Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography Study Guide

Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography by John Dominic Crossan

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This detailed analysis of Biblical writings about the life of Jesus considers his life and work within the context of the historically documented circumstances of his time. The analysis covers social, political, economic, and spiritual considerations. These considerations are all grounded in the central thematic contention that Jesus was a radical liberal activist, seeking moral justice for all and increased openness to faith by all. A secondary component of this analysis is the contention that the Bible is not and was never intended as a literal recounting of actual events, but is instead to be read and interpreted as a metaphoric commentary on ways that human beings could enter into a closer relationship with God.

In the book's Prologue, the author outlines both his intent and his motivation, clearly indicating that in researching and formulating his analysis, he is not attempting to undermine Christian faith but to look at both additional and alternative ways of interpreting and understanding the foundations of that faith as defined in the New Testament of the Bible.

The author then begins the analysis proper by examining the circumstances of Jesus' birth, specifically his family, community life, and the social, political, and economic ways of the world into which he came. He proposes the theory that the writings about those circumstances were shaped and defined by the authors' intent to connect Jesus, theologically, spiritually, and historically, with past Hebrew leaders and prophecies. The author continues his analysis on these two levels in the following sections, exploring how Biblical references to other important Christian figures like John the Baptist, Pontius Pilate, and Barabbas were both defined by historical context and the need of the original writers of the Bible to shore up the Christian faith with references to the Old Testament.

A substantial portion of the book is taken up with the author's consideration and analysis of Jesus' teachings as a manifestation of his quest for social justice. He specifically considers Biblical references to Jesus' advocacy on behalf of the poor and the ill, delving deeply into both those references and the history of the time. His contention is that Jesus was a radical activist, a liberal determined to break down society's traditional, constructive ways of functioning. He goes into detailed explanations of just what those ways were and how Jesus' attitudes and actions confronted the dehumanizing qualities of those ways, all with an eye to opening both faith and day to day prosperity to a broader and deeper range of people.

Throughout the book, the author demonstrates how the writings in the Bible should not be taken as literal accounts of actual events but as metaphorical, symbolic manifestations of Jesus' spiritual intent ... specifically, his determination (as discussed above) to open both the Kingdom of God and the life of the world to more people. As part of this demonstration, he offers examples of how the meanings of words, phrases and images can be transformed by translation and interpretation, suggesting as he does

so that the Bible is, in fact, a succession of interpretations, shaped and defined by its authors in order to perpetuate their attempts to build the Christian faith.

The final sections of the book consider the Biblical narratives of the crucifixion and resurrection, and how the probable facts of what happened were shaped and re-defined by later Christian writers to reflect their belief that the man they came to believe was the Messiah could not possibly have been treated in the meaningless, inhumane way history suggests he was. Here the author comes closer than anywhere else in the book to what many would call heresy, suggesting that the historical reality of the time in which Jesus lived and died suggests that many of the events of that crucial time simply could not have happened and that many of the "Facts" presented in the Bible were, again, interpretations.

In his Epilogue, the author summarizes the events of Jesus' life under consideration, briefly outlines the history of how the books of the Bible were compiled and edited, and suggests that the Christian faith can only benefit from increased examination of the context through which both it and the writings about it developed and were defined.

Prologue

Prologue Summary and Analysis

"From Christ to Jesus" The author defines his intent to come to an understanding of the historical realities of the life and teaching of Jesus and his motivation such as the realization that the four traditional New Testament gospels are, in fact, "interpretations" of Jesus' life based on individual theological perspectives. He documents the existence of other forms of gospel outside the four New Testament gospels, and describes the process of research and synthesis that led to the formation of his theories, a process that includes three components. They are examinations of the life and ways of the time in which Jesus lived such as "cross-cultural anthropology," of the history of the area and its effect on everyday life such as "Greco-Roman and especially Jewish history," and of the development of various theological perspectives arising from Jesus' life and teaching such as the "literary or textual" context. Finally, he suggests that while he may have come to an understanding of who Jesus was and why his teachings have/had the influence they do, living according to the teachings themselves is another thing altogether.

The Prologue clearly defines the book as one of research, as opposed to one of faith. But as the author himself suggests, that doesn't mean that either the research or the conclusions drawn from that research negates faith. Nor, he also suggests, is it intended to do so. What he does suggest is that his research and his conclusions, as well as the implications arising from both, have the potential to add depth to faith, broadening and deepening insight. This in turn, increases the potential for triggering not only greater faith but more effective ways of living a life defined by that faith.

Part One, A Tale of Two Gods

Part One, A Tale of Two Gods Summary and Analysis

This section opens with two quotes, the first being a celebration of the birthday of Augustus Caesar, a savior who has ended war and brought peace and order to the world, and the second from the Gospel of Luke in which angels announce the birth of a savior who is the Son of God, Christ the Lord.

The author comments that within two centuries, two different men, the aristocratic Augustus Caesar and the poor-born Jesus of Nazareth, were both proclaimed sons of God, saviors, and bringers of peace. He traces the interweaving of history and myth that led to the declaration associated with Augustus, and then turns his attention to the similar process involving Jesus.

The author comments that of the four gospels, only Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' birth and infancy, suggesting that the different details included in each connect directly to the differing Christian theologies defined in each gospel. Quoting extensively from both gospels, he examines some of those details, illustrating how they are clear attempts to link the life and lessons of Jesus to Jewish spiritual and theological history.

Here the author points out several specific ways in which the Old Testament was deeply mined for theological and metaphorical scaffolding to be used in constructing the New Testament.

The author discusses Jesus' family history and the Biblical references to his brothers and sisters in relation to what "social history and cross-cultural anthropology" reveal about his family life. He focuses on the class structure in the Roman Empire of the time, which he breaks down into several categories, from the Ruler and Governors at the top down to the Artisans, the Degraded and Expendable classes. He suggests that, according to the original language of the Bible, Jesus was referred to in terms that suggested he was an Artisan, or close to the bottom of the socioeconomic status ladder and probably, among other things, illiterate.

The author begins this section by returning to the parallels between Caesar and Jesus and suggesting that while it is no surprise that followers of the former invented a divine history for the former, it seems unlikely that anyone should do so for the latter.

As the author begins his explorations of the historical and social contexts of Jesus' life and teaching, he also explores the ways in which the Bible was developed and shaped within those same contexts. At times that secondary exploration is ironic, as in the case here, with his commentary on how the humble beginnings of the man Jesus barely suggest the status achieved by the Biblical Jesus written about in the New Testament. At the same time, it's interesting to consider the implications of some of the chapter titles. In this section, the title "The Trojan Caesar Comes" is particularly noteworthy with

its implied reference to the Trojan Horse. The title's implication is that the assault on the ways and values of the culture made by Jesus came from within and was as stealthy as that perpetrated by the Greeks through the use of the Trojan Horse.

Part Two, The Jordan is Not Just Water

Part Two, The Jordan is Not Just Water Summary and Analysis

The quotes at the beginning of this section comment on the similarities between spiritual traditions in America, Africa, and the Far East.

The author comments at length on the writings of the historian Josephus, a primary source of information about the socio-political world in which Jesus lived and taught. A primary focus of Josephus' writings, the author points out, was the Jewish belief faith that "some massive and world shaking divine intervention" will transform their world and the way they inhabit it, a philosophy that the author defines as both apocalyptic and messianic. These factors, he adds, must be taken into account when considering Josephus' writings about John the Baptist.

Here the author points out that Josephus and his work were governed as much by the political and military requirements of the government of the time than by a need for historical accuracy. He quotes, at length, two excerpts from Josephus' writings that comment on the Baptist's role and teachings which, the author suggests, then combined with his drawing large numbers of followers to make him a profound threat to the sociopolitical status quo.

The author suggests that the Baptist's teachings were a more likely trigger for his execution than the reason given in the Bible such as his moralistic condemnation of the governor's sexual activity. The latter, the author further suggests, was additional manipulation undertaken by the authors of the Gospels to achieve theological goals such as defining parallels between the Baptist's death and teachings and those of Jesus. He also contemplates parallels between the geo-climatic wildness of the area around the river Jordan with the wildness of the Baptist's message, suggesting that if the Baptist's teachings are examined outside of their context such as the theological agenda of the New Testament, they reveal a completely different intent outside of any relationship to Jesus.

"The Apocalyptic Drummer" The author quotes extensively from historical documents to support his contention that in his writings about the Baptist, Josephus was drawing parallels between his leading followers through the wilderness of Jordan, Moses leading followers through the wilderness of Egypt, and other apocalyptic preachers leading the Jewish people to salvation. He adds that historically, the Baptist never actually led a group, but dispersed those he baptized throughout the region, making them ready for the coming messianic apocalypse (transformation into new life)

"John Baptizes Jesus" Here the author comments on what he describes as Biblical discomfort with the idea that John baptized Jesus (an action that implies Jesus as

spiritually inferior) and on how the Gospel writers countered the implications of that action with narratives of Jesus' divinity revealed as a result of the baptism.

"From Fasting to Feasting" The author presents quotes from gospel writings outside the four New Testament gospels that portray ways Jesus and his teachings first embraced the Baptist and his, but eventually evolved into his own (see "Quotes", p. 48). He also presents quotes portraying John as fasting and Jesus as feasting, which can be seen as metaphorical representations of the differences in theological perspective between the two.

"One Like a Son of Man" The author comments that several of Jesus' teachings about the coming of the "Son of Man" to lead and redeem the people can be, and have been, interpreted as being as messianic and apocalyptic as the Baptist's. He then points out several aspects of translation and interpretation which to him clearly suggest that in those quotes, Jesus was referring to human beings in general rather than to himself or any other specific messiah figure

There are several points during this section at which the author's implications merit further clarification. For example, "In Chains to Macherus", the author begins to develop his thesis that acts of spiritual transformation practiced and preached by both the Baptist and Jesus had profound socio-political consequences which, in turn, both defined and triggered the determination of the governing Roman powers of the time to suppress both them and the movements for change they inspired.

Meanwhile, in "From Fasting to Feasting", the author is suggesting that for the Baptist, a spiritual life was one of self-denial ("fasting"), of withdrawal from the ways of the world. Meanwhile, he suggests that for Jesus, a spiritual life was one in which the self, connected with the spirit and ways of God, is simultaneously able and intended to define, celebrate and function within the physical, earthly life (this exploration continues in Part 3). Finally, in "One Like a Son of Man", the author is essentially suggesting that literal translations of original Biblical text seem to suggest that a key component of Jesus' teaching was that every individual human being had the power to transform his/her life, to lead him/her self out of the wilderness. This, in turn, relates to analyses later in the book that suggest Jesus also taught that the "Kingdom of Heaven" was not a place above, but to be found in life and relationships, as well as in each individual, in this earthly life.

Part 3, A Kingdom of Nuisances and Nobodies

Part 3, A Kingdom of Nuisances and Nobodies Summary and Analysis

The quote at the beginning of this section comments on the breadth of meanings associated with the concept of "basileia" or rule during the Greco-Roman period of history.

The author discusses different relationships between power and government as defined by different perspectives on earthly vs. heavenly power. He suggests that instead of preaching the more apocalyptic and messianic vision of transformation taught by John the Baptist and other prophets, Jesus was an advocate of an age-old, cross cultural belief that it was possible to live according to the rules of the Kingdom of God in the here and now, a philosophical and theological perspective that, he adds, that was entirely in keeping with his being a part of, and orientation towards helping, the poor.

The author suggests that Jesus' teachings on the breakup of the family were anchored in the ideal of breaking down traditional lines of male and age defined power, suggesting that the true family of humanity is ideally one in which everyone is equally available to God, and God is available to them.

In considering Jesus' comments on the poor being blessed, the author distinguishes between words in the original Greek traditionally translated as meaning "poor" but which in most cases more accurately translate into "destitute". This suggests, the author writes, that Jesus was not talking about the functional poor but those unable to function because of illness, disability, or circumstance. He then points out that in that context, Jesus' comments "focus not just on personal or individual abuse of power but on such abuse in its systemic [form]." This, he suggests, implies there is no individual within a given society that does not bear at least some responsibility for the suffering of the destitute.

Here the author comments on the attitude towards children in the area and time in which Jesus lived, quoting a text that, he suggests, encapsulates the generally held practice that unless a child was acknowledged and accepted by its father, it was essentially a nobody. This, he points out, gives exceptional metaphoric meaning to the Biblical stories of Jesus embracing children, suggesting that in his reaching for them and touching them, he is metaphorically communicating the idea not only that the Kingdom of God embraces everyone, but more importantly that it embraces Nobodies.

The author discusses the contemporary implications of Jesus' famous parable about the Kingdom of God being like the mustard seed. In the time and place in which the parable was recounted, the author writes, mustard was a dangerous, invasive plant that could

take over a garden or field. The implication of the parable, the author suggests, is not only that the Kingdom is powerful, but that it could/would invade spheres of power and control dominated by others.

The author defines "commensality" as the theory and practice of regarding eating and dining as manifestations of society, commenting that Jesus' parable of inviting people to dine without regard for any kind of social distinction (a profoundly radical idea, the author adds) is another metaphoric reference to the Kingdom of God. The author also points out that both theory and practice went against the prevalent societal governance/concepts of honor and shame, suggesting that Jesus, as an advocate of a breaking down barriers associated with both concepts, was perceived as being without either, and therefore as a profound danger.

Here the author supports the contentions of the previous section with examinations of the social anthropology and historical documentations of the past. He suggests that Jesus expanded his enacting of the principles of true freedom and equality for all into his relations from eating into society at large, a process the author calls "radical egalitarianism." The concept, he adds, is as dangerous and alien to contemporary society, he adds, as it was to that of Jesus' time.

There are three important points to note about this section. The first is the author's continued exploration of his theory that a core component of Jesus' teaching was the idea that the Kingdom of God was not something "heavenly" but "earthly". This, as the author suggests, was a profoundly radical perspective for the time and would arguably have been seen as such by the Christian church in the centuries since Jesus first taught, and could arguably still be seen as such by contemporary Christianity.

The second key point is how the author's research also reveals additional breadth and depth in Jesus' teachings. Primary examples here are his commentaries on the status of children and the nature of the mustard plant, both of which lend considerably more stature and meaning to the spiritual and/or social manifestations of Jesus' words and actions.

A third key point is how the author deepens his consideration of how Jesus himself acted on his faith and beliefs such as his experiences of commensality and egalitarianism. Here again, the author supports his thesis that Jesus' life and teachings were about faith in action, action which may seem to be contradictory to traditional Christian practices.

Finally, perhaps the most important, point to note about this section is the author's examination of both the context and content of Jesus' teachings on the family. It's important to keep in mind that these teachings do not devalue the family as an institution , but how that institution manifests. In other words, the author contends here that Jesus' teachings on the family illustrated the belief that the traditional patriarchal structure of the family is another example of societal and traditional imposed rules defined by a desire for status and power, as opposed to a need for and recognition of

the value of an individual life. This, in turn, can be seen as a reiteration of the argument that the Kingdom of Heaven exists within each individual life and experience.

An individual, Jesus seems to be suggesting cannot achieve the Kingdom of Heaven as Jesus defines it if a person is oppressed in any way, be it by a patriarchal family structure, power-oriented sociopolitical and economic structure, status, and morality-oriented spiritual structure.

Part 4, In the Beginning Is the Body

Part 4, In the Beginning Is the Body Summary and Analysis

The quote at the beginning of this section comments on the two traditional spiritual responses to evil in the world, the miraculous and the revolutionary, and comments that the former is the primary anchor of so-called "religious" orientation.

The author reiterates his central premise that Jesus didn't just talk about his beliefs about the Kingdom of God, he acted on them. This, in turn, leads to contemplation of how the body is, and has traditionally been, used both as a manifestation and a source of society, leading into consideration of Jesus' physical miracles.

In analyzing both the literal and metaphorical meaning of Jesus' healing of the leper, the author discusses how taboos and rules about physical boundaries were in fact, efforts to preserve social, spiritual, and racial integrity. He also draws a distinction between disease, which he defines as an individual experience, and illness defined here as the stigma associated with having the disease, suggesting that in touching the leper Jesus was in fact curing the illness, therefore transcending stigma. This, he points out, is yet another illustration of how Jesus actively challenged prevailing thought and belief an, in this particular case, metaphorically took the leper into the so-called Kingdom of God.

The author prefaces his discussion of this particular miracle of Jesus' with a careful examination of phenomena associated with trance, with demon possession and with psychological disorders, saying that it is, for him, both impossible and unwise to attempt to negate their reality and/or validity . He then suggests that the Biblical story of Jesus casting demons out of human beings and into a herd of pigs might, in fact, have been intended to read as a metaphoric narrative of casting off oppressive authority in general and Roman authority in particular, all in the name of realizing the Kingdom of God.

The third of Jesus' primary miracles, the raising of the dead Lazarus back to life, is portrayed by the author as another metaphoric retelling and/or manifestation of Jesus' teachings relating to the Kingdom of God. The reference here, the author suggests, is to life in the Kingdom coming back into the "dead" bodies and spirits of those suffering with earthly, physical oppression.

The author begins by considering a key aspect of the Greco-Roman culture of the time, the patron/client relationship. This, he suggests, was among the most important and most necessary of the central societal conventions of the era, perpetuating profound, lasting barriers to social, political, and economic equality. He then suggests that for Jesus, being itinerant was less a matter of necessity than a manifestation of his desire to break down and/or challenge conventions that he believed didn't allow for the Kingdom of God to be available to everyone.

Here again, the author juxtaposes the literal and metaphorical contexts of the Jesus story, reiterating his point that these two aspects of his life and work are in fact two sides of the same coin. In other words, action illuminates meaning, and meaning is implied by action.

A particularly interesting aspect of this section is a point the author makes in his drawing a distinction between illness and disease. Specifically, he cites contemporary society's reaction to AIDS as an illustrative parallel to the reaction of Jesus-era society to leprosy, the stigma of having the disease being almost as debilitating and destructive as the physical disease itself. It's worth noting that at one time, cancer was viewed in much the same way, victims being perceived as having failed in some way, as being less worthy, less human, less valid. In any case, the author's point about Jesus' treatment of the leper, both literal and metaphorical, can again be seen as a reiteration of the book's larger point that Jesus both embodied and triggered revolutionary changes in thought, about society and about God.

Meanwhile, in the book's final sub-chapter, the author once again places Jesus' life and work within the socioeconomic context of the time as opposed to his considerations of illness, which took place within a socio-moral context and specifically the traditions from which Jesus broke by moving around. Primary among these traditions was the practice of a successful man's family being the primary beneficiaries of that success. In other words, what made a man successful was the success he could bring into the lives of his kin. Here the author again portrays Jesus as very much an individualist, simultaneously implying and acting upon the principle that no-one should rely on anyone but himself and God for fulfillment and/or prosperity.

Part 5, No Staff, No Sandals, and no Knapsack

Part 5, No Staff, No Sandals, and no Knapsack Summary and Analysis

The quote introducing this section comments on traditional ways of passive but disruptive resistance manifested by masses of poor and oppressed, adding that for such groups to enact direct confrontation, "great desperation" must be present.

The author begins this section with a summary and reiteration of the socio-cultural contexts such as faith, gender, and economic constraints within which Jesus lived and taught. He also reiterates his contention that Jesus challenged those contexts in the name of bringing his egalitarian beliefs about the Kingdom of God into reality. This, the author contends, placed him on the fine dividing line between the passive and direct forms of confrontation referred to in the introduction.

The author extensively quotes from three of his primary sources in support of his contention that what Jesus preached and practiced in terms of healing and eating was "extended to others as both challenge and empowerment." He then examines translational and textual components of the three readings which, he suggests, are suggestive in three primary ways. These include the idea that there were not necessarily twelve apostles sent out by Jesus to spread his teaching. The other two suggestive points he raises suggest that, according to the original texts, women were an important part of Jesus' traveling ministry, and that that ministry was founded on contact with both individual homes and communities of people in larger centers.

Here the author considers the codes of behavior manifested by Jesus' ministries as defined by his rules of what his apostles should carry and/or wear, many of which evolved throughout those ministries. He traces the origins of the initial rules to the practices of a particular sect of itinerant Greek philosophers, the Cynics. The Cynics, the author suggests, challenged traditional ideas and practices of governance in the same way Jesus did and, at the same time, reinforced both their itinerant and self-sufficient natures.

Here the author develops an important sub-theme, the idea that many of Jesus' teachings and actions were not original to him but were in fact modifications and/or adaptations of other philosophies. It's important to note here that this particular theory about Jesus and Christianity has, through years of research, developed a broader scope - in other words, there is more to the parallels between Jesus' teachings and those of his philosophical ancestors than their common rules about footwear. Cross-cultural research into spirituality, faith, ritual and myth has suggested and continues to suggest that many if not all aspects of Jesus' teachings have parallels in spiritual and religious systems around the world. The same point can also be made about the story

of Jesus' life, in that even a glancing study of comparative mythology will show that that story has parallels with archetypal stories of spiritual and physical transformation and transcendence. The point is not made to dispute or negate the value of Jesus' life or teachings, but rather to suggest that both are part of and connected to larger and broader experiences of spirituality and of living a life based in that spirituality.

Part 6, The Dogs Beneath the Cross

Part 6, The Dogs Beneath the Cross Summary and Analysis

The quote introducing this section comments on the frequency of crucifixion in the ancient world and on the complete humiliation and destruction, both physical and moral, of the individual associated with it.

The author documents the historical prevalence of crucifixion as an ultimate form of punishment, the details of what crucifixion physically involved, and its socio-political implications, commenting specifically on the birds and wild dogs who feasted on the remains of those who died on the cross.

Here the author presents evidence that two of the most important pre-crucifixion events in the Biblical Crucifixion narrative were both New Testament interpretations of Jesus' life shaped by deliberate attempts to echo Old Testament prophecies. He also suggests, however, that a third event did take place, the result of a spilling over of Jesus' angry determination to break down the socio-spiritual status quo. He contends that Jesus acting in such a violent way in such a spiritual setting at a point of such high emotion was the crucial, defining the trigger for his arrest, trial, and eventual crucifixion.

The author suggests that what took the peasant, small-town, itinerant Jesus to the wealthy, larger, and settled community of Jerusalem was the presence there of his brother James. The author presents evidence suggesting James had significant social and economic status, and that that status, which embodied values and practices Jesus actively opposed, provoked Jesus to the point that a visit became necessary.

Here the author examines the pre-Jesus career of Pontius Pilate considering his history in the military and in governance, and in relationships with prophets and leaders similar in perspective and activity to Jesus. Pilate is portrayed as "an ordinary second-rank Roman governor...careful to distinguish between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless...the aristocrat and the peasant."

In a similar vein, the author presents evidence that Barabbas, the so-called "robber" released in recognition of Passover, was a decades-later creation of the gospel writers, a metaphoric glorification of similarly motivated freedom fighters who fought to save Jerusalem from destruction by invading Romans.

Here the author suggests that for the most part, the Biblical narrative of events associated with Jesus' death and crucifixion is not based on fact but interpretation. He illustrates his point with a complex process of text-based analysis and reconstruction similar to a process apparently undertaken by highly literate followers of Jesus in the decades following his death. These followers, the author proposes, had a profound knowledge and experience of both Jewish theological history and prophecy, as well as a

pattern of reinterpreting that history to suit their own theological purposes. Those purposes, the author suggests, were to provide a spiritual explanation for what faith suggests could not have happened.

The author reports that according to historical record, the body of a victim of crucifixion was either left on the cross or removed for burial in a shallow grave. The reality of the situation was unacceptable to followers of Jesus and his teachings who could neither believe nor accept that the body of the Chosen One could be treated with such disrespect. So, he further suggests, over time these followers and writers developed stories of what happened to Jesus' body, details including the character and status of Joseph of Arimathea.

In this section, the author gets into what is arguably the most potentially controversial aspect of his argument, his effort to "factualize" the Crucifixion and Resurrection. This, it might also be argued, is the opposite of what the author suggests the Christian church has done in the centuries since the events being considered took place - specifically, mythologizing those events in order to strengthen their theological and spiritual implications. The process of mythology is outlined not to mention dramatically illustrated in apparently logical detail in "Searching the Scriptures" and the author contends throughout the book, defined the actions and intentions of anyone who wrote what eventually became the New Testament.

All that said, there is the clear sense that the various historical details outlined by the author are both well researched and logical, and that the horror of those details adds dimensions to Jesus' suffering that the Biblical accounts barely hint at. Ultimately, though, there is also the sense that for the faithful, both detail and horror would likely be irrelevant. At this point in the Jesus narrative, arguably more so than at any other point in both the Jesus story and this book's analysis of that story, the what and how and sociopolitical why are less important than the who and the spiritual why. In other words, to this point fact and meaning could, for the faithful, conceivably and reasonably intertwine. Here, however, there is the sense that, again for the faithful, the author is crossing a line, that as he examines the "facts" associated with what has arguably become one of the most socially and spiritually transformative "events" in history, he is robbing those events of their transcendence, bringing the heavenly down to earth with a bone-shattering, blood-spattering thud. The point is not made to suggest that his attempt to awaken insight in the reader is either inappropriate or invalid, but rather to suggest that however reasoned it appears, that attempt has, in spite of his apparent efforts and good intentions, the potential to be perceived as a denial of Christian faith.

Part 7, How Many Years Was Easter Sunday?

Part 7, How Many Years Was Easter Sunday? Summary and Analysis

The quotes at the beginning of this section include a poetic contemplation of beauty and a more clinical contemplation of charisma.

He presents quotes from a pair of commentators, suggesting that in the years following the crucifixion, various factions within the Christian movement began reinterpreting the literal circumstances of his death into something more metaphorically and spiritually inspiring.

The author links St. Paul's discussion of Jesus' resurrection with Paul's theological belief that resurrection for ALL was inevitable, suggesting that for Paul, Jesus was leading the way.

Here the author suggests that Paul's revelation of Jesus' power and truth was probably the result of a trance-like circumstance, commenting that Biblical portrayals of similar revelations experienced by other apostles and followers were more likely defined by what they had lived, learned and researched. He goes on to suggest that because of divisions between the various sects of followers, many Biblical stories of the revelation of Jesus were defined by the struggle of various factions to establish power and authority within the Christian community. One such story, the author suggests, is the recounting of another of Jesus' miracles.

The author quotes extensively from the Gospel of St. Luke to support his assertion that the Gospel was shaped to incorporate echoes of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, in which Jesus enabled a small amount of food to feed hundreds and also to establish the leadership of one man, St. Peter. This, the author suggests, is a redefining of the principle of commensality as Jesus initially preached and practiced it.

The author contemplates the Biblical stories of Jesus' filling of the fishermen's empty nets and his walking on water. He suggests that like stories of his other so-called "nature" miracles, these narratives are intended to establish authority of Peter over the rest of the followers and that of Jesus over all.

The author breaks down and analyzes several Biblical stories associated with Jesus' resurrection, which he reiterates were metaphoric constructions based on Old Testament prophecies. These stories, he suggests, establish the authority of the so-called Beloved Disciple, St. John, over that of St. Peter.

The author repeats his suggestion that the resurrection narratives in the New Testament are not intended to be historical representations of what happened three days after Jesus' death but metaphoric interpretations of the growth of Christian faith over a period of several years, perhaps decades. He then concludes this section with the gospel story of the unnamed woman of Bethany. She might have been the true author of the Gospel of St. Mark. She was also, as indicated by Jesus' comments in that gospel about the purity and strength of her faith, the model "for the faith that was there before, despite, or even because of Jesus' death."

Here again the author develops his theory that as a faith, Christianity is defined more by interpretation than by actual facts and events. In this chapter he takes that theory even further by suggesting there are layers of interpretation at work in the Bible, specifically Paul's theological beliefs layered on top of those developed by the more chronologically and spiritually immediate "disciples". The author seems to be suggesting that the more layers of interpretation, the further removed the faith becomes from the man and actions that originally inspired it.

It's also interesting to note how the author portrays the early Christian community as not being immune to the perils of politics, how even within a community inspired by its leader to transcend both the ideals and practices of power ended up defined by the same sort of struggles for dominance and control.

But perhaps the most important element of this section is the author's commentary on the role of women in the faith. The first point to note here is that the author clearly avoids what many Biblical scholars over the centuries have found to be an easy connection to make, suggesting that the Biblical figure of Mary Magdalene is the woman of Bethany. In avoiding making the connection, however, the author also seems to avoid discussing the presence of Mary Magdalene in spite of her being named in the Gospels as one of the first people to establish reconnection with Jesus after the resurrection. The same point could be made of women in general, in spite of a number of women in the New Testament embodying the Christian faith in profoundly fundamental ways. It could, in fact, be argued that, perhaps in spite of his best intentions and in spite of his earlier suggestion that in many original texts the importance of women was emphasized, the author is perpetuating the centuries-old Christian tradition of devaluing the importance of women in the Christian faith and in life in general.

Epilogue, From Jesus to Christ

Epilogue, From Jesus to Christ Summary and Analysis

The quotes here refer to historical documentation as being the purview of the privileged.

The author summarizes all his theories into a single narrative, reinforcing and defining his thesis that Jesus' teachings were as much a socio-political movement as an evolution in spirituality.

The author contemplates some of the ways Christianity has questioned its identity, and affirms what he believes to be the answer to those questions. He suggests that that answer results from the development of a number of divergent views and / or experiences of Jesus, all of which are built upon and/or defined by the blend of history and interpretation, a blend that must, he further suggests, be constantly reexamined. He concludes the section and the book with consideration of the actions of the Roman Emperor Constantine in calling The Council of Nicea. He suggests that the defining of Christian faith through a conference sponsored by a powerful figure of authority is, at the very least, an ironic development given Jesus' historical origins and apparent social conscience. In closing, he poses the question of whether "it is time now, or is it already too late, to conduct, religiously and theologically, ethically and morally, some basic cost accounting with Constantine?"

In his conclusion, the author repeats his thematic contention that Christianity is, or rather has become, a faith of interpretation. As in his previous commentary on the writings of Saint Paul, the author suggests here that there has been yet another layering process on that interpretation, in this case of Constantine that of an individual with an even greater sociopolitical agenda than those that have gone before. Ultimately, the author also seems to be suggesting that it's time for Christianity to peel away those layers of interpretation and get back to the basics. This includes looking at what happened and when, who made it happen and why, and how what, who, and why can transcend the when and be applied to the now. This "now" is the living now that Jesus taught was in fact the time and place of the living Kingdom of God.

Characters

Jesus Christ

In the Bible, and specifically in its New Testament, Jesus Christ is portrayed as The Messiah, the person who, according to Jewish theological tradition will lead the faithful from their earthly sins into a more spiritual existence. While Jewish tradition holds that that person has not yet appeared on earth, according to Christian theological tradition, the man known as Jesus was that person. This book, however, is less interested in either tradition and more in the social, historical and political contexts of the man Jesus' life, work, teaching, and death.

In those contexts, then, Jesus was born into poverty, was probably illiterate and mostly uneducated, was raised in a family with several siblings, and as he grew into manhood became a preacher of what was radical liberal thought for that time period. He advocated breaking down traditional social, political, economic, and moral barriers that had for centuries defined and sustained the Roman culture into which he was born. He put his theories and beliefs into action in such ways and to such public acclaim that, again according to the book, he got into so much trouble with the Roman authorities that he was viewed as a traitor and insurrectionist, tried, and executed. In contemporary terms, he was a militant liberal extremist, and it might not be going too far to suggest that, again in contemporary terms, he was viewed and treated by the authorities of the time as a domestic terrorist.

John the Baptist

John, like Jesus, is an important Biblical figure whose work and legacy are defined more within the socioeconomic context of the time in which he lived and less within the context of the Biblical narratives in which he appears. John, according to the Bible, was a kind of herald, a precursor to Jesus, foretelling his coming and manifestation as the Messiah and urging the people of Israel, Jew and Roman alike, to be ready for the Messiah's arrival. The difference between that version of John and the John of "Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography" is that the John of the latter was not necessarily prophesying the arrival of a specific individual. In other words, like other so-called "Messianic" prophets, he was saying "A Messiah will come," and not that "The Messiah is here." The latter, the author suggests, was a post-Crucifixion invention of the authors of the gospels who wanted to give additional weight to their theological interpretations of Jesus' life and work.

Moses

In the Old Testament of the Bible, Moses was appointed and inspired by God to bring to the Jewish people his laws, the Ten Commandments, and lead them out of slavery to the Pharaoh of Egypt and into the land promised them. "Jesus: A Revolutionary

Biography" suggests that in telling the story of Jesus' life and work, the authors of the New Testament deliberately sought out ways of drawing parallels between the story of Moses and that of Jesus, essentially to set him up with a similar sort of spiritual and moral authority.

Josephus

Josephus was a Roman historian whose records of the time at which both Jesus and John lived, as well as of the years following their deaths are used both in "Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography" and other historical analyses as the primary source material. The author goes to pains to point out that while Josephus and his writings were unarguably influenced by the social and political circumstances in which he lived and wrote, a great deal of what he includes in his work can be seen as having a significant degree of accuracy. In other words, he and his work are seen as accurately representing the circumstances of the time in which Jesus lived, taught, and died.

James

Referred to in the Bible as Jesus' brother, the author portrays the apostle James as being active in Jesus' teaching, in the life built around that teaching and as a possible reason for Jesus being present in Jerusalem at Passover.

The Cynics

In Part 5, the author draws clear comparisons between the instructions for behavior Jesus imparted to his followers and the patterns of behavior practiced by a group of Classical Greek philosophers called The Cynics, who practiced and preached mistrust of the political and military status quo.

Pilate, Barabbas, Joseph of Arimathea

These three individuals play important roles in the Biblical narrative of Jesus' trial, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Pilate was the Roman governor of Jerusalem at the time, Barabbas was the name given to the thief released by Pilate in recognition of Passover tradition, and Joseph was the wealthy Christian citizen who took Jesus' body from the Cross and buried it in his family's tomb. Of the three, "Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography" suggests that only Pilate was an actual, historical person. Barabbas and Joseph, the author suggests, were inventions created by the authors of the Gospels in order to reinvent Jesus' story in their own theological image and to fit their own theological agendas.

St. Peter, St. John

Peter and John were, according to Biblical teachings, two of Jesus' most influential and most loved disciples. While the book does not dispute the emotional closeness of the two to Jesus and the moral inspiration he gave them, it nevertheless portrays them as involved, either directly or indirectly, in a struggle for control of the early Christian church and for recognition as the ultimate representatives of Jesus' will following his death.

The Woman of Bethany

In the Gospels, the story is told of a woman who, inspired by her faith and by the humility of Jesus, anointed his feet with rare and valuable ointment, and then wiped them dry with her hair. There are two important points to note about the way this character is discussed. First, the author separates her from traditional Christian interpretations of her identity that she was either Mary Magdalene, traditionally identified as a prostitute, or Mary the faithful sister of the house-proud Martha, both sisters to the resurrected Lazarus. The second and related point is that the author refers more to her symbolic rather than her actual identity and specifically, as a metaphoric representation of purity, humility, and absolute faith.

Emperor Constantine

In 312 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine became convinced that the consolidation of the Roman Empire under his rule was the result of intervention by the Christian God, and converted to Christianity. A few years later, in 315 AD, he convened the Council of Nicaea in which scholars and religious leaders, under his direction, put together and edited a version of the Bible that in many ways continues to be the foundations of contemporary Christianity. In other words, and as the author of "Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography" points out, a military and political ruler took the teachings of a man who historically opposed everything he stood for and shaped them into an interpretation of those teachings that has formed the basis for centuries of Christian faith and practice.

Objects/Places

The Bible

The Bible has been, for centuries, the undisputed source of Christian teaching, an inspiration of faith and a guide to how that faith should be put into practice. It consists of several texts, written over a period of several centuries but edited, for the most part, into a single document on the order of Emperor Constantine of Rome at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. It has since been revised and translated several times, a situation that suggests its contents can reasonably be seen as open to interpretation.

The Old Testament

This first part of the Christian Bible consists of writings inspired by Judaism.

The New Testament

The second part of the Bible consists, for the most part, of writings inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ who, in Christian tradition, was the Jewish Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.

The Four Gospels

The Gospels are found in the New Testament, and recount the story of Jesus' life and teaching, blending what presents itself as biography with theological and moral instruction.

The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is, on the one hand, portrayed by the Bible as an idealized place where those who accept God's authority and love live in eternity with both God and other, like minded souls. On the other hand, Jesus and his teachings suggest that the Kingdom of God is not so much a place as it is a way of living, thinking, believing and acting. In other words, the Kingdom of God is an identity, a way of being, and is therefore possible to achieve and realize on earth in earthly life.

Nazareth

This small, poor village in Israel was, in both historical and Biblical tradition, the community in which Jesus grew up.

Jerusalem

This city is, in contemporary society a center of faith for three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the time of Jesus' life and work a political, economic, and spiritual center for much of the Middle East, and as such was an understandable focus of the anger of the politically, economically, and spiritually Jesus of Nazareth.

The Temple in Jerusalem

For years before the appearance of Jesus, the Temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish faith and practice. Over time, however, it also evolved into a place of commerce, a place of trade and business. One of the most famous, and most spiritually potent, stories of the Bible involves Jesus losing his temper in the Temple and throwing out all the merchants as he shouted that they had desecrated a religious site. While the Bible emphasizes the moral and spiritual implications of this action, the author emphasizes the social and political, suggesting that as a direct result of this act of radical violence, the governing authorities of Jerusalem realized that Jesus was too potentially dangerous to be allowed to remain alive.

Sandals, Staff,

In Part 5, the author draws comparisons between the teachings and practices of Jesus and those of the Cynics paying particular attention not only to various articles of faith but also to ways in which action and visual impression reinforced that faith. According to the author's research, both the Cynics and the early Christians chose poverty as a means of expressing their humility before spiritual power, and both Cynic and Christian manifested that humility by what they wore and carried as well as what they did not wear or carry. Sandals and a cloak were seen, at least in the early, more extreme phases of both Cynicism and Christianity, as unnecessary indulgences in physical comfort. Not carrying a staff to assist in walking was, again in the early stages of both philosophies, was not only a rejection of physical comfort but a metaphorical suggestion that the only support the traveling preacher needed was that of his philosophy. The "wallet" was actually more of a backpack, with the lack of such suggesting again that the traveling preachers could, and should, get along without any moral or physical encumbrances. Later, however, as both Christianity and Cynicism eased their insistence upon adhering to the rules, all four of these physical manifestations of comfort were eventually permitted.

The Council of Nicaea

In 325 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine called a meeting at Nicaea of prominent theologians and Christian leaders. The main item on that meeting's agenda was the putting together of a document incorporating the varied, and sometimes contradictory,

writings on Jesus' life and teaching. In other words, the Council of Nicaea put together the Bible.

The Trojan Horse

In Classical Literature, an end to the decade-long war between the Greeks and the Trojans was triggered by the Greeks' use of the Trojan Horse, a large wooden horse left outside the gates of Troy by the Greeks as an apparent peace offering. While the Trojans accepted the offering and took it within their gates, they did not know it was filled with Greek soldiers who, in the night, left the confines of the horse and slaughtered the Trojans while they slept. The Trojan Horse has, over the millennia, come to represent victory by stealth, an overthrowing of power from within.

Themes

Jesus as Socio-Political Revolutionary

This is the book's primary focus, its portrayal of Jesus as someone for whom the rules and traditions of his society, as manifest in every institution from the government to the home, were corrupt, inhumane, constrictive and life-denying. Using both Biblical narratives and the socio-historical context of those narratives as source material, the author puts forth the argument that for his time, Jesus was a liberal activist who was determined to break down the layers of barrier between rich and poor, influential and helpless, vulnerable and empowered. Following developments in Jesus' story from the beginning of his life to its end and beyond, the author constructs a portrait of an individual emerging from personal oppression and striving to inspire others to follow a similar personal path towards spiritual, social, and political enlightenment and freedom.

It's important to note that, as the author points out in his Prologue, the book is not intended to undermine and/or destroy the foundations of Christian faith, but rather to place that faith within a sociopolitical context that, in turn, offers it additional breadth and depth. In other words, the book suggests that the life of Jesus was, and ought to be seen as, a life of passion and commitment to justice and truth transcendent of circumstantial identity. That truth, the author further suggests, was grounded in universal awareness and acceptance of a single truth where simply being human and being alive entitled one to claim relationship with the Kingdom of God.

The Bible as Metaphor

Several times throughout the book, the author argues that the words and stories contained in the Bible, even those associated directly with Jesus, should not be and were never intended to be seen as literal, historically accurate representations of fact. While it may be BASED on fact, and on the circumstances in which those facts came into being, the content of the Bible is, the author contends, a collection of interpretations and extrapolations, all of which are intended to inspire, illuminate and define both faith and action. Those interpretations, the author further contends, are expressed in metaphorical terms, with events, characters, and situations all designed to communicate meaning through imagery rather than through straightforward, factual narration. The book defines the historical sources and implications of the imagery involved, and what the images meant to Jesus and to the people. A clear example of this is evidenced in his commentary on the parable of the mustard seed in which the author points out the clear implications and layers of meaning in Jesus' story. The book's exploration of this particular theme seems to suggest that in the same way as the meaning and implications of Jesus' actions were defined by the time in which he lived and taught, contemporary society should also look to itself for meaning and implication, for resonances with contemporary circumstances. In other words, in the same way as Jesus used metaphors relevant to the context of his contemporaries to illuminate

meaning, those hearing stories about him today should interpret those metaphors in ways relevant to the context of life as it is lived.

The Value and Power of the Individual

Using the truths of Jesus' life and teachings as a foundation, both the Bible and this book present images of individual empowerment and fulfillment, narratives of courage that result, and possibilities for manifestations of change resulting from those acts of courage. What "Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography" does that the Bible does not do is examine Jesus' words and actions, and the narratives of both, within their actual historical context, portraying him as an advocate for the oppressed and for a personal, immediate and intimate connection with God's spirit at work in individual lives. Both works however, suggest and develop the spiritual premise that existence within and connection to the so called "Kingdom of God" is best defined by individual experiences of spirit and freedom, as opposed to experiences defined by what both works suggest are structures and traditions motivated by power. The irony is that in Jesus' time as now, those who seek and obtain power have a vested interest in suppressing individuality. The less connection people have to their individual desires and identities, the more likely they are to blindly follow the lead of those with a stronger connection. This, in turn, raises an interesting question. Would an advocate for individual experience such as Jesus seems to have been respected a decision to NOT follow his teachings? Would the person be encouraged to act according to tradition and rule rather than according to individual desire and truth?

Style

Perspective

The Irish-born author, a former Roman Catholic priest, has for several decades been a leader and innovator in the historical study of Jesus' life and work. At times, his views have been controversial, particularly when he has discussed the times at which the various books of the Bible were written. It is important to note, however, that he backs up his contentions here and in his other writings with what appears to be documented, careful, detailed research.

All that said, while Crossan's reasons for writing seem clear to simultaneously deepen genuine faith and challenge faith built on false premises, it is less clear just who his intended audience is. His reasons for writing and the book's content seem to suggest that he is writing for the benefit of Christians who accept the Bible as both absolute historical truth and the unquestioned word of God. In other words, he seems to be advocating a considered, thoughtful faith, rather than a blind unquestioning one. The question then becomes whether such an audience would even pick the book up, let alone read it. It may be, in fact, that in his book Crossan is in effect preaching to the converted, addressing his thoughts and analyses to people who, at least to some degree, already share them.

It is important to note that while critics of the research-based approach to the Bible may see such approaches as undermining faith, it could be argued that in this particular case, the research-based work is, in fact, a reiteration and strengthening one of the New Testament's most vivid and traditionally controversial points. This is the idea that the Kingdom of God cannot reached in ways proscribed by institution and tradition, but through pathways unique to every individual. It is, in short, in the perspective of this book and arguably that of Jesus himself, a lived and living way of living, which is defined through and by experience.

Tone

In general, and as befits the book's apparent intent, "Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography's" overall tone is subjective, presenting its theories in clear and self-defining relationship to what the author believes to be provable facts. The book's general tonal quality, however, is neither dry nor overly academic, but accessible, engaging, and apparently reasonable. The author makes no overt attacks on theories and practices that run counter to his, but instead seems to be striving to present what he knows to be potentially controversial in a non-confrontational way. While it could also be argued that in some cases, the author's contentions make the stories of the Bible even more true, or true a greater variety of ways, it could also be argued that such is the nature of the author's material that controversy is inevitable. In other words, there is every possibility that those who hold strongly to Christian faith and practice would/will not take kindly to

ANY suggestion, no matter how carefully phrased, that the source of their faith is anything but absolutely true. Here the point must be made that such a reaction would probably be the case in any faith community confronted with rational analysis of their holy book. In short, there is the sense about the book that while the author seems to be making every attempt to present his ideas in ways that would provoke thought and consideration rather than knee-jerk rejection, there are those within its apparent intended audience who would react negatively to the book no matter how carefully shaped its overall tone.

Structure

With the exception of the Prologue and the Epilogue, the structure of "Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography" parallels, in broad strokes, that of the material it is examining, which is the life story of Jesus Christ as recounted in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. The first point to note here is that the Four Gospels in the New Testament, the Biblical writings focused directly on Jesus and his teachings, do not all start with consideration of the circumstances of Christ's birth. But two of them do, and since the story of Jesus' birth begins the story of his man's life, that's where the "Biography" begins its considerations, analyzing and considering the sociopolitical circumstances of the primary, Biblically narrated incidents in Jesus' life all the way through to the crucifixion and resurrection. Considered on its own, this structure seems to make sense. It is clear, straightforward, linear and easily followable. When considered in juxtaposition with other aspects of the author's stylistic choices, it seems that there may be another reason for this choice of structure.

As discussed above, the author seems, at least to some degree, careful to communicate his theories and define the evidence supporting those theories in as non-confrontational a way as he can. In that context, it seems possible that basing the structure of his work on the structure of the New Testament was intended to reinforce the idea that he is not attacking the Christian book of faith but in fact using its structure and stories as foundations for his own. In other words, his echoing of Biblical structure combines with his evident respect for the faith the Bible inspires to suggest that he is not anti-Bible or anti-Christianity, but is in fact aware of the Bible's potential value at the same time as he is looking into other ways in which that value was expressed and could be comprehended.

Quotes

"Luke, in that double infancy story, sends two powerful messages to hearer or reader: John is the condensation and consummation of his people's past, but Jesus is far, far greater than John" (pg. 10.)

"Moses would 'save [his] people' from Egypt, but Jesus would 'save [his] people from their sins.'...Matthew, like Luke, sends a strong and powerful message ... Jesus is the new and greater Moses" (pg. 15.)

"Clearly, somebody went seeking in the Old Testament for a text that could be interpreted as prophesying a virginal conception, even if such was never its original meaning. Somebody had already decided on the transcendental importance of the Adult Jesus and sought to retroject that significance onto [Old Testament teachings]" (pg. 18.)

"...any decision on Jesus' socioeconomic class must be made not in terms of Christian theology but of cross-cultural anthropology, not in terms of those interested in exalting Jesus but in terms of those not even thinking of his existence" (pg. 25.)

"It is not absurd...to claim that Jesus was DIVINE, but it is absurd to claim that JESUS was divine. Who is HE, or what has HE done, to deserve such a birth?" (pg. 27.)

"John was an apocalyptic preacher announcing, in classical Jewish tradition, the imminent advent of an avenging God and not, like Josephus, the imminent advent of an imperial conqueror" (pg. 38.)

"It is not enough to await a future kingdom; one must enter a present one here and now" (pg. 48.)

"When today we read his words in fixed and frozen texts we must recognize that the oral memory of his first audiences could have retained, at best, only the striking image, the startling analogy, the forceful conjunction, and, for example, the plot summary of a parable that might have taken an hour or more to tell and perform" (pg. 58.)

"We might see Jesus' message and program as quaintly eccentric or charmingly iconoclastic...but for those who take their very identity from the eyes of their peers, the idea of eating together and living together without any distinctions, differences, discriminations or hierarchies is close to the irrational and the absurd" (pg. 70.)

"Those who, like peasants, live with a boot on their neck can easily envision two different dreams [of justice]. One is quick reveng -a world in which they might get in turn to put their boots on those other necks. Another is reciprocal justice-a world in which there would never again be any boots on any necks" (pg. 71.)

"The open commensality and radical egalitarianism of Jesus' Kingdom of God are more terrifying than anything we have ever imagined, and even if we can never accept it, we should not explain it away as something else" (pg. 73.)

"We are quite used to calling society the body politic, but it is equally important to reverse the process and speak as well of the politic body. It is not just that society is body writ large; body is society writ small" (pg. 76.)

"It is, unfortunately, one of the abiding temptations of pastors and scholars to reduce Jesus to words alone, to replace a lived life with a preached sermon or an interesting idea. To remove, however, that which is radically subversive, socially revolutionary, and politically dangerous from Jesus' actions is to leave his life meaningless and his death inexplicable" (pg. 93.)

"Those without power could be clients to the patrons above them, and those patrons might even be themselves clients to others far more powerful still. Brokers were clients to those above them and patrons to those below" (pg. 96.)

"The equal sharing of spiritual and material gifts, of miracle and table, cannot be centered in one place because that very hierarchy of place, of here OVER there, of this place OVER other places, symbolically destroys the radical egalitarianism it announces" (pg. 101.)

"The Kingdom of God...for Jesus...began on the level of the body and appeared as a shared community of healing and eating-that is to say, of spiritual and physical resources available to each and all without distinctions, discriminations, or hierarchies" (p. 113.)

"Both [Jesus and the Cynic preachers] are populists, appealing to the ordinary people; both are lifestyle preachers, advocating their position not only by word and by deed, not only in theory but in practice; both use dress and equipment to symbolize dramatically their message" (pg. 122.)

"It is hard, for now, not only for those who have faith in Jesus, but also for those who have faith in humanity, to look closely at the terror of crucifixion in the ancient world" (pg. 124.)

"...Roman crucifixion was state terrorism...its function was to deter resistance or revolt, especially among the lower classes...the body was usually left on the cross to be consumed eventually by the wild beasts" (pg. 127.)

"...Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing whatsoever about the details of his crucifixion, death, or burial. What we have now in those detailed passion accounts is not history remembered but prophecy historicized" (pg. 145.)

"How could God's Chosen One have been so treated, and if he had been so treated, could he still be God's Chosen One?" (p. 145.)

"...by Easter Sunday morning, those who cared did not know where [the body of Jesus] was, and those who knew did not care" (pg. 158.)

"What happened on Easter Sunday? Is that the story of one day? Or of several years? Is that the story of ALL Christians gathered together as a single group in Jerusalem? Or is that the story of but one group among several, maybe of one group who claimed to be the whole?" (pg. 160.)

"We have, from before his execution, those missionaries who went out in imitation of Jesus' own lifestyle, practicing free healing and open commensality. Did they all stop their activities on the day of his death? Did they all immediately lose their faith? Or, if they found themselves just as empowered as before, was he not somehow still with them, and how could that absent presence best be expressed?" p. 163

"Fishing all night without Jesus, the disciples catch nothing. Sailing all night without Jesus, the disciples get nowhere. Jesus returns and immediately there is a great catch or a safe harbor. The symbolism is obvious, but it is a symbolism for a specific leader ... in the former case, and for a leadership group in the second one." p. 186

"...we cannot tell whether the Beloved Disciple represents an individual person or a different mode of leadership" (pg. 190.)

"Easter is not about the start of a new faith but about the continuation of an old one. That is the only miracle and the only mystery, and it is more than enough of both" (pg. 190.)

"The deliberate conjunction of magic and meal, miracle and table, free compassion and open commensality, was a challenged launched...at the most basic level of civilization's eternal inclination to draw lines, invoke boundaries, establish hierarchies, and maintain discriminations" (pg. 196.)

"Christian belief is 1) an act of faith 2) in the historical Jesus 3) as the manifestation of God" (pg. 200.)

"Christianity must repeatedly, generation after generation, make its best historical judgment about who Jesus was then and, on that basis, decide what that reconstruction means as Christ now" (pg. 200.)

Topics for Discussion

Discuss the literal and metaphorical relationship between the quotes at the beginning of each section and the content of the sections themselves.

Research and discuss the parallels, in both theme and structure, between the story and teachings of Jesus, spiritual archetypes and beliefs in other cultures, and the structure of the stories manifesting those teachings and beliefs.

Contrast the importance of faith with the importance of historical reality in relation to consideration of the life and teachings of Jesus. How relevant, for example, is it to consider his socioeconomic background as a so-called "Peasant" or "Expendable" to his teachings and to the faith inspired by them?

Consider the author's suggestion that in both faith and practice, Jesus was a socio-political radical, challenging traditional ways of faith and / or function. In what ways is/has Christianity, traditional and contemporary, embraced and/or rejected this aspect of his life and work?

In what ways could Jesus' rebellion against constrictive regulations and traditions be carried out in contemporary society?

Discuss the theory and value of rebellion such as that practiced and preached by Jesus. What standards should be used to determine what should be rebelled against? When is rebellion necessary, and/or justified? When is squashing such rebellions necessary and justified? Where should the line be drawn between necessary government and individual freedom of the sort advocated, according to the author, by Jesus and his followers?

Discuss what you think Jesus' reaction would be to someone who, in the name of living an individually-defined life of the sort he advocated, refused to follow his teachings. What might Jesus say? What might Jesus do?

Consider, in general, the role and value of faith and spiritual practice. Discuss whether fact or faith is more important. Is inwardly-directed contemplation or outwardly-directed action more valuable and expressive of individual faith?