

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



*Buy me a coffee*

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_sbet-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbet-01.php)

# BIBLICAL WORSHIP AND THE ASCENDED CHRIST

MARK W. ELLIOTT

A talk originally given at the Rutherford House Dogmatics Conference, Palmerston Place Church, Edinburgh, September 1, 2015

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGE OF NEW CATHOLIC APPROACHES

According to recent Catholic liturgical theology, lacing scriptural reading squarely in the context of liturgy allows the signs of scripture and the history of salvation to be interpreted through the seven sacraments and their symbols, on their way to being referred up to Christ as the Lord of glory.<sup>1</sup> Worship is thus a workshop where Scripture can find its way to Christ, leading the participants with it by the hand. One might see here in this species of Catholic theology a principle of *sursum corda* that, when combined with the mystagogy borrowed from Maximus the Confessor, transcends the usual focus on the material and sensible presence of Christ among believers. In this new-ish perspective there is a sense of believers being encouraged to living *up to* as well as *in* Christ, since the meaning of cultic participation *to be meaningful* has to be metaphorical, designating a more ‘spiritual’ sense, even as one is inserted into Christ. Taking part in the giving and taking of bread and wine has to relate us to a higher reality, one of self-offering, receiving and renewed self-offering. Liturgical theology can thus help prevent theology and its symbols from becoming a set of abstract ideas or a description of ritualised religion as role play. Philip Caldwell calls ‘liturgy as a continuation and activation of the perfect worship that Christ offered to the Father in his humanity; liturgy is the action of Christ in the church.’<sup>2</sup> This is a fulfilling of revelation, or at least a making present of revelation. Caldwell owns here his debt to Odo Casel, author of *The Mystery of Christian Worship* (1932). Inspiration can also be found in Romano Guardini’s *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (1930), a seminal text for the liturgical theology of Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI).<sup>3</sup> The eucharist makes the church but the church also makes the eucharist, as

---

<sup>1</sup> So, Salvatore Marsili, *I Segni del Misterio di Cristo*, C.L.V.-Edizioni liturgiche, 1987, as related by Philip Caldwell, *Liturgy as Revelation* (Renewal: Conversation in Catholic Theology), Fortress, 2014, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> See D. Vincent Twomey, *The Dynamics of the Liturgy: Joseph Ratzinger’s Theology of Liturgy*, (Ignatius Press, 2022).

per the Vatican II peritus (theological adviser) Henri de Luba.<sup>4</sup> This is a theology that accompanies and encourages the *sursum corda*, the lifting up of hearts.

With this in mind, and as a prompt, even an inspiration, it will be instructive to look at the resources of the *Reformed* tradition for an Ascension Christology that can be illuminated by the light of a liturgical theology, which is supremely a theology of the Eucharist.

## 2. STARTING WITH CALVIN

As Calvin traced the second article of the Apostles' Creed through Book II of the *Institutes*, he inveighed against a roster of Protestant challengers and for once was not afraid to name them. Against Osiander, Calvin repeated that the fellowship believers have with God is one of righteousness, not of essence as beloved of the mystics. Believers are close to Him who has always been Head, not just when Incarnate, for he has been head of all things from the beginning, and since in his risen Headship he is exalted above the body that implies a need for the body to look upwards in spiritual mediation or communication. Likewise, against Servetus, Calvin insists that Christ was Son of God well 'before' he became Man and accordingly did not require incarnation to be 'Son' (versus Servetus). In worshipping Christ who is above one is worshipping him in his proper place and as who he is, creator not creature. To be specific, as Calvin spells out at *Institutes* II,14.3:

Until he comes forth as judge of the world Christ will therefore reign, joining us to the Father as the measure of our weakness permits. But, when as partakers in heavenly glory we shall see God as He is, Christ, having discharged the office of the Mediator, will cease to be the ambassador of his Father, and will be satisfied with that glory which he enjoyed before the creation of the world. Then also God shall cease to be the Head of Christ, for Christ's own deity will shine by itself.<sup>5</sup>

Hence the meaning of 'his kingdom shall have no end' is that, even when Christ will stop mediating, once the heavenly state is set up, and so stop being priest, he will still be king, along with the Father, both enjoying the worship of the saints that is no longer mediated through Christ's passing. *En passant* Calvin (at Inst II, xvi, 4) makes it clear that God never hated what he made, as though such hatred had to be reversed by atonement: 'For he hated us for what we were that he had not made.' Our sinfulness

<sup>4</sup> See Paul McPartland, *The Eucharist makes the Church*, 2nd edn., (Eastern Christian Publications, 2006).

is what needed atoning. It is important to hang on to this distinctive of Reformed theology, that God unconditionally loves what and whom he has made, and hates our 'unmaking'.

Tarrying a little longer with Calvin, he had more to say about this by him a year after the final edition of the *Institutes*, in 1560. The Mantuan Stancaro, influential in the Reformed communities in Poland, presented himself as the scourge of the Arians, claiming that to speak of the Son of God as 'mediator' is to subordinate Him to the Father. Calvin replies that this is an over-reaction to Servetus: the Son's mediatorship *does* pertain to his pre-incarnate state, and he is mediator towards the angels and creation (Col 1:15), but that does not affect his essence at all as fully divine. For mediation is not in the first place about doing something that deals with sin, but allowing a gap between Creator and creatures to be bridged. Only in a secondary sense is the Son a 'priest' who must deal with human weakness and sin's consequences: to be 'high priest forever' is meant only in the sense that the Father had always so willed the incarnation, and is distinct from His being mediator. Yet it seems that even the mediatorship can cease, because scripture nowhere says 'mediator for ever'; and what it means to be high priest forever has been explained in the sense of the Father's will. Mediator is more primary to who Christ is than priest is, but even it is not foundational. It is part of a subordination for the sake of a creation which will no longer be required once heavenly glory becomes all that there is.

Part of the issue with an overemphasis on 'in Christ', as in Todd Billings' account of sanctification according to Calvin<sup>5</sup> (or some sort of metaphysical 'ascent' in the case of Julie Canliss)<sup>6</sup> is that if one that does not spell out more precisely what the Genevan might have meant, he ends up looking rather like Osiander, whose position he took great pains to oppose. Furthermore, it makes Christ a functionary, in order to facilitate an elevation in 'our' status. For it all becomes about our being ontologically raised rather than being known and knowing in proportion to the transformation of ourselves, according to a measure or analogy of faith, as Paul cryptically put it in Romans 12:3,6. One might use the motto for the 'participative' soteriology: 'up close and impersonal' for the life with Christ. The metaphor of seeing is important here: the focus is not sharp; even with scripture as one's eye-glasses (once more to borrow from Calvin), the believer cannot see God face to face, yet in Christ there is mediation which pertains to his divine nature's being refracted, and in a sense translated or de-coded and rec-coded through his humanity. Yet

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *participation and the gift*, (OUP, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Calvin's *Ladder*, (Eerdmans, 2010).

a sufficient distance (of a from earth to heaven quality), such a reservation does not seem inappropriate for a faith as *fiducia* or a spirituality *in via*. There is a mediation of that Mediator who is the person of the Son in his divinity, even while it speaks of Christ's atoning agency through his earthly ministry (mediation 2) as priest by his obedience. One should note that Christ in his humanity is not conceived 'instrumentally', say in terms of a *hilasterion*. *Institutes* II.xvi.6 does mention that he gave his life as an *asham* (*satisfactoriam hostiam*), an offering for sin, when the Son of God took upon shame and reproach of our iniquities in order to return to clothe us with purity, as per 2 Corinthians 5:211 and Romans 8:3. However that humanity is never 'allowed' to be wholly passive in this operation. More weight is given to the life of learned obedience as the context of his work of repairing mediation. And the emphasis in his response to Stancaro (who had enjoyed a reputation since 1552 of being a Nestorian of sorts) is on the unified work of the Son, who is distinct from the Father for the sake of the economy. Calvin rejoices that the Church Fathers are right behind him in this. The Son of God is the agent through and through, or more than that is Person, even as he partakes in human nature, and it is his Person who is to be glimpsed in the scriptural recounting, but also in his exalted state.

In Calvin's first reply to Stancaro, we can see that the same applies to the priesthood,

...which Christ could not undertake without entering into the heavenly sanctuary. Wherefore, the apostle, to prove that he is the lawful priest, adduces the testimony: "You are my Son, today I have begotten You" (Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Ps. 2:7), by which he clearly shows no one is equal to or suitable for this office without divinity. The conclusion, then, is certain: if Christ is a priest, it is because he is the only begotten Son of God, and on the other hand, he is not the Son of God without considering his divinity—this divinity is a necessary requisite of the office of priesthood. And so, because Adam was estranged from God by sin, Christ was pre-ordained priest to effect a reconciliation, that through him an approach to God may be opened for the ancients. Hence, he is called a priest forever, not because he was simply taken from among men, but because by the Father's decree he took on human form to atone for sin.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> J. N. Tylanda, "Christ the Mediator: Calvin versus Stancaro," *Calvin Theological Journal* 7 (1973), pp. 5-16, 14; (cf. idem, "The Controversy on Christ the Mediator: Calvin's Second Reply to Stancaro," *Calvin Theological Journal* 8 (1973), pp. 131-57; idem, 'The Calvin-Westphal exchange: the genesis of Calvin's treatises against Westphal', *Calvin Theological Journal* 9 (1974), pp. 182-209.

So it is the decree that gives Christ's priesthood its distinctive sempiternity. He continues:

Finally, unless Christ were designated Son of God in power (Rom. 1:4) he would not be regarded the mediator. Now, if these elements adhere together by an invisible bond, that the Son of God is the mediator, then it is outside of controversy that Christ is the Son of God in respect to both natures, and hence it follows that he is mediator no less by reason of his divinity than by his human nature. Furthermore, no sane man will deny that Christ sits at the Father's right hand, insofar as he is God revealed in the flesh, [340] and this is affirmed of the whole person. But the prophet intimately joins these together (Ps. 110:1), that the Lord who sits at the Father's right is made king and appointed priest over the church. Nor should we omit in this matter the saying of Peter, that the holy prophets once spoke by the spirit of Christ (1 Pet. 1:10), because here it is not only a question of the eternal Word, but of the office of mediator; if he governed the prophets by his spirit when he was not yet clothed.<sup>8</sup>

As Jacob Tylenda observed, Calvin's response appeared in February 1562 as an appendix to his treatise "On the True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper", published versus Heshusius, one of the last of the Protestants to plague him.<sup>9</sup> It is arguably no coincidence that Calvin's teaching on the mediatorship of Christ and his interpretation of the Eucharist are to be found published together.

In an ambitious article Christopher B. Kaiser contends:

In order to stress the importance of the eucharistic ascent, Calvin sometimes stated that the bodily presence of Christ was to be sought only in heaven. Did this polemical stance exclude the presence of the risen Christ with us and for us at the table? Not according to the texts reviewed here. While it would be futile to try to make Calvin appear entirely consistent, especially in his more polemical moods, he did repeatedly affirm the real, bodily presence of Christ in the eucharistic feast.<sup>10</sup>

Kaiser argues that with help from the fathers Calvin came to see Christ in the eucharist as a ladder reaching up to a spiritual heaven, and that meant a secure fixing on the ground. Unfortunately there is little evidence of this adduced from Calvin itself. Instead we read:

<sup>8</sup> Tylenda, "Christ the Mediator", p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Kaiser, 'Climbing Jacob's ladder: John Calvin and the early church on our eucharistic ascent to heaven', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), pp. 247-267, 265.

Although Calvin emphasized the location of Christ's body in heaven, particularly in later polemical contexts, he also believed in the substantial presence of Christ's body in the sacrament itself.

This is misleading, for Christ's presence by activity does not entail a real, local presence; as though Calvin had to compromise with Lutherans on the matter, as Kaiser suggests he was doing.

Actually in the passage that Kaiser quotes from the 1540 edition of the *Institutes* there is no mention of any *overcoming* of distance:

But, if we are lifted up to heaven with our eyes and minds to seek Christ there in the glory of his Kingdom, so under the symbol of bread we shall be fed by his body, [and] under the symbol of wine we shall separately drink his blood, to enjoy him at last in his wholeness. For though he has taken his flesh away from us, and in the body has ascended into heaven, yet he sits at the right hand of the Father – that is, he reigns in the Father's power and majesty and glory. This Kingdom is neither bounded by location in space nor circumscribed by any limits.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1559 edition Calvin then added the words, 'as the symbols invite us to him in his wholeness' (*quemadmodum symbola nos ad eum integrum invitant*; OS 5:364) That is Christ, the one who is ascended bodily but is now to be approached in a spiritual manner, possibly signifying Christ's composite hypostasis.<sup>12</sup>

Kaiser comments that Calvin write this 'in order to stress the fact that the wholeness of Christ can only be found in heaven, not in the physically separate elements on the table.' Indeed, that is the point: although Christ as human is to be located in heaven, there are no spatial co-ordinates in the kingdom where he reigns on earth. Distance is overcome in the kingdom in the sense that there are no spatial dimensions to it. That there is a distance from where his humanity is located in heaven, as a full humanity having spatial dimensions (Inst IV, 17.19), to where believers are on earth, but which reach down via 'his kingdom' (or rule: *regnum*), making distance irrelevant. If that is the case, then to talk of ascent in any literal sense, that Kaiser wants to call 'cosmological' seems strained. There isn't much 'ascent' of believers; rather the word is 'enjoying him'. The 'betweenness' of 'him and us' is not spatial in any sense. He is not 'far away up there', and the lifting up of our minds is a spiritual one.

<sup>11</sup> Inst. 4.17.18 (ed. McNeill, 2:1381).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 3: The Extra' offers a close reading of Calvin's Christology. Stephen Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology*, (Cambridge UP, 2004), remains a valuable guide.

Now what Kaiser gives us in terms of food for thought is useful, not least Calvin's commentary on the Geneva-Zurich accord on the Supper, the *Consensus Tigurinus* of 1549:

'Christ then is absent from us in respect of his body, but, dwelling in us by his Spirit, he raises us to heaven to himself, transfusing into us the vivifying vigor of his flesh, just as the rays of the sun invigorate us by his vital warmth.' (CO 9:72)

In brief, Christ 'raises us up' spiritually and feeds us with the energy of his human flesh. Divinisation allows 'like' to come closer to 'Like'. There is no 'active' participation; there is instead active in-dwelling, transfusing energy into believers. What is important is that union with Christ is a religious, dynamic reality, not a metaphysical one. Climbing to heaven does not mean literally getting higher in the cosmos, or being closer to the source of Being, but it is something that goes on in the heart as a spiritual movement of God. If one is to consider the *Last Admonition to Westphal* (1557), where Calvin states that 'the sacraments are a kind of ladder by which believers may embark upwards to heaven',<sup>13</sup> the metaphorical and spiritual tenor of the discourse should be clear, as should be the sacramental context: this is no mystical elevation. It is clear that the sacraments are 'ladders' by which one finds Christ, but in an earlier passage in the same work:

But if faith must intervene, no man of sense will deny that the same God who helps our infirmity by these aids, also gives faith, which, elevated by proper ladders, may climb to Christ and obtain his grace. And it ought to be beyond controversy, that as it would not be enough for the sun to shine, and send down its rays from the sky, were not eyes previously given us to enjoy its light, so it were in vain for the Lord to give us the light of external signs, if he did not make us capable of discerning them.<sup>14</sup>

So for Calvin, the language of distance and ascent is metaphorical since as he said there are no measurements in the kingdom of God. One is to look up to the Ascended Christ rather than look downwards at the earth for his ubiquitous 'presence'. There is a repeated note in Calvin's theology of the Supper on the Spirit effecting the active presence of Christ where the

<sup>13</sup> *Tracts of John Calvin*, ed H. Beveridge, (T&T Clark, 1849), 2:404: 'sacramenta esse scalarum instar fidelibus, per quas sursum coelos conscendant' (CO 9:213–14).

<sup>14</sup> 'The Consensus Tigurinus: Exposition of the Heads of Agreement', *ibid.*, p. 218.



believers are on earth. The mediator Son takes the priestly achievement of his human career and applies it for now, during the lives of believers and as long as the church militant lasts. The Church looks ‘up’ as Christ in his reigning works ‘down’.

### 3. HEBREWS AND THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

On the face of it, Hebrews teaches (and Thomas Aquinas affirms) that the ‘foreverness’ of Christ’s High Priesthood is an eschatological one, one which stretches way on into the experience of heaven? For on this matter Aquinas comments: ‘Again, he continues a priest forever (Heb 7:4), because the thing of which it is a figure, namely, the priesthood of Christ, remains forever.’<sup>15</sup> That Christ’s priesthood possesses perpetuity is confirmed in his comment on 7:28, Vulgate: *lex enim homines constituit sacerdotes infirmitatem habentes sermo autem iuris iurandi qui post legem est Filium in aeternum perfectum* ‘the Son... is completely perfected evermore, namely, to remain a priest forever.’<sup>16</sup>

And while John Owen on Hebrews 6:20 avoids the subject, being far more interested in Christ as forerunner, by Hebrews 7:28 the phrase ‘made perfect forever’ now suggests to the English Puritan that the perfection achieved by the end of Christ’s life through obedience endures forever. This becomes more clear if one looks at Owen’s more extended comment on Hebrews 7:16-17:

Wherefore the *zoe akatalutos*, the indissoluble life here intended, is the life of Christ himself. Hereunto belonged, or from hence did proceed that *dynamis*, or power, whereby he was made a priest. And both the office itself, and the execution or discharge of it, are here intended. And as to the office itself, this eternal or endless life of Christ is his life as the Son of God. Hereon depends his own mediatory life for ever, and his conferring of eternal life on us, John v. 26, 27. And to be a priest by virtue of, or according unto this power, stands in direct opposition unto the law of a carnal commandment. It must therefore be inquired, how the Lord Christ was made a priest according unto this power. And I say it was, because thereby alone he was rendered meet to discharge that office, wherein God was to redeem his church with his own blood. Acts xx. 28. By ‘power,’ therefore, here, both meetness and ability are intended. And both these the Lord Christ had from his divine nature, and his endless life therein.

Or it may be the life of Christ in his human nature is intended, in opposition unto those priests, who being made so by the law of a carnal commandment,

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, tr. Chrysostom Baur, (St. Augustine’s Press, 2006), p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

did not continue in the discharge of their office by reason of death, as our apostle observes afterwards. But it will be said, that this natural life of Christ, the life of the human nature, was not endless, but had an end put unto it in the dissolution of his soul and body on the cross. I say therefore, this life of Christ was not absolutely the life of the human nature, considered separately from his divine; but it was the life of the person of the Son of God, of Christ as God and man in one person. And so his life was endless.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Owen is happy to say that Christ's priest is forever, but also that the priesthood is a 'life' which the Son of God has lived, even when the human nature died, and goes on living, indefinitely. That is the foundation of any 'priesthood' which in turn confers life on the believer. Owen follows Aquinas, even while deepening his account.

Calvin thinks somewhat differently. For the record, it should be noted that Calvin in his commentary on Hebrews is silent as to whether Christ's *priesthood* was forever. However the idea is that ascended Christ will give believers a 'hand-up', as it were, but that thereafter there will be no more 'mediation' by him.

On Hebrews 6:20 Calvin wrote:

that all the external and ancient figures and shadows were to be passed over, in order that faith might be fixed on Christ alone. And carefully ought this reasoning to be observed, — that as Christ has entered into heaven, so faith ought to be directed there also: for we are hence taught that faith should look nowhere else. And doubtless it is in vain for man to seek God in his own majesty, for it is too far removed from them; but Christ stretches forth his hand to us, that he may lead us to heaven.<sup>18</sup>

For, on Hebrews 7:25 Calvin commented:

It belongs to a priest to intercede for the people, that they may obtain favor with God. This is what Christ is ever doing, for it was for this purpose that he rose again from the dead. Then of right, for his continual intercession, he claims for himself the office of the priesthood.<sup>19</sup>

Christ's priesthood continues until the end of the world, but not beyond. It is not 'forever'. For 'after' the resurrection day, all believers will see God directly.

While on Hebrews 7:27, in turn:

<sup>17</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1684), (Banner of Truth 1982), Vol. 5, pp. 542-43.

<sup>18</sup> <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom44/calcom44.xii.v.html> ad loc.

<sup>19</sup> <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom44/calcom44.xiii.v.html> ad loc.

“for Christ was made a priest, being not of the common order of men, but the Son of God, subject to no defect, but adorned and endowed with the highest perfection.” He again reminds us, that the *oath* was posterior to the law, in order to show that God, being not satisfied with the priesthood of the law, designed to constitute a better priesthood...It is his sacrifice which is sufficient *to the end of the world*.<sup>20</sup> (my italics.)

According to Calvin, Christ has ascended to do this work of mediation, but not for ever, only *to the end of the world*. For Christ’s human high priesthood (for sins past and future) gives way to the cosmic mediation by the Word, although, as we have already seen, that too will be withdrawn.

Calvin observes how Christ’s office as Priest means he is one who works within the souls of believers.

Thus Christ, in his human nature, is to be considered as our priest, who expiated our sins by the one sacrifice of his death, put away all our transgressions by his obedience, provided a perfect righteousness for us, and now intercedes for us, that we may have access to God. He is to be considered as a repairer, who, by the agency of his Spirit, reforms whatever is vicious in us, that we may cease to live to the word, and the flesh, and God himself may live in us.<sup>21</sup>

It would seem that the Priesthood of Christ for Calvin is something for the souls of believers in this world and this life.

The constructive point of all this is that the Son of God has of course a key role in the economy and works even now as the Great High Priest, but that his proper and eternal place is with God the Father and the Spirit. As the one who saves and yet is also the proper agent of creation and conservation, he is to receive especial thanks. And yet, beyond thanks there is awe as befits an eternal king who deserves worship as such. And Christ is to be worshipped as being in his proper place, beyond the realm of being a priest for us, for doing something for us. His kingly majesty invites self-surrender and adoration. This is the religious feeling that Calvin would want inculcated. This is why his main work is called *Institute(s) of the Christian Religion*. The Church is called to worship Christ as he is (king), not just for what he has done for us (priest).

#### 4. THE SUBJECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE OBJECTIVE ‘GIVEN’

Many modern Church theologians can relate to the ‘religious-practice’ matrix for theology. As Brian Gerrish has observed, Schleiermacher was

<sup>20</sup> <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom44/calcom44.xii.v.html> ad loc

<sup>21</sup> ‘The Consensus Tigurinus: the Heads of Agreement’, *ibid.*, p. 201.

self-consciously one with Calvin in feeling the need to give an account of theology that was not one of shuffling concepts across some metaphysical board.<sup>22</sup> His too was theology as instruction in religion. Given his views on the inexpressibility of religious feeling, Schleiermacher thus understands articulate worship as, at best, an approximation to the feelings of the participants. The language of worship, whether in poetry or prose, can never fully contain the affections of the worshipers, which will overflow in ideal circumstances from each worshiper to the others.<sup>23</sup> Van der Wilt defends Schleiermacher for the honest down to earth quality of the religion where God can speak through the human emotions expressed, rather than over against them (as per Barth). ‘Schleiermacher’s conviction that specific acts of worship reflect and continue the mission and ministry of Christ is an integral extension of his view that worship is “incarnational”...’.<sup>24</sup> On this account, Christ is the inspiration for but not the object of worship. It is largely about love and the communication of feelings. Hence note of receiving instruction in Calvin (and possibly implicit in Schleiermacher elsewhere) as to the proper method and right content of worship seems missing in this account.

The side of Schleiermacher that Van der Wilt plays up, a wanting to run with the best of human aspiration towards God in doing theology is not all that far away from the heart of James K. Smith’s *Desiring the kingdom*<sup>25</sup>, which is Romantic, possibly in the best sense of the Neo-Calvinist tradition. My sense is that there is a desire to be integrative in post-neo-Calvinist theologies of culture, which want to use generic human desire as a motor to drive the spiritual life: how much happier Christianity is when it’s what each of us wants deep down. However is that not doggedly anthropocentric?

Now there is something of this emphasis on subjectivity going on in the fact that the Reformed tradition valued the Psalms for what they could do for the Church. In early modern Reformed controversies, Moses Amyraut insisted that a Church that read the Psalms together, stayed together. Yet the Reformed Church could not simply allow the Psalms to have a liturgical purpose without using them as a resource for theology, for beginning and ending with *God*, and this from the time of Bucer and Calvin onwards. One does not find much to argue about in the sense of

<sup>22</sup> Brian Gerrish, *Continuing the Reformation: Essays on Modern Religious Thought*, (Univ of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 230.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Van der Wilt, ‘“Why worship?”: Schleiermacher speaks to the question’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): pp. 286-307, 290.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 297.

<sup>25</sup> James K. Smith, *Desiring the kingdom : worship, worldview, and cultural formation*, (Baker Academic, 2009).

interpretations of the Psalms running along confessional lines. Of course there are different views of what the Kingdom is, and how Jewish the Messiah figure was. Sujin Pak has observed some of this<sup>26</sup>, as Calvin was eventually accused of ‘Judaizing’ by the Lutheran Hunnius.<sup>27</sup> Yet Calvin was not alone in finding doctrine in the Psalter. Theological and polemical quarrying of the Psalms began with Martin Bucer, in contrast to Bugenhagen’s non-theological interpretation. The hallmark of the interpretation of the Psalms by the ‘Rhenish School’, with which Bucer was associated,<sup>28</sup> was that of the kingdom as a public, visible entity, gradually making itself known as God guided history. Hence Robert Bellarmine SJ’s commentary on the Psalms, which is completely non-controversial, rarely given to doctrinal expositions, and which speaks of Christ as the reality in which believers are to find spiritual protection, is in that way closer to Bugenhagen’s.

Yet the Bernese Reformer Wolfgang Musculus’ approach combines the best of these, as can be seen in his comment on Psalm 45:4&5, where a large heading intrudes into the commentary, namely: *De Christo Rege Populi Dei*. This is written as though the reader should be aware that the following section doubles as both commentary and theological ‘common place’ or excursus.

The kingdom of Christ is not of this world, that is, it is not shaped to the form of earthly kingdoms, for it is not of the earth but of heaven, not carnal but spiritual, not labile, but constant and firm. The sword that Christ bears is a sword from his mouth. That is the almighty word, to beat down enemies, to which he speaks in his wrath. And this kind is with us, armed with his heavenly and all-powerful sword until the end of the world. What then can the enemy power of Satan do, with all his satellites: sin, the world and death? Although the life with Christ who is ‘our’ life is hidden, still the spiritual eye can see this kingdom of Christ having advanced.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Sujin Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin: Sixteenth-Century Debates over the Messianic Psalms*, (Oxford U.P., 2009).

<sup>27</sup> See David Puckett. *John Calvin’s Exegesis of the Old Testament*, (WJK Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Gerald Hobbs, ‘How Firm a Foundation: Martin Bucer’s Historical Exegesis of the Psalms’, *Church History* 53 (1984), pp. 477-91. Bernard Roussel, ‘De Strasbourg à Bâle et Zurich: une école rhénane d’exégèse (ca 1525-ca 1540),’ *Revue D’Histoire Et de Philosophie Religieuses* 68 (1988), pp. 19-39.

<sup>29</sup> W. Musculus, *In Sacrosanctum Davidis Psalterium Commentarii*, Basel: Hervagius, 1551, ad loc.: For a sample translation (of his commentary on Psalm 15 see ‘Wolfgang Musculus, Scholia. “Commentary on Psalm 15 (1551)” translated by Todd M. Rester & Jordan Ballor, *Journal of Markets & Morality* 11 (2008), pp. 349-460.

One can hear the echo of Luther's *Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott* (Psalm 46). Yet Musculus adds here that David declared to Christ that he (Christ) is a king who reigns in the middle of his enemies, even in their hearts (*in corda inimicorum regis*), which is an interesting conception of providence. The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of the spirit whose administration is spiritual and which is located firstly in the minds of the pious who are defended by Christ. (*Est enim regnum Christi, regnum spiritus, cuius administratio spiritalis est, & in animis piorum sita, qui a Christo defenduntur.*) Yet also in the hearts of the impious. The idea seems to be that of turning one's enemies into heart-felt friends and worshippers can be done by the Word of truth. Desire is not merely affirmed, it is challenged and channelled and aimed towards Christ the king.

There is indeed 'subjectivity' in that Christ's perfect soul is foreshadowed by that of the Psalmist.<sup>30</sup> This really means the narrated life of the Psalmist, one which foretells the story of Jesus Christ; from this we can move 'up' in spiritual, non-spatial terms to contemplate God himself. Behind and beyond the mediating, priestly offering of a life there is the Son who is King above being Priest. Reformed theology acknowledges the importance of the Logos who can both capture the citadel of an individual heart even while running the universe in his *asarkos* state. 'Jesus is my Lord' is no less an affirmation of value than 'Jesus is Lord'.

## 5. CONCLUSION: CHRISTOCENTRIC DISCIPLINE IN WORSHIP

Recently the conversation has turned to 'Christ with us, among us and we in Him'. However the concept of 'participation' rather puts the spotlight on the Church and can be impassive in operation, lending itself to a metaphysical objectivity and security that might be a false one. Is our faith in Christ or is our faith in our being in Christ? There is a sort of resting in a security, there is a 'givenness' of a habitual grace in the ether, rather than a calling to a vocation of person and a being ruled by his Lordship in the present. Surely here needs to be all these three in play. We may like what 'participation' means with its emphasis on the communal; in the church, one is in Christ, who in turn is in the Father, like a set of Russian dolls. Yet ironically the metaphysical mysticism might just de-personalise and lead to abstraction. If 'our' deification becomes a matter of faith, that does sound at one level encouraging, but it also shifts ecclesiology too much into the centre. Much better, I submit, to view Christ as far off ahead, yet coming from the future and coming with power towards his church: the called-for '*sursum corda*' allows the church to glimpse him, just as one

<sup>30</sup> As with Athanasius, *Ad Marcellinum*, §14.

sees a further horizon from a high vantage point. Like the Groom of the Song of Songs he goes away, in order to come close spontaneously.

Along with the popular theme of 'participation' goes a theology of 'presence', of divine presence, of being with, of being there. This is fine as far as it goes. It accords well with theologies of pilgrimage, of sojourning, of being on the road together. People complain about the early Barth's dialectical theology as being 'contrary', not affirming what needs affirmed in already neo-Gnostic times. Why unsettle us more? Well, first, because the idea of shaking up the categories of creation is to realise that our notion of God can be tied tightly to no part of creation. The danger then is one of making God up according to our liberal desires, of reading Christ as we might prefer, of worshipping 'Jesus the revolutionary'. Second, in the shaking and re-purposing of creation it is still good creation that is the object. Its boundaries are stretched, yet they are strengthened by the exercise, even as they are called to serve God's ultimate purposes.

There is also a tendency to want to bring what believers or humans have to the table, as it were, as part of what God is doing in the 'return' of his own movement of grace to himself, according to a Neoplatonic. In a reaction against a so-called 'Zwinglian', ice-cold 'memorialism' of Baptists and other Evangelicals, there has been an emphasis in some recent books on Worship on our being raised together with Christ, caught up in a movement of God's energies, so that Christ and his body ('us') occupy the same space, at the same level. One might take for instance John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the reality of God*.<sup>31</sup> This idea of presence seems to enable worship as that which channels our resources of feeling into some self-offering enveloped by 'divine presence', rather than see God the Son as the one who is worthy of worship, and whose adoration is the point of Christian worship. Then there are the practical approaches to worship that would seek to make theology more about faith in terms of disposition, and less about reason and argument.<sup>32</sup> Yet again by dividing affect and mind we might the more easily be conquered. It takes a mind to recognise the continuous otherness of God and perceive him in relationship with 'us'.

Now, granted, a liturgical theology that embraces a warm contemplation is to be appreciated. For it values God for who he is, in the way that the Psalms have parts where there are hymns of praise, elevating God beyond our thinking and its value-systems. And yet there needs to

<sup>31</sup> John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the reality of God: an evangelical theology of real presence*, (IVP Academic, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community*, (IVP, 2006).

be the discipline to our imagined negative theology that the Scriptures provide: actually if contemplation focuses too much on the *via negativa* then the danger is one of filling the gaps of ignorance with enthusiastic and imaginative discourse, rather than with sober adoration as we just manage to glimpse the form of God. As is often mentioned, Calvin (and I would extend this to the Reformed tradition at its best) was happier when observing who and what God is towards creation and humanity, in his economy. 'Who God is in himself' can of course be extrapolated from that to a certain degree, but perhaps we do better to think that contemplation is something better left to the world to come, with only glimpses for now. Hence our *doctrine* of God will remain largely partial, as Christians for now find their place in the rightful hierarchy, under the great Mediator-Priest.