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Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Schelling

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ideas which wastes its passions on past foes and past combats. Its world is insular and marginalized, and its battles are joined in a narrow ecclesiastical milieu far from the raging questions that torment humanity today. No doubt the so-called existential questions are addressed throughout history, but for Gerstner there seems to be a confusion between timeless issues and timeless jargon. One wonders whether Gerstner spends more time defending a theological system, with its corresponding rhetoric and rationale, than he does in proclaiming the radical scandal of the gospel to which he is committed. My own partisanship finds Neo-Orthodox agapaism more radically Biblical than Gerstner's Anselmian straitjacket which makes Biblical love the prisoner of feudal notions of justice divine and human.

Beyond this theological assessment must be made an historical one, and that must be a most telling critique. Jonathon Edwards does not shine through in this book with all his splendor. The greatest of New England's Puritan thinkers, the bridge between orthodoxy and Pietism, remains disembodied in this work. He is used by Gerstner to buttress Gerstner's own agenda. Undue space is given to analysis (i.e., of medieval thought, Augustine and Luther) that adds little or nothing to Edwards' thought. Theology is living; it has flesh and blood. Edwards is an overwhelming manifestation of that in his life and in his major works and polemics. It is to be profoundly hoped that Gerstner's planned exhaustive treatment will allow Edwards to live and speak out of his own setting and not out of the apologetic needs of the author.

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Quest for a Philosophical Jesus

Vincent A. McCarthy

Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986, n.p.

From the Apologists of the second century until today philosophers have attempted to prove the truth of Christianity and to show that it is acceptable to reason. Most of such attempts have been viewed with suspicion, if not hostility, by the Church. Vincent McCarthy examines the philosophical defenses of Christianity by four outstanding philosophers: Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Schelling. He argues that these eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers have clarified the issues that still face the philosophy of religion.

When these four appeared the Enlightenment was firmly in control of the intellectual scene. Christianity, the Church, the Bible and even Jesus had been cast aside as superstitious, irrational, dogmatically authoritarian

and a threat to rational living. Philosophers affirmed that Christianity and other historical religions must be replaced by the universal religion of reason (Deism). Each of these four philosophers swam against this intellectual stream and argued that Christianity in general, and Jesus in particular, were still worthy of rational acceptance.

The four took different routes to restore Christianity. Rousseau and Kant used moral reason to demonstrate that Jesus was a moral teacher worthy of being followed. Hegel and Schelling found Christological doctrines to be highly significant when philosophically interpreted.

The title of the book parallels Albert Schweitzer's famous title because McCarthy believes that the quest for the historical Jesus was also an answer to the critique of the Enlightenment. Those who sought Jesus as he really was in history believed that they would find a Jesus who was immune to the Enlightenment criticism of the Christ presented by orthodox Christianity. Similarly these four philosophers believed that Jesus, seen through the eyes of rational philosophy, would not have the deficiencies of the Christ proclaimed by the churches. The four desired to keep Jesus but were certain that he would be lost if he were not reinterpreted.

McCarthy's summary of the efforts of the four makes for fascinating reading. Each tried to develop a whole philosophy of religion as the climax to his philosophy. Unlike contemporary philosophies of religion, they saw no problem in restricting themselves to one particular religion. Other religions appear in their systems only to demonstrate Christianity's superiority.

Rousseau was influenced by and saw himself as a part of the Reformed tradition. The other three came out of Lutheranism. Should not the churches have applauded these valiant defenders of the faith? In fact, all four were condemned by the churches and theologians. Despite their sincere attempt to defend the faith, each remodelled Jesus and Christianity to fit his philosophical system. Orthodox Christians complained that the remodelling had perverted or destroyed Christianity. Ironically the Enlightenment foes of Christianity were joined by theologians and clerics in attacking the four.

McCarthy concludes that the efforts of the four teach us that philosophy cannot become the apologist for a particular faith. Philosophy of religion, by its very nature, must deal with all religions and their contributions. Despite these four philosophers, reason and faith have not been reconciled. Today we know that "Philosophy of religion is not theology, nor need it pretend to be" (p. 223).

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