

STUDY GUIDE

JESUS: UNCOVERING THE LIFE, TEACHINGS, AND RELEVANCE OF A RELIGIOUS REVOLUTIONARY

The below is a summary of the two paradigms of Christian thought that shape our understanding, followed by general characteristics of communities informed by the second paradigm. This was Marc's last comprehensive [book on Jesus](#). It is full of insight and "reeducation." This "Study Guide" does not explore chapter by chapter discussion.

The earlier paradigm and the emerging paradigm

Marcus identifies four central characters of what he calls "the earlier paradigm," the product of the *last three centuries*. Note, they are not ancient nor traditional.

- The earlier paradigm sees Jesus through a Christian doctrinal lens.
- The earlier paradigm sees the gospel and Jesus within the framework of biblical literalism.
- The earlier paradigm sees Jesus as intrinsically linked to the afterlife.
- The earlier paradigm emphasizes believing.

Marcus sees Jesus within what he calls "an emerging Christian paradigm." This book develops the way the gospels and Jesus are seen within this paradigm. Below are the foundations of a historical-metaphorical way of telling the story of Jesus.

- The gospels are the result of a historical process. Written in the last third of the first century, they tell us what Jesus had become in the lives of the communities in which the traditions reported in them developed.
- As such, the gospels combine memory and testimony. Some of what they report is Jesus remembers; some of what they report is the fuller understanding that had developed in the decades between his death and the writing of the gospels.

- The gospels also combine memory and metaphor, historical memory with metaphorical narrative.
- There is a crucial distinction between the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus. The former is Jesus before his death; the latter is what Jesus became after his death. There are important differences between the two.

Marcus presents these paradigms in the first chapter of the book. This sets the framework for his discussion of the gospels, Jesus, God, the “kingdom of God,” Jesus’s death and resurrection.

The paradigms are “lenses” through which we come to see and understanding what our New Testament stories are about. Take time to appreciate where we have come from and where the emerging paradigm points.

In the Epilogue of this book Marcus identifies characteristics of what he calls “emerging congregations.” Reflect on them.

- They are committed to adult theological reeducation as a way of reclaiming the richness of the Bible and the Christian tradition. Such reeducation is necessary because most of us grew up with a form of the earlier paradigm of Christianity that stopped making sense to us. But rather than abandoning the Bible and tradition, emerging Christianity is reclaiming it as the basis for Christian identity and formation.
- They are communities of practice, teaching and encouraging the spiritual practices of the Christian tradition. This involves a robust affirmation of the reality of the sacred, a “rediscovery” for Christians who had become skeptical about God because of difficulties created by the earlier paradigm. Spiritual practices – daily practices such as contemplative prayer, other forms of prayer, reading the Bible or devotional classics, reminding ourselves of the presence of God in the dailiness of life; and corporate practices such as worship and embodying compassion – are the way that we live more deeply into God. Practice is about paying attention to our relationship to “what is,” the sacred, God.
- They are communities of intention and commitment; to be part of them involves taking the Christian path seriously. They are welcoming communities open to anybody who wants to be there. But to become a member rather than a visitor or kindred spirit involves an intentional commitment, a covenant, to move more deeply into a relationship with God as known in Jesus.
- These communities often take seriously the role of beauty as a mediator of the sacred. The good, the true, and the beautiful, to name an ancient triad, are all affirmed as sacraments of the sacred. The way worship is done – music, the words and movement of the liturgy, the visual aspects – matters.

- They are communities that emphasize compassion, justice, and peace as the central virtues of the Christian life. This is a major result of the recovery of the Bible's passion for justice and peace. They seek to take seriously God's passion for the world. On the political spectrum, most are politically progressive, with some more moderate and some more radical. Though still a minority within the American church as a whole, they are more numerous now than a decade ago. These Christians as *Christians* are beginning to contest the Christian right's recent near monopoly on politics.

In a phrase, what is happening within these mainline congregations is a movement from *convention* to *intention* as the animating motive of being part of a church.

This book was written in 2006. How does what Marcus said then compare to where we are now?

And I note, Marc ends this book quoting 20th century scholar Kenneth Burke who images that we are all part of an unending conversation. The conversation began long before we were born, and it will continue long after we're gone.

Quoting Burke: "The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress."

Indeed. And the conversation continues....

FEEDBACK

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