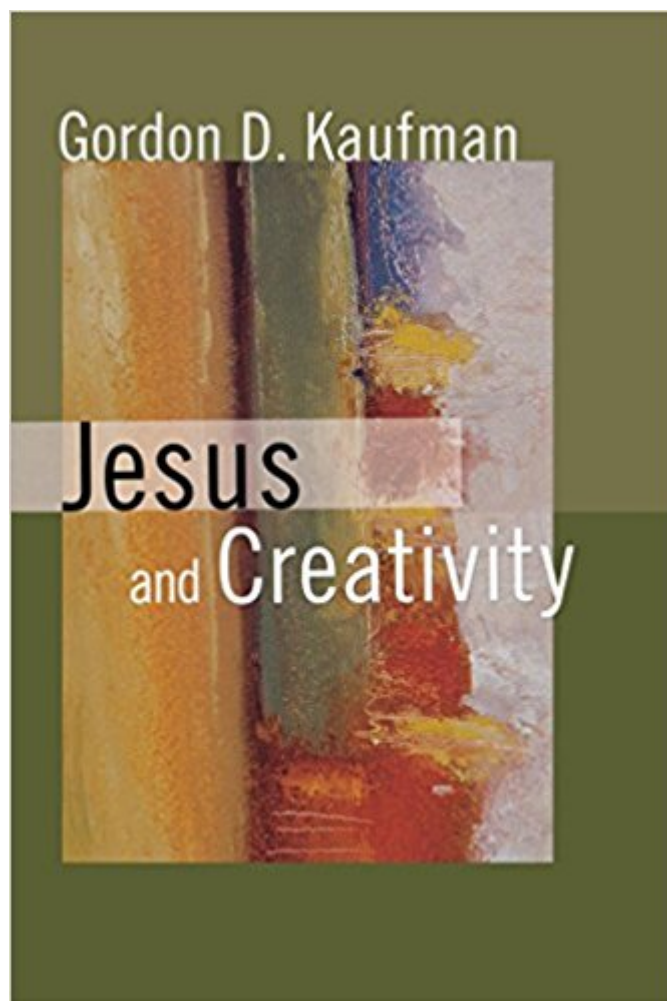


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# Jesus And Creativity



## Synopsis

"The most recent stage of Kaufman's thinking, as it is embodied in this book, has attained an admirable simplicity, power, and relevance to the needs of our day. He calls us to embody the creativity that came vividly to expression in Jesus and in the historical trajectory of his influence. Kaufman frees his Christian theology from every trace of mythological and supernaturalist thinking without diminishing its importance for today's world." John B. Cobb Jr. Ingham Professor of Theology Emeritus Claremont Graduate University

The lively interest today in the historical figure of Jesus is rarely matched by theological advances in understanding his person and significance for our own time and worldview. Gordon Kaufman takes up this challenge in this bold, speculative work. Despite the fabled difficulties of traditional Christological terms, Kaufman seeks to re-envision the symbol of Jesus within the contemporary scientific worldview. Building on his notion of God as simply creativity, he here locates the meaning of Jesus' salvific story within an evolving universe and a threatened planet. Outside the dualistic categories of the biblical worldview, he finds, the enormously creative and influential figure of the historic Jesus can have a vital role in the emergence and development of the cosmos and human history. Within that role, he argues, Jesus, his relation to God, and his centrality to Christian faith become clearer and our own lives and actions take on a new meaning. Gordon D. Kaufman is Professor of Theology Emeritus at Harvard Divinity School. His many important theological works include his *Essay on Theological Method* (1975, 3rd edition 1995), *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (1985), *In Face of Mystery* (1993), *God-Mystery-Diversity* (Fortress Press, 1996), and *In the beginning . . . Creativity* (Fortress Press, 2004).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book contributes significantly to discussing: (1) Why cannot "serendipitous," which actually becomes personal in the human embodiment of it where human freedom and creativity coalesce, be itself personal? (2) Why cannot one hope for eternal life, if one can hope for a better human future on the basis of "creativity's record? --Robert Haight, Union Theological Seminary, New York --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gordon D. Kaufman is Mallinckrodt Professor of Divinity Emeritus at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is the author of twelve books, including "In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology".

This book provides a rational Christology that is entirely this-worldly, with no traces of mythology or supernaturalism. This book provides an intellectual path for those who wish to maintain their intellectual integrity and still associate with faith communities that hold to more traditional theologies. It's an understanding of Jesus and the Christian religion that is compatible with a scientific world-picture based on findings and speculations of modern astrophysics, cosmology, biology, and evolutionary theory. I recommend doing a web search for a review of this book by Wesley J. Wildman of Boston University. Kaufman labels the traditional understanding the Christian theology as "Jesus trajectory-1." This is the Jesus-story which presupposes an understanding of God as an anthropomorphic quasi-personal agent-creator, working (sometimes miraculously) through historical events. The word "trajectory" is fitting here as a description of the creative development over hundreds of years of concepts such as the Trinity and explanations such as the the Resurrection to explain how they understood the advent of Jesus. This "Jesus trajectory-1" was developed using words and concepts that made sense to the people in that time. Kaufman then provides an alternative way to view Christian theology based upon what he labels "Jesus trajectory-2." Just as "Jesus trajectory-1" was developed by early Christians with words that made sense to them, Kaufman says we today need to use words that make sense in the language and knowledge of our time. Early Christians thought in terms of resurrection and deity of Jesus. In place of this, Kaufman proposes to think of God as creativity in a way that can fit within the constraints of modern historical methods. Jesus can then be accepted as presenting important standards and models still valid in today's life and activity. This would include such themes as: "self-giving love (agape), forgiveness,

nonviolence, generosity, and the like as of continuing (perhaps universal) significance. . . . The story of Jesus points us toward a trajectory emphasizing the creation and sustenance of communities of love and freedom, reconciliation and peace."This book provides a serious interpretation of religion that's consistent with the way many educated people view their lives today. Kaufman does so without apology to supernaturalists on the premise that many people today find the supernatural view implausible. It's surprising that so few theologians have attempted to speak on behalf of such people.Kaufman describes the trajectories of creativity that arc through the long history of the universe and also through the evolutionary history of our planet. We are dependent on the surrounding natural environment, and yet we are also capable of creatively transcending our environment through understanding and influencing it. This leads to his discussion of the need for humans to protect the world's environment.In "Jesus trajectory-2" we learn to see Jesus as an expression of creative, natural, and very human possibilities that he both taught and enacted in his life. There is no afterlife here, but there is life abundant. There are no supernatural rescue stories but there is a relentless drive for justice that enhances health and happiness for everyone. There is no supernatural consummation of worldly history but there is a future lying open before us, and subject to our creative influence. Jesus is not the only model and norm for a lifestyle of ecological responsibility, social justice, and a better future, but his vision is one that we can choose. And that is good news indeed. (Some of this wording is borrowed from the review by Wesley J.

Wildman.)Kaufman also makes it clear that "Jesus trajectory-2" is not an exclusive view, and thus it can accept other religious traditions (or non-religious world views) as valid in their own cultural settings. But one would hope that other religions and world views can find those creative aspects within their own traditions and understandings that will encourage the creative possibilities of human endeavors.Kaufman wrote a book titled "In the beginning ... Creativity" prior to writing this book. Both books should be read to understand Kaufman's theological thinking during his final years. Gordon D. Kaufman died on July 22, 2011.

Let me introduce a piece of my story that is related to Gordon D. Kaufman's book 'Jesus and Creativity.'I was raised (it seems so long ago) in a Fundamentalist Roman Catholic Church. In 1959 I entered its major seminary to study its fundamentalism that would lead to a fundamentalist priesthood. I was unaware (in 1959) of a personal emerging shift. In that first year I read a particular book that changed the trajectory of my thinking, of my imagining, of my living. I began a serendipitous creative experience.It is these words, at this time, like a hot iron branded my consciousness, "Is evolution a theory, a system or a hypothesis? It is much more: it is a general

condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must bow and which they must satisfy henceforward if they are to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow" 'The Phenomenon of Man,' by Teilhard de Chardin page 218. Like Gordon Kaufman I have been invited by Nature and History 52 years ago to freely think critically and creatively about the connectivity or entanglement between three symbolic or metaphorical words: God, humanity and world. Hence, I can feel and associate with Gordon Kaufman's long journey as we have that similarity with God, humanity and world. Gordon Kaufman in 'Jesus and Creativity' goes beyond theological reductionism. There is no reductive oxygen in a theology that wants to try to understand the unknowable or the mystery of God, humanity and world. How shall we critically think or imagine an emergent world? How shall we think or imagine a God, humanity, world that is coming into being? How shall we think or imagine a God, humanity, world that we cannot prestate, prevision or predict? How do we live not knowing the future? Is the Kingdom of God that Jesus foretold the Kingdom of Creativity? And, is that Kingdom made from three entangled metaphors: God, humanity, world? I can imagine that Jesus the human being fits well into Kaufman's metaphor, humanity. Gordon Kaufman offers his methodology in the Preface of his book 'In the Beginning...Creativity.' "By 1975, with my book 'An Essay on Theological Method,' I had come to the conclusion that all theological ideas, including God, could best be understood as products of the human imagination, when employed by men and women seeking to orient themselves in life. This freed me to experiment with a variety of ways of thinking about God, humanity and world...." This methodology freed Kaufman from supernaturalism to rethinking God, humanity, world in terms of a naturalist and historicist. Margaret Wertheim written echo applies to Kaufman, in her book 'Pythagoras' Trousers' in her Introduction she writes, "Rather than see ourselves in relation to mythical heroes, gods, and religious laws, we in the West see ourselves now in relation to atoms, stars, and scientific laws. Whatever people's private beliefs, it is THIS scientific picture that is taught in our schools and universities, that is endorsed in encyclopedias, atlases, science magazines, television programs, and newspapers...Christian theologians assigned to these spheres ranks of celestial beings, angels, archangels, cherubim, and the like...This Christian cosmos, alive with souls and animating spirits was dismantled by the new physics of the seventeenth century...it is not that the universe itself changed but the PEOPLE had; the old explanations that had been satisfactory for centuries no longer sufficed." We are the authors of our predicament and we are the solution as well. When we talk about the symbol of God as Creativity we are talking to ourselves as creativity that is totally responsible for the creativity within humanity and world. The Jesus trajectory for God as Creativity is found in Matthew 18:20. Where two or three are gathered in creativity therein is the

presences of Creativity. Creativity is not solely in a book, person, or thing. It is gathered in two or three people in creative love and caring. Gordon Kaufman is projecting as a naturalist and historicist that Creativity is God, and creativity is in humanity and in the world is the Good News. He paraphrases this in the Preface of his book from John's Gospel opening verses 'In the Beginning...Creativity:' "In the beginning was creativity, and the creativity was with God, and creativity was God. All things came into being through the mystery of creativity; apart from creativity nothing would have come into being." God as Creativity is not outside of humanity and world but within the creativity pageantry in humanity and world; this makes the three creative symbols interconnected and interdependent. This is the sacred relationship. This is a relationship toward a reverence of life to engage the whole of humanity to be wise. Can I or Gordon Kaufman force you to sense the sacredness of a creative life? No! But maybe the vastness of the universe, the vastness of human invention and historicity can invite you! The choice is yours. The book 'Jesus and Creativity' shifts Jesus back into creative humanity and I think the creative human Jesus would gladly accept (my) and Kaufman's demotion from divinity. That demotion is irreversible. Jesus came from the same creativity that humanity came from, that is, from the creativity of a 15 billion year old world and as our consciousness span we gave birth to God and the honored named of Creativity. Behind all our thinking with mystery are word symbols. O, Language, you are so, so finite, so, so at home in time, space and matter that you cannot deliver conceptualization of your own so, so word - God. We like Jesus are humbled by our finiteness. This humility began for Jesus 2000 years ago and for me in 1959 at the age of 24 and 52 years later I accept Robert Bellah's humble words, "in the last analysis (we human beings and Jesus are) responsible for the choice of (their) symbolisms." I find Gordon Kaufman's symbolism in 'Jesus and Creativity' a joy. I hope you find the same joy as you begin to reconceive the Jesus-trajectory. Creativity is Good News. George Pieczonka is the author of "Ann of Green Pastures." The makings of your married American Catholic Pastor. Check it out on [..]

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