

# The Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection

By John Dominic Crossan

I have a short introduction and then three subjects. The three subjects will be the crucifixion, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus.

As my introduction, I ask you to think about what we would know about Jesus if we knew nothing at all from Christian sources. We would know about Jesus from Josephus and Tacitus. They agree on three points. First, there was a movement. Second, the authorities—Tacitus mentions just the Romans, Josephus mentions the higher authorities of the Jews and the Romans—crucified Jesus to stop it. Third, it didn't work, and the movement continued to spread.

Those are three historical facts that I would ask you not to forget. There was a movement, and authorities killed the mover, but now it has spread all over the place.

## The Crucifixion Of Jesus

My first subject is the passion and crucifixion. I am very much aware of asking your indulgence in summarizing a lot of material. To simplify things, I will give you a sharp thesis and then my arguments for it. This is my thesis on the passion. The detailed, almost hour-by-hour, moment-by-moment, who-said-this who-said-that accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not history memorized but prophecy historicized. So that's the sharp dichotomy—history memorized or prophecy historicized. We shall see what these mean as we go along.

Let me take a first example, a relatively safe one. It won't bother anyone too much. The case is Jesus' silence during the proceedings or the trials. Jesus is silent when he's questioned by Jewish authorities in *Mark 14:31* despite immediately answering in *Mark 14:62* and answering without any mention of silence in *Luke 22:67a–69* and *John 18:20–23*. Or again, Jesus is silent while being questioned by Roman authorities in *Mark 15:5* despite previously answering in *Mark 15:2* and answering without any mention of silence in *John 18:34–37*. Is Jesus' silence under trial history memorized or prophecy historicized?

By history memorized, I mean that somebody was there, somebody noted the facts, somebody passed them on and eventually they got written down. What do I mean by prophecy historicized? Somebody, after the death of Jesus, searched the Hebrew Scriptures to see if the Elect One (I use that as a general term) could suffer and die. And they found, for example, *Isaiah 53:7*, which says, “He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” They then told the story of Jesus’ trials to conform to that description read as prophecy (retrojective prophecy, of course).

That is what I mean by prophecy historicized. In a way, once you say Jesus was silent, then you can go on and have him talk, because that’s not the point. The point is the fulfillment of prophecy. My thesis is that prophecy is creating the stories. That’s a first example, and, as I said, it’s a relatively safe one. Nobody will live or die for that one.

Let me take a second example, the case of Jesus’ multiplicity of trials. In the Acts of the Apostles 4:24–28, Luke says “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant [in *Psalms 2:1–2*]: ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.’ For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” Now, look at the various stories about the multiple trials of Jesus before his condemnation.

Realize what I am doing. I want to know if prophecy is creating history or history is creating prophecy, as it were. The Gospel of Peter is a gospel not found in the New Testament, but it is one of those in the database that Steve Patterson talked about earlier. I consider that this gospel contains a source independent of the New Testament. In the Gospel of Peter, the trial of Jesus is one great big proceeding with everyone there. Pilate is there, Herod Antipas is there, and the Jewish judges, presumably not the aristocratic ones but the religious ones, are all there at a joint trial. There’s only one trial in the Gospel of Peter at 1:1–2.

In Mark there are two separate trials, one before the high priest in *14:53–65* and another before Pontius Pilate in *15:1–20*. And when we get to Luke, there are three trials, one before the high priest in *22:54–71*, one before Pontius Pilate in *23:1–5, 13–25* and one before Herod Antipas in *23:6–12*. At that point we have run out of authorities to conduct trials. We have separate trials by religious authorities, aristocratic Jewish authorities and Roman authorities. My question is if *Psalms 2:1–2*, which talks about the Messiah being tried before the nations and the kings, is generating the details of the trials.

My third example, and I am getting into more difficult ones each time, is Jesus as the abused scapegoat. We find in the story of Jesus' trial the motifs that he is spat upon and poked with a reed. In *Mark 14:65*, on trial before the Jewish authorities, Jesus is struck and spat upon, and in *Mark 15:19*, on trial before the Roman authorities, he is struck with a reed and spat upon. In a way, when you're being put to death by crucifixion, it seems a minor detail if you are spat upon or poked with a reed. Yet why do you have that in the text? Why do soldiers who are just doing their job, however cruel it is, bother to spit on somebody? Why do they poke him with a reed? Where do the reeds come from?

Let's take a look at the Epistle of Barnabas, a document that is not in the New Testament. It's a work of exegesis written towards the end of the first century in which Christians meditate explicitly on Hebrew Scripture, or Old Testament texts, and find them fulfilled in the passion of Jesus. As far as we can see, the author doesn't seem to know any of the canonical Gospels. He hasn't read the stories. He equates Jesus with the scapegoat from the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Jesus is the scapegoat who carries away the sins of the people. But he knows not only *Leviticus 16*, which is where you find the story of the scapegoat. He also knows details that aren't in *Leviticus 16* but which we find later in the Mishnah, the codification of Jewish law compiled around 200 C.E. by Judah the Patriarch. It looks like he's actually remembering the ceremony; he's not just reading Leviticus.

Barnabas 7:7 says, "Note what was commanded: 'Take two goats, goodly and alike, and offer them (notice how the type of Jesus is manifested). ... And do you all spit on it and goad it, and bind the scarlet wool about its head and let it be cast into the desert.'" Apparently, Barnabas knows, and I would presume that this is probably historically

correct, that when the scapegoat was being ushered into the desert, the poor beast was spat upon by the people, not as cruelty to animals, but simply to spit their sins out upon it, to get rid of their sins in a physical sense. And poking the goat with the reed, the ordinary instrument they would have at hand, pushes it on its way. You can hardly imagine a more graphic way of saying I empty my sins onto this beast, and get away from me, beast, into the desert.

Which came first? Was Jesus spat upon and poked with a reed in historical fact, and then did people go looking to find those things in the Old Testament texts? Or did they know about the scapegoat and apply the image to Jesus? I am completely convinced that the line went from the scapegoat to Jesus because those poking reeds make more sense moving in that direction than the reverse. The scapegoat typifies Jesus, who dies “for our sins.”

Those are only three examples. To convince you completely, I would have to go through the entire passion account, as I did in my 1988 book *The Cross That Spoke*.<sup>(1)</sup> But understand my thesis. What you have, hour by hour, moment by moment, Pontius Pilate said this, Jesus said that, the high priest said this, is not, I believe, history remembered and transcribed. Maybe that’s possible, but I am not talking about what is possible. I am talking about what is probable in these stories. You should understand this because it’s very important. If you asked me under oath in a court of law, could this or that have actually happened, I would answer yes to any could question. Anything could have happened. The question is which is more probable in this case. Are we going from prophecy into history or from history into prophecy? My thesis argues for the former option—prophecy into history.

This is my reconstruction of what happened historically during the passion. The people who were with Jesus fled when he was arrested. Those who fled knew nothing about what happened. They could, of course, imagine a crucifixion. It did not take much imagination in first-century Palestine. Those who knew nothing historically combed the scriptures theologically, that is to say, those who were able to read did. Those who combed the scriptures theologically came up with various types and texts that showed how God’s Chosen One could suffer and die and still be God’s Chosen One. Out of a medley of such types and texts, an historical story was eventually created, and thereafter we have the story that we all know. That is my thesis with regard to the

passion of Jesus. With regard to those detailed and multiplying trials of Jesus, we are dealing not with history memorized but with prophecy historicized.

I would ask you to think for a moment how absolutely, how utterly, how unspeakably unfair it was for early Christian writers, say in the third and fourth centuries, to go back to their Jewish colleagues and say, “Don’t you understand, can’t you read, won’t you understand? Read the text, see how it is fulfilled. How can you deny Jesus was the Messiah? There was darkness at noon in *Mark 15:30*. Read it as foretold in *Amos 8:9*.” Those Christian polemicists quarried from Jewish quarries the very stones they threw at the Jews. I find that unspeakably unfair. And that is for me what is at stake here. Otherwise you could say, “Well, maybe it’s prophecy, maybe it’s history, but who cares?” I think it is from prophecy that the history was made. It cannot be used, therefore, to batter the people who made the prophecy and who, with equal right and truth, found it fulfilled in very different ways.

## **The Burial Of Jesus.**

My second subject is the burial of Jesus. Again I’m going to make a strong thesis and then give you a sort of general argument for it. Jesus was buried, if he was buried at all, by the people who crucified him. Watch the argument here because there are jumps. What, with regard to Roman practices, do we know about crucifixion? I’m going to quote from Martin Hengel’s book about crucifixion. It’s really not a book; it’s a series of quotations from Greco-Roman authors about crucifixion. It’s a catalogue of horrors, actually. I think we have to get back a little of the horror in the heart of darkness to understand crucifixion. What I’m doing here is not trying to be sensational, but I want everyone at the end of this to smell the horror.

“Among the Romans,” says Hengel, “[crucifixion] was inflicted above all on the lower classes, i.e., slaves, violent criminals and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces, not least in Judea. The chief reason for its use was its allegedly supreme efficacy as a deterrent; it was, of course, carried out publicly. ... It was usually associated with other forms of torture, including at least flogging. ... By the public display of a naked victim at a prominent place—at a crossroads, in the theater, on high ground, at the place of his crime—crucifixion also represented his uttermost humiliation, which had a numinous dimension to it. ... Crucifixion was aggravated further by the fact that quite often its victims were never buried. It was a stereotyped picture that the crucified victim served

as food for wild beasts and birds of prey. In this way his humiliation was made complete. What it meant for a man in antiquity to be refused burial, and the dishonor which went with it, can hardly be appreciated by modern man.”<sup>(2)</sup>

Think for a second. The Romans had three *summa supplica*, or supreme penalties. What made them supreme was not that they hurt more than anything else. The Romans didn't calculate hurt too much. What made them supreme was that there was nothing left to bury. You were annihilated. One of those penalties was crucifixion; the second was being cast to the beasts in the amphitheater; the third was being burned alive.

What made crucifixion awful is that you were probably not buried. Most of the time you were left on the cross for the dogs and the crows. Try to understand and imagine the place of crucifixion. Think of it as what it was intended to be, a place of state terrorism. Probably the uprights were there all the time. Try and imagine the flies. Try and imagine the prowling dogs. Try and imagine the smell of sweat and blood and urine and excrement. That's why Paul admitted that to preach the crucifixion and the crucified Christ was to announce “the folly” of the cross. That is an older translation—a nice word. “Folly” sounds like some charming eccentricity. But the word in Greek is the root from which we get our word moronic. Paul speaks with devastating accuracy of the absolute stupidity in the Roman world of announcing a crucified Christ.

According to Roman practices, therefore, Jesus was probably not even buried. What about Jewish exceptions? What about the burial of crucified bodies before sunset? In *Deuteronomy 21:22–23*, there is the command, “When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; because you shall bury him that same day.” Notice, by the way, that the presumption is that you have already executed this person when you hang him on a tree, and you're hanging him as a warning. He is already dead; therefore, it is relatively easy to take him down by nightfall.

We know from the Temple Scroll, the longest of the Dead Sea Scrolls, that the Essenes talked about this; when they imagined that they would take over Jerusalem, they applied that text specifically to crucifixion. Not only when you kill somebody and hang him on a cross or a tree, but also when you hang him up to die, he must be buried on the same day. The question, however, is, to put it crudely, did Pilate read the Temple Scroll? Did Pilate care? Did the Romans observe Jewish piety?

There are two problems here. Everything we know about Pilate from outside the New Testament puts him on a collision course with Jewish religious sensibilities.

Furthermore, when the Essenes tell us in the Temple Scroll what they want to do when they take over Jerusalem, they're probably telling us what's not being done right now. So the best hope we could have is that maybe, maybe, as an exception to standard Roman practice, Jesus was buried out of Jewish piety.

Textually and archaeologically, we do know this. Crucified bodies could be given to their families. Philo mentions this in his work *Against Flaccus* (81–84). He says, "I have known cases when on the eve of a holiday of this kind [birthdays of the illustrious Augustan house], people who have been crucified have been taken down and their bodies delivered to their kinsfolk." Then, in 1968 at Giv'at ha-Mivtar in northwest Jerusalem, the first crucified body was found and, in the same tomb complex, by the way, a man who had been burned alive and whose leg bones still showed the striations of the grid marks.

It was possible, therefore, for somebody to be buried by the family after being crucified. But remember that, in general, if you had power, you were not crucified. If you were crucified, you did not have the power to control your burial. According to Roman practices, then, Jesus would not be buried. For Jewish exceptions, maybe it is possible that Jewish piety was observed and Jesus was buried by the soldiers who crucified him.

But now I come to the third point, what I call Christian apologetics, that is, the steady improvement in Jesus' burial across the gospel texts. That's what makes me deeply suspicious about what was there at the beginning. Try and imagine if Jesus' followers had fled. They would not know what had happened, but they would know what happened to crucified people. What was their best hope? What was their worst fear?

In the Gospel of Peter (5:15–6:22), which I mentioned before, in a section I consider to be independent of the New Testament, there is an explicit reference to Deuteronomy, which presumes that Jesus would have been buried out of Jewish piety by those who had crucified him. They would at least have followed Deuteronomy and so, of course, he was buried. You can almost feel their hope and their fear in reading that text. Of course he was buried. He must have been buried. Somebody would have observed Deuteronomy. Notice that in the Gospel of Peter there's no talk of his being buried by

his friends. In the Gospel of Peter, Jesus is buried by his enemies because of *Deuteronomy 21:22–23*.

We move on to *Mark 15:42–47*. We now have burial by a friend, but a somewhat inadequate one. “When evening had come, and since it was the Day of Preparation,” that is, the day before the Sabbath, “Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” That explains it. How could he have power and still be on Jesus’ side? Well, he was a respected member of the council, so he was in the leading Jewish circles, but he was also looking for the kingdom of God. That explains everything plausibly. But, in case you have any doubts, we give you his name.

Matthew and Luke, who are the most careful readers that Mark ever got, notice this problem. Matthew decides not to mention the council. He simply says in *27:57*, “There came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus.” That’s one obvious solution to Mark’s problematic conjunction of political power or access to Pilate and faith or sympathy for Jesus. Luke changes it in the equally obvious but opposite direction. He was a “member of the council,” he says in *23:50–51*, but, “a good and righteous man ... who ... had not agreed to their plan and action ... he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.” That solves the Markan dilemma.

Finally, in *John 19:38–42*, this process reaches its climax. Jesus receives a regal burial by his friends. John has both Joseph of Arimathea (from Mark) and Nicodemus (from *John 3:1–9, 7:50*) involved together. “Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.” Jesus is now given what can only be described as a royal embalming. At the start, as history’s real terror, were Jesus’ enemies and the dogs. At the end, as faith’s unreal apologetics, were his friends and the spices.

But no amount of damage control can conceal what this intensity confirms. With regard to the body of Jesus, by Easter Sunday morning, anyone who cared did not know where it was, and anyone who knew did not care. Why should the soldiers, even if they had given him a quick burial and gone home, remember the death and disposal of a nobody? Still, *Matthew 27:19* records that Pilate’s wife had troubled dreams that night. That never happened, of course, but it was true nonetheless. It was a propitious time for Roman imperialism to start having nightmares.



# The Resurrection Of Jesus.

My third subject is the resurrection. I'll be dealing with three theses here. The first thesis is that resurrection was one way, but only one way, Jesus' earliest followers, after his execution, explained the continuation rather than the termination, the expansion rather than the contraction, of faith in Jesus as the manifestation of God.

Imagine some of these people from the Q community that Steve Patterson talked about three months after Jesus' execution. They are a couple. They are missionaries of the kingdom. They have been going out since they first met Jesus and doing what he told them to do. Dressed like destitute wanderers, they go into the rural hamlets bringing healing and eating with those they healed. They stay away from the big cities; they stay away from the market towns; they go to small, tiny hamlets, with 150 or 200 people. They go down the alleyways, and they enter a courtyard house. The homes around it are single rooms. Maybe an extended family, but maybe strangers share the courtyard. And they talk about the kingdom of God.

And then, three months after the execution of Jesus, they hear a rumor. They killed him. They executed him in Jerusalem. It takes another month before it's definite. They now have to explain something to themselves. How was it that for the last three months the divine empowerment wasn't turned off? How was it that the kingdom of God still seemed to be proceeding as well as it ever proceeded? They were still having some people believe and some people tell them to get out of here. And nothing changed three months ago when something was supposed to have happened to Jesus in Jerusalem. They never had an Easter Sunday. They never lost their faith. Jesus, after all, had warned them that wisdom would be rejected. It's a dangerous business we're in. Remember John the Baptist. It can happen to us. They are sad, extremely sad, of course, that Jesus is dead. But, get on with it. Get on with it.

Imagine another case. Imagine Paul in *1 Corinthians 15*, which everyone quotes because it has become normative, as if this were the only type of Christianity in the first century. Paul concludes in *1 Corinthians 15:13, 16* that, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised ... For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised."

Why does he argue it that way? Why, even if there is no general resurrection, can't Christ be raised anyhow? What Paul is saying is this: I am a Pharisee, and I believe in the general resurrection. As far as I am concerned, Jesus has risen from the dead, and is, according to *15:20*, "the first fruits of those that have died." The resurrection of Jesus starts, in other words, the general resurrection, just as the first fruits start the general harvest. For Paul, the harvest has begun; the resurrection of the dead has begun.

We usually say that Paul expected the end of the world soon. That, I think, is flatly wrong. Paul considered that the end of the world had already begun, and only by the mercy of God was it holding until Paul and others could get around widely enough among the gentiles to warn them. That's the way I see Paul. His logic is quite clear. General resurrection and Jesus' resurrection stand or fall together. The general resurrection has begun. And, he insists, if this is wrong, then our preaching is in vain.

But does Paul speak for all of early Christianity? That is the question I want to ask. The people of the Q gospel don't think like that. If you were to talk to the people of the Q gospel and ask them if Jesus was risen from the dead, they would probably reply that such was not their language. If you asked them where Jesus is, they might have answered that he is with God. "What do you mean by that?" "We don't know. All we know is that the empowerment of Jesus is still operative in our lives." "Is he risen?" "Well, if that's your language, okay, but it's not ours."

It is Paul's language, however, and I don't think Paul could put it any other way. I wouldn't know how to interpret Paul except within the framework of his belief that the general resurrection has begun. Resurrection is crucial for Paul.

But should we take Paul's language and make it normative for all of early Christianity? My thesis is that there were other types of Christians in the first century who did not confess Jesus using the term resurrection. They might, for example, as in the Gospel of Thomas, speak about "the living Jesus." And if you said, "Do you mean the risen Jesus?" They might reply, "No, the living Jesus. Yesterday, today, tomorrow and forever. What do you mean, risen? That's not the way we think."

I now move from my first to my second thesis. Paul had experienced Jesus. Paul had a vision. Paul had a revelation. And he must equate that experience with the experience of Jesus' earliest followers. Otherwise his own authority is at stake. He mentions, as

you know, in *1 Corinthians 15:1–8*, the appearances of the risen Jesus. He appeared to Cephas, to the Twelve, to more than 500 people, to James, to all the apostles and last of all to Paul himself. A vision of the risen Lord was determinative for Paul. And he, I think for rather obvious political reasons, says it's determinative for everyone. It is the vision of the risen Lord that makes him an apostle on a par with the others.

My third and final thesis is this. Risen apparitions after the execution are not at all about the origins of Christian faith but about the origins of Christian authority. They are not about belief but about power within those early communities. And I do not really say that pejoratively. I'm simply trying to describe what these texts are interested in.

Let me give you an example. In *Luke 24:12*, to exalt Peter as the leader, you have the following episode: "But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened." The women have announced the empty tomb, but Peter is the only one who runs to the tomb. The emphasis on Peter is clear. But supposing in your community you didn't believe that Peter really was that important. What could you do with that piece of tradition?

Let me read what *John 20:3–10* does with it. What he intends to do is exalt his own Beloved Disciple (the "other disciple") over Peter. (1) "Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. (2) He bent down to look in and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. (3) Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself." Now we come to the clincher in point four. The Beloved Disciple got there first and looked in first, but Peter went in first. (4) "Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in and *he saw and he believed*" (italics added). It doesn't say that Peter didn't believe, but it doesn't say that they believed either. It says he saw and he believed. Then the story reverts to the plural. (5) "For as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes."

I can see only one way of understanding that apostolic race to the tomb. To Luke, Peter is the leader, so Peter is the only one who gets to run to the tomb. For John, the

Beloved Disciple cannot quite ignore that tradition about Peter's authority. But the Beloved Disciple does everything important. He gets there first, he looks in first and, above all, he believes.

Suppose, now, that you wanted to come back from the Peter side with a counter-exaltation of Peter. Look at *John 21:9*: "When they [Peter and six other disciples] had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it." Why a charcoal fire? The last time we saw a charcoal fire was when Peter, around the charcoal fire, denied Jesus three times in John (*John 18:17, 25, 27*).

Watch what happens. Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these [the other apostles]?" He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'" Even though lambs and sheep should exhaust the possibilities, you need a third time. Peter denied Jesus three times, so he had to affirm Jesus three times. "He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'" The sheep must be repeated to fill out the required threesome.

Peter wins out. It seems to me absolutely clear that what people are doing in these stories is trying to decide who's in charge in the various communities. And the way you decide that is by claiming who saw Jesus. To whom did Jesus speak?

In conclusion, Christian faith is faith in the historical Jesus as the manifestation of God. Resurrection is one way, but only one way, of expressing the absence as presence, or presence despite absence, of Jesus as experienced in the world by a believer. Leaving aside Paul, whose experience was exactly what Marcus Borg was talking about earlier, an experience of an altered state of consciousness, a vision of Jesus, the other experiences in the last chapters of our New Testament Gospels are not intended to be visions or hallucinations or anything else in that sense. They are calm, serene statements of who is in charge in this community and who is in charge in that other community.

## Questions & Answers

**Question:** Thank you for an inspiring and uplifting talk, which brings to mind a book that was prominent in England called *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (Dell, 1983) by three British authors. It was sensational at the time it was published. The book takes the position that Christ was not crucified but that an arrangement was made under which Christ was taken away, not crucified, just taken away, and that Christ led a normal life, including marriage. My question to you, sir, is this. Can you comment on this book, which was, incidentally, highly criticized by the Church of England?

**John Dominic Crossan:** I don't believe a single word of it. I haven't read the book, but I have heard of it. I would consider that the crucifixion of Jesus is as historically certain as anything in the world can ever be. Because, as we said, it's in Tacitus, it's in Josephus and it's in the Christian writings. And it was a terrible embarrassment. I do not see any evidence whatsoever to prove that Jesus survived his crucifixion physically. I think, actually, if you try to face what crucifixion was, it's sensational enough just by itself. It doesn't have to be sensationalized.

**Q:** I think you have enunciated a male point of view. It was Mary Magdalene who got to the tomb first, and she was the first person to recognize Jesus.

**Crossan:** In Mark's Gospel, which is the earliest of the Gospels, Mary and the women get to the tomb first. This is part of Mark's polemic against the family of Jesus and the disciples. The women don't tell anyone; they run away. I would not put much on that, in itself.

What I would emphasize are two other points. First, in *John 20* he takes Peter and sort of debunks him. At the end, he takes on Thomas, the traditions that the Gospel of Thomas is based on, and debunks him. But in the middle, he goes after Mary Magdalene. In John, she keeps getting it wrong. She says three times, in *John 20:2, 13, 15*, "They've stolen the body." In terms of the Johannine community, Peter, Mary Magdalene and Thomas are important leaders who all need to be downgraded. Second, if I wanted to find a woman to exalt, I would follow exactly the story in *Mark 14:3–9*. I would emphasize the unnamed woman who alone believes in Jesus, anoints him because she knows if she doesn't anoint him now, she's never going to get a chance again.

She's the only one who believes in Jesus. The disciples have been told repeatedly in Mark, "I'm going to die and rise, I'm going to die and rise," and they say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." This woman believes it. She's unnamed, and we're told that, in memory of her, this story is going to be told whenever the gospel is told, something that's said of nothing else. If I was looking for an ideal female Christian hero, she's the one I would claim because she is the first one who comes to faith. And notice she comes to faith before Easter.

**Q:** I would like to know how the Word in the New Testament was handed down, and in what sort of gathering it was discussed. If there was no written word left for us to follow, in what setting was it that the Word was talked about and handed down as far as the New Testament is concerned?

**Crossan:** I think we have to look at two different tracks, very distinct, and they're separated according to class. When Jesus was a peasant talking to peasants, anyone who had the courage could live like Jesus. And he told them, "You too can bring the kingdom. I don't have a monopoly on it." All it meant was adopting a lifestyle like Jesus'. That couple I talked about, the one wandering through the alleys preaching the kingdom, knew that Jesus had said don't wear shoes, not because their memories were good, but because their feet were very sore. In other words, it's in the continuation of a lifestyle like Jesus' that the real guaranteed continuity between Jesus and the earliest Christians is found. It's not in their memories at all. It's in their lifestyle. If they remember what he said, it's just to justify their lifestyle. In one way you could say the continuity is in mimesis or imitation, not in memory. Now that's one group, and that could be practiced by anyone with courage.

There were obviously other groups who also heard Jesus, like people in the retainer class that Marcus Borg talked about earlier. They were operating in Jerusalem and were searching the Hebrew Scriptures. To search the Scriptures, they had to be able to read. Those people were going through and looking for texts to apply to Jesus. I think they were a different social class. Both those tracks were operating at a very early stage. I find much more continuity in the words than I find in the deeds, because most of the deeds are creating history to suit prophecy. They are creating, actually, most of the narrative material, as distinct from the sayings material. So you have different kinds

of continuities. In a way, the words and the deeds of Jesus operate on different principles and in different social classes.

**Q:** Three questions: From the discussion it appears that you do not assume that Matthew is written by the apostle but by somebody else. And I'm wondering who you assume wrote Matthew. Number two: Why would the Christians put into the account the story of Peter's denial three times? And three: How would you interpret the words of Christ from the cross, "Why hast thou forsaken me"? That sounds much more like that would be historical. I can't see how that would aid the Christians.

**Crossan:** Let me go back to something crucial that Steve Patterson said earlier. Mark is followed by Matthew and Luke. They use Mark's passion account as a source. So if you have all three of them doing anything, you still have only one independent source. Second, is John an independent source? I don't believe it with regard to the passion account. I can't find anything distinctive there.

So we have to watch Mark very carefully. Does it make sense for Mark to insist that Peter is a jerk, to put it bluntly? Yes, for Mark. No, for Matthew. Does it make sense to say that one of the Twelve betrayed him? For Mark, yes. Does it make sense for Mark to say that on the cross Jesus is abandoned? Yes, because Mark's going to have no apparitions. He's writing for a persecuted community who should not believe that Jesus appears, because he didn't appear when they needed him. He is trying to prepare them for the period between the death of Jesus and the Parousia [the second coming]. Jesus felt abandoned by God—so will you. This is the terrible lost loneliness. Jesus felt it and you should be ready for it. Mark is talking to people who are being persecuted, and apparitions don't work for them. You can't tell people, "Don't worry, God will intervene," when they're really being persecuted.

I think Mark comes out of a situation of real persecution, and you have to be very careful to understand what Mark is doing. So, yes, for Mark to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," makes sense for Mark. That's the way his people felt when they were being killed. That's the way most people feel, if they get to think about it, when they're being killed. Abandoned. So he is trying to speak to them with Jesus' death as their model. But remember, that's Mark.

**Q:** Even that example, isn't that simply a quotation from *Psalms 22*, and couldn't that quotation simply be another instance of prophecy historicized?

**Crossan:** Yes, I presume it is. But you get to choose. In a certain sense, all prophecy is there to choose from. You can highlight that. For example, compare the death of Jesus in Mark with the death of Jesus in John. You don't get anything in John about, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." Jesus dies in John when he's good and ready. He asks for a drink to fulfill the Scriptures, and he dies when he is ready. In Mark, he dies in agony. In John, he dies in triumph. Those are different ways of choosing what to use.

**Q:** I have no problem with your central thesis, that a lot of the passion narratives are prophecy historicized. But my question is why one would bother to do that in the first place unless one is thoroughly convinced that one had been in the presence of the Divine. And wouldn't it take something like the appearance of a resurrected figure to get one to go through the exercise, in the first place, of constructing a narrative that would convince others that prophecies had been fulfilled?

**Crossan:** My answer is flatly no. Let me recall the term Marcus Borg used—spirit person. In every great religion, some people have ecstatic experiences. I don't think Ghandi ever had one, but I do think Ghandi is a religious figure. There are different ways that people experience the Divine. Some go through this sort of magnificent mystical experience. For other people, the Divine is so obvious that they do not have mystical experiences. I think for Paul it took an ecstatic vision. I do not think that was necessary for everyone. It trivializes Christianity to say it took a vision to jar everyone back to where some had always remained. My thesis, remember, is that Christian faith was not Easter faith. It was there as soon as anyone saw God in Jesus. And there were people whose faith was strong enough that God was still in Jesus without worrying about his execution. I think that's true to human nature. It does not always take visions. There are also people who don't give up.

Some people, the elites, went back to the Scriptures. I'm not sure at all that the Q-types, if they could read, would have been impressed one way or the other. They knew the kingdom was working because it was working. Nothing had changed. It wasn't better or worse. They were experiencing it in ordinary, everyday life. I consider that as much an experience of God as Paul being knocked to the ground with a blinding-light-



type revelation. There are different kinds of revelation. Not better or worse, just different.

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