

## RENAISSANCE/MODERN THEOLOGY

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS:  
A NINETEENTH-CENTURY CATHOLIC RESPONSE  
TO DAVID STRAUSS

Presenter: William Madges, Xavier University, Cincinnati

The presentation this year was concerned with the thought of Johannes E. von Kuhn and was well coordinated with the theme of this year's convention on Jesus as the concrete foundation of Christianity.

In 1835, David Strauss stirred the theological waters with the publication of his *Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*. One might expect to find a lively reaction among the members of the Catholic faculty of the University of Tübingen where Strauss was working as a member of the Protestant faculty. Such, however, was not the case.

With the exception of a series of articles by Martin Joseph Mack in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* of 1837, there is relatively little to be found by way of response to Strauss. And even the response of Mack is inclined to see the question raised by Strauss as an essentially Protestant problem. Johannes von Kuhn, therefore, stands out as perhaps the single Catholic contemporary of Strauss who took the argument of Strauss seriously and attempted a sustained response to it.

Kuhn's discussion, as Madges pointed out, operates at two levels. The first level is primarily exegetical; the second is focused more on the philosophical background involved in Strauss's theory of myth. At the exegetical level, Kuhn argued that Strauss had a mistaken understanding of the literary nature of the Christian scriptures. The Scriptures are, in Kuhn's view, a conscious theological argument. To perceive them from a scientific perspective means to recognize this fact, for this reveals their true literary character. Since that is the case, a principle of selectivity is at work in their composition. The biblical writers select those elements of the life of Jesus that are pertinent to their argument. They also select those elements of the Hebrew Scriptures that can be used to confirm their argument. In essence, the Christian Scriptures represent neither a neutral historical reportage, nor a purely anonymous myth created unconsciously by the community. Rather, they are a historically based theological argument created deliberately by the apostles.

The presentation and discussion focused mainly on this exegetical aspect of Kuhn's work and had little time left to deal with the philosophical aspect which consists largely in a critique of the Hegelian background Kuhn believed to be a significant element determining the position of Strauss.

Much of Kuhn's argument resonates with current discussion about Jesus as a historical figure and his significance for Christian faith and identity.

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## SACRAMENTAL AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

### CONVERTED COMMITMENT TO CHRIST IN LITURGY

Presenter: Donald L. Gelpi, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

In his presentation on "Converted Commitment to Christ in Liturgy" Gelpi sought to move beyond the laconic treatment of conversion in Bernard Lonergan. As alternatives to questions on nature and grace treated in his *Charism and Sacrament*, Gelpi focused on the forms and dynamics of Christian conversion. He spoke in terms of transvaluation versus the supernatural existential and existentiell christology of Rahner. He asserted that the construct of conversion to Jesus Christ through the RCIA and beyond through the other sacraments poses a new challenge to the whole church today. Mystagogy, he explained, focuses on the charisms and gifts that all Christians have.

In the process of conversion Gelpi acknowledges five forms of conversion: affective, intellectual, moral, religious, and sociopolitical. He also recognizes seven dynamics of conversion, each of which conditions every other. This current approach to worship he characterizes as foundational and experiential. It embraces the encounter with Christ and others and demands commitment and Christian living with revelatory sacramentality. It involves one in helping to construct a just social order. Gelpi currently endeavors to advance the unfinished sacramental revolution of Vatican II.

Gelpi contrasted the politicization caused by original sin with socialization into the family of God offered through the RCIA; marital dysfunction in contemporary society with conversion to the sacramentality of marriage; clericalism, sacerdotalism, and sexism in orders with the conversion demanded by ordination;