

A Crowd Is Lining Up To Give Us Gold: Cultural Exegesis At A Turkish Wedding

Charles E. Faroe*

International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, Czech Republic

Abstract

In *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview and cultural formation*, James K. A. Smith argued that cultural practices contain implicit values that are deeply formative, often in ways inimical to Christian character. Smith posited the need for Christian counter-formation at the affective level. This essay applies Smith's method of "cultural exegesis" to a Turkish cultural practice, the "pinning ceremony" at a Turkish wedding. Using the findings of this analysis, recommendations for corporate discipleship practices for the Turkish church are set forth.

KEYWORDS: James K. A. Smith, cultural liturgy, affective anthropology, Turkish wedding, Turkish Christians, discipleship practices, Christian formation.

"Our ultimate love is oriented by and to a picture of what we think it looks like for us to live well, and that picture then governs, shapes and motivates our decisions and actions."

James K. A. Smith (2009, p. 53)ⁱ

Introduction

The task of this essay is to explore the application of James K. A. Smith's affective philosophical anthropology and his related practice of "cultural exegesis" to the work of Christian disciplingⁱⁱ in a non-western culture, in this case, the Republic of Turkey.ⁱⁱⁱ

Smith's book, *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*, arose out of a concern for "authentic, integral" Christian higher education (Smith, 2009, p. 11, 18n3). For Smith (2009, p. 18, 26), who emphasized that education is more about *formation* than *information*, this concern has evolved into a rigorous effort to develop a "philosophical theology of culture" (p. 12, 14). Central to Smith's project in *Desiring the kingdom* is a consideration of cultural formation

rooted in an affective philosophical anthropology which maintains that persons are “fundamentally creatures of desire” (2009, p. 55).^{iv}

In the epigraph above, Smith referred to a love, a picture, and human action. The love is an *ultimate* love, more deeply defining than our thoughts or doctrinal beliefs. This love refers to our heart’s desire. The picture is an *affective* vision of human flourishing: images and experiences engage our senses, engage us bodily and influence us at the level of story, aesthetics, and imagination. Smith’s prepositions here are purposeful: our desire is oriented *by* and *to* the picture. The affective vision serves both to *captivate* and *define* desire. Because it has won over desire, which most deeply defines us, this picture, laden with implicit values, determines how we behave.

Where do we encounter this vision of the good life? Smith contended we do so through involvement in concrete cultural practices (he used the examples of shopping, sports and academic pursuits). Implicit in the practice is a *telos*, the target towards which the practice aims our desire. Our willing, embodied engagement forms dispositions commensurate with the *telos* implicit in the practice. Smith’s model of affectivity (Smith, 2009, pp. 47-72) drew on a philosophical stream that interprets our non-conscious negotiation of the world (e.g. Heidegger’s understanding, Bourdieu’s logic of practice and Charles Taylor’s social imaginary), supported by the findings of cognitive science regarding the adaptive unconscious. Because affectivity, as sketched by Smith, operates largely under the radar of conscious cognition, we are not necessarily conscious of the values being formed in us.

So, in Smith’s model, while we may not name the *telos*, we ascribe worth to the vision of the good implicit in the practice by engaging in the practice and aiming our desire towards it. Even in secular contexts,^v Smith equated such ascribing of worth with worship and labelled these practices liturgy. Smith (2009, p. 73) observed, “Understanding cultural institutions as liturgical institutions, as dynamic structures of desire, primes us to have a more heightened and nuanced appreciation of what’s at stake in those institutions.”

The fact that the *telos* of a practice may be hidden from our conscious recognition led Smith to undertake the “cultural exegesis of practices.” Smith (2009, pp. 89-90) proposed a “Christian analysis and critique of culture” that looks at culture “through the lens of identity-forming practices.” Such exegesis, according to Smith, should ask, “What vision of human flourishing is implicit in this or that practice?... What sort of person will I become after being immersed in this or that cultural liturgy?...If we read *through* such cultural practices – if we read between the lines, so to speak, and discern their teleological aim – what do we see?”

Smith has developed his model out of concern for Christian secondary education, and, as a Canadian, has exegeted North American culture from within. But Smith’s affective philosophical anthropology and the related concepts of cultural formation and exegesis have potential significance missiologically when applied to issues of cultural and Christian formation in other arenas, non-academic and non-Western. For the remainder of this essay, I will explore such an application by examining the *takı töreni* or “pinning ceremony” that takes place during a Turkish

wedding. To provide adequate context, this examination will consist of three stages: a description of the practice in its everyday setting, complexification^{vi} of the practice by raising questions about it, and lastly, cultural exegesis of the practice in affective terms, seeking to posit a possible *telos* and consider its significance for discipleship in the Turkish church.

Description of the Pinning Ceremony

In Turkish *tören* means “ceremony,” while *takı* is a noun derived from the verb *takmak* which means “to attach” or “put on.” In everyday speech, *takı* often refers to jewelry and in the context of weddings refers to a gift – generally a gold coin, bracelet, necklace, watch, or currency – given to the bride or groom by pinning or otherwise putting it onto their person.

The most common gift given at a pinning ceremony is a small 22-karat gold coin (1.8 cm in diameter and 1.754 grams in weight) referred to as “a quarter,” because it is one fourth the weight of a “Republic gold piece.” These ornamental coins are produced by the Turkish mint but are not legal tender. They are available in quarter, half and whole sizes and usually have a small gold loop attached to the top for a safety pin for pinning onto the recipient (“Çeyrek Altın,” 2012)^{vii}.

Although a civil ceremony suffices to be legally married in Turkey, it is normally only one of a series of events leading to marriage. Durutürk (2008, p. 39; 2007, pp. 97-101) listed getting acquainted via a trusted go-between, asking for the woman’s hand, betrothal, engagement, henna party (bride’s party), civil ceremony, wedding reception, and honeymoon, and noted that each of these events has a ceremonial aspect which includes some form of reciprocal gift giving.

During the pinning ceremony people line up and, in the sight of the other guests, give their gift to the bride or groom. The pinning ceremony at the wedding reception is the culmination of the gift-giving aspect of the wedding events, because it usually occurs last and involves the most people. At a wedding reception, the pinning ceremony usually comes later in the event, after refreshments, music, dancing, and the cutting of the wedding cake. According to Durutürk (2007, p. 51), “Sometimes a microphone is used to announce that the pinning ceremony is about to begin and sometimes while the pinning ceremony continues, an employee of the wedding salon or a relative with experience in this area uses a microphone to announce so all can hear each present that is given to the bride or the groom.” By the end of the pinning ceremony the bride and groom are, to some extent, covered with gold and currency.

During my research, Turkish friends consistently gave the reason for the pinning ceremony as *dayanışma* (i.e., “helping each other out”) and said it was to help the newlyweds financially as they were starting out. Durutürk (2007, p. 106) confirmed this widespread understanding, stating that “most of the time people say the purpose is to provide a measure of material support for the newlyweds.”

We have looked at a brief description of the pinning ceremony’s terminology, context, activities and perceived purpose. Now we will look more critically at some economic and relational dynamics of the pinning ceremony.

Complexification of the Pinning Ceremony

The pinning ceremony as described above is social (relatives and friends) and economic (giving the newlyweds gifts for material support). To gain insight into how the pinning ceremony may represent something more “complex and polyvalent,” we will now critically explore some economic and relational dynamics.

Consider the idea that the pinning ceremony exists primarily to provide economic help to the newlyweds (the “economic benefit explanation”) in light of the following incident shared by a Turk (B. Ç., personal communication, February 4, 2012)^{viii} about her mother’s wedding:

At the wedding reception...a lot of gold was given to my mother, especially by [my father’s] relatives. Of course my mother was delighted. The morning after the wedding my father’s sister comes to my mother and says, “Let me have the gold back, we borrowed it from the neighbors so we’d have something to put on you.”

Such face-saving behavior, while understandable, undermines the economic benefit explanation. Family insiders arranged to create the proper impression for the larger group; social concerns superseded economic reality.

Another challenge to the validity of the economic benefit explanation is the widely held expectation of reciprocity. In casual conversation about this cultural practice, Turks consistently mentioned that the married couple would reciprocate for the gold or money given at the pinning ceremony by giving at least the same amount or, ideally, a *greater* amount, in return at a future wedding.^{ix} A Turk (İ. U., personal communication, April 28, 2012) commented that if one fails to give the same or a greater amount, “everyone will gossip about you and shame you. Shaming you is not strange because it is accepted that everyone knows this rule.”

Thus the simple idea that the pinning ceremony creates wealth must be balanced by the idea that it creates indebtedness. As Durutürk (2007, p. 220) observed,

...the purpose generally assumed...is to help the couple in their new life. However, here we need to take into account the fact that the help the guests give determines the help they will receive in the future... when the newlyweds attend a future wedding of those who have given the gift, they must keep in mind the help given to them and be careful not to give a gift of lesser value. Accordingly, though the repayment date is indefinite, the newlyweds and/or their families have become indebted to some of their acquaintances or, on the other hand, have received repayment for a loan made in the past.

So while the pinning ceremony has economic dimensions, since wealth changes hands, this practice is specially freighted with social obligations. A lump sum is received but due to the practice of reciprocity represents no increase in net worth and (in view of the ideal of giving more than was received) may actually represent net indebtedness.

The financial benefit explanation is further weakened by the tendency towards lavish spending associated with hosting the wedding reception. Turkish psychiatrist Erol Göka (2006, p. 56) considered a “propensity for ostentation and luxury” to be “one of the most prominent characteristics of Turkish group behavior” and referred to “Turkish celebrations where money flows like water” (Göka, 2008, p. 151). The cost of hosting a lavish wedding reception is, at least sometimes, met by using the gifts given to the couple at the pinning ceremony. Durutürk (2007, p. 219) illustrated this with a respondent’s statement: “When my father insisted, ‘With my place in the community, nothing less will do,’ we were forced to rent the most expensive wedding salon. He said, ‘Lots of people will come, you’ll easily cover the cost from the gifts.’”

It would be simplistic to say there is never a net financial benefit to the newlyweds. Available information suggests a diversity of outcomes for the gold received at the wedding: savings for the future, payment of debts related to the wedding or the newlyweds’ household, and, in some cases, manipulation within the extended family that results in the wealth being taken by others (Durutürk, 2008, p. 53; “Kadınlar kulübü: Düğün,” 2011; “Kadınlar kulübü: Kızlar,” 2010).

So financial benefit occurs sometimes but, contrary to the common explanation, this is apparently not the most fundamental significance of the pinning ceremony. As seen above, social norms and obligations play a key role in the enactment of this practice. Durutürk concluded the meaning of ceremonial consumption at Turkish weddings (including the pinning ceremony) is primarily relational, saying it “is used as an instrument of building, maintaining or breaking relations within family circles and kinship groups” (Durutürk, 2008, p. 39).^x Accordingly, our complexification project will continue by exploring some relational dynamics of the pinning ceremony.

One question about the relational dynamics concerns the ostentatious way the gifts are announced. Generally, gift giving among individuals in Turkey is handled with great reserve. In a popular handbook, Charlotte McPherson (2008, pp. 89-90), a student of Turkish culture, instructed that “[a gift] should not normally be handed to the host; just place it in the hallway or on a table...If a gift needs to be handed to the recipient... this should be done without a lot of attention.” Regarding the difference between reserve in private gift giving and ostentation at the pinning ceremony, McPherson (personal communication, March 31, 2012; cf. also McPherson, 2012) said at the personal level the “relationship is more important than a gift” but at a wedding “you are expected to be seen by others to be giving a gift” and that giving more generously indicates relational importance and “affirmation of [the] wedding.”

This would seem correct. White (1994, pp. 96-97) discussed the “avoidance of apparent profit in personal relations” as a norm in Turkish culture. At the personal level, emphasizing the gift suggests a mercenary motivation, which undermines the relational bond, but at this corporate celebration, highly visible giving has symbolic value that reinforces the relational bond.

Another question about relational dynamics and the pinning ceremony concerns intra-family strife. Turkish families generally display a high level of interdependence characterized by

“closely knit relationships” in what has been designated a “culture of relatedness” (Sunar, 2004, p. 222). A 2006 study identified the family as Turkey’s most cherished institution and 75% of respondents said their primary sense of “belonging” was to their family and close relatives (Yılmaz, 2006; Düzel, 2006). Durutürk (2008, p. 54) referred to the “painstaking efforts” expended by the engaged couple to integrate each other into their respective immediate and extended families.

In this context, reports of intra-family strife related to money and gold from the wedding gain significance. One of Durutürk’s respondents commented, “Unfortunately every issue where money is concerned ends in a fight” (Durutürk, 2007, p. 219). Turkish social media websites provide candid reports of family members and relatives creating great offense by failing to give traditionally expected gifts, stealing wedding gold, “helping” collect gold and money at the wedding and “forgetting” to return it, putting extreme pressure on the couple to lend or give them money, and much more (“Kadınlar kulübü: Düğün,” 2010). If the pinning ceremony has a primarily relational function, why is it perpetuated if it engenders intra-family strife?

One possible answer to this question is that, in Turkey’s “culture of relatedness,” while the family plays a central role, the family’s relationship to its broader social network is also powerfully influential. Geert Hofstede’s empirical research found Turkey to be a collectivistic culture, where “people belong to in-groups...who look after each other in exchange for loyalty” (Hofstede, 2012). White (1994, pp. 93-99) described a culture of indebtedness where reciprocity and obligation provide solidarity and security. She observed, “What is exchanged in a reciprocal relation in Turkey are not gifts...but debts – the indebtedness calling forth feelings of guilt and obligation to cement both a sense of solidarity (as family, friends, acquaintances, non-strangers) and dependence.” Such reciprocity avoids closure (so relationships will be ongoing) and presupposes that indebtedness, and hence the obligation to help when needed, is transferrable across interrelated social networks. In this context, it is plausible that intra-family strife caused by wedding gold is endured to ratify the place of the newlyweds in the broader social web. As an enactment of mutual indebtedness, the ceremony includes the new couple in the social web.

Complexification has led us from a simple picture of gift giving as financial help to a more broad-based vision of the pinning ceremony as a compelling performance freighted with relational significance for communal membership.

Cultural Exegesis of the Pinning Ceremony

This essay began with Smith’s notion that persons are essentially creatures of desire and cultural practices serve a liturgical function that aim our desire affectively at some *telos*, a vision of the good. Affective participation, engagement that is bodily, sensory, emotional, and aesthetic, forms value-laden dispositions which influence our choices and behavior. Smith suggests that such cultural formation may subvert loyalty to God’s kingdom and require Christian counter-formation, which will also function not merely intellectually, but at the affective level.

In this section of the essay, I will seek to sketch a cultural exegesis of the pinning ceremony with observations about possible relevance for Christian discipling. Below, in the discussion and recommendations section, I will suggest some possible responses to the discipleship questions raised here.

“We are many...”

As we arrive at the wedding salon, we enter a dedicated, liturgical space. The big room is elegantly decorated, full of well-dressed people. The space is full of noise, full of activity, children running around, people greeting, embracing, kissing their elders’ hands with deep respect. We are many, but this space is big enough for all of us. There is sudden joy at seeing distant relatives, old friends, current and former neighbors and coworkers. There is also the disquieting recognition that there are many people here we do not know, and the stab of fear or shame as we spy across the crowd a person who has betrayed or rejected us. Though the space is big and the crowd is diverse, there are tables set with chairs and we organize ourselves according to relational comfort and obligation, seeking out family, relatives and friends, those to whom we specially belong. We will eat and drink, dance and celebrate for hours together. Together! We are not alone; we belong.

The wedding reception, which generally culminates with the pinning ceremony, affectively encodes hearts with the power of the social web. The sights, smells, sounds, emotions, the physical contact of greetings and the need to negotiate a highly nuanced plethora of hierarchical relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, teachers and students, more and less educated, higher and lower income, and urban and rural persons (Özdalga, 2004, p. 8) reinforces dispositions rich with the importance of belonging. The crowd is our story, our history, a rich tapestry of relationship. What is more, there is strength and security in numbers. As White (1994) pointed out, each relationship implies many more relationships, relationship means obligation, and obligation creates security.

Now a Christian discipling question: If the captivating picture here is, “we are many,” how should a Turkish Christian deal with his or her new reality that “we are few”? At this writing, Turkey has a population of around 72 million and Turkish Christians number about 4,000 persons in 100 churches throughout the country. *What does the gospel teach us about being a minority in our world and how can these teachings be embodied in practices that affectively form Turkish Christian community?*

“I owe, therefore I am...”

The room is warm from the heat of hundreds of bodies that have celebrated for hours. Food, drink, dancing, conversation, and laughter have made us mellow, a bit tired. It is getting late. In our fine wedding gown and elegant tuxedo we take our place on a small stage where all can see us. Children are still running around playing, music is playing, hundreds of conversations form a diffuse rumble. A microphone blares and guests start to line up in front of us. Streams of

people – our revered elders, our school and work friend, relatives, neighbors, people we don't recognize – are flowing towards us, bringing us gold. Each stands before us. We kiss our elders' hands, we kiss our peers on their cheeks. We embrace, we greet. Each guest pins money or gold onto our clothes, or puts gold jewelry on us. The microphone loudly announces each guest and how much they gave .

As discussed above, gifts given at the pinning ceremony are subject to well-known expectations for reciprocity. The gifts reflect both an elaborate system of showing respect and the creation and perpetuation of relations of indebtedness (Durutürk, 2007). Göka (2006, p. 59) said that Turks' extravagant gift giving "reflects expectations of submission and is closely related to a culture of domination." White (1994, p. 86) emphasized that these relationships are, nonetheless, a form of security: "Relations of domination based on the gentle violence of obligation and reciprocity...appear reliable for long-term commitment and flexible in the face of unforeseen events." This induction into the newly enlarged social web is embodied; it is physical. The Turkish used for this gift giving is *takmak*, literally, "to attach." Hands reach out and make contact, the bride's arm is lifted so gold bracelets can be pushed past her hand. Hands grasp your clothing and fumble with safety pins. Gold flashes and crisp banknotes rustle. These physical, tactile experiences are part of the affective encoding. As Smith (2009, p. 59) noted, "it's as if our appendages function as a conduit to our adaptive unconscious." Each gift, each touch, engraves the heart with the stream of people, a relational chain of reciprocity, stretching back to the past and out to the future. By making us indebted^{xi} they let us belong; through the "gentle violence of obligation and reciprocity," they make us secure.

What kind of Christian formation should take place concerning this deeply encoded understanding of reciprocity? Jesus' words, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High,"^{xii} set forth a vision radical for any culture. *How can the gospel's "inverted understanding"^{xiii} of social relations and reciprocity be internalized and, critically, what practices will affectively engrave these values within the Turkish Christian community?*

"Shame makes us wise..."

As we stand having gold pinned on us, all eyes are watching. As each gift is announced a ripple of discussions moves through the crowd. Who gave much, who gave little, who is not in line at all? We'll talk about this for weeks – for months! And look at my husband's uncle's son's family, hiding at a corner table, not getting in line. Wait, why isn't my new mother-in-law getting in line? Surely she's not going to cause a scandal by not giving me a gift tonight! All are watching, all are judging. If she dishonors me in front of everyone, what will people say? How will I live with the shame?

A significant aspect of Turkish collectivist culture is the enforcement of customary values and practices by what White (1994, p. 86) referred to as "[c]ollective reprobation, or community censure." Göka (2008, p. 136) attributed this to the "social and external conscience" of Turkey's

oral culture. He emphasized that it is “important in an oral culture to conform to ‘custom’ clearly known by all; knowledge of what is wrong and forbidden is public property, set forth in stock phrases and pithy sayings.” In the affectively charged context of the pinning ceremony, the “picture” that captivates and defines desire is approbation by the crowd and hence avoidance of shame. A bride describes her mother’s reaction when the groom’s mother “forgot” to give a gift during the pinning ceremony: “My mother cried so much – she said, who knows what all our family and friends said about that behind our backs!” (“Kadınlar kulübü: Düğün,” 2011). One Turk described the way shame colored this experience for him as a child. Because they were poor and would be ashamed to have no gift, they sometimes did not attend weddings. He continued, “Sometimes we went to a wedding but didn’t get in line at the pinning ceremony and that created pressure: ‘I wonder what the neighbors are thinking about us?’ When everyone has gotten in line and we kept sitting at our table, sometimes it made me feel sad... I would think, maybe it would be wiser not to be here” (İ. D., personal communication, March 19, 2012).

Wisdom has been described as doing “the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, for the right reason.” So here shame teaches what is “right” and becomes a source of “wisdom.” What implications might this have for Christian discipling? On the one hand, God’s wisdom warns that “the fear of man brings a snare” and is inimical to a life of faith (Proverbs 29:25). Yet the value of collective culture to guide and the possibility of godly peer pressure^{xiv} should not be deprecated. *What corporate, embodied, affective practices might be cultivated in the Turkish church to sanctify the deeply inculcated concern for the “wisdom of the crowd”?*

Discussion and Recommendations

The cultural exegesis above has raised issues of corporate identity, in particular the reality of being a small minority, issues of reciprocity, status and belonging, and issues of enforcing group values through the power of shame. All of these issues relate strongly to Turkey’s collectivist culture, which should alert us to the potential danger of approaching counter-formational discipleship practices from a North American individualistic perspective (Hellerman, 2009). Affective discipleship practices should engage Turkish believers *corporately*. Although I am not a Turkish Christian, I lived in Turkey for many years and have been involved in teaching and training Turkish Christians since the early 1980s. Thus, the suggestions that follow are based on first-hand experience, though that of a foreigner. These recommendations are preliminary assessments awaiting the work of communal discernment by the Turkish church. They are offered in a hopeful, respectful attitude. I will briefly suggest four corporate discipleship practices: use of social media, inter-church events, charitable giving and mercy ministry, and discipleship through group discussion.

Social media serves to foster Turkish Christian corporate identity. In Turkey’s largely oral culture, Turks have responded enthusiastically to the internet and use it preeminently to “chat” with one another online (Göka, 2008, p. 128). Turkey presently has over 31 million Facebook users, which represents about 40 percent of the total population (“Turkey Facebook statistics,”

2012). As Turkish Christians “friend” one another, a context of corporate solidarity and mutual encouragement is created. Maturing believers share scripture, testimonies and prayer needs. Rather than sensing themselves an excluded minority, chains of mutual Christian friends emerge – including people from churches throughout Turkey, Turkish Christians in other countries, and non-Turkish Christian friends – creating a larger vision of belonging and solidarity within the body of Christ. Importantly, this occurs in a highly affective medium where images, music and personal experiences are shared.

Inter-church events can also play an important role in affective formation for Turkish Christians. Most Turkish congregations are relatively small, seldom numbering over 100 and often consisting of under twenty. There tends to be a fair amount of attrition due to persecution and discouragement. Church facilities are also sometimes attacked or vandalized, adding to the sense of being a beleaguered minority. Rather than merely sharing statistics about the growing number of Christians in Turkey (a cognitive activity), believers from around the country need to come together to share embraces, conversations, worship and meals (an affective experience). A Turkish Christian (B.Ç., personal communication, September 4, 2012) illustrated this phenomenon with the following anecdote:

It was interesting... Two weeks ago worship and ministry leaders [from around the country] gathered and the meeting was very crowded. I asked [my 13 year-old son], “What did the Lord show you at this meeting?” He replied, “There were people from lots of churches. We’re not alone after all, Mom.”

Charitable giving and mercy ministry, properly handled, can create opportunities for affective counter-formation with regard to expectations of reciprocity and status. Neyrey (1998, pp. 190-211) suggested that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, was “calling off the honor game” that was such a large part of the Mediterranean culture of his day: “Jesus’ discourse sets up another set of expectations... Disciples swap the approval of their kin and neighbors for that of Jesus and God.” As Turkish Christians participate in helping to meet financial and social needs within the church and the wider society, they must similarly adopt Jesus’ counter-cultural ethos, “when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”^{xv} Giving is part of the corporate life of congregations and as Smith (2009, p. 204) emphasized, is affectively encoded with a kingdom *telos*: Christian giving “isn’t a mutual or reciprocal gift exchange since there is a radical disproportion between the gifts we’ve received and the gifts we now offer ‘in return.’ Rather the offering is an expression of gratitude.”

Discipleship through group discussion might seem routine to North American Christians, but such a practice is rich in implicit significance for Turkish Christians. It is a commonplace that Turks, as oral learners, “learn by talking.” Yet in the area of religious instruction, there is a cultural expectation that a religious authority figure will teach while the faithful listen

submissively. However, Christ's followers, indwelt by his Spirit and having his word, are called to "teach and admonish" one another in Colossians 3:16. As Moo (2008, pp. 288-289) observed, "'teaching' refers to the positive presentation of Christian truth while 'admonishing' refers to the more negative warning about the danger of straying from the truth...[T]his text gives to each member of the congregation the responsibility to teach and admonish other members." In a recent discipleship curriculum development project (referred to as *Derin Değişim*, which means "deep change"), Turkish Christians have written discussion-oriented lessons using scripture and many illustrations from daily life. A church planter (personal communication, April 2012)^{xvi} from a conservative Anatolian city offered this report on the use of these lessons in a woman's group:

We have been using the *Derin Değişim* lessons for several months now... They have been really helpful for the ladies to put scripture into practice in their daily circumstances. They are able to relate really well with the examples and scenarios. Several times I was impressed that they were able to relate and plug in the truth from God's word into their own lives. I would say this is large in part due to the examples being so culturally relevant to what they are facing. The lessons generate a lot of discussion and each person is able to share and be involved.

Although such mutual teaching and admonition need not be a negative shaming behavior, it does employ the "wisdom of the crowd" to promote and reinforce values.

Conclusion

In light of the diversity within Turkish culture (Özdalga, 2004, p. 9) and the need for circumspection in assessing values, especially cross-culturally, the conclusions of this essay remain tentative. With this disclaimer, my conclusion is that efforts to exegete a cultural practice represent a tool for serious engagement with culture and provide insight for the work of Christian discipling. Exploration of the pinning ceremony at a Turkish wedding through description, complexification and cultural exegesis suggests a *telos* of security through membership in a large social web. This finding has provided insight into possible directions for discipling and the nurturing of corporate, transformative practices for the Turkish church.

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 NOTES

ⁱ Smith is a professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

ⁱⁱ This essay uses Nancey Murphy's formulation of *discipling* as "the church's teaching and formation of its members" along with the work of "communal discernment," which seeks practical wisdom in the recognition of God's will for the values and actions of the church community (Murphy, 2003, pp. 37-38).

ⁱⁱⁱ I am grateful to Dr. Nancey Murphy for suggesting the structure of this essay and to Ben Faroe, Dr. Larry Poston and Ken Wiest for reading and commenting on the essay in draft form. This essay is a modified version of an essay originally submitted to the International Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2012, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Postgraduate Certificate in Theology.

^{iv} For a discussion of Smith's treatment of affectivity, see my essay, "In pursuit of a holistic Christian pedagogy: James K. A. Smith's *Desiring the kingdom*, a critical book review" submitted to International Baptist Theological Seminary, December 2011, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Postgraduate Certificate in Theology.

^v David Lyon, in part following Smith, developed the possibility of "considering social and political life as 'religious phenomena'" (Lyon, 2010; Smith, 2012).

^{vi} "To complexify something is to take that which at first glance appears normal and uncomplicated and through a process of critical reflection at various levels, reveal that it is in fact complex and polyvalent" (Mowat & Swinton, 2011, p. 13).

^{vii} Unless specified otherwise, all translations from Turkish in this paper are my own.

^{viii} A number of Turkish Christians were interviewed for this essay. Although they have given permission to use their statements, they are identified by initials to protect their privacy.

^{ix} This brings to mind the fundamental question of gift exchange raised by Marcel Mauss in his seminal work, *The gift*, originally published in 1923. Godelier summarized Mauss's question: "Why is it that, in so many societies, at so many periods and in such different contexts, individuals and/or groups feel obliged not only to give, or when someone gives to them to receive, but also feel obliged, when they have received, to reciprocate either the same thing (or its equivalent), or *something more or better?*" (Godelier, 1999, p. 10) (emphasis added).

^x The English translation is Durutürk's.

^{xi} In discussion with a Turkish friend, I called this dynamic "mutual indebtedness" (*karşılıklı borçlanmak*). He immediately corrected the concept by adding an additional causitive and passive ending to the verb: "making each other to be indebted" (*karşılıklı borçlandırılmak*) (A. İ., personal communication, March 15, 2012).

^{xii} Luke 6:35, *New American Standard Bible*.

^{xiii} Green (1997, pp. 273-275) noted that "Jesus has subverted a key organizing factor of the Roman Empire – namely patronal ethics. The Empire was an intrusive, suffocating web of obligation..."

^{xiv} For example, Proverbs 5:14 and Hebrews 10:24.

^{xv} Matthew 6:3, *New American Standard Bible*.

^{xvi} Due to security concerns, the person's name is not given.

* Direct correspondence to: Charles E. Faroe (chuck.faroe@interman.us)