

## REVIEW

### *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition*

Graham Redding, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 2003. 324pp.

In a time when there is little reference to the Reformed tradition among us this is a book that injects a strong measure of Reformed theology – and liturgy. It may come as something of a start to those who sit lightly to tradition to encounter the stuff of Reformed Catholic thinking.

Graham Redding addresses a Church that is no newcomer to the scene. It did not begin with the John Knox in 1560, nor with the Victorian religious revivals, but is a continuation, albeit Reformed, of the historic Church and faith from early times.

#### Prayer to God through Christ

He examines what it is for personal development and corporate worship of the Church to offer prayer to God through Christ. In doing so he is unlikely to make an immediate appeal either to reductionists or to pietists, but what he has to say is of considerable substance as we ask, if we ask, - what is it that the Church is doing as it gathers for worship Sunday by Sunday?

He traces the issues in this area back to those the Church was grappling with in the period of the 325 Council of Nicea, since failure to resolve the role of Christ in the prayer of the Church led to problems in the medieval Church which the Reformers addressed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He explores the significance of the priesthood of Christ in the thinking of Calvin, Knox and the lesser-known reformer John Craig, particularly with regard to the role of the Eucharist in the prayer life of the Church. He goes on to examine the impact of the Westminster tradition and that of the forensic theology of Puritanism in undercutting the freer spirit of the teaching of both Calvin and Knox.

#### Strands of recovery

The recovery of the Church of Scotland after 200 years of harsh moralism, judgmental theology and starkly bare worship, ironically in the name of

Puritan 'freedom of the spirit from outward forms', was not easy. Dr Redding surveys two strands of recovery.

First, was the reconception of prayer through thinking more deeply about the doctrine of atonement by John McLeod Campbell, with salvation offered by grace to all, in contrast with the prevailing theory of double predestination?

Second, on another front, the bleakness of Scottish public worship was challenged by the Church Service Society, which sought to restore the shape of the liturgy in common worship, to bring back the dimension of active corporate congregational participation and to rediscover the richness of the full Christian heritage in worship.

### Ascension of Christ doctrine

About the same time the newly formed and theologically high Church Scottish Church Society reaffirmed the doctrine of the Ascension of Christ and its relation to the prayers of the Church. It was a doctrine that had been strong in Knox's lively 1560 Scots Confession, but was absent from the later Westminster Confession and the sombre worship practices that flowed from it. By contrast, in the Scots Confession the Ascension was not seen as an addition to the salvation story but as an integral part of it, and affirming the Lordship of Christ over Church, state and cosmos. It also sees the incarnation as an essential part of Christ's priesthood in bringing our humanity into the presence of God.

A modern writer quoted by the author touches on the implications of this for the experience of the Church: 'He (Christ) becomes what we are, that in him we might become what he is'.

### The structure of liturgy

Of particular value is Dr Redding's investigation of the structure of the order of the liturgy of Holy Communion from the time of the early Church down to the 1940, 1979 and 1994 Church of Scotland Books of Common Order and the 1993 PCUSA *Book of Common Worship*. Since what we believe is mirrored in how we worship, these liturgies are important in understanding what the Church sees as central to its faith and life.

## 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish renewal

The theological and liturgical renewal in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Scottish Church not only reaffirmed the place of the Ascended Christ in Church worship and prayer, but as a corollary sought to restore the centrality of Eucharistic worship (also desired by Calvin and Knox) which was lost in the subsequent two centuries of stern ecclesial moralism. The proponents of the revival reminded the Church that it is not only the dying Christ who is remembered in the Eucharist, but also the living and interceding Christ, from whom the efficacy of prayer and sacrament derives.

The restoration of the call in the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving to 'lift up our hearts' and our response that 'we lift them up to the Lord' was, and is, part and parcel of prayer that is not only through Christ, but with Christ. This understanding of the priesthood of Christ avoids making prayer into a task, rather than a joyful sharing with the Lord of the Church. The Eucharist and 'prayer is not something the Church does. It is something in which it participates'.

There comes to my mind a fine Lutheran Holy Communion service in Lund Cathedral at the time of the 1952 Faith and Order Conference. Above the altar in the dome of the apse is a mosaic of the ascended Lord in the act of blessing and equipping the Church. Kneeling a few places from Pastor Martin Niemöller at the reception of Communion we were conscious that his witness for Christ against the Nazis had arisen from his adherence to the Lordship of the ascended Christ and he was still sustained from the same source. Dr Redding reminds us that Reformed Catholic theology (as well as Lutheran theology) rises from the same source and determines the nature of the Church.

*Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition* is not an easy read. Particularly the first half demands a good deal of knowledge of the history of doctrine. It is a book that will, however, make a significant contribution to those (particularly students in theological colleges and universities) who seek to understand how the Church has come to be and to grasp what it is that gives character to the tradition in which we stand.

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