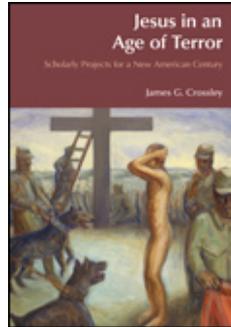


○ REVIEW OF JAMES G. CROSSLEY, *JESUS IN AN AGE OF TERROR: SCHOLARLY PROJECTS FOR A NEW AMERICAN CENTURY*

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Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* is frequently employed as a metaphor for any situation in which a young maverick reveals a major failing of the established order about which others have been inexcusably blind. In *Jesus in an Age of Terror: Scholarly Projects for a New American Century*, James G. Crossley dramatically exposes the pervasive Orientalism which continues to be proudly paraded in many quarters of New Testament scholarship, and which since 11 September 2001 has become, in Derek Gregory's words, 'hideously emboldened'.

The book is divided into three main parts, each demonstrating how certain trends within biblical studies emerged at the same time as similar socio-political trends in the broader world. As Crossley also shows, these trends in biblical studies have in turn tended to reinforce Anglo-American power and hegemony. Crossley's concerns are not merely theoretical but also, as he is careful to emphasise, entail some deadly consequences. Instead of providing a radical counter-voice to state propaganda and oppression, time and again scholarship has not only accepted stereotypes of Islam and Arabs, but has provided an 'intellectual' rationale with which to buttress it. As one particularly powerful example, Crossley discusses the American soldiers who raped and tortured Iraqis at Abu Ghraib – who were following procedures based in part on theoretical generalisations about 'the Arab' made by Raphael Patai in *The Arab Mind* (in particular, sexual and shaming stereotypes), and which happen to be the same stark generalisations quoted with favour by biblical scholars who are members of the Context Group. For Crossley, such scholarly complicity is diametrically opposed to the proper role of the intellectual, who should continually and severely question authoritatively received positions and problematise popular prejudices.

In Part One, Crossley provides a historical survey of the ways New Testament scholarship has 'been influenced by its political and social settings' over the last century or so (p. xiii). He brings this survey up to date by closely examining contemporary biblical studies blogs, or 'biblio-blogs'. Unlike academic books and articles, biblical scholars frequently voice their personal and

political opinions on these Internet sites, thereby providing Crossley with ready and useful data with which to examine the influence of mainstream ideologies. In order to carry out his analysis, Crossley productively applies Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's 'propaganda model of manufacturing consent'. Crossley's results are strikingly similar to the conclusions originally reached by Herman and Chomsky in respect of the mass media, in that biblical scholars overwhelmingly tend to replicate and support rather than criticise the conservative political ideology of Anglo-American government and mainstream media. Crossley documents the widespread tendency among bibliobloggers to repeat official American governmental positions on the 'War on Terror', to refuse to look behind terrorist violence to the systemic socio-economic violence that contributes to it, to ignore the violence of Anglo-American-Israeli foreign policy, to treat the deaths of people in some parts of the worlds as less important than others, to treat Islam as inherently evil, and to uncritically support the modern state of Israel. While a handful of bibliobloggers are indeed critical of such positions, such dissenting voices are most often ignored or dismissed outright by the majority. Yet Crossley argues that most bibliobloggers are not 'deliberately pushing political agendas'; what is said or left unsaid is more often a subconscious, and so unreflective, imitation of the 'broader cultural context' (p. 25).

In Part Two, Crossley convincingly demonstrates the link between the 'clash of civilisations' thesis and certain forms of rhetoric found in Christian origins scholarship. Crossley adds to the mounting criticism of Samuel P. Huntington's thesis of insuperable difference between the West and Islam, denouncing its broad over-generalisations and its tendency to paint all cultures, not just Islamic culture, as homogenous wholes. Crossley demands a more specific and historically-rooted understanding of Islam, greater attention to contrary facts that do not support the 'clash' model, and a critical approach to the role of Western foreign policy. Crossley also criticises the anti-religious tirades of atheist Sam Harris as ignoring the complex of social, political, and economic 'roots of Muslim violence', in favour of 'stunningly simplistic and ideologically convenient answers' (p. 85). What is common to these criticisms is the need to move beyond simple stereotypes and oppositions and grapple with the true complexity involved in any cultural-religious analysis.

It is no surprise then that the Context Group's rigid oppositions of shame versus guilt and community versus individuality bring out the gadfly in Crossley, who scorns Bruce Malina's description of 'Mediterraneans' in *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (1996, 114) as 'a stunningly judgmental generalization about peoples, covering vast geographical and cultural areas, and which smacks of old-fashioned imperialistic anthropology and the Orientalist scholarship famously demolished by Said' (p. 112). Nor does Crossley hold back when Malina approvingly cites Hans Tütsch's 'unfortunate and, frankly, absurd analysis' of 'the Arab' or when Malina concludes that what Tütsch 'says of Arabs holds for village Mediterraneans in general'. Crossley rightly retorts that this is a 'whopping great generalization covering vast geographical and cultural differences', which is 'not just morally lacking but intellectually dubious when applied to the Mediterranean 2000 years ago' (pp. 119–121). As Crossley also points out, it would be quite unthinkable to make such stereotypical generalisations if the subject were Jews rather than Arabs (p. 112). What is more, these trends in biblical scholarship have coincided with the increased socio-political significance of 'the Arab' and 'the Middle East' in the West from the 1970s onwards, which resulted from the oil crises and political uprisings against U.S. political control (p. 115). '[T]he rhetorically stark contrasts... have emerged in New Testament scholarship at a notable

period in recent history and—wittingly or unwittingly—buy into the rhetoric of Orientalism old and new’ (p. 141).

In Part Three, Crossley demonstrates a further connection between socio-political developments and New Testament scholarship, one which has not been widely considered in reviews of historical Jesus scholarship. At the time that New Testament scholarship was discarding its old heightened contrast of Judaism versus Christianity (and law versus gospel) and was seemingly embracing the Jewishness of Jesus, the West’s social and political interests were beginning to embrace the modern state of Israel. Yet, the newfound love for Israel in the West was not the result of any sudden renunciation of antisemitism. Politically, it was due to Israel’s strategic place in the oil-producing Middle East and, socially, it was largely due to the prophetic importance given to Israel by Christian Zionists and their numerous American sympathisers. But if the West’s interest in Israel and Judaism was largely self-serving, as Crossley implies, so too was the developing interest of many biblical scholars. Jesus’ Jewishness was of interest only to the extent that Jesus could be shown to be *atypically* Jewish, somehow superior to his fellow Jews. And so, Crossley concludes, despite the apparent embrace of Jesus’ Jewishness, in practical terms the longstanding Western idea of Christianity’s superiority remains intact.

However, Crossley’s contention that the continuing superiority accorded to Jesus and Christianity in biblical studies rests on ‘national’ as well as ‘religious’ bias (p. 193) is not quite so convincing. While Crossley’s examination of N. T. Wright and Larry Hurtado demonstrates an overriding concern to manufacture so-called ‘unparalleled’ traditions for Jesus and the early Church, such a concern is probably explicable in terms of the scholars’ *religious* presuppositions. In fact, the examples Crossley provides of the nationalism of Christian Zionists tend to stand *in contrast* to the limited interest shown towards modern Israel by Wright and Hurtado. Here, unlike the earlier parts of the book, the lack of connecting evidence risks psychological speculation concerning the scholars’ ‘intentions relating to Judaism’ (p. 176). This is especially true of Crossley’s criticism of Crispin Fletcher-Louis’ interpretation of ‘the son of man’ (pp. 183–186). There is no good evidence of any ‘dramatic omission of evidence’ (p. 185) on Fletcher-Louis’ part; instead, his conclusions are ostensibly based on the substantive matter of a difference of opinion concerning that Jewish evidence. Crossley’s reliance on Maurice Casey’s opinion in *The Solution to the ‘Son of Man’ Problem* (2007) as ‘the most up-to-date and comprehensive work on the term ‘son of man’ itself omits to mention the 2007 anthology, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, which reaches quite different conclusions from what is essentially the same evidence.

Such minor criticisms aside, Crossley has uncovered a disturbing and pervasive trend of continuing Orientalism active in certain areas of contemporary New Testament scholarship. He has also gathered and analysed a great deal of firsthand evidence to convincingly support his conclusions, rather than relying on the type of highly theoretical arguments that often dominate discussions of Orientalism. He delivers all of this in a conversational style, interspersed with witty comments and some decidedly naughty counter-readings of some ambiguous quotations. For any who still doubt it, Crossley has provided a valuable demonstration of some of the ways in which biblical scholarship, far from sitting in any hallowed seat of objectivity, is profoundly influenced by wider social and political trends.