ABSTRACT

Knowing the Way: Scriptural Imagination and the Acts of the Apostles

by

Amanda Jo Pittman

Date: 4-27-2016

Approved:

Fred P. Edie, Supervisor

Brittany E. Wilson

Susan Eastman

Craig Dykstra

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I offer a pedagogical proposal for learning the Christian Scriptures guided by respect for the nature of the reader and the integrity of the biblical text. Christian educators have profitably developed recent theoretical interest in the body’s role in human meaning with regard to worship and praxis methodologies, but the implications of this research for communal study of the biblical text merit further development. I make the case for adopting scriptural imagination as the goal of pedagogically constructed encounters with the Christian Scriptures. The argument proceeds through a series of questions addressing both sides of the text/reader encounter.

Chapter one considers the question “what is the nature of the reader and, subsequently, the shape of the reader’s ways of knowing?” This investigation into recent literature on the body’s involvement in human knowing includes related epistemological shifts with Christian education. On the basis of this survey, imagination emerges as a compelling designator of an incorporative, constructive creaturely capacity that gives rise to a way of being in the world. Teachers of Scripture who intend to participate in Christian formation should account for the imagination’s centrality for all knowing. After briefly situating this proposal within a theological account of creatureliness, I make the initial case for Scriptural imagination as a pedagogical aim.

Imagination as creaturely capacity addresses the first guiding value, but does this proposal also respect the integrity and nature of the biblical text, and specifically of biblical narratives? In response, in chapter two I take up the Acts of the Apostles as a
potential test case and exemplar for the dynamics pertinent to the formation of imagination. Drawing on secondary literature on the genre and literary features of Acts, I conclude that Acts coheres with this project’s explicit interest in imagination as a central component of the process of Christian formation in relationship to the Scriptures.

Chapters three and four each take up a pericope from Acts to assess whether the theoretical perspectives developed in prior chapters generate any interpretive payoff. In each of these chapters, a particular story within Acts functions as a test case for readings of biblical narratives guided by a concern for scriptural imagination. Each of these chapters begins with further theoretical development of some element of imaginal formation. Chapter three provides a theoretical account of practices as they relate to imagination, bringing that theory into conversation with Peter’s engagement in hospitality practices with Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18. Chapter four discusses the formative power of narratives, with implications for the analysis of Paul’s shipwreck in Acts 27:1-28:16.

In the final chapter, I offer a two-part constructive pedagogical proposal for reading scriptural narratives in Christian communities. First, I suggest adopting resonance above relevance as the goal of pedagogically constructed encounters with the Scriptures. Second, I offer three ways of reading with the body, including the physical, ecclesial, and social bodies that shape all learning. I conclude by identifying the importance of scriptural imagination for Christian formation and witness in the twenty-first century.
Dedication

To Tim, the love of my life.
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Introduction

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Leaving aside for a moment what precisely Philip meant when he asked the Ethiopian eunuch this question (Acts 8:30), this same question posed in relationship to the Scriptures drives my intellectual curiosity and my sense of vocation. In my practice as a teacher of Scripture in the academy and in churches, I regularly ask my fellow readers one of many forms of this question. Do you understand what you are reading? What does this mean? As a scholar of Christian education, I spend my research hours seeking to understand the assumptions, concerns, commitments, and hopes that undergird the way people answer that question.

The question “Do you understand what you are reading?” has two fundamental presuppositions, one about the nature of understanding and the other about the text that is understood. Theological anthropology and epistemology, exegesis and hermeneutics intertwine here, as I believe they do in every context of Christian education whether recognized as operative or not. Stated more baldly, every encounter with the Scriptures presupposes often-implicit understandings of what kind of creatures read the text and what kind of text they read.

Contexts and processes of Bible study in my own experience have instantiated quite different answers to this question. As a pint-sized Bible Bowl champion, I implicitly comprehended that understanding what I was reading meant getting the facts

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1 I am a member of the churches of Christ, a conservative Protestant free-church tradition which arose from the Stone Campbell Movement on the American Frontier and historically emphasized Bible facts, the biblical basis for church practice and unity, and calling “Bible things by Bible names.” Gary Holloway and Douglas A. Foster, *Renewing God’s People: A Concise History of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2001), 109.
right. The resulting pedagogy typically involved close reading, identification and dissemination of the information therein, and an emphasis on memory verses and Bible trivia. In other developmental contexts, such as youth group, understanding what I was reading in the Bible meant being able to rightly discern the (typically restrictive) moral precept for application to my adolescent life. The resulting pedagogy frequently involved a persistent, often narratively reductive, search for the clear principle for application. In yet other contexts, understanding what I was reading meant identifying the psychological impact of the text – how does the text make me feel, or how do the characters in the text feel? Here, the text’s meaning primarily entails its capacity to comfort, confirm, and enhance self-esteem. Pedagogies corresponding to these concerns often use the biblical text either as a launching pad for a conversation that is more psychological than exegetical, or begin with “felt needs” and eventually, if briefly, locate a biblical passage that addresses those needs.

These diverse formative experiences with the Scriptures occurred across a number of contexts in my faith formation in my conservative, Southern, predominantly white free-church tradition, but the dynamics and questions that pertain are hardly limited to that context. Presuppositions about the nature of the text and the nature of the reader undergird encounters with Scripture in all contexts, whether or not participants recognize their impact. Moreover, these questions are justly formative and theologically weighty, meriting the attention of scholars and practitioners interested in Christian formation.

I propose that adopting Scriptural imagination as the orienting concern for a Christian community’s pedagogically constructed encounters with biblical narratives
provides a potent and appropriate means of respecting both the integrity of the biblical
text and the nature of learners as creatures of God. My exploration of this proposal begins
by considering a series of questions on both sides of the text-reader interaction. The
argument then takes a constructive turn, testing the viability and teasing out the
implications of this account of Christian formation in and through the Scriptures.

Chapter one considers the question “what is the nature of the reader and,
subsequently, the shape of the reader’s ways of knowing?” I first situate this project
within broader epistemological shifts toward recognition of the body’s role in meaning
within and beyond Christian education literature. After grounding my proposal in a
theological account of creatureliness, I claim that imagination is an
incorporative, constructive creaturely capacity that is central to meaningful and faithful Christian life.
Recent interest in “scriptural imagination” coheres with this theoretical account, and brief
attention to those proposals helps to clarify the relevant issues and complexities.

While most interest in Scriptural imagination takes a broad view of the biblical
text, in chapter two I consider the appropriateness of imagination as a lens for reading a
Considering both the literary features of the narrative and the relevant secondary
literature, I propose that Luke narrates dynamics of theological formation and communal
understanding in Acts. I further suggest that the narrative invites the reader to come to
certainty in a re-orienting way of knowing, and that the narrative does this in a manner
that coheres with this project’s express interest in imagination as part of the process of
Christian formation in relationship to the Scriptures.
With the dynamics of the imagination and its viability as a lens for interpreting Acts established, it remains to be seen whether the concern has any interpretive or formative payoff. In chapters three and four, I take up a particular pericope from Acts as a test case and exemplar for readings of biblical narratives that seek the formation of scriptural imagination. Peter’s encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18 and Paul’s shipwreck on Malta in Acts 27:1-28:16 constitute the texts under consideration. Both pericopes significantly and thematically connect with the overarching narrative of Acts, and both also narrate embodied and affective, narratival and practical elements of the Christian life. Chapter three employs the theoretical discussion about the formative nature of practices to suggest that Peter undergoes a transformation of the imagination through the co-operation of bodily, rational, and communal ways of knowing. Chapter four argues that Paul evinces a persistent Christological imagination in the midst of the shipwreck, communicated through the narrative interaction and affective resonance of the story and consonant with narrative formation. The integrative analysis in these chapters demonstrates the resonance of these formational concerns with these biblical narratives.

In chapter five, I make a constructive turn and develop some implications for Christian formation in congregational encounters with Scripture. I return to the proposed concerns with the nature of the reader as creature and the integrity of the biblical text that support the proposed focus on scriptural imagination. I suggest two approaches to biblical narratives in the context of communal Bible study. First, I argue that resonance, rather than relevance, should function as educator’s orienting concern. Second, I suggest three ways of reading with the body that entail visceral as well as rational exegesis.
Scriptural imagination is a necessary element of the church’s life, as it involves everything from the day-to-day interactions of Christian bodies, to the complex negotiations of Christian identity in changing cultural contexts, to eschatological hope. On these matters the narrative of Acts, with its account of the movement of the Way into new contexts, has much to teach the twenty-first century Western church. The orienting concern with scriptural imagination as an outcome of communal engagement with the Scriptures has the benefit of both respecting and attending to the integrity of the biblical narratives in Acts given to the church and the creatureliness of the community to which such biblical texts are given. Though this specific consideration limits its scope to the book of Acts, it is my hope that the implications of this study will extend to other biblical narratives and result in further insights for scriptural pedagogies. The success of this proposal, and its potential benefit for other narratives, will be the reader’s to decide.
1. Imagination as Incorporative Creaturely Capacity

This first chapter considers the anthropological side of the reader-text encounter, namely the nature and capacities of the human creatures who gather in Christian communities in hopes of being Christianly formed by their study of biblical narratives. Christian educators, as well as philosophers, have explored these questions about the nature of the person as learner for millennia, and recent decades have brought increased interest in the bodily nature of human persons as a component of knowing. In the course of this chapter, I define and adopt the term “creature” as part of a theological account of the learner, grounding that terminology in the Scriptures while drawing on recent research on the relationship between embodiment and understanding. I further propose that, given the kind of creatures we are and the Christians we hope to become, imagination is a central category for the task of Christian formation. Recent accounts of imagination define it as a fundamental, interstitial human capacity that gives rise to deep ways of construing and responding to the world in which we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Since imagination, like all aspects of human life, stands beset by sin, a full account of it requires attention to the deformation of the imagination and its need for transformation.

Christian theology across the centuries maintains that the Scriptures provide a central means by which God makes salvation in Jesus Christ known. In the final section, I make the case that pedagogical concern for the imagination is broadly consonant with the Scriptures themselves, attending to recent literature on scriptural imagination. Recent accounts of scriptural imagination provide ample opportunity to establish some
fundamental claims about Scripture that support this account. This first chapter, therefore, provides the theoretical and theological foundations for the following chapters by setting forth an account of the imagination within Christian formation.

1.1 Visceral Knowing and Bodily Meaning

It is both obvious and significant that every educational account presupposes some understanding of the nature of the person who learns. Such understandings vary, sometimes considerably, across time and culture. A strict and hierarchal division between body and mind commonly recurs in these accounts, rising to particular prominence during the Enlightenment.\(^1\) According to this framework, whatever role the body has in understanding, such as its role in the collection of sensory data, actual understanding requires the rational capacities of the mind operating in modes superior to – and even opposed to – the body. A primary concern for objective truth, abstracted information, and pure reason govern the goals of teaching and learning. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, however, a number Western Christian educators and other thinkers have increasingly come to resist the dominance of Cartesian frameworks for understanding the person as learner, that is, frameworks that allot primacy of place to reason, cognition, and information.

Across the centuries, Christian thinkers have frequently preserved the body/mind hierarchy, though sometimes adding additional components or nuances.\(^2\) Some models of Christian education, like the “religious instruction” model, preserve a concern for the transmission of information that is largely characteristic of reason-centered approaches to education.\(^3\) A number of other models of Christian education have arisen, however, that conceive of the learner in more holistic ways. Jack Seymour’s taxonomy of Christian education identifies six models, which locate the formational center of gravity in, for example, spiritual pilgrimage, praxis methodologies, or socialization in the community of faith.\(^4\) Contemporary Christian educator Thomas Groome defines the learner as an “agent-subject-in-relation,” a designation reflective of his integration of phenomenology, pragmatism, and praxis methodologies.\(^5\) Following the significant work of Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, recent discussions in Christian education focus specifically on the role of corporal, corporate practices in the formation of Christian faith and life.\(^6\)

These approaches reflect a broad epistemological shift to a more holistic conception of the knower that increasingly characterizes discussions within as well as far beyond the field of Christian education. In more recent discussions, which frequently

\(^2\) Augustine and Aquinas both preserved the hierarchy inherent in Aristotle’s view of the person, though their accounts added a basic theological gloss to those accounts. Ibid., 49.

\(^3\) This model takes the secular schools as its model, with an emphasis on the teacher as an instructor tasked with the transmission of information. Jack L. Seymour, “Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education,” in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education*, ed. Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 4.

\(^4\) See summaries on Ibid., 8–9.

\(^5\) Groome provides a helpful summary of these historical shifts in the dominant epistemology. Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 38–84.

include research in neuroscience and other sciences of mind, human learning and knowledge is fundamentally embodied, affective, relationally dependent, and emergent from the body’s engagement with the environment. The supposedly higher capacity of abstract reasoning is, while still important, actually secondary and derivative. Moreover, bodily forms of knowing are irreducible and irreplaceable, which is to say that rational, cognitive ways of knowing cannot supplant them or encompass them. A small sampling of this conversation introduces the need for an explicitly Christian account of those realities and establishes the theoretical grounds for prioritizing the imagination.

1.1.1 The Role of the Body in Secular Thinkers

Philosopher Mark Johnson takes extensive issue with the “cognitive propositional view of meaning,” by which he means the assumption that bodily and mental process are separate. Stated differently, he challenges the long prevailing view that percept and cognition are distinct from one another. Quite the contrary, he argues, for rational processes do not receive “raw data” from the body, strip it of its dependence on the body and marshal it in support of objective, abstractly rational conclusions. Instead, all understanding operates primarily (as in, first and most essentially) on the basis of a “take” on the environment that is preconsciously shaped in and by affective response to it.\(^7\) Furthermore, the way in which individuals come to personally engage the physical

\(^7\) In other words, emotion “colors” every act of perception. This is true, Johnson says, whether the emotion is “felt,” that is, recognized by the conscious mind, or not. He uses the preconscious visceral response to certain environmental features as an illustration of this reality. The emotions can be formally recognized – “I feel this way in this place for this reason” – but they remain effective whether or not they are identified and articulated. Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, Paperback ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 61.
world and relate to other agents in it takes shape through common, bodily participation in that environment. Johnson employs studies in attachment theory and the mimetic nature of the relationship between young children and their caregivers to demonstrate the continuity of “immanent, pre-conceptual, and non-propositional” forms of meaning across all of human life.8

Consequently, the fundamental way in which persons know, learn, and respond to the world is through “body-based intersubjectivity.” This “being with others via bodily expression, gesture, imitation, and interaction” is, Johnson says, “constitutive of our very identity from our earliest days, and it is the birthplace of meaning.”9 “Conceptual metaphors” provide a further example of the persistent dependence of rational, analytical capacities on the body’s engagement with the world. The metaphors that govern our highest order reasoning depend for their efficacy on a resonance that arises from the engagement of our bodies with the physical environment.10 His embodied theory of learning, in which the “character and significance of persons’ interaction with their environment” largely comprises human meaning, raises an important challenge to information-centered educational proposals.11 Consequently, an account of what it means

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8 Johnson claims that all adults are still “big babies” in that the formational processes engaged in infancy remain active in some form across all of life. Ibid., 34. This claim is corroborated by Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 72.
10 Johnson states that such a primary metaphor, which is the root of abstract, conceptual thinking “is based on an experiential correlation between a particular sensorimotor domain and some domain pertaining to a subjective experience or judgment.” Ibid., 178. To take one example, it is our bodies’ experience of being small and of falling that give the statement “I feel down” its meaning. This metaphor is one example of the “systematic mapping from body-based, sensorimotor source domains onto abstract target domains.” Ibid., 176.
to know and to learn “must attend to these various different areas of our body-mind existence,” including social relationships and visceral comportment.\textsuperscript{12}

Other philosophical accounts echo Johnson’s concern with the social body in learning, including and extending beyond the pragmatist philosophers that Johnson employs.\textsuperscript{13} Charles Taylor’s concept of the “social imaginary” and Bourdieu’s concept of the \textit{habitus} constitute roughly analogous forms of insistence on the social body’s power to shape the enacted understandings of individual biological and phenomenological bodies. Taylor’s “social imaginary” refers to the way people “imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.”\textsuperscript{14} This form of social understanding operates tacitly, and participation in the practices and relations of a particular social body generates and regenerates it. In other words, through participation within a larger social body, socially shared meanings and expectations become instantiated in an individual’s understanding. Bourdieu’s \textit{habitus} refers to a “system of structured, structuring dispositions” governing social life.\textsuperscript{15} Akin to a “feel for the game,” \textit{habitus} entails the \hfill

\textsuperscript{12} Johnson’s account of the body is multi-faceted, including both the physical and phenomenological body along with the social and cultural body. The physical body refers to the body as biological organism; ecological body refers to the organism/environment interaction; phenomenological body refers to the body in lived experience; the social body refers to “intersubjective relations and coordinations of experience; the cultural body refers to all artifacts, institutions, etc, that constitute culture.” Ibid., 278. I return to this multi-part account of the body in chapter five.

\textsuperscript{13} Pragmatist educational philosophers Dewey and James feature prominently in his discussion. He draws explicitly on Dewey’s interest in the relationship between reasoning and the body and James insistence that precept and concept were not separate entities but rather reside on the same continuum. Ibid., 117.


\textsuperscript{15} Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{The Logic of Practice} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 52.
tacit, bodily meanings that shape what an individual within a community sees as possible or impossible, good or ill. Here again, the social body inculcates ways of relating, knowing, and construing on an individual level that, while powerful, often operate tacitly or below the level of conscious awareness.

Ian McGilchrist shares Johnson’s concern with the reclamation of pre-conceptual, non-propositional, and relational forms of meaning in *The Master and His Emissary*. McGilchrist’s ostensibly more narrow interest in reframing the relationship between the brain’s two hemispheres eventually moves to much broader implications for human meaning and culture. He argues that the brain’s two hemispheres have fundamentally different ways of engaging reality. The right hemisphere primarily governs the preconscious and sensorimotor awareness of the world on which our analytical capacities depend; it is the proprietor of Gestalt perception, perception akin to a picture slowly, then suddenly, coming into focus. This hemisphere’s mode of engaging the world is deeply relational, bearing primary responsibility for attachment and empathy, and yielding “a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world . . . and to this world it exists in a relationship of

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16 Ibid., 66.
17 McGilchrist explicitly rejects accounts that try to differentiate the hemispheres on the basis of “what” that they do, arguing that they actually engage the world with a fundamentally different “how.” He notes that the right brain is typically associated with artistic functions, while the left-brain is associated with rational operations; in colloquial terms, this is what people mean when they say that they are “right-brained” or “left-brained”. This form of bifurcation is challenged by research into various forms of neurodiversity. Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 93.
18 Ibid., 47.
McGilchrist likens right hemisphere perception to a circle, a process more generative of interconnection than utility or efficiency.\textsuperscript{19} By contrast, the left hemisphere makes selections from and re-presents the tacit, interwoven perceptions of the right hemisphere, making them available for conscious analysis.\textsuperscript{20} The left hemisphere exerts primary control over focused attention and grasp, oriented by a concern for explicitness, control, and utility.\textsuperscript{21} It is also responsible for the development and employment of language, though not in all complexities of its use.\textsuperscript{22} Arrival at understanding, for the left hemisphere, is the assemblage of discreet, disconnected parts into some kind of system, a reflection of its interest in abstraction and analysis. While the right hemisphere’s take on the world can be metaphorically described as “musical,” the left’s take is more “mechanical.” If the right hemisphere’s perception could be imagined as a circle, the left’s perception is more like a line.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, McGilchrist distinguishes between the hemispheres on the basis of their respective ways of apprehending (a distinction of “how”) and not of functions (a distinction of “what”).\textsuperscript{24} He summarizes the relationship between those “hows” as follows: Gestalt perception of the world begins in the right hemisphere, then moves to the left hemisphere, which selects, articulates, analyzes, and interprets. Optimally, understanding then returns to the right hemisphere for reintegration. Often, he argues, the

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 174.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 447.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{23} While the left hemisphere deals with language, the right hemisphere’s tacit sense of context and interconnections is required for understanding humor, word play and irony. Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 446.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 3.
process gets truncated in the left hemisphere. When this happens, the results include a fragmented or disintegrated knowledge, an overly mechanistic understanding of the world that risks dehumanizing or objectifying aspects of the world as a means to an end, an unhelpful and dishonest overlooking of the body’s role in meaning, and a loss of critical emphasis on relationship and interconnectedness as central to human meaning.\(^\text{26}\) He suggests that the current historical era reflects just this eventuality, as it more highly values the products and processes of the left hemisphere than the right.

Like Johnson, McGilchrist offers an alternative to accounts of the person as knower that dis-emboby and dis-integrate knowledge by arguing for the primacy of tacit, affective, and bodily ways of apprehending the world. In his discussion of broad philosophical movements across history, he notes that the left hemisphere’s abstracted and more dis-embodied ways of knowing quite often carry the day, with countervailing philosophical, historical movements striving to recover an emphasis on tacit, aesthetic, and embodied ways of knowing.\(^\text{27}\) McGilchrist concludes his account by suggesting that any effective counteraction of the negative effects of the left hemisphere’s dominance requires a recovery of the body’s role in meaning.\(^\text{28}\) Specifically, he suggests emphasizing the value of myth, music and art, areas of life in which he considers

\(^{26}\) See his imaginative and fictional, yet eerily recognizable, description of the world as it would be if totally dominated by the left hemisphere. Ibid., 428.

\(^{27}\) McGilchrist also provides historical summaries that indicate the shift between periods in history when the two hemispheres seem to be well balanced (ancient Greece, the Renaissance, and the Romantic period) and periods in which the work of the left hemisphere began to dominate (later Roman period, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment). See chapters eight through twelve.

\(^{28}\) McGilchrist suggests that the “invisibility” of the right hemisphere’s work, which the left hemisphere seems to promote, is a major contributing factor with regard to its relative absence from so many accounts of the person as knower. McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 232.
religious traditions to be particularly exemplary. His compellingly written account has been critiqued for, among other things, its overly broad claims about history and philosophy, as well as his tendency to suppress contradictory evidence. Many of his suggestions, however, particularly as they relate to the lateralization of the brain and the fundamentality of the body, provide additional reinforcement to this more broadly supportive set of claims about the body’s role in meaning.

1.1.2 The Role of the Body in Christian Educational Accounts

Neither McGilchrist nor Johnson write from a religious perspective, and Johnson expresses overt suspicion regarding the extent to which his account of the meaning of the body coheres with traditional understandings of spirituality or the possibility of encounter with transcendence. Still, the insistence on locating meaning first and primarily in the body’s engagement with the social and physical environment resonates with recent accounts of Christian formation.

Warren Brown and Brad Strawn argue that, since human life is material through and through, the participation of the body in the environment and in relationship to other

29 Without making any claims to the truth status of the Christian mythos, he does suggest that it is exemplary of an attention to meaningful mythos that serves an important role in human understanding at both levels of our engagement with the world. The discussion will return to the formative role of a meaningful mythos or story in chapter 4. Ibid., 441.


bodies deeply shapes the life of faith.\textsuperscript{32} Like Johnson, they see all cognition as embodied and embedded, defining the “mind” as the emergent reality at the interaction of the body and the brain.\textsuperscript{33} Their account of Christian formation engages research in attachment theory, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience and insists on the necessity of the distinct form of sociality in the church and the role of bodily practices in Christian formation. On the basis of that claim, they give the Christian community primacy of place as a network of relationships and a form of sociality in which people begin to practice new patterns of relation that can ultimately come to shape their preconscious engagement with the broader world.\textsuperscript{34}

The most prominent voice in the current discussion, however, may belong to Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith.\textsuperscript{35} Smith rightly notes that “behind every


\textsuperscript{33} Given the plasticity of the brain and this fundamental co-operation, the mind refers to the shape of the brain as influenced by the body. As Warren Brown said in a recent plenary lecture, “if a human brain were in an elephant’s body, it would have a very different mind.” Warren S. Brown, “Christian Virtue as Embodied Cognition” (Society of Professors in Christian Education, Washington, D.C., October 16, 2014). See also Johnson, \textit{The Meaning of the Body}, 175.

\textsuperscript{34} For instance, persons come to understand their potential relationship to objects within their environment through interaction with other people – a phenomenon typically referred to as joint attention. This reality derives largely from the fundamentally mimetic nature of our relationships with others. Young children, for instance, will imitate the way older children or adults manipulate objects in their environment as part of joint attention, thus coming to establish an orientation to that object. Imitation is also a key aspect of attachment. The ways in which early caretakers relate to infants and young children come to establish patterns of expectation regarding the environment and other people – as fundamentally safe and reliable, or threatening and unreliable, for instance. These patterns of attachment influence us well into adulthood, and the mimetic aspects of our interactions continue as well. In sum, we depend on other people not just to see to our basic needs but also to open us to the world and form incipient understandings of what kind of world it is and what kinds of relationships and attachments it entails. Brown and Strawn, \textit{The Physical Nature of Christian Life}, 56–70.

\textsuperscript{35} Smith is a philosopher at Calvin College, whose recent work includes a trilogy of books that present “an invitation to re-vision Christian education as a formative rather than just an informative project.” James K. A. Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 18. The first two volumes receive attention here, while the third volume is still forthcoming.
pedagogy is a philosophical anthropology” and argues that viewing the person as a lover, rather than a thinker or believer, lays the groundwork for an educational approach that is formational rather than merely informational.\(^{36}\) Toward that end, Smith provides a “formal account of education as the formation of the imagination by affective practices.”\(^{37}\) “Cultural liturgies” provide the focal point of Smith’s first volume. These “rituals of ultimate concern” instantiate normative narratives through generative embodied practices. Participation in such practices shapes the affections, and consequently orient the lives of participants toward certain ends rather than others. In response, the Christian liturgy is a necessary context of counter-formation.\(^{38}\)

In the second volume, Smith builds on his “liturgical anthropology” by proposing a “Christian philosophy of action” that accounts for the centrality of the body and the pre-theoretical, affective drivers of human behavior. Narratives play a central role in his account of the formation of such pre-theoretical drivers. Narratives “train” emotions at the level of the body, and those emotions shape not only response to the world but also the more fundamental perception of it.\(^{39}\) As he aptly summarizes the point, “the way to

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., 27. At the end of this first book, he turns specifically to the Christian university as a context for this kind of holistic formation.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 34.

\(^{38}\) The Christian liturgy concretizes and materializes the formative narrative of the Christian faith by engaging the community in formative practices of worship. Smith provides his own “exegesis” of the practices of worship in a later chapter, suggesting the ways in which engagement in each of them might be formative of a certain imagination. In response to charges of naivety with regard to the formative power of the liturgy, Smith emphasizes the “dense and charged” nature of worship, adds that awareness of cultural liturgies can mitigate their formative power, and appeals to the broader practices of Christian life as support alongside the liturgy. Ibid., 207–209.

\(^{39}\) Smith pushes back against “intellectualist” accounts of action that suggest that all action is on the basis of conscious, rational choice. He claims instead that even basic ‘perception’ is imbued with evaluation. For that reason, emotional training affects the way in which we perceive, and the “emotional perceptual apparatus (which I am linking to the imagination) is significantly ‘trained’ by narrative.” James
the heart is through the body, and the way into the body is through story." He draws on both Bourdieu’s notion of the *habitus* and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of *praktognosia* in proposing that all being in the world lies between instinct and intellect. Our embodied, tacit orientation toward the world forms the basis for any conscious deliberation about that world, and such an orientation develops through practical, bodily participation. Again in this volume, he emphasizes in worship as a form of bodily counter-formation, describing it as “construal training” given its capacity to shape our embodied ways of knowing. Christians require, Smith contends, a “sanctifying of perception” through the “restor(y)ing of the imagination.”


Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 14.

This paradox is directly analogous to Johnson’s location of understanding between the body and reason, or in McGilchrist’s proposed interchange between the right and the left hemispheres. For discussion of Bourdieu’s *habitus* see the discussion near fn 15. *Praktognosia* in Merleau-Ponty’s account refers to the fact that “the motor experience of our body is not a particular case of knowledge; rather, it offers us a manner of reaching the world and the object . . . that must be recognized as original, and perhaps as originary. My body has its world, or understands its world without having to go through ‘representations’ or without being subordinated to a ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying function.’” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 141.

Smith states, “So the body carries a kind of acquired, habituated knowledge or know-how that is irreducible and unarticulable, and yet fundamentally orienting for our being-in-the-world.” Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 45.

Smith draws explicitly on Mark Johnson, concurring with Johnson’s commitments to the necessity of interconnected brains, bodies, and environments for understanding. He relates conceptual metaphors specifically to the embodied practices in worship, even suggesting that worship helps worshippers construct new conceptual metaphors. Ibid., 119-122. I am less convinced that worship gives us new conceptual metaphors, suspecting instead that worship provides us with new narratives and associations for existing conceptual metaphors.

Ibid., 160.
1.1.3 Critical Questions for Christian Formation

These theorists share a fundamental insistence on the dependence of all understanding, including abstract, rational cognition, on the body’s ways of knowing. These accounts broadly assume that bodily and mental processes are not separate but rather continuous and deeply interrelated. Visceral, affective orientation to the world deeply shapes the construal of the world on the basis of which persons reason.\(^45\) The body’s engagement in its physical and social environment deeply shapes the processes of interpreting events and creating meaning. Even abstract, metaphorical ways of thinking ultimately derive from experience as a body in the physical environment.\(^46\)

These important insights into the way persons come to construct and analyze conscious understanding raise critical questions for Christian educators. First, can we substantively ground this account of the person in the Christian tradition, especially since some of its resources are decidedly secular if not openly suspicious of religion?\(^47\) Smith, along with Brown and Strawn, appropriates these secular theories in their accounts of Christian formation, but both appropriations leave some substantive theological resources untouched.\(^48\) I suggest that a Christian account of human creatureliness provides an

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\(^{45}\) Johnson and McGilchrist attend to this most explicitly and thoroughly, but it is also a major feature of Smith’s account in that he describes the role of the affections primarily in terms of desire as a more orienting aspect of human life than rational choices.


\(^{47}\) McGilchrist sees general value in religious forms, like meaningful mythos or a religious aesthetic sensibility, while not granting religious truth claims. McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 441. Johnson is suspicious of any claim to “vertical spirituality,” that is, human relationship with a non-embodied reality called God. The best we can hope for, he suggests, is horizontal spirituality found in communities of like-minded people. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 281.

\(^{48}\) Neither Brown nor Strawn are theologians, and their account is theologically thin. They have a very high view of the church, and thus of the church’s contribution to the rehabilitation of our embodied
appropriate theological framework for this view of the person. As creatures of God, and even though all creation stands subject to the powers of Sin and Death as a consequence of the fall, humanity nonetheless stands under the possibility of redemption through the body of the Incarnate Christ (Rom 6:5-23).

First, however, we require a clarifying way of speaking about the coalescence of the relational and personal, affective and cognitive, conscious and preconscious operations in giving rise to our deep comprehension of the world. Bodily ways of knowing are certainly primary, yet conscious, constructive, creative processes remain fundamental to human experience and knowledge. At times, these accounts risk establishing an unhelpful dichotomy rather than a helpful distinction between these different capacities. 49 What stands in the gap between bodily ways of knowing and the and embedded minds. Brown and Strawn, The Physical Nature of Christian Life, 168. They have a correspondingly thin account of distorting and destructive role of sin as an ongoing reality within Christian communities, and they do not offer any substantial discussion of the work of the Trinitarian persons. Jamie Smith grounds his discussion of the rehabilitative potential of the embodied practices of the liturgy in sacramental convictions about the supercharged presence of the Spirit in the liturgy. What he offers, and claims to offer, however, is more accurately a philosophical anthropology. For discussion of sacramentality see Smith, Desiring the Kingdom, 139–144. For his discussion of the imago dei, see Ibid., 163.

rational accounts we give of them? What capacity of the human person permits and can integrate these diverse sources of human knowing in giving rise to a whole way of being in the world? The imagination identifies this capacity.\textsuperscript{50}

1.2 Imagination as Incorporative Capacity

Imagination describes the interstitial, integrative capacity that incorporates the rich, diverse forms of meaning engaged by the embodied creature. Imagination often appears in educational arguments and casual conversations with little to no definition, despite the fact that its connotations and categories have significantly varied as the term has been developed and employed across time. Recent literature on the imagination provides resources for some necessary definitional clarity.

Deeply subject to philosophical vicissitudes, imagination has garnered high praise in one period of history but deep suspicion in another, as Garrett Green ably demonstrates. For Kant and Hegel, imagination performed an important function as the means by which sense perception becomes available for formal cognitive operations.\textsuperscript{51} Despite other significant differences in their accounts, both thinkers agreed that “religion is imagination, and they both mean by this term that religious truth is inextricably linked

\textsuperscript{50} The next section provides a definition of capacity in the course of providing further definition of the imagination.

\textsuperscript{51} Green translates their use of the term Vorstellung as imagination, as opposed to Begriff or pure thought. For Kant, this use of the imagination contributed to a distinction between empirical religion and philosophical religion. The imagination was the means by which philosophical principles came into expression in empirical or positive religion. Garrett Green, Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 17.
with images dependent on sense experience.”\textsuperscript{52} Since, however, the ultimate goal is to move past dependence on sense experience to the realm of “pure thought,” imagination is penultimate and ultimately dispensable.

The Romantics, however, accorded primacy of place to imagination as an aspect of human experience and understanding.\textsuperscript{53} Coleridge differentiated the primary imagination, which is a necessary component of perception, from the secondary or “creative” imagination.\textsuperscript{54} Unlike Kant and Hegel, for whom reason ultimately surpassed all, imagination remained indispensable in Coleridge’s thought as the closest analogy to the divine creative spark. In his formulation, primary and secondary imagination, working in tandem, exercise “esemplastic” power – that is, the power to make into one or to unite what the primary imagination provides in secondary or creative ways.\textsuperscript{55} The Romantic’s respect for the imagination continues to influence modern scholars, like Christian educator Maria Harris, but such appreciative emphasis on the imagination was short-lived.

Imagination’s philosophical standing deteriorated in the later modern period in the hands of a series of thinkers who relegated it to a deeply subordinate status.\textsuperscript{56} In some accounts, imagination, especially when employed or invoked within the context of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} In many ways, this philosophical movement constituted a reaction to and development from the hard rationalism and left-brain dominance of the Enlightenment. McGilchrist, \textit{The Master and His Emissary}, 352.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Esemplastic is Greek compound term Coleridge coined. Ibid., 279. Green, \textit{Imagining God}, 19.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Green, \textit{Imagining God}, 24–27. See more substantive analysis of Feuerbach and Nietzsche in chapters four and five of Garrett Green, \textit{Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
\end{itemize}
religious discussions, functioned as an indication of fallacy, even malicious fallacy. In Feuerbach, imagination is not just contrasted to pure thought (Begriff), but to the truth itself, such that imagination “is the diametric opposite of “reality”; it is the origin of fiction and error.”\[^{57}\] For Marx, these religious constructs or imaginings were harmful tools of oppression in the hands of the economic elites.\[^{58}\] This understanding of imagination stands behind its equation with “flights of fancy”, which are characteristically cute in children, but hardly the purview of responsible adults.

If the prevailing definition of imagination in the later modern era held it to be the engine of the purely imaginary, Garrett Green suggests that the epistemic shifts associated with post-modernism create space for imagination’s recovery.\[^{59}\] The broad rejection of foundationalist understandings of truth claims correlates with a recovery of the indispensability of imagination to all human thought.\[^{60}\] Green locates the imagination at the level of “paradigm” and the organizing features of comprehension, such that “right interpretation depends on right imagination.” Green draws on Kuhn’s philosophy of science in connecting the imagination to the function of paradigms in arranging and interpreting, even when the operation of those paradigms goes unrecognized. What he calls the paradigmatic imagination operates at the level of gestalt perception, the tacit and

\[^{57}\] Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination*, 14.
\[^{58}\] Green, *Imagining God*, 24.
\[^{59}\] Green uses the term “post-modernism” descriptively as “a way of referring to the ‘nonfoundationalist’ situation that increasingly characterizes our cultural world” and the rejection of the Enlightenment appeal to universal norms. He differentiates this from “prescriptive post-modernism” as a hard philosophical position that “denies that texts have any determinate meaning of the kind that modernist interpreters presuppose.” Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination*, 8–9.
\[^{60}\] Part of Green’s project in *Imagining God* is to carve out a space for cooperative understandings between religion and science, in contrast to modern thinkers who consistently maintained strict boundaries between the two. Green, *Imagining God*, 77.
preconscious way in which a whole is more than the sum of its parts. 61 If even the interpretation of scientific “facts” takes shape through the employment of tacitly held interpretive paradigms, then religious and scientific ways of knowing are not as bifurcated as previously assumed. For Christians, he says, to “insist that our truth claims are not mediated by imagination is to claim unique exemption from the limits of bodily and historical existence to which our contemporaries are subject.” 62

Green frames this role of the imagination as internalized paradigm in terms of the hermeneutical imperative, the recognition that all of reality, including the scriptures, is subject to paradigm dependent interpretation. Importantly, for Green, the Scriptures are both the object of interpretation and the means of interpreting reality. In this latter sense, Scripture functions – or can function most fully - as the lens through which Christians interpret the world. 63 This function of scripturally formed imagination, then, is to tell us “what the world is like” in its broadest and deepest sense.” 64 Furthermore, a scripturally formed imagination helps us to see what the world can and will be like when God’s kingdom comes in its fullest, and, consequently, to see more clearly the ways in which the present reality departs from it.

61 Major scientific breakthroughs often coincide with paradigm shifts necessitated by increasing dissonance between the evidence and the existing paradigm within which the evidence ostensibly supports certain conclusions. Green also notes the more extent to which even “facts” are popularly perceived as “paradigm dependent.” Green, Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination, 17.
62 Ibid., 16.
64 Green, Imagining God, 79.
Since the publication of *Imagining God* in 1989, the conversation has continued to expand across a number of fields and through additional developments.\(^6^5\) Other theologians, Christian philosophers, and Christian educators have drawn upon these broader trends in providing new angles to the task of Christian formation. Much of this more recent literature, defines imagination in this broad and basic sense as a central, constructive human capacity that integrates the ways of knowing held by both the body and the mind, the conscious and unconscious, and the personal and social, in giving rise to a whole way of being in the world.

The imagination, thus described, is an interstitial and constructive capacity, integrating tacit and preconscious elements of embodied experience with conscious activities of reasoning, reflecting, remembering, perceiving, and projecting into the future. The “way of being” that arises from the work of the imagination includes rational comprehension, but also ways of seeing, desiring, construing, and acting. In this way, imagination serves as helpful shorthand for the holistic way of knowing that has been the concern of epistemic proposals hoping to move away from strict, Cartesian paradigms.\(^6^6\) Locating the imagination either exclusively in the conscious or pre-conscious realm of human experience actually distorts rather than clarifies its function. The imagination is as much the generator of the pre-conscious, “more than can be said” construal of the world as it is conscious creativity.


\(^6^6\) See discussion in section 1.2
Such a broad, integrative definition characterizes recent work on the imagination, including Trevor Hart’s account of imagination in relationship to theological aesthetics. Hart rejects conceptions of the imagination as “a discrete human organ or part to be set alongside the others (the will, the reason, the conscience, and so on) each having its own distinctive sphere of responsibility.” His preference for the term “capacity” rather than “faculty” reflects this resistance. He contends that imagination is not “some arcane ‘thing’ with carefully specified and limited remit,” but a “way of thinking, responding and acting across the whole spread of our experience.” Hart’s definition bears similarity to Green’s in its insistence on the broad function of imagination and its implication in the whole way of engaging reality.

Discussions among Christian educators echo the breadth of these accounts, in which imagination includes but is not limited to the capacity to “image” something that is not present to the senses. Paul Avis defines imagination as “the faculty that perceives connections, creates combinations, and extrapolates from those to new insights.” In his

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67 Emphasis in all quotes is original. In older scholarship depended upon faculty psychology, imagination is frequently discussed as a distinct organ. C.S. Lewis, for instance, described it as the “organ of meaning,” distinguished from the reason’s function as the “organ of truth.” C. S. Lewis, Selected Literary Essays, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 265. Green explicitly rejects the faculty psychology approach because his own definition of the imagination’s function identifies it as foundational to reasoning; he retains the word “faculty” but redefines it in its verbal sense of “ability to do something.” Green, Imagining God, 40. Hart reframes the organ analogy in a helpful way when he suggests that “the imagination is the psychical equivalent not of our appendix (which, when it becomes troublesome or painful, we can simply cut out and flush away without loss) but the blood supply which circulates things (both good and bad) around our entire body. The question facing us, therefore, is not so much whether we shall be imaginative as human beings, but how we shall be so.” Hart, Between the Image and the Word, 5.

68 The representational or “creative” elements of the imagination’s work are often the exclusive meaning in common sense uses of the term.
definition, imagination is both integrative and creative. Drawing on Coleridge and Newman in constructing his proposal, Avis suggests that metaphor, symbol, and myth function as the “language” of the imagination. Sarah Arthur, likewise, concludes that imagination refers to a fundamental integrative capacity by which persons “discover, process, and creatively express coherent meaning . . . [and] make connections between thought and experience, word and image, self and other, seen and unseen.” Here, the imagination explicitly includes the capacity to “creatively express coherent meaning” in ways that mediate between body and brain (thought and experience) as well as the personal and social (self and other).

In *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, which is now a landmark text in the conversation among Christian educators, Maria Harris describes imagination as the capacity that “binds into one (*einhaltungscraft*).” That integrative work includes “the

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69 Paul D. L. Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 41. Avis appears to use the term “faculty” here in the sense of faculty psychology, for he distinguishes imagination as something separate and apart from either “analytical reason” or “moral consciousness.” As stated above, I want to reject this compartmentalization in favor of an understanding of the broader, integrative understanding of the imagination.

70 Avis lacks Smith’s keen interest in embodiment, but both authors recognize that narratives have a particular power with respect to the formation of the imagination. Avis is particularly concerned to highlight the importance of myth, metaphor, and symbol because, in his assessment, they are generally consigned to secondary status. He claims that these three features of human meaning must be “taken seriously, though critically and with discrimination; second, informative or cognitive, as embodying genuine insight into reality, albeit an insight that is shaped and conditioned by the psychological, social, and cultural context; and finally, unsubstitutable or irreducible, that is to say, incapable of being translated into some supposedly ‘straight’ or literal and nonfigurative language.” Ibid., 11.


72 Arthur specifically names two significant challenges for faith formation in the present, postmodern moment: the loss of a communal story or metanarrative and the failure of the imagination “regarding the claims and demands of the Christian gospel.” She intends to reclaim the central role of the imagination for Christian faith, with particular emphasis on the role of stories – told in Scripture, summarized in the creeds, and enacted in liturgy – in the formation of the imagination. Ibid., 26.
intellectual, conceptual, and mental powers associated with the mind and the incarnational, corporeal, and physical capacities associated with the body.” Her description explicitly reflects the power of the imagination in mediating between brain and body in a way that coheres with other descriptions surveyed.

In contrast to these broader definitions, Smith locates imagination primarily at the preconscious or pre-theoretical level, as a feature of human life more akin to Merleau-Ponty’s praktognosia or Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus. For Smith, then, imagination refers more specifically to the operations at the level of our preconscious construal of the world that are conditioned by affections and bodily ways of knowing, or what he calls the human “emotional perception apparatus.” Consequently, the formation of the imagination unavoidably involves communities of intentional practice, be that church communities engaged in liturgy, intentional communities organized around forms of common life, or universities invested in the holistic formation of students. Smith’s

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73 Harris declines to offer a specific definition of the imagination, for fear that strictly delimiting its operations obscures the deep mystery and paradox in its work. She follows William Lynch in defining imagination as “all the faculties of human beings, all our resources, not only our seeing and hearing and touching, but also our history, our education, our feelings, our wishes, our love, hate, faith and unfaith, insofar as they go into the making of our image of the world.” Maria Harris, Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 9. Harris aims her account of the imagination at expanding the ways that teacher’s conceive of their task to include the imaginative, the sacramental, and the aesthetic, and at encouraging more “imaginative” means of teaching. Ibid., 158.

74 To adopt McGilchrist’s language within Harris’s definition, the imagination might be located at the nexus of right and left hemispheres in their ongoing interaction. McGilchrist himself does not consistently use the term “imagination” in the holistic sense meant here, though he does cite research that indicates that split brained patients – that is, patients whose right and left hemispheres do not cooperate, have greatly diminished capacities for imagination. See McGilchrist, The Master and His Emissary, 199.

75 See discussions at and near fns 15 and 36.

76 Smith, Imagining the Kingdom, 36.

77 His account does not address other locations of Christian formation, including congregational contexts apart from the liturgy. I am particularly concerned with contexts in which the intentional study of the Christian scriptures is the focus.
account of the role of reasoning is quite thin. Yet even he suggests that conscious thinking about practices can deepen their formative effect, which would suggest a greater cooperation of reasoning and bodily ways of knowing than his account sometimes intimates. That cooperation, I am claiming, is largely the work of the imagination.

In summary, we can identify two key points in this discussion. First, imagination is fundamental to a way of being in the world; it includes but is not limited to our creative, artistic, or fanciful capacities. Second, imagination is deeply incorporative; it generates and integrates conscious acts of interpretation and the pre-conscious “take” on reality that lies at the tacit level. Some caveats are needed here. First, this account does not presume that the integration of pre-conscious and conscious elements of human experience is obviously consecutive, amenable to clear articulation, or automatically coherent. Rather, there is a good deal of space for “slippage” between these ways of knowing, and even the possibility for contradiction and inconsistency. Second, this account does not suggest that engaging the imagination at a pre-conscious level necessarily results in transformed imagination at the conscious level, or vice versa. The acts of constructive integration described here occur organically rather than mechanically. Third, this section does not intend to provide a full philosophical account of the imagination but rather to identify what imagination can help Christian educators see with greater clarity – namely that deep formation in the way of Jesus takes place at the level of the imagination, at the intersection of human thinking about, behaving toward, loving within, relating to, and construing the world.
1.3 Imagination in Theological and Formational Perspectives

Thus, this project defines imagination as the integrative, constructive capacity that works at the intersection of ways of knowing located in both bodily and cognitive, conscious and non-conscious, and personal and social forms of human experience. By drawing together diverse ways of knowing, the imagination generates coherent patterns of meaning that deeply form human engagement with the physical and social world. Imagination, then, is a critical category for Christian formation, including the ways in which educators think about constructing encounters with the Christian Scriptures. We are not, as in our epistemological past, mechanical brains that process information, but embodied minds whose physical and relational interaction with the given environment deeply impresses on us certain tacit ways of knowing and relating. At the same time, the intentional study of the texts of the Christian tradition, and the specific claims and intentions for living as disciples of Jesus, also constitute a major feature of Christian life. While reasoning should be framed in terms of the body, accounts of Christian formation, particularly in relationship to the Scriptures, need to attend to both. Christian formation aims to shape an imagination capable of ways of knowing, relating, construing, and acting that reflect the Lordship of Jesus. This claim requires a theological framework for this human capacity. A Christian account of imagination depends upon a theological understanding of the learner that accounts for creaturely limits and realities and frames them in relationship to both the power of sin and to redemption through Christ.
1.3.1 Imagination and Creatureliness

Foregrounding the imagination in Christian formation gives theological as well as practical weight to the conditions of human existence as creatures of God.\(^\text{78}\) To be a creature is to be embodied and material, with all the relational, affective, and environmental elements of human being-in-the-world that pertain, and that this broader literature recognizes.\(^\text{79}\) As a result, creaturely engagement with and understanding of the world is both rational and supra rational. A “more than can be said” element of human experience persists; the body possesses an excess of meaning to which our cognitive capacities have only selective and partial access.\(^\text{80}\) Reframing these realities as characteristics of life as God’s creatures sets some theological parameters for appreciating their capacities as well as their limitations.

The possessive qualifier – persons as creatures of God – grounds this Christian understanding of the person. Attempts to define a person on the basis of any particular capacity make this qualifier especially important, as they risk excluding some persons.

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\(^{78}\) My choice of the term “creature” here is an intended contrast to the use of “animal,” common in philosophical and theological literature drawing on Aristotelian resources. James K.A. Smith opens his account by contrasting views of the rational and believing animal with his own proposed view of the person as a desiring animal. See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 40. The term “animal” however, lacks the theological content that the preferred term “creature” implies, while the latter term still connotes the realities the prior term intends to highlight.

\(^{79}\) The language of the person as “creature” further evokes the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, in which God describes creation, created as orderly, harmonious, and well provisioned, as “good” and even “very good” (Gen 1:31). It is interesting to note that several of the conditions of creatureliness that this literature describes are also elements of the creation narrative, particularly the one found in chapter 2. The newly formed human bodies reside in a singular location that provides their environment (Eden; Gen 2:8), require sustenance that the garden provides (all the fruit of the trees you may eat, save two; Gen 2:15-17), and depend on sociality for full flourishing (it is not good for the *adam* to be alone; Gen 2:18).

\(^{80}\) Johnson discusses this in terms of the emotions’ role in meaning; our bodies have an emotional response of fear or some other emotion to a situation long before – or even in the complete absence of – conscious awareness of that emotion, what he calls “feeling” the emotion. Phenomenologically, the experiences may seem simultaneous but are in fact sequential. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 64.
altogether. Pedagogical proposals, dependent as they are on animating understandings of the person who learns, face the same problem.\textsuperscript{81} For every aspect of human life and meaning, generally, and for Christian life and meaning specifically, a relevant limit case complicates the account.\textsuperscript{82}

For theoretical purposes, this account operates on the basis of an “imagined learner,” that is, a presumed typically capacitated adult, with some critical caveats.\textsuperscript{83} First, I am not suggesting that these ostensibly typically capacitated imagined learners are ideally or completely so. Second, I am not suggesting that those who are differently-abled in various ways are not (or should not be) participants in contexts of Christian formation. Furthermore, this theoretical approach in no way intends to relegate those who might deviate from the typical in any number of ways to secondary pedagogical or personal status. Finally, and most critically, the fact that all are creatures of God, called into existence and sustained by their Creator, further resists any attempt to imply the valuation

\textsuperscript{81} Stanley Hauerwas has argued for de-centering intellectual investigation of the Christian tradition in favor of centering embodied practices in Christian formation for just this reason. Intellectual investigation presumes a certain level of intellectual capacity that places the activity out of reach of the more vulnerable members of Christian communities. This implicit critique of overly intellectual or information-oriented education is helpful, but it does not resolve the larger question that it raises. For every account, a limit case exists. Stanley Hauerwas, “The Gesture of a Truthful Story,” in \textit{Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education}, ed. Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 104.

\textsuperscript{82} For example, accounts of the person and the person’s formation that place relationality at the center risk partially excluding individuals whose capacity for empathic connections and robust relationality with other persons are hindered. Accounts of person and pedagogy that foreground embodied practices risk partially excluding those whose bodily limitations prohibit their full participation.

\textsuperscript{83} Christian Smith notes the number of limit cases but still suggests that there is value in working with an account of the “normal” person. He is careful to clarify that “normal” is a description, not a value judgment. Christian Smith, \textit{What Is a Person?: Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 20. For further discussion, see Ibid., 478–481. My language of the “imagined learner” is intentionally analogous to the language in chapter 2, drawn from literary critical readings of the biblical text, which use the descriptor of the “imagined reader/hearer” to describe the reader that the text seems to presuppose, including capacities and background knowledge that reader is presumed to have.
or devaluation of persons on the basis of characteristics. Our common membership among the ranks of God’s created ones grounds our common lot without ignoring or ranking our various differentiations.

In short, as creatures of God, the value of human persons derives not from innate capacities but on relationship to God as God’s own. While the complications of existence in our fallen, vulnerable, and creaturely state remain, the theological weight carried by this possessive mitigates against the temptation for definitions of the human person and his or her capacities to be exclusionary.

1.3.2 Creatureliness, Sin, and Encountering God in the Flesh

Since imagination is a fundamental creaturely capacity integral to Christian formation, a theological account of imagination requires some way of specifying the creaturely capacity for encounter – and even participation – with the transcendent reality of the Triune God. Both theoretical and theological considerations generate this

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84 I find that the attempt to define the imago dei in terms of a particular human capacity, be that reason, creativity, or potential for relationship, to suffer from the same problem. Smith suggests defining the image of God in terms of task, namely the task of serving as divine representatives, which has the benefit of cohering with a strong historical reading of the Genesis narrative. Robert Karl Gnuse, *Misunderstood Stories: Theological Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 34–37. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 163. Even a task-oriented account has risks, because a great deal depends on how the “task” is defined and whether the definition is differently specified as the case requires. In short, I am not sure that any account of the person, including the one offered here, fully escapes the risk of unintentionally de-valuing some groups or individuals. My choice to operate on the basis of a typical imagined learner arises from theoretical necessity (I could not possibly attend to all possible limit cases), but any exclusionary effects are entirely unintended.

85 I do not, however, follow Vanhoozer in seeing specific features of our embodiment – race, gender, etc – as mere “props” or “costumes” for our performance. Identifying the shared condition of our existence as creatures before God does not necessitate theological claims that elide the complexities presented by our embodiment. In a world so deeply influenced by Sin and Death, those differentiations are all too often destructively, hierarchically construed to the concrete harm of some groups and the benefit of others. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 368.
necessity. Some theorists, like Mark Johnson, argue that the fundamental realities of embodiment make meaningful relationship with a non-material God impossible. Non-theological accounts that focus on embodiment may be reductively materialist in a way that does not readily or apparently cohere with Christian claims to transcendence or faith. Second, any discussion of these anthropological realities must account for the degrading and distorting influence of sin, operating in and on human bodies and communities.

Imagination, like all of creation, stands vulnerable to the distorting, destructive powers of Sin and Death, which find expression in various aspects of the imagination’s operations. H. Richard Niebuhr’s account of revelation in relationship to imagination highlights the distorting capacity of the “evil imaginations” of the human heart, which must be overcome if we are to see rightly. Craig Dykstra, following Niebuhr, sees sin operating as a power, capable of distorting our imaginations and operating at a societal and collective level. Imagination, under the influence of sin and operating in a fallen

Johnson states that, because human beings are their bodies, there can be no such thing as “vertical spirituality,” as in a true connection between an embodied person and a dis-embodied, non-material deity. The best one can hope for, in his account, is a horizontal spirituality, experienced in the relationship between persons. He goes on to state that the “immortal soul” cannot be an actual reflection of the person, because of the fundamentality of our bodies to our whole way of being in the world. Johnson, The Meaning of the Body, 281. His account does not, however, recognize the significance of Christian doctrines like the incarnation of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within human bodies, or the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Space does not permit an account of all three of these as contrapuntals to his reductive materialism. Sandra Schneiders notes “The importance and complexity of the idea (and the reality) of the body is the reason why the bodily Resurrection of Jesus is crucially important for Christian spiritual experience in the present. The Resurrection of the body establishes the continuity between the pre-Easter Jesus experienced by his historical contemporaries in first-century Palestine and the post-Easter Jesus universally but personally present and active since Easter. The bodily Resurrection is the ground of the permanence of the Incarnation in the cosmos, especially in human history, and in the personal and corporate experiences of believers.” Sandra M. Schneiders, “Biblical Spirituality: Text and Transformation,” in The Bible and Spirituality: Exploratory Essays in Reading Scripture Spiritually, ed. Andrew T. Lincoln, J. G. McConville, and Lloyd Pietersen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 139. Incarnation alone receives a more substantive account, but these other theological and biblical loci are other avenues of fruitful exploration as it relates to a theological account of imagination.

world, can generate the “fearful drive for self-securing” that Dykstra locates at the root of much sinful behavior. More recently, Willie Jennings’ book on the Christian imagination explores the ways in which a distorted, supercessionist theological imagination has harmfully shaped Western colonial conceptions of racial identity, power, and geography to the quite concrete detriment of others.

The “givens” of human embodied experience, as well as the social and physical conditions in which that experience occurs, bear the marks of the Fall. The powers of sin and death infiltrate even pre-conscious construal of the world, such that communities may, for instance, come to perceive certain racialized “others” not (only) as stranger but (also) as threat or subordinate. The effects of sin are also persistent and relationally experienced and spread. Infants and young children, whose orientation to the world is especially malleable, receive formative care from those marked by sin and death, even when loving and well intentioned. The deeply imitative component of human sociality

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88 Dykstra states, “our sinfulness arises out of an attempt on our part to guarantee that a real need of ours is met – to be noticed and loved for the unique, particular, mysterious being each of us is. . . The dynamic of sin is broken only if we are in fact profoundly and permanently noticed and loved.” Craig Dykstra, Vision and Character: A Christian Educator’s Alternative to Kohlberg (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 49. See also Craig Dykstra, Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 86–90.


90 Thus Jennings notes, the social imaginary of “whiteness” “was a global vision of Europeans and Africans but, more than that, a way of organizing bodies by proximity to and approximation of white bodies.” Ibid., 59.

91 Brown and Strawn describe in particular the role of caregivers in the formation of appropriate forms of attachment. The ways in which very young children learn from their caregivers what types of attachment are welcome and expected set the stage for forms of relating that can follow them for their entire lives. The authors are careful to note that even anxious or resistant forms of attachment can be reformed as the result of careful work and the creation of stable relationships. The difference in the “malleability” of infants and young children in the context of interpersonal relationships and the relative malleability of adults and older children is one of degree and not of kind. Brown and Strawn, The Physical Nature of Christian Life, 77. This is not an argument for total depravity or original sin, but it remains
makes no differentiation between behaviors worth imitating and not, social practices and relationships can sustain and disseminate distorted ways of relating, consuming, and construing in the world.

The conscious, creative out-workings of the imagination are no less susceptible. It is illustrative that some biblical terms translated by the NRSV as “imagination” appear with reference to idolatry, as with Paul’s reference to the role “inward thoughts” (ἐνθύμησις) in the construction of idols (Acts 17:29). In 1 Tim 6:5, translators render the Greek term for “to suppose, think” (νομιζω) as “to imagine” as a form of illusory perception and improper judgments or statements about the good. In Ezekiel 13, those false prophets who prophesy out of their own “heart” (לב) are said to be prophesying out of their “imagination” (Ezekiel 13:2, 17 [NRSV]). Here, imagination explicitly refers to false proclamation in the interpretation of events. 92 Each component of the imagination’s integrative work – its dependence on pre-conscious, affective ways of knowing, its
critical to account for the social and relational effects of sin in light of what we know about the ways in which humans are deeply formed.

92 Green, *Imagining God*, 109. The New Testament does indicate some epistemic effects of sin, as in Romans 1:18-32 in which those who have been “handed over” to sin due to their unwillingness to acknowledge God “became futile in their thinking and their senseless hearts were darkened,” ultimately harming their ability to discern the good (Rom 1:21). See also Ephesians 4:17-24. Though the term is not used in the New Testament, the holistic way of life before God that is recommended, which includes reconstituted forms of relationality as the body of Christ, the description of the church’s reality as the “way,” the prevalence of affective language in both the greatest commands and in Paul’s commands regarding the disposition of community members toward one another, the recommendation of distinctive patterns of practices in relationship to the function of a normative story all point to the formation of the imagination as it is defined here.
relational and cultural development and sustenance, and its conscious, personal out-
workings, fall under the influence of Sin’s distorting power.\footnote{On this point, Craig Dykstra’s earlier account is a helpful corollary to Smith’s later one, which does not offer a robust discussion of sin as a theological category, though see his short rebuttal to purely “intellectualist” accounts of sin. Smith, \textit{Imagining the Kingdom}, 141. For short discussion of sin in relationship to liturgical confession, see Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 177–182.}

The situation, thus described, is surely dire but not hopeless, for the incarnate, resurrected body of Christ provides the theological location of the imagination’s rehabilitation. In the incarnation, Christ, while fully God, takes on a fleshly, creaturely body in order to deal decisively with the power of sin precisely as it resides in and exerts power over the bodies of believers. Having described the power of sin as opposed to the power of the Spirit, Paul in Romans 8 confidently proclaims the cessation of condemnation for those who are “in Christ Jesus” because God “having sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and to deal with sin, . . . condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:1; 3). Through Christ’s own crucified and resurrected body, God defeats the powers of sin and death in their work within and on human bodies. Baptism provides the means by which individual human bodies participate mimetically in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, with the result that Christians are freed to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).\footnote{Christians are baptized into Christ in order put to death the “body of Sin” by “having been united” with Christ in his death in hopes of being united with him in his resurrection (Rom 6:5-6). There is no realized eschatology here. Christians indeed are freed from the power of sin and death, but their full participation in Christ’s resurrection lies in the future. The Greek text frequently reflects such paradoxes of time with alternating verb tenses. Furthermore, there are responsibilities of Christians as active agents in the present, in response to God’s action through Christ. Christians are commanded to “present their members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification” (6:21). Though God’s actions are clearly and always primary, there remains a clear sense of the responsibility of human embodied agents to collaborate and cooperate.}
The function of the incarnation in the economy of salvation receives prominent attention in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The “Christ hymn” identifies Jesus as the one who is “born in human likeness (δειμονώμαι)” and takes on the “form of a servant” (Phil 2:7). Susan Eastman’s analysis demonstrates how for Paul, the incarnation provides the means by which human beings are made able to join Paul as fellow imitators of Christ and participate in the pattern of Christ’s life (Phil 3:4b-17). Disciples of Christ are called to follow the example of Paul in “being made like [συμμορφωμόνος] [Jesus] in his death” in order that somehow resurrection might be attained (Phil 3:10). The incarnation of Christ sets the pedagogical program, as those who call on the Lord join in imitative response to Christ’s action, including being shaped (presumably by the Spirit) into the form of his death. Furthermore, and by the Spirit, Christians hope for the redemption of their own bodies by virtue of the resurrection of Christ’s body from the dead (Rom 8:10; 23).

95 Christ appears as one striding onto stage in the character of Adam, following the plot to its inevitable conclusion – death – but then, because exalted by God, turning the tragedy into comedy. Susan Eastman connects the imitative elements and instructions in the Philippian letter to both the Greco-Roman culture of theatre and theatricality and the pedagogical practices typical of ancient paideia. Critically, Eastman notes that the logic of “downward mobility” that characterizes Christ’s move from the form of God to the likeness of humans and Paul’s move to call former gain now loss constitutes a radical departure from Greek paideia, which was concerned with imitation of others for the purposes of social advancement. She suggests that it is perhaps for this reason that Paul avoids using the term paideia, even using the cognates quite rarely. Susan Eastman, “Imitating Christ Imitating Us: Paul’s Educational Project in Philippians,” in The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays, ed. J. Ross Wagner, Christopher Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 449.

96 Note again, as in Romans 6, the tension of tenses is maintained, and there is a sense of both past accomplishment, present experience, and future hope. Here, as elsewhere, Paul’s use of the passive voice is indicative of the active presence of divine agency.

97 In addition to lifelong participation with Christ, it seems likely that Paul’s baptismal theology is also in view here, given the discussion of baptism in Romans 6 as the means by which Christians “united with him in the likeness of his death (τῷ θεοίμονα τού θανάτου αὐτοῦ; Rom 6:5).
The incarnation of Christ thus provides the theological framework for this proposal regarding the imagination’s centrality to the Christian formation of human creatures. Christ became a creature, standing in relational, creaturely solidarity with the finite and fallen, whom he is not ashamed to call brothers and sisters (Heb 2:11). The writer of Hebrews goes on to say that, since humans inhabit flesh and blood, Christ “shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:14). The creaturely realities that necessitate this foregrounding of the imagination, including finitude, embodiment, and relationality, are caught up and redeemed through the Savior who took on a finite and vulnerable body in obedience to God. The body of Christ in this primary sense creates the conditions in which the body of Christ, knit together by the Spirit in the church, can participate in God’s purposes.

Furthermore, some contemporary discussions of imagination explicitly connect imagination with incarnation as the locus of creaturely encounter with God. This claim takes a variety of related forms, each of which shares the conviction that imagination is the human “corollary of the incarnational and sacramental character of Christianity.” 98 Trevor Hart describes imagination, like incarnation, as the “hypostatic union of matter and meaning.” Hart sees incarnation as necessary to any account of human creaturely capacities in their encounter before God, because incarnation refers to “God’s radical accommodation to the creaturely condition”. 99 For that reason, he makes incarnation the

central theological framework of his various essays on imagination. Green identifies imagination as the *Anknüpfungspunkt* or the point of contact between humans and divine revelation. Green contends that imagination “identifies the specific point where, according to Christian belief and experience, the Word of God becomes effective in human lives. More formally, imagination is the anthropological point of contact for divine revelation.”

In terms of both the possibility of creaturely transformation and of creaturely encounter with God’s revelation, the incarnation of Christ theologically grounds the centrality of imagination to Christian formation. The insights from various philosophical and scientific fields about the fundamentality of tacit, affective, embodied, and relational forms of knowing to all human understanding undergo reframing here as the conditions of creatureliness. As creatures of God, humans live in light of God’s creational intent but also with the consequences of the Fall, through which the powers of Sin and Death infiltrate diverse forms of creaturely being and knowing. In the incarnation, God took on flesh, fully experienced the conditions of creatureliness and yet lived without sin. In so

100 Hart claims, “The sooner theologians take imagination seriously, the better, then, because anything less is a blinkered denial of what learning across a range of disciplines is telling us is a vital component of the human condition. Apart from anything else, this means that it is a central part of that ‘flesh’ which, according to Christian faith, the Son of God came into the world to make his own, in which he lived, suffered and died, and which he raised from death and exalted to the Father’s right hand.” Ibid., 7.

101 Green identifies imagination as a mediator between Barth and Bruner on the matter of whether the anthropological side of the contact could be specified, and summarizes their debate in this way. Barth was deeply suspicious of any attempt to locate revelation on the human side, fearing importing and distorting revelation within philosophical categories external to it. Bruner, however, however contended that the theologian should be able to account for the way revelation intersected with human life. Green suggests, “imagination is the anthropological point of contact for divine revelation. It is not the ‘foundation,’ the ‘ground,’ the ‘preunderstanding,’ or the ‘ontological basis’ for revelation; it is simply the place where it happens – better, the way in which it happens. Green, *Imagining God*, 40.

102 Ibid.
doing, and through his death, burial and resurrection, God through Christ definitively dealt with sin “in the flesh.” Through the incarnation of Jesus, and through our mimetic participation in the life, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Christ in baptism and discipleship within the body of Christ, that is the church, human creatures are “conformed [by God] into the image of His son” (Rom 8:29).

1.3.3 The Operative Account of Imagination

In line with other accounts that critique information rather than formation centered approaches to Christian education, this account seeks to locate imagination at the center of the project of Christian formation. The concerns and commitments included in this account of imagination’s centrality to Christian formation are not, on their own, groundbreaking. By some measures, the elevation of cognition in Christian formation may be a more recent innovation. The foregrounding of imagination in this account, however, adds some critical elements to a broad interest in the role of affections, aesthetics, and practices.

First, imagination, as a fundamental, interstitial capacity provides a way of thinking about the ongoing interaction between abstract reasoning and more bodily ways of knowing. Imagination aids in holding together the insights about our embodied, relational ways of knowing with the operation of reason, without collapsing one into the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{103}}\text{See Smith, }\textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 18.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{104}}\text{Bernsten notes that the ancient catechumenate was concerned not just with the transmission of essential information but also the formation of the affections. John A. Bernsten, }\textit{“Christian Affections and the Catechumenate,” in Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education}, ed. Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 229.\]
other. Stated differently, imagination provides useful shorthand for the capacity of the embodied self to integrate the various ways in which creatures know, without eliminating distinctions between them or assuming seamless interaction. The cooperative work of the imagination is non-reductive, ongoing, and difficult to pin down. Yet, at the same time, imagination is absolutely central to the ways in which we construct meaningful experience of the world and the sense of our place within it. It includes the construction of personal origins, understanding of the present situation, and the ways in which an individual projects and attempts to orient him or herself toward that future.

This account of the imagination does not explore all of its complexities, nailing down its various components and describing its order of operations. In this way, the account of the imagination provided here is more heuristic than diagnostic or definitive. Imagination provides a helpful way of describing the distinctive, complex, and ongoing work that the embodied mind engages in as it makes its way in the world. It provides a way of moving between accounts of Christian education as biblical study and worship participation, portraying the work of different aspects of Christian formation as cooperative and irreducible, and this formation as fundamentally incorporative in the most corporeal sense of the term.

Second, imagination is theologically comprehensible as the locus of the encounter of human creatureliness with the Triune God, the redemptive result of the incarnate Christ’s resurrection to the right hand of God. In this way, imagination implies a cooperative (though unequally so) view of divine and human agency, the involvement of both creature and Creator. God initiates the encounter and ultimately serves as the
primary agent of formation into the image of Christ, at least if the passive formational verbs in Paul and the reorienting intervention of divine agents in the Book of Acts are taken at their word (e.g. Phil 3:10-11; Acts 10:44). At the same time, Christian education presumes consequential and cooperative human agency in the task. Human agents, in crafting and performing liturgies, in identifying and confessing our cooption by sinful structures, habits, and narratives, in structuring encounters with the Scriptures, and in participating in patterns of relationship as the body of Christ, participate in some partial but important way in the work of the Spirit in the formation of God’s people.

This discussion has hinted at, but not yet explored in depth, what the human facilitation of the transformation of the imagination might entail. The complex function of imagination as incorporative capacity suggests that the imagination’s transformation may involve diverse forms of experience and ways of knowing. Building off of other recent proposals, this project assumes a central place for embodied practices and formative narratives in this work. These suggestions receive in-depth analysis and specification in later chapters, when particular biblical texts are engaged with attention to the formation of the imagination in the world of the text as well as the worlds of those who encounter it.

1.4 Imagination and the Scriptures

When imagination and the epistemology it presupposes appear in Christian formation literature, it most typically occurs in accounts that focus on praxis
methodologies, aesthetics or theology and the arts, or liturgy. These conversations have been fruitful and productive in expanding Christian education in ways that explicitly integrate the body’s ways of knowing. The conditions of creatureliness described here should also, however, shape the ways in which congregations gather for the discursive, cognitive, and communal task of studying the Scriptures. I propose that reading for scriptural imagination presents a way of accounting for both the nature of the learner as creature along with the integrity and complexity of the biblical text. Consequently, pedagogies for the study of the Bible in congregations might fruitfully aim for the formation of scriptural imagination.

Scriptural imagination emerges as a matter of theological and formational concern in two recent discussions, both connected to scholarship at Duke Divinity School. A brief survey of these conversations provides sufficient opportunity to clarify some underlying assumptions about the biblical text that inform this project as well as areas inviting further exploration. Since a full theology of Scripture lies well beyond the scope of the present investigation, underlying assumptions will be stated, rather than argued.

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105 For praxis approaches relative to the holistic epistemology, and the analogous concept of conation, see Groome, *Sharing Faith*. For liturgy oriented approaches, see Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*. For aesthetically oriented approaches, see Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*; Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination*; Hart, *Between the Image and the Word*.

106 To be sure, the biblical text appears in these other pedagogical proposals, but I have in mind here those educational contexts in which the study of the Bible is the central goal.

107 For helpful and more substantive discussions of these issues, see the “nine theses” and subsequent articles in the *Art of Reading Scripture*, which have been especially influential in my own thinking. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., “Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture: The Scripture Project,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 1–5. For more detailed discussion see Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 43–61.
1.4.1 Scriptural Imagination: Proposals and Parameters

In an essay in *Theology and Scriptural Imagination*, Luke Timothy Johnson laments the loss of a scriptural imagination, by which he means an intimate, personal, tacit knowledge of the scriptures that renders the world in which Christians live. Johnson aims his account largely at the academy’s separation from the life of faith and its narrow parameters for biblical scholarship.\(^{108}\) His concern with scriptural imagination corresponds with the account of imagination proposed here, in that he attends to both the personal and embodied nature of imagination.

For Johnson, four hermeneutical principles offer hope for the recovery of the scriptural imagination, which he believes ancient readers possessed to a much greater extent.\(^{109}\) First, readers must recognize that scripture “imagines” rather than “describes” the world; in other words, it provides an imaginative framework for the interpretation of things we know to be descriptively true about the world.\(^{110}\) Second, the recovery of such imagination depends on “the cultivation of readers whose appropriation of Scripture is

\(^{108}\) He is, in fact, so unoptimistic about the capacity of academic biblical studies to foster scriptural imagination that he concludes “it is necessary, therefore, to encourage the development of theological with scriptural imagination within the structures of the church itself.” Luke Timothy Johnson, “Imagining the World Scripture Imagines,” in *Theology and Scriptural Imagination*, ed. L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley, Directions in Modern Theology (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 9. Rather than the scholarly guild’s devotion to “literary archeology” that eschews any confessional commitments or interest, a recovery of scriptural imagination “must come from a relationship with Scripture that is mediated . . . by a faith community whose practices are ordered to the transformation of humans according to the world imagined by Scripture.”

\(^{109}\) Johnson claims that the earlier Christians lived in the world that the Scriptures imagined. While certainly a good deal has changed since the advent of modern biblical study, his claim still seems idealized. At some level, it seems dangerous to presume that any group of people simply lived in the world Scripture imagines, without the blindness and particular sins of its day and age impinging upon interpretation. Ibid., 6.

\(^{110}\) Johnson says, for instance, that the Bible does not contradict the theory of evolution because it does not compete with it. Ibid., 10.
grounded in practices of Christian piety,” which includes and extends beyond worship.  

Third, Johnson suggests that readers need to be inculcated in more than a flat, historical reading of biblical texts, both because the dominance of this one mode of reading represents the compression of multiple modes across Christian history, and because he claims that the historical mode is not the one most capable of forming the imagination.  

Johnson’s fourth suggestion is to attend carefully to the shape of the lived experience of readers of the text, in order to connect the world Scripture imagines with the world that actually is. Johnson’s four steps hint at, but do not propose, pedagogical principles related to the study of the biblical text as imagination-forming, and his brief essay raises two scriptural issues to which this project must attend en route to its own pedagogical suggestions.  

First, Johnson raises the issue of the relationship between academic biblical studies and the study of the Scriptures within communities of faith, particularly as it relates to the scriptural imagination. Johnson argues that scriptural imagination requires moving the center of gravity of biblical study back into the church, as he further illustrates by making communal practices of piety the essential context for fostering

111 Johnson adds that the situation of biblical interpretation within a believing community provides some guard against the human tendency of self-deception. This seems true, but it should be noted that whole communities can also be seized by the desire to live into their collective deception. Ibid., 11.

112 While cognizant of the capacity for excess in pre-modern interpretations, he nonetheless laments that the multivalence of pre-modern readings has been so thoroughly compressed into only one mode of reading that is not, in his view, the mode most capable of forming the imagination. The situation looks a bit different if the primary context of the discussion is the congregational setting rather than academic ones. It is possible, of course, for historical critical concerns to dominate a congregation’s study of scripture, particularly in traditions or local congregations with resources and inclination to engage in that sort of study. Indeed, the literal sense maintained its importance for pre-modern readers as a necessary component in the broader project. The challenge, as I see it, is to actually and fruitfully maintain a number of ways of reading, in which none of them functionally eclipse the biblical text itself.
scriptural imagination. Such a move is necessitated, in large part, by the narrow concern of modern biblical scholarship with the world behind the text rather than the world the text imagines, or, one presumes, the world imagined within the text. While I am sympathetic to Johnson’s concerns, I maintain a deep appreciation for historical-critical scholarship, seeing it as less necessarily antithetical to the formation of scriptural imagination in a congregational setting than Johnson seems to presume in this article. At the same time, one of the broader concerns in this project is the intent to enhance the agency of congregational or lay readers of scripture, which a strong focus on historical-critical scholarship can sometimes undermine.¹¹³ This project employs historical-critical study in service of the Bible’s function in the church, a means to faithful, embodied understanding. Given the relative “strangeness” of the world Scripture imagines, our reading of the Scriptures benefits from an enhanced understanding of the historical shape of communities, practices, and narratives within the text.

Johnson also expresses concern with literal readings of the text, by which he means flat, historical reading, particularly common in the academic guild. He fears specifically that such a literal reading has more limited value as an imagination-forming encounter with the text, or at least less potential value than more symbolic or typological readings. Imagination forming potential, however, already appears to be enshrined in the literary texture of the Scriptures. Seeing the Scriptures as “the chief point of imaginative contact with God,” Green adds that “narratives, poetry, and proclamation are able, by

¹¹³ I am reminded of a conversation I once had with a church member in which he confided that, while he was grateful for the wealth of information biblical scholars had provided, he nonetheless felt like Scripture was less accessible or more distant now than it was before.
means of their metaphoric inspiration, to render God himself to the faithful imagination.” While not to deny the value of other forms of reading, Johnson’s concern about the imaginatively paucity of the so-called literal sense is significantly mediated by the generic diversity of the Scriptures. On the whole, the Scriptures may well do more evoking than arguing, more portraying than analyzing, more poesis than propositions.

Third, in Johnson’s essay, as in the conversation surrounding the work of Richard Hays, the use of the adjective “scriptural,” presumes a predominantly unified text that generates a singular scriptural imagination rather than many scriptural imaginations. Such an assumed unity to the canon is hardly a bygone conclusion. The best instinct of the well intentioned but ultimately unsuccessful biblical theology movement is, in Johnson’s view, its attempt to take seriously the literary interconnections and the

114 Green, Imagining God, 185–186. If the Bible speaks in the “language” of the imagination, Green proposes that the task of theology is to identify the “grammar” of the imagination. Green, Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination, 205. Avis concurs with Green’s proposal that Scripture speaks in the “language” or “key” of the imagination, namely through metaphor, myth, and symbol. Avis’s approach to Scripture follows something of a pre-modern path, as he follows Augustine, Aquinas, Coleridge, Newman and others in drawing out the “poetical, figurative, and symbolic character of the Bible.” Avis, God and the Creative Imagination, 61.

115 I join Vanhoozer in his concern with the dominance of conceptual-propositional views of Scripture, which, while not identical to Johnson’s concerns with a flat historical reading, has the capacity to produce similar results of abstracted information divorced from the life of the church. Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 266–272.

116 It also elides the question of canonical boundaries and definitive shape, e.g. the inclusion of the apocrypha, the re-classification of the Hebrew Bible books in the Christian Old Testament, etc. Some scholars are quick to push against the assumption that the canon is fully and finally fixed. See James K. Mead, Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 3–6. Given the project’s concern with congregational contexts, and particularly Protestant congregations, the issue is less germane to this project. For clarification, references to the Scriptures or the Bible presume the Christian canonical ordering and, unless otherwise noted, exclude the deuterocanonical texts.
complex of images spanning the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{117} The tension of unity and diversity within the Scriptures fixes something of a chasm between theologians, who are quicker to appeal to the unity of the texts, and biblical scholars, whose reticence to superimpose a unity onto the diverse collection may arise from their concern that each text be respected in its integrity and particular voice.\textsuperscript{118}

This project presumes that the Christian Scriptures can be effectively conceived of as a “coherent dramatic narrative,” siding with those authors who prefer the language of drama rather than narrative as a metaphor for the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{119} By “coherent dramatic narrative”, I mean that there is, within the diverse collection of textual voices, a discernible complex “plot.” Some internal dynamics from within Scripture support this, including the inclusion of what might be termed “plot summaries” at various points, as well as the arrangement of the Christian canon such that it begins with the creation of the heavens and earth and ends with the new heavens and earth.\textsuperscript{120} At the same time, a diverse chorus of voices contribute to the development of the plot, introducing important “tensions and digressions” that complicate attempts to provide a smooth narrative summary or single theological center.\textsuperscript{121} Finally, the diversity of voices also includes the diversity of genres, which can possess quite different functions.\textsuperscript{122}

\begin{itemize}
\item Johnson, “Imagining the World Scripture Imagines,” 13.
\item Carol A Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth,” \textit{The Journal of Religion} 76, no. 2 (April 1996): 291.
\item The preservation of Ruth alongside Ezra despite the tension in their respective portrayal of intermarriage, the preservation of the confidence of Proverbs regarding the just distribution of blessings
\end{itemize}
With specific regard to pedagogies for scriptural imagination, the presence of diverse texts within a “coherent” (not simple, linear, evolving, or univocal) narrative has the following implications. Individual texts within the Scriptures should be respected as having their own integrity as voices in the intra-Scriptural dialogue. Consequently, this project begins with an individual pericope and attends to the integrity of that discrete textual unit within its literary context. This is something of a departure from attention to Scripture in accounts that discuss imagination, which tend to treat Scripture in terms of its overarching unity without a good deal of attention to its diversity. This project aims to augment that discussion by bringing scriptural imagination down to the level of the study of an individual text.

The conversation prompted by the scholarship of New Testament scholar Richard Hays introduces additional elements to the discussion of scriptural imagination, which alongside Qohelet’s recognition that rain falls on both the wicked and the good, are important tensions for which any biblical theology must account.


123 Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth,” 305.

124 James K.A. Smith attends to the Scriptures rarely, focusing predominantly on their use within the liturgy. He does not offer, nor does he claim to offer, any account of the Scriptures themselves, and thus he does not deal with the matter of the texts’ unity and diversity. Smith focuses instead on the narrative unity of the Scriptures. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom, 197. Green, a theologian, acknowledges the debate about the unity of the scriptures and argues for a “gestalt view of the canon.” This view locates the unity of the scriptures in the “pattern in which all of its parts hang together as a whole. This unity is something quite different from maintaining that all the biblical books contain a common theology, treat the same themes, or otherwise share some common ‘essence.’ It is to hold that the multifaceted strands of biblical tradition manifest a family resemblance, that they ‘belong together,’ that the pattern they present to the imagination in concert is different from, and greater than, their individual patterns.” Green, Imagining God, 114.

125 The issue of the unity and diversity of the scriptures is not resolved, and is, perhaps, irresolvable. My concern in this pedagogical approach is to hold the tension, ascribing to a view of the texts’ dramatic unity without eliding the important discipline of close reading of individual texts.
Hays defines as “the capacity to see the world through lenses given to us in Scripture.”

In a public forum, he went on to add,

“Scriptural imagination is the capacity to have our imaginations transformed by the encounter with Scripture in such a way that we see the world in light of God’s revelation, fundamentally through God’s revelation in the election and call of Israel and the death and resurrection of Jesus as redemptive events for the world.”

The public conversation continued with articles by other Duke faculty members in *Divinity Magazine*, which dealt with other matters related to scriptural imagination.

C. Kavin Rowe offers habits for reading Scripture as imagination-forming, including habits of reading that are concentrated, communal, and attentive to the history of reception. He also indicates the importance of what he calls “tools” for reading the text, including knowledge of the original languages and the historical context. Sujin Pak draws from pre-modern Christian history to remind the church not only of the variety of ways of reading Scripture, but also of the contemporary value of the historical,

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126 Hays’s tenure as Dean has been marked by a public interest in scriptural imagination as it relates to the formation of Divinity school graduates. In his 2012 Dean’s report, Hays presented the mission of the school in this way: “to seek the renewal of the church through the formation of scriptural imagination.” Richard B. Hays, “The Renewal of the Church through the Formation of Scriptural Imagination,” in *The 2012 Dean’s Report: Duke Divinity School*, accessed August 11, 2015, Site discontinued.


128 These articles are addressed to a popular audience, rather than an academic one. At the same time, and likely in part due to their audience, they attend specifically to the practices of congregations with respect to the Scriptures. For that reason, I find them to be interesting, if brief, contributors to this discussion.

theological parameters around the “playground of the scriptural imagination.” Willie Jennings points out that the scriptural imagination can be both healthy and diseased. Consequently, he claims that the task of the church and Christian leaders is to help people discern the difference.

The genesis of this project roughly coincided with this broad conversation about scriptural imagination, and my research intersects with this conversation at several key points. First, there is a broad sense that the normativity of the Scriptures derives from not merely its provision of rules for moral application, but also its capacity to shape a whole way of seeing or construing the world in which we live. This normative function is implied by Jenning’s claim that the task of the church with regard to the scriptures is to see the world as it should be. The suggestion that Scripture serves as a lens for the interpretation of the world is as old as Calvin, and more recently advanced by Green. Yet, as the prior discussion has indicated, any perceptual “lens” that human creatures employ includes not only our conscious acts of interpretation but also the ways of

132 Specifically, Pak points to the fourfold “senses” of Scripture as an early example of recognition of Scripture’s multivalence. She identifies five boundaries or “faith commitments” regarding Scripture: 1) the authority of Scripture for Christian life, 2) the Trinitarian scope and character, 3) the purpose to edify the Church, 4) the Christological center, and 5) the narrative scope that affirms the fundamental unity of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. G. Sujin Pak, “A Playground for the Formation of Scriptural Imagination: Lessons From Church History,” Divinity Magazine, Spring 2013, 11–12.
133 Calvin, Calvin’s Institutes, 28. Green, Imagining God, 106.
knowing and seeing that reside at a preconscious, affective, bodily register. If Scripture is to shape the imagination, then, it needs to be seen as potentially or actually operating on the multiple registers at which the imagination is discussed here.

Scriptural imagination is – or can be - deeply implicated in our complex and embodied being in the world. Building on his claim that imagination is not just mental creativity but is “practically dense” or “lived,” Rowe claims that scriptural imagination entails the shape of a whole way of life. Appropriately resisting the dichotomizing of “being” vs. “doing,” Rowe states that such dichotomies obscure things because “human lives are not divisible . . . all our thought takes place within the lives that we live, and our practices are inseparably intertwined with the thinking that makes the practices intelligible.”

Imagination, by the definition proposed here, also resists such dichotomizing.

Finally, “scriptural imagination” does not mean that anything goes, an important caveat given the resistance in some quarters to the introduction of “imagination” to theology or biblical studies out of fear that imagination almost certainly results in that which is merely “imaginary.” Pak refers to the importance of parameters on good readings of Scripture, theological and biblically derived commitments regarding what

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135 Rowe, “‘Do You Understand What You Are Reading’: A Formation of Scriptural Imagination”, 6.
136 Garrett Green is also careful to note that biblical interpretation as an imaginative enterprise is “no mere activity of the intellect but engages the whole person, body and soul.” Moreover, imagination, and, consequently, the act of interpretation accomplished through the organ of the imagination, is not merely personally held capacity for it “is forged in communal experience and practice.” Green, Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination, 184.
137 Hart, Between the Image and the Word, 40.
constitutes a “good” reading. These considerations provide some necessary parameters for both this exegetical exploration and the pedagogy that will arise from its interaction with the theory of the imagination presented here.

1.4.2 A Pedagogy for Scriptural Imagination

In this chapter, I have made an initial case for adopting scriptural imagination as the goal of pedagogically constructed encounters between communities of faith and biblical narratives. Imagination provides a helpful label for the incorporative, holistic ways that human creatures apprehend the world, ways of knowing that include the complex interactions of tacit and conscious, personal and social, analytical and affective components of human life. Recent discussions of scriptural imagination overlap with this project’s anthropological and epistemological concerns, while raising further substantive questions and suggesting some parameters. Each of the proposals speaks about the Scriptures in an overarching sense, but discrete texts within the Scriptures might also be fruitfully considered through this lens. Could particular scriptural narratives offer any clues about the ways in which a distinctively Christian imagination might be formed? What might constitute pedagogical “best practices” for reading individual biblical stories in communities of practice as texts meant to form our imagination?139

138 For Augustine, the most critical criteria by which any biblical interpretation should be measured was whether it led to love of God and love of neighbor. Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, trans. D. W Robertson (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 30.

139 Here, I mean specifically the pedagogical approach, the way or ways in which the encounter with the text is structured or the moves/strategies by which the text is “taught.” Rowe’s article in the Divinity School magazine suggests both “habits” and “tools” for reading. My own approach will look specifically at the teacher’s role in constructing the context and learning experiences surrounding the reading. Rowe, “‘Do You Understand What You Are Reading’: A Formation of Scriptural Imagination,” 7–9. Hermeneutical stances toward the text are constantly implicated here, despite quite often remaining
In the following chapters, I suggest that the Acts of the Apostles can serve as a test case and exemplar for dynamics pertaining to the imagination’s formation. In chapter 2, I demonstrate the “fit” between this chapter’s concern with imagination as a creaturely capacity and the features and concerns of the Acts of the Apostles. I argue that imagination is an appropriate lens for Acts due its portrayal of the concrete life and practices of the early church as well as its explicitly signaled and implicitly discerned formative effect. With these features of Acts established, the remaining necessary groundwork is prepared for the integrative, exegetical analysis in chapters three and four, as well as the pedagogical proposal in the final chapter.

unarticulated. This project engages with hermeneutical questions as a matter of course, but offers no substantive account of a hermeneutical perspective as such.
2. Imagination and Acts

In chapter one, I argued that scriptural imagination frames the pedagogical task relative to the Scriptures in a manner that explicitly accounts for the creaturely nature of the reader. Drawing on recent theories about the bodily basis of all knowing, including philosophical and scientific accounts as well as Christian appropriations of them, I argued that imagination describes the incorporative capacity at the heart of human life that integrates the embodied creature’s various ways of knowing and gives rise to a whole way of being in the world. Given the relatively thin development of this conversation with regard to the study of the biblical text within Christian education literature, I suggested that the transformation of the imagination in the encounter with the Scriptures presented an area in need of further consideration.

In this way, the first chapter established theoretical groundwork for one of the two central norms guiding this project, namely, that pedagogies applied to Scripture ought to account for the nature of the learner. This chapter pursues the same aim with regard to the second norm, namely that pedagogies applied to Scripture respect the integrity of the text as given to the church. By respecting the integrity of the text, I simply mean that pedagogical approaches seek to seriously engage the biblical text in its literary, historical, and contextual particularity and complexity.\(^1\) While the implications of this normative claim can be and will be developed in more than one direction, this chapter specifically

\(^1\) I am by no means ignorant of the historical and current debate that lies behind any “given” text, including canonical or deuterocanonical boundaries, intratextual divisions, translation issues, and the like. In keeping with the context of North American Christianity of a primarily but not exclusively Protestant variety, by “text” or Scriptures I mean one of the common English translations of the sixty-six book canon.
considers whether or not a pedagogy aimed at scriptural imagination is as appropriate for the Scriptures as it is for the communities of creatures who read them.

The discussion in chapter one provided initial indication of the epistemic fit between the Scriptures and the imagination. Some theologians locate that appropriateness or fit in the generic shapes and variety of the Scriptures. Others locate the appropriateness of imagination to the Scriptures on a global scale, at the level of the Scriptures as a single body of literature. My interests in the present chapter and in the broader project differ in the following ways. First, none of these approaches offers specifically pedagogical implications. In other words, Scriptural imagination provides the pedagogical objective, but it is not developed in terms of a pedagogical method capable of supporting the development of such a Scripture-shaped capacity. Second, these earlier proposals do not typically consider the appropriateness of scriptural imagination at the local level, that is, at the level of attention to an individual text within the Scriptures.

In this chapter, I address the second gap by narrowing the focus to one biblical text, the Acts of the Apostles, and arguing for, rather than assuming, the amenability of this particular text to the formative concerns entailed by the imagination. I argue that

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2 Paul Avis notes that the forms within Scripture, particularly the predominance of metaphor and myth, serve as indications of the appropriateness of imagination to the Scriptures. Avis, God and the Creative Imagination, 65–67. Garrett Green argued similarly. Green, Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination, 185. Walter Brueggeman makes a similar claim in an attempt to chart a third way between the fallacies he calls conservative propositionalism and liberal developmentalism. He argues that the Bible is the “pivotal element” in the church’s counter-formation into a distinct way of life appropriate to the people of God. Walter Brueggemann, Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 57. He proposes a dramatic understanding of our engagement with the biblical text. Ibid., 64–68.

3 This is characteristic of the discussions of Luke Timothy Johnson as well as Richard Hays, whose attention to scriptural imagination resides largely on the level of the text as a whole.
Acts serves as a fitting test case for a pedagogy aimed at scriptural imagination because the ways of knowing associated with the imagination can be “interpretively advantageous” for reading Acts as Christian Scripture. This argument rests on three different forms of evidence. First, since the prologues to Luke and Acts imply formative intent on the part of the writer, I begin with an analysis of what the prologues suggest about the text’s intended effect on Theophilus, the identified recipient. Second, having established the relevance of formational concerns to Acts in this broad and initial sense, I next consider what the literary character of Acts may indicate about the means through which the text might exert formative effects. Here, contemporary debates about genre and the relationship of Luke to Acts are highly pertinent, and considering each debate situates this project within the field of New Testament studies and clarifies some methodological parameters for later analysis. Finally, I expand Kavin Rowe’s interest in “narrativized ecclesial practices” as a feature of the formation of the Christian community’s imagination in Acts. The centrality of embodied practices for the negotiation of the church’s identity in its socio-cultural location is fully consonant with the theoretical perspectives articulated in the first chapter. Luke’s presentation of such practices within

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4 Kavin Rowe uses the language of “interpretively advantageous” to describe principles that, while not strictly endemic to the text or known to the original author or community nonetheless assist interpreters in identifying the dynamics and functions of the text. C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 146. I return to Kavin Rowe’s employment of contemporary theories to describe the formation of the community in Acts in a later section.

5 This wording is also Rowe’s, used in his *World Upside Down* in the chapter on the role of ecclesial practices in forming the church’s social imaginary vis-à-vis the Roman Empire. Much more will be said about Rowe’s treatment of practices later in the chapter. Ibid., 6. For the moment, it suffices to say that I take my cue from Rowe about the formative and epistemological significance of the practices Luke narrates, but I want to extend his logic.
his robust narrative account models and presumes theological reflection attentive to the reality of bodies participating in communities of practice.\(^6\)

**2.1 Lukan Prefaces and Formative Intent**

The investigation into the possible coherence between imagination and Acts begins with the relevance of formational concerns in a broader sense. While biblical scholars typically eschew the search for “authorial intent,” the Lukan prefaces (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-11) provide a distinctive window into Luke’s purposes in writing.\(^7\) Given the information provided by the prologues, we can initially presume the presence of formative intent within the text. Considering the prologues also raises the methodological question of the reader/recipient of Luke’s two volumes, since questions of formative effect cannot be separated from the question of audience.\(^8\)

**2.1.1 Lukan Prefaces**

Both the Gospel and Acts begin by addressing one Theophilus, whose identity is much debated. Luke applies the honorific “Most excellent” (κράτιστος) to him in Luke 1:3, and commentators have suggested that he may be a wealthy patron who funded Luke’s literary efforts, a notable Christian in Luke’s community, or a representative

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\(^6\) In the chapters that follow, I want to develop this consonance in thinking about the ways in which narratives and practices function formatively in the community’s of faith seeking to negotiate their own embodied identity in the midst of their contemporary context.

\(^7\) Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 145. Luke is not the only gospel to provide explicit clues to the Gospel writers’ intentions. The author of John’s gospel explicitly states that “these things are written so that you may believe” (John 20:31).

\(^8\) Luke is traditionally referred to as the author of this text. For simplicity’s sake, I will refer to the author of Luke-Acts by the traditional designation of Luke. I will differentiate the traditional author from the Gospel that bears his name by referring to the text as “Gospel” or “Luke’s Gospel.”
“lover of God,” as the name literally means.\(^9\) In any case, Luke implicitly identifies Theophilus as an interested and informed party, and likely also a Christian convert.\(^10\) Luke indicates his dependence on other eyewitnesses and “servants of the word” (Luke 1:2), the existence of other accounts (1:1), and his own careful investigation (παρηκολουθήκοτι ἀνώθεν; 1:2).\(^11\) The author’s resolution, stated in the first person singular, was to write a “meaningfully ordered account” (ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς; 1:3). Critically, in the final sentence of the prologue, a purpose clause lays out his general intent: “in order that you [singular; Theophilus implied] may know the assurance [ἀσφάλειαν] concerning the things which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:4).\(^12\)

The content of this narrative, and potentially also the prior instruction, includes those “things that have been fulfilled among us” (περὶ τῶν πεπληρωμένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων; Luke 1:1). As the divine passive verb construction suggests, the content of this instruction is properly theological, an account of what God has accomplished in the midst of the Christian community (“among us”). The narrative is carefully investigated, well resourced, and “meaningfully ordered” (καθεξῆς; Luke 1:3) in order to be


\(^10\) The “catechesis” (κατηχήσις; aorist passive indicative verb) mentioned in 1:4 is past tense; Luke’s purpose then, is not conversion or the provision of wholly new information, but something else.

\(^11\) Mark is generally assumed to be one of those previous accounts that Luke employs, along with the much debated “Q” source. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 3:6. Given this project’s focus on Acts, no discussion of the synoptic problem is provided.

\(^12\) Here, as elsewhere, translation from the New Testament are my own unless otherwise indicated.
rhetorically persuasive and convincing. In other words, Luke “reconfigures the selected events into a particularly well-ordered sequence, so that the reader who follows the connections made by this narrative will be able to realize the true significance of these events and benefit from it in terms of (re-)assurance.”

The final purpose clause indicates that Luke wants Theophilus (and, presumably, other readers) to know the “certainty,” “assurance” or “security” of all those things about which he has been instructed (τὴν ἀσφαλέων). The term connotes confirming, edifying, or solidifying rather than simply informing processes. A related form appears in Acts 2:36 as an adverb modifying the verb “to know” rather than, as in Luke 1:4, a noun serving as the same verb’s object. At the conclusion of his Pentecost speech, Peter exhorts the house of Israel to “know assuredly” (ἀσφαλῶς σῶν γνωσκέτω) the identity of Jesus as Lord and Messiah. The content of the speech is not necessarily new information, but rather a compelling presentation of events intended to move the audience to a new way of knowing and being in response to Jesus as God’s Messiah. A similar dynamic appears to be at work in the Acts narrative as a whole. Luke pursues his

13 NRSV, NIV, ESV all translate the term as orderly; KJV prefers “in order.” The term used here also appears in Acts 11 to refer to the setting forth of a persuasive theological account of events (Acts 11:4).
15 The English word for asphalt derives from this noun. NRSV – truth; NIV, KJV – certainty; CEB – confidence.
16 The word γνωσκέω is used in both cases, though in the subjunctive form in Luke 1:4 and the imperative in Acts 2:36.
“legitimating and edifying objectives” through careful narration of God’s definitive saving work in Jesus Christ and continuing work in and through the church.\textsuperscript{17}

The secondary or recapitulatory preface in Acts references the same recipient, Theophilus (Acts 1:2), as well as Luke’s “first book” concerning what Jesus “began to do and to teach” (1:1).\textsuperscript{18} Unlike in Luke, it is difficult to distinguish between the preface and the main account; the two blend smoothly.\textsuperscript{19} The opening of Acts recalls the content of the Gospel, the things Jesus did and taught, and the Gospel’s ending at the ascension, while also introducing the context for the events in Jerusalem. Jesus spent his time between his resurrection and ascension “instructing” (ἐντελέμενος) and “speaking” (λέγων), as well as performing “convincing proofs” (τεκμηρίως; 1:3) for the disciples. The ending of Luke implies Christological content in this post-resurrection instruction, as Jesus interprets his life and ministry within the “law and the prophets” (Luke 24:27). The recapitulatory preface and the overlapping content form a “hinge” between the texts.

This quick survey of the prologues establishes the relevance of formative concerns for understanding Luke’s narrative in Acts in two ways. First, the prologues point to Luke’s intent to provide “assurance” or “security” in knowing, knowing that progresses past the initial instruction in some way. The aim for Theophilus, then, is not

\textsuperscript{18} Pervo notes that such secondary prefaces, “used intermittently in multivolume productions, indicated both a break and a link: this new volume/roll bears some relation to another or others.” Richard I. Pervo, \textit{Acts: A Commentary}, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 33.
initial conversion but subsequent, ongoing Christian formation. Second, the “meaningfully ordered” shape of Luke’s narrative provides the means for accomplishing this intent.  

2.1.2 The Implied Readers

This concern with Luke’s formative intent raises questions about the intended recipients. Commentators have made a variety of proposals for the historical identity of the author Luke, as well as the audience for his two-volume work. The most common suggestion for the latter is that Acts was mostly likely written to Christians in the eastern portion of the Roman Empire around 100 C.E., sometime after the completion of the Gospel. Pervo sees the detailed information about Ephesus as well as other areas around the Aegean as particularly indicative of the author’s provenance, if not also the texts’.

Information about the actual identity of the author and the readers remains speculative,

21 Richard Pervo has recently argued for a second century date for the text, sometime between 110-115 C.E., but his argument is not sufficiently convincing. Pervo sees Acts as bearing far more in common with the early apologists than with Paul, and cites three areas of evidence of the later date: 1) the text’s apologetic features, connected with the assumption that Acts is a “legitimating” narrative; 2) The interest in church organization and the election of leaders to designated positions, reflective of early catholic concerns and more in line with the pastoral epistles; 3) the text’s insistence on its antiquity (which differs from Matthew and Mark), and reflects more third generation concerns. I do not feel that the emphasis on church “positions” is nearly as prominent as in the Pastoral Epistles, with Acts 1 and 6 being the only clear example of such nominations and the criteria for them. Furthermore, given the value placed on a group’s antiquity by the culture, it is not necessary to interpret that interest as indicative of a distinctly third century development. Finally, Luke’s apparent awareness of other accounts may provide for the possibility of knowledge of Paul’s letters, even if they had not been formally assembled into a “canon.” Richard I. Pervo, “Acts in the Suburbs of the Apologists,” in Contemporary Studies in Acts, ed. Thomas E. Phillips (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 30–36.
however, and the historical reconstruction of those individuals is a “notoriously hazardous enterprise.”  

This project, like a number of other literary approaches to Luke-Acts, operates on the basis of an “imagined” or “competent reader” rather than a historically reconstructed community of readers. I construct the competent reader as one who possesses “the kind of characteristics and competencies required to make full sense of the author’s work.” The competent reader is, therefore, a historically disciplined reconstruction. Late first century historical realities, including social structures, literary culture, Roman political arrangements, and the like, function as critical elements of the “cultural encyclopedia” at the disposal of the imagined readers and with reference to which the text operates.

The imagined competent readers for Acts - that is, the readers that Acts appears to assume - are familiar with the Greco-Roman imperial context, which is frequently referenced and with notable specificity. The competent readers appear to be familiar with the Septuagint, both in terms of its contents and with regard to its importance for interpreting the meaning and significance of events, especially regarding Christ. Luke also appears to assume that readers are familiar with his Gospel or “first word,” given in

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particular the number of literary references to events and patterns of characterization in the Gospel that recur and further develop in Acts. Finally, Luke appears to assume that his readers possess sufficient cultural awareness to catch the quotations and allusions to texts in the broader, pagan literary context.

This study of Acts, then, is a historically disciplined literary analysis. Text-critical or form issues will largely be elided, though any situations in which these issues bear significantly on the interpretation of the text will be duly noted. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

2.2 The Formative Shape of Luke’s Story

Having established the broad sense in which this narrative coheres with formative interests with regard to the reader, what claims can be made about the relationship of the shape of the text to that formative intent? Scholarly discussions of both the relationship of Acts to the Gospel of Luke and the genre of Acts are both relevant to this consideration and much contested. While space does not permit an exhaustive discussion of either subject, brief attention to both locates this project within the current debates and raise some methodological considerations at the level of the interpretation of individual pericopes within Acts.

27 One example of this will be considered at length in chapter 4 in discussion of Paul’s shipwreck scene. As is often noted, Paul occasionally quotes directly from pagan poets, as in Acts 17:28.
28 This project does not adopt any rigid literary-critical framework, but instead uses the tools and approaches of literary criticism on a more ad hoc basis.
29 At some level it is difficult to dichotomize these issues. The debate about the relationship of the gospel to Acts is also implicated in the debate about genre. I will indicate the co-inherence of the issues where it is helpful.

The unity of Luke and Acts functioned as an “axiomatic” claim for much twentieth century study of Acts, especially since Cadbury introduced the hyphenated designation “Luke-Acts” in 1927.30 This project assumes that Luke-Acts is a unified literary project in two volumes, as the above discussion of Luke’s two prologues implies. At the same time, the unity of these two texts requires some qualification, and recent challengers to the consensus about the texts’ unity rightly contend that there are theological and methodological matters at stake in whether, how, and at what level(s) interpreters assume unity exists.31 These challenges to the general consensus for unity help to clarify the nature and hermeneutical significance of considering Luke and Acts as two parts of a unified literary project.

2.2.1.1 Challenges to the Unity Consensus

In Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts, Mikail Parsons and Richard Pervo argue that Luke-Acts fails to meet the conditions of unity at generic, narrative, and theological levels.32 After quickly granting authorial unity and highlighting the obvious canonical dis-unity, Pervo weighs the various genre proposals for the texts, which include historiography, biography, and monograph, and concludes that none successfully

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31 Bird notes that Todd Penner, F. Scott Spencer, Jacob Jervell, and Frank Matera offer strong cautions against glib assumptions regarding the unity of the two narratives. Ibid., 432–434. Bird also contends that opting for the unity of the text necessitates “a description of the exact nature of the unity between the two volumes and a justification of its hermeneutical significance.” Ibid., 442.
encompasses both books. Consequently, the books constitute two separate genres and are not generically unified.\textsuperscript{33} Furthermore, he argues that the assumption of generic unity ultimately frustrates the full attention to the features of both texts and limits understanding by “eliminating many useful bases of comparison for the sake of a nebulous general model.”\textsuperscript{34}

Parsons and Pervo also take up the question of the literary and theological unity of Luke and Acts. Parsons not only views the evidence typically cited in favor of literary unity as inconclusive, but also argues that new forms of literary analysis indicate disunity instead. Theories about levels of narration, including narrator involvement in the story’s events, reveal differences in the kinds of narration found in Acts as opposed to Luke’s Gospel.\textsuperscript{35} Pervo notes that, in his estimation, no substantive account of the theological unity of the texts yet existed, and proposed that the high anthropology in Acts could be construed as a point of continuity with the relatively low Christology of the gospel.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} For instance, Pervo classifies Luke’s Gospel as biography, along with the other gospels, which, contra Tannehill, he categorically rejects as a genre classification for Acts. Pervo sees the lack of a clear-cut genre for Acts as less problematic and perhaps even expected for the clearly popularly written text that he understands Acts to be. Ibid., 40.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 44. Additionally, Pervo worries that claiming that Luke’s Gospel is incomplete without Acts functionally de-values all other gospels that lack a second volume, which he calls “absurdity.” This is something of a false equivalency. And even if so, the devaluation that Pervo fears is already enshrined in Luke’s prologue, which indicates his awareness of other accounts and his decision to write one of his own regardless.

\textsuperscript{35} They identify linkages, parallels, and the prefaces as the primary evidence of literary unity. Parsons follows literary theorist Rimmon-Kenan in distinguishing between extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrators, the former who narrates from “above”, and the latter who narrates as if also a character in the narrative. Luke assumes the role of the extradiegetic narrator in the gospel, while Jesus serves as intradiegetic (along with other characters). Ibid., 49–50. Furthermore, the involvement of the narrator in the “we passages” in Acts constitutes a significant departure from narrator involvement in Luke. Ibid., 65–67.

\textsuperscript{36} He states, “first and foremost the problem of continuity, of the relation of the life and activity of the Church to the ‘Christ-event’.” Parsons and Pervo, \textit{Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts}, 86. Pervo sees Luke as portraying the apostles as Greco-Roman “divine men” and he claims that “For Lukas, Jesus, in a special and particular but not always distinct way, and the early missionaries are so endowed as to be able
Parsons and Pervo rightly caution readers against uncritical assumptions of unity to the extent that such assumptions can frustrate attention to each volume in its literary integrity. The majority of scholarship, however, has failed to be convinced that their argument sufficiently undermines the unity of the texts. In several cases, alternate theories account for their evidence while maintaining the unity of the texts. Variety in terms of narration certainly exists, but it does not necessarily indicate disunity rather than Luke’s varied literary artistry. The complicated nature of the genre discussion for Acts, discussed in the next section, weakens the argument against unity on the basis of genre. In short, the complications they identify do not sufficiently overwhelm evidence for the literary and rhetorical unity of the volumes.


38 William Kurz, for instance, identifies the same narrator variety but, contra Parsons, concludes that the variety results from Luke’s skill exemplified across the double work. William S. Kurz, Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 45. He states that “the special emphasis on Lukan narrators highlights the Lukan point of view on the events recounted, both as subsuming traditional materials and sources and as adding a distinctive voice to the harmony of the New Testament.” Ibid., 1. Furthermore, by Parson’s measure the narrative of Acts itself qualifies as dis-unified on its own.

39 In quick summary, the emerging consensus about the genre of Acts is that it is irreducibly mixed. Furthermore, the genre of the gospels is its own puzzle, for the gospels are hardly identical to ancient biographies. Given these realities, the genre distinction argument is not as powerful as it might have been if clear genre categories always pertained.
Andrew Gregory and Kavin Rowe’s edited volume revisits Parsons and Pervo’s challenge, adding reception history as an additional piece of evidence against unity. Rowe notes that, while there is external evidence that the early church recognized a common author, no such external evidence implies that these texts were subject to a “unified reading strategy.” While Luke as the author may have maintained literary unity in more than one way, scholars should be wary of assuming that the texts were historically received in the way that Luke intended. Subsequently, the problem with unified approaches in contemporary scholarship is not “the exegetical results but the claim that the first Christians would have understood the implications of Acts in relation to the first volume.” The disjunction between the unified reading that Luke may have intended and the canonical status and reception history raises a methodological question about the precedence of literary-critical versus historical approaches when making interpretive choices.


43 Gregory maintains that Luke intended for the texts to be read together, and suggests that, though the evidence is not definitive, there may have been cases in which the texts were read together or in light of one another. Andrew F. Gregory, “The Reception of Luke and Acts and the Unity of Luke-Acts,” in *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and C. Kavin Rowe (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 87-88.
first by noting that evidence from very early reception history is quite thin and includes nothing from the first century. Second, and in light of that gap, Johnson contends that the literary-critical approach operating on the basis of a posited ideal reader rather than a posited historical one remains the best approach. In the case of Luke-Acts, he finds the internal evidence for unity ultimately compelling.\footnote{He highlights in particular the fact that the prologues indicate clear intent and likely fact that the first recipient of both texts was the same, and that Luke presumes at least his earliest reader(s) knowledge of the first text when receiving the second. Johnson, “Literary Criticism of Luke-Acts: Is Reception History Pertinent?” 60.}

Since this project engages in literary critical analysis, I follow Johnson in treating Luke-Acts as a unified narrative on the basis of the internal evidence. I also follow Gregory in seeing the potential value in historical and reception history approaches depending upon the nature of the research and the desired outcomes. At the same time, given the scarcity and ambiguity of the early sources, I find internal evidence to be more compelling than external evidence on this matter.

2.2.1.2 Internal, Literary Evidence for Unity

The internal evidence marshaled in support of the literary and theological unity of Luke-Acts is broad and may be loosely categorized by literary style and redaction. Evidence from Luke’s literary style includes, but is not limited to the corresponding prologues,\footnote{The complete discussion of the prologues can be reviewed in section 2.2. One final note on the prologues in relationship to the unity of the text should be made here. The second prologue, as noted, appears to be recapitulatory, and some scholars consider this fact as evidence of the dis-unity of the text because it may well indicate that some time has passed between the composition of Luke and the composition of Acts. See Pervo, Acts, 33. The amount of time that elapsed between composition is, however, conjecture, much like the historical recipients. In response, I interpret the recapitulatory nature of the preface to Acts as an indication of its connection to Luke as part of a unified literary project.} dependence on scriptural motifs that span and structure both volumes,\footnote{The complete discussion of the prologues can be reviewed in section 2.2. One final note on the prologues in relationship to the unity of the text should be made here. The second prologue, as noted, appears to be recapitulatory, and some scholars consider this fact as evidence of the dis-unity of the text because it may well indicate that some time has passed between the composition of Luke and the composition of Acts. See Pervo, Acts, 33. The amount of time that elapsed between composition is, however, conjecture, much like the historical recipients. In response, I interpret the recapitulatory nature of the preface to Acts as an indication of its connection to Luke as part of a unified literary project.}
overarching prophecy/promise and fulfillment motif, and Luke’s apparent concern with the continuity of the church’s ministry with the teachings and work of Jesus as reflected in patterns of characterization and narration.48

Evidence from the structure of the gospel and from Luke’s redaction further supports the unity of Luke-Acts. Luke appears to adapt source material when writing the gospel in a manner that reflects his intention to write a second volume, as when he


withholds the important quotation of Isaiah 6 until the end of Acts.\textsuperscript{49} Furthermore, the uniquely constructed ending of the Gospel appears to set the stage for the second volume.\textsuperscript{50} Finally, Alexander identifies significant literary parallels between the prologue of the Gospel (chapters 1-4) and the literary epilogue of Acts (chapters 27-28), parallels that she contends imply literary intentionality and forethought.\textsuperscript{51}

On the basis of this evidence, this project operates with the understanding that Luke-Acts constitutes a unified literary project with overarching narrative, theological concerns. I assume both retrospective unity, in that the second volume clearly looks back to the first, and prospective unity, in that the first volume appears to clearly anticipate the second.\textsuperscript{52} While recognizing that claims about Luke’s means of conceiving and writing


\textsuperscript{51} These parallels include an emphasis on Rome and the Roman Empire as the context for events (Luke 3:1-2; Acts 28:14), the rejection of the proclamation by some in Israel who have eyes but do not see (Luke 4:16-30 and Acts 28:24; see also the contrast of seeing/not seeing in Luke 2:29-30 and Acts 28:26-27); the evocation of the “hope” or “consolation” of Israel (Luke 2:25; Acts 28:20); the hermeneutical framework provided by Isaiah, including an emphasis on salvation and the extension of salvation to the Gentile (see quotes from Isaiah at Luke 3:4-6, 4:18-19 as well as Acts 28:26-27). Alexander, “Reading Luke-Acts Back to Front,” 432-438. Though Alexander does not attend specifically to it, the salvation of “all” is also a prominent theme in the shipwreck scene, perhaps a further reflection of the emphasis on salvation in the literary prologue to Luke. See Gaventa, The Acts of the Apostles, 345-346.

\textsuperscript{52} Alexander employs the distinction between prospective and retrospective unity in her article in the Verheyden collection, noting that prospective unity is more difficult to establish than retrospective.
the two volumes remain conjectures, evidence within the two texts clearly suggests that the unity is best conceived as both prospective and retrospective.\textsuperscript{53}

2.2.1.3 Methodological Implications of Unity

The unity of Luke and Acts has the following implications for this project. The analysis of each pericope includes attention to its literary context in Acts. Since the literary work is in two volumes, each of which is coherent on its own, the scope of this project investigates the narrative of Acts as a complete literary work.\textsuperscript{54} That said, I consistently explore themes, characters, events, and practices within the selected pericopes in terms of the literary background provided by Luke’s Gospel. This kind of exploration includes, but is not limited to, those instances in which the narration of an event in Acts evinces clear allusions to events in Luke’s Gospel.\textsuperscript{55}

Two areas of the forthcoming analysis are particularly affected by this methodological choice: characterization of key figures and consideration of the

because it requires making claims that depend more heavily on the author’s intent than the reader’s literary experience. Nonetheless, she counts herself as a “reluctant convert” to that view, largely on the basis of the internal evidence provided by the literary linkages between prologue and epilogue summarized in the preceding footnote. Alexander, “Reading Luke-Acts Back to Front”, 438-439.


\textsuperscript{54} The unified nature of these works does not mean that the texts are identical in every theological nuance or literary strategy. Differences and developments, as well as resonances and allusions, require attention.

\textsuperscript{55} Following Hays, I will attend to literary “echoes” as well as obvious allusions. Both features of the text may apply to key terminology, patterns of characterization, or to literary structures. Richard B. Hays, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 29–32.
community’s practices. Following John Darr, I see characterization as a cumulative project across both books, a claim that has two kinds of implications for the analysis in the following chapters.\(^{56}\) The first implication is that readers develop Lukan characters sequentially; the construction of characters who appear in both volumes begins with the events and descriptions in Luke’s Gospel. Peter is a clear example; chapter three considers him in detail. The progressive nature of characterization also includes the ways in which Luke develops characters who only appear in Acts with reference to the characterization of Jesus in the gospels. This Christologically inflected characterization applies to both Peter and Paul. In a related sense, my interpretation of the significance of embodied practices in Acts also depends upon references to the practices of Jesus and his disciples as presented in Luke’s Gospel.

### 2.2.2 The Genre of Acts

The genre of Acts constitutes another critical feature of the shape of Luke’s two-volume story, particular given that genre classifications traditionally provide critical clues regarding the presumed function of a text. This area of scholarship on Acts is, however,

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\(^{56}\) In some cases, this claim makes a substantial difference in the characterization of a character or character type. Darr takes the Pharisees as an exemplar of this fact. He challenges the claim that Luke has more positive view of Pharisees in Acts than in the gospel. Gamaliel’s prominent role in the release of the imprisoned disciples in Acts 5 appears to be a positively intended action, but given the character profile developed across both texts it becomes more likely that this is a case of the unknowing contribution of even characters generally antagonistic to God’s mission. This is not the only location in the text in which a character ostensibly opposed to the disciples ironically and correctly identifies the disciples or treats them favorably. The spirit-possessed slave gift in Acts 16 correctly identifies Paul and Silas as “slaves of the most-high God,” even though within the narrative context she (and her owners) are foes and not friends. John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 116–120. See also Cornelis Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 75–82.
quite contested. Following a review of the landscape of current proposals, I locate my own understanding of the genre alongside the current consensus and identify the import of this discussion for this project’s formational concerns.

2.2.2.1 Genre Proposals and the Emerging Consensus

Thomas Phillips specifies four proposed genre categories for Acts: historiography, novel, epic, and biography. He identifies historiography as the most common genre designation, characteristic of a majority of approaches to the text in the twentieth century. In its long tenure as the dominant genre theory, several historiographical sub-categories have emerged in terms of which Acts is variously conceived: apologetic history, biblicized history, or general history concerned with community origins. By contrast, and in keeping with his view of Luke-Acts as a literary unity, Talbert suggested that the two-part work reflected ancient biographies like Laertius’s Lives in which the life and teachings of a founder are followed by accounts of those in his “school”. Richard Pervo


58 Talbert identifies three features of ancient biography, including the life of the founder, the life of his followers, and a summary of the school’s teachings. He notes that the final component is not present in the traditional way but suggests that the speeches in Acts serve the same function. Talbert, Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts, 131. While his proposal has never dominated the discussion, the narrative patterns and forms of parallelism that he identifies will be considered in relationship to what Talbert calls their “didactic significance”. Ibid., 7.

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suggests that Greco-Roman novels should be considered as parallel texts to Luke-Acts.\footnote{Pervo defines an ancient novel as “a relatively lengthy work of prose fiction depicting and deriding certain ideals through an entertaining presentation of the lives and experiences of a person or persons whose activity transcends the limits of ordinary living as known to its implied readers.” Richard I. Pervo, \textit{Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles} (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 105. Pervo stops short of defining the genre as novel, instead arguing that Acts is profitably read with such novels in mind. He argues more strongly against the possibility of classifying Acts as formal history, on the basis that it is too miraculous, colloquial, and adventurous than the genre permits. At any rate, he argues that the text is, if anything, a popular writing, perhaps most akin to a historical novel. Ibid., 121. Balch counters Pervo’s contention that the subject matter of Acts is insufficiently political or military to constitute a history. Balch sees Luke-Acts as offering a political history, in that the text follows a trajectory from founders to successors to expansion, includes concerns with “all nations” and the “ends of the earth,” and has the word expanding in place of a military force. David L. Balch, “The Genre of Luke-Acts: Individual Biography, Adventure Novel, or Political History?,” \textit{Southwestern Journal of Theology} 33, no. 1 (1990): 19.}

Similarly, MacDonald claims that Luke engages Homer’s writings in Acts as part of the deliberate “literary transvaluation” of these texts.\footnote{While the parallels MacDonald identifies between Homer and Luke-Acts merit close examination, and while I am not convinced of their strength, the clear existence of occasional literary parallels makes his introduction of the concept of evangelistic \textit{mythomachia} as the function an intriguing possibility. Dennis R. MacDonald, \textit{Does the New Testament Imitate Homer?: Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles} (Yale University Press, 2008), 151. Philips concludes his article by suggesting that the genre of Acts might be something akin to a historical \textit{mythomachia}. Thomas E. Phillips, “The Genre of Acts: Moving toward a Consensus?,” \textit{Currents in Biblical Research} 4, no. 3 (June 2006): 385.}

Even those proposals arguing for a clear genre category frequently note the presence of other generic features in the text. Marguerat, who rejects the ancient novel as a genre category, nonetheless identifies novelistic elements of the text in stories like the shipwreck.\footnote{Marguerat, \textit{The First Christian Historian}, 249-256.} Gregory Sterling, drawing on Heather Dubrow’s terminology, claims that the best interpreters of Acts can do is to identify the “host genre” that contains the generic variety within a particular framework.\footnote{Sterling, \textit{Histoiography and Self-Definition}, 16.} Pervo claims that Acts is a popular work and that “unrestrained by the conventions governing elite literature, popular writers were able to
blend genres and create new ones." Even Talbert claims that the text is a “mixed form” while arguing for biography as the genre category. Finally, in a recent volume Loveday Alexander avoids narrow delineation of the genre category, instead employing a variety of ancient texts as co-texts for understanding Luke-Acts.

What suggestions, if any, can be made about the text’s formative effect if, in fact, Acts has no clear genre category? While it may still be possible to identify historiography as the “host genre,” doing so mitigates the difficulty without resolving it. While a specific genre may not be identifiable, a concern with the identity formation of the community of readers underlies the various proposals. For the purposes of this project, that concern sufficiently establishes the coherence of formational concerns and the text.  

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63 Pervo, Acts, 18. Pervo holds that employing various models for understanding Acts more adequately illuminates its distinctive features than rigidly associating the text with a single genre. See this chapter, footnote 33.


65 In Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context she resists a restrictive conception of genre and instead compares the genre to a variety of ancient texts including history, novel, biography, and technical literature. She follows Burridge in seeing genre as “not so much a set of rules as a set of cultural expectations, which authors may subvert or transform but which they must somehow engage with if the process of communication is to get off the ground. This approach allows us to move inwards to the text, focusing initially on the generic expectations of competent contemporary readers.” Loveday Alexander, Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles, Library of New Testament Studies 298 (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 20. She notes that “‘Fact’ and ‘fiction’ are not generic categories at all, and in ancient literature it is clear that the conventional markers of factuality (in any genre) were easily – and regularly – subverted.” See Ibid., 156. Philips suggests that one of Alexander’s most substantive contributions to the genre discussion is her de-coupling of historiography as genre and the presumed facticity of the text. This, along with her insistence that the prefaces put Luke-Acts on the “fringes of history” rather than its center “has encouraged scholars to reconsider their categories, and the result has been a softening of the borders between genre classifications.” Phillips, “The Genre of Acts”, 383.

66 All things considered, I think historiography may be the most prominent generic convention, given what seems to be to be an interest in the community’s identity. Marguerat claims, “If history answers an institutional necessity to fix the memory of the past, then the ambition of the work ad Theophilum is to provide Lucan Christianity with an identity. In writing his diptych, the author wants to show his readers who they are, where they come from and what formed them” (emphasis original). Marguerat sees the “identity intention” as most at home in the “historical mode” Marguerat, The First Christian Historian, 31.

67 In other words, the analysis can proceed on the basis of formative intent even despite the lack of a clear genre-defined set of expectations.
The genre discussions helpfully clarify the various textual strategies that Luke employs in his “edifying and legitimating project.”

Furthermore, as recent discussions suggest, the shift away from crystallized genre categories does not necessarily entail interpretive gridlock. Alan Bale suggests that a prescriptive approach to genre, even if accounting for two or more genre categories, “actually seems to hinder interpretation by making a critic invested in one (or two or three) genres maximize some features and minimize others.” Instead, it may be more productive to attend to the literary culture more broadly and to watch for the “signposts” within the narrative of Acts that would indicate what literary culture or social realities the narrative evokes. Stated in the terms employed earlier, these “signposts” indicate elements of the “cultural encyclopedia” presumed by the text. That cultural encyclopedia, as suggested above in the discussion of the imagined reader, includes the Septuagint, Greco-Roman or Jewish novels, historiographies and epics, as well as Luke’s Gospel. I assume, following Bale, that “the combination of common texts and common culture allowed Luke to direct his audience as to how to read his narrative.”

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69 Alan Bale, *Genre and Narrative Coherence in the Acts of the Apostles*, Library of New Testament Studies 514 (New York: T & T Clark, 2014), 72. He identifies two objectives for his study of genre in biblical studies: “the first is to move away from a prescriptive approach to genre toward a more flexible model (while avoiding so much flexibility that it becomes pointless). The second is to establish how genre enables and assists communication in literature.” He also notes that genre theorists in literary studies are increasingly moving away from rigid genre categories entirely. Ibid., 71.
70 Though Bale does not cite Umberto Eco on this point, he is referring the same cultural reality when he references the “cognitive environment” by means of which interpreters make sense out of communication. For clarity’s sake, I use Eco’s term consistently throughout this argument. Bale, *Genre and Narrative Coherence*, 82.
71 Ibid., 93.
It is now possible to revisit the broader purpose of this section, namely to continue considering whether or not Acts is amenable to consideration through the lens of this project’s interest in formation. I contend that Luke’s overarching purpose in this generically complex text is the formation of the readers in the Way of Jesus. Luke has a “practical and didactic outlook” and “seeks to call his audience to renewed commitment to the Christian message and living.” The genre categories helpfully elucidate the literary strategies through which Luke seeks this purpose.

Advocates of historiography highlight Luke’s apparent concern with the articulation of a people’s identity in context, often with particular interest in antiquity or origins. Sterling sees Luke’s apologetic purposes as inwardly directed, an effort to help the community of Christians understand their distinctive identity in the Greco-Roman world. Furthermore, history in the ancient world included a didactic or educational function. Ancient histories could exert didactic force for their audience through “the plot structure representing the historian’s moral interpretation of the events.”

Ancient historiography also made use of narrative models for imitation, which form a particularly prominent feature of the didactic function of biographies. Advocates of biography, along with some other scholars, point to Luke’s clear use of literary

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73 Luke’s efforts to demonstrate continuity of his narrative with the Septuagint constitute one effort to establish the origin of the community in a broader history. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, 363.
74 Sterling identifies Luke-Acts as an apologetic historiography, the “story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group’s own traditions, but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world.” Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, 17.
parallels to identify reliable characters by their relationship to and imitation of Jesus.\textsuperscript{76} Talbert construes these literary patterns as a response to concern for succession in a period of doctrinal controversy, but the \textit{Sitz im Leben} need not be so specific for exemplars to function as an aspect of Luke’s formative intent.\textsuperscript{77}

Features of the text more akin to ancient novels or epics, like those highlighted by Pervo and MacDonald, seem contradictory or irrelevant to any formative concerns, but that appearance is misleading.\textsuperscript{78} Pervo notes that in popular literature, edifying and entertaining objectives were not mutually exclusive but rather cooperative functions.\textsuperscript{79} MacDonald suggests that Acts literarily constitutes a \textit{mythomachia}, a “battle of competing fictions.”\textsuperscript{80} Narrative, even that which appears in non-historical or legendary texts, is a culture and identity forming force.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{76} Moessner sees the parallels as partially constitutive of Luke’s adoption of the prophetic pattern including the prophet like Moses and the rejected prophets. Moessner, “‘The Christ Must Suffer,’” 255. Pervo also notes that similar correspondence between characters occur in ancient novels with similar effect. Pervo, \textit{Profit with Delight}, 133.


\textsuperscript{78} This is particularly true if formative intent is tightly wedded to the historiographical genre and its (presumed) respect for facticity. It is the entertaining or fantastic elements of Acts that Pervo seems as contradictory to a historiographical framework and more fitting for the genre of novel. The story of Eutychus for instance, would be a brief moment of humor rather than a matter for formal historical record. Pervo, \textit{Profit with Delight}, 65–66.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{80} MacDonald, \textit{Does the New Testament Imitate Homer?}, 151. Cribiore’s study of the artifacts of Roman education at the outposts of the empire further substantiates the prominence of Homeric texts as models of imitation in ancient schooling across the imperial world. Raffaella Cribiore, \textit{Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 140.

\textsuperscript{81} Tim Whitmarsh claims that “literature is an ever incomplete, ever unstable process of self-making.” Tim Whitmarsh, \textit{Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2. Whitmarsh goes on to claim that \textit{paideia} in literature of a variety of genres (philosophy, rhetoric, history, satire, and biography) was a key means by which Greek citizens carefully, even subversively, constructed identity while under the Roman empire. Ibid., 5. Even the practice of \textit{mimesis} using older literary models “was a fundamental means of constructing the cultural status of the present. . . the use of mimesis, moreover, was not simply a nostalgic attempt to ignore the evident disparities between past and present in the hope of creating a deluded, imaginary continuity with the past.
In summary, each of the genre proposals highlights one or more ways in which Luke’s text formatively engages the reader: in historiography, by establishing the identity of the church at the intersection of various narrative histories including the story of Jesus; in biography, by indicating characters who imitate Jesus and are therefore worthy of imitation and authority; in novel or epic, by both entertaining and educating. The critical common denominator among the proposals is that the effect of the narrative is somehow to provide certainty or assurance. I further suggest that such assurance entails their common life as a distinct community of practice whose identity is negotiated at the intersection of the story of Jesus, the story of Israel, and the cultural stories in their environment. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, this identity negotiation and formative intent provide fruitful and necessary conversation partners for Christian formation in the present day.

2.2.2.2 Methodological Implications of the Genre Debate

This project’s analysis of Acts, consequently, does not depend upon the adoption of certain reading conventions associated with a particular genre to the exclusion of others. Instead, the investigation of both pericopes in chapters three and four includes the ongoing process of intertextual citation of Classical models draws attention to discontinuity as much as continuity. Ibid., 88. He later claims that “paideia is a strategy of self-making, a means of arrogating to the subject a series of empowered identities. . . . at the same time, however, the process of poiesis indicated in the term ‘self-making’ should be stressed: the paideutic self lies on a continuum with the literary product, both created by the same techniques and methods.” Ibid., 129. His work provides an interesting point of comparison to Luke’s literary identity-forming project in Acts.

attention to the literary “signposts” that Luke employs to direct the reader, or to features of the cultural encyclopedia Luke evokes to make his point. By way of preview, both selected pericopes include a literary parallel between Jesus and one of the apostles as a key feature that holds forth an exemplar for the formation of the reader. Acts 27 specifically recalls features of Greco-Roman novels in what appears to be a theological adaptation of a literary trope. In Acts 10, the identity of the people of God and a speech more characteristic of Greco-Roman historiography, as well as divine intervention more characteristic of biblical history, are both important components of the narrative.

In the past two sections, I have made a case for the coherence of Acts with formative interests. First, I looked specifically at the prologues as early indicators of formative effect of these two connected volumes, particularly given the clues they contain about what the author appears to desire for Theophilus. I then surveyed two major debates about Luke-Acts: namely, the unity and genre of the two volumes. Both of these debates have methodological implications for the literary analysis of Acts, and they inform the question of the relevance of formational concerns to Acts. Underlying the various generic possibilities is a common formative intent within Luke’s ancient milieu. The unity of these texts conveys that any reading of formative effects for the reader of Acts would need to take Luke’s Gospel into account.

Before moving on to the textual analysis, however, I need to demonstrate one further point of coherence between Acts and the specific formative interests of this project. Is the formation of the community in Acts analogous to the kind of formation described in chapter one as the formation of the imagination? I contend that it is, and that
Luke’s use of narrative and particular interest in the community’s practices provides the basis for this coherence.

2.3 “Narrativized Ecclesial Practices” and Imagination in Acts

To state the question directly, is there epistemic “fit” between the ways of knowing associated with the imagination and the ways of knowing that Acts presumes, describes, and seeks to instantiate in the reader? Recall from chapter one that imagination describes an integrative, creative capacity that incorporates the ways of knowing held in both embodied and rational, personal and social, affective and analytical components of human life. The imagination gives rise to a whole way of being in the world that includes but is not limited to conscious, rational comprehension. I contend that Luke’s interest in the practices of the Christian community as a central element of formation in its distinctive life provides the basis for the theoretical, theological coherence I am claiming. Work by Rowe, Gaventa, and Holmås on practices within Luke-Acts provides some methodological clues and clarifies the issues at stake.

C. Kavin Rowe’s analysis of practices in Acts provides the impetus for this consideration of practices in relationship to the formation of the community. In World Upside Down, he focuses on what he calls “narrativized ecclesial practices” as a largely overlooked component in the debate about the church’s relationship to the Roman Empire. How is it, Rowe asks, that readers can make sense of both the text’s claims that the church is politically innocuous and the frequent perception of the Christian

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83 Rowe, World Upside Down, 6.
community as a threat to the status quo of imperial life? After close reading of texts in the journeys of Paul in Asia Minor and Greece, Rowe concludes that Luke narrates a quiet cultural (ie: not traditionally political) coup through the communal life of the church. Rowe states that it is impossible to “conceive of Acts’ narration of cultural disruption – the political worries, for example, of the Romans and/or Jews – without the formation of concrete communities with noticeably different patterns of life.”\(^{84}\) In and through the Christologically normed life of the church, culturally formative practices within the Greco-Roman world face a challenge at the level of the “social imaginary.” At the same time, the church is innocent of the charges leveled against it (δίκαιος), in that it cannot be successfully charged with treasonous activity.

Three central and definitive “narrativized ecclesial practices” are key to Luke’s narration of this tension: the confession that Jesus is Lord, the mission to the ends of the earth, and the gathering of the “Christians.”\(^{85}\) Engagement in these practices works to constitute a distinctive “social imaginary” that quietly subverts some fundamental operating assumptions of the Roman Empire.\(^{86}\) The result is a sort of “thick” theological

\(^{84}\) Rowe considers events including those in Lystra, Philippi, Athens, and Ephesus as well as the many references to Paul’s innocence in his trial before various Roman authorities. Ibid., 103.

\(^{85}\) The adjective “narrativized” is important here, because “the text of Acts embeds Christian practices in a story and in so doing gives them a particular narrative shape.” As Rowe argues, we cannot simply focus on “doing” over “thinking,” on practices rather than discourse or theology. The three practices detailed, Rowe argues, are central to the whole project and form scaffolding from which any other practices that Acts includes actually hang. Ibid.

\(^{86}\) The term “social imaginary” is Charles Taylor’s. See discussion in chapter one near fn 44. Rowe concludes that “Taylor’s description of the co-inherence of practices, normative notions, and a larger moral or metaphysical framework is interpretively advantageous because it helps to uncover the deeper matters that are at stake in the way Luke tells the story of the Christian mission . . . to see the potential of the Christian mission for cultural demise is to read it rightly. Indeed, this is but the flip side of the reality that God’s identity receives new cultural explication in the formation of a community whose moral or metaphysical order requires an alternative way of life.” Ibid., 146.
knowledge that resides at the level of embodied practice and not only at the level of theological propositions. Though Rowe does not employ the broader literature described in chapter one as foregrounding the importance of the imagination, the “thick” theological knowledge residing at multiple levels of experience is precisely the kind of knowing consistently associated with Christianly formed imagination.

In the following analysis, I extend Rowe’s logic in new directions, attending to practices he does not emphasize, like hospitality, discernment, and the Lord’s Supper, as generative sites for the formation of imagination that gives rise to the Way of Jesus. I also hope to develop Rowe’s logic within a more explicitly formation-oriented account, drawing my own textual analysis into more sustained conversation with literature in Christian formation. This project, as a result, significantly differs from Rowe’s in terms of scope, balance of analysis, and the form of contemporary application.

Practices like the ones named above often appear in high concentration at critical moments in the narrative’s development, moments in which they both drive and respond to the unfolding events. Practices like prayer, hospitality, testimony, and mission are intertwined with moments of divine intervention, with the construction of new understanding, in the indication of reliable characters, and with the conflict of embodied

87 Rowe is interested in practices primarily in terms of the question of the church’s relationship to the socio-political order and the tension between innocence and charges of disruption. Thus he states, “The hermeneutical attempt with the language of ‘core practices’ is to point to the essential importance of these particular practices for the tension we are trying to think.” (emphasis mine) Ibid., 102.

88 Rowe provides a model for the employment of secondary literature as “interpretively advantageous” for understanding the dynamics within the biblical text. Rowe appeals to Charles Taylor’s work as “interpretively advantageous” and his background awareness of Alasdair Maclntyre’s conception of teleologically, narratively informed practice suggests provocative and fruitful areas of overlapping concern between Christian formation literature and the study of Acts. Ibid., 146.
understanding between the Christian community and its cultural conversation partners, both Jewish and Greek. Importantly, the practices are situated within a narrative that takes its cue from the story of Jesus; the practices themselves reflect the “things Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:2).

I selected the narratives in Acts 10:1-11:18 and 27:1-28:16 on the basis of their participation in critical themes of the text, the prominence of specific practices within them, and the presence of intersecting narratives within the account. The Peter and Cornelius encounter narrates the movement of the gospel to the Gentiles at the unambiguous and irresistible initiation of God. The scenes on the shipwreck and in Malta are evocative texts for analysis due to their position in the literary epilogue of the book, which recapitulates central themes operative since the opening of the gospel. These events put an emphatic narrative stamp on Paul’s innocence, and Paul’s practices and postures contribute to the theological power of the story.

While Rowe attends to the cooperation of three key practices in the formation of the community, Geir Otto Holmås’s *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts* attends to the development of one particular practice across both Lukan volumes. Holmås situates prayer at the center of Luke’s “legitimating and edifying objective,” and he sees the contours of the practices of prayer as developing and emerging over the course of the narrative and in relationship to Luke’s objectives. Specifically, prayer indicates divine

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causation or approval, even as it occasionally precedes divine intervention. The instructions of Jesus help to “crystallize” the practice further, and provide the criteria for assessing the practice of leading figures in the text, who function as narrative exempla. Finally, prayer advances the overarching theme of the plan of God unfolding through the interaction of divine and human initiative.91

While this project considers the formative function of various practices rather than focus on one, I follow Holmås’s narrative method for evaluating the shape of a practice within the text. When I consider the practice of hospitality in chapter 3, I, like Holmås, trace the establishment of practices in the ministry and teaching of Jesus and their contribution to the didactic intent of the text. Also like Holmås, I trace the development of a practice chronologically, with attention to the function of such practices with regard to plot, characterization, and major themes as well as those moments of instruction in which components of the practice become “crystallized.” While my attention to practices will, of necessity, be more modest in scope, I consider his approach as a useful guide for considering both the shape and effect of practices in Acts.92

Beverly Gaventa’s From Darkness to Light considers the accounts of conversions in Acts as well as other New Testament texts, and while it is not a discussion of practices historiography, stating that “sometimes this exemplary function of history is made explicit in the works of historians. Overall however, the use of records of the past for paradigmatic purposes has been a commonplace that was implicitly understood and shared by all. In line with this, an ancient reader would undoubtedly have recognized a strong educational undercurrent pervading Luke-Acts.” Ibid., 55.


92 Ibid., 17.
in Acts in a strict sense, it raises some important considerations. 93 Gaventa does not refer to conversion as a practice, but the conversion accounts in Acts include a variety of practices, including baptism, testimony, prayer, hospitality, and scriptural exposition. 94 With regard to conversion itself, Gaventa cautions the reader against treating any of the conversions as a model or template for evangelistic practices. 95 This relatively common way of reading conversion stories reduces a meaningful pattern of experience into a rigid, even mechanical, template. Similarly, I take care to avoid reifying into a rigid template whatever meaningful pattern a practice may entail. Such reification risks obscuring practices by importing a sense of rigidity to Christian life that the text itself does not specify. The church’s practices exist at the junction of continuity and discontinuity, embedded in the ministry of Jesus yet broken open and applied in unexpected ways and to unanticipated persons. In this way, practices participate in the broader pattern of rupture and re-narration that characterizes the text of Acts as a whole.

Gaventa’s caution about under-emphasizing the role of divine activity in Acts by focusing predominantly on human initiative also raises a critical issue for this project’s attention to practice. It may be the case that a focus on practice risks such elision of the


94 These practices of hospitality and testimony in Acts 10:1-11:18 are specifically taken up in chapter 3, and the practices of the Eucharist during the shipwreck as well as healing and hospitality on Malta in Acts 27:1-28:10 are take up in chapter 4. Gaventa offers in this text some critical insights about the centrality of hospitality to the unfolding narrative; those insights will be integrated in that later chapter. Gaventa, From Darkness to Light, 109.

95 Ibid., 124.
critical role of divine activity in the accounts. I maintain that, like Christian formation, practices exist at the intersection of divine and human initiative. To preview the argument in chapter three, both Peter and Cornelius are actively engaged in the practice of prayer when they receive a vision from God. Here, human practice serves as the context of divine activity. Within the same account, however, God’s decisive interruption of Peter’s testimony with the outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles prompts Peter to engage in a common practice now differently applied – the baptism of the Gentiles. This study will attend specifically to the location of practices as sites of human cooperation with divine agency, in an effort to avoid overlooking one when considering the other.

Some final notes on upcoming chapter’s methodology are appropriate at this point. This project is, formally, a Christian formation project conducted in extensive conversation with biblical studies. Given the shape of the project, the exegetical analysis is a conversation partner alongside the theoretical, pedagogical discussion. The following two chapters each begin with a theoretical discussion regarding some elements of the imagination’s formation before moving into the exegetical analysis.

Chapter three focuses specifically on the capacity of practices to shape the imagination, particularly within a community and in cooperation with the community’s articulated sense of identity. Chapter four looks at the role of narrative in the formation of the imagination, including the work of narrative on personal as well as social levels. Attention in both chapters then shifts to literary analysis of the biblical text, which considers the formative dynamics in the text with particular interest that which pertains to the imagination. I also situate the practices in the pericope with reference to their
background in Luke’s gospel and relevant features of the broader cultural milieu of the Greco-Roman world. Having explored the formative dynamics in the text in conversation with the imagined ancient reader, each of these chapters concludes by suggesting analogous dynamics for the imagined, 21st century western Christian readers.

2.4 Conclusion: Moving toward Analysis

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the coherence of the Acts of the Apostles with the formative interest described in chapter one in three ways. First, I considered the prologues as indicators of Luke’s interest in the formation of the reader. Luke wants Theophilus to move to a more assured way of knowing the things that he has already been taught. Consideration of the debate about the relationship of Luke to Acts and the genre of Acts added greater specificity to this account of the narrative’s formative effect. The formative effects of Acts take place with close reference to the story of Jesus in Luke, and the mixed genre of Acts makes possible productive consideration of this narrative alongside various texts within its cultural milieu. Finally, I turned to recent interest in practices as formative elements in Acts specifically as an indication of coherence with imaginal formation specifically.

Luke’s unique image for the followers of Jesus, “the Way,” evokes the kind of holistic formation with which I am concerned. The Way of Jesus includes ways of knowing, being, acting, and relating, negotiated with reference to the Scriptures and in the midst of existing cultural circumstances. The next two chapters consider the formation of key characters in the Way, with particular focus on the formation or effect of their imaginations.

In the last chapter, I argued that Acts is amenable to analysis through the lens of formational concerns. The generic shape of the text, its relationship to the Gospel of Luke, and its prologues point to formative intent in keeping with the function of parallel forms of ancient literature. Furthermore, Luke’s interest in narratively situating the practices of the Way, especially in relationship to the practices of Jesus, hints that the formation at stake in the text is analogous to what the first chapter called the formation of the imagination.

This chapter, along with chapter four, aims to test whether these formative concerns are interpretively advantageous in two ways. First, I aim to see whether attention to the formative dynamics in the text helps to clarify what is at stake in the events that Luke recounts for the communities in and in front of the text. Second, I consider whether approaching Acts through the lens of imagination assists modern readers in the interpretation of Acts as a formative text for creaturely life before God. This chapter, then, contributes to the broader attempt in this project to take Acts as a test case and exemplar for the formation of scriptural imagination in communities of faith.

In Acts 10:1-11:18, Peter’s encounter with the Gentile Cornelius brings about a substantial change in the church’s entire way of life, including theological understanding, sense of identity, and common practice. Furthermore, Luke retells this account three times in various forms, making it second only to Paul’s conversion in the amount of
emphasis it receives in the narrative.\(^1\) In short, few events in Acts are more consequential for the shape of the narrative and the church’s own identity than Peter’s response to the prompting of the Spirit in the inclusion of the Gentiles among the believers.

The significant change Peter undergoes in seeing, acting, and relating with respect to the Gentiles is fruitfully understood as a transformation of his imagination. This imaginal transformation occurs through the non-reductive interplay of embodied participation in the Christian practice of hospitality and conscious, constructive discernment, concluding with the public, traditioned narration of the community’s new way of being.\(^2\) Recent discussions about the formative function of Christian practices provide a necessary starting point for this investigation of hospitality. This literature provides definitional clarity for the term “practice” and situates the argument within the epistemology described in chapter one.

With the practices framework better defined, I turn to the biblical text, beginning with a brief summary of the narrative context and the broad structure of Acts 10:1-11:18. I begin by identifying the literary situation and narrative contours of the passage before moving to the historical background of ancient hospitality practices as well as their development in Luke’s Gospel. The chapter concludes with a suggestion about the text’s resonance for the modern and post-modern reader.

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\(^1\) Peter’s encounter with Cornelius is narrated in the third person in Acts 10, restated in first person in the mouth of Peter in Acts 11:1-18, and very briefly recapitulated, again by Peter, at the Jerusalem meeting in Acts 15:6-11. Likewise, Paul’s conversion is recorded in the third person in Acts 9:1-30, and then renarrated in first person by the character of Paul in Acts 22:3-21 and 26:9-18.

\(^2\) By non-reductive, I mean that no component in imaginal transformation reduces the importance of any others. The embodied, tacit ways of knowing exist in their own integrity, even while being integrated with more conscious ways of knowing. Positing the cooperation of these elements of human doing does not presume the collapsing of one into another.
3.1 The Formative Power of Practices

In chapter one, I defined imagination as an integrative, constructive human capacity, reflective of the anthropological and epistemological realities pertaining to humans as creatures of God. As creatures, humans know or apprehend the world in ways that irreducibly involve the body and the brain, the personal and the social, the tacit and the conscious working in close but non-reductive interaction. The imagination hovers interstitially between these complex areas of human experiencing, knowing, and doing, ultimately generating a way of construing and, consequently, being in the world. Christian educators interested in the formation of a scripturally shaped imagination must account for inherent dynamic tensions within imagination in shaping a community’s engagement with a discursive text.

Embodied practices integrally function in the formation of this whole-bodied creaturely capacity. James K.A. Smith has recently and compellingly connected Christian practices and imagination, drawing on and expanding the attention that a diverse range of scholars have paid in recent decades to the centrality of practices in the formation of a way of life.⁴ Establishing the imagination-forming potential of practices necessitates

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³ J. Smith, along with David I. Smith, identifies three strands in the discussion of practices. Philosophical literature on practices constitutes the first category; here Alasdair MacIntyre and Pierre Bourdieu feature prominently. The second category includes philosophy of education literature, like the work of Etienne Wenger. The final category contains those proposals that bring the practices conversation within the realm of Christian theology. Here, the work of and inspired by Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass is paramount. Smith and Smith, “Introduction: Practices, Faith, and Pedagogy,” 6. Christian theologians interested in liturgy and moral formation have recently attended to the formative nature of practices. The Blackwell Companion to Theology and Ethics is one of many representatives of this line of research. Hauerwas and Wells state in the opening chapter that “the aim of this volume is to stretch, inspire, and develop the reader’s conception of Christian worship in order to challenge, enrich, and transform the reader’s notions of the form and content of Christian worship.” Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells,
attention to some broad theoretical issues as well as the relationship of practices to imagination more narrowly.

### 3.1.1 Theoretical Perspectives on the Formative Power of Practices

Practices have constituted an area of study in philosophy and Christian theology for some time now, generating both discussion and debate. This literature, like the literature on narratives, is quite expansive. For the purposes of this argument, two angles of approach into the conversation help to clarify the role of practices in the formation of imagination in preparation for the integrative analysis later in the chapter. This section begins by setting forth a definition of practices drawing on the influential work of Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass. It then turns to the matter of the forms of knowledge that practices presupposed and potentially generate. This second consideration also necessitates dealing with some points of departure in accounts of practices, which I will ultimately argue constitute dualities rather than dichotomies.⁴

#### 3.1.1.1 A Definition of Christian Practice

A practice is a cooperative form of human activity that is historically extended and aimed toward fundamental needs and certain desired (if sometimes only implied) ends. A Christian practice, then, addresses those needs as they are conceived and defined by the Christian tradition and takes its shape in response to operative conceptions of

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⁴ Duality implies a level of relationship and potential cooperation that dichotomy does not.
God’s purposes. In Bass and Dykstra’s influential account, Christian practices include those “things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”

This broad definition separates their account from others, like Reinhold Hütter’s, that insist on a clear distinction between practices in the “ecology of creation,” that is, those that are “broadly human,” as opposed to those in the “economy of salvation” through which “God’s salvific activity is communicated and mediated.” Bass and Dykstra include practices like “honoring the body” and “household economics” in the category of Christian practices to the extent that these are “congruent with the necessities of human existence, as seen from a Christian perspective on the character of human flourishing.” Consequently, a practice merits the label Christian by virtue of the

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6 In Hütter’s theological taxonomy of practices, the “economy of creation” includes all practices relevant to the sustenance and flourishing of human life more generally. Hospitality would be an example of the economy of creation, the Eucharist a representative of the economy of salvation. In accounts like this, a practice merits the adjective “Christian” most typically by its inclusion in a liturgical setting or presumed sacramental power, or explicit personal engagement with some specific activity or artifact of the Christian faith (Scripture, prayer, icons, etc). Reinhold Hütter, “Hospitality and Truth: The Disclosure of Practices in Worship and Doctrine,” in Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 206.

7 Dykstra and Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” 22. What distinguishes a Christian’s practice of household economics from the practice of their atheist neighbor is not (merely) the articulated reasons for acting but (sometimes also) the shape of the actions themselves. See Dorothy C. Bass, “Ways of Life Abundant,” in For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 30–31. The chapter on household economics, for instance, includes those basic activities that constitute the common features of physical life within a household, in which people participate whether or not they confess any particular faith. The Christian practice of household economics involves norms from within the Christian tradition. Sharon Daloz Parks, “Household Economics,” in Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People, ed. Dorothy C. Bass, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 43. Their definition also presumes “overlap” between engagement in these practices and the practices engaged by those outside of Christian tradition. Bretherton has argued that this overlap is indicative of “ad hoc commensurability” between religious communities that can serve as productive ground for inter-religious
normative story or tradition called upon to define, evaluate, and amend a practice across time and context.⁸

To state the point differently, for the purposes of this project, a practice meets four criteria. Practices are 1) socially extended, by which I mean that they are mediated and sustained by a community of practitioners, while not excluding the possibility that individuals may sometimes engage in them alone.⁹ Practices are 2) historically situated, meaning that they have and bear into the future a history or tradition.¹⁰ Furthermore, practices are 3) complex, involving a number of discrete, adaptable actions or “movements” that together constitute a practice.¹¹ Finally, 4) practices entail ends and outcomes, which may be explicit and agreed upon or implicit and contested, or perhaps both at the same time.¹² Complex activities with these social, traditional, and generally

⁸ Stated in MacIntyre’s terms, the resources of the faith provide the tradition in which the telos or teloi of practice find definition. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 219.


¹¹ For MacIntyre, laying brick is not a practice, but architecture is. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

¹² Here I depart somewhat from MacIntyre’s conception of practices. I agree with MacIntyre that practices have ends and objectives, that those ends and objectives can be publicly accounted for in the form of a narrative, and that the intelligibility of a practice within its tradition and narrative is an important good. These things are, however, more slippery that MacIntyre seems to suggest, for humans operate in conflicted territory at the nexus of several possible traditions. Furthermore, while his definition of a tradition includes internal debate about its contours, that recognition does not entail subsequent and necessary recognition that cooperative practitioners can have different and still ‘traditioned’ conceptions of the telos of a practice, and that their common engagement in that practice does not require that consensus. This point receives further discussion in a later section, but it suffices for the moment to say that I locate the cohesion of a Christian practice in its claim to adherence to the Christian tradition, not in a clearly defined and broadly shared sense of the telos of that practice.
teleological or intentional characteristics, including everything from Christian worship to domestic economics, fits this definition.\(^{13}\)

Bass and Dykstra’s broad definition still entails, however, a prioritization of liturgical or ecclesial practices as key sources and generative contexts for the normativity of all practices.\(^{14}\) Liturgical practices are theologically “thick,” “consommé” compared to the “broth” of practices more broadly construed and engaged.\(^{15}\) Thicker practices can, however, recruit thinner ones with a kind of gravitational pull. A “thinner” movement in the practice of hospitality - like managing registration at a homeless shelter – can be theologically, practically grounded in God’s hospitality to the church in Jesus Christ at the table.\(^{16}\) The theological center of gravity provided by liturgical practices generates, orients, and sustains the broad scope of Christian practices.

This broad definition has significant gains for Christian formation, including the formation of the imagination with which this project is particularly concerned. It

\(^{13}\) This definition of practice omits from MacIntyre’s definition the concern about “goods internal to the practice” vs. external goods, for reasons that his concern there as it relates to virtues takes the argument too far off course. For more on this aspect of practice in MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 188–189.


\(^{15}\) James K. A. Smith makes a similar distinction between practices that are “thick” versus “thin.” Thick practices are those that are directly relate to deep markers of identity or meaning, while “thin” practices do not, or do so to a much lesser extent. Thick practices can, however, bring thinner practices into a realm more connected to meaning and identity. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 82–83.

\(^{16}\) They state, “The practice of hospitality, as we understand it, also encompasses, among other things, the biblical stories that have shaped the way in which the hosts perceive their guests; the specific habits, virtues, knowledge, and other capacities of mind and spirit that the hosts bring to the situation, many of which could have been developed only within the context of the practice itself; the liturgical words and gestures that make manifest in crystallized form the hospitality of God to humankind and our obligations to one another; and the domestic hosting that prepares family members to break bread with strangers in less familiar surroundings as well.” Dykstra and Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” 19.
maintains a normative center while better facilitating the connection between worship practices and the daily life of faith than a strict delineation between the two. A strict worship/service division does nothing to ameliorate the lack of religious congruence, or the persistent dis-integration of Christian claims and confessions in worship and behavior in other contexts. Humans think and act in deeply situational ways, thus the ways of thinking, feeling, and relating that pertain when communities gather for worship are not automatically activated in different contexts without some prior scaffolding for such connections. Intentionally and persistently connecting Christian practices across a variety of life contexts to liturgical practices creates the greater possibility of extending theological ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting across more of life.

3.1.1.2 Forms of Knowing Relevant to Christian Practices

In chapter one, I introduced a tension within the discussion of imagination, namely between proposals that primarily locate imagination at the level of preconscious construal of the world and those that locate its operation instead primarily in conscious, preconscious, and unconscious layers.

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17 For their part, Smith and Smith assume Bass and Dykstra’s generous definition of practices, such that Christian practices include not only prayer and fasting but also care for the body, humility, and table fellowship, which have significant overlap with other forms of practice. Smith and Smith, “Introduction: Practices, Faith, and Pedagogy,” 16.

18 The persistent problem of “religious congruence” makes this integration a matter of real concern in Christian formation. In his essay on the “religious congruence fallacy” in sociological research, Mark Chaves makes a compelling argument against the glib assumption of congruence between religious beliefs and behavior, presenting a helpful critique against claims that worship “works” in automatic ways. In Chaves’s view, the root of the problem is that schemas for thinking, understanding, and behaving that may be activated in worship or church contexts are simply not automatically applied in different contexts because human beings think and act in ways that deeply and thoroughly contextual. What is necessary in response is the concerted effort to bridge those divides. Mark Chaves, “Rain Dances in the Dry Season: Overcoming the Religious Congruence Fallacy,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 49, no. 1 (2010): 12.

19 Whether this reality is understood to be an aspect of sin or simply a condition relative to our finitude, its pervasiveness warrants great in claims about the efficacy of practices across the whole of a life.
creative, and constructive endeavors. A similar tension can be found in the practices literature, sometimes traced back to the differently inflected accounts of practices in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Pierre Bourdieu. With practices, as with imagination, I ultimately argue that the tension is dynamic and integral to the ways that human beings apprehend and engage the world. Practices generate ways of knowing that cannot be encapsulated by or reduced to concept, that are socially mediated through participation in communities of practice, and that remain amenable to, though never fully captured by, accounts constructed about their meaning. Attending to both Bourdieu and MacIntyre helps to clarify the intersection of these accounts as well as differences in emphasis.

MacIntyre’s After Virtue proposes a recovery of the Aristotelian account of the relationship of virtues to the moral life, a proposal that responds explicitly to the failed Enlightenment project and the rise of emotivism as an account of moral choice. These modern accounts suffer from the loss of a clear telos for human life as well as the social context and tradition by means of which actions come to be publicly accounted and accountable. He proposes instead that practices, narratives, virtues and traditions are mutually defined and defining components of the moral life. Virtues are those qualities that support achievement of the goods only available to practitioners through particular

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20 The Enlightenment project refers to the attempt to rationally justify morality. MacIntyre, After Virtue, 39. Emotivism refers to “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.” Ibid., 12.

21 His oft-cited if cumbersome definition of practices runs as follows: “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” MacIntyre, After Virtue, 187.
practices. Narrative serves as the common historical shape of intelligible accounts of action, as well as the unity of human life. Tradition, “an historically extended, socially embodied argument . . . about the goods which constitute that tradition,” provides the broader social context that informs those narratives account. Modern accounts of moral choice fail, MacIntyre claims, because they separate virtues or right judgments from the broader context that makes them intelligible.

The formative nature of those practices in MacIntyre’s proposal is complex, narratively grounded, and connected with a sense of the personal identity of the practitioner. “Intelligible accounts” of action are a major feature of MacIntyre’s account of practices; ideally, practices flow “intelligibly from a human agent’s intentions, motives, passions, and purposes.” Intelligibility here is broadly, even affectively, construed, and an intelligible account takes the form of a narrative capable of encompassing the givens and unpredictability of life rather than a set of abstract ideals. MacIntyre insists that moral agents can ask one another for such accounts of their actions and recognize the right of others to ask such accounts of them. In doing so, he rightly

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22 Ibid., 193–194.
23 Ibid., 222.
24 Ibid., 218.
25 Ibid., 209.
26 Ted Smith’s comments on MacIntyre’s proposal errs in discounting the role of tradition and narrative in MacIntyre’s conception of practice and instead seeing MacIntyre’s account as oriented around clearly defined ideals. It seems that, in part, he conflates ideals with MacIntyre’s goods internal to the practice. Ted A. Smith, The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 28.
27 He states the point more strongly when he claims that “unintelligible actions are failed candidates for intelligible actions,” for we respond to unintelligible actions with bafflement and by presuming neuroses or a deep cultural disconnect. MacIntyre, After Virtue, 209–210.
emphasizes an important feature of human life in communities, namely that in among a group of diverse agents, persons do make moral choices and articulate reasons.

Bourdieu’s account of practices emphasizes the tacit and pre-conscious ways in which practices shape our engagement with the world. In his account, he explicitly resists an account of action in which all action can be explained by an appeal to rational principles.28 Practices in his account possess meaning that is distinct from, irreducible to, and independent from the rational accounts constructed about them – in his words, the “logic of practice is not the logic of the logician.”29 Consequently, any description of a practice or its apparent “logic” substantially differs from the practice itself. Bourdieu refers to this practical way of knowing as a “feel for the game,” a tacit sense of the rules and moves that govern certain forms of interaction.

Practices for Bourdieu, as for MacIntyre, are socially and historically extended, in that they presume a history that is carried into the future by a particular community that engages in a set of practices.30 Entrance into such a particular community of practice requires habituation into a set of history-laden, socially effective, implicitly meaningful practices, which Bourdieu calls a habitus. Habitus refers to “systems of durable, transposable dispositions” that function as “principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without

28 The Logic of Practice is the classic text for Bourdieu on this subject. In it, he seeks to chart a third way between subjectivist and objectivist accounts of action. Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, 52.
29 Ibid., 86.
30 Ibid., 54.
presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them.”

Comparisons of MacIntyre and Bourdieu reach diverging conclusions regarding their compatibility as accounts of practices. The divergence posited between these accounts sometimes depends on the extent to which commentators perceive MacIntyre’s account of the operative “tradition” as highly rational, fixed, or persistently conscious and intentional. While I interpret MacIntyre’s account as more nuanced than some of his commentators suggest, it seems clear that MacIntyre places more emphasis on the importance of “intelligible accounts” of practice that does Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, practices effectively generate a meaningful way of being in the world, a habitus, apart from conscious intention or clear articulation. For MacIntyre, without intentionality practices become unintelligible to both their practitioners and their observers. Both proposals share a concern with the historical and social nature of practices, but the force and function of those elements become developed with different points of emphasis. In Bourdieu’s account, the meaning of practices is largely separate and apart from any accounts of them, while for MacIntyre, the capacity to narrate, to articulate the meaning of a practice in relationship to an identifiable tradition, plays a far more central role.

Within a somewhat analogous discussion of Christian practices specifically, Kathryn Tanner suggests that accounts of Christian practice like Bass and Dykstra’s

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31 Ibid., 53.
32 For analysis that presumes their compatibility, see Smith and Smith, “Introduction: Practices, Faith, and Pedagogy,” 7–11. For an analysis that sees clear departures between these accounts, see Smith, The New Measures, 27.
ascribe unrealistically clear or defined forms of meaning onto malleable and unsystematic behaviors. By her analysis, cooperative forms of human behavior do not require an explicit, articulate sense of the practice’s meaning or a clear consensus on it. She states that, rather than having a rigidly defined structure, practices in general are fluid and processional in nature, “working through improvisation and ad hoc response to changing circumstances.” Bass and Dykstra do not suggest, however, that practices are fixed and formulaic in the sense that Tanner’s critique of unrealistically clear accounts of practice seems to assume. Furthermore, their account does not suggest that the meaning of practices lies only or even primarily in the accounts given of them.

Christian practices are, as Tanner rightly notes, in no way exempt from the blurred boundaries, dissonances, slippages, and competing interests that complicate our collective negotiation of life as finite creatures. Christians, even Christians within the same local church, do not agree in every point about the nuances and purposes of the Eucharist, for instance, and such tight consensus is not strictly necessary for the community’s participation around the Lord’s table. It should also go without saying that practices do not become theologically sound by virtue of being liturgically located. Even in Corinth Paul took issue with what was communicated by the shape of the Corinthian’s

33 Kathryn Tanner, “Theological Reflection and Christian Practices,” in Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 229. Tanner’s broader project is also concerned with the necessity of theological reflection not as post-practice reflection or pre-practice education but as essential to the practice itself. This is especially true, she notes, because Christian practices, “being what they are” inevitably generate problems. Ibid., 228. She goes on to add, that “No fully thought out, perfectly consistent, or neatly circumscribed Christian practices precedes the needs of the moment to guide the exercise of that practice into the future.” Ibid., 232.

practices at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17-22). The dynamics of sin and the limitations of finitude must be reckoned with when offering a formational account of practices.

For that reason, it is unsurprising that, despite other apparent differences, Tanner, Bass, and Dykstra highlight the centrality of theological reflection to Christian practice.\(^{35}\) Theological reflection can raise to conscious awareness those forces and commitments that inform a practice, whether those be forces from within the Christian tradition or from without, including places in which practices actually serve competing ends.\(^{36}\) Conscious commitment to knowing and discerning God’s work is entailed by the insistence that Christian practices are conducted “in light of and in response to” God’s work. While Bass and Dykstra never suggest that practices only ever entail conscious knowledge, Dykstra does emphasize that explicit articulation of reasons and norms relative to a practice by all practitioners features in practices’ formative effect.\(^{37}\) Christian practitioners reflect on and cooperatively articulate reasons for their specific forms of practice, but such reflection is occasional, a pause “midstream.”\(^{38}\) Or, as MacIntyre puts the point, “stories are lived before they are be told.” Narration of an intelligible account occurs after and in

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\(^{35}\) Tanner makes this case most strongly, but Bass and Dykstra also note that practices must constantly be evaluated according to theological norms and warrants, rather than assumed to be in line with God’s purposes. Dykstra and Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” 23.


\(^{38}\) Dykstra and Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” 17. They are speaking of practitioners here, in distinction from theologians or scholars of practice, whose reflection is their primary vocation. I think the occasional nature of the reflection applies in practitioner and academic cases. Even a theologian is also a practitioner, critical reflection on practice is not occurring at every moment.
the midst of complex human life in which actions interact with and are constrained by social conditions and actions of other agents.\textsuperscript{39}

Thus, while MacIntyre does not provide a thick account of the creaturely ways of knowing that include, as chapter one suggests, pre-conscious, affectively oriented, and largely tacit ways of knowing, and Bourdieu does place greater emphasis on these aspects in relationship to practices, these differences present no irresolvable impasse. Instead, both aspects of practice – conscious, articulated, and intentional as well as pre-reflective, unarticulable, and habitual arises directly from the complexities of human knowing and epistemically “fit” with the imagination. Christian practice presents no exception to the “ambiguities, inconsistencies, and open-endedness” that characterize much (or most) human behavior.\textsuperscript{40} These differences and limitations identify dynamic tensions inherent in human engagement with the world in and through practices rather than irreconcilable accounts of the same reality. Two recent works on the role of practices in the formation of imagination within a community of practice suggest a way of conceiving this dynamic tension: James K. A. Smith on practices and imagination and Etienne Wenger on identity and learning in communities of practice.

### 3.1.2 Practices and the Imagination

Jamie Smith’s recent proposals in \textit{Desiring the Kingdom} and \textit{Imagining the Kingdom} hold together both the teleological, explicitly normative elements of practices with their function at pre-reflective, unarticulated, and tacit levels. In his broader project,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{39} MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 212.

\textsuperscript{40} Tanner, “Theological Reflection and Christian Practices,” 232.
\end{footnotesize}
he aims to “situate theoretical reflection within the wider purview of our fundamental pre-theoretical orientation to the world.”\textsuperscript{41} In pursuit of that objective, he foregrounds the pre-theoretical drivers of human behavior, with particular focus on the role of narratives and practices as recruiters of human desire. Two features of his discussion of practices are especially salient.

First, Smith claims that practices are, in fact, teleological, in that they direct human desire and intention to certain ends or “loves” rather than others.\textsuperscript{42} Our consumption of certain media with its implicit or explicit narratives or our participation in certain cultural practices shape and orient our desires. Those desires or longings reside at “gut-level,” or at the level of our visceral comportment in the world. This visceral comportment powerfully generates human behavior and does so logically and developmentally prior to our conscious reflection and articulation. In contrast to proposals that suggest that we think our way into certain ways of acting, Smith claims that, by and large, we act and feel our way into certain ways of thinking.

Embodied practices are especially powerful formers of visceral ways of being because they recruit the imagination, even when practitioners do not recognize their effective nature.\textsuperscript{43} Consequently, practices can operate formatively without our intention

\textsuperscript{41} Smith, \textit{Imagining the Kingdom}, 13.
\textsuperscript{42} This is a major component of his liturgical anthropology – the liturgies in which we engage shape our desires and work at a level “below” beliefs or thoughts. Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 40.
\textsuperscript{43} As noted in chapter one, his concern with the imagination diverges from this project’s definition in that he locates imagination primarily on the pre- or non- conscious level and downplays too much the role of conscious reflection relative to the imagination. Smith, \textit{Imagining the Kingdom}, 36. He has been critiqued along these lines since the publication of his first book, which he acknowledges in the second volume. Some critiques – like those that suggest that he sees no role for reason – misread his account and intent. Still, while he admits that conscious reflection on practice may be helpful to its formative effects, he
or consent, as opposed to working only as the result of our intention. At the same time, Smith claims that we can and do come to articulate and consciously reflect on those ends toward which practices direct, and this coming to awareness can be a key feature of Christian education. Smith suggests, for instance, what he calls an “apocalyptic reading” of cultural practices: that is, the discipline of interrogating practices in order to “uncover” the deep commitments and love-orienting or -disorienting capacities of those practices. His suggestion of apocalyptic readings anticipates that practices have formative effect in cultural contexts apart from explicit reflection, but that there can be important moments of what we might call “intentional clarity.” By intentional clarity, I mean those instances in which practitioners pause to identify reasons for and ends of certain practices. Similarly, conscious awareness of the de-formative ends of certain practices can have a “de-activating” function and thus can mitigate some of the de-formative effects, particularly when pared with practices generative of different understandings.

Smith’s account of the centrality of liturgical practices further indicates that explicit articulation can constitute an important component of formation in practices, even while his account raises questions about the contestability of those articulations. Smith identifies clear “ends” to liturgical practices, though the ends he identifies differ

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44 Secular liturgies are “rituals of ultimate concern” that both reflect and shape what matters. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom, 98.
45 Again, this is not to presuppose that the articulation of those reasons for acting is the same thing as action. Bourdieu’s distinction of the “Logic of practice” as being different from other logics still pertains. It is to say, however, that the two co-exist, if sometimes in an uneasy relationship.
somewhat from similar summaries. In some cases, the rationale for some practices may be stated as part of the practice: “On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread and broke it” (1 Cor 11:23). Furthermore, catechesis both ancient and modern includes explicit instruction and participation in liturgical practices. Scholars of Christian formation in the “socialization” school of thought, John Westerhoff and Charles Foster, for instance, include actual instruction in practices, which entails articulation of their purpose and function as part of the practice of formation.

Smith’s account also keeps the “more than can be said” aspect of human knowing, being, and relating at the center of his account of Christian practices and narratives in Christian formation. This emphasis may, in part, explain his reticence to offer strategies for thinking about or reflecting on practices. No kind of thinking about practices replaces actual participation in them, for practices are deeply grounded in our whole-bodied understanding of self and world. Consequently, our discussion of the relationship

46 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 155–206. This is important because other accounts of what and how the liturgical practices form us to be certain ways can be articulated quite differently. Smith, for instance, suggests that baptism does X, while Wells claims that baptism does Y. See *Ibid.*, 182–190. See also Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 83. This sort of internal dialogue and disagreement is certain inevitable, given the breadth and depth of the Christian tradition, but (contra Tanner) it does not ultimately make useless explicit reflections on practice that might occur in the midst of it.

47 Bernsten notes, “the pedagogy of the early church was not exactly experiential nor yet doctrinal and instructional. It was a unity of teaching and experience which, taken as a whole, was understood to be at the behest of the paschal mystery itself.” Bernsten, “Christian Affections and the Catechumenate,” 240.

48 I am thinking here of, for instance, Charles Foster’s eventful education model, which centers around an event, which may well include the enactment of a particular Christian practice. The moves of that curriculum are preparation, participation, and reflection, in which case theological norms and warrants are explicitly claimed as critical alongside participation, without claiming that the participation is reducible to speech about it. Charles R. Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 47–50.
between participation and reflection upon participation is further aided, then, by a turn to educational philosopher Etienne Wenger.

Etienne Wenger’s “social theory of learning” implicates participation in a community’s practices in what it means to generate meaning and develop identity in the midst of social activity.\(^49\) In his account, participation refers “not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructive *identities* in relation to these communities.”\(^50\) Practices serve as the context of meaning construction through the ongoing interaction of two elements: participation and reification. Participation refers to the engagement of individuals in the practices around which that community is oriented.\(^51\) Reification refers to any attempt to codify or represent the practice, including various forms of discourse, instructions, models, images, memos, and so on.\(^52\) Learning, in this account, entails evolving forms of mutual

\(^49\) His social theory of learning resides at the intersection of four axes: theories of practice and theories of identity, as well as theories of social structure and theories of situated experience. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12.

\(^50\) Ibid., 4. Emphasis original.

\(^51\) He goes on to further define participation as “a complex process that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging. It involves the whole person, including our bodies, minds, emotions, and social relations.” Ibid., 56. He defines such meaning-constructing practices quite broadly, well beyond religious or educational institutions. His case studies come from his participant observation of one insurance claims processing company. Ibid., 18–34.

\(^52\) By using the term reification he intends “to preserve the connotations of excessive concreteness and projected reality that are suggested by the dictionary definition. Indeed, no abstraction, tool, or symbol actually captures in its form the practices in the context of which it contributes to an experience of meaning.” Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 59.
engagement in a practice, understanding and improving the existing practice, and developing “repertoire, styles and discourses” through reification.\textsuperscript{53}

The necessary, irreducible interaction of participation and reification in formation through a community of practice is analogous to the dynamic tension between practices and accounts of practices considered earlier. Wenger’s consistent resistance to the bifurcation of theory and practice, of thinking and doing, is instructive. He further resists any attempts to force his theory of learning in communities of practice onto one side of that bifurcation or the other. Wenger insists repeatedly that participation and reification are dualities in relationship, not dichotomies. As a result, neither can be reduced to – and each implies - the other.\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, the kind of learning that Wenger has in view is not merely “neurological memory, information processing in the brain, or mechanical habituation.” Instead, this learning “has to do with the development of our practices and our ability to negotiate meaning. It is not just the acquisition of memories, habits, and skills, but the formation of an identity.”\textsuperscript{55}

In this way, Wenger, who has no explicit interest in faith, summarizes the kind of learning that Christian formation seeks, and for which I contend the imagination is essential. In Luke and Acts, the disciples of Jesus come to constitute a distinct community of practice, membership in which involves participation (Acts 2:41-47). The

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 95.

\textsuperscript{54} He suggests, for instance, that assigning greater import to either participation or reification does not result in a lessening of interest on the other but rather a heightening of the import of both. I think that Jamie Smith’s account actually verifies this, though unintentionally. Smith rightfully foregrounds what he calls “pre-theoretical drivers” of human behavior, but in my own reading I find that his argument leaves me with lingering questions also about how better to think about practices.

\textsuperscript{55} Wenger, \textit{Communities of Practice}, 96.
description of the church as the Way is further suggestive of an understanding of discipleship as a distinctive practical way of knowing that is frequently identifiable by outside communities. Turning to the “Way” of God involves certain truth claims about the nature of God’s work through Jesus Christ, and this conversion is at the same time a full-bodied experience requiring a holistic, ongoing reshaping of a whole life.\(^\text{56}\) Growing in Christian life entails the increasing capacity to imagine the world according to God’s promises and purposes in Jesus Christ, and movement into fuller and more meaningful participation in ways of construing, relating, acting, and knowing that are faithful to that theological, social imagination.

Wenger’s concern in *Communities of Practice*, and our own concern here, is “fit” between epistemology and pedagogy, or, to state it in the terms of this project, between creaturely realities and learning the Scriptures. Wenger claims that educational processes that involve participation are effective and good not in theoretical isolation but because they are “epistemologically correct.” By this he means “there is a match between knowing and learning, between the nature of competence and the process by which it is acquired, shared, and extended.”\(^\text{57}\) If, as I have claimed, Christian formation seeks ways of knowing, doing, being, and relating in light of Christ and if, as I also claimed, persons are creatures for whom imagination is a generative and deeply influential capacity,

\(^{56}\) In establishing whether his emphasis on the embodiment of human life is appropriate to Luke’s portrait of conversion in Acts, Green concludes that it is, “not because the third evangelist was a cognitive scientist born out of time, but because his conceptual patterns held together what subsequent portraits of human nature (especially those influenced by René Descartes in the modern West) have pulled apart.” Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 43.

\(^{57}\) Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 102.
processes of learning ought to cohere with that purpose and reality. The more intellectual or discursive activity of reading the Scriptures constitutes no exception to this claim.

In sum, Christian practices refer to a complex combination of socially and historically extended activities oriented toward often, but not always, identified (if also contestable) ends. These practices are rightly called Christian practices when they presume a generative, normative relationship to the resources of the Christian tradition. At the same time, practices entail an internal dynamic tension between participation and reification or, to state the point differently, between ongoing pre-reflective participation and moments of explicit articulation or instruction. This tension mirrors the dynamic of the imagination itself, which operates in our preconscious, holistic construal of the world and our conscious mental or creative constructions. Holding the two in tension allows us to better see the possibilities and limitations of practices as a means of formation.


In the last chapter, I argued that the book of Acts can be profitably read in light of theories of the imagination because the text entails literary dynamics that resonate with claims about the imagination’s formation. One of the relevant literary dynamics identified there is Luke’s interest in narrating the practices of the community as a major feature of their common life in the Way of Jesus. The previous sections of this chapter have further

58 This definition leaves unresolved the manifold complexities involved in deciding precisely what resources the Christian tradition includes or does not include, nor does it strictly delineate what criteria regulate engagement with or employment of those resources. It falls to Christian communities of practice to make these discernments out of their own particular traditions.
specified the concept of practices and their formative effect. The time has come to determine whether bringing this concept of practices to bear in the interpretation of narrativized ecclesial practices in Acts produces any interpretive gain.

3.2 Peter’s Encounter with Cornelius in Exegetical and Historical Perspective

Acts 10:1-11:18 provides this chapter’s test case, and the analysis focuses first on the involvement of the practice of hospitality in the consequential events that take place when Peter encounters Cornelius. I begin by indicating the immediate literary context and major features of the narrative. In keeping with the social, traditioned, embodied, and formative nature of practices, I then frame my investigation of hospitality within relevant historical and literary contexts in order to consider how these contexts help to shape the meaning of hospitality in this account. This four-fold analysis lays the necessary groundwork for the constructive, formational argument I make in conversation with the text in the following section. There, I argue that the transformation Peter experiences in this narrative is most accurately identified as a transformation of his imagination.

3.2.1 Literary Context

Acts 10:1-11:18 stands as the climactic encounter in a series of conversions with symbolic import.59 As followers of the Way scatter following the persecution of Stephen (Acts 8:1b-3), four conversions indicate the movement of the gospel into predicted but

largely unprecedented territory. The conversion of the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, the church’s zealous persecutor Saul of Tarsus, and many unnamed individuals in the region of the Judea collectively convey several themes pertinent to the events that follow in Caesarea.

The first two conversions occur within the ministry of Philip, who enters the story in Acts 6 as a servant appointed to attend to the needs of the widows (Acts 6:5). Philip first heads to Samaria, where his ministry rings with notes of Jesus’ own public ministry in both characteristic activity and response. The lame are healed (Luke 5:18 and Luke 7:22; Acts 8:5), people experience release from unclean spirits (Luke 6:18, 8:15; Acts 8:5), and there was “great joy” (Luke 2:10; 8:13; Acts 8:6) and “amazement” (Luke 8:56; Acts 8:13) among those who witnessed these events. Those amazed witnesses include Simon the magician, who has previously impressed the people with his own power (Acts 8:9-13). He finds, nearly to his peril, that the Holy Spirit’s power is impossible to manipulate or purchase. The conversion of the Samaritans was sufficiently remarkable to warrant a visit by Peter and John, functioning as emissaries from the apostles in Jerusalem (8:14). The men arrive and lay hands on the baptized to confer the Holy Spirit, who has not yet come on the Samaritans (8:15-17). On their way back to Jerusalem, Peter and John proclaim the good news to other villages in Samaria.

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60 Territory can be read both literally and metaphorically here. The gospel spreads to new social groups and into new geographical areas that roughly coincide with the geographical outline in Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8 – “and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In the next unit, an angel of the Lord directs Philip to the wilderness road (8:26). Once there, the Spirit prompts him to approach the chariot of an Ethiopian eunuch, who is returning from a religiously motivated trip to Jerusalem and is reading from the scroll of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7-8; Acts 8:27-34). After scriptural instruction about the Messiah, beginning with the passage from Isaiah, the eunuch asks Philip if anything prevents (κωλύει) him from being baptized (9:37). His question is not simply rhetorical; as Brittany Wilson clearly argues, the Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion entails the crossing of several social boundaries at once. After the baptism, the Spirit “snatches Philip away” and apparently transports him to Azotus, while the eunuch continues on his way rejoicing (χαίρων; 8:39-40).

The conversion of Saul in Acts 9 represents yet another major turn of events accomplished through the direct intervention of divine agency; here, an enemy of the gospel becomes one of its most prominent advocates. The Lord Jesus quite literally stops Saul in his tracks as he travels to Damascus to continue persecuting the church, leaving him blind. The Lord then appears to a disciple named Ananias to deliver the clearly unwelcome command to visit Saul, who, Ananias is told, has received a vision from the Lord about him (9:11-17). Ananias questions God about the wisdom of visiting a perpetrator of violence but ultimately obeys (9:13-14). After the scales lift from his eyes,

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63 Significantly, Ananias is praying when he receives this vision, a combination of divine and human activity that appears more than once in this section.
Saul is baptized, breaks his fast, and begins teaching and preaching (8:20). Here, the community functions as an active discerner of the events taking place, as it discerns the validity of Saul’s conversion and accepts him as one of their number (Acts 9:19b-30).

With two short healing stories, Peter retakes center stage as an itinerant missionary in the area of Judea as Saul recedes temporarily from view. Peter heals a paralyzed Aeneas in Lydda, and raises the widow Tabitha from the dead in Joppa (Acts 9:32-43). Both of these accounts include a deliberate narrative correspondence between these accounts of Peter’s healing ministry and accounts from the ministry of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. The healing of Tabitha closely resembles the raising of the dead girl in Luke 8, minus the bleeding woman intercalation. Such correspondences in characterization and action between a disciple and Jesus are not unique to this section.

At the same time, the differences between Jesus and Peter prove as illuminating as the similarities. In the Gospel, Jesus is both the agent and effecter of the healing, while Peter

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64 Paul’s blindness functions as a punitive miracle. In broader Christian and Jewish literature, “blindness indicates powerlessness, as well as ignorance and bad judgment.” Wilson, Unmanly Men, 167.
65 The most noticeable difference in the paralytic healing stories is the absence of the forgiveness of sins controversy. Though the Greek terminology sometimes differs, the scenes are basically parallel. Both cases involve a paralyzed man (παραλειμένος; Luke 5:18; Acts 9:33) who is lying (κατάκειμαι; Luke 5:25; Acts 9:33). Jesus, and Peter by the power of Jesus, commands the man to rise (ἐγειρέω; Luke 5:24; ἀνάστηθι; Acts 9:34). Immediately the man rises (παραστάθηκε ἀναστάς; Luke 5:25; εὐθέως ἀνέστη; Acts 9:34). In both cases, a community response follows (Luke 5:26; Acts 9:35)
66 Both females have died (ἀπονήσκω; Luke 8:42, 52; Acts 9:37). Someone exhorts (παρακαλέω; Luke 8:41; Acts 9:38) the healer to come. When they arrive, there are people waiting and weeping (κλαίω; Luke 8:53; Acts 9:39). Finally, both women are raised (ἐγειρέω, Luke 8:54; ἀνάστηθι, Acts 9:40). Both stories conclude with a note about the news of the events, which are spread in Acts 9:42 and commanded not to be shared in Luke 8:56.
67 This broader pattern of correspondence will be explored later in terms of the ministry of Paul as well. Talbert construes the consistent parallels as indicative of a concern for succession and the reliable passing on of the tradition. I side more with Tannehill in seeing them more in terms of their function as characterization, though I want situate it specifically in terms of the educational functions of texts, especially as it relates to character formation. Talbert, Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts, 92.
is a representative agent dependent upon God’s power. Peter tells Aeneas “Jesus Christ heals you,” and, unlike Jesus, Peter kneels and prays before telling Tabitha to get up (Acts 9:34, 40). Both of these healing accounts in Acts conclude with the note that many people in the vicinity turned to the Lord (8:35, 43), in keeping with the section’s broader theme of conversion.

Some recurring patterns in these accounts reappear in Peter’s encounter with Cornelius. First, divine agency operates prominently in these encounters, at times directly interrupting, other times appearing in implied rather than explicitly stated ways, and in one unusual case appearing to respond on the basis of the apostles’ actions. Second, the human agents in these encounters are active and cooperative. God acts in prompting and confirming the spread of the gospel; human agents are actively discerning God’s activity and how to respond. Finally, the embodied and social nature of these conversionary events is clear. The baptism of differently marked bodies figures prominently, but so do other embodied practices that become increasingly constitutive of the Way. Practices like teaching and reading the scriptures, proclamation, prayer, fasting,

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68 I use the term “meaningful pattern” to distinguish my approach from the establishment of a template or paradigm for conversion. See discussion around fn 95. Green notes that a number of attempts at establishing such a paradigm do exist, but they vary considerably and rarely account for conversion across both books. Green, Conversion in Luke-Acts, 45–49.
69 See discussion at fn 67
70 The question of divine and human agency is one of some dispute in Acts scholarship, particularly given the frequent use of the particle ἐπὶ and the sense of the divine necessity of certain events. I discuss the issue of divine necessity in relationship to the plan of God in chapter four. In preview, I maintain that divine and human agency cooperate in the book of Acts. While God’s action is prior, most especially God’s action through Jesus Christ, the role and initiative of human agents is still quite important.
and the giving of alms function as background, bodily context that, while not predictive of God’s action, stands nonetheless meaningfully associated with it.\textsuperscript{71}

Joel Green’s recent work on conversion stresses that it is both a moment of turning and a process of orienting a whole way of life, including knowing, being, doing, and relating.\textsuperscript{72} The processual side of conversion can also be called Christian formation, the life-long process of seeking to be transformed by God into the image of the Son. It makes sense, then, that a conversionary text is fruitful ground for considering the formation of the imagination. With these themes in mind, we turn next to a summary analysis of the text’s narrative features.

3.2.2 Narrative Contours

The narrative unit that spans Acts 10:1-11:18 begins with the introduction of a new character, Cornelius. He is a God-fearer, a centurion of the so-called Italian cohort, and a pious person characterized by constant prayer and almsgiving.\textsuperscript{73} The angel informs him that his prayers have gained a hearing before God and instructs him to send to Joppa

\textsuperscript{71} The Samaritans (8:12) and the eunuch (8:38) are baptized, and Peter and John (8:17) as well as Ananias (9:17) lay hands on believers. See also Acts 19:1-7.

\textsuperscript{72} Green claims that “Luke’s theology of conversion refuses any facile distinctions between conversion as act and process, between cognitive and moral change, between movement from one religion to another and deepening commitment within one’s religion, and between personal and community formation.” Green, \textit{Conversion in Luke-Acts}, 88.

\textsuperscript{73} Various commentators have noted that Luke appears to have a high view of Roman officials, some suggesting a Lukan apologia pro imperio. Luke’s portrayal may be positive in some sense, but not unequivocally so. It nonetheless remains the case that Roman officials of a number of types are often positive, or at least largely non-antagonistic, characters in the story. The centurion commended for his faith and support of Israel in Luke 7:1-10 is one useful point of comparison. This is the first appearance of a centurion in Acts, though they play a more prominent role during Paul’s imprisonment (21:32-33; 24:24; 28:16), where they stop his illegal beating as a Roman citizen (22:22-29), protect him from attack by a Jewish mob during his transfer (23:12-23), and heed Paul’s words and preserved his life during the shipwreck (27:31-32; 42:44). For more discussion, see Steve Walton, “The State They Were in: Luke’s View of the Roman Empire,” in \textit{Rome in the Bible and the Early Church}, ed. Peter Oakes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 2–6.
For Peter. Following his vision from the angel, he commands his men to go and retrieve Peter according to the angel’s directions. Cornelius’s visitation by an angel commences a series of parallel visions, journeys, arrivals, and accounts of visions that constitute the narrative unit. Peter’s vision of a sheet lowered from heaven with clean and unclean animals follows Cornelius’s vision of the angel. When Peter resists the visions instructions to “kill and eat” on the basis of the animals being “common and unclean”, the vision repeats the instructions twice more before departing (10:9-20).

Cornelius’s men arrive at Peter’s house in the immediate aftermath of his own vision; they speak to Peter and he invites them to stay, though only after additional prompting by the Spirit (10:17-23a). Peter then arrives at Cornelius’s house with the company sent to fetch him, and Cornelius welcomes him into his home (10:23b-29). After Cornelius briefly recounts his own vision and response (10:30-33), Peter speaks, giving an account of his new conclusion relative to the new “lawfulness” of his presence among Gentiles based on his vision and a summary of the gospel message (10:34-43). The Spirit interrupts Peter’s speech – and the parallelism in the literary structure – by falling on the Gentiles while Peter is still speaking (Ἐπὶ λαλοῦντος). Peter commands that

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74 In many ways the characterization of Cornelius mirrors the characterization of Tabitha in the prior section. She too is introduced by name and location, with the added information that she is a disciple (9:36). Similarly, both individuals are assigned positive religious characteristics: Dorcas is “full of good works” and, like Cornelius, “acts of charity” – or literally alms (ἐλεημοσυνῶν ἦν ἑπόσι; 9:26; 10:2).

75 As Gaventa points out, the structure of scenes with the clear parallels, careful references to time and simultaneously occurring events, and progressive clarity regarding a vision, resemble many Greco-Roman novels. Gaventa, From Darkness to Light, 110–111.

76 Though this analysis does not focus on this practice, prayer is an additional important component in this scene. Cornelius receives his vision at three o’clock, a known time of prayer for the Jewish and Jewish-Christian communities (Acts 3:1). Peter, we are told, has gone up to his roof to pray at noon, and so it is in the context of prayer that both men receive their visions. For other instances of dramatic divine intervention or presence during prayer, see Acts 13:1-3 and Acts 16. For more discussion, see Holmås, Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts, 60.
the Gentiles be baptized, for no one can withhold (κωλύσω) the water for baptizing the Gentiles.77

In the final section of this narrative unit, 11:1-18, the reader learns that believers in Judea have not received reports of Peter’s ministry among Gentiles with equanimity. Peter comes under particular scrutiny from circumcised believers for “going to” and “eating with” uncircumcised men (11:3).78 In response to the objections, Peter presents a meaningfully ordered account of the events that have taken place, and the narrative unit concludes with the community’s consensus that God has given even to Gentiles the same gift of repentance leading to life that was given to them.79

This brief summary initially indicates some of the basic features of the narrative that point toward the presence of hospitality conventions, among them, the transfer between domestic locations and the controversy over choice of dinner companions. In order to establish what valence this practice has in its historical context, the relevant features of the hospitality within Luke’s cultural encyclopedia require further definition.80

77 This is a positive re-statement of Peter’s question: “Who is able to withhold the water?” This term first appears in the Ethiopian eunuch’s question to Philip about what would withhold, or prevent, him from being baptized (Acts 8:36).

78 Importantly, this is the first time in Luke-Acts that any believers are specified as “circumcised,” indicative both of the new diversity amongst believers while also pointing forward to the emerging disagreement at the heart of the council in Jerusalem in Acts 15.

79 See discussion of this term in section 2.2.1. There, as here, I understand the term to connote rhetorical rather than strictly factual concerns.

80 Recall that practices are historically and socially extended, that they are complex, that is, they involve a number of activities or movements within them, and that they direct toward certain ends, whether those be personal or social, implicit or explicit. Reading a Christian practice off of a biblical text that reflects a culture quite different from our own necessitates attention to the historical and traditional aspects of the practice. In Entertaining Angels, Arterbury complains that the popularity of hospitality as a theological or philosophical category, even at the popular level, too often results in readings of hospitality in biblical contexts that fail to attend to the operative definition in that historical setting. He particularly protests the “watering down” of a rich and complex practice of ancient hospitality to simply table
3.2.3 Historical Considerations

Hospitality constituted an integral part of the ancient social fabric, and the presence of this meaning-laden cultural practice within Luke-Acts has been a subject of interest in recent years. The secondary literature clarifies the broader pattern of hospitality practices that inform the cultural encyclopedia of Luke’s model reader. First, a matter of definition: ancient hospitality, in contrast to much modern hospitality, referred specifically to the process by which a stranger of some kind becomes a guest, rather than the reception of a close familiar. Though certain terminology and an identifiable complex of activities indicate the presence of hospitality conventions.

It is possible to speak of a single cultural “script” for hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world, because hospitality conventions among different groups largely overlapped. Though there are some subtle but important differences, hospitality practices would have been generally recognized as such across a variety of contexts. The stranger-oriented nature of hospitality is semantically instantiated. The clearest set of


One notable difference has to do with guest/host combinations. Private hospitality in the Greco-Roman world typically meant hospitality to strangers, whereas Jewish and Christian travelers typically sought out distant kinsman or compatriots of some form as hosts during their journey. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 58.
terms for hospitality are the ξεν- root words like the verb “to show hospitality” (ξενίζω) as well as the adjective for foreign or foreigner (ξένα), and explicitly signals the welcome of strangers. A second category of terms includes verbs of welcoming (δέχομαι, ἀσπάζομαι, ἀποδέχομαι), entering (εἰσέρχομαι) and remaining (μένω). Finally, references to domestic locations are common (οἶχος, οἰκία, οἰκέτης) along with indicators of association (κολλάω, σύν-).

Conventional hospitality included some combination of the following practices. A guest either approaches the house and requests hospitality, or a host goes out into the road to meet a guest. The ratification of the hospitality agreement occurs when the guest enters the house. Upon that entrance and ratification, the host provides the guest with necessary provisions, including water for bathing, food, often in the form of a lavish meal, and a place to stay. Hosts typically provided overnight lodging for both guests and the guests’ animals, though the duration of the stay varied. Finally, the host would often accompany the guest to the edge of the city, that is, to the end of their home domain, in reflection of their ongoing obligation to protect their guests from local dangers. Hosts might also provide gifts to their guests, including provisions for their journey ahead.

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84 Ibid., 53.
85 Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 54. See also Arterbury, Entertaining Angels, 83.
86 In Greco-Roman texts, the bath appears to be a full bath, often given by the host’s servants. In Jewish and Christian texts, the water provided (or not provided, as was the case in Luke 7:44) is for the more specific purpose of washing feet. Arterbury, Entertaining Angels, 57.
87 See summaries of these conventional practices in Ibid., 53–54. Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 63–72. Gift giving was especially prominent in cases in which guest-friendship was formally established. Ibid., 74.
With the basic means of identifying the practice of hospitality within ancient literature outlined, what kind of social meaning did ancient hospitality customs convey? First, hospitality was broadly associated with virtue or piety. In the writings of Homer, for instance, the boundary between the barbaric and the cultured was frequently determined on the basis of the relative hospitality or inhospitality. Odysseus’s repeated question upon alighting in a new location is taken to be paradigmatic of this connection between custom and virtue. He asks, “to the land of what mortals have I now come? . . . are they kind to strangers and fear the gods in their hearts?” For Jewish and Christian communities, Abraham’s hospitality to the Lord in the guise of three strangers functions as the paradigmatic account (Gen 18:1-15), and later Jewish literature develops this hospitality tradition further. Conversely “perversions” or grossly insufficient versions of the practice of hospitality indicate negative characters in a given story.

Theoxenic hospitality, one particular development of the connection between hospitality and piety, refers to the belief that the gods (or their representatives) sometimes

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88 These studies of ancient hospitality cite Homer as likely the most significant Greco-Roman influence, given that his writings provided the basis of most education throughout the empire. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 38. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers*, 60–62. Denaux, “The Theme of Divine Visits and Human (in)hospitality,” 266.


90 Denaux refers to Gen 18 as the “story par excellence” of meritorious theoxenic hospitality. Denaux, “The Theme of Divine Visits and Human (in)hospitality,” 269. For a summary of the development of this tradition in later Jewish literature, see Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers*, 142–149.

91 In the biblical tradition, the distortive and destructive practices of hospitality in the book of Judges advance the broader theological point about the state of Israel when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 82. After recounting the rape and dismemberment of the Levites concubine in Judges 19, Jipp notes, “if the authors intent was to use corrupted hospitality to demonstrate the degeneration of the world of Judges, he could have hardly been more successful. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers*, 165.
appear in the guise of visiting strangers. In accounts of this kind, after first taking on some form of disguise, the gods subject themselves to humans’ hospitality and/or inhospitality, both of which are taken to be indicative of the (im)piety of the host. The gods then reveal themselves and mete out the applicable reward or punishment. In broader Greco-Roman literature, Zeus was particularly associated with this practice. In the biblical tradition, this understanding of hospitality appears to lie behind Hebrew 13:2, which contains one of two uses of a technical term for hospitality (φιλαξένια; also Rom 12:13). Here, the writer advises Christians not to neglect hospitality to strangers, “for through just that some have without knowing received angels as guests (ξενίσαντες).”

Finally, hospitality practices occasionally provided means of establishing persistent social bonds between disparate groups. Joshua Jipp notes a distinction between “obligatory” acts of hospitality in the reception of a stranger in need of lodging and provision, and “ritualized” hospitality, what he calls “guest friendship.” In guest-friendship relationships, a pseudo-kinship bond is established between guests and hosts. Interestingly, these bonds are often forged between people of different ethnic groups, and

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93 Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 72.
94 Arterbury does offer some differentiation between theoxenic hospitality as practiced by Greco-Roman versus Hellenistic Jewish and early Christians. The most obvious difference is the nature of the God or gods who visit – Zeus or Yahweh. In Greco-Roman writings, the host would often worship the guest once the hidden identity of the God was revealed. Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian guest’s were typically associated with angels of Yahweh, in which case “proper response to the divine, divinely commissioned, or royal hospitality counterpart was to bow down and show reverence to the visitor.” Arterbury, Entertaining Angels, 173–174.
95 “Simple hospitality, or ‘obligatory’ hospitality, is the straightforward welcoming of a complete stranger whereas guest-friendship, or ‘formal hospitality’ is a ritualized establishing of pseudo-kinship relations between two people from different social groups.” Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 73. See also Arterbury, Entertaining Angels, 173–174.
they become permanent relationships maintained by the descendants of those who made the initial connection. The relationship is formalized by the giving of gifts. At times, these relationships were strategic and political, including relationships established between Greek cities. The expectation of reciprocity and mutual benefit is a major feature of such relationships.

One major distinction between Jewish hospitality practices and the broader cultural script requires particular attention. Jewish travelers typically sought out a kinsman when traveling; some sources indicate that the local synagogue functioned as the first stop for Jewish travelers seeking hospitality. Concerns with ritual purity and the cleanliness of food drove this practice. For some time before, including, and after the first century, both Jewish and Greco-Roman writings indicate the dedication of Jews to maintaining clear distinctions between themselves and the Gentiles around them. Jewish food traditions were one of the most recognizable markers of Jewish ethnic and religious identity. These realities clearly impact hospitality practices. Among other forms of association, “eating was an occasion fraught with the possibility of breaching the purity code, one of the most crucial aspects of the Mosaic law for the maintenance of the separate identity of the Jewish ethnos.” Consequently, the “antipathy of Jews toward

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96 For the durability of these relationships, see Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 68. For political forms of such friendships, see Ibid., 106.
98 Arterbury, Entertaining Angels, 78.
99 Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 208.
table-fellowship with Gentiles . . . [was] an intrinsic feature of Jewish life.”\textsuperscript{101} While the matter of whether Jews would have extended hospitality to Gentiles is more debated, it seems clear that pious Jews would not, under almost any circumstances, accept hospitality from a Gentile for fear of violating purity codes.\textsuperscript{102}

In summary, three elements of this description of hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world have particular bearing on our understanding of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius. The fairly standard “cultural script” for hospitality, including constitutive activities and descriptive terminology, provides a basic measure by which to confirm the relevance of hospitality conventions for understanding Peter’s encounter with Cornelius. Theoxenic hospitality, specifically, provides an additional component for consideration. Finally, the role and function of hospitality with regard to reciprocity and the formation of guest-friendship relationships has particular pertinence for this encounter between Jewish and Gentile social groups. First, however, one other feature of the cultural encyclopedia needs to be considered for its contribution to the cognitive environment in which the hospitality encounters in this text would be understood: hospitality in the ministry of Jesus as recounted in Luke’s gospel.

3.2.4 Biblical Resonance

In Luke-Acts, hospitality is “more than peripheral” to Luke’s theological purposes, being deeply woven into the narration of God’s salvation of all through the

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Arterbury, \textit{Entertaining Angels}, 162.
Lord Jesus. Luke attends more specifically and frequently to matters of hospitality than do his fellow Gospel writers. As part of his overarching theological concerns, Luke portrays God as guest who visits Israel in the person of Jesus Christ. The note of visitation is first sounded in Zechariah’s song in Luke 1:68-78; the verb to visit (ἐπισκέπτομαι) frames the song. The term appears again in Luke 7:16, where the crowds in Nain who witness the raising of the widow’s son praise God saying, “God has visited (ἐπισκέπτετο) his people.” This terminology for visitation “typically describes a great act of God’s coming in salvation or judgment.”

The real possibility of inhospitality persists throughout Luke-Acts, and it is realized on more than one occasion. While tax collectors and sinners welcome Jesus, his encounters with some religious leaders are sometimes considerably less hospitable (e.g.: Luke 7:36-54). Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44 rings with notes of the rejection Jesus will experience there. In Acts, the acceptance/rejection dynamic

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103 Denaux, “The Theme of Divine Visits and Human (in)hospitality,” 255.
104 For instance, Luke frequently redacts stories he’s received from his eyewitnesses that are recounted in the other gospels, situating them in the context of hospitality events. The parable of the banquet is one example (Luke 14:15-24; Matt 22:1-14). In addition, some of the material that appears in Luke’s gospel alone is hospitality related, like the parables of the son and other lost things (Luke 15).
106 For debate about the translation of this term as “visit” rather than “look favorably upon” see Denaux, “The Theme of Divine Visits and Human (in)hospitality,” 277.
107 It appears twice with reference to God’s visitation to Israel to deliver them from Egypt (Gen 50:24-25; Ex 3:16-17). Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers*, 221.
108 Ibid., 234.
continues through the “itinerancy of the Word and the witnesses.” Jipp claims that it is “hardly accidental that Luke uses a form of δέχομαι to describe the hospitable reception of δ ὁ λόγος in four geographical regions which correspond to the geographical itinerary of Acts 1:8.” Emissaries of Jesus like Peter and Paul are repeatedly identified as the recipients of local hospitality during their itinerant ministry. As with Jesus, those who encounter the divine word and its witnesses either respond with hospitality welcome or rejection.

Jesus’ instructions to his itinerant disciples in Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1-12 crystallize both possibilities and establish the appropriate response to each. In these broadly parallel passages, Jesus identifies and sends followers to other locations, twelve to surrounding villages in 9:1 and seventy-two to the places Jesus intended to go in 10:1. He advises those who are sent to take no additional supplies, with the expectation that receptive households will provide the necessary provisions. Such hospitality should be accepted

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109 Some suggest that the “Word” in Acts is actually the primary character. He states that the word functions as a traveling divine agent who visits new locations, grows, and increases in strength (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). Ibid., 136.

110 Ibid., 137.

111 Whether Jesus sent seventy or seventy-two disciples is a matter of significant textual debate, noted in most English translations. Some scholars support seventy-two on the basis of its symbolic import, perhaps in connection with the seventy-two nations included in the table in Genesis. Some conclude that while the first missionaries sent were the significant number twelve sent to villages in Israel, the seventy-two sent here are meant to prefigure the Gentile mission. While I am persuaded by this argument, the case advanced here does not depend on the resolution of this textual issue. Green, The Gospel of Luke, 410–411.

112 This list differs slightly in each account, but no significance need be applied to the differences. 9:3 lists staff, bag, bread, money, and extra tunic. 10:4 lists purse, bag, sandals, and the odd instruction not to greet anyone on the road. In general, Luke 10:1-12 is more expansive. It includes Jesus words about the ready harvest and instructions to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers (10:2). There is also a greater sense of danger, indicated both through the reference to those sent being “lams among wolves” and with the note of judgment in 10:12, followed by woes pronounced against unreceptive towns. It is also worth noting that this broader section concludes with the identification of people’s response to the disciples
graciously; disciples should “eat and drink whatever is set before you” without going from house to house in search of a better situation (10:7) When the locale responds inhospitably, the disciples should shake the dust off their feet in protest “as a testimony against them” (9:5), perhaps with words of warning (10:11-12; see also Acts 13:50-51).

Jesus, in his own itinerant ministry (especially Luke 9:51-19:44), frequently appears in homes and around tables as the recipient of hospitality, and often these settings include controversy or conflict. The key issue is quite frequently Jesus’ own choice of dinner companions. From the earliest days of his ministry, those who witness Jesus eating with “tax collectors and sinners” grumble (ἐγγύγυγυζον) about its inappropriateness (5:30). The grumbling that Jesus “welcomed (προσδέχεται) sinners and ate with (συνεσθείει) them” occurs in Luke 15:1, and provides the context for the parables of things lost and found. Yet again, “all who saw” grumbled (διεγγύγυζον) when Jesus accepted, and indeed demanded, the hospitality of Zacchaeus (19:6).113

The basis of the Pharisees’ complaint in these settings likely includes the suspect ritual purity of Jesus’ dining companions, those “tax collectors and sinners.”114 Ritual

with their response to Jesus himself (10:16). As in Acts, already so here: the disciples function as Jesus emissaries and as conduits of his presence.

113 Jesus informed Zaccheus that “it is necessary (δεῖ) for me to stay (μεῖναι) in your house” (Luke 19:5). In response, Luke tells us that Zaccheus “received him (ὑπεδέχετο) with joy,” in marked contrast to the response by the crowds. Note also that, as in 5:30, there are strong notes of repentance and forgiveness in this hospitality context. In 5:31-32, Jesus tells the grumblers “it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” In 19:10, following Zaccheus’ own repentance – expressed in concrete, monetary terms – Jesus states “for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

114 Powell notes that “Jesus is elsewhere maligned as one who ‘welcomes sinners and eats with them’ Luke 15:2), implying that he did this repeatedly (cf. Mt 11:19, Lk 7:34).” Though, “exactly who
purity, including cleanliness with regard to table fellowship, was a central feature of Pharisaic tradition in the first century. The matter comes up directly in Luke 11:37-41, in which a Pharisee is amazed that Jesus failed to appropriately wash before a meal in his home. In response, Jesus charges his dinner companions to match this concern for outward purity with concern for inward purity through almsgiving.\footnote{Green notes “their concern for ritual purity (exemplified in the cleanliness of vessels – cf. Lev 11:32-33; 15:12) overlooks the need for integrity between one’s inner constitution and one’s public behavior . . . Jesus directs attention toward a unity that overcomes socio-religious barriers, in direct contrast to one that separates people from one another and keeps them separated. This is a purity manifest in social-relations – explicitly, on a behavior, almsgiving, that collapses the distance between the social elite and the needy.” Green, \emph{The Gospel of Luke}, 471. Jesus goes on to provide an acerbic critique of his Pharisees host. While Matthew locates much of these critiques in the context of Jesus’ seven-fold “woes” against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, Luke places the critique in the context of a meal in the home of a Pharisee.} One persistent critique of Jesus’ ministry, then, is his consistent choice to dine with those outside of certain standards for ritual cleanliness, having come “not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:11).

If, in this way, Jesus’ practice presents a contrast to Pharisaic hospitality conventions, his instructions on hospitality in Luke 14 counter some Greco-Roman conventions. Once again at a dinner party (Luke 14:1), Jesus offers three distinct instructions regarding hospitality both offered and received.\footnote{Green observes regarding the broader cohesive literary unit of Luke 14:1-25 that, “In addition to their obvious importance in the provision of food, meals serve pivotal social functions, the meaning of which is explored in this narrative section. One may refer in particular to the practices of Pharisees, for whom meals functioned to establish ‘in-group’ boundaries and embody socio-religious values pertaining to...”} To guests, specifically...
those who seek the places of honor, Jesus advises taking the lowest place, “for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted (14:11).” Jesus then turns “to the one who had invited him” and suggests extending hospitality outside the customary bounds of reciprocal relationships. Instead of strategic invitations to those who can “invite you in turn” (ἀντικαλέσωσίν) in reciprocal and mutually beneficial arrangement, invite the “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” (14:13). Those groups worthy of invitation also appear in the story of a banquet that follows, in which rejection and unlikely invitation constitute key themes. Those who were initially invited reject the invitation due to material concerns. In response, the invitation is extended to the same unlikely constituencies – “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind,” and those on the roads and lanes outside the city. Meals, in Luke, then, function not only as opportunities to foster existing relationships but also create new ones, even outside the prevailing conventions of strategic hospitality and social strata.

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ceremonial purity. Such values were not unique to Pharisees, of course, but were shared by others, including the social elite, for whom the table was an expression of kin- or friendship and for whom dining served to give expression to concerns for honor and reciprocity.” Ibid., 540.

117 This statement with its explicit sense of reversal reflects the statements of Jesus elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel (find these) as well as the broader theme of reversal that pervades the whole (see Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55). As Jipp notes, Dio Chrysostum’s “The Hunter” also critiques the rich who “welcome openheartedly with gifts and presents only the rich, from whom, the host expected a like return, very much as the present custom is in selecting the recipients of our kind treatment.” Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 130.

118 The teaching in 14:15-24 is not explicitly identified as a parable in the text, but it seems to be parabolic in the sense that it narrates a scene removed from (but still relevant to) the present scenario, much like the parable-in-context of Luke 12.

119 The material excuses narrated here, a significant difference from Matthew’s banquet parable, may be reflective of the concern of Lukān Jesus for the potential of possessions to disrupt the calling to discipleship. See also Luke 3:10-14.

In these explicit instructions about hospitality, several points related to the function of hospitality in Jesus’ ministry, and the normative practices for his disciples, come into clearer focus. First, the practice of hospitality within Jesus’ ministry appears to relativize concern with ritual purity when matters of God’s salvific intent are at stake. Jesus breaks bread with and receives the hospitality of those who constitute the particular target audience for his ministry, though all the while calling for their turning to God. Second, Jesus’ own practice and teachings about hospitality countermand the strategic use of hospitality arrangements for the purposes of building up or solidifying “in-group” status. Instead, the participants in hospitality exchanges should be those on the peripheries to whom Jesus’ ministry is quite frequently specifically directed. The relevance of these aspects of Jesus’ ministry to Peter’s actions in the encounter with Cornelius will be discussed in the next section.

3.3 Integrative, Formative Analysis

On the basis of this historical and literary background, I can now argue that Peter participates in the practice of hospitality in a manner that is christologically shaped and generative of formation we can most accurately describe as the transformation of his imagination. First, I attend in detail to the markers of hospitality practices in the third person narration of events in Acts 10:1-48. I trace the indications and development of the practice with specific reference to the background information provided in the previous analysis, making specific suggestions about the bodily nature of Peter’s formation in and prior to this encounter with Cornelius.
Given the imagination’s complexity, and this chapter’s exploration of practices, it could be objected that participation alone is insufficient for the transformation I am describing. In anticipatory response, I attend to the explicit markers of changes in perception or understanding that pertain to Peter’s development in the narrative. These markers include verbs of reasoning, judgment, and articulation, and they evince a clear progression from cognitive dissonance to new proclaimed and enacted conclusion. This co-inherence of conscious reflection with embodied participation reflects the internal duality of practice’s formative power.

Third and finally, I turn to Peter’s first person, “meaningfully ordered account” of these events, taking it as an exemplar of theological discernment within a community of practice. Following Peter’s account, the community confirms with wonder this new understanding. Such transformation of the community’s imagination in response to God’s actions, whether direct, as in Peter’s case, or as experienced through the revelation of such divine actions in Scripture, as with the community of readers, is fruitful ground for our consideration of scriptural imagination.

3.3.1 Formative Hospitality

Semantic markers of hospitality proliferate in this account, including the verb ἐκνιβίζω (10:6, 18, 23, 32). The narrator introduces Cornelius as devout and God-fearing

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121 In this way, Peter’s account is analogous to Luke’s implied purpose in the text as a whole. For further discussion of my translation of ἐκνιβίζω as “meaningfully ordered”, see chapter 2, footnote 14.

122 This term is relatively rare in the New Testament literature, appearing only ten times. It appears three more times in Acts (17:20; 21:16; 28:7), once in Hebrews (13:2), and twice in 1 Peter (4:4, 12). The following terms from the earlier summaries of semantic markers appear in this passage: ὑπεράνωσα, εἰσία, 146
along with his “house(hold)” (τῷ οἶκῳ αὐτοῦ). Furthermore, the angel specifically informs Cornelius that he can find Peter staying (ἐν οἴκῃς) in the house by the sea; in other words, Luke specifies that the itinerant Peter is already the recipient of someone else’s hospitality. Cornelius sends two of his household slaves (οἶκης) along with a devout soldier to retrieve Peter. In Peter’s vision scene, Luke takes care to note Peter’s location on the roof of the house. The significance of the command to “kill and eat” the envisioned, unclean animals, and Peter’s resistance to eating anything “common or unclean” introduces key concerns that only become fully apparent as the story progresses.

References to hospitality persist in the arrival scenes. Cornelius’s men arrive in Joppa asking for Simon Peter’s house (τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ Σίμωνος; 10:17) and calling out to see if Peter was staying there (ἐν οἴκης). Following the Spirit’s direction to go with the men who have come, Peter asks why they have sent for him. After hearing the angel’s
instructions and that they are to bring him into Cornelius’s house, Peter invites the men to stay. When Peter arrives in Caesarea, he “goes in” (ἐἰσέλθειν) to Cornelius’s house twice (10:25, 27). In keeping with the pattern of theoxenic hospitality, when Peter arrives, Cornelius falls at Peter’s feet and worships (προσεκύνησεν) him, apparently recognizing him as divine or at least a divine emissary. Peter causes him to stand, staying emphatically “stand up; for I myself am a human (ἀνθρωπός; 10:26).”

At this critical point, Peter states “You yourselves know that it is unlawful (ἀδέμιτος) for a Jewish man to affiliate with or go to a Gentile,” going on to add, “God has shown me not to call a human (ἀνθρωπον) unclean or common” (italics mine). Here, Peter reapply the language of his resistance to his vision’s command to kill and eat the common (χοινὸν) and unclean (ἀκάθαρτον; 10:14) to his hospitality with Gentiles. He from custom that only occurs because the Spirit compels it! Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 210.

He initially enters (εἰσῆλθεν) in 10:25, where he is met by Cornelius, potentially in an outer courtyard. He then enters (εἰσῆλθεν) again, presumably into the main house, to find a large group assembled. The emphasis on Peter’s entrance into Cornelius’s house could indicate its climactic nature. Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 211. They could also, however, serve to emphasize the ratification of a tacit hospitality agreement that in the broader literature typically occurs when a guest enters the host’s house. Arterbury, Entertaining Angels, 52. See also Ibid., 92.

Leviticus 10:10 may be in view here: “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean.” According to deSilva, “This verse introduces the two main pairs of terms used within Israel to construct its purity map. “Common” (or “profane”) is a neutral term, referring to the ordinary spaces and things of the world that are accessible to human beings. Holy is the corresponding marked term, referring to special spaces or things that have been ‘set apart’ from the ordinary (the ‘common’) as belonging in some special way to God. ‘Clean” is a neutral term, referring generally to a person or thing in its ‘normal’ proper state. “Unclean is the corresponding marked term, denoting that something has crossed the line from the normal state into a dangerous state of pollution.” D.A. deSilva, “Clean and Unclean,” ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, The IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 142. The application of these terms here resonates within the broader context of ritual purity.
makes this point while at the same time acknowledging their shared awareness of the unlawfulness of his close association with Gentiles.\textsuperscript{128} Cornelius’s recapitulation of his vision continues the emphasis on hospitality by recounting many of the domestic details.\textsuperscript{129}

Peter’s proclamation of the gospel begins with a restatement of his new and now emphatic understanding regarding the expansiveness of the gospel. He begins by stating that “I truly understand that God is one who shows no partiality, but in every nation the one who fears him and works righteousness is acceptable/pleasing to him (10:24b-35). His gospel proclamation includes that Jesus “ate and drank” (συνεφάγομεν καὶ συνεπίστευμεν; 10:41) with his disciples after his resurrection, and the interjection that Jesus is the “Lord of all” (10:36).\textsuperscript{130} Following the coming of the Spirit to the Gentiles (to the astonishment of the Jewish companions who accompanied Peter from Joppa!) and the

\textsuperscript{128} Peter states that both his “coming near” (προσέρχεσθαι) and his association (κολλασθαι) are known to be unlawful. The second word, which the NRSV translates as “associate” has more the sense of affiliation than casual contact. It is used three times to describing the choice whether to “join” the believers (Acts 5:13; 9:26, 17:34). Elsewhere in Luke, it refers to a business arrangement of being hired (ἐκολλήθη; Luke 15), here the younger son of the parable with a Gentile pig farmer. It also appears in the Spirit’s instructions for Peter to “join” (κολλάζοντι) the Ethiopian’s chariot. Luke uses the verb in connection with group affiliation, particularly the affiliation of others with the gospel, and elsewhere in references to cross-cultural contact of some form. Thus it is likely that the “unlawfulness” has more to do with affiliation than simple contact, a situation that is intensified by Peter’s “going in” with the Gentiles home, the point of controversy in 11:2.

\textsuperscript{129} Cornelius’s reiterates he was in his house when the vision was received and that he received instructions containing the location of the house where Peter was staying.

\textsuperscript{130} The reference to Jesus’ hospitality to and with the apostles functions to solidify their calling as witnesses while also calling to mind the prominence of hospitality in the ministry of Jesus.
baptism of the Gentiles, Cornelius’s Gentile household invites Peter to stay (ἐπιμείνα) for several days (10:48).  

Hospitality in this story reflects its historical and theological/literary context at several key points. Peter accepts the hospitality of a person who demonstrates receptivity to the Gospel, though requiring some prompting from the Spirit (10:19). Cornelius stands in continuity with religious outsiders whom Jesus welcomed and called to repentance in his ministry. Like tax collectors and sinners, Cornelius as a Gentile God-fearer resides at the somewhat suspect periphery of Israel’s religious way of life. He, like one of those from Jesus’ illustrative story of the banquet who is out on the “roads and hedges,” is nonetheless invited to God’s table (Luke 14:23). Peter comes to understand the Gentiles as those whom God has visited and welcomed, just as God had extended hospitality to the people of Israel.

Gaventa claims that conversion in this passage applies as much to Peter as to Cornelius and his household, highlighting Peter’s own transformed way of being and understanding. She rightly observes that it is somehow by means of the practice of hospitality that Peter connects his vision about food choices and the extension of the gospel to a Gentile audience. Hospitality practices, especially when coupled with the

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131 The companions recede from view at this point, thought it is presumed that they shared the news of the events that eventually reached the “circumcised believers” who raise issue in chapter 11.
132 The passage reiterates God’s acceptance of Cornelius. The angel first crosses the threshold of Cornelius’s house with the vision, in which he indicates that Cornelius’s prayers have risen before God. Furthermore, Cornelius tells Peter that they are all “in the presence of the Lord” to hear his message to them, Jew and gathered Gentiles alike. The coming of the Spirit on the Gentiles, then, is not the first indication of God’s presence as a host of all nations in this account. Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 215–216.
133 Gaventa, From Darkness to Light, 114.
climactic coming of the Spirit on the gathered Gentile household that interrupts Peter’s sermon, makes it ultimately clear to Peter that Gentiles are being included under the Lordship of Jesus. Andrew Arterbury argues that hospitality provides the “contextual logic” for the encounter, the situational clues by which Peter makes the connection.\footnote{Arterbury, Entertaining Angels, 154.}


These accounts of Peter’s transformation still seem to emphasize Peter’s cognitive operations. Peter’s cogitating here is important, and I attend to it in detail in the next section. In these accounts of hospitality’s contribution to Peter’s transformation, its contribution is primarily as the problem situation for the reasoning. Yet given the role of the body in the ways humans come to know and apprehend the world, and this chapter’s focus on practices in relationship to imagination, can the significance of hospitality in this encounter be construed as operating also on a different level?

I suggest that interpreters should not discount the visceral nature of hospitality as part of the formative power at work here. Hospitality involves the proximity of fleshly bodies around tables and in homes, and the thoroughly corporal and corporate activities of ingesting food and drink, washing feet and/or bodies, along with multiple other ways in which meals involve numerous, olfactory senses.\footnote{Richard Beck also notes that psychological studies have shown that decisions regulated by Purity/Sanctity metaphors are governed by the affective rather than rational systems. Richard Beck, Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Morality (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 64.}

In this way, hospitality is deeply connected with the core emotions of attraction and disgust. Peter’s objection to the
“uncleanness” of the animals he is instructed to kill and eat may have more connotations than a rational, legal objection to the infraction of a specific command. It is far more likely that residing within Peter’s “by no means!” with any religious, legal objection is a more basic reaction of disgust. This is suggestive of the very real possibility that Peter’s presence in Cornelius’s home is viscerally uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{137} Since all reasoning begins in the body, including visceral and affective elements of our comportment in the world, and all perception is, at root, influenced by the affections, the power of bodily experience is critical to the deep transformation of a way of knowing and being.\textsuperscript{138}

Peter’s participation in the ministry of Jesus presents a fruitful possibility for further consideration along this line of thinking. Luke identifies Peter as one of those who has been with Jesus from the beginning (Acts 1:21). Additionally, Peter’s characterization in Acts is christologically inflected, further supporting the relevance of drawing these connections between Peter in the ministry of Jesus and Peter as Jesus’ witness in Acts.\textsuperscript{139} The narrative background in the Gospel has significant explanatory power with regard to the events that occur, which reflect the Gospel’s theme of hospitality relative to itinerant ministry, the redrawning of hospitality customs when tables

\textsuperscript{137} “Socio-moral” disgust and core disgust, that is disgust regulated by the olfactory/digestive systems, are intermingled. Ibid., 74. With regard to Acts 10, Beck suggests that the narrative connection that develops between unclean \textit{foods} and unclean \textit{people} may be exemplary of the close connection between socio-moral disgust (in which disgust applies to people) and core disgust (in which disgust typically applies to food or drink). Ibid., 77.


\textsuperscript{139} As when Luke’s account of Peter’s healings of Aeneas and Dorcas are specifically crafted in ways that mirror stories from the ministry of Jesus. The same phenomenon has also be identified with the ministry of Philip in Samaria, and it also occurs in the ministry of Paul and in the paralleling of Paul’s healing of the Malta officials servant with the healing of Peter’s mother in law (Acts 28).
are oriented around Christ, and the inclusion of religiously peripheral and potentially unclean persons within hospitality practices.

To state the point differently, Peter is a “legitimate peripheral participant” in the ministry of Jesus, to deeply formative effect. “Legitimate peripheral participation” describes a central form of pedagogy in apprenticeship cultures, in which “learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and . . . mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community.”

What this account calls apprenticeship is sufficiently analogous to discipleship in Luke. Within the Lukan volumes, Peter, as a disciple, is inculcated into distinctive forms of practice that come to characterize the community of Jesus followers in Acts. Practices of hospitality constitute one such constellation of distinctively shaped, historically situated activities that constitute a Christian practice. The distinctive patterns of participation in hospitality that characterize the ministry of Jesus can then be expected of the early church under the leadership of those witnesses with whom Jesus “ate and drank” after his resurrection (Acts 10:36).

In other words, it is reasonable to suggest that Peter’s participation in the hospitality of Jesus created the conditions in which hospitality with Cornelius becomes viscerally intelligible, and Peter’s visceral comportment open to alteration. This kind of bodily habituation is no panacea or guarantee, as if bodily practice forms practitioners automatically or predictably. Viscerally uncomfortable hospitality could, just as easily,

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have the opposite effect of reinforcing an existing sense of disgust. Two other elements in this account also co-operate in Peter’s visceral comportment in the transformation of his imagination – ongoing discernment and communal, theological narration.

3.3.2 Ongoing Discernment

Focus on hospitality in Acts 10 rarely devotes any substantial analysis to the verbs of reasoning and reflection that pepper the account and move it toward its culminating question – “who can hold back water for baptism?” (Acts 10:48). Those verbs of reasoning, however, point to another ongoing practice within the text that more easily escapes notice – namely, ongoing reflection. This ongoing reflection represents an essential component of imaginal transformation alongside the practice of hospitality itself, constituting another means by which human activity cooperates with divine action within God’s purposes.

The first clear marker of a cognitive state occurs during Peter’s vision. Here, Peter expresses cognitive dissonance regarding what the voice accompanying the vision indicates he ought to do with the unclean animals. He exclaims “By no means!” (Μηδεμως!, 10:14), a word used only by Luke in the New Testament, and then only here and in the recapitulation of the vision in 11:8. Following the vision, Peter is “confused”

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141 This presents one potential weakness in proposals about the formative nature of practices. It is simply not enough to do them, trusting that they will have the intended effect automatically. While proposals for practices as formative are often more nuanced, in discussion and application the critical edge can be lost. It should also be said that it isn’t a foregone conclusion that the practices produce any specific kind of thing rather than another. These things are complex and contested.

142 Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 211.
(διαπορέω; 10:17), a state of being that, in Luke, typically refers to affairs that lack explanation or defy the known facts.143

When the Spirit speaks to Peter concerning the arrival of emissaries from Cornelius, Peter, though confused, is actively engaged in the process of reasoning about what he has seen. Luke again uses a hapax legomenon, here διενθυμομένου (10:19), which as a middle/passive participle has the sense of an ongoing “turning it over in his mind.”144 Peter, it seems, immediately began engaging in ongoing reflection in response to the confusing vision. Significantly, when the Spirit instructs Peter to go with the men, he is to go without “making a distinction” (μηδὲν διακρινόμενος; 10:20).145 This term, first used in this pericope here, plays a significant role in the events that unfold.

When he arrives at Cornelius’s house, and after he cedes the “unlawfulness” of his presence, he provides a provisional statement of his new understanding of the situation. “God has shown me,” he says, “not to call any person profane or unclean” (10:28). After Cornelius recounts his own vision, Peter begins his proclamation of the

143 Again, this is a term used only by Luke. It appears in Luke 9:7 to describe Herod’s confusion at reports coming out of Galilee, and in Acts 2:12 to describe the amazement and confusion of the crowds at Pentecost, some of whom go on to provide their own account of events (drunkenness) that Peter must contest. Its third and final appearance in Acts 5:24 describes the confusion of the guards and chief priests when Peter and John are absent from their locked cell.

144 While διενθυμομένου only appears once in the New Testament, a related and less intensive form ἐνθυμέμαι appears twice in Matthew’s gospel, once as an aorist passive participle used when Joseph resolves (ἐνθυμήσεις) to divorce Mary (Matt 1:20), and again when Jesus “sees their thoughts (ἐνθυμήσεις)” when he forgives the sins of the paralytic (Matt 9:4).

145 The verb translated here as “make a distinction” could also be translated as to doubt, to hesitate, to separate, or to waver. The NRSV translates the phrase as “without hesitation.” Given the presence of this term at the opening to chapter 11, as well as its use in Acts 15:9, where it clearly has the sense of a distinction (or, more accurately, the elimination thereof), I prefer to translate it in terms of distinctions, reflective of its broader Lukan use. This word, the root of the modern discrimination, has a central function in the unfolding of the story. Johnson, Scripture & Discernment, 92.

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gospel with the added emphasis that he “truly understands” (Ἐπ’ ἀληθείας καταλαμβάνομαι; 10:34) God’s non-partiality. This middle-passive term has the sense of understanding by means of inquiry, implying a process of coming to understanding. Peter then goes on to give a proclamation of the gospel uniquely tailored to his understanding of the situation; in other words, Peter’s understanding of the situation has proceeded to the point that he is able to integrate and adapt knowledge. Finally, upon witnessing the Spirit descending on the gathered Gentiles, he recognizes the Gentiles common receipt of the gift of the Spirit and commands that they be baptized. Further acting on his confirmed understanding, Peter accepts the Gentiles’ hospitality for several days more.

The following table summarizes this progression:

**Table 1: Peter’s Cognitive Progression**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Greek Term</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:14</td>
<td>Resistance/cognitive dissonance</td>
<td>Μηδαμώς</td>
<td>Context: vision with command to “kill and eat” unclean foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:17</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>διηπόρει</td>
<td>Context: follows vision; Peter’s state when Cornelius’s men arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:19</td>
<td>Active processing</td>
<td>διενθυμουμένου</td>
<td>Context: Peter’s state when the Spirit bids him welcome the men without making a distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:28</td>
<td>Provisional statement of understanding</td>
<td>ὁ θεὸς ἐδείξεν</td>
<td>Context: when Peter enters Cornelius’s home to find a number of people gathered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:34</td>
<td>Emphatic statement of understanding</td>
<td>Ἐπ’ ἀληθείας καταλαμβάνομαι</td>
<td>Context: immediately following Cornelius’s account of what led to Peter’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Peter’s activity, explicitly signaled in the text, clearly mirrors the duality inherent in practices. Peter’s engagement in hospitality practices, like all embodied experience, retains a “more than can be said” quality. In other words, the transformation that Peter goes through in the hospitality encounter with the Gentiles, which results with his unhindered participation in this baptism, cannot be simply reduced to what Peter says about his experience. At the same time, Peter engages in conscious reflection that is creative to the extent that it allows him to connect previously disconnected experiences and categories – clean and unclean, common and cleansed by God. In and through the transformation of his imagination, Peter comes to a new comprehension of the whole of God’s purposes, arranging new insights into a coherent theological understanding of the extent of God’s salvation – Jesus is, indeed, the Lord of all.

3.3.3 Communal, Narrative Discernment

The story, as Luke tells it, does not end there. The community of believers, to whom he references obliquely throughout the conversion narratives, comes into play in

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147 The transformation can also profitably be compared to Dykstra’s account of the transformation of the imagination in Dykstra, *Vision and Character*, 81–87.
the days following the baptism of the Gentiles. What results through Peter’s testimony to what has taken place is the initial communal acceptance of the news of God’s salvation to the Gentiles. This final section provides an initial indication of the ways in which Peter’s private transformation contributes to the imaginal formation of the community.

When Peter leaves Joppa and the home of Simon the Tanner, he is accompanied by some of the local believers (literally: brothers from Joppa; 10:23). These believers witness the events that take place in Peter’s house, and are “astonished” when the gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out “even on the Gentiles” (10:45). Interestingly, they too appear to discern that the Holy Spirit has come on the Gentiles, for Luke observes that, “they saw them speaking in tongues and glorifying God” (10:46; emphasis mine).

The role of the community becomes more prominent at the beginning of chapter eleven. Luke tells us that news of the Gentiles accepting (ἐλαμβάνοντες) the word of God spread to the believers and apostles in the region of Judea (11:1), presumably through the believers who accompanied Peter and then returned home. Once the Spirit falls on the Gentiles, Luke begins designating the Jewish Christians as the circumcised believers (10:45), a designation that reappears with reference to those who raise issue with Peter.¹⁴⁸ When Peter next goes to Jerusalem, some circumcised believers criticize Peter for “going in” and “eating with” uncircumcised people (lit: men; 11:2). In a bit of wordplay obscured by most English translations, Luke records that these circumcised believers

¹⁴⁸ This is the only use of the designation “uncircumcised” in Acts. The terms is far more common in Paul’s letters, eleven out of twenty uses being located in Romans where the term functions as a demarcation of Jew versus Gentile. Interestingly the introduction of believers as circumcised appears for the first and only time here in Acts.
“made a distinction” against Peter (διεχρίνοντο; 11:2), for failing to make the appropriate distinctions with regard to association with Gentiles (διαερινόμενος; 10:20).149

In response, Peter begins to “set forth” in a meaningfully ordered way all the events that occurred, providing a first person recapitulation of the third person report of events in 10:1-48.150 The matter of appropriate distinctions remains at stake throughout his speech.151 Most of the differences between this account and the longer version in 10:1-48 are superficial, the result of the change of perspective.152 Peter’s words exclude the extended narration of the hospitality encounters and the content of the speech to the

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149 διεχρίνοντο and its cognates appear five times in Luke-Acts, all in the second volume and with respect to the inclusion of the Gentiles in Acts 10. The repetition of the term is obscured by most English translations, which translate its first use as “without delay” (NRSV, NIV, ESV). The term does have a range of meanings, which include “without delay” along with “doubt,” “make a distinction,” “decide,” “discern,” or “judge.” It is most often used to convey doubting or judging in its nineteen uses in the New Testament. But the persistence of the term across this particular narrative unit and its role in the issue raised by the circumcised believers suggests that a consistent translation in the sense of distinction or judgment is most appropriate.

150 The middle form of this verb, with the meaning “set forth” or “declare” describes Peter’s actions here, Priscilla and Aquila’s corrective teaching for Apollos (18:26), and Paul’s teaching the Jews in Rome (28:23). The verb can also mean “to expose an infant” when in the active voice, which is its use in Luke 7:21. The matter of appropriate distinctions, and who makes them, remains at stake in this account, as it does in Peter’s later, and shorter, first person account in Acts 15:7-11.

151 In addition the term’s appearance in the third person accounts in 10:20 and 11:2, as well as in Peter’s third person account in 11:12, it also appears in the third and final account of these events, this time before the gathering in Jerusalem. There, after “much debate” about the necessity of circumcising new Gentile believers, Peter stands up to recount his own ministry and notes that it is, in the end, God who “makes no distinction between us and them (καὶ οὐδὲν διέχρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν; Acts 15:9).

152 In Peter’s retelling, the parallel structure disappears, and Cornelius recedes to the background. The characterization of Cornelius as a God-fearer, a pious person respected even by the Jewish people, is curiously not a part of Peter’s apologetic retelling. This is particularly curious since the characterization is repeated both in the narrator’s establishment of the scene (11:2), in the angels words to Cornelius (11:4), and in the emissaries words to Peter about the one who sent them (11:22). That Cornelius was a god-fearer appears to have little relevance to the circumcised believer’s conclusion that God had indeed extended to the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles. Contra Jacob Jervell, “The Church of Jews and Godfearers,” in Luke-Acts and the Jewish People: Eight Critical Perspectives, ed. Joseph B. Tyson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 11–14.
Gentiles, though the contents of that speech appear to be integrated elsewhere. Peter also makes specific reference to the six men from Joppa who went with him and entered Cornelius’s house (11:12).

The most telling differences come at the conclusion in 11:15-18 and in the form of additions that indicate further Peter’s further theological reflection on the events in Cornelius’s home. After recounting the Spirit’s falling upon the Gentiles, he adds, “just as it had on us in the beginning” (11:15). To that recollection of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11), Peter adds that he remembered the word of the Lord concerning the baptism by the Holy Spirit (11:16; Luke 3:16). Finally, in 11:17, he states “if, therefore, God has given to them the same gift (δώρεαν) that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to be able to hinder (κωλύσω) God? The term κωλύσω recalls Peter’s exclamation in 10:47, in which the object that may be withheld or prevented is the water for baptism. The term also appears in connection in the Ethiopian eunuch’s question about what might prevent his own baptism, and the related adverb ἀκωλύτως or “without hindrance,” rather ironically describes the state of Paul’s preaching while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:31). The use of this term Peter’s pregnant question in Acts 11:17 points to the irrepressibility of God’s purposes, even in the midst of surprising circumstances.

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153 One of the more interesting differences is that Peter’s recounts Cornelius’s words about his vision as including the note that Peter’s message would be for salvation for him and for all those in his house (11:14). This explicit note of a message of salvation is absent from chapter 10, but it may be reflective of the presence of Peter’s sermon in which, though the term salvation is never used, nonetheless indicates the welcome God has extended to all who call on God.

154 Luke records these as the words of John the Baptist, though they are hear attributed to Jesus (see also Matt 3:11).
The term “gift” (δωρέαν) in this context resonates in a particular way within the context of the practice of hospitality. In ancient hospitality customs, ritualized or formal hospitality agreements, including the establishment of long term “guest-friendship” involved the use of gifts. Here, the gift of the Holy Spirit appears to indicate God’s hospitable extension of friendship to the Gentiles, which results also in the establishment of hospitality between Jews and Gentiles. The community concludes that God has given even to the Gentiles repentance leading to life.

In response to all of this, Luke tells us that all who heard Peter were silenced, in a way that is reminiscent of the response of various antagonists to Jesus’ compelling words. Furthermore, the gathered community glorified God at the Gentiles inclusion in the community of repentance. Though the conclusion reached here will remain a matter of contention throughout Acts, and will require further deliberation in Acts 15, there nonetheless remains a sense in which Peter’s public theological reflection invites the gathered community to recognize God’s purposes. Here, Peter’s narration of what God has done helps the community to begin to claim a new kind of narrative about God’s work among them.

155 Given that the term of gift in these hospitality exchanges is δωρέαν, may be significant and in keeping with Luke’s broader interest in hospitality in relationship to divine purpose that Luke prefers δωρέαν to χάρισμα in describing the Holy Spirit’s presence with believers or other “gifts of the Spirit”. See also Acts 2:38. Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 216.
157 Jipp, Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers, 217.
3.3.4 Peter as Model of Transformed Theological Imagination

What is ultimately at stake in the encounter between Peter and Cornelius is the imagination of the community, their deep construal of the world, including how to be, act, know, and relate in response to God’s presence and purposes. Peter undergoes an imaginal transformation, in which he comes to a new understanding of the relevant distinctions (διακρίνω) pertaining to the people of God. Bodily participation in the practice of hospitality engages the tacit apprehensions of the world implied in the imagination’s formative power in human life. Peter’s practice takes shape within the wider Greco-Roman script of hospitality practices, but it is distinctively and importantly shaped by his participation in the ministry and teachings of Jesus. Peter objects to the vision’s suggestion to kill and eat on the basis, not only of the unlawfulness of the activity but also the uncleanness, suggesting the possibility of a visceral experience of disgust.\(^{158}\) The voice from heaven simply replies, “what God has made clean, you must not make unclean.” The depth of the adjustment needed to overcome such distinctions requires more than the exchange of one rational principle for another.\(^{159}\) Participation in Jesus’ own practice of hospitality makes it viscerally comprehensible that God’s work might well include unconventional, even unclean, forms of hospitality.

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\(^{158}\) In the retelling in Acts 11, Peter states it even more explicitly – “nothing unclean has ever entered my mouth.”

\(^{159}\) ἴσχες can also be translated as “make common”, but the theme of hospitality and the controversial nature of Jew/Gentile relationships makes the cleanliness focused translation more appropriate. The text never specifies Peter’s emotional or explicitly visceral response to what takes place; it is important to resist uncritically importing affective states that the text does not support. My suggestion remains conjecture, but it is informed conjecture. I would argue that attending to the bodily practices of the text, with the appropriate historical qualifications and context, provides another way of accessing the story at the affective, bodily level without requiring psychological eisegesis disconnected from a close reading of the text itself.
Additionally, participation in hospitality practices coheres with Peter’s conscious, cognitive progression to new understanding. The creative, constructive aspects of imagination appear fully in effect as Peter moves through dissonance and confusion to a new conclusion about the lawfulness of hospitality conducted between a Jew and a Gentile. The capacity to draw new deep connections between events as part of a traditioned narration of their meaning becomes additionally evident in Peter’s recapitulation of the events in 11:1-18. The practice of hospitality alone, apart from this level of disciplined, ongoing reflection and communal discernment is insufficient. The necessity of the continuation of this communal discernment becomes apparent in Acts 15. For the imagination to be transformed, for a holistic way of apprehending the world as God would have it to be possible, the dynamics of participation in practices and disciplined reflection on them is required.

Finally, the implication of the whole Christian community of practice here is not incidental to the formation taking place. Green argues that what Peter experiences in the encounter with Cornelius is nothing short of Peter’s ongoing conversion, what we might also call formation, into the way of God made known in Christ Jesus, who is “the Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). Green rightly emphasizes both the role of divine revelation and

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160 Green resists the dichotomies that persist in accounts and definitions of conversion – process vs. event, individual vs. social, repentance vs. conversion – by claiming a both/and rather than either/or relationship. This move is in many ways analogous to the bifurcations I am resisting in my definition of imagination at the outset of this project. Green here claims that, for Luke, there is not strong semantic or theological distinction between repentance and conversion (contra those other people who say that repentance only applies to Israel, conversion to the Gentiles). The call to repentance persists, thus conversion in his analysis is an ongoing turning toward God and God’s purposes. Green, Conversion in Luke-Acts, 49–51. Green defines the necessary “conversion” in this way. “What is needed is a theological transformation: a deep-seated conversion in their conception of God and, thus, in their commitments,
vision, but also the social nature of the “conversion” – in other words, that fact that it involves community behavior not just individual affective or abstractly “spiritual”
states. The role of the whole community in this formation and re-formation of
imagination should not be discounted.

3.4 The Invitation to the (Post)Modern Reader

Luke tells us in Acts 2:44 that “all those believed were together and had all things in common.” Luke so frequently uses such expansive language that he might be accused of massaging the facts or idealizing the early church’s life. Leaving aside the unverifiable (dis)continuity between the church as present in Acts and the church as it actually was, such descriptors of the church’s unified life seem distant indeed. Those moments of disagreement (Acts 11:2), of fractured relationship (Acts 15:36-41), and efforts to mitigate the damage down by diverging opinions about the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church (21:17-26) seem far more familiar. With that in mind, we might return to hospitality in and in front of this account.

attitudes, and everyday practices. Consequently, the resolution of ignorance is not simply amassing facts but (re)alignment with God’s ancient purpose now coming to fruition (that is, conversion) and divine forgiveness. Note that we are speaking here of Peter and his companions as though they need to discern better and to align themselves with God’s agenda. This is important since these people are already Jesus’ followers.” Though Green never adopts the term, his wide-ranging definition of conversion is in many ways a definition of Christian formation– the ongoing conformity of Christian life to the way God made known in Jesus. For Peter to have his imagination transformed in this encounter is for Peter to be Christianly formed. Ibid., 94.

Green’s account, though quite helpful, does not attend to Peter’s participation in the community of practice surrounding Jesus’ ministry and his role in leading such a community as recounted in Acts. Green, Conversion in Luke-Acts, 98.
The present circumstances of most western Christians offer no shortage of potentially analogous situations, for the church and the world are rife with seeming irreconcilable differences and apparently impermeable social barriers. Global denominations argue internally over matters of doctrine, with positions demarcated as much by principle as by geography. Within the United States so clearly, though not uniquely, polarized by political parties, a Pew Research study observes a “tendency on the left and the right to associate primarily with like-minded people, to the point of actively avoiding those who disagree.”\textsuperscript{162} In local congregations, which often skew toward homogeneity, differences along the lines of race, class, ability, sexuality, culture, ethnicity and gender may not only be evident but fractious.

While the difficulties of discerning God’s purposes in the midst of and across these divisions remain, this analysis of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius suggests that simply articulating our common identity in Christ is simply insufficient. Concrete Christian practices that engage the bodies that manifest such differences, not just distant or anonymous online encounters, are required. Christian communities around the nation have ministries in which such differences are encountered, but Peter’s encounter with Cornelius suggests the further power of encounters far more mundane than organized ministry events. In the ability of practices to shape our understanding of the world from the “bottom up,” even the most common and basic aspects of our lives have formative potential. An imagination shaped by the scriptural proclamation that Jesus is, indeed, the

“Lord of all” requires the recruitment of ordinary, fleshly bodies knit together by the Spirit in the body of Christ.

In the previous chapter I claimed that, in Acts 10:1-11:18, Luke narrates Peter’s imaginal transformation, a transformation which ultimately results in the whole community’s move toward new ways of imagining, and therefore living into, new operative distinctions regarding the shape of God’s people. Peter’s imaginal transformation occurs in the midst of his practice of hospitality with Cornelius and his household, co-operating with his ongoing discernment of the meaning of events, and culminating in his public, theological narration of what God has shown them. The cooperation of these elements within the character of Peter corresponds with the theological and formational analysis of the role of practices in the formation of Christian life. In that earlier section of chapter three, I argued that practices participate in the shaping of Christian imagination because they engage the body in supra-rational ways of knowing while also inviting, in many but not all cases, conscious reflection and rational articulation of reasons for acting.

The next section turned directly to the biblical pericope, identifying its narrative contours and literary context, before considering the broader historical context of ancient Mediterranean hospitality practices as well as the literary development of the practice in the Gospel of Luke. It was then possible to exegetically discern a clear progression to anew, robust understanding developing in and through concrete, bodily practice. This progression from confusion to confident, adapted proclamation in the midst of practice invites the model readers, both ancient and modern, into their own imaginal
transformation, particularly when the community of readers is also a community that practices Christian hospitality.

In this chapter, I turn to a second pericope in Acts that I believe also corresponds to this project’s concerns with the formation of the imagination, though one less commonly investigated than Peter’s encounter with Cornelius. Paul’s shipwreck on the way to Rome historically receives only cursory treatment due to its presumed lack of substantive theological content, particularly by those who locate the theological weight of the book primarily in the speeches or consider historicity the primary criteria for valuation.¹ Read in its historical context and with formational theories about narrative in mind, however, the story reveals a substantive narrative theology with formative impact.

In Acts 27:1-28:16, Luke narrates the sea voyage and shipwreck of Paul in a manner that reveals the persistence of Paul’s theological imagination and invites the reader into the narrative formation of his or her own imagination. Luke crafts this account with an eye toward Greco-Roman shipwreck scenes, biblical themes and stories, and the individual story of Paul, utilizing the interaction of such narratives to powerfully convey theological messages. Paul maintains hopeful vision in the midst of danger and emerges as the surprisingly dominant figure in this account, yet his understanding of events and his role in them is profoundly shaped by the story-formed imagination. Given these literary dynamics, as well as the position of this scene at the climax of Paul’s ministry just prior to his arrival in Rome, this pericope merits consideration through the lens of this project’s concern with imagination in Christian formation.

¹ Denaux, “The Theme of Divine Visits and Human (in)hospitality,” 255.
The claim about the centrality of narrative to Christian formation undergirds this entire chapter; the first section supports this claim with recourse to wide-ranging research claiming a deeply formative role for narrative in human understanding and identity. Having established the theoretical lens, the argument turns to the pericope at hand, considering its role in the progression of the Acts narrative and identifying the pericopes narrative contours. As in chapter three, I locate the narrative historically, here specifically within the historical context of voyage and shipwreck scenes in popular Greco-Roman literature and, subsequently, in the cultural encyclopedia of the imagined reader. Since, for Luke’s imagined readers, the cultural encyclopedia also includes Luke’s Gospel and the Septuagint, biblical resonances in this passage receive attention next.

The final section engages in integrative analysis, using the discussion about narrative’s capacity to shape imagination to attend to the ways in which Paul’s own imagination takes shape as a character within the narrative. This analysis leads to the suggestion that Luke demonstrates a literary trans-valuation that invites the engagement and transformation of the readers’ own imaginations.

4.1 Formative Power of Narrative

Narratives, like practices, capably infiltrate and shape multiple levels of human experience, and continue to constitute a subject of significant interest among scholars since the “narrative turn” in the late 20th century. Theoretical interest includes both theological and secular scholars with a variety of foci; consequently, the literature on narrative’s power is quite expansive. Still, three heuristic categories helpfully indicate points of converging interest in or approaches to narrative among literature especially
germane to this project. Though much of this literature does not employ the term imagination at all, or in the exact same sense, it will nonetheless become clear that narratives, like practices, possess the same capacity to encounter human ways of knowing at multiple levels, and to do so both cooperatively and non-reductively.

4.1 Three Categories of Narrative Theory

The three categories introduced here indicate streams of convergence across a diverse set of texts. The first category includes literature that is especially concerned with narrative’s capacity to engage emotion and other pre- or non-cognitive aspects of human being in the world. Texts in the second category focus on narrative as a critical means of constructing an explicit sense of personal identity, including moral agency. The third category includes some proposals that look at narrative through a wider, societal lens, including the sense in which narratives constitute part of a “social imaginary” and become instantiated in cultural practices. Since these categories function heuristically rather than diagnostically, the boundaries among them remain porous and flexible, and the categories’ primary value is their ability to clarify the concerns at stake when narrative is taken to be formative for human life.

4.1.1 Narratives and Tacit Ways of Knowing

The first category’s theoretical concern with narrative’s capacity to shape human meaning at the level of the affections coheres and overlaps with the discussion in chapter one, particularly in its concern for the centrality of bodily and pre-conscious modes of perception to both human reasoning and comportment. Stated differently, narrative provides one potential way of moving beyond a “conceptual-propositional view of
meaning” to an expanded concept of “meaning” that includes that which resides in the body and emotions.² To review, in the imagination’s function as part of our pre-conscious construal of a situation, emotions are already at play even before we “feel,” that is, consciously recognize, them.³ For Johnson, imagination, emotion, and the body are closely linked, because emotion and other visceral means of engaging the world lie at the heart of all conscious and creative forms of meaning. Emotions fuel the imagination, and thus their shape affects the construal of the world and the possibilities that the imagination renders.

Narrative, as Jamie Smith has recently claimed, does important work in the shaping emotional engagement with the world, and Smith’s work helpfully connects Johnson’s claims about emotion with narrative specifically and with Christian formation more broadly. Working out of his theological anthropology of humans as “desiring beings,” Smith claims that humans are affectively driven. Furthermore, Smith contends that stories are uniquely situated to operate at this core level of human behavior: “narrative trains our emotions, and those emotions actually condition our perception of the world.”⁴ Such central, comportment-shaping stories, says Smith, “capture and orient . . . not primarily didactively or instructively, but affectively and unconsciously: such stories are ‘understood’ by the imagination at a ‘gut level’ that turns out to be the

² The conceptual propositional view of meaning claims that “meaning and thought are exclusively conceptual and propositional in nature and that the apparatus of meaning, conceptualization, and reasoning is not intrinsically shaped by the body even if these processes have to occur in a body. Johnson, The Meaning of the Body, 8.
³ Ibid., 60.
⁴ Smith, Imagining the Kingdom, 32.
incarnate core of my existence.”⁵ Thus, our ways of behaving, relating, and feeling become deeply shaped by stories that emerge from and effect us, and are reinforced or rewritten, through our bodily participation in cultures and communities.⁶

Recent neuroscientific research also connects narrative with affective formation, particularly with regard to the development of empathy. Researchers at Emory observed that reading a novel over several days produced a persistent increase in connectivity within brain regions associated with embodied semantics, story comprehension, and perspective taking. Though the increased connectivity decayed over time, the research indicates a linkage between engagement in stories and the ability to empathically engage another literary character, an observation that is quite old even if supporting fMRI evidence is new.⁷ Susan Keen’s study of novels and empathy demonstrates a persistent, though not automatic or guaranteed, connection between reading stories and developing empathy, which she defines as “a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, which can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s

⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 66.
⁶ Nussbaum notes, “Emotions, unlike many of our beliefs, are not taught to us directly through propositional claims about the world, either abstract or concrete. They are taught, above all, through stories.” Martha Nussbaum, “Narrative Emotions: Beckett’s Genealogy of Love,” in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 217. She later says, “We need to bear in mind, as well, that narratives contain emotions in their very structure; so their form stands in need of the same sort of scrutiny that we give to emotions represented within it . . . . Narratives are constructs that respond to certain patterns of living and shape them in their turn. So we must always ask what content the literary forms themselves express, what structures of desire they represent and evoke.” Ibid., 246.

⁷ The nineteen participants received fMRI scans to check for resting state data on the mornings following the prior night’s assigned reading of a section of the chosen novel. Even after accounting for other factors that could have contributed to the increase connectivity evident in the scan, the researchers were confident that the reading of the novel itself resulted in increased connectivity that persisted after the participants completed the novel. They were, however, unable to test the long-term durability of the connectivity. Gregory S. Berns et al., “Short- and Long-Term Effects of a Novel on Connectivity in the Brain,” *Brain Connectivity* 3, no. 6 (2013): 600, doi:http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1089/brain.2013.0166.
Reading stories can contribute to the reader’s capacity for empathy due in part to the activation of mirror neurons, which effectively activate a mental rehearsal of the activities or experiences described therein. This narrative effect draws on multiple human capacities for, as Keen notes, “narrative empathy invoked by reading must involve cognition, for reading itself relies upon complex cognitive operations. . . when texts invite readers to feel, they also stimulate readers’ thinking it also invites readers to think.”

4.1.1.2 Narratives and Personal Identity

Scholars whose work falls in this second category approach narrative primarily as the typical form in and through which individuals construct and share an explicit sense of personal identity. White and Epston, psychologists and practitioners of narrative therapy, designate the process by which meaning is inscribed on human experience as “storying.” Such stories are both descriptive and determinative in providing people with “a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives [that] is relied upon for the ordering of

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8 Suzanne Keen, “A Theory of Narrative Empathy,” *Narrative* 14, no. 3 (October 2006): 208. In this research, Keen is especially interested in testing whether or not the conditions exist for the empathy-altruism effect to be in place.


10 In Keen’s definition, empathy bridges both affective and cognitive domains, because it involves both affections and sensations in the body and memory and interpretation, which she identifies as more explicitly cognitive. Keen, “A Theory of Narrative Empathy,” 213.

11 They situate their account within the broader rise of “text” analogies in the social sciences. Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 10.
daily lives and for the interpretation of further experiences.”¹² In narrative therapy, a therapist supports individuals in the construction of new stories, that provide a – presumably psychologically healthier – account of an individual’s identity, relationships, past experience and future prospects.¹³ They argue that, in essence, individuals “perform” these stories, and in doing so engage in the continual authoring and re-authoring of their life “text”.

Drawing on what they deem to be an emerging consensus about the meaningfulness of life being essentially narrative in nature, educational scholars Goodson and Gill suggest that narratives serve as a key site of personal learning. They define learning as “an interplay of to-and-fro dialogic encounters at the core of which is enhanced understanding of oneself, others, one’s place in the world and a course of action more aligned with one’s values, beliefs, and worldviews.”¹⁴ Like White and Epston, they

¹² Ibid., 12. These stories are, by necessity, highly selective; no one story can capture the breadth of human experiences, some of which may remain inchoate. As others have noted, because humans exist in time, constructed accounts of the events take the form of narrative, including notions of temporality and cause-effect relationships. Given also that the interaction of both sacred and mundane stories that constitute our accounts of our own lives, Crites argues that “active consciousness, i.e., the form of its experiencing, is in at least some rudimentary sense narrative. Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 72.

¹³ They suggests that, for many, the problem may be habitual performance of a dominant, damaging story that can be exposed through a process of externalization that separates the problem from the sense of self or sense of relationship. They claim “this externalization is also helpful in the interruption of the habitual reading and performance of these stories. As persons become separated from their stories, they are able to experience a sense of personal agency; as they break from the performance of their stories, they experience a capacity to intervene in their own lives and relationships.” Individuals may receive encouragement to draw on available but previously “unstoried” aspects of their experience. White and Epston, Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends, 16.

¹⁴ Ivor Goodson and Scherto Gill, Narrative Pedagogy: Life History and Learning (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 88. They see narrative understandings of human life as a way to account for the consistent sense of self that people claim without positing a fundamentally stable self that post-modern theories of the person would deny. See Ibid., 100.
see the construction of such narrative, personal learning as dynamic. What they call a
dialogic “narrative encounter” provides space for re-narration and renewed forms of
action, as both teacher and learner interact around the life narrative, locate it in terms of
broader social forces or particular traditions, and finally integrate the story by
reconstructing the narrative. Their approach, in common with the concerns of narrative
therapy, seeks deep learning that generates a whole way of being in the world, including
the sense of self in relationship to others and to one’s own orienting convictions.

Accounts of narrative formation by Christian ethicists appropriately place more
attention on the role of the normative tradition in the construction of a sense of personal
identity. In *Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life*, Hauerwas describes
the self as the site of competing stories, including the story of the normative tradition.

Construction of an adequate “self” for the Christian requires that the tradition, the
“truthful story,” be an authoritative participant in the dialogue between various “selves.”
Thus he states that “by learning to make our lives conform to God’s way, Christians

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15 White and Epston refer to the narrative constructing process as intertextual, in that “it proposes
that persons’ texts are situated in texts within texts... [and] every telling or retelling, through its
performance, is a new telling that encapsulates, and expands upon the previous telling. White and Epston,
*Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, 13.

16 Flowchart of the process found on Goodson and Gill, *Narrative Pedagogy*, 126. Goodson and
Gill differentiate themselves from narrative therapy by rejecting an explicit desire to transform or address
particular issues. They state that their account of narrative learning “is not problem focused and does not
intend to resolve dissonances, although narrative pedagogues might find themselves wanting to draw the
individual’s attention to the discords and dissonances in his/her accounts as pedagogical leverages.” Ibid.,
118.

17 Here, his account resonates with the sense of competing narrative options assumed by secular
(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 245. See also footnotes 15 and 16.
claim that they are provided with a self that is a story that enables the conversation [between competing stories] to continue in a truthful manner.\textsuperscript{18}

Richard Bondi’s appreciative critique of Hauerwas suggests that a phenomenology of character, or an account of the self who engages in dialogue with such normative traditions, is necessary for the account of moral formation via narrative to succeed. The self potentially formed by narratives possesses four elements of human experience that deeply influence character formation: capacity for intentional action, involvement of the passions and affections, subjections to the accidents of history, and the capacity of the heart.\textsuperscript{19} Bondi’s account of the heart is analogous to the imagination. The heart’s capacity “unites feeling and intellect on a fundamental and telling level.”\textsuperscript{20} For Bondi, narratives and the communities that orient around and transmit them are central to the formation of character precisely because of the nature of human life. In providing “symbols and visions of the good life,” stories, working at the level of the human heart, provide “an interpretive lens to view reasons for intentional actions, to focus the affections and order the passions, to present virtues embodied in lives, and to give a new angle of vision on our subjection to the accidents of history.”\textsuperscript{21}

For Bondi, as for others in this category, stories are powerful directors and shapers of the holistic way of being in the world that this project claims arises from the

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 228.
\textsuperscript{19} Richard Bondi, “The Elements of Character,” \textit{Journal of Religious Ethics} 12, no. 2 (1984): 204. By intentional action, Bondi means a sense of moral agency and personal responsibility. He differentiates affections from passions by defining passions in an Augustinian sense as negative affections; in either case, he, like others, locates the affections as a central driver of moral behavior.
\textsuperscript{21} Bondi, “The Elements of Character,” 212.
incorporative, constructive work of the imagination. Bondi’s account also helpfully includes theoretical space for the slippage and limits that define human attempts to construct such narrative accounts. The operation of the passions, or what could simply be called sin, limits any person’s ability to see him or herself truthfully.22 Furthermore, by allotting “subjection to accidents of history” a central place in his account of human experience, he indicates many of the limits of self-determination posed by finitude and sin.23 These realities account for both the necessity of a normative tradition and the community that bears it, along with the ongoing task of authoring and re-authoring a sense of a Christian self at the nexus of these various forces. For deep and abiding formation of a Christian imagination, stories are indispensable. As Smith notes, “our perception will be sanctified just to the extent that our ‘background’ and imagination are recruited by a normative story.”24

4.1.1.3 Narratives and Social Meaning

The final category includes proposals that locate narrative’s function on a broader scale. As the previous categories and earlier chapters have already hinted, narratives live and move at the level of culture through widely-shared, social identity-related narratives and relatedly generative central practices. MacIntyre provides one development of this narrative capacity in his account of moral formation. Though MacIntyre places less emphasis on the individual’s narrative construction of a sense of self, he attends to the

22 See fn 19
23 MacIntyre notes something similar, namely that much of our lives are not self-determined, rather, to use his theatrical metaphor, we appear on a stage and in a scene with characters not of our own choosing, but one in which we nonetheless must act. MacIntyre, After Virtue, 213.
24 Smith, Imagining the Kingdom, 161.
role of narratives in the construction of intelligible account of one’s actions within a particular social context and tradition. “I can only answer the question, ‘What am I to do?’” MacIntyre famously says, “if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” For that reason, he claims “the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity.” These broadly held or socially situated stories have epistemological import, for even scientific theories become intelligible (or unintelligible and in need of revision) on the basis of the narrative histories in which they exist.

Such socially held, narratively formed expectations also shape the ways in which individuals interpret the actions of others. David Herman claims that narrative “scaffolds” or supports the interpretation of characters and situations outside of the text as well as those within it, and that by doing so narrative assists in the construction of a sense of self and, importantly, of other selves. Narratives facilitate this process by supporting capacities to interpret individuals as intentionally oriented characters within a complex narrative world. Stated in neuroscientific terms, narratives assist in the development of a “theory of mind.” Stories do this work, Herman claims, by supporting our ability to relate intentions, beliefs, and behaviors within a contextualized individual.

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26 Ibid., 221.
29 David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 297. Sometimes this works with deleterious effect, as in cases of “stereotype threat”; Ibid., 92. See also Miranda
Herman draws here on the notion of “folk psychology” introduced by the work of Hutto and Bruner, which Hutto defines as a form of “practical know-how” through which we construct explanatory accounts of the behavior of others.\textsuperscript{30} These constructed accounts draw on the actual intersubjective experiences of an embodied-reader-in-relation, a critical point of connection between Herman’s interests as a scholar of narrative and Johnson, Brown and Strawn, and others.\textsuperscript{31} Since storytelling provides the means for “projecting narrative worlds across space and time” in order to “make sense of past experiences, map out the course of future events, or assess how wider cultural assumptions and norms might have shaped or been shaped by one’s own or another’s conduct,” it has broad implications for meaning-making. Precisely this capacity to integrate, to assess, to act, and to project into the future is the central purview of the imagination.\textsuperscript{32}

Charles Taylor’s concept of the “social imaginary” provides another helpful way of accounting for the orienting role of such common narratively and tacitly held views of the world and the way it – and its inhabitants – operate. The “social imaginary” includes “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how

\begin{itemize}
\item Jerome S. Bruner, \textit{The Culture of Education} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 162.
\item Herman, \textit{Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind}, 92.
\item In this way, story provides a key means of “distributing intelligence – disseminating knowledge about or ways of engaging the world.” Herman goes on to state that “narrative at once reflects and reinforces the supra-individual nature of intelligence – that is, the inextricable interconnection between \textit{trying to make sense of} and \textit{being within} an environment that extends beyond the self.” (emphasis original) Ibid., 248.
\end{itemize}
things to on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie those expectations. The social imaginary is broadly shared by a group of people in a society, presumes normative notions about the way things should be, and is often carried in stories and legends. Smith describes a social imaginary as the way “we imagine the world before we ever think about it” going to say that it is constituted “by the stuff that funds the imagination – stories, myths, pictures, narratives.”

The social imaginary also entails the intersection of broadly held, normative narratives as they intersect with practices. Narratives function formatively alongside practices as generative of a social imaginary; here again, the theoretical conversation in chapter three overlaps with the present one. Smith picks up the co-inherence of story and practice in his account of formation in Christian liturgical practices, though he additionally brings in Bourdieu and some of the phenomenologists to further make his case. Smith’s insistence on careful attention to practices in learning communities, like the Christian university, derives from a shared concern with what Hogue calls the “bottom up” formation of the narratives through which the world is understood. To put it in Wenger’s terms, “what narratives, categories, roles and positions come to mean as an

34 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 66.
35 Says Smith, “The stories of a body politic become inscribed in our body through that ‘pedagogy of insignificance’ noted by Bourdieu – all the mundane little micropractices that nonetheless “carry” a big story. And insofar as we are immersed bodily in these microperformances, we are, over time, incorporated into a Story that then becomes the script that we implicitly act out.” Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 109.
36 Hogue, *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past*, 147. In his discussion of the formative power of ritual, Hogue notes that stories are “re-enacted in rituals that in turn produce experiences of similar thoughts and feelings in us . . . . Our rituals may also grow out of experiences and then shape the stories we tell.” Ibid., 145–146.
experience of participation is something that must be worked out in practice.”

Or, to restate within this project’s categories, the imagination’s formation depends includes both narratives and the way in which they get “worked out in practice.”

4.1.2 Narrative and Imagination

With this broad literature thus categorized, it is worthwhile to restate in more explicit terms the places in which this account of narrative’s formative power is especially germane to the formation of the imagination. Recall once more that the imagination refers to the incorporative, creative capacity that sits at the dynamic center of human being, knowing, acting, and relating. Because the imagination is interstitial, situated between the bodily and rational ways of knowing, it draws upon various elements of human experience and is powerfully shaped in a pre-conscious as well as conscious register. Furthermore, imagination integrates past experiences and future hopes, as well as the interplay between personal and social realms of experience.

Narrative intersects with human experience and knowledge at all such levels. The function of narrative in the construction of a sense of self provides one particularly helpful example. The narratively negotiated sense of self is not a hermetically sealed project but rather something that takes place at the intersection of social realities, physical conditions or experiences, and the individual’s ongoing account of all these things. Ways of being in the world, ways of relating to others in it, ways of knowing one’s own self,

37 In other words, identity is more than the stories we tell about ourselves because it includes what gets “worked out in practice,” a claim that resonates quite well with the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt 7:21) Wenger, Communities of Practice, 151.

38 Hart, Between the Image and the Word, 1.
and ways of crafting that tentative and dynamic understanding of self out of the past and into a hoped for future are all implicated in a narrative sense of identity. This narrative dynamic could also be seen on a societal level, in which certain key narratives come to be constituent parts of a society’s social imaginary and a shaper of social relationships within that group.

Other, more personal and subtle, effects of narrative on deep ways of human knowing also become clear in the discussion of narrative’s capacity to shape human emotion. Given the centrality of emotion as a driver of human behavior and as a shaper of all our base-level perception or construal of the world, the capacity to shape emotion is deeply influential. The literature on empathy provides one compelling example in this regard, for it claims that engagement with narratives can help us construe our encounters with other persons’ emotional states in deeply empathic ways.

As is the case with practices, the dualities of conscious and tacit, personally engaged and socially situated, past and future, also cooperate in narrative formation. In this way, narratives contribute to human meaning in a manner consonant with the imagination. Narratives also raise similar questions concerning the extent to which intent is necessary for their formative effect. To restate in terms of last chapter’s discussion, do narratives form in certain ways more or less automatically, and without our consent? Or does formation in and by narratives require intentional engagement of some kind? As with practices, the answer is yes. We can be captivated by certain stories without intending for them to be as effective as they are. Yet, as narrative therapy and other
literature claims, intentionally engaging and constructing narratives can be deeply formative.

Christian formation literature on the formative power of narrative frequently posits worship as the central context in which people are formed by participation into a particular Story, which the liturgy enacts or performs.\textsuperscript{39} Fred Edie’s work with the Duke Youth Academy involves high school students in participation and planning of the liturgy with the hope that immersion into the formative “ecology” in the liturgical ordo will help to generate a “liturgical vision.”\textsuperscript{40} This liturgical vision is a kind of Christian imagination, “born out of practice that consequently deepens practice – of liturgy and of living liturgically beyond the sanctuary walls.”\textsuperscript{41} Both Smith and Edie, who broadly conceptualize Scripture as “story,” locate the Scriptures as source and component of liturgical practice.\textsuperscript{42} Edie and Hogue also emphasize direct instruction in and around the Scriptures as a component of formation in the Christian narrative in the midst of the liturgy.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Smith, \textit{Imagining the Kingdom}, 137. David Hogue communicates a similar commitment to the formative potential of worship, stating that “stories that are read and enacted within a worship setting create a common narrative experience that deepens a sense of connection with others in the group. As our brains imaginatively reconstruct the stories of our faith, they engage us in a world shared by others around us.” Hogue does, however, seem to place more value on religious information than Smith does. Hogue, for instance, sees biblical illiteracy as a problem that prohibits worship from realizing the extent of its possible formative potential, stating “our worship and our pastoral care all eventually depend on our religious education and our evangelism.” Hogue, \textit{Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past}, 101.

\textsuperscript{40} Edie defines the ordo in the specific sense of “order of worship” and the more general sense of “the patterned communal way of life shaped around the practices of these holy things.” Fred P. Edie, \textit{Book, Bath, Table, and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry}, Youth Ministry Alternatives (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 7.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 186.

\textsuperscript{42} For a brief discussion of Scripture as narrative, see chapter one, section 4

\textsuperscript{43} Smith downplays the role of direct instruction, largely do to his effort to counter-act overly intellectualist accounts of Christian formation. In response to critics, he does suggest that instruction does,
Others have crafted proposals for narrative Christian formation oriented more toward classroom contexts and the communal consideration of specific biblical passages. The “story-linking” process proposed by Anne Streaty Wimberly and the “interlacing” process proposed by Elizabeth Barnes are distinctively Christian pedagogical attempts to employ insights regarding narrative and identity formation. Wimberly sees a role for Christian education “in honoring a persons’ quest for the soul’ story to be shared and for a larger story – God’s story – to inform and transform that story.” Guided by concerns for “liberating wisdom” and “hope-filled vocation,” she outlines a pedagogical approach in which one’s own story is articulated and brought into critical dialogue with the stories of others and stories from the biblical text. Elizabeth Barnes suggests, though she does not quite clearly define, a pedagogical process in which “biblical pictures and narratives are interlaced with narratives and pictures of worship and discipleship from the congregation itself with pictures from biography and the literary, visual, and performing arts.” This process hopes, when conducted in the context of worship and discipleship, to both reproduce the wisdom of the tradition and produce new insights through interaction with other stories.

in fact, deepen practice, though he still claims what I think is too substantial a formative role for practices even in the absence of such instruction. In this way it seems that Smith’s account often presumes that participants in practices who undergo this formation are already catechized. I highly doubt that this is a safe assumption. Smith, Imagining the Kingdom, 189.


The strengths of these proposals notwithstanding, none of the approaches adopts scriptural imagination as a specific goal. Furthermore, each of these proposals lacks the kind of sustained attention to biblical narratives in conversation with this narrative theory. Luke’s narration of Paul’s shipwreck in the Acts of the Apostles offers a productive conversation partner in this way.

### 4.1.3 Narrative, Imagination, and Acts 27:1-28:16

Recall that commentators on Acts, even despite disagreement about the text’s genre, generally agree that the text exerts formative effect through the shape and content of the narrative, a fact which suggests that the intersection between the formative capacities of narrative and this particular biblical narrative may be both evocative and fruitful. Acts may be conceived, that is, as conscious narrative reflection on the community’s theologically defined identity and character. Furthermore, as many have noted, the writer of Acts frequently draws upon other stories known to the text’s implied readers, including Greco-Roman texts and literary motifs but, more consequentially, the Septuagint and Luke’s own account of the gospel. At times, Luke explicitly portrays the actions and attitudes of characters within the Acts’ narrative as imitations of Jesus. Under Luke’s literary and theological prowess, cultural resources, and narratives come to be interwoven into a theologically formative narrative.

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46 Beverly Gaventa is insistent, and appropriately so, that Acts is a story about God before it is, and perhaps in order to be, a story about God’s church and what Jesus “began to say and do” in and through it. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 226.

47 For one summary of this dynamic relative to the prophetic cast of the text as a whole and the essential Christological character of these parallels, see Moessner, “The Christ Must Suffer,” 226.

48 Some scholars discuss this narrative interaction as a form of intertextuality. Richard Hays notes that the identity of the community is intertextually constructed vis-à-vis both the Jewish community and the
With this in mind, let us turn to the pericope at hand, the account of Paul’s shipwreck in Acts 27. This section begins by situating the pericope within the broader narrative context of Acts and attending to its literary features, progression, and structure. The section then contextualizes this narrative within the world of the competent reader, locating it historically within the context of parallel scenes in ancient literature and within the biblical literature with which it resonates. This wide-ranging analysis provides the necessary groundwork for the final, integrative exegesis. Ultimately, I argue that Luke persistently portrays Paul as acting out the pattern of Jesus’ own story in unprecedented circumstances, in a way that evidences Paul’s own hopeful imagination in the face of trials.

4.2 Paul’s Shipwreck in Exegetical and Historical Perspectives

Our engagement with this ancient shipwreck scene needs to be carefully contextualized within the literary and historical world inhabited by its first century model reader. The section first situates this unit within the ongoing narrative of Paul’s custody in the latter part of Acts. The series of trial culminates in his trip to Rome as prisoner and establishes some important themes. The broad literary contours and structure of the narrative receive focused attention in the next section. Attention then shifts from the

empire. Richard B. Hays, “The Liberation of Israel in Luke-Acts: Intertextual Narration as Countercultural Practice” in Reading the Bible Intertextually (Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, Leroy A. Huizenga, ed; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 101-118. For the intertextual nature of human narrative identity construction see White and Epston, Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends, 13. However, since an explicitly intertextual methodology is not employed in this project, I do not discuss these dynamics in inter-textual terms beyond the general sense in which I claim that narratives are interwoven in Luke’s account of the church and its key characters.
text’s literary to its historical and cultural context. Given the prominence of storm, sailing, and shipwreck scenes in roughly contemporary literature, including biblical literature, those parallel scenes may prove illuminative.

### 4.2.1 Literary Context in Acts

The shipwreck scene of Paul in Acts 27 falls in the final recorded days of Paul’s ministry, days that are, like the final days of Jesus’ ministry, shrouded with foreboding. Since resolving in the Spirit to go to Rome by way of Jerusalem (Acts 19:21), Paul makes a series of stops en route that resound with notes of caution and concern. When he speaks to the Ephesian elders on the beach at Miletus, he refers to himself as one “imprisoned” or “bound by” the Spirit (δέσμευόντος) and states that he is going to Jerusalem “not knowing what will encounter me in it” (19:22). He also tells them that he knows they will never meet again, for which the local Christians grieve (19:25; 37-38). As his journey to Jerusalem continues, Paul is twice warned by believers in Tyre and Caesarea not to travel to Jerusalem. In the last and most vivid of these warnings, the prophet Agabus binds (δέσμας) his hands and feet with Paul’s belt in a Spirit prompted demonstration of what will happen to Paul in Jerusalem (21:10-14). In response to these warnings, Paul proclaims, “I am ready not only to be bound (δεθήναι) but to die in Jerusalem” (21:13).

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49 There is something of a subtle reversal of fortunes communicated here; when we first meet Saul he is headed to Damascus in order that, binding the Christians (δεσμεύοντος), he might bring them in for trial (Acts 9:21).
Paul is, indeed, bound in Jerusalem (δὲδεκὺς; Acts 27:29), following an uproar during his presence at the temple that the Roman guard suppresses (23:27-36). The next four chapters record a series of trials before various authorities. He appears first and briefly before the ruling Jewish council, but internal dissention between Pharisees and Sadducees causes the Roman tribune to retrieve Paul (23:1-10). Paul’s quick-thinking nephew and a responsive centurion foil a clear attempt on Paul’s life, and Paul is safely transferred for trial before the governor Felix in Caesarea (23:12-35). Before Felix, Paul refutes the Jewish accusations that he is an “agitator” among the Jews, but Felix holds him at least two years in the apparent hope for a bribe. During his brief testimony before Felix’s successor Festus, Paul appeals to Caesar, and Festus consents (24:11-12). Before transferring him to Rome, however, Festus asks Agrippa, who has recently arrived with his wife Bernice, to hear Paul’s case, in part to clarify the legal reasons for his appearance before Caesar. Before this audience, Paul delivers his final defense speech,

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50 The verb συγκέω, used here the present middle/passive third singular to describe the agitated state of Jerusalem, is only used by Luke in Acts to describe a state of confused, agitated being that is consistently associated with negative or potentially negative response to the gospel or its messengers. It describes those in Jerusalem at Pentecost (2:6), the Jews in Damascus confounded by the newly converted Saul (9:22), and the assembly at the theatre in Ephesus (19:22). In Jerusalem, the tumult turns violent; the crowd is actively beating Paul when the Romans arrive (Acts 21:30-31).


52 This is the first of two schemes to take Paul’s life. The newly appointed Festus thwarts the latter by refusing to transfer Paul back to Jerusalem from Caesarea, eliminating the possibility of killing Paul during transfer (24:1-5).

53 Felix is an interesting character, who is interested in what Paul has to say, but finds the message threatening and discomfiting and sends Paul away. Still, as he waits in hope for a bribe, Luke tells us that he used to send for Paul for conversation (23:24-27).
which includes the third account of his conversion that Agrippa interprets as an attempt to proselytize (25:1-20).

These Roman officials are occasionally intrigued but ultimately disinterested, seeing the charges against Paul as an internal dispute between Jewish religious sects rather than charges warranting the death that Paul’s opponents desire.\(^{54}\) The unorthodox nature of Paul’s departure for Rome, even despite his apparent innocence, is neatly summarized in Acts 26:32. Festus turns to Agrippa and, in an apparent aside, states that Paul could have been freed had he not appealed to Caesar.

Yet there is more to Paul’s departure for Rome than legal machinations and Roman disinterest, for as early as Acts 19:21 Paul says that he must (\(\delta\varepsilon\iota\)) go to Rome. A vision of the Lord in 23:11 further corroborates the tenor of divine necessity. Just after his appearance before the Jewish council in Jerusalem, Paul is told to “cheer up!” because it is necessary (\(\delta\varepsilon\iota\)) for him to be a witness in Rome as he has been in Jerusalem. A similar indication of necessity recurs in the pericope at hand, which begins by identifying Paul as a prisoner among other prisoners (\(\delta\varepsilon\gamma\mu\omicron\omega\tau\alpha\zeta\)) being transferred to Rome for trial and, one presumes, his death (see Acts 20:22-25).

**4.2.2 Broad Narrative Contours**

Two travel summaries, the first in Acts 27:1-8 and the second in 28:11-16, bracket the entire pericope. These summaries or “travelogues” include “a series of short

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\(^{54}\) The attentive reader may be reminded of a similarly disinterested, but not prone to be overly gracious, Gallio in Acts 16. The word “sect” actually used here by Paul to characterize the Jewish classification of the Way in 23:14.
observations on sea or land routes, ships, sailing or stopover times, winds, welcome on
land, and the like.” The epilogue summary records the means by which Paul finally
arrives safely in Rome to be welcomed by the believers and put under house arrest,
indicating the end of his travel ordeal. The prologue, however, sets the early expectation
of the trip’s difficulty. Their “many days” of travel prior to their arrival at Fair Havens
involve slow sailing (βραδύπλοοῦντες), contrary winds, and reiterated and emphasized
difficulty (μόλις; 27:7-8). The prologue also introduces the key characters, Paul the
prisoner and Julius the centurion, as well as some of the minor ones. Julius plays a
particularly significant role in the events, and the narrator includes in this travel summary
the note that Julius treated Paul kindly (φιλανθρώπως; 27:3).

The next unit, Acts 27:9-12, begins with Paul’s first direct speech, as Paul warns
the centurion Julius that “danger and loss not only of the ship but also of our lives” await

56 μόλις appears in both verses 7 and 8, and is in the emphatic position in v. 8.
57 Aristarchus, the Macedonian from Thessalonica is identified as one of Paul’s travel companions,
likely intended to be included in the first person plural throughout the narration. Aristarchus is first
mentioned in 19:29 as one of Paul’s travel companions from Macedonia, appear soon after in a larger list of
travel companions (20:4). It is possible that this is the same Aristarchus that Paul names in the greetings in
both Philemon and Colossians, identifying specifically as his fellow prisoner. As with the other “we
passages” (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18), there is a long history of debate regarding whether the first
person narration reflects use of a so-called “travel source”, the author’s historical participation in Paul’s
journeys in the region of the Aegean (with the exception of Acts 27:1-28:16), of whether it is simply a
literary device. I follow those commentators who focus on its effect as an aspect of the narrative. Kurz
simply concludes that Luke intends to the reader to imagine the narrator as present. Kurz, Reading Luke-
Acts, 112. Gaventa suggest that the use of the first person adds additional urgency to this account. Gaventa,
The Acts of the Apostles, 230. Several commentators speculate that this literary device follows the literary
conventions for the genre, as examples of changes in narration have been located in both novels and in
historical accounts, but there is little consensus on the matter. See Susan Marie Praeder, The Narrative
Voyage: An Analysis and Interpretation of Acts 27-28 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms
International, 1984), 183–227. The approach taken in this project largely passes on questions of historicity
(though not historical context) in remaining more interested in the effect of the text on the imagined reader.
58 For more on centurions in Luke, see discussion of Cornelius in chapter 3.
them if they attempt to sail (27:10). Paul’s prescience here is not necessarily divinely given; Paul, like other well-traveled or educated persons, likely knew that sailing after certain points in the year was quite dangerous.\(^{59}\) Julius, however, listened more to the captain and ship owner than Paul, who is overruled by a majority who find their current harbor unsuitable for wintering in and this majority establishes a plan (βουλήν; 27:12) to winter at Phoenix and sets sail.

The weather conditions almost immediately foil their plans, for the next section begins narrating the danger and loss that Paul predicted (27:13-20). A strong wind called a Northeaster arises, and the sailors struggle unsuccessfully to bring the ship under control. In three successive stages, the storm and the response to it by those on the ship intensify – they are blown off course (13-15; 16-17), they jettison cargo (18-19), and finally abandon all hope of being saved (στρωτῷ; 20). Repeated statements that the ship was “driven along” reiterates their vulnerability to the storm’s caprice and power.\(^{60}\)

Paul speaks for a second time in the third textual unit (Acts 27:21-26). While acknowledging that what he warned about now occurs, he nonetheless urges his

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\(^{60}\) The verb appears in the first person plural in 27:15 and the second person plural in 27:17. The first and third person plural various here, sometimes awkwardly. Praeder attempts to different all activities as engaged by a select group of those with Paul as opposed to the others on the boat, that attempt is ultimately frustrated by variations like this. It seems strange to suggest that only Paul’s companions are being driven along in v. 15 rather than the entire ship’s inhabitants, or that Paul’s companions were the only agents of the sailing actions from Caesarea to Fair Havens only to have such actions taken over by others from that point on. Praeder, *The Narrative Voyage*, 107.
increasingly desperate and hungry travel companions to “take heart” (εὐθυμεῖν). He goes on to convey his vision from an angel of the Lord that, because it is necessary (δεῖ) for him to stand before Caesar, all on the ship will be saved, though the ship itself will be lost (27:21-26). Despite Paul’s confident assertion of their salvation, some sailors respond to increasingly shallow water on the storm’s fourteenth night by attempting to covertly flee from the ship in a lifeboat (27:27-32). Paul asks Julius to prevent their escape, claiming that unless they remained on the boat “you (pl) will not be able to be saved” (σωθήναι; 27:31). In response, Julius’s soldiers cut away the lifeboat and all remain on board.

In the unit comprised of Acts 27:33-38, Paul speaks a final time in the long night, urging all on board to take food in preparation for their salvation (σωτηρίας; 27:34). Before the other passengers, Paul himself takes bread, gives thanks, and breaks and partakes of it. Only then do the fellow passengers “take heart” (εὐθυμοι; 27:36) as Paul has already advised, eating and then throwing the remaining grain overboard. As daylight breaks, the sailors notice a reef where they might run aground. As the ship begins to break up, the centurion prevents the soldiers’ plan (βουλή; 27:42, 43) to kill all the prisoners to prevent their escape. For his part, Julius plans or intends to save Paul (βουλόμενος διασώσαι; 27:43). In the end, all two hundred seventy-six lives (ψυχαί) on

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61 Paul’s earlier warning suggested that they would proceed only with disaster and much loss (μετὰ ὑβρεῖος καὶ πολλῆς ζημίας). Those key terms are repeated in his statements in 27:21.
board either swim or float on debris to shore, where the shipwreck concludes with the note that “and thus it happened that all were brought safely (διασωθήκατοι) to land” (27:42).

The stormy seas have deposited the ship’s passengers on the island of Malta, amid the “barbarians” (βάρβαροι; 27:1-10). When, while building a fire, Paul is bitten by a viper, the locals conclude that he is “surely a murderer who, being brought safely through the sea (διασωθέντα), Justice has not allowed to live” (28:4). When Paul suffers no harm, the Maltese conclude that he must be a god. While wintering on the island, Paul heals the father of the “leading man” on the island, along with many others (28:7-10). Finally, Paul and his companions embark for Rome on a ship that wintered in Malta, arriving safely to be greeted by the Christians in Rome (28:11-16).

4.2.3 Historical Considerations

The turn to historical context as an aid for interpretation raises two questions. First, what (if any) cultural valence might shipwreck scenes have for first century readers? Second, and if so, is it reasonable to surmise that the imagined author of

62 The term βάρβαροι or barbarians likely indicates that the inhabitants of Malta are non-Greek speaking. Johnson suggests that the term reveals the Hellenistic leaning of the author. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 5:461. Alexander notes that the location of barbarians so close to the center of the Greco-Roman world indicates a radical departure from other narratives, in which such barbarians reside on the periphery of the known world rather than its center. She suggests that Luke here may be recalling the Jerusalem centered mental map that Acts 2 establishes. Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 84.

63 Johnson translates δικαίος as “Lady Justice” in order to clarify that the inhabitants of Malta referred to an agent and not a philosophical idea. Johnson also notes the existence of a parallel storm in which a sailor survives a storm only to be bitten by a snake. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 5:462. Jipp refers to this agent as the goddess Justice. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers*, 262.

64 Curiously, Paul does not correct the Maltese as he did those in Lystra and Derbe. Jipp, who is drawing heavily on the theoxenic notions of hospitality, surmises that the barbarians correctly ascertain the strong presence of divine power in Paul’s person and that Luke does not correct it perhaps because any attentive reader recognizes the barbarians’ error. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers*, 262. See also, Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 328.
Acts had requisite exposure to such scenes to not only to recognize its valence but exploit its form for his own literary purposes? Based on the historical evidence available to us about the content of ancient literature, forms of ancient education, and the insights of commentators, a reasonable answer to both questions is yes.

Shipwreck scenes are something of a “stock scene” in Greco-Roman literature, including Homer’s epic poetry and Greek novels, and these scenes possess certain common features and functions. Gaventa compares the nature of these scenes to car chase scenes in modern day action movies; they constitute an expected type scene the inclusion of which is not generally surprising, and may even be expected.65 Susan Praeder’s extensive analysis of Acts 27 in the context of ancient literature identifies several common elements, along with a few differences. Her analysis helpfully identifies features of such scenes relevant to Luke’s theological purposes in narrating this scene in the life of Paul. Those features include predictions of storm, geographical and meteorological concerns, loss of hope, jettisoning cargo, and the narration of specific sailing activities.66

Quite often in ancient Greco-Roman literature, characters predict storms and shipwrecks on the basis of weather or divinely delivered oracles, and such predictions are routinely ignored. Refusals to take such warnings seriously are sufficiently common that their presence in a narrative leads the reader to suspect the inevitability of a storm and subsequent disaster. Sailors as a character group also had the reputation for taking

66 For a full list of the shipwreck scenes from Greek and Latin literature that Praeder employs in her historical literary comparison, see Praeder, *The Narrative Voyage*, 184–186.
unnecessary risks, particularly when profit was at stake. So consistent is the combined effect of these elements that, Praeder claims, “predictions prejudice implied audiences against those who decide to set sail.”

Meteorological and geographical information includes specification of the direction of winds, certain known locations of safety or particular risk, and complications to celestial navigation. Typically, north or east winds are associated with storms at sea; in Acts the wind is designated as a “northeastern” (27:14). In addition to the wind’s capacity to drive ships off course, the disappearance of sun, moon, and stars adds to the sense of directional distress. Since these heavenly bodies provide the means of celestial navigation, their disappearance not only indicates the severity of the storm or the solidity of cloud cover but also the potentially dangerous loss of direction. Syrtis, which appears in the context of the sailors’ fears of running aground in Acts 27:29, appears in the broader literature as a known location of particular danger and a place from which ships and their sailors do not generally return.

In such perilous circumstances, a series of activities commonly occur in stories of this type, including the attempt to save the ship by jettisoning cargo and efforts at self-preservation even when at the expense of others. In Acts, the sailors jettison the cargo in 27:18, followed by the grain the ship was carrying in 27:38. In Achilles Tatius, as in

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67 Praeder refers to Aeleas Aristedes, who in *Orations* specifies the intent of sailors and the ship captain to sail on despite the irresponsibility of that decision. Ibid., 228.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 232. The combination of north and east is otherwise unattested in the literature.
70 Ibid., 233.
Acts, though the cargo is jettisoned nothing alleviates their difficult situation. In such circumstances, and somewhat unsurprisingly, explicit indications of the loss of hope are common. In these events, any expectation or hope of salvation entails the hope for the intervention of divine agency. Upon surviving their shipwreck by floating on a piece of debris, characters in Achilles Tatius’s novel *Leucippe and Clitophon* thank the benevolent deity for preserving them through the storm.

Voyage and shipwreck scenes communicate important cultural messages within the Greco-Roman context. Shipwreck scenes sometimes indicate divine vindication or support of those heroes who survive the ordeal. Voyages also represent and help to construct certain mental maps that distinguish the geographical center of the civilized or known world from the barbarian and unknown periphery, in this way implicitly communicating cultural values and superiority. As Praeder says of Aelius Aristides, Lucan, Ovid, and Vergil, as well as the author of Luke-Acts, “Through narrative worlds of storm and shipwreck they communicate their personal, political, and community experience and imagination.”

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74 Ibid., 246.


78 Praeder, *The Narrative Voyage*, 244.
Whether Luke could be expected to have such literary capacities should be defended rather than assumed. Rhetorical training in the imperial period included, among other things, “practice in composing narratives of storm and shipwreck, with Vergil as the model.”\(^7\) Some rhetorical manuals even contained formulas for what a shipwreck scene should contain.\(^8\) Furthermore, literary and rhetorical training took place by means of the imitation of models, among which Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were particularly prominent.\(^9\) Within the context of ancient education, then, the probability of literary *imitatio* within Luke’s writings can safely be presumed, particularly given evidence of such *imitatio* between Luke and the Septuagint.\(^10\) Furthermore, this literary *imitatio* does not necessitate a specific literary source that the audience is intended to recognize, given that shipwreck scenes were sufficiently common that their general cultural import remains detectable.\(^11\)

As it pertains to Acts 27, then, we can safely “imply that the author of Acts had received some training in the composition of narratives of storm and shipwreck and that

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79 Ibid., 243.
81 Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 140. Loveday Alexander notes, “Imitatio (either in the broad or the narrow sense) is . . . a widespread cultural phenomenon fundamental to ancient Mediterranean society. And it is part of an educational pattern that placed a high value on sensitivity to linguistic register.” Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 171.
82 Johnson locates the biblical resonance largely in the Luke’s prophetic portrayal of Jesus and the church, stating “the pervasive use of prophetic imagery and pattern is a key to understanding how Luke managed so convincingly to make his story of Jesus and the Christian beginnings a prolongation of biblical history. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 5:12. Indeed, as Alexander also observes, there is little that is particularly controversial in the claim that Luke engaged in imitatio, but it is something of a culturally revolutionary reality that Luke takes up the Greek Old Testament as his foundational text for imitation. Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 172.
his audience has at least the previous experience of reading them." Like the secular authors of his day, Luke employs this narrative of Paul’s shipwreck to communicate important culturally embedded, theological messages for his Christian readers. Alexander sees this voyage and shipwreck account, along with Paul’s speech in Athens in Acts 17, as clear examples of Luke’s use of “subtle linguistic and symbolic clues, which create hyperlinks with alternative cultural scriptures.” In other words, Luke drew upon existing cultural knowledge and narratives in crafting his account, while establishing that cultural narrative within a broader theological one.

4.2.4 Biblical Resonance

Two biblical texts are especially appropriate candidates for literary comparison, the storm in Jonah and the storm faced by the disciples with Jesus. In addition to the common features of divine involvement, human agents, and bad weather, other meaningful points of resonance emerge from their comparison. Considering these scriptural resonances provides important insight into the theological point that Luke appears to communicate in his narration of this event.

The linkage of the Jonah scene with Acts 27 typically occurs on the basis of the jettisoning of cargo, which in Jonah includes the casting of his own person into the sea (Jonah 1:5, 15; Acts 27:17, 30). As in the Acts scene, the sailors fear (φοβέσωμαι; Jonah 1:5; Acts 27:17, 29), and both the averted possibility of perishing (ἀπόλαυμι; Jonah 1:6;

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84 Praeder, The Narrative Voyage, 243.
86 See also Rowe, World Upside Down, 39–41.

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Acts 27:34) and the desire to be saved (διασώζω; Jonah 1:6; Acts 27:43-44) are prominent. Some commentators have surmised that Paul is explicitly paralleled with Jonah here, perhaps supported by the self-identification of both men as those who serve the Lord (Jonah 1:9; Acts 27:23). The comparison is possible but not tremendously compelling. Both Paul and Jonah respond to divine commissioning, but they do so in opposite ways, with Jonah fleeing (Jonah 1:3) and Paul resolutely advancing despite warnings of things he might fear (Acts 20:23). A stronger parallel between these short narratives might be located in divine involvement. In each case, God is both the one who sends the representative into potential or actual danger and the one who saves, though again, the method of salvation is obviously quite different and the storm does not have the punitive force for Paul that it has for Jonah.  

This passage also recalls the last time followers of Jesus found themselves in a boat in a storm, as they were when Jesus calms the storm in Luke 8:22-25. The literary resonances are clearer here, including a verb for embarking (ἀνάγω; Luke 8:22; Acts 27:2, 4, 12, 21) and the noun “ship” (πλοῖον; Luke 8:22, Acts 27:2 and throughout). In both cases, those on board express explicit fear of perishing (ἀπόλλυμι; Luke 8:24; Acts 27:34). An equally strong link can be located with regard to the question of God’s identity. The closing question in the Lukan passage, “who is this whom even the winds

87 Praeder notes that the jettisoning of materials on the ship is a sufficiently common literary characteristics of such scenes that its strength as an unambiguous link to the Jonah passages is somewhat reduced. Furthermore, though there are three episodes of jettisoning in each account, the third one in Acts 27 is at some distance from the other two. Praeder, The Narrative Voyage, 234. While πλοῖον is used for the boat in both accounts, the terminology for the storm itself varies.

88 In Luke, the concern with perishing is stated by the disciples in the present sense, whereas the word appears on Paul’s lips as part of an assurance that not even a hair on their heads will perish.
and the waves obey?” (Luke 8:25) makes this concern explicit. The identity of God as an agent who exerts control over the winds and seas – and with control over the fates of those subjected to them – appears in Acts 27 as well. The God “to whom [Paul] belongs and who he serves” is one and the same God who commands the winds and waves.\(^89\)

Finally, in a broader sense the seas function as symbolic indicators of chaos and disaster in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Psalms and other poetic texts. As Alexander notes, in the Psalms the roaring of the seas is specifically associated with the attempt by the nations to oppose the work of God, attempts which prove ultimately fruitless.\(^90\) For instance, Psalm 65:7-8 says of God, “You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth’s farthest bounds are awed by your signs.”\(^91\) That parallel has particular relevance here, where Paul is under Roman guard and in transport to Rome and in which the plan of God is opposed by the Gentile sailors at several points. The stilling of the seas is one of several forms of redemption from trouble for which the psalmist praises God in Psalm 107 (see especially 23-32). It is against this literary backdrop that the claim of Revelation gets its wonderful rhetorical power – “there will no longer be any sea” (Rev 21:1).

With these larger biblical resonances in mind, we have further resources for discerning the theological contours of this account. God’s identity as the agent in control

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\(^89\) I am presuming Rowe’s argument about the narrative inseparability of the identity of Jesus as Lord with the Lord God of Israel. Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 27.


\(^91\) There is also a sense in which sea functions in the Psalms as part of recollection of God’s power of the Red Sea in parting it to make way for Israel but using it to overwhelm their enemies. See Psalm 66:6, 77;19; 78:13, 53; 106:9. For God as the ruler of the waves, see 89:9 “You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.” Scripture citations here are from the NRSV.
of wind and waves in Acts 27 is more firmly established by the ways in which the stilling of seas recollects prior accounts of God’s salvific activity. It is possible then that these texts add to Paul’s assurance that what he has heard to be true is in fact possible, due precisely to the identity and agency of the God that he serves. Persistently in the face and chaos and fear, whether literally or figuratively in the form of roaring seas and raging winds, the God of Israel exercises the power to save.

4.3 Integrative, Formative Analysis

With those broad literary and historical parameters established, we are able to move to an integrative analysis that brings together the theories on narrative’s formative power with the historical and exegetical evidence that pertains to Acts 27:1-28:16. In support of this chapter’s claim that Luke presents Paul as a figure with persistent theological imagination that constitutes an invitation for the reader to have her imagination similarly formed, the integrative analysis develops three related points. First, the Christological resonances in the passage evince the function of the story of Jesus as the master-narrative for the development and actions of Paul’s own character. Second, the plan of God constitutes an important theological feature of Luke’s writing and an important element of narratively constituted hopeful imagination in this passage. Finally, the literary dynamics generate a creative mythomachia, especially as it relates to salvation in the passage, including its recipients, agents, and means. The chapter concludes with a suggestion of the kind of imaginal transformation to which the text might be calling twenty-first century Christians in a North American context.
4.3.1 Christological Resonance

The compelling and persistent Christological resonances in Paul’s character within the narrative present the first area of integrative analysis in light of the formative function of narrative described above. Readers may recall such Christological resonances from other characters; they appear, for instance, in the last chapter’s analysis of Peter in both his healings and hospitality in the unprecedented encounter with Cornelius. Similarly, the trials and final transport of Paul to Rome literarily recalls the final days of Jesus ministry in a number of ways, with parallels so strong that some consider the shipwreck scene to be the climactic portion of Paul’s own “passion narrative.”

Though that description overstates the case somewhat, the parallels are compelling, especially in combination with other points of resonance. In addition to the general patterning of the story and sequence of events, resonances between Jesus and Paul also appear in direct quotations from the ministry of Jesus, imitation of the healing ministry of Jesus, and the reference to the Christ-centered ritual practice of the Eucharist.

The opening verse of chapter 27 states that Paul was handed over (παραδίδωμι) to the centurion Julius for transport, along with some other prisoners. Agabus previously warned that Paul will be bound and “handed over” (παραδίδωμι) to the Gentiles, a phrase used to describe what happens to Jesus (Luke 18:32; c.f. Acts 3:13). During the course

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92 While implying any salvific significance to Paul’s death is clearly inappropriate, the literary parallels are quite strong.
93 The term sometimes specifically designates the “handing on” or handing over of teachings or information as in Luke 1:2, Acts 6:14 and 16:4. More commonly, however, it means to hand someone or something over to the authority of another, as when Jesus states that God has “handed over” all things to the Son (Luke 10:22) and when Satan tells Jesus that the kingdoms of the world have been “handed over”
of his various trials before different officials, Paul’s innocence in the eyes of imperial authorities is also repeatedly emphasized, as it was with Jesus (Acts 23:26-30; 26:30-32; see also Luke 23:13-25). Though Luke never narrates Paul’s own final conviction and death, he evokes Jesus’ trial and conviction as a narrative parallel to these events, lending support to the conclusion that Paul is eventually condemned.\(^\text{94}\)

Paul’s behavior in his own trial scenes departs somewhat from Jesus’ behavior. Whereas Jesus remains mostly silent throughout his trials before various authorities, Paul speaks eloquently in his own defense.\(^\text{95}\) The earlier attempts at Paul’s life precluded by the actions of the Roman guard and Paul’s nephew also possess no parallel in the ministry of Jesus, whose death is presumed and stated as fact from the earliest of Jesus’ predictions of his own death (Luke 9:22). These differences do not, however, greatly weaken the parallel, particularly since other evidence indicates the function of the story to him (Luke 4:6). Most often, however, the term has the sense of being handed over for punishment, including its sense of “to be betrayed” as in the passion narrative. Predictions of Jesus’ being handed over occur in Luke 18:32, 20:20, 21:12, 21:16, 22:4, 6, 21, 22, 48; 23:25; 24:7, 20; Acts 3:13; 8:3; 12:4; 21:11; 22:4; 27:1; 28:16, 17.

\(^\text{94}\) There is a good deal of debate as to whether Paul was executed or not, whether Luke knew it or not, and why Luke might have refrained from telling that part of the story when it could easily be presumed that his audience already knew it. I will deal neither with the historical evidence for or against this conclusion nor with the historicity of the shipwreck scene as a whole. The more interesting question within the scope of this argument is why Luke would withhold that information within the narrative, and whether the literary audience is intended to imagine Paul’s release or condemnation and death. I maintain that the audience is in fact intended to imagine Paul’s death as an innocent man, particularly due to the compelling literary parallels between Paul’s trial and Jesus’ own. At the same time, I think that the reader is fully intended to imagine the gospel as unimpeded by death, for God is clearly identified in the text as one for whom death is not ultimately an obstacle. Thus the somewhat enigmatic conclusion to the book in which Paul is preaching “boldly and without hindrance” despite his chains (Acts 28:30). Daniel Marguerat, “The Enigma of the Silent Closing of Acts (28:16-31),” in Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke’s Narrative Claim upon Israel’s Legacy, ed. David P. Moessner (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 296.

\(^\text{95}\) See Moessner, “‘The Christ Must Suffer,’” 249–252.

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of Jesus as normative narrative background for Paul’s character in the events occurring around the shipwreck.

Words from Jesus’ final discourse in the temple appear on the lips of Paul in this passage, quoted in Acts 27:24 from Luke 21:18 with minimal differences.⁹⁶ The Gospel passage contains a series of instructions relative to coming times of difficulty, in which the destruction of the temple is the primary focus.⁹⁷ In the midst of instructions relative to that event, Jesus refers to coming days of general persecution. Jesus says that, “they will lay their hands on you and they will persecute you, handing you over to the synagogues and prisons, leading you away before kings and governors on account of my name (Luke 21:12). Furthermore, they will be “handed over (παραδίδωμι) by parents and siblings and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death” (21:16).⁹⁸ In the midst of these troubling events and anticipated hatred, however, Jesus says, “not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives (ψυχαί)” (21:18-19).

A number of events occur in Acts that cohere with what Jesus predicts here, including events in the very recent context of this passage. Paul himself has been tried before synagogues and the governor Agrippa (Acts 23:26, 34; 24:10; 26:30). He has been

⁹⁶ The negation in Luke 21:18 occurs through the emphatic σοῦ μὴ (emphatically no) while in Acts 27:34 it occurs through the compound pronoun σὺνδέεσθαι (no one/none of;). The verb “to perish” (ἀπόλλυμι) appears in both verses, in the aorist subjunctive tense in Luke and the future indicative in Acts, but with the hair of your head as its subject in both cases.
⁹⁸ Note the use of this verb here as in Acts 27 and in the prior discussion about Christological resonance.
“handed over” by his brothers and kinsmen in Jerusalem, and imprisoned (Acts 22:1).  

He now finds himself on a boat bound for the ultimate trial in Rome. Here, in the context of his transfer to Rome for trial, Jesus’ words about the ultimate preservation of the disciples are radically reapplied to the passengers on the doomed grain ship through the message of Paul. Speaking for the third time during the ordeal, Paul exhorts his fellow passengers “take heart” and eat something, “for none of you will lose a hair from your heads” (27:24). After the shipwreck, the narrator notes that all two hundred seventy-six lives (ψυχαί) on board were saved.

Despite clear differences in the nature of the surrounding events, the coincidence of the concern with deliverance (salvation or redemption), the deeply symbolic physical activities of celestial bodies and seas, the call to be encouraged to persevere, and the promise of full preservation of lives suggest a strong resonance between these two texts. That said, why would Luke recall this text from the final days of Jesus in this passage, and why would he, through the words of Paul, so radically reapply the promise of salvation to the Gentiles? I suggest, and discuss in more detail in a subsequent section, that in this quotation Luke introduces into present events a sense of eschatological hope in salvation, presented here with specific reference to the salvation of the Gentiles. Other

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99 Note that Paul addresses his defense (ἀπολογίας) before the angry mob in Jerusalem to his fathers (πατέρες) and brothers (ἀδελφοί) (Acts 22:1).
100 The resonance between these passages may even extend to the broad eschatological discussion. While the destruction of Jerusalem is not discussed specifically, the broader sense of apocalyptic signs may well be preserved here. Note that Jesus references signs in the sun and moon and stars, and the parallel disappearance of the sun and stars in the shipwreck passage that is coupled with the failure of hope. Furthermore, Jesus states that at the celestial signs, there will be “distress among Gentiles (ἔθνων) confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves” (Luke 21:25b).
points of Christological resonance still remain to be considered: the Eucharistic meal reference and the miraculous healings on Malta.

On their last night at sea, Paul gives the eminently reasonable advice that all should eat, as they have not eaten for some time and physical strength and sustenance will surely be required to survive the coming ordeal. Though at one level pragmatic, the passage is nonetheless pregnant with meaning as a distinctively Christian practice of breaking bread. Luke narrates Paul’s actions with the same sequence of events that characterizes the breaking of bread at the feeding of the five thousand (9:16), at the last supper (Luke 22:19), and on the road to Emmaus (24:30): taking, thanking, breaking, and partaking. Consequently, the literary staging of Paul’s meal on the ship generates a good deal of scholarly debate surrounding whether or to what extent this meal is “Eucharistic.”

Objections to locating Eucharistic significance in this passage tend to fall along several common lines: the ambiguity and commonality of breaking bread, the absence of a cup, and the apparently public nature of the activity among pagans. The absence of the cup is the strongest objection. The reference to the taking and breaking of bread by Paul would be more potentially common or ordinary were it not for the relatively rare presence of the verb ἐὐχαριστέω, designating special blessing (27:35). Objections as to the public nature of the celebration of the table are common in later Christian

101 As Praeder notes, some of these earlier accounts do not include the action of partaking, but this deletion is not significant enough to disqualify the parallelism. Praeder, The Narrative Voyage, 132.
developments surrounding the exclusivity or mystery of the practice, but this may be anachronistically applied by later commentators. In general, objectors argue that given these complications the reader cannot presume that historical Paul participated in the Eucharist meal.

Other commentators, however, correctly note that, within the context of Luke’s narrative, this meal is portrayed with explicit Eucharistic resonances. To put the point differently, Luke intentionally crafts the account of Paul’s command and consumption of food in a way that clearly recalls deeply symbolic meals in the ministry of Jesus. These meals, including the feeding of the five thousand, are ultimately and intra-textually defined in relationship to the Eucharist (Luke 9:16; 22:19; 24:30). Whether or not the claim of Eucharistic practice can be grounded historically, it appears that Luke prompts the reader to recall these other stories of provision, sacrifice, and salvation. In other words, whether or not the Eucharist is historically plausible, Luke evokes Eucharist and the implicit narrative of God’s salvation in this distinctly non-liturgical context. Notably, Paul’s practice, not his words, ultimately persuades the passengers to eat before jettisoning the grain like everything else.

The final point of Christological resonance occurs in Paul’s ministry on Malta. Following his own miraculous survival from the viper’s bite and the local Maltese acclaim, Paul heals the father of the island’s “leading man” Publius. A common narrative progression occurs between this healing story and Jesus’ healing of Peter’s mother-in-law in Luke 4:38-41. In both instances, the healer receives hospitality in the home of a local

103 Ibid. See also I Cor 14:22-25.
family, though the language describing these encounters mirrors their quite different contexts. Following the establishment of the context, the narrator introduces a parent sick with fever (πυρετός; Simon’s mother-in-law in Luke 4:38; Publius’s father in Acts 28:8, who also has dysentery). In both cases the agent of the healing cures the fever. Each healing ministry episode concludes with a summary of other miracles performed in the area (Luke 4:40-41; Acts 28:9).

Luke appears to narrate the character of Paul as one whose own actions partake in the normative narrative of Jesus. In light of the previous discussion of narrative’s formative power with respect to the formation of an individual character, this could be conceived in terms of the role of narrative in providing a context for actions and a structure for articulating reasons for acting. In this case, Luke has constructed a narrative context that accounts for Paul’s distinctive actions in these unprecedented circumstances. Paul acts as Jesus acts, engages in activities that mirror activities in the ministry of Jesus, precisely because that is the operative narrative for disciples. The story of Jesus is the

104 In Luke, Jesus “goes in” to the home of Peter following his dramatic and controversial appearance in the synagogue. In Acts, Publius welcomes (ἀναδεξιάμενος) and entertains (ἐξόντως) Paul and his companions (implied by the first person plural pronouns that persist here). Note that ἐξόντως, as in Acts 10, preserves the sense of stranger/strangeness in the hospitality encounter, as well as being a more technical Greek term for such encounters.

105 Here again different language is used to describe the reality. Jesus “stands over” and “rebukes” the fever, which then departs. This language of rebuking is also the language used to describe Jesus control of demons in the prior scene (Luke 4:35) and in the summary of exorcisms immediately to follow (Luke 4:41). There are also references to the laying on of hands as bodily conveyer of healing in both pericopes, but the reference is located differently. In Acts, Publius is healed through the laying on of hands, but in Luke it only appears in the summary statement and not in the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law. These alterations in language are broadly consonant with Luke’s adaptation of language across the account, wherein his Greek becomes more elevated and less Septuagintal as the mission of God moves into more Greco-Roman territory. Pervo, Acts, 8.
master story Luke employs to interpret what Paul undergoes and to provide a narrative account of his reasons for acting.

4.3.2 The Plan of God and Narrative Interaction

In a related sense, the narrative dynamics in this passage also resonate with the broad and sometimes eschatological expectations entailed by the “plan of God” in Luke-Acts.\(^{106}\) Indications of the presence of this theme in Luke-Acts include explicit references to God’s plan (βουλή), the theme of divine necessity indicated by the particle δεῖ, which means, “it is necessary”, divine intervention in or direction of events, and the occasional use of pro-prefix terms indicating foreknowledge or planning (e.g. πρόγνωσις in Acts 2:23).\(^{107}\) The first three indications specifically pertain to Acts 27:1-28:16.

The use of “it is necessary” (δεῖ) to indicate divine involvement in events appears over forty times across Luke-Acts and in high concentration surrounding the identity and ministry of Jesus and the mission to the Gentiles.\(^{108}\) With regard to Jesus, the term


\(^{107}\) Squires identifies five literary devices by which Luke indicates the plan of God. Squires, The Plan of God in Luke-Acts, 2. The providence of God, typically indicated through speeches like Stephen’s that address God’s action in history, the use of epiphanies like those surrounding the birth of Jesus and the Peter/Cornelius encounter, and the role of prophecy, or the sense in which certain events like the suffering of Jesus are spoken of ahead of time in the scriptures and can be traced “beginning with Moses and the prophets” (Luke 24:27). Part of Squires critique of prior approaches to the theme is that they focus too narrowly on specific terms like the use of δεῖ and occasionally on pro-prefix verbs without adequately account for the variety of ways in which that plan was known. Ibid., 7.

\(^{108}\) Cosgrove notes that some of these uses are “ordinary” and indicate not divinely ordained necessity but rather a course of action that is fitting or appropriate. He feels as though prior studies of the subject fail to account for the role of human agency and fail to make this important differentiation on the translation of this term. Cosgrove, “The Divine Dei in Luke-Acts,” 173. Of these 13 ordinary uses, two occur in Acts 27, when Paul tells those in charge of the boat that they should (Εἶδεῖ) have listened, or it
indicates his “scripturally defined Messianic self-understanding.” This is evident from early on, as Jesus tells his anxious parents in Luke 2:49 that it was “necessary” for him to be in his Father’s house. It comes into play more fully in discussions around the necessity of Jesus’ suffering in Jerusalem, which he describes at multiple points prior to his crucifixion. The term recurs in a prominent way in the Emmaus episode, establishing the necessity of events to fulfill the law and the prophets (Luke 24:26) When employed in conjunction with Paul, the use of the term most often signifies his commission and authorization as one sent to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Importantly, the term appears in Acts 27:24 in this latter sense, when the Lord assures Paul that his life will be preserved because it is necessary for him to be a witness before the emperor. This statement recapitulates the Lord’s earlier words to Paul while in Roman custody in Jerusalem, when the Lord tells Paul to be encouraged because it is necessary for him to go to Rome (Acts 23:11).

In addition to the Lukan use of this key term, the plan of God also becomes evident through the entrance of divine agents in the course of events. The Lord, having

would have behooved them to listen, to his warning before they departed from Fair Havens. Barrett notes that Paul’s words here are likely not the result of special divine revelation, for it was fairly widely known that sailing after the Fast, as after some other meteorological or calendar signs, was unsafe. Barrett, “Paul Shipwrecked,” 58.


Jesus tells Paul to go on to Damascus where he will show him what “it is necessary” for him to do and tells Ananias just verses later that he will show Paul what is “necessary” for him to suffer (Acts 9:6, 16). Divine necessity with regard to Paul’s mission is also clearly indicated by the active role God or other guises of divine agency like angels, dreams, or visions, take in occasionally redirecting his travels, as in Acts 16:6-10.
spoken to Paul about the necessity of his trip to Rome, has already intervened once in this final journey of Paul’s once. In Acts 27:21-26 Paul reports a message he received from the Lord, that God would intervene and deliver all those on board to safety.\textsuperscript{112} The intervention of divine agency can be glimpsed again on Malta, when the signs that Paul accomplishes serve to legitimate him as God’s messenger.\textsuperscript{113}

The prominence of this theme of the “plan of God” raises the question of agency and the relationship between divine and human agency. Ernst Haenchen famously suggested that the characters in Acts exhibit nothing but the “twitching of human puppets” in the hands of divine agents.\textsuperscript{114} Both John Squires and Charles Cosgrove carefully preserve a place for consequential human action in the course of events, largely by noting that it is hardly the case that every moment, every movement in Acts results from divine intervention. Rather, those events that deal directly with the ministry or identity of Jesus and the events surrounding the spread of the gospel into Gentile mission fall into that realm. Squires sees Luke’s account of the plan of God as essentially reflective of Stoic understandings of providence in its contention that God makes some,


\textsuperscript{113} Both the healing of many on the island and Paul’s survival of the snakebite can be considered such signs. Squires includes such legitimating signs and portents as one of the five literary devices through which Luke communicates the theme of God’s plan. He cites the “signs and wonders” performed by the apostles in Jerusalem in Acts 5 as another key example. Squires, \textit{The Plan of God in Luke-Acts}, 97–101.

but not all things necessary. Furthermore, in Cosgrove’s reading, the theme of divine necessity has the broader function of situating events within scripture, calling followers of Jesus to obedience, and guaranteeing God’s support. God’s involvement in events, therefore, is not in predetermining every event but rather through dramatic entrances onto the stage of history and decisive interventions in unfolding events.

Gaventa takes a different approach in addressing Haenchen’s colorful contention, ultimately rejecting the question’s premise of human capacity for self-determination. She argues convincingly that the question for Luke is not whether you were under the power of some greater force, but which power – Christ or Satan. In her account, obedience and responsiveness, not initiative, characterizes the human agents in Acts. The cases of human initiative that she does identify are uniformly negative and ultimately

115 In his writings, Josephus associates this Stoic view of fate or God’s providence with the view of the Pharisees. Given this, it is hardly impossible that Luke might have both philosophical and scriptural backgrounds for this understanding. Squires, The Plan of God in Luke-Acts, 13.
117 Cosgrove addresses the clearer predestination language used in Acts, noting that it is a minor thread that is prominent only early and in the speeches of Peter in Acts 2 and 4. In conclusion, Cosgrove remarks that Luke’s use of ‘plan of God’ and ‘predestination is unsystematic and actually underdeveloped; thus there are some tensions present. Key among these, he notes, is the implication in Acts 2 that those who heard the message exercised agency in their response and the opposite implication in Acts 13 with the note that “all who were destined for eternal life” joined the church. Ibid., 190. Squires, The Plan of God in Luke-Acts, 189.
118 Gaventa, “Initiatives Divine and Human in the Lukan Story World,” 88. Her critical insight in this more apocalyptic perspective that human action cannot escape allegiance to one power or another is an important corrective.
119 Gaventa, who finds the language of agency obscuring, defines initiative as the capacity to change the course of events, including the exercise of decisive action. Ibid. In her reading, the so-called heroes of the text, Peter and Paul, do not actually initiate events but actually only obediently respond to what God commands or does. Thus, she notes, in Acts 10 all Peter is doing is trying to catch up and then not get in the way of God, as evidenced by his rhetorical question at the conclusion of the water about “withholding” the water for baptism.” Ibid., 86.
unsuccessful. Squires likewise acknowledges that attempts to resist God’s activity, rather ironically introduced in Gamaliel’s speech in Acts 5, are destined to fail, and those who attempt to resist God would be found to be “God-fighters” (θεομαχοί).

Yet Gaventa does not adequately account for the uneven distribution of references to divine plan or guidance of events, which tend to focus around certain events in the mission of Jesus and the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. While she is rightly concerned with a theocentric rather than an anthropocentric reading of Acts, God’s decisive and ultimately indefatigable shaping of events can and does co-exist with human agents whose actions in cooperative response to God remain consequential. In fact, while God ultimately thwarts human action in opposition to divine promise and purposes, human agency in cooperation with God is actually enhanced and supported rather than circumscribed. In other words, when acting in line with God’s purposes, God makes human agents more effective, not less.

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120 Gaventa, “Initiatives Divine and Human in the Lukan Story World,” 85.
121 At times, she reads divine initiative into events in which Luke does not indicate as much. In Acts 15, after receiving instructions to take the letter from James around to the churches, Paul suggests to Barnabas that they visit the churches they established to see how they are doing; no reference to divine initiative supports this suggestion. When Paul heads to Berea from Thessalonica, it does not seem to be the case that God guided them there, so much that Paul was chased (Acts 17). Gaventa’s reading does not account for the distinctive and, I think, important phrasing of James conclusion in Acts 15 – “it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us” a statement that indicates at least some human involvement in the decision, though clearly not unassisted initiative. See also the church’s administrative – if Spirit infused – decisions and appointments in Acts 6.
122 Part of her concern is that the assumption that humans function as heroes who exercise clear agency in the story, even if understood as a “smaller initiative” in relationship to the bigger initiative of God, obscures the centrality of God’s action in Acts by focusing too much on the human characters. Gaventa, “Initiatives Divine and Human in the Lukan Story World,” 86. This is commensurate with her interest in her commentary, which is to claim that God is the center of the text, and not the church. Gaventa, The Acts of the Apostles, 27.
The intersection of the plan of God and the narration of Paul’s Christological imagination in Acts 27 occurs primarily around the affective disposition of hope, specifically, hope in salvation from shipwreck. At the same time, the resonance between this passage and the eschatological passage in the Gospel suggests that Luke may be evoking a broader sense of hope. The plan of God, and the salvation it includes, holds forth the promise that God’s purposes will be accomplished and that “by endurance” Jesus’ disciples will “gain their souls” (Luke 21:18). In many ways, Acts 27:1-28:16 presents a narrative recounting of the potential affective shape of the losing and gaining of one’s life for the gospel.

Because God’s plan and purpose, and Paul’s own salvation as a disciple of Jesus, are secure and firmly established, hope becomes a public activity. Out of that hope in the Lord’s salvation, Paul rises as a figure with a clear head in the midst of disaster, one who keeps not only his own self-interest, or the interests of his companions, in mind but who seeks the good of all. Paul claims this hope personally and vocationally, urging others to take heart because of the revelation he has received from “the God whose I am and to whom I serve” (Acts 27:23). His embodied testimony to that hope in the form of taking and breaking bread and partaking of it ultimately proves persuasive, kindling hope on the part of his fellow passengers.

In ways reminiscent of Anne Wimberly’s connection of narrative to hope-filled vocation, the character of Paul engages in his vocation as an agent of the gospel in a manner shaped as a re-enactment of the narrative that he claims to be true about God’s irrepresible work and revelation. Luke provides, in part, a literary account of the
narrative, vocational formation that Wimberly seeks, in which Paul’s personal narrative, the narrative of Jesus Christ, and the overarching sense of God’s plan and purposes intersect in a particular situation. Consequently, Paul is equipped to act in theologically and vocationally defined ways.

4.3.3 Salvation and Mythomachia

The theme of salvation in this passage, particularly when put in conversation with the broader possibilities of mythomachia as a literary strategy, clarifies what is theologically at stake in the relationship of this story to broader cultural stories. As discussed in chapter two, the emerging consensus about the genre of Acts is that it is mixed. Even so, scholars broadly assume that formative effect is accomplished through Luke’s narrative strategies. Through diverse literary strategies, Luke offers a distinctive narrative for the Christian community that resonated within and against the various stories that comprise its social surroundings. Two such stories, as Richard Hays argues, are the narratives of Israel in Scripture and the dominant narratives of the Roman Empire. In a similar way, Philips draws on MacDonald’s term mythomachia, which MacDonald defines as “a battle among competing fictions.” MacDonald suggests “the

123 Wimberly, Soul Stories, 17.
124 Hays focuses his analysis also on ways in which Acts challenges both – challenging Israel’s story in the literary redefinition of the Messiah as one who must suffer rather than politically triumph, and challenging Rome’s narrative claims to be the bringer of peace and salvation to the known world, with the emperor as one worthy of worship. Hays, “The Liberation of Israel in Luke-Acts: Intertextual Narration as Countercultural Practice.”
125 MacDonald, Does the New Testament Imitate Homer?, 151.
principal virtues of [Luke’s] compositions reside not in his linear continuity with historical events or traditions but in his strategic transformation of ancient narratives.”

Acts 27 provides a compelling example of mythomachia, given the way in which Luke narrates this account with explicit nods toward Greco-Roman literary conventions and tropes. An earlier section introduced several clear ways in which Luke’s narrative reflects conventional features of these narratives. Additionally, Luke includes an apparent allusion to Odysseus in Acts 27:41. Here, the terminology for the ship changes temporarily from the common πλοιον to ναυς. This, in combination with the hapax legomenon verb “to run aground” (ἐπικέλλω), recalls the Odyssey. Ken Cukrowski suggests that the value of this parallel might well to be to suggest an analogous need for perseverance in the face of disaster. Here, as in Acts 17:16-33, Luke changes the frame for the story, accomplishing a transformation of this Greco-Roman narrative “by its incorporation into a different comprehensive story.”

127 πλοιον appears in 27:2, 6, 10, 15, 17, 19, 22, 30, 32, 37, 38, 39, 44, 28:11
128 Homer, Homer, Odyssey, Volume I, 357.
130 Rowe, World Upside Down, 40.
The salvation language in this account offers important clues to the desired outcomes of this battle of competing narratives. The following terms indicate the distribution of the theme across the passage:

**Table 2: Salvation Language in Paul's Shipwreck**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Uses</th>
<th>Specific Referent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>σώζω</td>
<td>To save/be saved</td>
<td>σώζεσθαι (27:20)</td>
<td>Narrator re: all passengers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>σωθήναι (27:31)</td>
<td>Paul to centurion re:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σωτηρίας</td>
<td>salvation</td>
<td>σωτηρίας (27:34)</td>
<td>Paul re: all passengers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>διασώζω</td>
<td>To bring through/ be brought through danger safely</td>
<td>διασώσαι (27:43)</td>
<td>Narrator re: Julius’ intent to save Paul</td>
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<td>διασωθήναι (27:44)</td>
<td>Narrator re: all passengers</td>
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<td>διασωθέντες (28:1)</td>
<td>Narrator re: all passengers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>διασωθέντα (28:4)</td>
<td>Inhabitants of Malta re: Paul</td>
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</table>

Divine accomplishment of that salvation is indicated in several ways. The presence of the theme of necessity, discussed above, already indicates God’s involvement. More explicitly, Paul reports that the angel told him that “God has graciously given” salvation to Paul all those who were on their ship. This coheres broadly with the sense in Luke-Acts that salvation is the work of God, announced and accomplished by divine agents if witnessed and mediated by human ones. Jesus is the one

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131 Praeder, “Acts 27,” 692. The infinitive in 27:20 is in connected with the first person plural accusative pronoun ἡμᾶς, while the infinitive in 27:31 is connected with the second personal plural nominative pronoun ὑμᾶς. Salvation in verse 34 is modified by the second person plural possessive pronoun ὑπὲρας. The subject of the infinitive διασωθήναι in 27:43 is the noun “all” (πάντας), and the aorist active participle διασωθέντες in 28:1 is masculine nominative plural. The repetition of the plural in these four cases indicates that that object of the salvation enacted by God here is the number of them, which 27:44 indicates is, in fact, all 276 on board.

132 The NRSV supplies the “salvation” as the direct object of the verb “graciously given” (κεχάρισται), which also has the sense of “handed over” or “forgave”. See Luke 7:21, 42, 43; Acts 3:14; 25:11; 27:24.
who brings salvation, and who is thus named because he will “save the people from their sins.”  

Furthermore, salvation works at multiple levels of meaning in this passage, in a way not unfamiliar to other parts of Luke-Acts. This complex of salvation terms is used generally, though not entirely, in more strictly “religious” contexts, like the concluding notes of Acts 2:41-47. Yet in other places the language is more ambiguous, even ironic. Acts 16 contains two consecutive examples. The slave girl under the power of a Pythian spirit says that “these men . . . proclaim a way of salvation” (16:17) and the jailor a bit later on, once his suicide is prevented, asks what he must do to be saved (16:30). Furthermore, salvation in Luke is consistently both “spiritual” and “material,” though Luke might certainly find that dichotomization to be unnatural. Response to the word of salvation involves certain behaviors with material goods, as John the Baptist’s instructions clearly indicate (Luke 3:10-14). Zaccheaus responds to his salvation with the concrete giving of his goods (Luke 19:8), and the woman who has been forgiven, whose salvation Jesus affirms in their encounter in Simon the Pharisees house, clearly and obviously responds to salvation in Jesus with costly, embodied adoration (Luke 7:36-38). Salvation is consistently an embodied reality.

The potential double meaning of salvation is further supported by the broader symbolic import of the text as a whole. One common literary function of ancient

shipwreck scenes is the symbolic vindication of the text’s main character(s) by Fate or the gods. This seems to be the basis for the “barbarians” response to Paul’s viper bite on Malta, as they conclude that Paul must be a murderer because even though he escaped from the sea, “Justice” has not allowed him to escape (Acts 28:4). Tannehill suggests that the shipwreck scene also indicates Paul’s innocence in divine court, much as the previous Roman courts had intimated. While in the context of the shipwreck the salvation terms and language have the clear and immediate sense of physical preservation, a corresponding deeper sense of the term also lingers just below the surface.

Thus, while the text adapts some aspects of the common tropes it shares with similar stories of voyage and shipwreck, it puts them to use for Luke’s own theological purposes. No violent rush for self-preservation pervades this text, as there is in Leucippe and Clitophon; such violence is prevented due to assurance of salvation for all on board by Paul’s God. In these events, Paul emerges as a character whose embodied testimony to hope in God’s salvation facilitates the preservation of all lives on board. In recalling stories from the ministry of Jesus, and in concert with the Christological characterization and the theme of God’s plan, Luke presents here a compelling narrative theology aimed at a community whose story is open-ended with the potential of storms on the horizon. Luke interweaves narratives on several different levels within an overarching theological story of God as the agent of salvation for all, even against expectation and odds.

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136 Achilles Tatius, Leucippe and Clitophon, 141.
4.3.4 Paul as Model of Persistent, Theological Imagination

Luke presents Paul as a character deeply imbued with theological imagination, imagination that proves to be both persistent and persuasive. Within the texture of Luke’s narrative, Paul’s imaginal formation as embodied and enacted at sea occurs at a narrative nexus. Luke narrates the story of Paul as an agent of the gospel in connection with his sense of God’s purpose to reach the Gentiles; his vocational identity takes its cue from God’s role as the savior of all. That Paul’s individual story is in clear narrative interaction with the story of Jesus, which provides the master narrative for Paul’s own story here. While the shipwreck scene lacks any explicit proclamation of the gospel, its narrative theology is clear in its language of salvation, which both recalls and differs from conceptions of salvation in cultural stories of sailing and shipwreck. Rather than the divine agent responsible for the salvation selectively vindicating the few who survive the ordeal, God, who is the “Lord of all” (Acts 10), actually saves all on board. The sacrificial saving grace of God is further recapitulated in the clearly Eucharistic meal that Paul partakes in the midst of his fellow passengers.

Whereas in Acts 10:1-11:18, Luke portrays Peter’s imagination as transformed in his reflectively engaged, whole-bodied gospel encounter with Cornelius, at the close of the book Luke presents Paul as one whose imagination persists in the midst of trying circumstances. First, Paul interprets events according to theological realities; that is, his

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137 Similarly, though from quite different exegetical evidence, Barclay argues that “Paul both lives from the story of Jesus (it happened, crucially, once in history) and lives in it: it happens again, time and again, inasmuch as Christ lives in him.” John M.G. Barclay, “Paul’s Story: Theology as Testimony,” in Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 132.
perception of events, his construal of what is taking place is shaped by the story he claims to be true. His sense of participation in the indefatigable plan of God guides his role in the events that unfold. Second, in Luke’s narration, Paul appears as a Christologically inflected character, one whose actions reflect his captivation by the story of Jesus. Third, not only Paul’s claims but his affective responses bear evidence of his theological shaped imagination in these circumstances. Paul is not only able to be intellectually convinced but personally able to take heart and to encourage others to take heart. Fourth, Paul’s imagination allows him to embody these tacit and conscious ways of knowing in a manner that is so compelling to his passengers that they too are affected. Paul’s whole self is so deeply shaped by the story of God’s plan in Jesus Christ that, even in the midst of the most trying of circumstances in which all hope is lost, Paul is able to live out hope-filled vocation to turn the Gentiles from darkness to light (Acts 26:18).

4.4 The Invitation to the (Post)Modern Reader

What then might we say about the invitation this passage presents to the post-modern reader? The post-modern era, perhaps more than others, readily recognizes the competing narratives that western peoples typically inhabit. Sometimes, these competing narratives appear as an uncontrollable cacophony, a general, unavoidable narrative dissonance. The case is, however, that most people require some sense of personal narrative coherence to navigate their lives.\(^{138}\) In fact, those who cannot provide some sort of narrative account for their life may be subject to the clinical diagnosis of

disnarrativia.\textsuperscript{139} The construction of such narrative identity, however, never takes place
in a vacuum, as if each person freely self-determines from available options what kind of
life story is preferred. Our “subjection to the accidents of history” and the deeply
interactive, even imitative nature of our engagement with the world complicates and
confounds any such attempts.\textsuperscript{140} Furthermore, the cultural and personal narratives that
surround us, including ones that are not of our own making or to which we might like to
withhold formative consent, can profoundly shape human life nonetheless.\textsuperscript{141}

The reality of competing narratives about what kind of world we inhabit, what ails
it, and what offers salvation from its conditions presents something of a mandate for
Christian education. A scripturally formed imagination presents a powerful form of
resistance to the cooption of human life by alternative soteriologies. Three such alternate
soteriologies are particularly prominent in this context.

As Jamie Smith’s “alien anthropology” of the shopping mall suggests, consumer
culture provides one such soteriology, with the problem in the human condition
redescribed as a matter of possession (or lack thereof).\textsuperscript{142} Hence, salvation is offered in
the form of purchases and grace in the form of Labor Day discounts. A particularly
compelling and forthright example of this can be glimpsed in the commercials for a major
TV provider that have appeared in the advertising cycle in 2015 and 2016. In these
commercials, a cool, suave, and otherwise fully socially functioning celebrity (who has

\textsuperscript{139} Brown and Strawn, \textit{The Physical Nature of Christian Life}, 84.
\textsuperscript{140} Bondi, “The Elements of Character,” 208.
\textsuperscript{141} Smith, \textit{Imagining the Kingdom}, 32.
\textsuperscript{142} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 98.
the correct satellite provider) is contrasted with a somehow mal-formed or ill-functioning version of himself (who only has cable). In the tagline of the commercial, the successful version of the self gestures toward the unfortunate version and says, “Don’t be like this me.” The salvation of the person from non-functioning or mal-functioning to fully functioning, from nerdy or effeminate to cool and manly, is mediated by consumption of a particular service. This is a salvation narrative.

As William Cavanaugh has noted, political systems offer their own salvation narratives. In this current season of presidential primaries, such competing salvation narratives are fully on display. Two democratic candidates spar in part over whether experience and pragmatism offers salvation, or else what is described as a “political revolution.” On this side of the aisle, the agent who saves America from her woes is good, big government. On the other side of the aisle, however, the agent of salvation is typically business or the free market economy. Political candidates suggest means of salvation from that which ails the nation, including more hawkish national security plans, border walls, higher taxes or lower taxes. There are real debates to be had about these issues, but Christian educators would be derelict in their duties if they did not notice that these compelling visions are billed precisely as salvation narratives aiming to captivate our imaginations.

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143 For one example, see Really High Voice Peyton Manning Commercial | DIRECTV NFL SUNDAY TICKET - YouTube, accessed March 17, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyYc1Z9j948.
144 Cavanaugh argues that “the modern state is best understood . . . as an alternative soteriology to that of the church.” William T. Cavanaugh, Theopolitical Imagination (New York: T & T Clark, 2002), 9.
Finally, Western media culture is inundated with stories that exude the myth of redemptive violence. The recent spate of superhero movies over the past decade presents one particular instantiation of this narrative, cultural reality. In typically stark black and white terms, good does battle against evil, the bad guys are slain, and the good guys survive. It is not difficult to see parallels between this narrative pattern and the Greco-Roman shipwreck scenes, in which the divine vindication of the heroes takes the form of survival in peril, while the less worthy perish. In a world where, it is suggested that “the only thing that can stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun,” violence is seen as the default means by which good triumphs over evil and greater violence is precluded. Quite often, the default to violence arises out of fear, fear of perishing, fear of loss.

Acts 27:1-28:16, however, invites the reader to enter into a narrative of a quite different salvation in light of which to live and work. The disposition of the modern reader might then be something analogous to Luke’s, trying to weave together various threads of a story into a theological tapestry. Critically, this activity is not done in outright rejection of cultural narratives, or as if oblivious to them, but rather in critical engagement. What cultural stories might Christians re-narrate or transvalue in accordance with the logic of God’s own salvation? What scriptural narratives aid this work? And how can such a compelling story sink deep enough into our spirits that the church can stand in the midst of the storm and take heart, knowing that God’s purposes are sure even if so much else is wind-tossed and desperate?
5. Towards a Pedagogy for Scriptural Imagination

This project’s animating concern with a way of approaching the task of teaching and learning the biblical narratives that respects both the nature of the reader and the integrity of the Scriptures narrates the argument at each stage. I propose that adopting scriptural imagination as the goal of pedagogically constructed encounters with biblical narratives constitutes one fruitful pursuit of that objective. Scriptural imagination entails close attention to the biblical text as well as a constructive recognition that creaturely ways of knowing are tacit, bodily, and affective as much as they are conscious and rational. This final chapter explores some implications of this argument for Christian educators interested in shaping encounters with the Scriptures in communities of faith that might better facilitate the growth of scriptural imagination.

I suggest two pedagogical implications for Christian educators to consider when structuring a community’s encounter with a biblical narrative. First, I argue that educators should structure communal engagements with biblical narratives in ways guided by a concern for resonance rather than relevance. Entailed in this shift in approach is a metaphorical shift from scriptural narrative as resource to scriptural narrative as theological space. Second, I contend that educators need to consider ways to facilitate close reading of the biblical text, but with and through the body. Before proceeding to that account, however, it may be helpful to make explicit both the assumed context and the appropriateness of these suggestions to that context.

First, the pedagogical implications developed here are appropriate to the local, pedagogical context I am imagining – namely those contexts in which communities of
Christian practice, no matter their shape, gather for the explicit purpose of engaging the Scriptures for Christian formation. In other words, I have in mind communal, rather than individual study of Scripture, and I presuppose that the readers involved in such studies are engaged in a life of Christian worship and practices. At the same time, these Bible study contexts comprise one component of faithful life, one part of a formational ecology that also includes worship, fellowship, service, and the like. The necessity of this formative ecology reflects the whole-bodied nature of formation as creatures of God that the opening chapter developed in terms of epistemology and theological anthropology.

I developed these implications within my own Western, largely North American and Protestant Christian context, and the influence of my Scripture-emphasizing free-church denomination may well be discernable in these pages. I hope and believe that these suggests have applicability far beyond the contexts of my own formation. On the whole, North American Christianity appears to be undergoing a great deal of change, which Phyllis Tickle categorizes as one of the great theological “rummage sales” of

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1 Some caveats may be helpful. I do not mean to imply that readers not engaged in a life of Christian practice cannot comprehend the biblical text. I do think, however, and here I follow Sandra Schneiders, that understanding the biblical text as Christian Scripture does involve active submission to the forms of individual and communal life that it seems to demand. In her words, “only one whose spiritual sensibility has been formed and educated by the life of the Christian community, whose intelligence has been enlightened by the faith of that community, whose affectivity is enlivened by the experience of God’s love in Christ can hear integrally what the text as scripture is saying.” Schneiders, The Revelatory Text, 61. While the most common form of such communal life in the North American context is still the traditional Christian congregation, and that congregational context is largely presumed, these pedagogical implications could pertain to Christian communities of various forms, including house churches, emerging church, and missional communities, that organize their life around common worship and practice.

2 It is well beyond the scope of this project to argue for the relative weight or well-defined shape of any one of these components, or to propose a canon of non-negotiable Christian practices. I nonetheless maintain that worship, service, fellowship, care, along with contexts of structured engagement with the Scriptures, comprise formative endeavors critical to the shaping of the imagination.
Christian history, akin to the rise of monasticism or the Protestant Reformation. As Christianity in the global south continues to expand, with implications for life in North America. As new forms of church emerge and the cultural context continues to change, anxiety as well as differing assessments of the problems and their solutions abound.

The Way of the Lord Jesus in Acts resonates with the church’s twenty-first century situation. The Way of Jesus charts its distinctive course between and among various cultural options and without the benefit of consistently beneficent cultural conditions. Yet the Christians in Acts are not heroes, visionaries, or social entrepreneurs. Instead, they find themselves attending and responding to the work of God as they endeavor to carry on the pattern of Jesus’ ministry. The church perennially needs to be captured by that same spirit. But what kind of Christian formation practices could contribute to our becoming, in our own time, that kind of people on that kind of Way?

Scriptural imagination is a necessary component for the church’s life and future, perhaps even more than visionary, adaptive leadership or creative forms of ecclesial life, as the former is, at best, the generative source for the latter. As this study has shown, imagination indispensably functions in the deep formation of disciples of Jesus. Such imagination is a holistic way of knowing and perceiving that integrates forms of

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5 Charles Foster argues that the problem in the Methodist church has a great deal to do with a turn to evangelism and outreach to the detriment of the church’s internal ministries of formation especially as they pertain to children and teenagers, locating the problem largely internal to the church. Charles R. Foster, *From Generation to Generation: The Adaptive Challenge of Mainline Protestant Education in Forming Faith* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 7. Others place the blame primarily on the shifting cultural context, in which case the problem is largely external.
comprehension associated with the embodied and rational, personal and social, tacit and conscious capacities in giving rise to our ways of being in the world. With all this in mind, let us begin consider the pedagogical implications, beginning with a recollection of salient points developed throughout this project.

5.1 Summary of Argument

I proposed in chapter one that that imagination stands at the center of Christian formation, given that it entails holistic ways of seeing, acting, responding, and relating within our creaturely realities before God. In concert with the epistemological shifts toward bodily ways of knowing and a theological account of human creatureliness, imagination presents one way of accounting for the complex and concrete ways human beings engage the world. Human imaginations are, however, distorted, since even the social and physical conditions in which we live as creatures fall subject to the powers of Sin and Death. Christians claim that our imaginations, and our whole selves, require transformation, and in this the incarnation of Christ is essential. In taking on a body, becoming flesh and blood, Christ stands in salvific solidarity with creation, enabling us to speak of the transformation even of bodily, creaturely capacities (Heb 2:14-18; Rom 8:1). The transformed imagination also provides a locus of God’s ongoing transformation of the church into the image of Jesus Christ.

Though imagination appears in Christian formation accounts focused primarily on praxis or worship, more remains to be said about the implications of this capacity’s
centrality for the study of the Scriptures. Tracing the contours of some recent discussions of scriptural imagination helped to clarify the concerns at hand, along with some suggested tools or practices. Bringing these initial discussions into more extensive conversation with the theories of knowing described in that first chapter provides critical resources for exploring the pedagogical implications of seeking to have the church’s imagination formed by the Scriptures.

Typically, the discussion of Scriptural imagination posits a singular imagination, one collectively shaped by the whole of Scripture. Considering a specific biblical text as imagination forming literature constitutes an additional, and less common, approach. Furthermore, can the basis of the coherence of imagination’s concerns with the study of the Scriptures, or with the particular texts within the biblical canon, be specified?

Toward that end, chapter two took up the Acts of the Apostles, employing it as both test case and exemplar of the dynamics that pertain to the reshaping of the imagination. Taking up major issues in the study of Acts, I argued that the broad consensus regarding Luke’s formative intent as achieved through careful, theologically oriented narration of the community’s life, growth, and contextual negotiation of identity as disciples of Jesus provides an evocative point of overlap with concerns about the imagination. This is especially the case given Luke’s interest in narrating the formation of

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6 Sandra Schneider’s discussion of biblical spirituality as “transformative textual interpretation within the overall project of Resurrection-rooted Christian spirituality” is analogous to my concern here. Schneiders, “Biblical Spirituality: Text and Transformation,” 134. She defines imagination in a manner consistent with Garrett Green, focusing on imagination’s capacity to “construct reality in its wholeness.” She says “the bodily based imagination is the natural substrate of the organon of spiritual experience, the human subjective pole of the revelatory experience, while the biblical text is the objective pole. It is important to note that we are not discussing a ‘subject’ (the reader) over against an ‘object’ (the text) but a textually mediated interrelationship between God and the human subject” (emphasis mine). Ibid., 139.
the community through “narrativized ecclesial practices.” The cooperation of narratives and practices in formation, narrated in Acts, identifies a particular point of convergence between the biblical text and the imagination that merits further consideration. Formative narrative dynamics in Acts including the interweaving of scriptural, cultural, and Gospel narratives in the account of the community’s identity. The practices of the disciples in Acts take the practices of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel as their normative precedent.

Extending Rowe’s practical logic in different directions, I consider the function of other narratively shaped practices in shaping the community’s imagination. These practices, I claim, help to shape the whole community’s ways of being, relating, feeling, and acting out of a sense of the God-given “whole” in which their lives are lived.

Given the complexity of the discussion of imagination and the need to test my identification of Acts as a test case and exemplar of imaginal formation in greater exegetical detail, chapters three and four analyze specific pericopes. Following essentially the same logic and structure, these chapters approach the imagination’s formation from a different angle in order to explore the specific features and evidence of imaginal transformation initially suggested in chapter one. Chapter three focuses on practices and the potential for non-reductive co-operation of conscious reflection and tacit ways of knowing in the formation of human understanding at the level of the

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7 Rowe, World Upside Down, 6.
9 Recall the discussion of the paradigmatic imagination in chapter 1 near fn 58.
imagination. Chapter four focuses on narrative, looking at imagination’s narrative formation at both a personal and a societal level.

In chapter three, I argued that Luke narrates Peter’s imaginal transformation occurring in and through Peter’s Spirit-led hospitable encounter with Cornelius and his household. The substantial literature on practices, including the debate about the ways of knowing associated with them, established practices as a feature of the imagination’s formation. Practices possess the potential to engage with human meaning at multiple levels of experience. This discussion clarifies a helpful theoretical lens for the consideration of this significant story.

Like some previous commentators, I identified the significance of hospitality with regard to Peter’s actions, reactions, and comprehension, further suggesting hospitality’s bodily way of knowing as an aspect of the formation of the imagination. Hospitality is not merely the incident context in which Peter’s change of mind occurs but actually helps to generate the change in holistic understanding. The practice of hospitality, given especially hospitality’s power to access and potentially reshape dynamics of visceral comportment, helped to recruit Peter’s bodily ways of knowing regarding membership in the Way. I provide historical support for the embodied ways of knowing and social valence associated with hospitality in the Greco-Roman context, and then narratively grounded hospitality as a prominent component of Jesus’ ministry. This textual and historical evidence helps to establish my claim that the center of Peter’s transformation or “conversion” may rightly be called his imagination.
Though this function of hospitality suggests some supra-rational elements of Peter’s transformation, close reading of this pericope also yields a series of cognitive verbs and markers of changing cognitive states as Peter moves toward the decisive step of baptizing the Gentiles. Such co-inherence of rational and supra-rational ways of knowing epistemically “fits” with the preceding theoretical discussion of practices. The narrative re-capitulation of events before the broader community in 11:1-18 provides evidence of further, traditioned reflection that invites the community within the text into Peter’s imaginal transformation. This communal transformation ultimately requires further discernment and teaching (Acts 15), but its narration here elicits the potential transformation of the ideal reader’s imagination regarding the shape of God’s people. Analogous transformation on the part of contemporary readers could be conceived in Christian communities characterized by Christologically normed hospitality practices.

In chapter four, I turn to Paul’s sea voyage and shipwreck on the way to Rome in Acts 27:1-28:16 and the capacities of narrative to shape imagination personally, socially, and affectively. In this text, Luke weaves together the story of Christ and the overarching plan of God with Greco-Roman cultural narratives in portraying Paul’s own persistent imagination in the face of difficulty and threat. As in chapter three, the beginning of chapter four establishes the theoretical foundation for the integrative analysis. Here, I categorized the wide-ranging discussions of narrative’s formative functions into three heuristic categories: narrative and personal identity, normative narratives in moral formation, and narrative and the social imaginary. These categories illustrate the breadth and depth of narrative’s potential formative function with regard to human personal
identity, accounts of the meaning of events, and a deep sense of “the way things are or should be” as these understandings animate and orient human behavior.

With this theoretical background in mind, the narrative dynamics in the passage come into clearer focus. As with the practice of hospitality, voyage and shipwreck scenes require explicit situation in their historical context and in terms of their biblical resonances. Thus situated, Luke’s adoption and adaptation of these narrative patterns and valences within the theological narrative of God’s salvation of all more clearly emerges in the textual analysis. Paul’s characterization, his way of being, acting, and relating in this situation, can be defined as the result of persistent theological imagination, because it includes the future he anticipates, his sense of personal identity and vocation, and the affective states that ultimately prove to be compelling for his fellow passengers. Luke portrays Paul’s persistent imagination at the nexus of personal, Christological, theological, and cultural narratives. I consider Luke’s integrative narration as analogous to the necessary imaginative work of modern day communities of readers, who negotiate their own Christian identity and vocation in the midst of the discordant resonances of different, sometimes competing narratives.

Acts exemplifies the formation of a community’s scriptural imagination through “narrativized ecclesial practices” and the characterization of key figures, who experience and evince formation into such an imagination. Chapter two established this possibility by reviewing broad discussions of Acts as a formative narrative in relationship to Luke’s Gospel. Chapters three and four provided exegetical texture, considering what the lens of the imagination might illuminate about formative elements instantiated in Luke’s
account. In each of these chapters and in this way, a pericope from Acts serves as a “test case” for close reading concerned with the formation of imagination.

Over the course of these chapters, I also attempted to methodologically instantiate the concerns I claim as central to shaping formational encounters with the Scriptures: concern with what it means for persons to understand the Scriptures and with the integrity of the Scriptures themselves. I attended to the anthropological concern in chapter one by discussing imagination as a generator of holistic, integrative, meaning with which Christian educators should concern themselves. I next turned to literature in and on Acts to establish the appropriateness of my concern with imagination’s ways of knowing with the text of Acts. Chapters three and four represent an initial attempt to work out this proposal on the exegetical ground.

The implications of this exploration of scriptural imagination for the church’s study of scripture constitute the subject of the remainder of this chapter. I begin by providing a fictional case study that instantiates some common possibilities for the communal study of biblical narratives. Following brief analysis of those case studies and in response to that analysis, I propose two approaches for the study of scriptural narratives that better account for the forms of understanding entailed by the imagination while respecting the complexity and particularity of the Scriptures given to the church.

5.2 A Tale of Two Classrooms

On this Sunday morning, like most of the ones before it, the steady hum of conversation fills the classroom. Much of the conversation coalesces around the industrial sized coffee pot on a table to one side, covered in coffee stained napkins and
discarded spoons. The class participants, mostly in their forties and early fifties, greet one another with warmth and familiarity, inquiring about one another’s teenage children and aging parents.

The steady hum of polite conversation ebbs, however, as the teacher moves toward the front of the Sunday School classroom. The class members begin to filter into their seats, arranged as eight parallel rows of straight-backed chairs facing a podium and screen. The quiet, steady hum of the projector gradually replaces the human voices as the teacher projects the morning’s first PowerPoint slide with the day’s topic: Acts 10. For the following forty-five minutes, all eyes remain directed toward the teacher, the screen, or the pages of the open Bibles many class members hold in hand. The teacher begins by asking members of the class to read the text, assigning one of several chunks to different volunteers. The next slide contained a map of greater Judea, and the teacher spends several minutes explaining Caesarea’s proximity to Joppa, their location in the coastal region, and other mentions of those locations in Acts. For the next fifteen minutes, the only sound in the room, aside from the rustle of thin-paged Bibles, is the teacher’s voice, outlining the various large sections in the chapter and introducing other information from commentators as deemed significant.

In the last ten minutes of the hour, the teacher opens the floor for questions, of which there are relatively few after such a thorough presentation of historical background and textual details. One student ventures to ask whether the teacher thinks God still communicates in visions, to which the teacher responds that nothing is impossible (though with a tone that suggests many things are unlikely). A different
student observes that Cornelius seems surprisingly receptive to the gospel for a Gentile, to which the teacher adds that commentators see Luke as rather consistently portraying centurions as figures receptive to the gospel or gospel messengers. In closing, the final slide includes a suggested “take-away point” regarding the application of the text to life.

In second classroom, and for the fifth week in a row, it takes the teacher ten full minutes past the official start of class time to call the group to order. Adults in their late twenties and thirties begin to sit at several round tables, while others continue to mill around the mini-muffins and coffee pot. As in the last classroom, these class members seem to know and care for one another, although the distribution of the group into small tables makes the closer relationships more distinguishable from the casual ones on the basis of the intensity of the conversation. Even as class formally begins, two couples continued chatting as they refill their Styrofoam cups from the community coffee pot.

The next ten minutes pass quickly, as a volunteer wrote prayer requests and updates on the classroom whiteboard. Details about an upcoming baby shower, the organization of meals for a class member recently home from the hospital, and discussion of an upcoming service event follow. The eagerness with which class members desire to build community and “do life together” is made manifest by the conversation and the class time devoted to these details.

Finally, twenty minutes or so into the hour, the teacher states the opening discussion question: “When have you had to make a difficult decision?” Class members spend the next ten minutes discussing at their small group tables the various, largely minor, moral quandaries they had faced – whether to report a co-worker swiping sticky
notes and small office supplies, and the like. After collecting some examples of difficult decisions from the class, the teacher asks the class to turn to Acts 10 in their personal Bibles or the Bibles provided on each table. After a few volunteers read the story, the teacher invites people to articulate what struck them as especially relevant when they read the story together.

The rest of the class was spent in a free flowing discussion of resources for making difficult decisions, including occasional, isolated observations from Acts 10. One student pointed out that Peter had a decision to make about whether to go with the people sent for him, and that the Spirit guided his decision. Another student expressed her wish that the Spirit would be that explicitly directive in her own life! The discussion moved into a broader conversation about what principles Christians should employ in making decisions, a conversation in which Acts 10:1-11:18 largely receded into the background.

Using the considerations I have identified as implied in every pedagogical encounter with Scripture, we can begin to suggest what assumptions about text and reader appear to be operative in these encounters. In the case of the first classroom, the kind of understanding generated appears to be cognitive, individualistic, and primarily oriented toward the historical rather than the contemporary context. A theory/practice and body/mind split may well be entailed in the clear emphasis on knowledge of biblical and

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10 I assume that these different instantiations of the practice of Christian education, like all Christian practices, “carry a broad and complex range of theological, ethical, and philosophical assumptions, convictions, insights, and reasonings, all of which are in need of exposure, display, and continuing scrutiny.” Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice in Theological Inquiry and Education,” 56. For instance, assumptions about the nature of biblical authority and the nature of revelation are also implicated. Space does not permit a full exploration of those complex issues, and thus they remain a matter for exploration in another context. See helpful discussion in Schneiders, The Revelatory Text, 43–61.
historical information. Any attention to “application” is secondary in both sequence and attention. The pedagogy places more emphasis on scripture’s capacity to inform the collective bank of knowledge than to form or re-form present practice or the shape of Christian life. Furthermore, the presentation of the text bears no marks of the congregational context, as in the local church’s life, ministry, community, or members, and makes only scant and secondary efforts to facilitate that connection. The teacher, who for this group is typically a member of the clergy or otherwise highly educated, holds almost all-interpretive authority, which appears to be allocated largely on the basis of knowledge of textual information.

This first classroom exhibits strength in its concern with the integrity and complexity of the text, but it struggles to account for the creaturely realities of the reader and learner. In part, this lack results from the near complete failure to attend to the embodied realities of class members. Practices and embodied existence emerge solely as the potential outcome of theoretical discussions rather than elements with epistemic import, which are integral to the ways creatures actually apprehend and engage the world. This approach also assumes what Smith calls an “intellectualist account of action,” which proposes that by and large people think their way into acting certain ways.11 Within this context, the implication is that, armed with more biblical information, Christians might be resourced with better information for living the Christian life.

In the very different second classroom, the corporal and corporate lives of community members take center stage each week in the practice of opening class with

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11 Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 34.
prayer requests and announcements. Furthermore, within whatever study is taking place in a given quarter, the teacher adopts relevance to the lived experience of Christian faith as the primary concern of the Bible study. Students in the class, who are typically parents of young families, both explicitly request that their studies clearly and consistently connect to their experiences, and they respond well when teachers make that attempts.

Here, the necessity of making difficult decisions functions as the aspect of personal experience that the class will explore in relationship to Acts 10. The forms of meaning generated here appear to be less individualistic and less prone to body/mind dichotomies in their concern for communal care and Christian life. The teacher shares interpretive authority, encourages affective, personal engagement, and facilitates group discernment through discussion. In actuality, many of the same assumptions that govern the first description operate here as well. Class members are encouraged to share their individual responses to the text, but no attempt is made to evaluate those responses or treat them as more than statements of interpretive preference.\textsuperscript{12} This approach does seem to better balance cognitive and affective engagement with the text under consideration, but it does not attend to bodily practices more broadly or to the full context of either the text or the present situation.

Though this second approach strives to be “relevant” and “practical,” fully connected to the experience of the learner, it is less attentive to the scriptural unit in its particularly and integrity than may be desired. In practice, the explicitly selected personal

\textsuperscript{12} It is interesting how closely this sort of approach is to the emotivist perspective that MacIntyre rejects. Value statements made here are both intended and presented as expressions of personal opinion without any recourse to anything else. See discussion at chapter 1, footnote 22.
experience provides the lens that largely determines what in Acts 10 appears relevant. Personal experience provides the framework for the reading, which, while not necessarily problematic, might still limit the depth of the scripture to be explored. Of the personal experiences and suggestions offered in the text-based discussion, no attempt is made to ground those responses within the text under consideration. To some extent, the text recedes from view and experiential reflection takes center stage.

Both of these approaches certainly create the possibilities for deep, meaningful formation at the intersection of text and reader in community. The Spirit’s transforming work through the Scriptures hardly depends upon the pedagogical prowess of the teacher. At the same time, the role of human agency in the cooperative endeavor that is Christian formation calls upon our best efforts. While the Spirit can and may well work decisively, what readers do in engagement of and response to the Scripture also matters. With that in mind, what possibilities for teaching for scriptural imagination are possible, governed by the criteria assumed throughout this project?

5.3 How Then Shall We Read?

A quick library search yields a number of resources for teaching “imaginatively.” Typically the adjective indicates the use of art, creative performance, poetry, or visualization. The Creative Teaching Methods book, for instance, lists role-play, mime, simulation games and creative writing as possibilities. Other approaches, like Ignatian spirituality in which the biblical text is imagined in the greatest possible detail, may also

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13 Marlene D LeFever, Creative Teaching Methods (Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1996), 42.
be classified as imaginative means of engaging scripture. Typological and symbolic forms of reading that connect the scriptures with broader experience certainly also qualify; the Scriptures themselves provide a wealth of such rich imagery. The approach taken to imagination in this project differs somewhat. Rather than confining imagination to wildly creative or specifically artistic or image-driven methods or outcomes, I have consistently located imagination at the center of human apprehension and action.

Scriptural imagination, more specifically, refers to the influence of the scriptures on the imagination such that the Scriptures increasingly shape our ways of being, feeling, construing, understanding, and relating in the world. Given the first norm, pedagogy for scriptural imagination would need to account for the body and the creaturely, imagination-driven ways of knowing that include visceral and affective components of human being-in-the-world. At the same time, the pedagogy would remain attentive to the integrity of the text as it stands, reading it closely and attempting to allow the text to establish the terms for the discussion.

My proposal for a pedagogical approach that may be productive of a scriptural imagination entails two ways of approaching the task of constructing communal

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15 I’ll pause to briefly address two potential objections. First, no pretense of objectivity on the part of the reader is implied by the attempt to let the biblical text establish the terms of the encounter. The concrete situation of the reader always factors into interpretation, but this need not eliminate the possibility of letting the text set the terms. Second, I do not mean to suggest that this pedagogy alone is capable of generating scriptural imagination for contributing to Christian formation. On the contrary, this project assumes that approaches beginning with experience in one form or another have significant value. Praxis reflection models like Thomas Groome’s and the story-linking process proposed by Anne Wimberly both present powerful ways of engaging the text within a different pedagogical framework. This proposal merely means to establish another pedagogical possibility that I am claiming may have particular benefits in the development of a scriptural imagination.
engagement with the Scriptures. First, I suggest that educators replace a concern with the *relevance* of a biblical text to experience with a concern for *resonance* of the biblical text with experience. This adjusted approach includes a shift in the metaphors typically used to describe the relationship of the biblical text to contemporary life. Second, I suggest that educators aim for bodily exegesis, including the physical, ecclesial, and cultural bodies that pertain. These pedagogical proposals reside at the level of overarching approach, though with important implications for discrete teaching strategies. I identify some, but not all or very many potential strategies or activities in the discussion; each approach could employ a variety of strategies in the attempt to generate encounters with the text that fuel a scriptural imagination.

### 5.3.1 Seeking Resonance Above Relevance

Scriptural studies in congregational contexts, like the one in the second fictional case above, often labor under the burden of relevance. The concern may be variously expressed, but it generally entails the sense that study of Scriptures should relate or connect to our lives in the here and now. The concern reflects important theological claims. That the word of God is “living and active” presupposes the ongoing work of the Risen Word and the written word into the present day (Heb 4:12). The concern with the relevance of Scripture also coheres with the metaphor of Christianity as a Way – a form of common life and practice that is often distinguishable from other forms in its surroundings and that is shaped by God’s revelation.

At the same time, relevance may not suffice as an articulation of the goal of congregational encounters with Scripture; some examples of typical pursuits of relevance
may illustrate. First, relevance may be sought by treating the text as a deposit of moral nuggets, which teachers help to mine for the service of the church and moments of individual moral discernment. Quite often, the concern for applicable moral principles involves the refining away of narrative dross, leaving the precious metal of relevant ideas behind. This kind of search for relevance is akin to the class in the first case study, in which in the end the narrative was distilled to a “take away point” or principle for application. Teachers may also seek relevance by framing the engagement with the biblical text within a contemporary concern. This kind of approach is common in praxis reflection models, in which contemporary praxis determines which Scriptures are relevant to the practical subject at hand. Typically, in this case the teacher predetermines the Scripture(s) relevance, by preselecting what he or she deems as pertinent to the event or practice that frames the encounter. A similar dynamic is apparent in the second case study above, in which decision-making provided the frame within which the class encountered Acts 10.

Relevance may describe a valuable pursuit in connecting the text to life, but I contend that adopting it as the primary outcome for a pedagogically constructed encounter with the Scriptures obscures and limits the engagement with the text, as much as or more as it aids in connection to contemporary life. In the first case study, the strategy for locating relevance ultimately results in eliding textual detail. The narrative becomes dispensable once the relevant information is extracted. Relevance, in this case, prompts reductive reading, a suppression of narrative texture for rational principles.
Determining relevance on the basis of readers’ experience may impose prior and unhelpful limits on the ways in which the text can connect with human life. Employing experience as the de facto criteria for determining the relevance of the given biblical text has the benefit of ensuring a clear “application” to life circumstances, but it imports some constraints at the same time. The second case study provides a potential example. The experience of making difficult decisions serves as the lens through which the gathered community engages the text. When a group of learners is particularly homogenous, the range of lived experience that the text might engage is likely even more limited. In this case study, it is not clear that all experiences of making decisions are equally considered; the examples provided come largely from the white-collar workplace and may not cover the range of experience that the class members possess. Some persons’ or groups’ experiences are implicitly taken to be more typical or important than others. Furthermore, in the adoption of such a specific experiential lens, the “text” of human life functions as normative for what in the biblical text matters. While the life text is always, unavoidably, and usually productively implicated in any reading of Scripture, approaches to Scripture that always begin outside of it may well have the effect of flattening the rich texture of Scripture or domesticating its strangeness.  

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16 On the intersection of reality, experience, and truth, Edward Farley observes that “The failure to critically interpret situations in the present makes the believer passively subject to them as if they were norms, untouchable powers. This is the primary reason why existence in the world before God requires wisdom (theology) which is not merely spontaneous but is a self-conscious interpretive response. The complexity, power, and corruptibility of reality itself sets this requirement.” Edward Farley, “Can Church Education Be Theological Education?,” in Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education, ed. Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 35.
In a related sense, the adoption of relevance as the primary criterion has the potential of engaging the Scriptures on the basis of their benefit to the status quo. Charles Foster notes that, in the selection of materials, communities tend to move toward that which is therapeutic or psychological rather than what is primarily theological or personally challenging.\(^{17}\) One possible element of the lure of therapeutic and psychological approaches to scripture is the fact that both place the biblical texts on the side of the reader, rather than approaching the Scriptures as a collection of texts that speak against the church as well as to or for it.\(^{18}\) If congregations want to engage Scripture as a text with the capacity both to comfort and call, to encourage and to admonish, to reframe as well as confirm, then a different way for teachers to articulate the hoped for formative encounter with Scripture may be more appropriate.\(^{19}\)

Instead, I argue that resonance rather than relevance provides a more adequate way of conceiving the goal of pedagogies for Scriptural imagination in the encounter with biblical narratives. Resonance entails the attempt to let the text under consideration establish a narrative world that sets the terms for the community’s engagement with it. In

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\(^{17}\) Educator Charles Foster identifies a “preference for psychological, therapeutic, and marketing rather than theological sources for churches thinking about their education,” often based in a concern for learner “needs”, as a primary problem within Christian education. Foster, *Educating Congregations*, 27.

\(^{18}\) In this case, scripture is imaged less as a sharp two-edged sword and more as a bean bag chair, to a large extent malleable in order to make the one encountering feel most comfortable. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once made a similar observation about our tendency to align ourselves with the text, stating “we prefer our own thoughts to the Bible. We no longer read the Bible seriously. We read it no longer against ourselves but only for ourselves.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work, 1931-1932*, ed. Victoria Barnett, Mark S. Brocker, and Michael B. Lukens, trans. Anne Schmidt-Lange, 1st English language ed, vol. 11, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 277–278.

\(^{19}\) To clarify, I do not mean to suggest that this is the only way of approaching Scripture, or to suggest that praxis, topical, or other ways of approaching Scripture necessarily do violence to the text. I do think, however, that there is an important place in the church’s curriculum for studies that attempt to let a biblical text set the terms of the discussion.
this case, the text is imaged as formative space into which we enter, rather than a resource we mined for “take aways” or moral propositions. The shift in metaphor reframes the task of engaging Scripture as more formative than informative. The shift also differently construes the agency of the reader. If the text is engaged as theological space creator, important learner agency in entering and attending to that space remains, yet the sense in which the Spirit might encounter the reader through the text is more adequately, theoretically accounted. The difference is subtle, but again, it reflects the attempt to allow the text to frame the readers’ encounter with it rather than our encounters ultimately determining what is of interest or “relevance” in the text.

I am proposing, in other words, not a change to or from specific teaching tactics but rather a more fundamental shift in orientation to the text that would influence the use and combination of teaching tactics. Rather than a linear search for a useful principle for application, imagination-forming learning in the engagement with scriptural narratives needs to attend to the broader construal of the narrative world as the process of interpreting. In other words, the pedagogical approach taken with biblical narratives needs to attend to the ways in which the narrative world is imagined, to the construction of characters within that world, to the presuppositions and central narratives in that narrated world, and to the bodily comportments, practices, and affective engagements narrated. Critically, this approach attends to the activity and relationship of God with these texts, as the claim to theological status and concern implies.
David Herman explores processes of constructively engaging narrative worlds as an expression of his interest in what he calls the “mind-narrative nexus.”\(^{20}\) Herman considers two processes that reside at this nexus; “Worlding the story” refers to the means by which humans reconstruct narrative worlds and characters in the process of interpretation. “Storying the world” refers to the means by which narrative becomes a scaffold for meaning-making practices of the reader in terms of the non-narrative world. By worlding the story, he means the active process in which embodied readers construct the characters, spaces, relationships, and intentions within the text. In doing so, readers draw upon their own relational, sensor-motor, and embodied experiences, including their tacit sense of the reasons that people generally act in the ways that they do.\(^{21}\)

The second process Herman suggests is “storying the world,” by which he means the ways in which narratives help to scaffold our understanding of the world outside of the narrative text. Though Herman’s account is thoroughly secular, this process is analogous to Christian claims about Scripture’s formative function. To refocus Herman’s process specifically on Scripture, biblical story can scaffold theological understanding of the actions of human agents in our lived experience because it supports our capacities to relate intentions, beliefs, and behaviors within a contextualized individual.\(^{22}\) Here, those interactions are theologically construed.\(^{23}\) Since “storytelling affords a basis for

\(^{20}\) Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*, 1. He is also interested in facilitating a conversation between those discussions in neuroscience and in narrative theory.

\(^{21}\) See discussion of folk psychology near chapter four, footnote 30.

\(^{22}\) Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*, 297. Crucially, this capacity depends upon the intersubjective experiences of an embodied-person-in-relation, a critical point of connection between Herman’s interests as a scholar of narrative and McGilchrist, Brown and Strawn, and others. Ibid., 92.

\(^{23}\) Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*, x-xi..
projecting narrative worlds across space and time, in order to make sense of past experiences, map out the course of future events, or assess how wider cultural assumptions and norms might have shaped or been shaped by one’s own or another’s conduct,” it has broad implications for forms of meaning associated with imagination.24

By seeking resonance rather than relevance, I have in mind the kind of processes and practices of reading that Herman associates with worlding the story and storying the world. Within the context of congregational Bible study, “worlding the story” refers to the community’s attempt to enter into the narrative world, considering the relations, normative notions, practices and postures that constitute it. While doing this requires entering the “strange world of the Bible,” readers nonetheless enter it as their twenty-first century selves. The turn to “storying the world” differs from a move to application, because it does not seek principles for application but rather engages the reader in a fundamentally analogical and interpretive exercise of connection generating. The interaction of these two processes engages the embodied experience of readers while also requiring careful attention to the details and contours of the biblical narrative. Both are required, and the interaction of the two creates the possibility for the formation of scriptural imagination.

24 In this way, story provides a key means of “distributing intelligence – disseminating knowledge about or ways of engaging the world.” He goes on to state that “narrative at once reflects and reinforces the supra-individual nature of intelligence – that is, the inextricable interconnection between trying to make sense of and being within an environment that extends beyond the self. Ibid., 248.
5.3.2 Reading with the Body

The involvement of the body in the processes of worlding the story and storying the world benefits from further specification in conversation with Mark Johnson’s multi-faceted account of the body. The body, according to Johnson, is a highly complex reality that includes the ecological, phenomenological, social, and cultural bodies.\(^{25}\) The body’s ways of knowing draw on all of them, and the imagination as an integrative, constructive capacity incorporates all these ways of knowing in generating a sense of who, what, and where we are in the environment and therefore how we ought to be, relate, and act.

I suggest that educators think about the task of imaginatively formative engagements with biblical narratives as the process of reading with the body in this broadly defined sense. Selecting and adapting Johnson’s diverse bodies for the Christian formation context at hand, I propose conceiving of the task of reading for scriptural imagination in terms of reading with the physical body, the ecclesial body, and the cultural body.

5.3.2.1 Reading with the Physical Body – Visceral Exegesis

Reading with the physical body entails the involvement of the biological body in the process of reading, which we might think of as a form of visceral exegesis or reading that registers at the level of the body. As part of the process of “worlding the story,” this kind of exegesis involves carefully attending to the details in the text in hopes of

\(^{25}\) Along with the physical body or the biological organism, Johnson includes four other construals of body: the ecological body, or the broader environment, the phenomenological body, or the body as we experience it, the social body, the network of formative relationships, and the cultural body, the complex of institutions and artifacts that shape our cultural existence. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, 274–278.
identifying the practices, postures, and poses of bodies in the text. With the story thus re-
icarnated, any visceral, affective, or psychological resonance that occurs has a better
chance of being grounded within the text itself.\textsuperscript{26}

Two existing proposals for reading strategies that involve the body provide initial
practical suggestions for prompting visceral exegesis. Homiletics scholar Anna Carter
Florence suggests several ways of entering the world of the text in order to better
understand it.\textsuperscript{27} She suggests, for instance, “blocking” the text, a theatrical term that
describes the process of staging a scene and the movements within it. For a group of
readers to stage the text requires that they attend both closely and creatively to the details
provided, and that they arrange their physical bodies accordingly. She asks the students,
thus physically staged, to reflect specifically about what the staging helps them see in the
text, asking questions like “Are they facing each other? Is there eye contact? What does
their physical placement communicate about their status, their feelings, and so forth?”\textsuperscript{28}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{26} Uncritical “psychological” readings of the biblical text sometimes read into the text from the
outside, exacerbated by the fact that biblical literature, and ancient literature generally, provides little
information on the interior, emotional lives of biblical characters. Modern readers, however, as part of the
process of reading implicitly make these sorts of connections as part of “worliding the story” and the
construction of character. The intent here is not to avoid emotional connection but rather to seek ways of
establishing it within a close reading of the text.

\textsuperscript{27} She is speaking specifically to understanding the text in preparation for preaching; though the
precise ends are different, the means that she suggests for readers to engage the scriptures fit well within a
concern for scriptural imagination.

\textsuperscript{28} Anna Carter Florence, \textit{Preaching as Testimony} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007),
141. I tried this once with John 9, assigning speaking and non-speaking roles to a Sunday morning class
and inviting them to actually move around the room as the story dictated. The activity was uncomfortable
for many, as the class was quite unaccustomed to any activities that did not involve open Bibles and seated
bodies. I also found myself quickly adjusting the location of various “scenes” in order to accommodate
some mobility issues for an older member of the congregation. Once the kinks were worked out, however,
several things quickly became apparent. Class members commented that seeing the blind man standing all
alone before an opposing crowd, rejected even by his parents, highlighted their own sense of what was at
stake in the passage. Other noted that it quickly became apparent how absent Jesus was from the story,
 appearing only at the beginning and the end.
“Dis-located” or “re-located” exegesis constitutes another method used by Florence and recently popularized by Lauren Winner.\(^\text{29}\) This practice involves reading biblical passages in physical or social environments that engage the body’s visceral experience by either intensifying the text’s resonance with present circumstances or prompting discomfiting dissonance. Winner describes the deeply moving and challenging reading of 1 Corinthians 13 outside of a detention center as one example of this kind of formative reading, in which a familiar passage resonated bodily in its full difficulty.\(^\text{30}\)

5.3.2.2 Reading with the Ecclesial Body – Practical Exegesis

We might also approach the task of reading with the body in terms of the ecclesial body, the community of Christian practice that together engages the text. These formative practices include the practices of Christian worship, practices of personal devotion like fasting and prayer, practices of care and mercy, as well as practices of service, outreach, and justice. Furthermore, while the relationship is hardly mechanical, the Acts narrative does suggest a meaningful association between God’s guidance, support, or direction and Christian practice. Again and again in Acts, the community of faith is praying, reading, fasting, or worshiping when God directly and definitively enters the scene. Again and again in Acts, the community and its individual members appear to have placed themselves – by their practices – in a situation in which they can hear, see, and discern the revelation of God. While not to make definitive claims about the many possible forms


\(^{30}\) Winner, “Dislocated Exegesis.”
of God’s revelation, the way that communal practices function in Acts as a way of putting oneself in a place of discerning God’s revelation seems an appropriate point of correspondence with the discussion of reading with the ecclesial body.

Charles Foster’s proposal of eventful education has important implications for reading in the ecclesial body, though I would adapt them somewhat within the context of this proposal. Foster’s process of preparation, participation, and reflection is intended as a way of connecting the biblical text to the life of the community of faith. While the biblical text is part of all three stages, the event at hand sets the parameters for the discussion. Foster offers several forms of “events” that can be included here, including events on the liturgical calendar and features of local life.31

Foster’s insight about the formational import of these church practices can, I propose, be helpfully appropriated as part of the concern for scriptural imagination.32 In adaptation of his approach, I would think about beginning with a biblical narrative, engaging and constructing its narrative contours as a group of readers as previously proposed. The attempted move would then be from text to concrete situation in congregational life. The teacher could employ “interpretation of the situation” questions

31 The breadth of such events is important particularly for so-called “non-liturgical” communities of faith, like many evangelical Protestant denominations or congregations. For such communities, the regular celebration of Pentecost or Lent might not constitute part of their annual life. His proposal, however, could have the added benefit of inviting actual theological grounding for events brought into the church from the broader culture, like Mother’s and Father’s Days. Rather than merely protest the infiltration of non-liturgical holidays, I would be content to see church’s theological narrative such events in all their complexity, including problematic aspects. Foster, Educating Congregations, 41.

32 Another benefit of this approach is the broad sense in which it takes participation in the church’s life as formative. Etienne Wenger’s concern with communities of practice, in which people grow into increasingly complex participation, has helped to ground similar suggestions in earlier chapters. See discussion in chapter 3, beginning at footnote 46.
common in practical theological discourse to hone the contours of the situation, only then to have the class think together about places in which similar dynamics are instantiated in church life, or in the life of the church’s community.\footnote{See, for instance, Richard Robert Osmer, \textit{Practical Theology: An Introduction} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.}

The move here is essentially one of analogical connection or resonance, one way of “storying the world”. In keeping with a move of analogy rather than a move of facile identification, it would be imperative to maintain the co-existence of both similarity and differences. Still, it constitutes a way of imaginatively establishing the contemporary community or practice alongside the community of practice constructed by the text. Another way of doing this might be to enter the space of the text by imagining the contemporary community of readers as “legitimate peripheral participants,” like the circumcised believers who accompany Peter from Joppa.\footnote{Or conversely, with the “we” who travel with Paul from Jerusalem to Rome.} Here, the readers’ relationship to the narrative is not as judge or distiller of moral value but rather as companions on the Way. The intent would be for the readers to identify as co-participants in what is happening in the text, guided by the same normative theological claims as the community therein, bound in service of the same Lord.

\textbf{5.3.2.3 Reading with the Social Body – Cultural Exegesis}

The final way in which I propose reading with the body is reading with the cultural body, that is with the broader set of practices and narratives that constitute the way that we know more broadly. Here, I am indebted to Smith’s claims about the importance of exegesis of cultural liturgies and the apocalyptic reading of cultural
narratives.\textsuperscript{35} For Smith, this form of exegesis involves a theological reading of the ends toward which cultural practices point and the ways in which those practices imply both problems and the means by which such problems are resolved. Smith does not attend, however, to the potential intersection of the exegesis of cultural liturgies with the exegesis of biblical narratives in a community of practice.

The consideration of cultural narratives and liturgies is, however, critically important for the formation of the scriptural imagination, since no scriptural imagination emerges in a cultural vacuum or uninfluenced by its cultural surroundings.\textsuperscript{36} We cannot reconstruct the world that Scripture imagines in a manner unaffected by the world that shapes our own imagination. Scholars of literary character theory who apply that theory to the construction of biblical characters note that the practice of constructing characters, much like the practice of constructing a narrative world, inevitably involves filling in the gaps from our own experience.\textsuperscript{37}

Consequently, all our attempts to form and be formed in a scriptural imagination assume context and experience, both of which inevitably affect the text’s resonance and shape the imagination that results. Smith’s proposed cultural exegesis is helpful in this regard. First, it helps to clarify the features of the world that shape us, effecting a least a

\textsuperscript{35} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 92.

\textsuperscript{36} Johnson is somewhat too glib in his claim that we should recover and/or come to see “the world that Scripture imagines,” and in his claim that the pre-modern church had more ready access. Johnson, “Imagining the World Scripture Imagines,” 6.

\textsuperscript{37} This is especially the case, Bennema notes, with ancient texts, within which much characterization is “indirect”, leaving it to the reader to make inferences that “fill in the gaps.” Bennema, \textit{A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative}, 60.
partial mitigation of the power our environment and activities have.\textsuperscript{38} Yet the practice of doing such exegesis also constitutes an exercise in theological imagination. A similar dynamic can be identified in Acts 27, in which Paul emerges as a narrated character whose life resonates with the life of Jesus but in an account that quite explicitly takes shape within the influential context of a cultural narrative.

Finally, Anne Wimberly helpfully suggests that groups within a broader culture may possess specific needs and resources for Christian formation. Her story-linking pedagogy aims to address both needs and resources within the African American community as she experiences it. Wimberly’s pedagogical approach includes modern day stories from members of African American Christian communities as well as stories from the African American faith tradition. The community, led by the teacher, brings both of these stories into direct conversation with a biblical story chosen on the basis of its resonance with these other stories. The whole pedagogy moves toward ethical decision making guided by liberating wisdom and hope-filled vocation, both of which she develops in ways that are culturally specific.\textsuperscript{39}

Wimberly’s account evinces deep contextual wisdom in both broad and narrow senses. She is keenly attuned to the life of a particular community and the ways in which particular stories likely resonate. The “everyday stories” from individual people

\textsuperscript{38} The identification of the function and orientation of these liturgies can effect at least a partial de-activation of their formative power. More adequately counter-acting them, in Smith’s account, requires participation in the counter-liturgy that is Christian worship. Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 209.

\textsuperscript{39} Wimberly states that this kind of story-linking is already at home within the African American community’s oral culture. Other research suggests that the principle can by more broadly extended. For more on narrative as identity-shaping, see chapter 4. See Wimberly, \textit{Soul Stories}, 34. for a full outline of her pedagogical approach.
contribute to the “locality” of her approach. She is also aware of the influence of cultural forces and narratives on that community. Though the concern for scriptural imagination, resonance, and the dual norms guiding this project might result in a somewhat different configuration of her proposed pedagogical moves, her cultural and pedagogical wisdom should be taken seriously. Even in approaches that begin with a particular biblical narrative rather than at another starting point, focus more on the text, or omit some components of her approach, the contextuality of her approach remains important.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications: Revisiting Acts 10

It may be helpful to pause briefly to envision a possible instantiation of the suggested, imagination-oriented approach to biblical narratives, again taking Acts 10 as the focus. Only one of very many possible out-workings of this approach appears here. This illustration should, however, help to clarify the potential relationship between the broader approach and specific teaching considerations.

In order to scaffold the class’s attempt to “world the story,” the teacher should consider ways to prompt close, attentive reading of the biblical text. Distributing the readings among the class, or across different translations, invites as many people as possible into the oral interpretation of the text. It might also be possible to prompt the readers ahead of time, rather than asking for volunteers in the moment, in order to ask them to give thought to the appropriate tone of voice and inflection as elements of interpretation. For narratives with a great deal of dialogue, distributing the reading by roles could be a helpful way of directing attention to who actually says what. With a pericope as long as Acts 10, this could be done any number of ways, including reading by
scene to get a sense of the overall progression, or in divisions oriented around Peter’s
dialogue as opposed to narrative description, setting, and other characters. Other ways of
encouraging close reading include structural readings, in which the class is invited to
identify different scenes in a narrative, including location, setting, and participants.\textsuperscript{40}

Constructing the characters in the text presents another approach to worlding the
story that teachers might profitably explore. This process engages people in a holistic
process of attending to characters in the text, including the character’s prior knowledge,
their intentions, their relationships, and so forth. Since characters are constructed by the
reader in conversation with the broader text and on the basis of knowledge from their
own experience, this provides an opportunity for both close reading and attention to
literary context in terms of the character’s role and development in the story overall.\textsuperscript{41}
With regard to this particular pericope, possible questions include: What has Peter seen
and done in the literary context up to this point? What does Peter believe, and how does
that shape his responses to the circumstances in which he finds himself? Does Peter’s
character develop in any way in this scene? If so, how? These kinds of questions and the
process in which they participate invite the reader into the text without having to focus on
the reader’s life and experience explicitly.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{40} I have invited classes to do this while treating the biblical narrative as the basis for a movie
script, for which they need to provide the stage directions and setting information.
\textsuperscript{41} Personal experience is unavoidably involved in the readers’ construction of a literary character.
Neverthele, the text itself provides constraints for that character reconstruction, and the broader social
\textsuperscript{42} As John Darr notes, “the process of constructing character is neither neutral nor unidirectional.
Even as we fashion dramatis personae, we are being positioned and maneuvered – indeed, shaped – by the
Several related possibilities exist for considering the ways in which the text stories the world in which the readers live, that is, how the text might resonate with events and experiences in the world outside the text. One possibility could be to facilitate visceral connections between both ancient and modern practices of hospitality, inviting close attention to the function of hospitality in the story as a possible point of visceral coherence between the world of the text and the world of the (post)modern reader. A teacher guiding engagement with the text might invite people to imagine and describe the bodily experience of being one of Peter’s Jewish companions at the table with Cornelius’s household. This approach provides the opportunity for the recollection and articulation of analogous experiences as well as experiential engagement with the story, though care may be required to keep the conversation disciplined by the biblical text.

Finally, the teacher might ask the readers to describe the kind of world that the text imagines. Possible prompting questions that could be employed with regard to Acts 10 include: Where does power to effect change and shape circumstances reside? What are the central relationships and responses? What elements within that story appear in other ways in the broader world imagined by the text? When, how, and toward what ends does God seem to act? Is this consistent with or different than the ways God has acted before in this text? Where else in Scripture do we see similar divine action? Where might we identify analogous dynamics in our own world and experience with God? The aim of these questions is, again, not to move beyond the narrative to truly useful points of data, but to invite participants into an engagement with the story that, while still connected to the details and contours of the text, remains attentive to the bodies that read and the
bodies that are read, locates such bodies within the complex worlds that they inhabit, all in hopes of generating powerful resonance that can scripturally shape the imagination at the core of our active existence in the complex worlds that we inhabit.

Stated differently, the development and exercise of scriptural imagination through the search for resonance is an analogical exercise, a discipline rather than an automatic response to reading the text. The distance of the ancient biblical text from modern life is considerable, not only in language and culture but also in underlying assumptions and practices. Furthermore, as has been stated earlier in different terms, it is not safe to presume that a scriptural imagination is automatically activated in contexts that are not specifically religious. Some intentional generation of those connections, as well as communal practice generating them, seems necessary for evocation of scriptural paradigms in a variety of secular situations. The difficult work in educational contexts of exploring those analogical connections is absolutely critical to the capacity of biblical narratives read in communities of practice to reshape our imaginations and, in turn, to contribute to the Spirit’s re-shaping of the church and all creation in reflection of Christ’s kingdom and God’s good purposes.

5.5 Conclusion

The North American church lives in uncertain times, the fact of which we are reminded at regular intervals and from sources as varied as People Magazine and Pew Research Center. In this respect, the study of Acts is timely. Not long after Paul’s safe

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43 See chapter 1, near footnote 19.
arrival in Rome, the story ends without full resolution in a situation of uncertainty and foreboding. At the same time, despite imprisonment, despite opposition, despite everything, in the final words of the story Paul is preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus boldly and without hindrance (ἀκολήτως; Acts 28:31). His unhindered preaching recalls earlier notes that God’s purposes cannot be hindered (Acts 10:48; 11:17). Despite and throughout the significant changes the church undergoes as it spreads to new contexts and faces new challenges, the sufficiency of God’s action in the church and the trustworthiness of God’s promises and purposes provide a theological, narrative constant.

Critically for our own day, Acts has something to teach us about the formation of Christian imagination in the midst of everything else. I have argued that scriptural imagination is a central feature of Christian formation, in that it accounts for the formation of the imagination as the generative, integrative core of holistic human meaning. Acts narrates the formation of the Way of Jesus, in which the story of Jesus provides the narrative model for the life and teaching of the church. Yet while that normative story of God’s plan and purposes in Jesus operates across the whole narrative and in sometimes surprising ways, it intersects with various cultural narratives in the construction of Christian identity. Scriptural imagination as witnessed and formed in the narrative of Acts presents both possibility and challenge to the church’s ministry of formation in the twenty-first century.
Works Cited


Biography

Amanda Jo Pittman was born to Bill and Kim Taylor in Arlington, Texas on October 11, 1986. She grew up in Arlington, TX as a member of a local Church of Christ. She graduated summa cum laude with B.A. in Christian Ministry from Abilene Christian University in 2009, and received a Master’s of Divinity degree from ACU’s Graduate School of Theology in 2012.

Amanda and her husband, Tim Pittman, moved to Durham, NC for Amanda to begin the Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) program at Duke University Divinity School in August of 2012. While in Durham, she served as the adult education ministry leader at the Cole Mill Road Church of Christ. She received a two-year “Vocation of the Theological Educator” doctoral fellowship from the Louisville Institute in 2014, participating in three annual meetings. She has been a member of the Religious Education Association, the Society of Professors in Christian Education, and the Society of Biblical Literature. Committee work includes the Duke Graduate Conference in Theology planning committee (2013-2014), Christian Scholars Conference Graduate Section committee (2015-2017), and the committee responsible for creating and leading the Credential in Reflective and Faithful Teaching Program for Th.D. students at Duke Divinity School.

Amanda begins her faculty career as Assistant Professor of Bible, Missions, and Ministry at Abilene Christian University in the fall of 2016.