



The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Dorothy L. Sayers

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In this popular play-cycle, Sayers makes the Gospels come alive. "Her Jesus can bring tears to your eyes. You will be deeply moved--a powerful experience."--Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*.

The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Details

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From Reader Review *The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* for online ebook

Patricia says

Sayers tells the story of the gospel in plays written for radio. I would have loved to have heard these performed but the reading is very enjoyable--no matter how many times you've read the gospels, this will bring the story of Jesus to life in a new way. A good reminder that these were real people who didn't know the end of the story.

William Korn says

Dorothy L. Sayers was a remarkable person. Her popular fame came from her mysteries featuring an aristocratic amateur detective, Lord Peter Wimsey. But she was also a renowned scholar, having produced one of the best-regarded ever translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, and she produced a great deal of excellent fictional and non-fictional writing on religion. It would be well worth your while to Google her and find out more about her and her writings.

Sayers' attempt to tell the story of Jesus' ministry in a kind of "verbal vernacular" - that is, the protagonists speaking as if they were real people instead of folks reciting the exalted language of the King James Bible - worked remarkably well. While reading the words of a work designed to be performed as a series of plays is always less fulfilling than hearing the plays performed, one clearly gets the idea of where Sayers was going with it.

Of as much interest as the plays themselves are her instructions to the directors and actors who would perform the plays. I learned a lot more about the Gospels from her characterizations of the apostles and other actors in the narrative than I have by reading theological texts or sitting in church.

If you are interested in seeing the Gospels "come to life", reading this book would be an excellent way of doing it.

Thani says

The more Dorothy Sayers I read, the more Dorothy Sayers I want to read. This cycle of radio plays is just the sort of imaginative interaction with scripture in Ignatian style that I'm becoming more and more hungry for. As farseeing and thoughtful as always, Sayers brings Jesus, the disciples, and others to life in the richest, most human way I've encountered through written word. Particularly fascinating is her depiction of Judas as the brightest and most talented of the disciples, which, combined with his zeal, plays a large part in his fall as his faith in Jesus gets eclipsed and undermined by his greater faith in himself. For anyone used to being one of the sharpest in the room but willing to see her or his self in this character, Sayers brings plenty of opportunity for sharp conviction and rightful fear of the Lord.

Krista says

(12 radio plays dramatizing the life of Christ, originally on the BBC in the 1940s?)

My small group is reading this aloud together (just finished play #5) and it's been interesting food for discussion--and a lot of fun. Sayers applies her usual wit, humor, insight, and imagination to exploring what these characters in the gospels might have been like, what the political climate was at the time, how these stories we get glimpses of might have looked up close. With a little British twist.

We have all been drawn to, fascinated by, her portrayal of Judas. She makes him an extremely appealing person--he's the person you most want to be, and you have to keep reminding yourself he's the person you least want to be. None of the other disciples--a somewhat bumbling, motley crew--comes close to Judas in intelligence and understanding; none of the others are anywhere near as capable or articulate. Sayers gives Judas large measures of wisdom, depth, insight, courage, and passion--and just enough human weakness to worm its way in and twist those things in the wrong direction... In her notes, Sayers describes him as having the greatest potential--and therefore being the greatest risk. It's very interesting--and very unsettling.

David Sarkies says

A modern passion play

12 May 2012

I remember when I first stumbled across this book. I had heard of Dorothy Sayers, though my first encounter with one of her books was a translation of Dante. While I had heard of her I had never thought too much of her until I discovered that she was more than just a writer of detective fiction. I am not really a big fan of detective fiction, which is why I never really went looking for any of her works, but I was suitably impressed with her writings on Dante, that when I found this book I grabbed it. However, the guy behind the counter at the second-hand bookshop where I found this book was just as surprised to discover that this book was amongst his collection, and had hinted that if he knew that it was there then it would not have been for sale. Unfortunately, after I had picked it up, it was a little too late.

I recently discovered a 200 year old book on my bookshelf that I paid 10 quid for, only to discover that it was significantly undervalued (by about 50 quid). It makes me think about the idea of collecting old books. There is always discussions of what people can invest money in, and while there is the standard super funds and the stockmarket, and even commodities like gold, one of the more exotic investment opportunities involves antiques and artwork. The trouble with that is that you need to have a good knowledge of such items to be able to successfully invest in them. It is no good buying a crappy painting by an unknown painter in the hope that in the future it may be worth a packet. It is also pointless paying the actual price for an antique in the hope of getting a 10% to 20% gain over a period of say ten years. If one is going to successfully invest in such items one needs to go by what I call the Warren Buffett method: look for something that holds value but is going at a discount because then a real gain can be made.

For example, with a 200 year old copy of Frankenstein you would be hard pressed to get change from \$120 000.00. Buying it at that price is incredibly risky, because you are more likely to lose money than to make money. However, if you find a copy of the book for, say, \$200.00 (very, very unlikely, particularly since the

Antiquarian Booksellers are more than likely to have got to it before you) then purchasing it is a much more safer bet. As for me, I generally purchase books for interest, and based upon the author and the subject. I am more likely to pass over a 200 year of copy of Jane Austen's Persuasion than a 50 year old copy of H.G. Wells' Time Machine. However, that is actually getting more unlikely the more interest I develop in old books.

Well, that diatribe above has little to nothing to do with this book, but I felt that with the adventure I had in buying this book I felt that I should make mention of a little interest that I have. Anyway, this book is based on a series of radio plays that were released on the BBC around Easter during the 1930's. The style is based on the old York Mystery Plays, where during the Middle Ages acting troupes would travel the country visiting the towns and villages of England to perform what is termed as a cycle. This idea actually goes back to the ancient days when Bards would travel the country telling epic tales to the villages and towns that they visited. This is how scholars believe that the Odyssey and the Illiad came down to us.

I found the story enthralling, and it would have been really good to have actually been able to listen to the play as opposed to simply reading it off of the page. I find that a lot with many of the plays that I read. Watching them being performed, especially by a competent group of players, is much more entertaining than simply reading the play from a book. It is a shame that a lot of my favourite plays are simply no longer performed, and the one time I had an opportunity of seeing the plays in London (and Athens) I ended up missing out on them by a few days (I was really disappointed to discover that the Medea finished the day before I arrived in Athens, and the next play wouldn't begin until the day after I left).

As for the subject matter of the play I must say that many of us are already familiar with it, and in many cases it does not delve deeply into the ideas behind it. Much of the play is written more in the vernacular than the high flowing language that appears in many of the Bibles of the day (and even today). The thing is that Jesus spoke in the vernacular. Yes, he was interested in approaching and speaking to everybody, but his main purpose was, in his words, 'to seek and save the lost'. It raises the dilemma of who we should spend our time sharing the gospel with: the high born or the low born. Jesus mixed with both, but it seems from the gospels that the high born tended to react negatively to his sayings whereas the low born welcomed him. However, there were still many of the high born (Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus) who understood him and committed themselves to him. One of the things we see in this play are the tensions between the members of the ruling elite, particularly with Nicodemus, who was a member of the Sanhedrin. They were the ones that pushed for his execution, however Nicodemus was left with a decision, and the implication from the Bible is that he threw his lot in with Christ.

As for me, I must admit that my evangelism of late has been a little non-existent. However, as I face a crisis of faith, I suddenly discovered friends who are not believers who get beside me to encourage me to stick it out. As one friend said, 'don't let a few fools force you to ditch your faith'. I have heard many Christians (including my father) slander non-believers, treating them as if they hate God and will do anything to undermine a Christian's faith. However my experience is that this is not necessarily the case. Many non-believers that I have met have respected, and even encouraged, my faith. In other cases, after having come to know me, they have developed a new found respect for Christianity. It makes me wonder even more since many Christians seem to treat evangelism as little more than a fishing expedition and simply do not take the time to actually build relationships with non-believers. I have discovered (and maybe it is one of my gifts) that it is the relationship that counts, and by offering a hand of friendship and kindness we can have a much greater impact than simply going in hammer and tongs.

Kathy Hale says

A series of radio plays describing the ministry of Jesus Christ. It really relied on the Gospels and put life into many of the disciples especially Judas. Very powerful and would be good for a church study.

Tommy Grooms says

The Man Born To Be King is a 12-play cycle of the life of Jesus Christ by Dorothy Sayers. C.S. Lewis said he would read it every Holy Week, and it was so superb I intend to do the same. Sayers harmonizes the Gospel accounts beautifully, and her plays exceed every adaptation of the Biblical text I've ever experienced in bringing the weight and richness of the Incarnate Christ to life.

Logan Lee says

I give this play 5 stars because Sayers brings new life to the life-giving story of all time: the Gospel. She masterfully negotiated through her scripted liberties while never abandoning scripture. My favorite example of this is from Mary Magdalene when she recounts her conversion to following Christ:

"You were the only person there that was really alive. The rest of us were going about half-dead- making the gestures of life, pretending to be real people. The life was not with us but with you-intense and shining, like the strong sun when it rises and turns the flames of our candles to pale smoke. And I wept and was ashamed, seeing myself such a thing of trash and tawdry. But when you spoke to me, I felt the flame of the sun in my heart. I came alive for the first time. And I love life all the more since I have learnt its meaning."

This is a must read.

Cleo says

Wow! Just wow!

Lucy Green says

A new look at the story of the gospels, fresh and original because it simply tries to get at the truth.

Holly Weiss says

Gave to Sarah.

Norm Burdick says

This was originally a series of 12 radio plays, written and broadcast for a broad public during World War II. One of the most fascinating things about it is that each of the twelve plays comes with descriptions for the people reading the parts what each of the characters, in Sayers' opinion, is like, or is thinking or feeling in the play. There are also instructions on what in terms of vocabulary and accent would be good English equivalents to the originals.

The result is down-to-earth dialogue (in addition to the quotes from Scripture) from the characters and both inspiration and stimulation for the reader. Sayers knows that there is often more than one way to interpret what a particular character was like (was Judas a simple thief, a frustrated zealot, an egotistical Intellectual), and her interpretation may be different from yours, and I found myself often saying "could well be," but even when I might have thought something different, it was still fascinating to see what she had done with them.

I am currently doing what C.S. Lewis did every lent--re-reading these--and since I do not do so every year, I have forgotten a lot, and am both enjoying and being inspired by them all over again.

Blair and Ben says

Very interesting read

It would be a good read during Lent. Also would love to find an actual recording to listen to with the kids...

Barry Haworth says

This book is a series of radio plays written by Dorothy Sayers in the 1940s, depicting the story of the life of Jesus. In writing them, the author has taken the many incidents in the gospels and put them into a single, plausible and very engaging narrative. You come away from reading this think that while it may not have all happened exactly like this, it may very well have been something very like it.

Apart from the plays themselves being very readable, each play is accompanied by a set of notes from the author about the characters and the action. As well as illuminating the play itself these are an extremely useful commentary on the life and times of Jesus in general, and are well worth reading. Also of interest (though not, perhaps, so much as the notes on each play) are the introductions by the author and others which deal with the controversy which surrounded the plays when they were first produced. These are not essential to read - a new reader can quite happily skip them and go straight to the first play - but are well worth reading if you have the time and the interest.

Mary Sue says

With her typical integrity and perspicacity, Dorothy L. Sayers tackles the problem of perspective in looking

at the life of Christ -- through a series of twelve electrifying radio plays.

Sayers argues in her insightful introduction that people follow the story from a post-Resurrection point of view. As a result, the characters involved are one-dimensional; they are so wicked that they are effectively removed from real life. It's more comfortable that way; nobody's actually like that anymore; it wouldn't happen here. The stateliness of the Authorised Version and the dignity of the church furthers the notion. "The characters are not men and women: they are all "sacred personages", standing about in symbolic attitudes, and self-consciously awaiting the fulfillment of prophecies." (p. 22)

So she wipes that all out and makes the story real again. She shows us how familiar the motivations behind the characters' actions are--love, pride, arrogance, simple faith, etc. She makes the story *ordinary*, and in doing so she reveals just how extraordinary and close to the heart the whole story is.

The disciples are no different than you and me. Her description of Matthew the tax collector is shockingly vulgar--and yet she ends it with "Jesus likes Matthew very much." Simon Peter, with all his ups and downs, recognizes he is in the presence of something much greater than mere man that first night with the fish. "And I lost my head--it seemed so queer, and I was tired, and I fell on my knees and said: 'Sir, go away and leave us--I'm a sinful common man, and I can't bear it.' And he laughed, and said, 'Have courage; follow me and I will teach you to catch men.'" (p. 121)

And Judas broke my heart. She made him the most intelligent of the disciples--and yet, he is all brain. "He can see the meaning of sin and repentance and the fearful paradox by which all human good is corrupted as soon as it comes to power. He is as yet only beginning to see it--but presently he will see it plainly, and be the only disciple to grasp the necessity of the crucifixion. And seeing it, as he does, only with his intellect and not with his heart, he will fall into a deeper corruption than any of the others are capable of." (p. 69)

Her characterization of Judas is eerily reminiscent of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor and, to a lesser extent, his Ivan Karamazov and Faulkner's Quentin Compson (two of my favorite characters in literature, and now after reading this book I need to go reevaluate why I sympathize with them and if I am right to do so!). Though the other disciples are not as intelligent as Judas, they instinctively grasp what Judas cannot: that Jesus is more than a man. As they grow, they all understand and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.

Judas desperately wants Jesus to be the Messiah, but he doesn't have faith that He is. So when it seems like Jesus is doing the wrong thing, Judas would rather have Him killed. It breaks Judas when he sees his own true self in the end, and yet his pride keeps him from repenting, even though he knows Christ will forgive him.

Sayers makes the reader understand that the characters in the story - the greatest tragic irony, she calls it - they don't know what we know. She manages to make us walk that path with them and see it unravel again anew even though we already know the outcome. It's electrifying - and it's real.

I can't recommend this book highly enough.

Leandro Guimarães says

Superb!

Annyke says

C.S. Lewis read this every year during Lent - and I see why.

Louisa says

This is an amazing book that I underestimated for a decade.

When I first tried to read it, i was already skeptical because of the sickly sentimentality of the cover (which makes the book look, in the best case, like a christmas book); i skipped the introduction & fairly early came upon Jesus described as "that man with the golden hair"... i couldn't take it and put the book down.

BUT THESE ARE NOT SERIOUS, ENDEMIC PROBLEMS and the book turns out to be enchanting (I did make a cover for it out of some William Morris wrapping paper).

They were radio plays covering the entire life of Christ (hardly christmas at all!!) done in Britain in the middle of WWII (in 1942 Sayers may well not have realized yet how creepy it was to give Jesus "golden hair," and at any rate it doesn't come up again).

The plays themselves are wonderful, and almost as wonderful are her instructions to each actor of how to play his or her character or what the characters are thinking.

But i think i can do no better with this review than to quote from Sayers' amazing introduction, worthy of reading by itself.

"A loose & sentimental theology begets loose & sentimental art-forms; an illogical theology lands one in illogical situations; an ill-balanced theology issues in false emphasis & absurdity. Conversely; there is no more searching test of a theology than to submit it to dramatic handling; nothing so glaringly exposes inconsistencies in a character, a story, or a philosophy as to put it up on the stage & allow it to speak for itself...."

However, she continues:

"In writing a play on this particular subject, the dramatist must begin by ridding himself of all edificatory & theological intentions. He must set out, not to instruct but to show forth; not to point a moral but to tell a story; not to produce a Divinity Lesson with illustrations in dialogue but to write a good piece of theater...

"For a work of art that is not good & true *in art* is not good or true in any other respect & is useless for any purpose whatsoever--even for edification--because it is a lie, and the devil is the father of all such. As drama, these plays stand or fall."

Rebecca says

Dorothy Sayers wrote a brilliant, powerful, and moving play-cycle when she wrote "The Man Born to Be King". I loved this play. Her notes before each play were also very insightful and fun to read. For once the people in the story felt like real people you could talk to.

Stephen Gamble says

I really enjoyed the introduction to this book, the trouble is it made all the distinctive theological points that the rest of book goes on to make but in a clear and direct way - so reading the rest became a bit redundant. The gospel stories inflected with a 1950s aspect made me smile, it would have been contemporary and challenging once.
