



Who Killed Jesus?

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The death of Jesus is one of the most hotly debated questions in Christianity today. In his massive and highly publicized *The Death of the Messiah*, Raymond Brown -- while clearly rejecting anti-Semitism -- never questions the essential historicity of the passion stories. Yet it is these stories, in which the Jews decide Jesus' execution, that have fueled centuries of Christian anti-Semitism.

Now, in his most controversial book, John Dominic Crossan shows that this traditional understanding of the Gospels as historical fact is not only wrong but dangerous. Drawing on the best of biblical, anthropological, sociological and historical research, he demonstrates definitively that it was the Roman government that tried and executed Jesus as a social agitator. Crossan also candidly addresses such key theological questions as "Did Jesus die for our sins?" and "Is our faith in vain if there was no bodily resurrection?"

Ultimately, however, Crossan's radical reexamination shows that the belief that the Jews killed Jesus is an early Christian myth (directed against rival Jewish groups) that must be eradicated from authentic Christian faith.

Who Killed Jesus? Details

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Margaret says

Very difficult to follow at times. VERY intellectual and complex in the reasoning and research presented, but compelling. The teaser title of "roots of anti-semitism" is buried under the author's constant commentary and comparison with another author's book. Thought-provoking in terms of when the gospels were written, whether they were historical events presented later or old testament prophecies presented as predictions coming true during the age when the gospels were written. Also interesting weaving of non-canonical gospels (Gospel of Peter, et al.) in posing alternate possibilities of the events from Jesus' arrest to resurrection.

Amanda J says

Crossan is a top-notch Jesus historian. Unlike some of his larger tomes, this is very readable.

Steven Williams says

In this book John Dominic Crossan, a well respected New Testament scholar, claims that the stories in the Gospels portraying the Jews as responsible for Jesus' death are non-historical, which he uses to try to cleanse Christianity of its anti-Judaism and subsequent anti-Semitism leading to the holocaust. In other words he claims that anti-Judaism is not a valid historical viewpoint. He has developed a conception on what counts as historical or not in the gospels to help in this endeavor. He also writes against Raymond E. Brown's views in Brown's *The Death of the Messiah*. Crossan argues against Brown's history, or what he believes his history to be.

In the prologue Crossan juxtaposes his and Brown's methodology. Crossan takes the position that most of the passion stories in the Gospels are prophecy historicized. Crossan only admits that the real (to him) history makes up only about ten percent of what is written in the gospels. Chapters one through seven cover the analysis of Jesus' crime, arrest, trial, abuse, execution, burial, and resurrection. Crossan relies heavily on The Gospel of Peter, claiming it was written earlier than the canonical gospels. This goes against Brown's opinion. In the final chapter Crossan spells out his point of view and what he thinks it means for faith. The main conclusion is that the parts of the gospels that tarnishes the Jews are not historically accurate, thereby exonerating them of the crime of deicide.

I will not go into any details of his arguments, but will offer up some comments on some of what he says. Page numbers in parentheses are from the HarperSanFrancisco paperback edition.

Crossan quotes both Josephus and Tacitus (5) as evidence for a historical Jesus. There are at least two problems with this. One is that being ancient historians they are not always accurate. The second is possibly more important. Both writers could just be quoting Christian texts available at the times they wrote in.

With the fig tree incident (62-3), where Jesus made the tree wither I could not help but conclude that the biblical Jesus did not care about the environment.

He wants to argue that the Gospel of Peter is early than the canonical gospels. He states based on this gospel that "Rome is Christian." (91). If this were so, it would indicate that the Gospel of Peter was later than the canonical gospels, counteracting his claim for the reverse.

After quoting a passage in the Gospel of Peter, he tells us it is "Absurd, of course." (97) If this passage is absurd, why not the whole gospel and the rest of the New Testament, the gospels included.

He quotes Josephus about an incident with Pilate and the Jews, where the Jews "fell prostrate" before Pilate for "five whole days." (149) This is absolutely preposterous, just like a good deal of all biblical stories.

I take issue with Crossan's whole approach. He wants to claim that the texts of Jesus' passion that reflect negatively on the Jews are prophecy being taken as history, but when they do not it is prophecy becoming history. It seems awfully suspicious to do this, especially when any history claimed in the gospels is suspect because there is not any independent verification for it. His whole approach is a case of cherry picking. His aim is admirable—to counteract anti-Semitism based on Jesus' passion stories. But, if the passion did not happen because there was no historical Jesus, the best way to counteract the passion stories' anti-Judaism is to acknowledge that it is myth, and so has no basis as history, which is a much more compelling reason than picking and choosing which is history and which is not.

The book is interesting enough. I found it intriguing how Crossan lays out his case, but ultimately fails. So, I would have to give the book a fair to good rating overall.

I could recommend the book for those who might be interested in someone attempting to pick history out of the minefield of gospel texts, both canonical and not. If one has no experience with the Gospel of Peter, like me, it might hold some interest there. If one is looking for a valid theory based on biblical texts, be prepared to be disappointed if you are willing to take a critical approach about biblical history.

Aimen says

Unnecessarily ambiguous and text book boring. You're better reading the old Pope's book than this nonsense.

Andrew says

Was a good book, but rather confusing at the same time. The book title is rather tantalizing but SPOILER ALERT: the answer is not a surprise. As for Crossan's stated intent, to discuss the origin of antisemitism... he never really does except barely in passing. What it is is a study and analysis of the NT.

Jeff says

<http://thatjeffcarterwashere.blogspot...>

Timothy James Lambert says

An excellent look at the Passion narrative which attempts to answer the question. Is it History remembered or Prophecy historicised.

Rae says

As well as looking at anti-Semitism, Crossan addresses Christ's atonement and resurrection. It seems that many scholars who profess to be Christians do all they can to undermine our faith in Jesus Christ.

Joni says

Whew! I am finally done. This book was well researched and documented, but reading it was very much like studying a textbook.

Tim says

Helpful to read alongside the Gospel of John.
