



## Review

**Tércio Bretanha Junker, *Prophetic Liturgy: Toward a Transforming Christian Praxis* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2014), pp. 179, ISBN 978-1620329566. £13.00**

Junker's book has a very simple premise: the church's sacramental praxis forms a community committed to justice for all. Writing as a South American Methodist deeply indebted to the liberation theologies his continent produced, Junker is also able to draw on a rich history of ecumenical engagement and observation – an ecumenism reflected in the wide variety of theological sources that make their way into this book. Junker is plain-speaking and forceful – one might even say prophetic – in describing what is so obvious to him but may strike some as very strange: the church that is committed to engaging the sacraments and receiving the grace they convey must engage the world as itself a conveyer of grace.

If one had any doubts about what Junker meant by 'prophetic' in his title, those doubts are dispelled in the first chapter. Within, Junker engages Heschel among others to outline a paradigm of prophetic praxis begun in ancient Israel and now inherited by the Christian Church. Those familiar with liberationist strands of theological reflection will not be surprised by the content. As he marches through a litany of saints both old and new it becomes increasingly obvious to the reader that loving one's neighbour cannot exclude social and economic concerns. What is less obvious is how the sacraments are meant to facilitate such love.

This becomes the concern of the second chapter. Quickly defining and explaining what a sacrament is, he proceeds to delineate the three prophetic orientations to which these sacraments hold: unity, reconciliation, and transformation (p. 38). These three orientations are worked out explicitly as related to baptism and the Eucharist, engaging Chauvet, Cavanaugh, and Hellwig along the way. Junker seems to imply that these are not the extent of the sacraments – a fork he received from his mother can serve as a sacrament too – so one may

do well to take the author at his word that these are only illustrations; but it is striking that none of the other rituals various traditions have historically hailed (or not) as sacraments are ever explicitly mentioned.

Unity, reconciliation, and transformation become part of a larger, Trinitarian paradigm in Chapter Three. Sacrament becomes an important link to tie the Trinity's activity intimately to the world. This becomes even more apparent in the fourth chapter with its discussion on gift, continuing in the final chapter. As Junker works out what he now calls a 'matrix of total sacramental rituality', gift means to receive and return with a difference. Heavily influenced by postmodern thinkers on this subject, Junker argues that in Christ the gift of grace is given and Christ is received in the sacrament. This gift is then returned to God in a different form: prophetic discipleship. That discipleship takes the form of uniting and reconciling those the world has split apart by working to transform the oppressive structures and practices that surround the community that is itself being transformed by the gift God is giving. The cyclical nature of sacrament which gives rise to its repetition maintains the church's call and commitment to its prophetic calling. Imperative to this matrix taking hold, however, are personal engagement, a community that bodies forth justice and peace, attentiveness to the ways in which the church's language actually is transforming its members, and an awareness that the liturgy is a part of the church's wider mission that does not at once turn the liturgy into means towards the larger end.

Overall, this book is well worth reading. While spelling and grammar could have used another editorial pass, it is not so distracting that one loses a sense of the whole. What is surprising is the forceful 'is'-ness with which Junker describes this account of sacrament and liturgy. It is as if liturgy simply does this by virtue of being liturgy. The dogged insistence that liturgy should not be other than this description is indeed welcome. Too often, of course, this is not what liturgy and sacrament do at all. Junker acknowledges that these have been too frequently 'romanticised' but does not offer an explanation for how to reclaim the sacraments from such distortions of their purpose. What is the liturgist meant to make of this absence? For those who carry out liturgies in churches that have heretofore romanticised the sacraments, a quick change to the blunt is-ness of Junker's description

could prove pastorally unwise. Junker's own thoughts on how to make this transition would have been a welcome addition to an otherwise thoughtful book.

Yet for a Scotland wrestling with the debates and results of the Referendum, Junker's book may be timely. As the national debate swirls around whether or not Scotland is more just as part of the United Kingdom or separated there from, and as work begins following the vote to reconcile both parties within Scotland and between Scotland and England, Junker suggests that the resources are there for the church to make a significant contribution. If the church can learn to body forth the prophetic calls of its sacraments – simultaneously justice for all and reconciliation to all – perhaps Scotland's future can be brighter no matter the way the vote goes.

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