



Theology and Revolution -- The 1839 Zurich Revolution: A Reader in the History of Theology for the Theology of History by [Douglas R McGaughey](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

*Theology and Revolution -- The 1839 Zurich Revolution:
A Reader in the History of Theology for the Theology of History*

This project has three aims:

- 1) to provide translations of pro and con reports, public letters, and street pamphlets published at the time of the populist, 1839 political revolution in Zurich, Switzerland, sparked by the appointment by the Canton government of David Friedrich Strauß, author of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, to the position of Dogmatic Theology and New Testament Studies at the university in Zurich;
- 2) to demonstrate the two, dramatically different tasks in Historical Theology (the history of *theology* and the *theology of history*) by the example of this revolution in the 19th Century driven by conflict between religion and science,
- 3) to show by analysis and comparison of the respective texts that Strauß' personal, dramatic, theological shift from a far left-wing Hegelianism in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* of 1835 to a Kantian *pure* religion in *The Life of Jesus Prepared for the German People* of 1864 profiles the impact of the Copernican Turn in theology that, like in popular perception and even in the natural sciences, remains incomplete, yet powerfully promising, as an inclusive (not simply Christian) *theology of history* capable of transforming humanity as a species.

Strauß read the gospels as mythic constructions, not literal fact. The gospels are a product of the creative imagination of humanity, but it contains historical elements, ideas, and symbols that are far more significant than the facts. Hence, there is a general husk/kernel structure to the gospels that calls out for focus on the kernels, not the literal, narrative husks.

Although NT scholarship has progressed beyond Strauß' literary criticism based on the Griesbach Hypothesis of the priority of Matthew, there is nothing about source, form, redaction, and socio-scientific criticism or new with the discovery of the plethora of extra-canonical texts that diminishes the insights derived from the mythic reading of the text.

The different "Jesuses" who emerge from contemporary biblical criticism as well as the multiple theologies attributable to the gospel authors as a consequence of scholarship since Strauß do not eclipse or nullify, per se, Strauß' Hegelian Speculative Theology. They all are narrative husks for theological kernels. Furthermore, because speculative theologies, which include biblical literalism's anthropomorphic God, are incapable of proof or disproof, they all (including Strauß' Hegelian Speculative Theology) are susceptible to doubt. Whereas

Anthropocentric Theism transforms God (not just the Christ) into man to make God in our image, Hegelian Speculative Theology transforms humanity into God – both surely judgments capable of doubt.

In his first *Life of Jesus*, Strauß took the idea of the God-Man to be the ultimate kernel or “idea” of the mythic texts. The God-Man is disclosed in his fulness for humanity’s self-understanding by the narratives of death and resurrection. The God-Man is universalized by Strauß to include the entire human species that understands its role in the divine drama, which is history, in which God seeks awareness of Himself through humanity’s “reconciliation” with Him. In Hegelian Speculative Theology “There was a time when the Son was not” (the Christ as God-Man had not appeared in history) but “God became man, that man might become God” (the goal of salvation is divinization of the believer).

However, Strauß’ theological significance is not his Hegelianism. At the end of his career, in his second *Life of Jesus*, seeing the limits of an Hegelian ontology/dialectic, he overcame his reservations with respects to Immanuel Kant’s “pure” religion to stress the centrality not only of human creativity but moral responsibility for that creativity and the significance of the invisible Commonwealth of God that fosters a “culture of rearing,” not merely a “culture of skills.” Kant’s *pure* religion (at the core of all traditions) is, of course, no reduction of religion to mere morality. Religion is capable of responding to the anxieties and sufferings of humanity just as it encourages moral culture, but religion does not involve overcoming humanity’s self-created anxieties and sufferings that arise by treating the husks of religion as literal facts. Furthermore, moral culture involves no finger-wagging but is anchored in the Commonwealth of God in which the dignity of each individual is acknowledged and the individual is encouraged to think, decide, act, and assume responsibility for her-/himself.

The Hegelian Strauß of the first *Life of Jesus* is calling humanity to be reconciled with God by escaping from history to become divine. The Kantian Strauß of the second *Life of Jesus* is affirming humanity’s finite capacities to be and become responsible human beings in history.