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The Jesus of Suburbia: Have We Tamed the Son of God to Fit Our Lifestyle?

Mike Erre
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This book amounts to an extended sermon addressed to modern American Christianity. It is a radical and refreshing call on Christians to stop waiting for God's work on Earth to be done by the White House.

The author begins with an historical account of the circumstances of Jesus' birth. Caesar Augustus and Herod, the Roman leaders in power at the time, form the political context for the gospels of Luke and Matthew. Caesar, says Erre, is depicted in the Bible as an authoritarian ruler who commanded both political and religious allegiance: "It was not enough to honor him as Emperor; he demanded to be worshiped as 'god' also." Herod is equally demanding and cruel: "He inaugurated a secret police made up of informants and torturers who would put down any insurgencies." Into the midst of all this absolute temporal power comes Jesus, born of humble origins, with a message that flies in the face of common sense: the meek shall inherit the earth.

This is the choice that Erre sets out. On the one hand is the smug complacency of the "Jesus of Suburbia," the Jesus who conforms to comfortable political and material needs; on the other is the "firebrand radical" who embraced the truly dangerous notion that people should oppose the power and authority of this world, instead of courting it. "Two kingdoms war on this earth," writes Erre. "One is led by Herods and Caesars; the other by Jesus Christ. One is built on war, oppression, wealth, power, self-interest, and control; the other on love, faith, hope, freedom, grace, compassion, and truth. … The revolution of Jesus … demands our choice between these two kingdoms."

Although the modern-day parallels to Rome are clear enough, Erre goes out of his way to avoid any specific attack on any present American political or religious leaders. Instead, he offers a series of erudite yet simply-written chapters on scriptural messages, maintaining a no-nonsense approach throughout. With a master's degree in the philosophy of religion and ethics from Talbot school of Theology, Erre is the pastor of teaching at Rock Harbor Church in Costa Mesa, California, a "megachurch" of some 4,000 people.

Erre finishes his book with a call for American Christians to become engaged with their world in a new way. Instead of being a "boundary-focused institution," emphasizing what divides them from others, he asserts that modern American Christianity should be like the movement of Jesus Christ, which was always "center-focused," emphasizing what unites. Erre has managed to both challenge and unite American Christians by emphasizing the dangerous Jesus, the one who taught his followers to be loving, tolerant, and compassionate to all mankind.
MARK SMITH (December 8, 2006)

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