

Book Review by Christopher Button

Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom and the Christian Act

Oliver Davies, 2013, Oxford University Press

This book has been published as part of a series on Transformation Theology, a relative recent innovation that seeks to provide a cross-over point between systematic and practical theology. It has been written in three sections starting with an attempt to establish the essential reorientation of theology towards being grounded in a Christology that finds its locus in the ascended and glorified Christ. It then takes this and applies it to the life of the Church and how we should understand our faith and praxis in light of this reorientation before finishing with a three-fold discussion of logic, philosophy and politics. The clear structure enables the sometimes dense arguments to be more readily accessed without disrupting the otherwise clear prose.

Davies starts by arguing that, especially with the advent of modern cosmological science, the importance of the doctrine of the ascension has been lost to us. In short, where our predecessors in the Early and Medieval Church understood heaven to be a part of the created order even if at the pinnacle of that universe, we have now often come to think of heaven as being somehow 'outside' of creation. This prompts the question of 'where is Christ?' This is focused around the continual although strangely changed physical incarnation of God in Christ.

The argument proceeds to be made that if we are to understand Christ as truly still part of the space-time universe and yet also in heaven then that requires a re-think of the 'where' question. Davies contends that this is not merely a technical point of doctrine but is rather a place where from the way we do practical theology must be grounded. If Christ is truly in heaven and yet still in the world then he is still accessible and is so now truly universal. The hiddenness of God has moved from the incarnation to the act of the Church in the world.

At times I feel that Davies does not push the point as far as I would wish to from this position. Early in the introduction Davies suggests that Transformation Theology provides a way for better ecumenicalism focused on the Christian Act that can offer a system of theology that allows The Salvation Army to express the importance of 'Christ in us' in the world. Davies at times holds back from the ultimate expression of

this Transformation Theology where the Christian Act becomes the primary source of divine revelation into the world. A deeper integration of Temple Theology at this point might help to bridge this gap.

Overall I am deeply indebted to Oliver Davies for the work he has done over the years putting together and building the Transformation Theology movement for the challenge it has offered to Christian doctrine and to the grounding it can provide for a Christological based practical theology of love in action.