deeply into the issue of how imagination affects us. Narrative, poetics, and metaphor are the scaffolding of our experience and how we intend to the world and are oriented to it. Because the nature of humanity is centered not in thoughts but desires, it makes sense that the greatest effect on us will come through story, narrative, poetics, and metaphor; these affect us at the level of desires and loves. (ITK, 108-109)

This again, is why we need to focus on our practices—our ‘liturgies’ whether they be in or outside of the church—because our practices or habits form us at the poetic and kinesthetic level and therefore, most profoundly. “Liturgies are compressed, repeated, performed narratives that, over time, conscript us into the story they ‘tell’ by showing, by performing.” (ITK, 109)

Dialoguing with Smith and the Gospels

I have spent considerable time here summarizing and rehearsing Smith’s arguments because of their weightiness and worthiness of consideration. His work has helped shape my thinking in many ways and I think there is much to commend. Continuing in this positive assessment and coming from my own perspective as a Gospels scholar, I want to offer a few dialogical thoughts about how Smith’s insights interact with some issues that I have observed in terms of reading the Gospels well.⁴

1) Different Discourses of Truth

One of the things I argued in my *Reading the Gospels Wisely* book is that there are in fact many different discourses of modes of truth telling. Smith’s insight into the power and importance of story made me sing here and he does a great job of articulating this. I want to affirm wholeheartedly with Smith that narrative/story/poetic/artistic truth is powerful and essential to our human existence. As Smith and I have both argued in our own way, there is an irreducibility to poetic or narrative truth. One cannot just take a story or poem, getting its “meaning”—defined as the propositional truth contained within the supposed husk of the story—and then discard it.

⁴ Some of the issues below I have raised and treated in part in my volume, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

Yet—and this is a big part of my whole goal in writing *RGW*—this is precisely how we have often read and interpreted and preached the Gospels, as if their narrative form is at best something to get through to the real, meaty, doctrinal truth, and at worst is an embarrassment and inferior form of truth-telling.

So a big, hearty Amen to Smith's beautiful explanation for the irreducible and irreplaceable mode of discourse in poetry and story. This bespeaks the non-negotiable, and I would push, central role the Gospels play in our theological and spiritual understanding.

2) Primacy of Love in Jesus' Teaching

Foundation to Smith's arguments is the central place that our loves and desires play in our human nature. Subsequently, as Smith argues, we need to intend or attend to this and how the liturgies of our habits affect these loves. Thinking about this from the perspective of the Gospels one immediately recalls that Jesus puts precisely this same emphasis on love as the apex of Christian life and life together. At the deepest level of Jesus' teaching is the call to intend to our hearts, to our love and affections as the most important thing about who we are and as the necessary root of all true righteousness.

In the Gospel texts there is the easy, low-hanging fruit of the explicit statements Jesus makes about what the first and second greatest commandments are—loving God and loving neighbor (Matt 22:34-40 and parallels). This is taken up and made even more clearly and dominantly the great theme of the Gospel of John (the Beloved Disciple) where Jesus' love for the Father, the Father's love for him, the disciples love for Jesus and vice versa, God's love for the world (John 3:16) is the grand and glorious love-fest theme. But it goes beyond this also to the way in which the Gospels, maybe especially Matthew and John emphasize that to be a Christian means to live in a relationship of love with other believers. In John, again, this is obvious with the High Priestly Prayer (John 19:XX) and other teachings (John XX). In Matthew it appears particularly through the great Matthean theme of showing mercy/compassion toward others and forgiving one another (Matt XX). This constant refrain in Matthew is the most practical, pointed way Jesus teaches his disciples to fulfill the second greatest commandment, through forgiving one another. In terms of righteousness, Matthew also particularly emphasizes throughout the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) that one's *heart* is the center of the issue.

3) Education is about Formation—Through Discipleship

A third parallel to draw between Smith's work and my understanding of the Gospels is the mutual emphasis on education as being about formation, not just information. This relates to work I have been doing on a "*paideia*-understanding" of Christian higher education, both in theory and practice at my own institution, including a short piece I recently wrote on Christ as Educator or Pedagogue.⁵

In brief, the point is that although in our tradition we often think of Jesus as Teacher—meaning the conveyor of true content or revelation—in the ancient world education was understood much more robustly as *paideia*, or the bringing of the individual to maturity and flourishing through training in virtue. Education is about the formation of the whole person, not the training in certain skills. When read in light of Jewish and Greco-Roman understanding of education the Gospels make much more sense in portraying Jesus as a Pedagogue who has "learners" (*mathetes*) who follow him and learn not just his content-teaching but his way of being in the world. The letter to the Hebrews interestingly reflects this same understanding with its very Greco-Roman language of Jesus as the one who brings his followers into *teleios*-ness or maturity through suffering. So too in the Gospels.

This has deep congruence with Smith's arguments in that being a disciple means being conformed over time *through practice and habits*. This is what Smith talks about in light of the kind of practical knowledge—what both Aristotle and the Jewish biblical tradition would call Wisdom—that we gain through practice. I think the Gospels depict precisely the same vision, that we are transformed through following and worshipping. This is, indeed, the kind of children the Father is seeking—those who worship by the Spirit and faithfully (what John means here by 'in truth').

4) Following Christ is Entailed with Belief and Understanding

Closely related to the preceding observation, we can also note that the Gospels confirm with different language what Smith argues when he says that our learned *habitus* or dispositions (affected by our liturgical practices) affect our believing and understanding. Recall that Smith is arguing that there is something going on pre-

⁵ <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/christ-the-educator>.

cognitively/under the hood that is fundamental to our perception, knowledge, understanding, and belief.

I think the Gospels witness the same reality through the emphasis on the foundational matter of the heart, or inner person. To use the helpful philosophical term of “entailment”—that is, that one idea necessitates and is necessarily interwoven with another—our following or discipleship is *entailed* with our understanding and believing. That is, our obedience is not separate from our ability to understand; it is a habitus that primes and shapes our belief and knowledge. This is most clearly and easily seen in Jesus’ epistemic earthquake statement in John 7:17: “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”

5) Doing Affects Being, and not just the Other Way Around

Fifth and finally, I find Smith’s arguments correspond well with the work I have been doing for the last several years on Virtue Ethics in the Gospels and the relationship of human transformation, justification, and salvation. To say it most succinctly, I believe that to correspond with both the scriptural witness and experience, our theological anthropology must understand that *doing affects being*, and not just the other way around, *that being affects doing*.

This is a massive issue and deserves a very nuanced discussion, but I must be necessarily brief here. In short, the Protestant tradition, especially its reductionized Modern forms, has had only a uni-directional anthropological understanding on this being-doing issue. Namely, Protestantism has emphasized that our *doing* is the fruit or result of our *being*. So we typically observe that in Paul’s letters he always starts with the truths about us (usually rendered as propositions) and then and only then exhorts us to living differently based on these. This is the classic Indicative-Imperative sequencing that Protestants often discern and emphasize in Paul’s theology. Deeply interwoven with this is the great Protestant emphasis, of course, on justification only coming to us as a gift of grace. This is a being-doing understanding. We are something (being) that results in and produces action (doing). To confuse this or somehow muddle it is, for those Protestants who have considered it, anathema.

This much is easily notable in Protestantism. I would suggest, however, that this approach reflects and effects a stunted anthropological and sanctification view. The Protestant emphasis on this being-doing relationship is fully true but not the whole truth. In

reality, we also become as we act; doing also affects being. I fully realize these are “fightin’” words! But let me painfully clear: I am not talking about the narrow topic of forensic justification and imputation. As a Protestant, I agree that this is a gracious gift that fundamentally changes our being, resulting in doing (or fruit). This is a biblical idea. This is settled and is our only hope. Rediscovering this fundamental truth is at the bedrock level of the Protestant Reformation.

But I am also saying that when it comes the fullness of human experience and human development (physically, mentally, spiritually) this true view is too static when applied across all of our experience. It is also profoundly true that as we act we become; we are ever changing. If we don’t have some mechanism for understanding this dynamic of human experience then we cannot explain how people really change and grow in sanctification other than in a deterministic way, making the exhortations to growth meaningless.

This relates to the Gospels in many ways, including the notions of discipleship I’ve already mentioned, but particularly here the vision of *human flourishing* that is found in places like the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes and the entirety of the Sermon are inviting us in to a way of being in the world that transforms us and promises us true human flourishing now and ultimately in God’s coming kingdom. This is not just an unreachable ideal on the one hand nor an earning of one’s salvation on the other. It is an invitation to grace-based, God-directed, Spirit-empowered, kingdom-oriented virtue, or what Matthew calls “righteousness” (which is defined as “whole person behavior that accords with God’s nature, will, and coming kingdom”).

While none of this is Smith’s language nor the framing of ideas he is addressing, I think it clearly connects in that his philosophical anthropology is seeking to explain how we change. His explanation includes a strongly body/kinesthetic element—we change as people through our actions. Of course, we don’t change at the DNA level, but most of life is not experienced at this level, but at the level of customs, habits, mindsets, experiences, etc., all of which are greatly affected by our actions and customs, and habits.

A Brief Dialogical Critique

With this summary and positive exploration in place we can now conclude by offering a few constructive thoughts of dialogue and critique. These are given in the context of great appreciation

and sympathy and in the spirit of good Gadamerian dialectic, which I'm sure Smith would welcome. I'll offer my dialogical critique in the form of a few questions.

1) *Is this an Imbalanced Reaction?*

Whenever someone is so bold as to offer a radically new paradigm for understanding a common response is dismissal and/or vehement attack. Neither of those are options for me. Nevertheless, there have been a few thoughtful respondents—and I hope I'm one of them—that have rightly raised the question of whether what Smith is arguing here, hugely beneficial and true as it is, might be an imbalanced overreaction; another example of the famous Kierkegaardian quip about the drunken peasant climbing up one side of the donkey only to fall off the other.

I am quite sympathetic to Smith's arguments and largely persuaded, but I can't help but raise the question of whether the strong emphasis Smith has put on our non-cognitive functioning is not ultimately synthetic and holistic enough to account for the whole of human experience and development.

What I mean is that while it is absolutely essential that we reconsider the inherently embodied nature of our existence and the profound ways in which we are motivated by habits and desires, Smith does not offer a model that is convincingly comprehensive enough on what role cognition/thinking *does* play in our formation and ongoing existence and development as rational animals.

He acknowledges this partially in his opening to ITK in which he responds to the ironic charge that he has written a very rational, cognitive, propositional book to argue for the essential non-propositional nature of our knowing! His response is fairly satisfying, actually, noting that there are different discourses of truth and, quoting Proust, that there is a mysterious irony that it is the intellect that is required to understand that the intellect is not the superior or most foundational aspect of our existence. Smith also is careful to ward off any charge of anti-intellectualism or any misreading that he thinks cognitive content in any way unimportant. That is all good.

But again, what is lacking is a coherent philosophical anthropology that notes the position and role of cognition in our nature and development. Liturgies do form and shape us profoundly, but so does revelation and cognition. And moreover, not all liturgies

are the same or equal. There must be some way for cognitive evaluation of them.

I think (feel) that Smith is probably right that the center of gravity of human existence is affectional more deeply than intellectual so I'm willing to side with him on that over against much of our own tradition. But the solution must be a both/and, not an either/or that is more than lip service to the ongoing importance of cognition. (He gives what seems to be only lip service to this by noting that he agrees we should continue to have physics classes as Christian colleges.) In this I wonder if Kierkegaard's understanding of human development might be one important interlocutor who is noticeably absent from Smith.

2) *Where are the Existing Categories, Concepts, and Conversation-Partners?*

Smith is so brilliant, so engaging, and so enlightening that it took me quite a while before it began to dawn on me that several of the matters he was articulating have already long existed in our communal dialogue in the form of various categories, concepts, and conversation-partners. For example, I realized that much of what Smith was articulating about habits and *habitus* largely stems from Aristotelian notions of virtue ethics *mutatis mutandis*. Related, remarkably, the discussion of *habitus* mentions Aquinas not at all, the giant theologian who bequeathed to Christendom much reflection on this topic. Further, as my friend Dr. Ben Mast, clinical psychologist at the University of Louisville and expert on neuroscience of memory noted, much of what Smith discusses about habits and non-cognitive knowledge/*praktognosia* has been dealt with quite extensively and with a different interpretation in the field of neuroscience.

The question that dawned on me is not "Why did Smith not know everything and say everything there is to say?" I realize this is impossible and unrealistic to expect. But rather, the question in my mind (and heart) was, why is he not availing himself of the language, concepts, and insights that have already been explored and debated for centuries on many of these same topics? Why talk about these matters of virtue without exploring the topic of virtue and the nuanced debate that has already occurred on this?

I am certain as a philosopher he is well aware of most of these topics and debates. The most sympathetic reading—which may indeed be the case—is that he intentionally did not use the catego-

ries and interlocutors common to many of these discussions so that he would not get bogged down in the ruts of the old debates and entrenched warfare on issues such as grace versus virtue, nature versus nurture, etc. If this is the case I'm quite in support largely, as Smith is very fresh and stimulating by virtue of his *not* getting bogged down but instead bringing new and exciting voices to the table.

Yet I can't help but wonder if something is lost in *not* tying in his arguments to Aristotle and Aquinas and others—lost both for the qualifications and enrichment they would bring (and I do think Aristotle and Aquinas would have more to say along the lines of an *integration* of reasoning and affection, intellect and love) and for the help in our overall understanding of how to integrate his arguments into those already existing debates and concepts.

3) Where is Holy Scripture, Theology, and the Kingdom?

Finally, I might ask, where is in all of this philosophical anthropology and vision for Christian education Holy Scripture, Theology, and Kingdom? That is, not as a biblicist who is counting references to Bible verses in his indices, but as a fellow Christian and theologian and Christian educator I think it is fair to remark that in these theological books there is in fact little to no engagement with Scripture or dogmatic theology, and maybe even more ironically, no discussion of the kingdom of God, either its shape, purpose, or form, despite its appearance in the title of both books!

Now if Professor Smith were here, I can imagine he might respond that he is doing prolegomenon work, preparatory work to help us understand *philosophical* anthropology that precedes such cognitive endeavors such as Scripture, Theology, and the content of the Kingdom. He might say that as a non-biblical scholar and non-theologian this part of the story is left to others. Fair enough. I can be sympathetic and charitable.

Yet he never says that he's only doing preparatory work and it seems on the contrary that he is offering a view of how humanity functions—a philosophical anthropology. As a Christian offering such a view it seems to me that his discussion of liturgy and desire should evidence at least basic revelatory content, especially when the nature and content of Jesus' transformative, love-based teaching is inherently *non*-intuitive and *not* discernible from human nature and natural theology; it is radically topsy-turvy and eschatological unexpected!

It seems any philosophical anthropology for a Christian needs to be a theological anthropology that has all the Smith offers but includes also the fundamental realities of sin and its (noetic and affectional) effects and the role of the Holy Spirit as illuminator and transformer. Along these lines, Smith says a few times that his view is actually the more Augustinian view than others, yet I see no wrestling at all with Augustine or what he said and how he articulated things. Augustine certainly addresses the issue of sin and God's redeeming work in his understanding of humanity.

This potential problem may indeed relate to and stem from my two preceding critical questions—the imbalanced de-emphasis on cognition and ignoring of earlier debates and interlocutors. If Smith does not give enough credence to the role of cognitive/intellectual content to our shaping and formation it would naturally lead to a de-emphasis on the revelatory content of Holy Scripture and dogmatic theology via the Holy Spirit, both of which cannot be written off as a tack-on to our development as liturgical animals. It is the content of Holy Scripture and its outworking in the tradition of Theology that has and does shape both our liturgy and our formation through reflection and meditation and instruction. Similarly, if Smith were to engage more deeply with the Aristotelian virtue tradition, Aquinas' wrestling with it, Barth's insights on the radical in-breaking nature of revelation, to name a few, then it would, I suspect, provide a bit more balance and a more comprehensive philosophical anthropology than Smith has thus far provided us, beautiful though it is.

Despite these challenges, I am grateful for the stimulating and challenging scholarship of Smith's work. I recommend that Christians read and ponder what Smith is presenting and continue to do so as we stumble towards understanding and faithful witness in the world.