

Christian Formation Workshop: Concluding Remarks

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An Interdependence Exercise

With gratitude to

Eff and Patti Martin

Aronson Family Foundation

The Templeton World Charity Foundation

John Templeton Foundation

Kingdomworks SDG Foundation

Stephen and Lauren Baker

David and Shelly Goodnight

Grace Griffin

Paul and Joanne Poelstra

Bill and Joanie Tankersley

Clayton and Angi Tuffnell

Willard Family

Westmont College, President Gayle Beebe

The Martin Institute staff—Steve Porter, Mike Di Fuccia, Mariah Velasquez, and Beth Cook



Workshop Consensus and Major Theme

Formation is deeply and thoroughly **relational**

relational pedagogy

second-person experience

reciprocating selves, self-giving love

Incarnational practices

receptivity

friendship

apprenticeship

and more...



A Theologically Richer View of Virtue Formation

- The **means**: cooperation with the Holy Spirit (co-agency)
- The **content**: Christlike character traits
- The **end**: communion—a love relationship with God the Father and with others



Formation IN relationship, FOR relationship

THREE MODELS of FORMATION

Model 1: “Synergistic” formation—
our agency plus the Spirit’s supernatural work in us
receptivity and responsibility



Model 2: Not enough of our agency engaged—manipulated or influenced
as passive instruments by others—advertising and algorithms

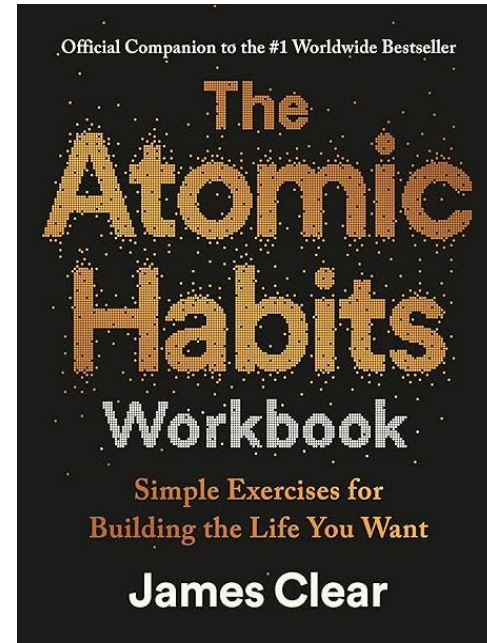
Model 3: Too much dependence on human agency—no divine agency—
self-perfection project

DIY formation: Self-Help Culture

A Competing Model of Character Improvement

- shallow version: motivational self-improvement in popular culture
- serious version: character education, virtue ethics, neo-Stoicism

potential or capacity → practice a virtue-activity → perfected character*
part of a “successful-and-happy-life” package (of choice)



*It may enable common goods and civic life, but this is more of an after-thought for us than for Aristotle

*Sometimes virtues are seen as merely instrumentally valuable for *any* end

Christian Formation: “WE, not ME”

Human capacity →
and incapacity

Created in love

Bear God’s image

Made for relationship

Sin as broken communion

Spiritual exercises →

“being with,”

“receptivity,”

cooperation with

the Holy Spirit

Christlike virtue →

exemplified

in the Body

Telos: shared life

fitness for

communion

with God and

neighbor

Relational identity

Spirit-empowered

Grace-enabled

Corporately held

Supernatural friendship

A fellowship of family



The Theater

- stories and pictures of happiness
- imaginative, embodied visions of beauty and goodness
- advertising and algorithms (the world on our screens):
“the good life”



The Gymnasium & Stadium

- Self-help/self-mastery culture, life-hacking, influencers
- Competitive achievement
- Sports as metaphor for “peak personal performance”
- “What I do”



The Agora or Marketplace

- acquiring/possessing
- financial success and security
- influence via economic power
- “What I buy, What I own”



The Temple

- Resolution for suffering and need
- Places to find meaning and healing
- Therapy and medicine
- “Where I look for wholeness”



Relational Formation is Countercultural

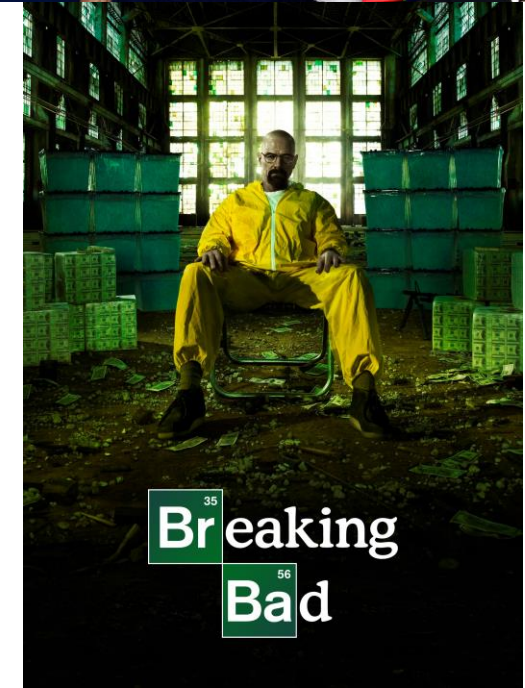
- Time-intensive
 - Personnel-intensive
 - Attention-intensive
 - Cooperative
 - Transcendence and teleology
 - **Result: a relationship-rich way of life**
- Not efficient
 - Not dehumanized
 - Not automated
 - Not individualistic
 - Not mere technique
 - Not mechanistic
 - Not aimed at products or achievements

Non-Reductive View of the Person

Resist forms of transformation that are non-agential (addictive, manipulative), depersonalized or dehumanizing (“hacking”, instrumentalized view of body & brains), and lack any sense of sacredness, meaning, or value beyond “the immanent frame”.

On a Relational Model of Formation

- Pay attention to **personal presence**
Encounters with persons
Being known and loved
Friendship
- Pay attention to the “**polis**” (life together)
Community-building
Social dynamics, structures, expectations
Places and spaces that shape us



Attention to Spaces

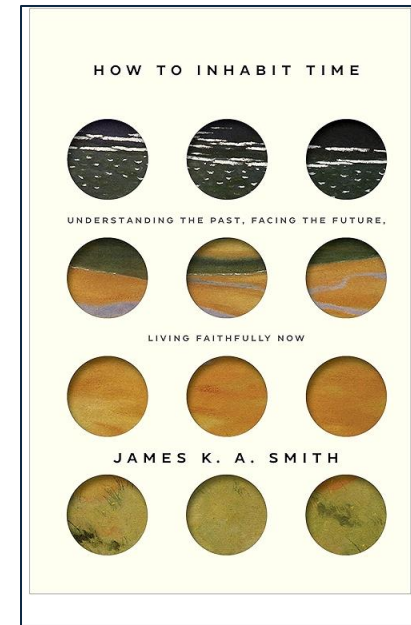
Training, time, teachers...and a
“training ground.”

“You need a neighborhood.”

- The “ZIP code argument”
- “Social architecture”: create and curate good default pathways



Attention to Time



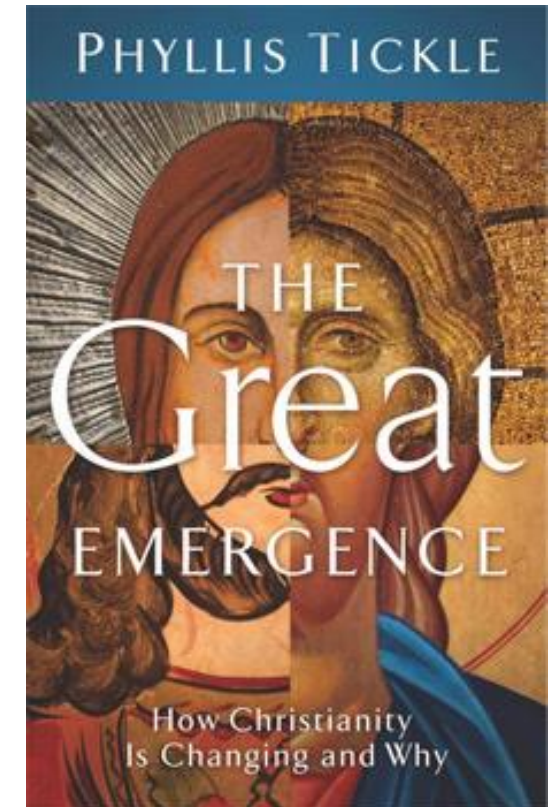
Where are we located in **history**?

Which **chapter** of the Christian story are we inhabiting?

How does that impact the “form” of formation?

Transformation fits the time in between the “now” of Christ’s redemption and the “not yet” of new creation.

Formative practices draw power from inherited past but must also adapt to future needs and circumstances.



Faithful Formation for our age

- The early church—ultimate loyalties in a clash of kingdoms
- Christianized empire—how to wield worldly power well
- Monastic memory—holding onto hope in dark times
- Etc.

What is the context and task we confront today?

How will our formation and transformation enable us to carry out that calling in Christlike ways?

Draw on history (faithfully remember and learn from our inheritances)

For rightly calibrated engagement now (loving presence in the present)

With an eschatological eye (hopeful imagination aimed at our ultimate end)

Belovedness, Becoming, Belonging

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

I Corinthians 12

In Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

Romans 12



My prayer is that...all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... in order that the love you have for me may be in them...

John 17