

John Dominic Crossan

## **Victory and Peace or Justice and Peace?**

### **Review by Angela Smith**

This DVD offers a very useful set of thought provoking lectures that give an insightful context for understanding the message of Jesus and the Gospel. Over the course of the lectures, Crossan presents in depth expositions of his own cogent theology and argues for a need to comprehend the Hebrew Scriptures (in context), along with the basics of Roman Imperial Theology, as integral to understanding how early Christian faith developed. The DVD presents excellent teaching that helps to make sense of the life of Jesus, and the Christian narrative, in a way that is entirely compatible with Progressive Christianity. However, all the titles of the lectures are very misleading (and feel overlaid onto some pre-existing lectures with presumably different original titles). In the third lecture, for example, 'What is the Content of Your Prayer?' focuses on why Jesus died, not on prayer. By implication, what you believe about the death of Jesus may well influence your prayer life, but Crossan does not make this explicit, nor is it the subject of his lecture. Each lecture is perhaps best heard as a complete talk, despite the claims made by the DVD, as the lectures do not satisfactorily or easily break down into smaller sections.

Angela P Smith, June 2011

### **Review by Paul Overend**

This DVD contains four lectures by Crossan:

- 'Justice and the World', on the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus and Roman Imperial ideology/theology
- 'History and Jesus', on the Kingdom programme and 'franchise' strategy of Jesus, in comparison with John the Baptist
- 'Worship and Violence', which offers a critique of the substitutionary atonement theory, including a consideration of Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of The Christ*
- 'Resurrection and Community', which considers the notion of an afterlife and explores resurrection.

The lectures are supported by some questions for consideration by groups.

There is much in the content to commend this DVD, especially the content of the first two lectures, and Crossan is a gifted communicator. But the sound production is not always good, as Crossan has an Irish American accent, and the church in which these lectures takes place has a constant echo, both of which mean the listener has to work to hear and understand. The notes suggest lectures might be further divided for small groups, and the questions they offer are so divided. This may be practical, but I thought this would interrupt the integrity of the lectures. The questions offered are largely ones of comprehension, helping one summarise what Crossan had said, rather than helping the

viewer engage with the implications of the content, which would have been more interesting. I would therefore advise those leading the sessions to watch the lectures, then raise questions of implication rather than comprehension.

Rev Dr Paul Overend , Academic Tutor, STETS

### **Review by Harry Baker**

I thoroughly recommend this Crossan DVD to anyone who no longer finds traditional Christian thinking sustainable and would like to get behind the surface story of the Gospels to a better, and perhaps more radical, understanding of the context and message of Jesus.

Crossan has a talent for identifying and illuminating theological questions and meanings lying below the Gospel surface largely unrecognized by traditional thinking. He has a clarity of thought not found in all contemporary theological writers and a gift for crisp presentation which bares the bones of a situation to show the underlying essentials. He has an attractive ability in speaking, to switch from serious mood to whimsy and back again without loss of direction and has a knack of coining memorable aphorisms.

The DVD has four main themes each presented as a lecture.

First Crossan contends that Jesus must be seen in the context of the first century Roman world and paints a picture showing the radicality of Jesus' message. He summarises this as Peace through Justice as opposed to the Roman Peace through Victory.

Then he considers the economic and political background to the overlapping ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, showing why they arose when they did and their basic difference. He unpacks Jesus' claim that the Kingdom of God is already here waiting to be entered, with the implication that God is dependant on our cooperation.

Thirdly, Crossan looks at the trial and execution of Jesus by crucifixion with particular reference to the Oberammagau Passion Play and the film "The Passion of Christ" He argues that these dramas misrepresent the likely crowds at Jesus' trial and he strongly rejects substitutionary atonement as an explanation of Jesus' sacrifice.

Finally, Crossan considers what first century people would understand by resurrection and argues from St Paul's mission that initially Christianity was to be seen as Following a Way not subscribing to a system of beliefs.

I was rather disappointed to find the DVD was published in 2005. I have read Crossan's books extensively in recent years and have attended one of his lecture series, so found much of the DVD content familiar. However for those coming to Crossan for the first time the DVD would be a good introduction to his style and they would perhaps be encouraged that a radical questioning of accepted Christian positions could be faith enhancing rather than the reverse. I found the lectures required great concentration and for me this was helped by the straightforward video presentation of Crossan speaking, without distracting extraneous shots or incidental theme music. Some might find the lectures too "academic" (they are very different from the Living the Questions presentation) and for this reason might be best suited for an established group with good tolerance of different view points.

The DVD would probably best be seen in much smaller sections than the four lectures to avoid being swamped with too much information for fruitful discussion.