



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 14 October 2018

How to Read the Bible and still be a Christian

We are NOT the people of the book – God did not so love the world that he gave us his only book! We are the people of 'the Way', followers of Jesus of Nazareth, and his 'Kingdom of heaven/God'.

The Bi-modal God

The early stories in the Bible can be found in earlier Mesopotamian and Sumerian traditions.

Genesis 1:31 – 'Creation' – all was good

Genesis 6:5-7 (*Yahwehist ~950BCE*) – *wicked*

Genesis 6:11-13 (*Priestly ~500BCE*) – *violence*

Genesis 6:17 – sends a flood to wipe out creation

The God of non-violent distributive justice or the God of violent retributive justice?

Note Genesis 6:18 – covenant, a binding two way agreement.

Isaiah 2:4 & Micah 4:3 – swords into ploughs

Joel 3:10 – ploughs into swords

A radical assertion is later subverted by the normalcy of civilisation.

The Jewish world view is based on the tribal origins of how a good household would be run – distributive justice and restorative righteousness.

Deuteronomy (~859BCE) introduces divine punishment and seeks to limit the escalation of retribution (eye for an eye).

But which Jesus?

Zechariah 9:9-10 – the Messiah (Christ) comes on a donkey in response to Alexander the Great in 330s BCE on his war horse.

Mark 11:1-11 – the 'Entry into Jerusalem' on a donkey of peace

Matthew 21:1-11 – the lampoon is intensified with a nursing jenny.

Revelation 19: 11-16 – the war horse, robe soaked in blood, trampling out the wine, the furious anger of God

Mark 11:17 – den of robbers

John 2:14-17 – whip (for the animals).

Jesus was clearly non-violent, as it was only he who was killed and not his followers.

Mark 15:6-9 – the parable of Barabbas (*multiple 'Messiahs' or 'Kings of the Jews' were found around the time of Jesus in revolt to the Roman occupation – Josephus records 2000 crucified in one day by the Romans*).

Allan Barr – *Synoptic Relations 1938*

Mark – radical, non-violent Jesus

Matthew incorporates Mark & Q – contradictory non-violent & violent Jesus

Luke – heavily revises Q to temper the violence.

The Message of John the Baptist

Mark 1:1-3 – John preaches the immanent intervention of God for miraculous liberation

Matthew 3:7 & Luke 3:7 – rhetorical violence

Matthew 3:10 & Luke 3:9, 17 – physical violence (axe to the root, chaff to eternal fire)

Luke 3:10-14 – seeks to ameliorate with a more positive amendment

In Josephus' writings, John's death is recorded.

This history becomes a parable in Mark 6:23 using the Jewish context of Esther 5:6 where the imprudent Ahasuerus becomes Herod Antipas, the bad Haman becomes Herodias, and the good Esther becomes John.

The Message of Jesus

Jesus was a disciple of John but changed his teaching.

There is a paradigm shift from the unilateral divine intervention to the bilateral divine and human co-operation (covenant) – paraphrased as 'you have been waiting for God while God has been waiting for you!'

Outcome: either reject, accept, or more usually accept but understand it within the old paradigm, hence the fairly soon addition of Jesus' 'return'.

Discussing the Kingdom's end is a refuge from facing it's start; debating the Christian future was, and still is, a strategy for avoiding the Christian present.

Mark 9:1, Mark 13:30 and Matthew 10:23 are NOT from the historical Jesus (or he got it very wrong!).

Escalation of Violence

Ideological – others subhuman, lacking one's own humanity

Rhetorical – rude names, caricatures, derogatory stereotypes (traitors or heretics)

Physical – lethal, either illegal attack or legal power

NB rhetorical violence was typical of debate in a Greek based culture.

Luke 6:37 – do not judge

Matthew 7:1-5 – punitive

John 8:44 – here is Jesus judging: 'you are from your father the devil'

Did Jesus change his mind or did John change his Jesus?

Violence of Rejection

Mark 6:11 – shake off the dust

Matthew 10:13-15 – on Judgement Day, Sodom & Gomorrah

Matthew 11:21-24 & Luke 10:12-15 – Jesus threatening punishment

Either Mark erased rhetorical violence or the Q gospel created it.

Violence of Proof

Mark 8:11-12 – no sign

Matthew 12:33-42 & Luke 11:29-32 – evil and adulterous generation & the sign of Jonah (a story), a double threat.

Mark based on the N & E of Galilee (under Herod Phillip), mostly gentile Christians.
Q based in lower Galilee (under Herod Antipas), mostly Jewish Christians.
Matthew represents Christian Pharisees, with bitterness on both sides

Matthew 23:13-33 – hypocrites and snakes

Compare Matthew 5:21-22 – ‘Sermon on the mount’ (the new Moses giving the new Law on the mountain)

Did Jesus change his mind or did Matthew change his Jesus?

Paul

Three Pauls: of the letters attributed to Paul, ETC (Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians) are conservative ‘pseudo Paul’, and 2Ts (Titus, 1 & 2 Timothy) are reactionary ‘pseudo-Paul’.

Galatians 3:28 – no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, man of woman; all are one in union with Jesus the Christ.

This is a radical challenge to Roman society which is patriarchal and runs on slavery (up to 1/3 of any population).

Paul on Slaves

Philemon 16 – welcome Onesimus as a brother, ie Christians should free Christian slaves.

1 Corinthians 12:13 – all the same value and status.

Colossians 3:22-4:1 & Ephesians 6:5-9 – can have slaves but equal responsibilities

Titus 2:9-10 – obligations from slaves to masters.

(1 Corinthians 7:21 is ambiguous and not easily translated).

Paul on Women

Genesis 2:24 – husband went to live with the wife’s family (*inserted into the creation story*); culture changed by the time of the Judges.

1 Corinthians 11:2-12 – women can preach and pray in public.

Married women traditionally wear a veil; here the cultural context is getting in the way of theology, making religion. Linked to issues around celibacy, and wives withholding sex from husbands.

1 Corinthians 7:12-14 – divorce, even-handed, ‘if she consents’.

Colossians 3:18 & Ephesians 5:22-33 – less even, with wives to submit.

1 Timothy 2-11 – silence & submission.

1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 – appears in different places in different manuscripts and is thought to be a marginal note from Timothy later copied into the main text. No such Jewish law exists.

We must read the Bible with an understanding of its own time and place.

The radicality of God is tempered by the normalcy of civilisation.

There are no divine punishments, only human consequences.

God of justice and love: not justice as vengeance and punishment, but justice as distributive fairness (or ‘enough-ism’).

Based on the book ‘How to read the Bible and still be a Christian’ (Is God Violent? An exploration from Genesis to Revelation) by John Dominic Crossan, HarperOne 978-0-06-220361-8, 2015.