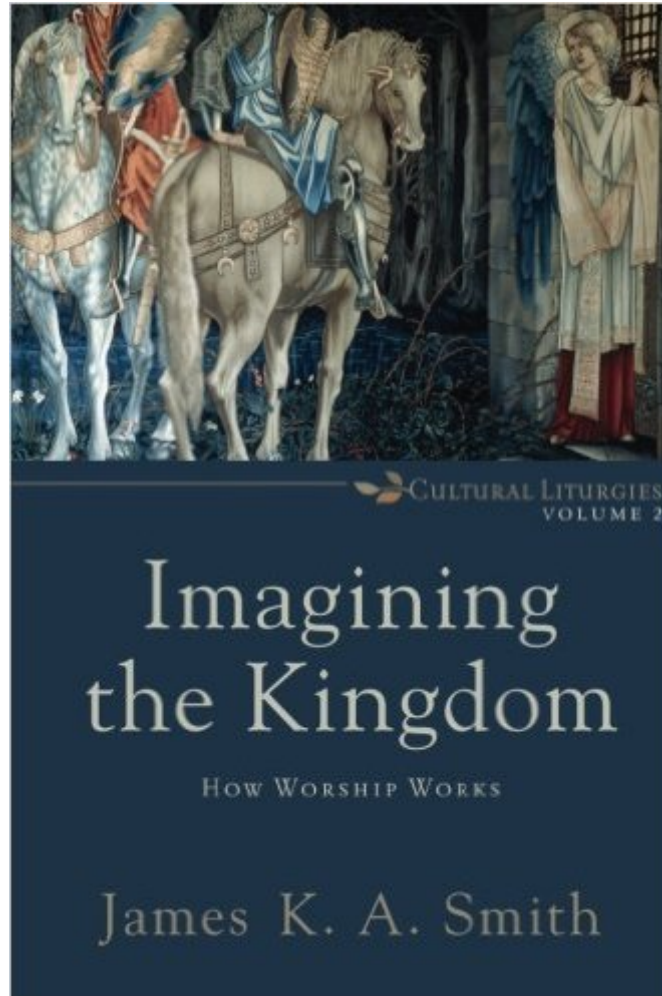


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Imagining The Kingdom: How Worship Works (Cultural Liturgies)



Synopsis

In the second of a three-volume theology of culture, a leading Reformed philosopher shows how worship works in shaping us through liturgical practices.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Let me start with as clear an admonition as I can: This is a book that every Christian should read. That is, everyone would benefit from the argument here, and find something to encourage his or her Christian walk. It's not a simple read - I'm not sure everyone would love it, or understand it - but this, like the first volume, *Desiring the Kingdom*, covers critical ground of what it means to worship, why we do what we do, or should do what we should do. Smith's underlying argument is that human beings are feeling, emotional, affective beings, shaped and molded by our actions and arts. He pushes against the dominant intellectualist, "world view" approach to the Christian life that says our doctrines and knowledge are the bedrock on which faithful Christian life exists or from which action inevitably flows. In this second volume of a planned three volume set, Smith focuses on the practices of worship, and how worship serves (or should serve) as a set of, context for, and arrangement of practices that orient us as individuals and communities towards loving, serving and knowing God. As a cultural anthropologist teaching at a Christian college, these have been the waters in which I have been swimming for a long time, and I am profoundly grateful for a text that makes this point so wonderfully. I am particularly appreciative of Smith's extensive use of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, an anthropologist and social theorist I have also found enormously helpful in my

own research and teaching on Christian life.

Imagining the Kingdom is the second volume of a projected trilogy by James K.A. Smith called Cultural Liturgies. In the first book, *Desiring the Kingdom* (which I have not read, but Smith gets the reader up to speed in the early parts of this book), Smith argued that humans are primarily shaped more by the imagination than the intellect. It is the stories we inhabit, and not the arguments we believe, that give our lives purpose. In other words, "we don't think our way through to action; much of our action is not the outcome of rational deliberation and conscious choice. 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." We are shaped by the liturgies that tell attractive (not attractive in the sense of "pleasant," but rather "resonant") stories and fuel our imaginations, whether those liturgies are secular or religious: "Through a vast repertoire of secular liturgies we are quietly assimilated to the earthly city of disordered loves.... So we toddle off to church or Bible study week after week ... without realizing that we spend the rest of the week making bread for idols (Jer. 7:18)." In this book, Smith looks specifically at what that insight means for the practices of worship and Christian education. The book comes in two parts. In part 1, the theoretical part of the book, Smith walks the reader through expositions of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu, asking what their theoretical models of how we are formed might mean for how we worship. In part 2, the practical part, Smith talks explicitly about how the theory discussed in part 1 reframes Christian formation and gives a fresh understanding of how worship works.

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