

REVIEW, TOXIC JESUS, MY JOURNEY FROM HOLY SHIT TO SPIRITUAL HEALING

(Marc-Henri Sandoz Paradella)

As an atheist rights activist, I welcome the provocative title. It gets attention and unsettles in a good way if that makes sense. Bad versions of Jesus do deserve this treatment. Second, I admire the helpful slant of the book as “a story of healing, liberation, and fierce embrace.” Third, the book is beautifully written. Its an easy engaging read. I have promoted it in progressive "Christian" circles as I feel that revisionist and liberal and feel good Bible interpretations do NOT protect people needing the Church's services and care as the Bible is dangerously worded at best and sweet interpretations often give way to darker and harmful ones. And they are too forced and desperate to last or give anybody deep assurance. What terrible things the Bible actually says will always be stronger than your opinion.

The following line is extremely important to those who worry about what children are taught in Christian schools, “I remember the torment I felt at seven years of age, thinking that if I hadn’t testified enough to my school friends, they would eventually go to hell. And I would be the one responsible.” We must recall that Christianity following the New Testament Jesus - what other version of Jesus can we take seriously? - sees Hell as the eternal dump where fires burn which means a child is being made to feel like he or she is doing something worse than causing the Jewish Holocaust. You would wonder if these doctrines helped Christians facilitate and enable and even celebrate the Holocaust in Nazi Germany.

These teachings are in the writings most people take seriously as an account of what Jesus was like. It is undeniable that Jesus went into a lot of detail that was meant to scare and disturb. For that reason, it is safest to take schools from the Church.

The Church may say that the sinner is the one most responsible or ultimately responsible but that is not a consolation. It is manipulative for the Church to act like it is! It is exactly what a religion that was trying to intimidate you would say. "Oh we only want to warn you." It means nothing and is hollow. It would be different if we could verify Hell but it is only a doctrine.

The toxic Jesuses are listed in Toxic Jesus. I have in brackets how they match the gospel Jesus' teaching.

Here is the list

The negator [Nobody is good but God alone]

The punisher [You will answer for every idle word you speak]

The magician [Faith can move mountains. Your faith has healed you.]

The castrator who wants to make you feel small [You being evil know not to give your child a stone when he wants bread]

The oppressor/tyrant [Scribes and Pharisees you killed every prophet - your father is the Devil a murderer and the father of lies]

The misogynist [Stone that woman for adultery if you are sinless]

The patriarchal chauvinist [God made man and woman for lifelong marriage and divorce is not allowed - this harms the woman most]

The enabler who hides the abuses of others [Not a word against Roman abuse of his people]

The fanatic [The God you believe in matters more than you or anybody else. Love him with all your heart - though something unproven should not be loved that much!]

The Puritan who wants nobody to enjoy themselves [He gave the poor nothing to improve their lot]

The anti-sexual pure spirit [Sex is limited to man woman marriage for life. This is as bad as banning sex altogether! And sex killed most wives for childbirth was laden with danger so it was a duty thing not a fun thing]

The Frankenstein Jesus who makes monsters [A false prophet is one who cannot get grapes from figs - good works are not enough, they must be heroic. The problems with the religion are rooted in Jesus]

The book is an excellent account of how these Jesuses do harm. The expose of these Jesuses is done through narration of the author's lived experience. Here in Ireland the campaign to allow safe legal and free abortion won not through making rational arguments but by telling stories. A story can replace a thousand arguments. It is a good method.

One toxic Jesus wants us to be stupid. Jesus did not act like a good teacher who helps the student see the answers and who speaks clearly. In fact he is usually very hard to understand. There can be no doubt that the New Testament Jesus does insult our intelligence. He makes us depend on gospels that were never examined or verified by those who had the authority to tell us what happened. They were written decades after the alleged events. Plus nobody admits that the New Testament

does not say if Jesus was stolen from the tomb or not. [The evidence that he was really put in the tomb is non-existent - nobody says this was certain. A bare statement, "He was put in the tomb and so and so were there" does not tell us how careful and observant they were]. In fact, he could still have risen after been taken. Yet the faith argues that you need to believe the body and soul are saved and that means that an empty tomb on its own is no good. Visions are no good on their own which is why Catholics dismiss most apparition stories even though the witnesses are clearly not lying. The brain is able to do such things. The resurrection data has serious plot holes and is one of the worst attested miracles of all time.

The book rejects a Jesus who divides people into saved side and unsaved side and condemns the unsaved to hell. But this is the Jesus of Matthew's gospel who threatens to divide the sheep from the goats and each are divided forever.

As for Jesus the misogynist, we are told, "the historic Jesus treated women with respect and consideration, giving them a place among his supporters and even among his nearest disciples and apostles". That would be shallow of him considering he said it was a sin to revise or soften any Old Testament law in Matthew 5 and a more woman hating law cannot be imagined.

He snapped at his mother at Cana. He was asked by her to help with the wine and he said no and did it anyway as if to say, "I am helping but its my idea not hers."

He let a woman debase herself by washing his feet like she was dirt with perfume and tears and he said he forgave her sexual immorality. He did not tell her he forgave her and to hold her head up high and that he would wash her feet. Feet washing was the work of a slave.

He told a pagan woman she and her daughter were animals and thus risked - or invited perhaps? - racist attacks on her for she was Canaanite. There is no evidence that this was an object lesson and the gospel would say if it were. He praised her faith but this faith was faith as in, "He has the power to do a miracle cure for my daughter". He knew such faith is cruel to encourage as many do not get their miracles.

He disowned his mother in Mark for the whole family including her thought he was mentally disturbed - the crafty gospel does not tell us that in those days insanity was equated with possession. Jesus tried to make out that anybody who thought his exorcisms were satanic tricks was a lost cause guilty of a sin that would never ever be forgiven.

Magdalene is described as the first apostle to see his resurrection and tell the disciples. In the gospel of John, Jesus appears saying to her, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Some hold that this was only Jesus' spirit. By ascending he is saying the body had not being revived yet where ever it was. Early gospel strata shows that resurrection and exaltation to God's presence, a form of ascension, are two sides of the same coin. So she did not see the risen Jesus. He is standoffish with her as if he is all about the apostles and they get a different reception and Jesus supposedly ordains them as messengers who forgive sins and gives them the Holy Spirit. The other gospels only have the women telling the apostles to prepare for seeing Jesus for themselves which makes sense in a culture where women could not count as sufficient witnesses. Luke goes as far as to omit Jesus appearing to the women. Mark has a forged ending where the women speak about the risen Jesus but the original ends with the women saying nothing.

Jesus lived in and went along with and even validated that age. An age where underage marriage for girls was the cruel norm. It was a norm that meant most first time mothers died in childbirth as their bodies were not ready. Though women could not divorce, perhaps for many of them were too young to be able to assert themselves, he cruelly banned them from initiating divorce. He blocked any conversation there. He blocked progress.

He did not stand with his own mother who was a mere child perhaps of 11 or 12 who owing to her hardship would have been more like an 8 year old and who was pregnant.

He had no right to even mention the sexual choices of the Samaritan woman to her or tell her her religion was wrong. "Salvation is from the Jews and you worship on the wrong mountain." She was clearly under the "wrong" patriarchal authority. Alarmingly Jesus himself was oppressed by his leaders and he wanted women subjected to that! It was patriarchy on steroids in those days.

When the adulteress was brought to him to see if he would agree with God's law about stoning her, all he had to do was shake his head and walk away for those who wanted to stone her were only a mob and only testing him and could not stone her anyway. But he dragged it out and told her at the end she was guilty of that sin meaning she could have been stoned legally later. He made sure this woman was tormented.

He had a purse and there is no hint that it was ever used to feed any poor woman.

The author tells us to ask ourselves, "Are there any illnesses or accidents or grief where you've been told that it was God's

will and you had to accept it, or maybe even praise God for it, or expect it to be resolved by God's grace in His own time?" If it is toxic to be told any of that, then the main psychological hindrance to atheism is removed. People feel they need faith to accept what happens even if it is reluctant acceptance for resistance only makes it feel worse. But you don't need faith to do that! Another incentive is the thought that God has a plan to fix the problem and we have to learn patience. The psychologist would worry that this may be a form of learned helplessness. Learned helplessness that avoids a diagnosis by talking about acceptance as if it were a required moral virtue and/or a plan is the worst kind.

"God is big! God knows! God is powerful! God must be adored! This god is so big that he takes up all the space. There is no place left for human beings. Even to consider using human resources, human skills, and human power seems to deprive this big god of some of what belongs to him" The author finds this image of God implies a person should become less so God can become more. God is greater the more you make yourself into nothing. The sense of Jesus the author reports is one who wants you to walk your way and he is with you but you are to find the strength to walk alone and let go of his hand. Some of us can and will not need need the hand at all.

The notion of creation out of nothing certainly does say that everything is full of God's action. Our nature resists this as the book notices. Maybe some need to rethink the creation thing.

The author speaks in the face of dangerous illness that he does not want to sacrifice like Jesus but to live. He says he refuses to accept what will happen for he wants to look after himself. He says this sense of needing himself to be his rock not Jesus is his "most authentic voice." He says this is part of a paradox, an experience where he felt a loving and helpful presence that he associated with Jesus. Atheists may feel a something where they both in horror accept the terrible inevitable and yet feel at peace with it.

The author speaks of his Jesus as one who does not look the other way when death and suffering happen. He knows all we go through for he went through them himself.

I would say that unless you presuppose creation out of nothing, Jesus cannot really know what it is like for anybody else. No matter how much a man suffers he cannot understand the suffering of another well for each experience is individual. This thought removes a major motivation for following traditional Christianity. But it is not psychologically viable.

I would go for the idea that some part of me can get involved when things get bad enough and when all seems lost to make me feel I alone will make the choices and take the help to get me through it. Take the help as in I do the helping for others cannot help me except in so far as I help myself by letting them. This protects the self-autonomy and self-ownership and independence that I have. It excludes a higher power.

What I am getting from the feeling that you are on your own and yet you are not is that it is a feeling that arises from an agnostic attitude. It lends support to the notion that though people recommend strong faith in God, agnosticism is a paradox in the sense that it helps you live alongside the truth while denying God. It is not a crutch but an act of courage.

Often people feel Jesus was with them when they get through a terrible ordeal. Every ordeal is really a sum of ordeals. Its never a single thing. They refuse to have a more realistic view where there could be something that abandons them and then changes its mind and the next time you look they are abandoned again and so on.

The book raises concerns about a punishing Jesus. I relate to the Jesus the punisher thing for in my Catholic upbringing I offered Jesus, "all the prayers works and sufferings of this day" and figures such as Padre Pio and St Francis who suffered horribly and unimaginably from 'miracle' stigmata wounds were role models. The idea of Jesus dying as a sacrifice for sins rose too early in the Church to be seen as anything other than a standard required Christian doctrine. We may need to act if people do illegal harm as long as we are here. But in an afterlife if nobody can really harm anybody else does it matter if those who we call evil have as much happiness as the Pied Piper? It only matters to the vengeful.

Jesus the magician is the dominant one in Christian circles where he turns a baby away from its innate evil to God in water baptism and turns bread and wine into his body and blood. No matter how sorry you are for sins, he does not forgive until you confess to a priest. And at the end of this you don't feel forgiven for forgiveness is more spontaneous than that. No wonder the sense of peace and conversion cannot last. It is too mechanical. You are told how terrible your sins are and that they deserve eternal punishment, especially missing mass, adultery, not giving money to the Church. That demonisation of your wrongdoing or alleged wrongdoing risks a person never feeling forgiven. People who do terrible things often never feel forgiven even if they are and suffer from that. The more sins you believe in and the worse you make them, then the worse you make the struggle to forgive as if it is not bad enough. Jesus it must be remembered told Peter to forgive a person seventy times seven a day and threatened unmerciful retribution on those who held grudges. This is an evil teaching and shows him for the moral bully he was. Nobody really thinks somebody who holds a grudge but otherwise does no harm deserves any punishment.

This paragraph from the book is one of the most important in my reckoning, "Religion may be a source of authentic

comfort. The belief in a loving power at work behind life events may be reassuring and help mobilize one's own resources for coping and holding out hope. But when religion covers hidden trauma, a different kind of belief and attitude towards life may merge. For example, in order to face the terror of the inner child who has seen one's parents overwhelmed by life events, one can be tempted to adhere to a simplistic vision: that a higher power controls everything and can intervene miraculously in any situation".

It is good he write it may be a source of authentic comfort. It is hard to know if it ever is. Or to know if the comfort is lasting or worth it in the big picture. Creation does imply God may not agree with our sins but he is responsible for them in the sense choice would not exist unless he created it. As for intervention, intervention is a matter of intention. Thus whether the intervention is a clear magical event - miracle or God just providing for us without us seeing anything out of the ordinary is irrelevant. That is a discussion about the type of intervention not intervention. Paradoxically, not intervening is sometimes an intervention in its own way. When you can act but do not that is intervention too in a passive way. Intention is the ingredient of intervention. Your intention is intervening when you intentionally just let things be.

God supposedly creates the limits to what we can do. The options are few in every situation. There is active intervention then stopping us from making choices outside of that boundary. Intervention is intervention.

He writes that the toxic Jesus has two sides one of which is the miracle side and the other is the fatalistic one. He says that either of these sides is a rejection of the truth, a rejection of reality.

The two can be the same if you consider fate itself to be a miracle. The alternative is to hold that things happen by chance and we are responsible for how we function within that.

Believing then that no matter what happens or how good or bad it is a miracle can happen is unrealistic. If the miracle is dependent on the faith of the believer [And Jesus said your faith has cured you] then people are blamed if God refuses to do a miracle that is much needed.

Fatalism has a God who lays out all your life unchangeably down to the last detail. The Catholics say you have free will but that God can at times do miracles. Nobody realises that is leads to a passive form of fatalism. "God can stop me falling over the cliff with a miracle - perhaps a rescuer materialising out of nowhere can save me. He doesn't." Active fatalism where God directly acts to control, is not really different from passive fatalism where God controls things by withholding miracle resources. The parent who puts the bread out of your reach is as controlling as the one who pulls it from your hands. God just controls all anyway and we are just pawns.

The author rejects the New Testament doctrine, taught by the Bible Jesus, that there will be real warfare between Jesus and the forces of evil in the apocalypse and that there is real warfare now with the devil and his demons. Putting the Jesus myth historians aside, no recognised scholar denies that this is what the historical Jesus would have stood for.

These doctrines are dangerous for they deny that we have and can develop the resources to look after ourselves and that that is what really matters.

Many, like the book does, would say Christians are committing violence and arrogance in some form when they nicely try to help the homosexual who wants to think in a traditional Christian way and be celibate. We ask why being nice to the sinner to see them renounce their sin of their own violation is hate only in this circumstance? The Christian doctrine that evil is only good in the wrong place and time and so there is no evil only a lack of good fuels the person who does evil. The person sees too much good in it and thus feels they must try harder next time. It is the reason for the phenomenon of how bad desires and workings are never satiated. It shows what one is saying when one accuses another of evil doing. Separating the sinner from the sin even if possible becomes irrelevant. Its clearly passive aggressive sanctimonious hypocrisy. If you sin your sin is part of what you are. Period.

The author uses the word Christianised in relation to some form of psychological counseling. I recommend that word be used to anything that does not depend on Bible or New Testament data as infallible. Otherwise Christian means just anything. It need not be tied to something to have a definition. I would caution that as a religion that claims the power to dole out amazing transforming grace, it should be assessed more on the harm it does than the good. It is unfair to say all organisations with a bad side should be walked away from. But they are not claiming to have a positive supernatural effect on their members. People often find their biblical faith damaging and hope to find out that it is without credibility. For their sake, religious structures need deconstructing.

I find this book a useful starting point if one sees the harms of traditional faith. Like the gnostics of the early Church, is it time to rewrite Jesus as a more humanistic and inclusive symbol? A mystery? A parable? Personally the answer is no. But for those for whom it is yes then I support them for why should anyone cause a barrier with Jews and Muslims over making Jesus to be the son of God and who offered his life to God in a crucifixion sacrifice? Books like this are needed.

