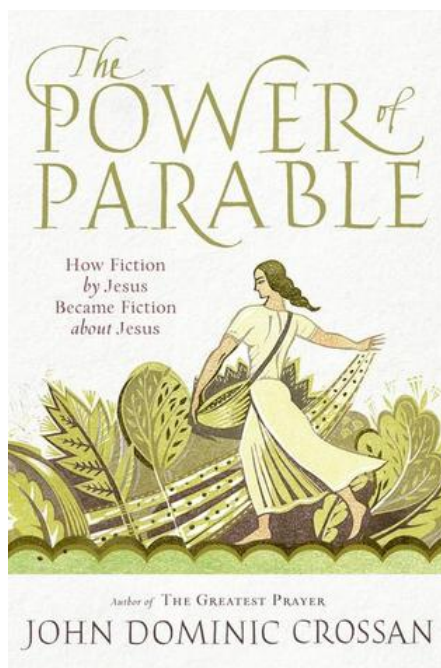




## The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus

*John Dominic Crossan*

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# The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus

*John Dominic Crossan*

## **The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus** John Dominic Crossan

The world's foremost Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan shows us how the parables present throughout the New Testament not only reveal what Jesus wanted to teach but also provide the key for explaining how the Gospels' writers sought to explain the Prophet of Nazareth to the world. In this meaningful exploration of the metaphorical stories told by Jesus and the Gospel writers, Crossan combines the biblical expertise of his *The Greatest Prayer* with a historical and social analysis that harkens closely to his *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, creating an illuminating and nuanced exploration of the Scripture that fans of Marcus Borg and Bart Ehrman will find fascinating and essential.

## **The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus Details**

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## From Reader Review The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus for online ebook

### Rick Edwards says

This is an important book. Crossan makes a strong case for the parabolic character of the gospels. At the same time, he does not finally persuade me that "parable" is a satisfactory category for these powerful and persuasive christological narratives. What the author does accomplish most effectively, I think, is to highlight the distinctive concerns brought to the four canonical gospels by their authors. He seems to find it helpful to use the categories of "challenge" and "attack" parables to arrive at and justify these different theological thrusts. Especially thought-provoking is his view that Jesus himself, as a historical person, so thoroughly worked from a non-violent perspective that he never employed attack parables, while frequently using the challenge type. Ergo, he finds Mark and Luke-Acts more consistent with Jesus' own approach, and Matthew and John less so. At the same time, he provides what I am coming to consider the most helpful analysis on why the latter two moved into attack mode, and the pitfalls in the Luke-Acts approach. Jesus, he believes, launched a non-violent movement against Roman oppression and the complicity in that oppression of the Jewish religious establishment. Matthew represents the perspective of Jewish Christianity vis a vis the emerging post-Temple synagogue Judaism. Luke-Acts emerges from the perspective of a Gentile Christian who believes that Christianity ought to assume the special legal status in the Roman Empire previously accorded the Jews, who ought to lose it. John, Crossan argues--and fairly persuasively--arises from Samaritan Christianity, which explains, and to some extent justifies, its harsh view of "the Jews" especially in the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. I look forward to re-reading the book, and fully expect that many of Crossan's observations will find their way into my preaching and teaching in the coming lectionary cycles.

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### Lee Harmon says

Crossan ponders, "I had observed that the parabolic stories by Jesus seemed remarkably similar to the resurrection stories about Jesus. Were the latter intended as parables just as much as the former? Had we been reading parable, presuming history, and misunderstanding both?"

In other words, are the stories of Jesus really book-length parables? Crossan presents three such parables in the Old Testament: Job, Ruth and Jonah. Ruth challenges a part of the Bible, Jonah challenges the whole of the Bible, and Job challenges the God of the Bible. But isn't there a major difference between the Old Testament books and the Gospels? Were the characters in these stories historical, the way we think of Jesus? So Crossan presents the story of Caesar at the Rubicon as "parabolic history" to show how even historical characters can be the subject of the development of parables.

Crossan separates parables by their flavor: riddle, example, challenge, and attack parables. I found the discussion of several New Testament parables insightful, but they served only as a lead-in to the bigger topic. In part 2, Crossan takes on the four Gospels each as a whole, presenting the meaning of them as book-length parables ... what they challenge, what they attack.

It is not really the historicity of the Gospels which Crossan contests, but their evangelical purpose. The undercurrent of truth, or lack thereof, is not the focus of his book; it is the way the stories are bent into parable, and what these book-length parables mean. Thought-provoking and well-written, a great read.

## John Hicks says

Stories about Jesus are parables similar to the stories Jesus told. He was teaching his followers how to tell his story, but they were often poor students. Crossan compares differences among the often-retold parables. Of the four kinds of parable in and before the time of Jesus (riddle parable, example parable, challenge parable, attack parable), his were challenge parables, told to shake up your assumptions and keep your understanding of the Bible from slipping into familiar partialities and self-serving ruts. Much of the Bible is better understood as parable than as history. Entire books of the Bible are parables: Ruth, Job, Esther. Sadly, and blame me not Crossan if this is wrong, the gospels slowly slip away from what Jesus said and taught, from Mark to Matthew to Luke-Acts and John, until Revelations stands Jesus on his head with the violence and rage with which it sorts good from evil. Along the way we lose "judge not," and "Love like the sun and the rain, that come to the deserving and the undeserving alike," and all that was best in his teaching. One of the three best books I've read about Jesus and his teachings.

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## David Crumm says

### Bible Scholar Expands the Importance of Jesus's Teaching Style

Famous Bible scholar John Dominic Crossan, a popular guide in TV documentaries about the ancient world, hopes his newest book will free more people from the trap of trying to believe that everything in the Bible is literally true. As we follow him in this new tour through the Gospels, Crossan promises a bonus: If we free up our expectations about how the New Testament teaches God's truth, we may discover fresh inspiration in these time-worn stories.

In a nutshell, here's how he takes us down this path: What if the world-famous parables of Jesus—the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son and all the rest—weren't the only parables in the New Testament? What if Jesus's approach to teaching by telling provocative stories became the over-arching style of early Christian teaching? What if the four Gospel writers actually weren't trying to nail down every single historical detail about Jesus like modern archaeologists in scientific reports? Instead, what if the Gospel writers' goal was to tell the most important stories about Jesus in the most memorable and thought-provoking way? After all, that's how Jesus told his parables. What if the Gospel writers were inspired to shape some of the details in their stories about Jesus to make them the most effective parables about Jesus that they could give to future generations?

At this point, some Christians will be upset with Crossan. If you are among them, then you are likely to have trouble with his new book. If you are a Christian who believes the Bible is true in a literal reading, then this kind of analysis is disturbing. But, before you dismiss this book out of hand, consider this: Crossan is regularly invited into mainline congregations almost every weekend throughout the year, where big crowds of people show up to hear him teach and preach about fresh approaches to understanding the Bible. Through public appearances, television and a long string of books, Crossan's message has reached millions. It's worth checking out what he's saying, this year.

Let me clarify one central point: This new book is not claiming that Jesus is pure fiction. In fact, Crossan clarifies this point himself. He writes: "Did Jesus ever exist as a historical figure in time and place? Is he like Julius Caesar—a factual figure, but enveloped in clouds of parable? Or is he like the Good Samaritan—an entirely fictional character of Christianity's parabolic imagination? My answer is that Jesus did exist as a

historical figure.” And, Crossan sets that final line in italics to make no mistake about this: He’s not trying to deny the truth of Jesus as a real-life figure in history.

Is Crossan out on a limb? For traditional Christian Bible readers, he is. But he has lots of company. Compare his arguments with some of the other popular authors who have new books available about Christianity and the Bible: Christian Smith in *The Bible Made Impossible*, Diana Butler Bass in *Christianity After Religion*, and Bart Ehrman in *Did Jesus Exist?* Of course, they disagree on many points, but they agree on some basic conclusions.

Even if you reject the second half of Crossan’s book, where he argues that the Gospel writers felt it was important to write their Good News in parable formats, you still may find yourself inspired by the book’s first half. That portion of the book is a remarkably fresh reading of Jesus’s own parables. So, my strong recommendation is: Give this book a chance. You’ll find that, in addition to personal inspiration, *The Power of Parable* is guaranteed to spark spirited discussion in your Sunday School class, Bible study series, or book discussion group.

*The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*  
*Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*  
*Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*

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### **Jon says**

The more I read from modern scholars about the historical Jesus, the more I realize I don't know very much about Jesus. This book from leading historian John Dominic Crossan is slow starting and there's a bunch of metadiscourse throughout ("first, I will say... then I will say"), but by the end of part one and throughout part two it was all groundbreaking to me.

Crossan's basic assertion is that the gospel writers each had an agenda that deeply colored their interpretation of Jesus's parables *and* their interpretation of historical events. Crossan leverages a life's worth of study to get to the heart of what was really said and meant in the stories of Jesus, and I find his take convincing. He explains long-held mysteries (e.g., why does Jesus say that he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist? Why does he say that the Holy Ghost can't come while he is on the earth?), and he does it in a way that's positive and life-affirming.

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### **Jose-Luis La Torre-Cuadros says**

Good and inspiring

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### **Eric Wojciechowski says**

“Do not, then, ever hear any of the specific names or classes or acts or episodes in the parables of Jesus with modern Christian ears; try to use ancient Jewish ears.” – Page 100 e-edition.

This quote sums up Crossan’s “*The Power of Parables*”. What you’ve been reading all these years and what

you thought they meant, you were probably wrong. Whereas many can be read as setting examples like the Good Samaritan, Crossan makes the case these stories were meant to challenge current thinking. For instance, in the story of the Master's Money where the two who invested were rewarded when the Master returned, and the third who did not was chastised, the story to modern ears suggests you should create wealth from wealth. But this is not a Jewish value. In the Torah, generating interest is forbidden. Crossan argues the Master's Money parable is better read as a story presented to the audience to get the debate going as to what is better: God's way (no interest)? Or the way of Rome (interest)?

Citing the story of Ruth, Jonah and Job from the Old Testament, Crossan makes the case that "challenge" was more the goal than example or otherwise. He argues that simply reading the parables isn't enough. Imagine in their original form, they were spoken by a teacher. The parable could have taken an hour to generate discussion with constant objections and interruptions. This does not translate when written and the meaning gets lost.

Crossan, of course, invested in the historical Jesus as he is, figures these parables were spoken by Jesus and discussed for lengths of time. I, however, being more convinced of the mythicist persuasion (that there never was a historical Jesus) can still accept Crossan's conclusions but that the New Testament parables were told and discussed by the first Christians, not Jesus. The first Christians were feeling their way around their new faith using the familiar Jewish formula of parable. In their belief that Jesus died and resurrected as a replacement of the Temple and yearly sacrifice of the sin of Israel, they discussed this new view of the world by challenging the old. What remains of these discussions, all we have left, are what were later boxed into the Gospels and the words put into Jesus' mouth. And the meaning gets further convoluted due to what being left is only in written form. It would be interesting to see some turned into stage plays to demonstrate what the parables would have been.

This sums up the first six chapters of "The Power of Parable".

The rest of the book makes up not what Jesus/Christians were talking about, but what parables were told about Jesus himself (the four Gospels and Book of Acts).

For Mark, Jesus was to represent a Jewish and Gentile community, not just Jewish in Jerusalem. Also for Mark, the unnamed were held to higher esteem than the named. The purpose appears to usurp the authority of the Twelve Apostles and a growing hierarchy.

For Matthew, Jesus was a Christian Jew usurping Pharisaic Judaism. Matthew appears to be writing from inside Judaism but attempting to supplant it.

For Luke-Acts, it attacked Judaism by promoting the Gentile and was an attempt to sell Christianity to Rome, to usurp any Jewish privilege. It appears this Gospel was already outside Judaism.

And then John, it was an attack on Judaism perhaps coming from the outside, perhaps from a Samaritan tradition. And most importantly, it's the only Gospel where Jesus is boss of the cross, he dictates everything that's going to happen and has foresight about it.

The most interesting part of this book was between parts one and two. It was the Interlude. In between the discussion of the parables told by Jesus and the parables about Jesus, Crossan discusses seven different authors/historians to old who told of the crossing of the Rubicon by Julius Caesar. He notes that the first were told as matters of fact, some not even mentioning the river by name. However later authors embellished, created mythological elements like, in the case of Lucan's telling of the crossing, a "being of wondrous stature and beauty, who sat and played upon a reed..." snatched a trumpet from one of Caesar's trumpeters and was the first to cross showing the way.

What's interesting about this is how, unlike the matter of fact historical recounting of Caesar's invasion of Rome, we have no matter of fact historical accounts of Jesus. All we have is parable. This is one of the indications to me that there never was a historical Jesus just as there never was a "being of wondrous stature and beauty" who led Caesar and his army across the Rubicon. But Crossan ends this book by giving reasons he still thinks there was a historical figure behind the parable. I won't dissect that here, it isn't entirely relevant. For what we'd at least both agree on, is that if there ever was a historical Jesus, that person is lost to history.

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## Charlotte says

The Power of Parable was my Tuesday morning book discussion groups most recently finished selection, and one that the whole group found extremely interesting. John Dominic Crossan is a Jesus scholar and his work is controversial, particularly those who do not want their long held beliefs challenged!

In the first half of the book, Crossan focuses on the parables Jesus told in the new testament (though for each of the three types of parables he talks about, he refers to old testament stories that follow the same pattern.) For our group, (and I expect most readers) we were startled with his analysis of the three kinds. (1) Riddle Parables--ones which Jesus suggests that his followers have been given the secrets to the kingdom and can understand, while other listeners will not. (2) Example Parables--lessons which could guide our lives "Go and do likewise" or "Do likewise at your peril" (3) Challenge parables: Those that help us rethink generally accepted ideas (He lists Job, Ruth, and Jonah in the O.T. as examples as well as ones like The Good Samaritan where the usually held "bad guy" is the hero and the "good guy" is in disgrace.) and are intended to have us make a paradigm shift.

In the second half, he adds another level--the attack parable. It is here that the book really becomes interesting and insightful! Crossan starts talking about the four gospels (including Acts with Luke as he believes these were intended as one work, but had to be split into two because scrolls could not accommodate that much info!) as parables about Jesus. Mark, the first gospel written led him to believe Mark was a Jew who chose to follow Jesus, and Mark used his gospel as a challenge to sects within Judaism. Matthew, the second written gospel begins with Jesus preaching against hatred and violence, but as the gospel goes on, he reverses that. One of the interesting concepts Crossan shared here was the progression that leads to violence (1. ideological--thinking that some groups are of lesser value (2) Rhetorical--speaking on that presumption, (3) Physical and even lethal action justified. While Matthew's gospel begins as a challenge parable it ends up being an attack against the religious elite. Luke-Acts seems to use stories about Jesus to make an attack on Judaism while also a challenge to Rome. John's gospel is an attack and challenge within Christianity itself.

In his concluding remarks, he said that though he has called these accounts parables, he had no doubt but what Jesus lived, and that his example was one directed toward a world of justice and love, peace and nonviolence and give hope that others can attain those goals.

The most disturbing part of the book is the that if his interpretations are correct, writers of the gospels, whether intentional or not, ended up promoting anti-Semitism.

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## Rod says

Let's get our priorities straight: John MacArthur has a book called "The Parables of Jesus". Please read

THAT instead of anything Crossan has to desperately imply.

Now on to the liberal progressive Ungodly Crap of the Jesus Seminar...

Quote (pg. 251)

"I conclude that Jesus really existed, that we can know the significant sequence of his life...but that he comes to us trailing clouds of fiction, parables by him and about him, particular incidents as miniparables and whole gospels as megaparables."

OH my Goodness that was mind-numbingly stupid - I was excited when I finally got to the last 10 pages. These scribbles should have been called "How to read Jesus as if he were Gandhi - even though the Bible many times shows us otherwise".

I suffered through ANOTHER Jesus-Seminar crap book. (only a few more to go). It's fun observing how these desperate liberal-scholars attempt to undo the Jesus of the Bible. I don't read these books to learn about Jesus but to see how a rebellious warped mind works. Mission successful.

For more insight and fun, I watched Crossan debate with a real theologian (James White) on youtube. Comical chaos ensued. Crossan got spanked like a newborn baby. His twisting and insisting the Bible can not possibly means what it actually says is hilarious and worthy of mockery. James White handled him beautifully. He's a far nicer guy than I am.

I was prepared for this book to be about New Testament parables and what Crossan would like them to be, the problem was: He desperately attempts to turn anything Biblical that he doesn't comprehend OR EMBRACE into a parable. WE are left with thousands of parables in ONE BIG PARABLE collection called The Bible.

And honestly - i'm okay with that. Be a liberal buddhist atheistic Guru if it makes you happy. But don't attempt to call it Christianity and insist I swallow it academically. Why do these Jesus-Seminarian's keep insisting they are somehow slightly orthodox Christians??? After reading this book - I still don't know. Their Jesus is in no way worthy of Godly worship or even appreciation as a Guru or noble teacher. If Jesus is not divine and God himself - then he is indeed lying and insane. To declare him historic and worthy is just nutty.

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It was amusing watching Crossan not simply look into parables: but start subdividing them and labeling them. Some are Challenge parables, others are Attack parables, or riddles and example parables. That in itself is kind of fun and possibly enlightening, but Crossan insists they are NEVER about Jesus or His eternal Kingdom and salvation. They are apparently about WHATEVER Crossan's imagination can discover.

On the brief positive side:

I did learn about the purpose of Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem. I haven't given this much thought - so I enjoyed Crossan stating how non-violent it would appear to have a King show up NOT riding an impressive war horse (Like Jesus does later in Revelation 19). I say ANY prophecy is a good prophecy - even if it shows how humble Jesus can be.

Crossan failed to notice how Holy Spirit inspired this donkey incident is. That's okay, so did all of the religious leaders in Jerusalem at the time.

Which leads to the major issues with John Dominic Crossan's theology:

Is Jesus a Warrior or a Wimp?

For some strange reason Crossan just can't comprehend that Jesus is Loving AND just. He insists Jesus must be either one or the other. Jesus can't be non-violent one day and a conquering King the next. Like most bad theologians - it is like John Dominic's Bible was missing a few hundred pages. Like some idiot who insists

the Baby Jesus can't possibly grow up - let's keep him a cute cuddly baby that we can pamper and control. But like the Bible says: Jesus came to conquer death and set the people free from sin... then he's coming BACK for Judgement and Kingship. Simply one thing at a time.

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Quote (pg. 251.)

"But could you not get that just as well from a non-historical figure in a magnificent parable? Not really. But why? What is at stake?"

How about conquering DEATH? Or eternal SALVATION? Or a Godly KING setting up His thrown and people? Or simply ALL FOR GOD'S GLORY?

Only a liberal humanist would declare everything spiritual be about US and our wants and progress. Crossan's golden calf is not worth worshipping.

So, Crossan has his heart set that ANYTIME an incident happens twice: It's a parable!

I say simply that God is making his point. Like when Jesus says "Truly, truly...". WE are a slow bunch. Can a lesson happen twice? Definitely. Can a prophecy happen twice? Indeed. Can four Gospel accounts repeat numerous events for clarity? You bet they can.

I honestly think God made the Bible as tricky and fantastic as He did - just to confuse and toy with the Atheists and liberals. Like when Jesus gets to the main point about Parables.

Matthew 13

The Purpose of the Parables

10Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" 11And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

““You will indeed hear but never understand,  
and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

15For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed,  
lest they should see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them.’

16But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Sorry Crossan, you are included in those WHO HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN. Your book proves that.

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## Ci says

This book has a deplorably bad writing style. Perhaps a direct transcript from a lecture but does not lend it well in book form. I can't get pass the smug "I will tell you -- I am telling you -- Just as I told you earlier" professorial tone of condescension. The parables are intriguing by themselves, but I do not have enough trust in the author to be led gently into their mysteries. I need a more generous author to understand the parables in Bible instead spending much time cringing from the knowing self-congratulatory tone of the author.

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## Alan Crowley says

### Finest Scholarship Made Accessible

Crosson models the very nonviolent pedagogy he works to explain. Though he writes in the genre of academic scholarship, he does so with a generosity and humility that welcomes all readers. He makes his methodology so transparent that he invites participation rather than exclude with intimidating virtuosity. This book is theology at its best, a shared journey of deep questioning and inspiring discovery.

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## Efranken says

too deep for me

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## Naum says

Been immersed in the Parables of Jesus for the last year or so, leading a group Bible study on the subject, and it has been a profound experience, revisiting and re-examining the parables.

Here, Bible scholar John Dominic Crossan takes a different route, exploring not just the meaning of \*parable\* itself, but develops a typology of parables - breaking them down into "riddle" parables, "example" parables, and "challenge" parables. Also, the arc of violence is alluded to, that it starts rhetorically, goes ideological and then ends up physical, as a natural progression.

It's really two books in one -- the first part I would give 5 stars where Crossan illustrates some Old Testament books (namely, Ruth, Jonah and Job) as book-length parables that turn upside-down the religious orthodoxy of the that age. Ruth, a Moabite (a detested race) is declared the generational lineage of David. Jonah flips upside down the model of a prophet, and the evil conquering Assyrians are depicted as God honoring, repenting children of Christ, much to the dismay of a usually "revered" prophet. Job rails against the Deuteronomy wisdom about sin and consequences (i.e., the folly of his friends using that argument).

The latter half of the book is weaker -- not because I am not sure I buy the assertions -- Crossan examines the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts (he considers Luke and Acts to be "one" book), and John, and issues some rather provocative affirmations. To cite a few, Luke is a Gentile and John is a Samaritan. While, Crossan, in deft manner of a scholar that explains his thinking in "layman" terms (especially lays out each chapter the 5 points he is going to make as a statement summary), his justification for his affirmations on these lines seemed slim to me. Nevertheless, the content will certainly stir the mind.

Weird is the juxtaposition of thought streams of reading N.T. Wright *\*How God Became King\** at the same time as reading this -- while Crossan might be light years off of the orthodox Wright in theological outlook, uncanny on how many particular perspectives they are spot on in.

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## **Peter says**

The writings of John Dominic Crossan (Professor Emeritus at DePaul University) have sometimes been seen as controversial, but his scholarship is solid and his logic compelling. And there is a danger in reading his many books – the danger that your assumptions about the Biblical text will be challenged. You will hear the text differently and learn about the cultural environment that shaped it; you will encounter questions you never could have imagined before.

Crossan's latest offering, *The Power of Parable*, explores parabolic method in the Biblical text. He addresses the Jesus parables, but he also investigates other Biblical parables like Ruth, Jonah and Job. He defines parable but also demonstrates various types of parables in operation in the ancient context as well as the Biblical text.

We most often assume parables are meant to demonstrate right behaviour – a classic example parable of 'go and do likewise.' Sometimes they are riddle parables meant to tease our intelligence. But Crossan makes the case that Jesus most often employed challenge parables, a rhetorical device meant to up-end our assumptions and force us to think differently about our world. If repent means to 'rethink', then challenge parables were the perfect linguistic tool to invite people to rethink what they thought they knew about matters of faith and politics.

Crossan makes a case that challenge parables were also a highly participatory teaching method that required crowd engagement, so well suited to the collaborative eschatology that Jesus preached and practiced. Parables, in old and new testaments, were meant to challenge and engage us.

The deeper challenge of the book comes in Part 2 when Crossan moves into the discussion of the gospels as parabolic history about Jesus. One gospel at a time, he makes a comprehensive case that we can see the principles of parable at work in the crafting of each book. The gospel writers were men of their time, they wrote within a certain milieu and with their own pastoral agendas – what Walter Brueggemann would call the 'vested interest' in each book of the Bible.

John Dominic Crossan certainly takes us into new territory and opens new vistas. We can learn more about parables, about the Gospels and about how we are part of this on-going divine collaboration.

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## **Diana Deming says**

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## **Joe Cummings says**

For people who enjoy John Dominic Crossan at his most thoughtful and scholarly best this will be a delight

to read. The importance of parables in the four gospels of the New Testament has been a reoccurring theme in his works since "In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus" which was first published in 1973. In "The Power of the Parable," he concludes that gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are mega-parables about the historical Jesus who himself used parables as a teaching tool.

Crossan does this in the right way. First he describes different types of parables: riddle, example, challenge and attack. Of the four, Crossan posits that challenge parables were used by the historical Jesus as a non-violent pedagogical tool that was thought provoking as well as provocative to listeners in Roman-occupied Palestine. He effectively shows how Jesus and the later gospel writers could draw on a challenge parable tradition in the Jewish bible-particularly the books of Ruth, Jonah and Job. Then he shows how each gospel can be seen as either a challenge or as an attack parable against another group that concerned the gospel writer.

Finally he underlines the real message of the historical Jesus to the people of his time and place. I recommend this book to readers who are interested in the life and times of the historical Jesus and of the gospel writers who later wrote about his ministry.

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### **Skyqueen says**

Well, this has forever changed the way I view the Bible and its stories. Can't say that it answers any questions per se. More like it raises a few more. It does put things in the historical period and society viewpoints of the time which is what is lacking in contemporary religious teachings and interpretations. The Good Samaritan story is one of the most enlightening.

Crossan views the Bible more as a collection of stories rather than literal occurrences. And at times, it seems he is overreaching in order to make it fit his point of view rather than just the plain facts...of which I am skeptical of anyway. I mean, how many FACTS can you prove from that time period.

One thing he has done though is a LOT of historical research and chronology. Whew! These people must never come up for air! Takes a special dedication.

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### **Rory Cooney says**

I just finished The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus. So many wonder insights... Highly recommended. Crossan ends thus: "The power of Jesus's parables challenged and enabled his followers to co-create with God a world of justice and love, peace and nonviolence. The power of Jesus's historical life challenged his followers by proving at least one human being could cooperate fully with God. And if one, why not others? If some, why not all? "Ashes denote," wrote Emily Dickinson, "that fire was." And if fire ever was, fire can be again."

4 stars instead of 5 only because of personal stretchy thoughts from him that were either idiosyncratic or impossible for me to decipher. Almost overcome by the fascinating conjecture that the author of the 4th gospel was a SAMARITAN Christian. Makes tons of sense. Thank you, Dr. Crossan!

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### **Bruce Campbell says**

John Dominic Crossan is a scholar of high esteem. This book has changed my views on the entire Bible. Fr. Crossan lays out a clear and simple understanding as to how almost all of the bible is a parable of one kind or another. His adaptation of the Gospels (he includes Acts and the continuation of Luke, not a separate book, but a second volume of the same book) into parables about Jesus was eye-opening. I especially like the chapter about Matthew and he shows that Jesus first, in chapter 5 of the Gospel (the beatitudes) strongly condemns anyone who even calls someone a "fool". Yet in chapter 28 of the same Gospel, we hear Jesus calling people (mostly the Pharisees) hypocrites! Crossan asks the question does that make Jesus a hypocrite, or is it just Matthew putting words in his mouth? To me, it just further strengthens my belief that Jesus was just an ordinary man, and not divine in any sense.

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## **Richard says**

With the tagline, "How fiction by Jesus became fiction about Jesus" you know this is going to be another wild ride from Crossan.

Crossan is a big name in the Historical Jesus circle. His scholarly work explores what was actually going on in the First Century Israel and what was embellished in our Bible.

This book does not shy away from Crossan's belief that many of the stories found in the four Gospels are not factual. Crossan uses this book to explain that the Gospels are in fact parables about Jesus' ministry.

The first part of this book lays out the argument concerning the parables Jesus told. Crossan gives us examples of Riddle Parables (so that the listener may not understand), Example Parables (go and do likewise), and Challenge Parables. Crossan points to most, if not all of Jesus' parables circled the challenge definition.

The exciting part of this book comes at the latter half. This is where Crossan dives into the, seemingly controversial, claim that the gospels were written as parable and not historical biography.

Crossan states that Mark wrote a Challenge Parable using Jesus' life to confront sects within Judaism.

Matthew was written as an attack parable with Jesus preaching against hatred and violent rhetoric but then going back on his own word and attacking the religious elite. Crossan explores examples of Matthew repeating a story found in Mark's gospel yet adding harsher language coming from Jesus.

The gospel of Luke-Acts is reported to be an attack on Judaism while also a challenge to Rome. A challenge to allow Christianity to have the same religious loopholes that Judaism held under Roman law.

John's gospel is also a hybrid of attack and challenge within Christianity itself.

In the end, you get the idea that Crossan believes the gospel writers had a hand in furthering anti-Semite sentiment with them having all this anger against the Jews and using Jesus as the example.

Like many of Crossan's books that I read, I really enjoy the detailed work and ease with which I can understand his points. I find myself nodding my head in agreement with his ideas and then, all of a sudden, he takes a sharp left turn. I'm stuck with a moment's whiplash and wonder where he can skew so far away.

No matter what you believe about Scripture, you will be impressed with Crossan's conclusions.

This book was provided for review, at no cost, by Harper One Publishing.

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