



Teaching Math Classically with Andrew Elizalde

Lesson 11: Taking a Liturgical Audit

Outline:

“Liturgical audit” is a term used by James K. Smith at the Society for Classical Learning Conference in San Antonio. James K. Smith suggested we ought to look back at our own practices (the rhythms and routines, the habits we have, those structures that inform how we interpret things) and examine them or do an audit of our liturgy—some obvious and some implied—the liturgies of our lives and our practice, even in the school setting.

- See Smith’s works *Desiring the Kingdom*, *Imagining the Kingdom*, and *Teaching and Christian Practices*, coedited with David Smith.

Habitus is the notion that in teaching we are exercising a transformative or a formative art, not just an information project. We are not just info dumping.

In *Imagining the Kingdom*, Smith suggests that we as educators have often focused on what we think and believe over the centrality and primacy of what we love.

- We are not just disseminating information to students.
- We’ve convinced the intellect rather than recruited the imagination.
- As Anthony Esolen puts it, “We want to stupefy them with information without form.”

Education can’t be only about imparting information. Students must be transformed.

- Often students are formed at the level of habits and routines.
- For example:
 - narratives or scripts we participate in
 - daily routines
 - habits of morning devotions

Role as teachers: impacting the people our students become. Our rhythms form their character, how they process and approach new ideas.

According to Smith, *liturgies* are compressed, repeated narratives that are performed over time that conscript us into the story they tell.

- What we are saying about ourselves as we repeat these routines and engage in these habits.



Smith, in *Imagining the Kingdom*, says: “. . . 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 their worship practices.”

- Smith quotes Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Logic of Practice*... *Habitus* is “the theory of practice as practice insists.”
 - not positive materialism nor intellectual idealism
- This language “has a philosophical echo that reverberates from Aristotle’s account of virtue, in which habits are those dispositions that incline us toward a certain end.”
- *Habitus* is a system for the habitual way we can structure our world.
- It’s about actions rather than mere observations.

Etienne Wenger, in *Communities of Practice: The Learning of Meaning and Identity*, speaks of

- processes that interact to shape communities of practice
- as these processes work together, community members become aligned as they develop behaviors with meaning for the group
- developing a set of behaviors based on shared imagination, goals for goods, and why they pursue them

What are the implications of our routines? What stories are we telling? How do students interpret meaning based on this?

- **Liturgical audit: How do the structures and routines of our school influence how students think?**
 - Classes
 - separate subjects
 - equal intervals of time
 - values, credits, grades, Carnegie units
 - Bells
 - marking beginning and end
 - “off” then “on,” then “off” again
 - Are subjects integrated, or are they separate, in different compartments in the brain?
- Possibilities:
 - Discontinue bells?
 - Let teachers watch the clock and determine end and beginning of period.
 - Students are ready to go from the start, or valuing a teacher’s conclusion over the exact end of the period.
 - Revisit the master schedule?
 - How often do students look at or interact with each other rather than the teacher?
 - How is the furniture arranged and what does it suggest?



- Harkness table
- Horseshoe shape of desks
 - Do students have enough time at lunch to rest and interact over a meal?
- What does classroom décor or the “wallpaper” say?
 - Are the posters framed? Ripped and wrinkled?
 - aesthetics of the classroom
- What does students’ body posture say?
 - Role of prayer before studying
 - Humility before God?
 - Respect for learning together?
- Must we blitz through books?
 - Can we read slowly and contemplatively?
 - David Smith in *Teaching and Christian Practices*: Can we accept that we won’t cover “everything”?
- Is it possible to design a school day with solitude and silence built in?
 - Is the day too full of noise?
- Are our classrooms too compartmentalized?
 - Can the school’s very architecture be saying something we don’t want it to?
- As teachers, ask what regular practices we have that are informing and forming the way students think about education. How are they interpreting the concepts we teach?

Time stamp 22:00, Andrew’s speech “Marked Not for Human Consumption” (spring 2007): (references the Chris McCandless story, *Into the Wild*; Tyler Durden in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*; Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*)

- The speech is about a student who tells his feelings about his school experience, numbly stuck repeating routines day after day, rushing through “learning” and activities with very little time for contemplation or rest or meaningful interaction with others.

As teachers, we need to reconsider such routines for our students:

- engage students’ hearts
- examine how our own routines and roles for forming how students think about the world
- find the balance between intellect and imagination
- recapture the importance of leisure

Richard Riesen in *The Academic Imperative*:

- We may need to do less, but do it better.
- Can students produce good work with the schedule we give them? How do they have time?
- quality over quantity



- role of athletics and co-curriculars

Try small changes to tweak schedules or homework load to slow down our students' lives.

- Consider the perspectives of these two books:
 - Alphonse Kohn, *The Homework Myth*
 - Harris Cooper, *The Battle over Homework*
- Kurt Shaefer in his chapter in *Teaching and Christian Practice* talks about how he refined his way of assigning homework.
 - The overwhelming number of practice problems students often have for homework can dull their understanding.
 - He suggests fewer and better assignments.
- Sadly, students don't always go home to silence and solitude these days but rather to social media.

Challenge: How can we, as ambassadors of Christ, show what we value through our school routines, and teach students to think rightfully about their world?