

Another Son: The Story of a New Teacher for the Modern Age

Kurtis Bell

Kurtis Bell (Apr 3, 2018)

Softcover \$14.99 (222pp)

978-0-9995823-0-5

Another Son is a spiritual parable that connects complicated questions with the lives of ordinary people.

Kurtis Bell's quirky modern parable *Another Son* mixes religious ideas with scientific thinking.

The story takes a parabolic approach and is intentionally vague on specific details. A nameless narrator—described as an “ordinary person without a strong or notable family history”—is literally on the road of life. He is transitioning to a bigger city when his car breaks down and he meets a traveling “gang” of disciples following Jos.

Jos is the embodiment of the great prophets of history—Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad—mixed with the ideas of scientists, activists, and religious leaders. The story traces the narrator's spiritual development, including his evolving understanding of free will, God, great evil, and enlightenment. It also traces the development of a “Church of Understanding” that seeks to transform communities into thriving places of knowledge and learning by starting new, faith-led businesses.

At the book's center is the notion that knowledge, defined here as the ability to think and create, can help people learn to live together. Jos offers insights into challenging areas with pronouncements on, among other things, the meaning of life and the afterlife.

As an amalgamated character, Jos remains distant and unknowable. This makes for challenging reading; Jos tends to speak in short, sermon-like reflections that do little to add to the building narrative. The book's formatting helps some in this regard, putting Jos's comments in regular type and leaving the remainder of the text in italics.

Jos is clearly the focus, but he is too ill defined to carry the full weight of the story. Other characters are stripped-down versions of people, functioning as mere names and actions; they do not feel authentically human.

The philosophical material at play here is challenging and significant, but it is not clearly imparted. Through the narrative, Jos and others are seen seeking connections between understandings of the divine and other aspects of the world's religions; they continually search for the meaning of life, but their searches are a challenge to navigate.

The book's ideas are grandiose: God is in everybody and every living thing; religion exists to answer questions about the afterlife; evolution really is creationism. But its winding and nonspecific storytelling style does not sell its answers well. Much ground is covered, but in an unhelpfully disorganized manner.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (April 12, 2018)

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