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**Future Christ:**
*A Lesson in Heresy*
François Laruelle
Trans. Anthony Paul Smith

This book is the first of three volumes of ‘autonomous works, coordinated by the material of their themes and objects and unified by their practice of thought’, which François Laruelle calls the ‘Triptych’ (ix). Intended to be a philosophico-religious treatment of the ‘heretic’ question that theology and religious studies apparently raise but fail to lead it to its logical conclusion. Laruelle intends to do this treatment by a non-conventional approach in the streams of heretics, mysticism, and Eros. Laruelle gives a glossary of terms that he invents and rediscovers throughout this book but cautions the reader to be not bound by the definitions and definitely not to systematise these definitions to some other ‘ism’ as that ‘would be contrary to the spirit of non-philosophy which is a practice of—and in—thought’ (x).

Anthony Paul Smith has done an excellent job of making the text accessible, which is highly difficult, even in the French original. In his introduction, Smith alerts the reader that this book is a ‘strange, alien treatise’ but clarifies that it is just ‘an effort to think differently’ and not ‘some postmodern pastiche’ that has gnawed into the minds of philosophers and prowls the corridors of philosophy departments of universities worldwide (xi). It would be heretical to characterise this book in any manner, because Laruelle wants the approach of this work to be completely heretical, not even adhering to heresy; he wants it to be a heretical of heretics. Laruelle intends to develop a thought that would be something of a non-Christianity but would not have any ‘ity’ to bind the heresy. The reader is encouraged to have an independent thought process on these lines.

This book is a call to attain the salvation that religion promises by being a decent human being, by being absorbent of the suffering of the victim, and by stripping religion of its decorative covers that neither salvage nor console. Smith positions his choice of translating Laruelle itself as an ‘example of the constructive aspect of his [Laruelle’s] science of philosophy (what is mistakenly taken to be a mere critique) after his break with philosophical (self-)sufficiency. It is an example of the positive non-philosophical programme of heresy’ (xix). The first English translation of Laruelle, this book introduces his thought to the Anglophone readers in a layered manner. And one cannot miss the uncanny similarity of thought that Laruelle shares with Swami Vivekananda in emphasising the functional and experiential aspects of religion. What Laruelle spearheads, much in the fashion of Swamiji, is theology, precept and experience, and examines the core of religion bereft of the shell that threatens to eat up the kernel.
a new religion that focusses more on the victim and the human based on an ideology that refuses to be merely an ideology and prefers to be humane, evolving with humanity.

Universalising religion by concentrating on the common features of all religions yet embracing the special features of different religions was preached by Swamiji. Laruelle envisions future Christianity and a universal non-religion. Here, ‘determination-in-the-last-identity’, a core concept of nonstandard philosophy that is ‘opposed to the reciprocal or circular causality of philosophy and to its limited unilateral modes’, (xxix) is of paramount importance. The human being is the future Christ for Laruelle, who clarifies the task of non-philosophy: ‘There are impassable misunderstandings, that philosophy cannot overcome ... in its usual way, the operation of non-philosophy is just that of making this visible in philosophy’ (18). He denounces the present state of religion: ‘Ethics and religions exude an infantile hope, a yearning for a silly beatitude and bring to light a hypocritical theodicy. They are the devices-of-the-church, they lull human beings into being inserted into the system of Grand Conformity and to make themselves into subjects-of-the-World’ (20). These words echo Swamiji’s statement: ‘Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries.’

Laruelle wants a theodicy that transcends theodicy and emphasises the ‘man’ or the victim: ‘The man of whom we speak is his own real identity, the irreducible core which makes him human and does not just differentiate him from the rest of Creation, to which he otherwise belongs, but from this as well’ (23). Laruelle explains the role of the non-Christianity he proposes: ‘However open it may be, “the-Christianity” is still a system-religion in convertibility and triad, an aborted and normalized madness that secures in a hallucinatory way its appropriation of Man-in-person. Non-Christianity breaks it down by dualysing the unitary “essence” of theologico-humanist man and gives him another birth, that of a Future Christ, separated from the World and so giving aid to it all the more. As for Gnostic resentment against God, the World, and Creation, which brandishes against them a spiritual fire, one can rather see it as an occasional cause for a non-Christianity that does not respond to the fire of persecution with the fire of intransigence’ (26). He also clarifies the three-pronged role of future Christianity: ‘Future Christianity finally posses [sic] three sources, mixed within “the-Christianity” in the historical sense, but that we distinguish and isolate in order to determine or unify them in-the-last-identity by Man-in-person, and so differently than in a religion. The first is the properly Gnostic experience of the definition of man. ... The second is the more general heretical aspect of the separation with the World. ... The third is the specifically Christian aspect of universal salvation, for the World and for every man, that works through the person of Christ’ (29).

Lest anyone hastily conclude Laruelle’s attempts to be atheist, he explains:

We do not practice or import any atheism, in undertaking an exercise of thought we sufficiently ‘believe’ in God, Christ, and more so in the Hell where these shadows live. We believe in a God who claims to take the place of Man-in-person and who is in Hell. In a Hell whose other name is ‘the-World’ dominated by the Principle of Sufficient Church. But also in a ‘non-Christian’ Christ rather than an Anti-Christ. This is the human trinity that we oppose to all those all-too-divine religions. A trinity that is no longer of three persons, but of Man-as-final-identity announcing his being-human in the World within the radically subjective figure of a Future Christ that every man who is in-hell has in becoming. ... The conception of separated Man is more than the foundation; it the cause which determines the efficacy of this transformation of ancient theological personages (30).

For all thinking persons willing to dive deep into the core of religion or religious practices, this book is a must read. It is also essential study to understand Laruelle.

Editor
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