

11-1-1994

On the Highest Good

Douglas Karel Harink

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Harink, Douglas Karel (1994) "On the Highest Good," *Consensus*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 2 , Article 19.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol20/iss2/19>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Wright does refer once to the Holocaust, acknowledging its impact on contemporary scholarship, without, however, using the word nor acknowledging Christian culpability over 1500 years. Instead, the Holocaust was "a moment of great and tragic need", and the church allowed its misconceptions of Judaism "to hull it into passivity". In the end, he dismisses Christian soul-searching as a temporary, if necessary, "reaction". "Christian scholarship is in the middle of a long-drawn-out process of repentance for having cherished false views about Judaism... How long it will be before things settle down again it is difficult to say... But the historical task cannot be accomplished by the back-projection of modern guilt feelings" (p. 148).

If Wright's project can be used as a warning of the consequences of doing business as usual in the church's theological enterprise, it deserves a close reading. But if it is just one more cushion for Christian complacency, then Fortress Press, which has done so much for Christian-Jewish dialogue in the past, has here made a serious mistake.

Glen H. Nelson
St. Ansgar Lutheran Church
North York, Ontario

On the Highest Good

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Translated and Annotated with a Scholarly Postscript by H. Victor Froese

Schleiermacher: Studies-and-Translations, Volume 10

Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992

iv + 149pp

With this volume The Edwin Mellen Press continues its commitment to make the works of Schleiermacher available in English translation. The translations are based on the new *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* being published by Walter de Gruyter of Berlin. Edwin Mellen is to be commended for taking up this long-overdue project, which will prove a benefit to all English-speaking Schleiermacher scholars, whether they read the original German or not. This is especially the case because of the annotations and introductions or postscripts which accompany the translations. The present volume, translated by H. Victor Froese, not only provides us with a very readable English rendering of a difficult German text, but also with a valuable 75-page postscript by the translator.

Schleiermacher's early essay (1789), *On the Highest Good*, was never published in his lifetime, and in the large scheme of his theological works is

not of major significance. It does however give us an insight into the early stages of Schleiermacher's academic career (it was written during his final year as a student at Halle University). As Froese argues in his "Postscript", Schleiermacher "... wrote *On the Highest Good* in the highly charged atmosphere created by Kant's critical philosophy, on the one hand, and by the reactionary scholasticism of [Johann August] Eberhard [1739-1809], on the other" (p. 63). His aim in writing the essay is to clarify the meaning of "the highest good" in relation to the discussions of these two major philosophers of his time. In particular he argues that the concept of happiness should have no place in the definition of the highest good if one is to "safeguard the objectivity of rational ethics", as Froese puts it (p. 86. Cf. also Schleiermacher's own definition on p. 12). Schleiermacher draws heavily on the insights of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in the development of his argument, and is somewhat more critical of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The essay is a work of serious philosophical ethics which not only makes heavy demands on the reader, but also shows the intellectual sophistication of a relatively young Schleiermacher (about 20 years of age).

Froese incorporates into his translation the many valuable notations made by the German editor, Günter Meckenstock, who has included numerous quotations from Kant's works that are relevant to Schleiermacher's text. This was a wise decision by the translator and/or publisher. Froese's translation is followed by his own scholarly and insightful "Postscript", which goes a long way toward making Schleiermacher's essay accessible to contemporary English readers. He provides us in "Preliminary Considerations" with a discussion of the historical philosophical context of the essay and an overview of previous scholarship on it. The thorough "Analysis" of the essay which follows aims not only to clarify the flow of Schleiermacher's argument, but also to show where and how he is indebted to and differs from his two major mentors, Kant and Eberhard. Here Froese is to be congratulated for his masterful grasp of the background to the issues and philosophers alike. The final section of the "Postscript" outlines briefly the relation of this essay to other of Schleiermacher's early works (to 1803) and to his later ethical writings. As Froese points out, even late in his life Schleiermacher returned to a consideration of the same theme, though with modified perspective.

Clearly this is a book for specialists in Schleiermacher studies or scholars interested in the early reception of Kantian ethics. It will have little appeal beyond these groups and, frankly, for busy pastors and lay people, even the academically inclined, it is hardly likely to make it onto the "must read" list. It is, nonetheless, a work of necessary scholarship that Froese has given us, for which we are grateful. All graduate level theological libraries will want this work added to their growing collections of Schleiermacher works in translation.

Douglas K. Harink
The King's University College,
Edmonton, Alberta

A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology

Clark M. Williamson

Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993

344 pp. \$28.98

This book attempts to reveal the anti-Jewish elements of Christian theology, and to reconstruct an alternative theology that corrects these prejudices. In his opening chapter, Williamson traces a direct line back from modern anti-Semitism to the anti-Jewish bias that arose within Christianity from its earliest days. This Christian hostility toward Judaism was the result of conflicts between Jews and Gentiles within the early church, and also stemmed from rivalry between the Jesus-movement and the mainstream synagogue establishment. This unresolved conflict divided a common religious heritage that should have been united in witness and purpose and tainted nearly every expression of the Christian faith from the development of its scriptures to the interpretation of those same scriptures, and the articulation of its major doctrines. As Christianity grew in popular support and came to control a monopoly on the state and social apparatus, Christian theology adopted a triumphant attitude and a repressive policy toward the continuing Jewish tradition. The church began to see itself as the new Israel, the benefactor of a new covenant that superseded in quality and effect the old covenant between the God of Israel and the Israel of God. This supersessionist attitude underpins most Christian theology, and has served as the legitimizing doctrine behind much of the social repression and official discrimination of Jews and the Jewish faith wherever the Christian faith has been the dominant religion. The culmination of this history of supersessionism and theological arrogance was the European Holocaust (*Shoah*) of 1933-1945.