

**CHRISTIAN D. KETTLER, *READING RAY S. ANDERSON*
(Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010, 178 pp.)**

Review by Adam Nigh
PhD Candidate
University of Aberdeen
adamnigh@abdn.ac.uk

In *Reading Ray Anderson*, Christian Kettler offers an introduction to Anderson's work that intends to encourage further reading of this "maverick theologian." Anderson, a one-time farmer turned pastor and theologian, earned his doctorate in theology at the University of Edinburgh under T. F. Torrance and taught systematic and practical theology at Fuller Seminary from 1976 to 2006, authoring twenty-seven books in that time. With Anderson's recent passing in 2009, Kettler now seeks to bring a wider audience to his work, a theology forged in and addressed to the concerns of concrete ministry, bearing what Donald MacKinnon described as a "nervous, restless quality" with significant influence from Barth, Bonhoeffer, Torrance, and Zizioulas.

The book is divided into two sections of three chapters each. The first section, "On Theology as Ministry," is meant to focus more on the theology, while the second section, "On Ministry as Theology," is meant to focus more on ministry, though the two cannot be fully separated in Anderson's thought, justifying a bit of overlap between the two. Each chapter ends with a real-life case study and a set of questions intended to help prompt reflection and connect the concepts dealt with in the chapter to the concerns of practical ministry.

Chapter 1, titled "Exploration Into God: The Doctrine of God and God's Ministry," opens the first section. The focus here is that knowledge of God is not something that ought to be sought in the realm of abstract transcendence (*omnis*) but in God's own ministry in human history fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We can make an exploration into God on the basis of the ministry of Jesus Christ, who is "literally the exegesis of the soul of God" (p. 8). There we find that love is

the very logic of God, a love that refuses to keep a safe distance from the pain and confusion of human estrangement but acknowledges the tragic element of our existence and resists excusing God for it, requiring a "doctrine of ambiguity" (p. 13). Our knowledge of God is possible because he has lovingly bound his existence up with ours. God's transcendence is thereby relocated, not to be found in his distance from us but in the historical humanity of Jesus Christ, what Anderson calls God's "historical transcendence" (p. 18).

The second chapter, titled "On Being Human: Theological Anthropology and the Humanity of God," continues exploring the reality that since God has become human, theology and anthropology are inseparable. On the anthropological side, we must attend to Christ crucified to understand humanity. There we find humanity united with all other creatures through its participation in the sixth day but differentiated from them in the seventh day, which is not merely a continuation of the sixth but is determined from beyond. Thus we are not determined by our creatureliness but by the Word of God, who, existing as a trinity of persons unified in differentiation, makes us in his image as cohumanity, differentiated persons in communion. Integral to the differentiation of cohumanity is gender distinction so that "gender identity reflects the complementarity in God's own being as the Trinity" (p. 43).

This leads to a discussion of Anderson's views on discrimination as an alternative to the dichotomy between determinism and free will: discrimination is decision made in response so that it is neither predetermined nor made in autonomous freedom. This view recognizes that we cannot know God's will ahead of time but only at the end. In the meantime, God's command does not determine specific choices for us but creates limits within which we discriminate between different possibilities. These insights are then developed in discussions of marriage, family, and death.

Chapter 3 is titled "Jesus Christ, Divine Reconciliation, and the Healing of Persons: The Reconciliation by 'The Little Man on the Cross.'" The focus here is on healing, both of persons and the relationships that distinguish them as persons. It is, of course, Jesus Christ, "the little man on the cross" (the meaning of this phrase is never made satisfyingly clear, p. 59), who heals us by being vicariously healed for us, taking on our disease and infirmity and healing it in himself. But in doing so, Anderson insists, Christ's healing reaches us at the core of our existence, including our feelings; healing our feelings means, ironically, an

ontological healing at the level of our being since “feelings *are* the self” (p. 66). Anderson understands the biblical episodes of exorcism as related to this kind of holistic healing, casting out not just demons but also all that is inhuman and establishing the truly human. Therefore, inasmuch as they relate to personal healing, salvation and faith are not merely religious matters but matters of the self as well, of personal trust and love learned in the concrete realities and relationships of life despite adversity and even disaster.

Anderson points to Judas as a case study for the relationship between Christ’s healing faith and obedience, and our faithlessness and disobedience, arguing that “when our love has been destroyed and our faith in prayer exhausted, as it was for Judas, then our only hope is in the love and faith of Jesus. He does not come because we have prayed rightly or loved perfectly; but he comes into our prayerless night and loveless days to become, once again, God’s answer and a focus for our faith” (pp. 84–85); here we undoubtedly have an Anderson “greatest hit”. This discussion leads (with a rather jarring lack of transition) to a concluding discussion on the family as the proper context for spiritual formation.

Chapter 4, “Ministry as Real Presence: A Sacramental and Relational Reality,” begins the second section of the book, shifting the primary focus from theology to ministry. The terms *sacrament*, *sacramental*, *liturgy*, and *liturgical* receive much use and consideration in their place in community in ways seen to be spiritual but not necessarily religious, a distinction made with less clarity than might be desired. It is claimed here both that “the incarnate Jesus is the liturgist” and that the church’s acts of liturgy are “not just acts remembering or in honor of Jesus, but acts of his real presence” (97), though Kettler insists that Anderson is not guilty of dissolving the identity and activity of Christ into the identity and activity of the church. Anderson argues that nonbelievers should be admitted to the Lord’s Table, suggesting that belonging is the original condition of our being so that we ought to welcome anyone into our liturgical fellowship and allow belief to take form within that belonging in which Christ’s real presence is experienced.

Anderson applies this notion of real presence to hermeneutics as well, holding to the risen Christ as the present and active criterion for hermeneutics, which necessarily issues forth in an “eschatology of humility” (p. 111) since Christ alone can establish the proper reading of Scripture and will when he comes. In the present, it is the Spirit that mediates Christ’s real presence to us. The

incarnation, the ministry of Christ as an obedient human filled with the Holy Spirit, has made the Spirit accustomed to our humanity, even “housebroken” (p. 114). All subsequent ministry is possible only on this basis through the same Spirit.

In chapter 5, “Ministry and Mission: Community as Kenotic and Ek-static,” Kettler makes Anderson’s case that evangelism and mission should not take place on the assumption that those we go to may belong to our community only on the condition of their belief; but instead, the church must live, as Christ did, in and with the world, enacting kenotic love to others on the presupposition of their belonging. Anderson focuses on the “ek-static” nature of the church, rooted in Christ, who “stands out” in his incarnated Sonship in prayer to the Father (p. 131). This is related to Anderson’s notion of “Christopraxis,” in which the church’s ministry and mission participate in the ongoing work of Jesus Christ, rather than its praxis being practical application of theoretical formulas.

Ministry and mission are inseparable, each needs the other, but there is a priority of mission to ministry such that it is the mission of the Holy Spirit that calls the church and its ministry (though, again, this is Christ’s own ministry) into being. In a related way, incarnational theology needs empowering Pentecostal experience and vice versa; the latter without the former leads to excitement with no direction, while the former without the latter leads to dead, insular churches. Moreover, ministry needs an awareness of God’s activity and responsibility so that ministers avoid misconstruing their responsibility as that of doing God’s job, rather than serving God in God’s work.

The final chapter is titled “Ministry as the Future of Christ Coming Into the Present: Eschatology — Toward the Church of the Final Century.” Kettler discusses death and eschatology, focusing on Anderson’s insight that the church should not be oriented to the ideal of the earliest church but to the eschatological Spirit of the future, the church as it will be at the final hour. In this light, questions of heaven and hell should not be dealt with under either the determinism of God’s sovereignty (Calvinism) or that of human decision (Arminianism), but through the revelation that Jesus Christ’s assumption of our humanity and conquering of our death removes death as the final determination of our lives. This is not, Kettler insists, universalism, but it puts the ultimate determination in Jesus Christ as the elect one who in coming all the way to us in his incarnation has gone to hell for us. Anderson addresses the question of the afterlife of those who commit

suicide through the same concerns. The peace and hope such a focus on Christ's assumption of our curse and conquering of our death brings forth allows Anderson to see death as a season of hope rather than of struggle and to minister to the dying in that light, respecting the "penultimate as well as the ultimate" (p. 164).

Kettler has served both the church and the scholarly theological community by calling greater attention to Anderson's provocative, sometimes frustrating, but more often soul-nourishing thought. The pervasive focus on Christ's real humanity, real presence, and the difference these make for real human lives has, as Kettler frequently proclaims, "profound implications" for Christian ministry. The case studies and questions to ponder at the end of each chapter, though sometimes difficult to connect neatly to the material, strengthen the emphasis on the concrete and pastoral. Pastors and those preparing for ministry will be especially served by the greater awareness of Anderson they will gain through this book.

Though the book contains such compelling theological insight and is also quite well researched, its organization is rather wanting. The material often moves jarringly from one topic to another with fairly awkward transitions, at times doubling back to earlier topics and repeating quotations, indicating the need for a stronger conceptual outline. Perhaps most lamentable is the absence of a conclusion to the book, a missed opportunity to bring the rather tangled lines of thought together into a final condensed and clear statement of the dominant insights and relevance of Anderson's thought. However, Kettler's intention of offering a "Ray-Lite," a collection of Anderson's "greatest hits" to entice the reader on to further study of Anderson's thought, has certainly been achieved.