

JESUS AND CREATIVITY. By Gordon Kaufman. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.

Many today agree that, just as the message of Jesus was transformed through its movement from a Jewish into a Greek cultural matrix, so too entry into the scientific framework of our cosmic and planetary story requires significant theological adjustment. This work of Gordon Kaufman, Professor Emeritus of Harvard Divinity School, makes a proposal for that shift that merits far more commentary than a short appraisal can provide. Nevertheless, I offer seven pairs of observations.

I begin with two suppositions. First, the work forms an integral part of a broader theological vision developed in the course of Kaufman's impressive theological career, including works on method, a major constructive statement on the Christian vision, and an essay on God and creation (*In the Beginning . . . Creativity* [2004], a companion to *Jesus and Creativity*). Within this context, K. presents a Christology from below, beginning with Jesus of Nazareth. Second, the broad structure of this work can be summarized in terms of its method and goals: it uses a method of correlation to interpret Christian attachment to Jesus Christ in terms that make sense within the framework of contemporary cosmology and a history of our planet and race (88). His work intends a credible account of the Jesus story "in relation to this world-picture" (83, xiii).

The two fundamental and constructive concepts of the work are announced in its title, and each one has an antithesis. The first is "creativity," or more fully "serendipitous creativity," that functions as a synonym for "God." Creativity or God is the transcendent, dynamic ground of the universe, as contrasted with a personal agent who exercises oversight in an anthropomorphic way. The other is Jesus (of Nazareth). But Jesus can be construed in two very different ways. Traditionally Christianity focused on understanding Jesus himself following the line of the development of Christian doctrine about his person. In place of this, K. concentrates on the story of the creative energy that faith in Jesus has released into history, beginning most intensely after the Easter experience of the disciples.

This second story has two acts. The first act stretches from Jesus to the present. The effects of Christian faith have been momentous for both good and evil, but its self-correcting potential, linked to Jesus himself, is positive. Jesus embodied creativity, and it spread through the movement that is Christianity itself. The second act begins at any given present and stretches into the future: it is the faith journey held out to each person today and the Christian community as a whole.

K., however, makes two major adjustments to the traditional Christian story. One is that, by keeping his analysis to the naturalistic level, he cannot affirm that God, as creativity, is personal (14–18). He also believes that a consistent non-dualist view of reality does not allow an afterlife awaiting humanity (57–58).

Yet he retains two fundamental elements of a deep Christian life: the one is a meditation by which one finds centeredness through a connection to the source of the awesome creativity of reality (60–61); the other is a deep motivation to participate, through the commitment of one's freedom, to the movements of personal healing, social justice, peace, and reconciliation in the pattern of Jesus (52–54).

This book left me with two questions. (1) Why cannot "serendipitous creativity," which actually becomes personal in the human embodiment of it where human freedom and creativity coalesce (86), be itself personal? I do not understand the implicit metaphysics of a generating force that is claimed to be transcendent to what it creates (28), nonetheless creating something larger and higher than itself and/or being unequal to what it actually creates. Second, why cannot one *hope* for eternal life, if one can hope for a better human future on the basis of "creativity's" record (53–54)? Barring such a hope, the preliminary optimism of this work turns to ultimate despair, at least relative to the many whose life and death entailed little more than suffering and for those today who face nothing else.

These are big questions, but many ask them today. This book contributes significantly to discussing those questions and cannot be bypassed by anyone interested in the questions in a professional way.

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