

Desiring the Kingdom
Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation

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During this week, I attended the church service at the Roman Catholic Church. One of the basic, distinctive marks of their way of praying is ritual: They do things over and over. When the priest says, “The Lord be with you,” without any thought or hesitation the congregation responds, “And with your Spirit.” The priest says, “Let us pray,” and the congregation stands up.

The daily lives have their rituals also: There are set ways of greeting people, eating, responding to a text. And when we are accustomed to a certain way of doing things we seldom ask why we do it that way. In the Eucharist, too, they have many ritual actions which they perform without asking questions.

In lieu of the comparison with Smith’s reading, the beginning of chapter four introduces Smith’s constructive account of Christian worship and formation by arguing for the primacy of sacramental worship over and against the communication of a particular worldview.¹

Smith writes that the material world is like bread and water which are not 'made' to be sacramental by some kind of magical divine fiat which transforms their created nature; rather, when they are taken up as sacraments in the context of worship, their 'natural sacramentality' is simply intensified and completed.²

Smith also points out that sacramental leveling entails the twin temptations to marginalize the church or to minimize the significance of the liturgy of Christian worship, and both temptations ought to be resisted. Finally, he points out that all

¹ Smith, James. K.A. “Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, And Cultural Formation. Vol.1. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.2009. Pg 131

² Ibid. Pg 143

Christian worship is liturgical in the sense that it is governed by norms, draws on a tradition, includes bodily rituals or routines, and involves formative practices.³

Chapter five of Smith's work is quite similar to the rituals performed in the Catholic Church, and highlights of the main context of the book. This chapter also presents the best and most accessible summary of his constructive project.

In this chapter, Smith explains what he calls the standard practices of the Christian liturgy: The Christian Calendar, The Call to Worship, God's Greeting and Mutual Greeting, Singing, The Reading of the Law, The Confession of Sin and Assurance of Pardon, Baptism, The Creed, Prayer, The Scripture and Sermon, Eucharist, Offering, and Sending as Witnesses. In each case his purpose is to explain how the presence or absence of the given aspect of the liturgy and the manner in which it is carried out will affect those who participate.⁴

Finally, Smith concludes the chapter by considering that Christian worship entails a relatively brief portion of the week. However, this reality can be moderated by the power of carefully attended Christian worship practices coupled with sensitivity to the power of secular liturgies.⁵

Additionally the power of corporate worship practices should be supplemented with habits of daily devotion that also take place in the context of families and other relationships.

³ Ibid. pg 149-152

⁴ Smith, James. K.A. "Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, And Cultural Formation. Vol.1. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.2009. Pg 179-185.

⁵ Smith, James. K.A. "Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, And Cultural Formation. Vol.1. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.2009. Pg 220

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