



# LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

SUMMER INSTITUTE

## The Gospel as Social Imaginary: Christian faith as 'know-how'

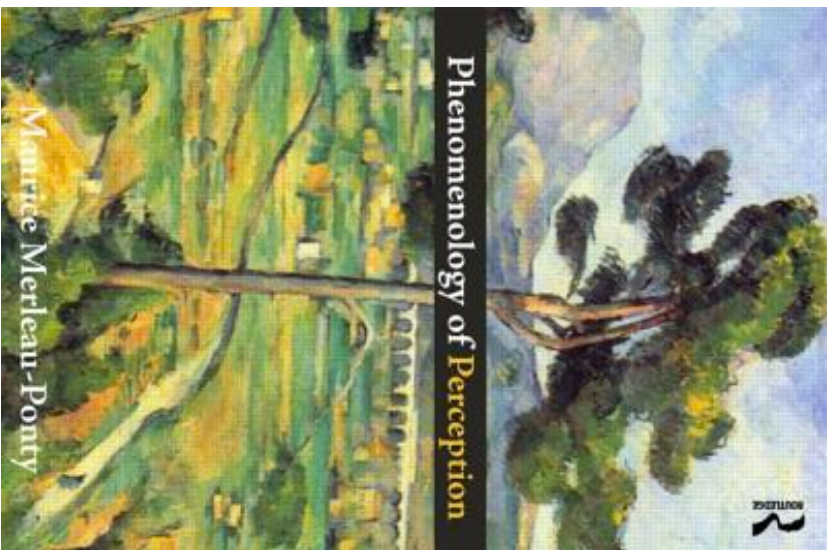
James K.A. Smith

12 July 2016

---



Knowing is *practical*



Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a “**praktognosia**,” which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my “symbolic” or “objectifying function.”

~Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 162.

We said earlier that it is the body which “understands” in the acquisition of habit. This way of putting it will appear absurd, if understanding is subsuming a sense-datum under an idea [the traditional “intellectualist” account of understanding], and if the body is an object.

***But the phenomenon of habit is just what prompts us to revise our notion of “understand” and our notion of the body.*** To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance—and the body is our anchorage in the world (*ibid.*, 167).

“Successfully returning a hard-served tennis ball requires what’s sometimes called ‘the kinaesthetic sense,’ meaning the ability to control the body and its artificial extensions through complex and very quick systems of tasks. English has a whole cloud of terms for various parts of this ability: feel, touch, form, proprioception, coordination, hand-eye coordination, kinaesthesia, grace, control, reflexes, and so on. For promising junior players, refining the kinaesthetic sense is the main goal of the extreme daily practice regimens we often hear about. The training here is both muscular and neurological. Hitting thousands of strokes, day after day, develops the ability to do by ‘feel’ what cannot be done by regular conscious thought.”

~David Foster Wallace, “Federer Both Flesh and Not”

Knowing is *communal*

# The Logic of Practice

Pierre Bourdieu

Every social order systematically takes advantage of the disposition of the body and language to function as depositories of deferred thoughts that can be triggered off at a distance in space and time by the simple effect of re-placing the body in an overall posture which *recalls* the associating thoughts and feelings, in one of the inductive states of the body which, as actors know, gives rise to states of mind.

~Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, (69).



One could endlessly enumerate the values given body, made body, by **the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy which can instill a whole cosmology**, through injunctions as insignificant as ‘sit up straight’ or ‘don’t hold your knife in your left hand,’ and inscribe the most fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of a culture in seemingly innocuous details of bearing or physical and verbal manners, so putting them beyond the reach of consciousness and explicit statement.”

“The cunning of pedagogic reason lies precisely in the fact that it **manages to extort what is essential while seeming to demand the insignificant**, such as the respect for forms and forms of respect which are the most visible and most ‘natural’ manifestation of respect for the established order, or the concessions of politeness, which always contain political concessions” (ibid.).

Knowing is *aesthetic*

**Temperament** is the primary requisite for the critic—a temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty. [...] To be purified and made perfect, this sense requires some form of exquisite environment. Without this it starves, or is dulled. You remember that lovely passage in which Plato describes how a young Greek should be educated, and with what insistence he dwells upon the importance of surroundings, telling us how the lad is to be brought up in the midst of fair sights and sounds, so that they beauty of material things may prepare his soul for the reception of the beauty that is spiritual. Insensibly, **and without knowing the reason why**, he is to develop that real love of beauty which, as Plato is never weary of reminding us, is the true aim of education.

~Wilde, “The Critic as Artist”



“For **the cultivation of temperament**, we must turn to the decorative arts: to the arts that touch us, not to the arts that teach us. [...] The art that is frankly decorative is the art to live with. It is, of all our visible arts, the one art that creates in us both mood and temperament. Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways. The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and masses becomes mirrored in the mind. The repetitions of pattern give us rest. The marvels of design stir the imagination. In the mere loveliness of the materials employed there are latent elements of culture” (Wilde, *ibid.*).



# LESLIE NEWBIGGIN

SUMMER INSTITUTE



# LESSLIE NEWBIGGIN

SUMMER INSTITUTE

Belonging to Believe:  
The Catechumenate as (Postmodern) Epistemology

James K.A. Smith  
12 July 2016



Sociologists have been telling us for a hundred years or more that the rationalization, pluralism, and mobility of modern life dissolve the bonds of tradition and community. This produces multitudes of men and women who are impelled, if they have religious yearnings, to embark on their own individual quests for symbols of transcendence. **The churches have become purveyors of this commodity rather than communities that socialize their members into coherent and comprehensive religious outlooks and forms of life.**





A comprehensive scheme or story used to structure all dimensions of existence is not primarily a set of propositions to be believed, **but is rather the medium in which one moves, a set of skills that one employs in living one's life.** Its vocabulary of symbols and its syntax may be used for many purposes, only one of which is the formulation of statements about reality.

Thus while a religion's truth claims are often of the utmost importance to it (as in the case of Christianity), it is, nevertheless, the conceptual vocabulary and the syntax or inner logic which determine the kinds of truth claims the religion can make. The cognitive aspect, while often important, is not primary.



Postliberal evangelism “resembles ancient catechesis more than modern translation. Instead of redescribing the faith in new concepts, it seeks to teach the language and practices of the religion to potential adherents. This has been the primary way of transmitting the faith and winning converts for most religions down through the centuries. In the early days of the Christian church, for example, it was the gnostics, not the catholics, who were most inclined to redescribe biblical materials in a new interpretive framework. **Pagan converts to the catholic mainstream did not, for the most part, first understand the faith and then decide to become Christians; rather, they process was reversed: they first decided and then they understood. More precisely, they were first attracted by the Christian community and form of life.**”



“The general point is that, provided a religion stresses service rather than domination, it is likely to contribute more to the future of humanity if it preserves its own distinctiveness and integrity than if it yields to the homogenizing tendencies associated with liberal experiential-expressivism. The conclusion is paradoxical: **Religious communities are likely to be practically relevant in the long run to the degree that they do not first ask what is either practical or relevant,** but instead concentrate on their own intratextual outlooks and forms of life. ”



# LESLIE NEWBIGGIN

SUMMER INSTITUTE