Conclusion

Telling the Story, Redux

Each of these authors has his own reasoning for trying to tell a story yet again that most people already know yet. Nino Ricci seems to tell it to struggle with his own religious past, while Anthony Burgess seems to use his novel to confirm what he believes. Jose Saramago appears captivated by the story, yet he is without any religious belief to speak of. Norman Mailer, with characteristic arrogance, seems to believe that he can identify with Jesus and can tell the story better than it has already been told. Nikos Kazantzakis tells the story, it seems, because he believes it and because he wants others to believe it. He may be unconventional in his beliefs, but his belief in Jesus is sincere.

Authors continue to come back to the story of Jesus, perhaps the most compelling story ever, for manifold reasons. They can be counted on to skew their views of Jesus through their religious, historical, and the biblical backgrounds, creating new interpretations of God, new motivations for Judas, and new temptations for Jesus. Their attempts to tell the story serve to force readers to see the story in fresh ways, which is nearly always beneficial.

There will always be those who are offended or angered by attempts to change the gospel story, but these novels should not be seen as undertaking that. They are admittedly fiction, and, while fiction can often tell the truth straighter than nonfiction, none of these books attempts to present a portrayal of Jesus as anything more than imaginative. This approach does not limit the power of these stories. Kazantzakis’ portrayal of Jesus striding through the crowd to protect Mary Magdalene from being stoned still affects me more than any image in the gospels. It does not matter to me that it did not necessarily happen in that way or even that it might have; given what I know about Jesus, I could easily see it happening. It rings true in a way that no other description does.
They Love to Tell the Story

It is this benefit from allowing those who have so immersed themselves in the gospels to see Jesus, his times, and his followers in new ways that should be the focus in examining these novels. Whether or not one agrees with the portrayals, one is forced to rethink his or her view of Jesus, which leads to new ideas, a result all novelists must be satisfied with.

Thus, as readers, we should come back to these novels to have our preconceived views of Jesus shaken again and again, going back and forth between them and the gospels to see if we might find a truth we have missed along the way. For that reason alone, writers should continue to tell again and again The Greatest Story Ever Told.
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