

A God Who Laughs

Jesus Christ is in! Disc jockeys playing Amazing Grace as one of the top ten, and some rock artists use Christian Scripture for their productions. An excitement arrived on the theatrical scene when the rock musical Godspell came to conquer. Many clergy of different denominations highly praised it. Why this preoccupation with Jesus Christ by the modern entertainment world? Jesus Christ Superstar drew its crowds and then Godspell made its impact.

The musical Godspell is based on St. Matthew's gospel, though the writer John-Michael Tebelak has been strongly influenced by Dr. Harvey Cox, dean of the Divinity School at Harvard, who doesn't make an evangelical stand on Scripture. In this musical version of St. Matthew's Gospel Christ is depicted as a clown, dressed in baggy pants with ROA suspenders and a Superman sweater. He is crucified atop of an empty coke crate. Someone wrote about Godspell: "In spite of the delightful irreverence of much of the action, the performance walks the delicate balance between humour and seriousness in a way that is profoundly moving."

When I read the reviews about Godspell I started to meditate for awhile about Jesus Christ. What must we think of Christ being portrayed as a clown? Why do people envisage Him that way? Is it just a sign of the times? An expression of the Christian faith in terms of our modern culture? Can we really go along with such expositions of Jesus Christ? I take it to be an expression of the upcoming culture. A new culture is emerging and what we see in Godspell is but a symbol of it. We should face the facts, Western culture is but tottering ruins while a new culture is coming in. We can neither simply ignore the symptoms nor dismiss them as passing fancies. We cannot close our ears because its message is heard over pop radio stations all over the world. The beat of rock is the pulse beat of the age. What we see and hear today are but signs of new developments to come.

Christ a clown? Can this idea be found in the Gospels? I find that the gospel is a laughing matter, foolishness, for all who don't believe. In one of the psalms (2:4), God is described as a God who laughs. What does He laugh about? About the antics of all who rebel against Him. Read the story of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. He steps out of these pages as the Lord of glory. Both God and man. He became poor so that we can become rich in spirit. He loved humour but also shed tears. Look at the Christ on Calvary's cross! Out of the darkness of the cross comes the light of the real Christ.

What is a clown? Webster's dictionary defines him as a "jester or fool usually in a circus or comic play, whose antics imitate the stupidity of the rustic simpleton.". Who is Christ? A clown? I cannot see Him in that light. I see Him as the Jesus Christ of the Scriptures, the suffering and sympathizing Saviour, Lord of glory and majesty.

The Lord is above the grotesque. He revealed and appreciated beauty. He commented about the natural grace of the lilies of the fields. He preferred them above the artificial glory of King Solomon. He relished in the joy of children, and their simple faith. The

disciples saw His miracles, His life, and they slowly came to realize that He was more than a great teacher. John wrote about Him: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

The prophet Isaiah foretold "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty." (Isaiah 33:17) This prophecy was partially fulfilled when Jesus was on earth and will be fulfilled completely when we will see Him in the new heaven and the new earth.

The Christ of the gospels is no clown but King. The rock musical Godspell will be followed by more such artistic creations influenced by the secularist stance of our age. But I am looking forward to the moment that I can be in His presence to worship Him as my Lord, saying: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." (Rev. 4:11)

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