

WHOSE JESUS, WHO'S GOEBBELS?

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SIR: In replying to my article “Is Jensenism compatible with Christianity?” (December), Michael Jensen (April) and Claire Smith and Ken Handley (March) fail to mention the main complaint I had about Jensenism. That was Archbishop Peter Jensen’s condemnation of “any religious system that involves even a modicum of human merit”, which I took to imply (and none of the respondents has denied) that the idolatrous Mother Teresa deserves eternal punishment for her so-called good works done without the badging of evangelical faith.

Michael Jensen’s reply especially is useful for its insights into how Jensenism sees the “liberal” enemy. He thinks liberals regard Jesus as the “rather limp, blond moralist of sentimental portraiture” and solemnly warns that “the Holocaust illustrates well the darkness of the human soul”. That view of liberals is a fantasy, indicative of the inability of Moore College to look over the wall. Liberals are concerned with the worth of persons, which is what makes the Holocaust an evil and equally what makes it worthwhile for God to be concerned for human salvation and distressed by human evil. Using the Holocaust for polemical purposes is a tricky business at the best of times, but especially so for those planning an everlasting gas chamber for those who do not sign up to their sect. “Not a popular message”, says Handley, “but Jesus said it”, in support of which he adduces Jesus’s saying “no-one comes to the Father except through me.” He apparently takes “through me” to mean “through explicit subscription to my faith” – surely something of a stretch of conjectural interpretation, especially when it is to form the basis of condemning most of the human race to damnation. It is because liberals understand the dark temptations of the human heart to condemn others unjustly that they do not accept the strained scriptural interpretations of Jensenism.

Archbishop Jensen himself has not chosen to join the discussion in *Quadrant* (contrary to the practice of Jesus, who took every opportunity to answer the carping of the scribes and lawyers). But a helpful Sydney Anglican has called my attention to his popular book, *At the Heart of the Universe: What Christians Believe*. The book shows all the selectivity about the gospels of which Jensenism has been accused. The sole mention of the Sermon on the Mount is in a sentence “[One who comes to the gospel

as a tourist] will recognize a few well-known landmarks, be consoled and grateful to report that the journey has been made and the Sermon on the Mount is still in place.” The Sermon’s actual content is not discussed. Matthew chapter 25 (where Jesus appears to offer salvation to those who feed the hungry and visit the sick, irrespective of their faith) is of course not mentioned, but its content is commented on obliquely through a reference to the Leigh Hunt’s nineteenth-century poem *Abou Ben Adhem*. Ben Adhem, an unbeliever, tells the angel who writes the list of those who love the Lord, “write me as one who loves his fellow men”, and his name is found to lead all the rest. That has a surface similarity, to say the least, to a number of Gospel passages. One might expect Archbishop Jensen to be keen to explain that that would be a simplistic reading and that other parts of the Gospels would need to be taken into account, but one would be surprised to find him downright dismissive of statements so obviously similar to what the boss said. What he actually writes is “The advice of the angel was poison; it was a lie worthy of Dr Goebbels.”

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