



Jesus: The God App

Peter D. Snow

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With intelligent, evocative prose, Snow has revisited the Jesus story for a contemporary audience.

The debut novel from Cambridge-educated theologian Peter D. Snow seeks to reorient the story of Jesus of Nazareth for a contemporary audience. The result is a thoughtful faith exercise certain to appeal to mainstream Christian readers.

Snow prefaces the novel by acknowledging that the gospels were written for very specific audiences, and that some authorial motivations have been obscured by time. They involve what was believed as much as what is known, he suggests; his own book aims to do similar work for a modern believing audience.

What is essential remains unchanged. Jesus's story is told from the perspective of an aged John, the once beloved disciple. His dreams are now haunted by the persecution of Christians after the crucifixion, and allude to Revelation. More than anything, John wishes to preserve the memory of the messiah, and of those who died for loving him.

John recounts the days leading up to Jesus's appearance, recalling his disillusionment with the Temple establishment and his spiritual attraction to the teachings of John the Baptist: "The religion I inherited had become like a richly decorated box, but when I opened it, there was nothing inside." When charismatic, introspective Jesus shows up on the scene, John is centered to be a receptive audience.

The Jesus readers meet on these pages is impossible to resist. He exudes peace, though his conversations with John reveal that he's constantly working to understand his own messianic role and how he can best serve the world. He's both troubled and worldly, careful and brave before the religious establishment. He engages in theological conversations with querulous Essenes and the Temple's Nicodemus, persuading some and alienating others. In the background lurks Annas, the discredited Sadducee leader who manipulates the Temple surreptitiously. Snow does a thorough job of setting the scene for Jesus's arrest and death.

The novel is certain to be a swift and satisfying read for fellow believers, and Snow is successful at fleshing out his protagonist and narrator, who become both human and inspiring in this telling. Occasional anachronisms prove a slight distraction, with characters dropping terms like "crazies" and "hotheads," though Snow has given himself some license for such colloquialisms at the outset of the project. Overall, though, the prose is intelligent, evocative, and often veers into winsome territory.

Theologically, readers may take issue with Snow's decision to render Annas Jesus's most powerful foe, which seems to reify the ahistorical notion that Jews were most responsible for Jesus's death. Readers should make note of the impetus for this casting: Snow's novel focuses on the religious threat Jesus posed, rather than the political. Annas's dark calculations do help to define this tension throughout the book, but should not be lifted from the context of the novel.

Snow's *Jesus* is a loving and sympathetic tribute to an endlessly fascinating religious figure.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (October 6, 2014)

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