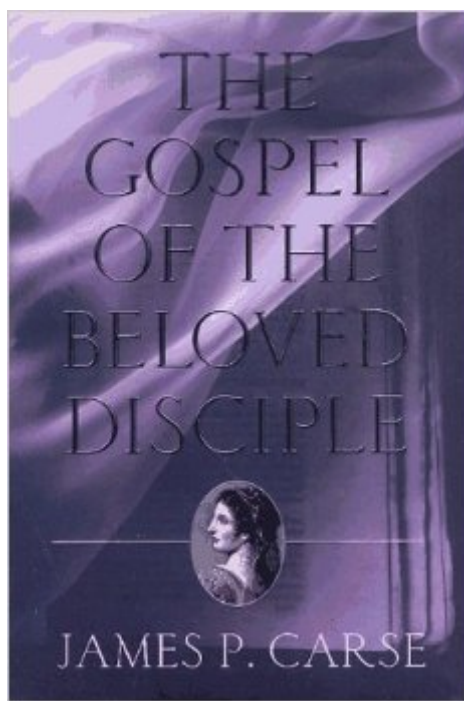


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The Gospel Of The Beloved Disciple



Synopsis

In this literary and religious tour de force, Carse daringly revives the ancient tradition of writing gospels to communicate the contemporary meaning of Jesus' life and teaching. This tradition resulted in dozens of gospels, such as the Gospel of Thomas, but died out when the Church closed the New Testament with its four official or "canonical" Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This, then, is the first full, all-new gospel in 1,500 years. It is not yet another novel about Jesus, such as those by Nikos Kazantzakis and Norman Mailer, nor is it a harmonizing of the traditional gospels, like those by Leo Tolstoy and Reynolds Price. As James Carse says, in introducing readers to this gospel, "What is needed, now as before, is imagination, but imagination that takes no more liberty with the known historical material than the earlier gospels themselves took.... Each [evangelist] wrote a gospel grounded in the time of Jesus and his own time. Why should we do less?"The book's prologue dramatically sets the stage by telling how, long after Jesus' death, some of his followers bring an old woman a parchment scroll on which they have painstakingly assembled Jesus' story, piercing together what they remember of him. They come to her because, as "the one Jesus loved," she knew him best. She listens carefully to their "gospel" and, when they are through, tersely responds that "it wasn't like that....There is too much to say to end it here."And thus begins her gospel, the first full gospel from a woman's point of view. She recounts many of the events of Jesus' life that we know from the New Testament gospels such as his birth, baptism, transfiguration, trial and crucifixion but in a very different and fully credible way. What her gospel brings is her perspective as his most intimate companion; she knew Jesus better than anyone else and wants to tell his story as she really experienced it, not to mythologize him or advance some Church agenda. Perhaps most arresting is her gospel's vivid presentation of Jesus' trenchant exchanges with the people he encounters and its many delightful and thought-provoking parables.

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Customer Reviews

This is an imaginative and thought provoking retelling of the gospel story. I have read the gospels of the Bible many times and read "The Last Temptation of Christ" some years ago. This book is worth considering as another view of Jesus's life and work. The "Beloved Disciple" of the title is not John, but the Samaritan woman, whose role in Jesus's life is expanded from a one-time encounter at the well to a close friendship. Wise in the ways of the world, she says to Jesus, upon first meeting him, "You have a thirst that I could never satisfy. Teach us your thirst." Along with his other followers, the woman travels with Jesus throughout Judea and is present at the entry into Jerusalem. Earlier in the story, an apparent miracle is performed when a lame boy suddenly leaps from his stretcher and runs away, as Jesus and his followers stand there, but the deeper miracle is understood to be the young man's liberation from his father's crippling expectations. At last, Jesus is brought before Pilate, who has used a ruse to capture him. Pilate cynically informs Jesus that he must die because, like the swallows that infest the eaves of his palace, he is not at war with Rome, yet Rome cannot defeat him. Thus, to preserve itself as an earthly power, it must silence him, and in a way that his followers will know is unjust, so they may then enter into conflict with Rome--a conflict, in short, of two opposing powers, a game played on Rome's own terms. Many familiar incidents and parables from the gospels are included, though with a slightly different twist. For instance, the father of the prodigal son seeks his wayward child, finds him in the pigsty, and settles down to tend the swine alongside him. The author seems to have done at least a fair amount of research into the life and thought of ancient Palestine, though the book is more of a presentation of Carse's other ideas, as written in "Finite and Infinite Games," than an attempt to present the cutting edge of historical scholarship on Jesus. Traditional Christian readers who might see such a book as blasphemous or irreverent might consider reading the book simply as a series of vignettes in the life of a wandering sage and taking its incidents and stories on their own merits. All readers should find a great deal of food for thought.

At every point where James Carse allows the canonical gospels to touch his narrative, he has given not a twist, but stood the story on its head, to show by subtle indirection that the opposite of what we

have been force-fed through tradition is closer to the truth of the events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. "If the genius of ruling has not left us, we will not oppose your words. There is a far better way to remove their danger, though their danger is great. We will make them our own. When Rome speaks on behalf of the poor, Rome will be seen as the enemy of great evils. We cannot do away with these loathsome birds so we declare them royal swallows. We will do the same with your words, or with some of your words...." (page 143) Carse has intimate experience of these words, and has followed their precept re some of the sayings and tales surrounding the wandering sage of Nazareth; he has appropriated them for today's intellectual. Clever--a very clever book.

If I'm going to read a novel based on the life of Jesus, I'd rather it at the very least avail itself of a recognizable personality. It seemed more like a very unflattering parody of the Jesus story than an attempt to answer the many challenges and questions which Jesus's mainstream accounts pose. I was hoping for something that I could share and discuss among open-minded lovers of wisdom. That may be what this is, but its obtuse approach to the subject does not seem to invite discussion, but to simply leave the reader feeling misled. Again, that's just my perception. I want to find out what others thought and felt about it.

This is a fascinating and absorbing novel. Although it doesn't have the natural realism of "THE Autobiography of Jesus and the Missing Years" it is movingly poetic. It is refreshing to find Jesus being presented in such an accessible manner. I had hoped for a more challenging presentation but I was more than compensated by the skill of the writing. If you find your faith at times flagging, this may just be the breath of fresh air you've been hoping for.

excellent!

The most interesting part of this book was the exchange between Jesus and Pilate. The rest seemed to be an obvious attempt to discredit the canonical gospel accounts of Jesus' life and death. Not half as interesting as either Mailer's "The Gospel according to the Son" or even Kazantkakis "The Last Temptation of Christ." This book was a disappointment, especially if you have followed the Historical Jesus literature of the past few years.

It is maddening when so-called wise "men" turn questions constantly back to the questioner, especially when the questioner is sincere. This book, which purports to be a "gospel" shows a Jesus

who never answers a question or replies with a story that says little. If one of the major religions of the world were based on the kind of Jesus represented in this book, people of this faith would be inept. Surely, there are some interesting dialogues in this gospel. The conversation between Pilate and Jesus has an interesting bent. But overall one would wonder why anyone would follow this man. His words are uninspiring and he seems not really to care about anyone. Maybe I missed the point.

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