

Freeing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence

Diana Butler Bass

Session I: Introduction: Liberate Jesus

Sunday September 8, 2024

“Who do you say that I am?” Matthew 16:15

- I. Millions have left the church, even more have left emotionally and some are wondering if they should leave.

Reasons

- Christianity has failed them
- Wounded or betrayed them
- Bored or lacks relevance to their lives

Anne Rice, Novelist 2010 “I quit being a Christian. I’m out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being a Christian.” p. xv.

- Institutional Christianity-some are engaged in deconstructing their faith and disrupting conventional notions of church. See p.xvi “Baby Jesus in a Cage”
- II. **“Who is Jesus, really?”** asks Diana Butler Bass (p. xviii). How would you answer this simple yet complex question?

The Jesus of History and Christ of Faith

- Historical view of Jesus introduced new ways of looking at Jesus as a rabbi, prophet, teacher, miracle worker, itinerant mystic, political rebel, rabble-rousing Jewish peasant. It considers Roman political history and Jewish cultural background.
- **Objections** to the historical view of Jesus- resist Jesus stripped of glory and rediscovered in the dust of ancient Israel. It insists on the miraculous God-Jesus, divinity making sure Jesus stays on the throne in heaven (where he belongs). Another words the theology of the church is the infallible guide to knowing Jesus the Christ.

III. **Martin Kähler, (1835-1912) German Theologian**

Distinction: “Jesus of History” “Christ of Faith”

- “The **Jesus of history** needed to be recovered, reclaimed, and reinterpreted as the man Jesus who has a radical ministry and life.
- The **Christ of faith** needed to be renewed, reasserted, and reembraced as the Jesus Christ of Orthodox doctrine” Orthodoxy meaning “Right belief” vs. Orthopraxy meaning “Right Practice” “Both/And” and not “Either/Or”
- The **Jesus of experience** is not fully captured in historical scholarship nor in conventional doctrine. The integration of these aspects provides fertile ground for growth and discussion particularly when our conversations are not exclusive, hurtful, and triumphal. Ever mindful that our language about Jesus confines both him and us
- Sharing faith narratives (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Humanist) may lead to greater understanding, tolerance, appreciation and celebration of our differences.

The Jesus Question: “Who Are You?”

- Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, **'Who are you, Lord?'** The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Acts 9: 3-5
 - Paul Introduces many Jesuses-gift-giving savior, egalitarian radical, Wisdom of God, Merciful One, Light of the World, Joy of all Hearts, mystical light, deliverer from sin and guilt, cosmic vision.
 - "Who" is a relational question, a question that opens us toward companionship, friendship, and perhaps even love. "Who" is an invitation into a relationship that can-if we let it -change us -sending us into unexpected paths.
 - Christians interpret Jesus as static, reliable, never changing. But we do changes and because of that Jesus goes with us in and through change, a surprising companion, showing up recognizable but ever new.
- IV. The title of the book is *Freeing Jesus*, and the book opens with a story of Diana hearing what she felt was the voice of Jesus asking to be sprung from the cathedral she was in. **What do you think Jesus needs to be freed from?**
- V. Bass lays out three different terms for understanding Jesus: **"Jesus of history," "Christ of faith,"** and **"Jesus of experience"** (pp. xviii–xx). **Which one are you more familiar with? What has been your understanding of Jesus through- out your life? How have you seen that change over the years?**