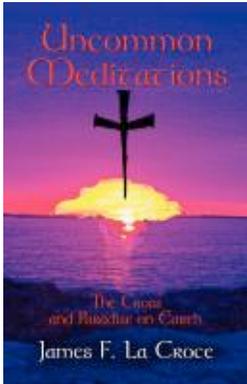


Uncommon Meditations



The Cross
and Paradise on Carch

James F. La Croce



These meditations presume Jesus was not born to be crucified but to usher in God's kingdom on earth. The crucifixion was a defeat, not a victory. They presume Jesus was not sent to satisfy the wrath of God, but to satisfy the love of God by treating the least as if they were Jesus, and commanding his followers to do the same. How else could planet earth become the kingdom of the love of God?

Uncommon Meditations

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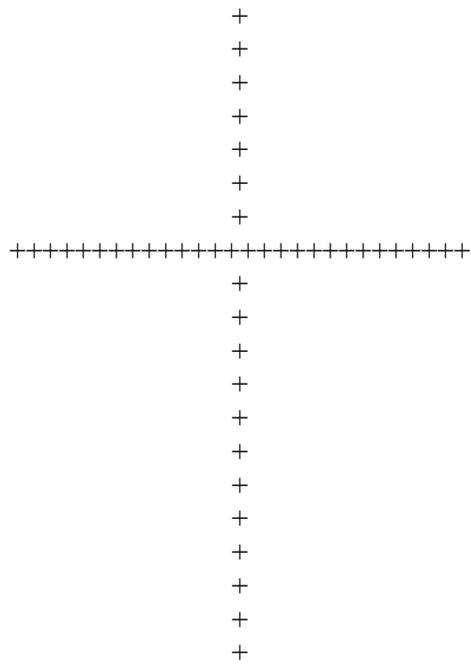
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UNCOMMON CHRISTIANITY



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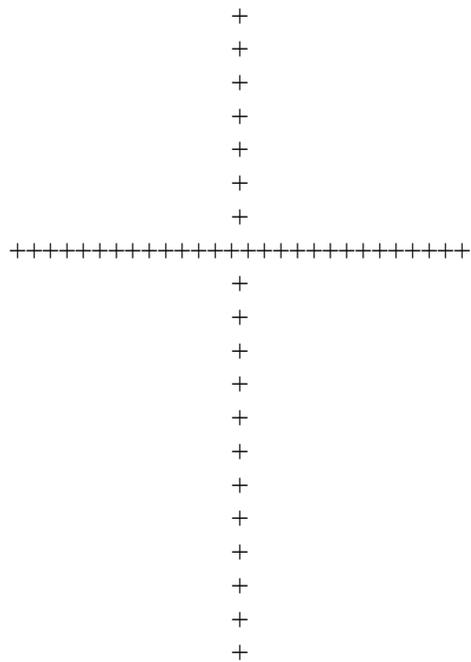
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UNCOMMON CHRISTIANITY



THE CROSS AND PARADISE ON EARTH

JAMES F. LA CROCE

Also by the Author

*ESCAPE FROM HELL AND THE ALMIGHTY WHITE GUY WITH A
BEARD*

JESUS, MAN ON A MISSION

Bible quotes are not cited as proofs
but as passages which have graced my life in Jesus.

Other quotes are often cited
to make my point, not the author's.

AUTHOR'S GRATITUDE

My thanks to the Glen Rock, NJ
Writers' Group for their helpful
observations and encouraging comments.

TO JESUS OF GALILEE

One of the thousands of Jews crucified by Rome

If no angels were cast into hell
(presuming no one can sin in heaven)

If no one named Adam and Eve disobeyed God
(presuming we are not born as sinners)

If the evil we do trespasses one another not God
(as you presumed when you taught us to pray)

If there is no wrath of God, no hell
(as presumed by many today)

Why were you crucified?
Who benefited from your death?

Cui Bono?

Meditation Prompt

“It is the best possible time to be alive,
when almost everything you know
is wrong.”

Tom Stoppard

Author's Presumptions

The Bible and Christianity

The bible is a book of sacred and inspiring stories
of the religious experiences of two faith communities
told in primitive and patriarchal times.
In those days it was believed God "spoke" only to men.
(That in itself should tell you something.)

The Christian Church is a house-divided
and as such cannot stand.
It has dared to proclaim God rejected the Jews
while assuming his son will not reject the Christians.

Meditating with these presumptions in mind
may not lead you to where I am in my faith
but they may help you reflect on where you are,
and that would be a grace beyond measure.

For Jim Coriden and Charlie Curran:
uncommon theologians,
faithful servants,
prolific scholars.

For married priests and nuns:
ministers without portfolio,
and the laity they serve,
dispersed but not dismayed.

For my nephew, Jim, and his partner Matthew:
may the grace of God
continue to prevail
in their relational orientation.

For myself:
too soon old, too late smart,
far too long a pale rider
riding the pale horse of personal salvation.

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PREQUEL

In our creeds and doctrines we gave Jesus a job
only he could do – save us from the legendary wrath of God.

In his ministry and his parables Jesus gave us a job
only we could do – usher in the legendary kingdom of God on earth.

In our Christian faith down through the ages
the job Jesus gave us counted for little.

His “kingdom come” prayer to Our Father
is but a piety that never made it into our creeds.

Who can blame us? The kingdom on earth will not come
unless we treat the least as if they were Jesus.

Saving our souls is no walk in the park.
But it is nothing compared to saving our world.

Accepting the kingdom on earth job may do little to change the world,
but it will do a world of good for our spirituality.

James F. La Croce

Meditation Prompt

I do not count my mother's life of faith and my upbringing in traditional Roman Catholicism as flapping about in spiritual garbage. I count as a blessing the faith that brought my mother through hard times and led me to where I am today.

But in the twilight of my life, in my eighty-third year, I must agree with C.S. Lewis:

“For I cannot help thinking that any religion which begins with a thirst for immortality is damned as a religion, from the outset. Until a certain spiritual level has been reached, the promise of Immortality will always operate as a bribe which vitiates the whole religion, infinitely inflames those very self-regards which religion must cut down and uproot....”

PREFACE

In 1941 a German New Testament professor published a book entitled: "Jesus kein Jude war." ("Jesus was not a Jew.") The man on the cross, he claimed, was more Greek than Jewish. It could not be otherwise. Greek culture was enlightened, while the Semitic culture was backward.

This book was more propaganda than scholarship.

In 1991, a professor at Catholic University of America in Washington published a book entitled "A Marginal Jew." He introduced his work by imagining a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jewish and an Agnostic Scholar were locked in the Harvard library. They were not allowed to emerge until they reached a consensus on Jesus. His book suggested they might very well agree that Jesus was a marginal Jew.

This book was more scholarship than the laity could handle.

In the decades between the German and American publications a Dutchman and two Germans, three reputable theologians, posed the crucial question about Jesus: WHY was he a CRUCIFIED Jew? They proposed that he was crucified because of his freely chosen ministry in Galilee.

This response promised bright beginnings.

In their brave new Christian theology we would no longer revere the crucified Jesus as a victim of divine wrath. Nor would we live as if his few years of lifting up the lowly and putting down the mighty counted for little, almost nothing, compared to his few hours on the cross. Jesus was not born to be crucified but to be a prophet for a kingdom on earth. He risked everything for a dream that Christianity has yet to dream.

James F. La Croce

This brave new theology is still a mustard seed.

This one big step in theology could have been one great leap for Christianity, each Parish committed to ushering in the kingdom on earth.

But Rome was not pleased with this disregard for heaven and hell. Nor would most of the laity have been edified if these publications had ever reached the pulpits. But to give Rome and the laity their due, this bright beginning cast a shadow over Christianity's most cherished tradition: if the crucifixion did not save Christians from hell and Satan, how then is Jesus our Savior; from what have we been saved?

But in light of the diminishing role of hell in sermons and theological discourse a Christian can rightly ask: was Jesus crucified because of his mission? Did he die to satisfy the wrath of Pilate, not the wrath of God? Was it his mission of ushering in the kingdom on earth and not Adam's sin in the garden of paradise that nailed him to the cross?

What cross does Jesus expect us to carry? Is it the cross he carried, the cross of service to the least? If so, it is no wonder that Christianity is a house divided and the world is in such a mess.

PROLOGUE

In 1929 I was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church.
I was taught to begin and end every prayer with the sign of the cross.
I believed the cross was all about God's love for Catholics.

My last name, La Croce, means "the cross".
It was great to be a Roman Catholic named La Croce.
"La Croce" saved me from the holy wrath of God, the unholy power
of Satan.
In my childish imagination a cross was planted at the gates of heaven
and hell.
On both crosses was nailed this terrorist threat:
Abandon all hope ye who are not Catholics

That this cross sent most of humanity to hell mattered little to me.
Even if it did, what could I do?
Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter.

At worship our mass re-enacted the crucifixion.
At worship the Protestants only "remembered" the crucifixion.
They believed that the Friday crucifixion needed no ritual repeats.
The blood shed that day saved true blue Protestants from hell.
Who they may be is being debated even as I write.

In their childish imagination a cross was planted at the gates of
heaven and hell.
On each cross was nailed this terrorist threat:
Abandon all hope ye who are not Protestants

Still, Catholics were as bad off as the Protestants and the rest of
humanity.
Any un-confessed mortal sin sent us straight to hell.

James F. La Croce

Our mortal sin list went on and on. It included birth control and eating meat on Friday. All this sounds sinister I know. But they say it really is so.

I do not count my upbringing as garbage time but as a time of grace. But my faith would have been better served by a church calling me to take up the cross of Jesus' ministry to the wretched, to revere Jesus as a son sent on a mission not as a son born to be crucified.

I no longer believe all I was taught as a child.
I am not an ex-catholic or anti-catholic.
I am a retired catholic, living on my uncommon meditations.
There was only one passion that urged me on:

“I wanted to see what was there for me once, what is there for me now.”

Lillian Hellman

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Surprised by grace

Since retiring from teaching I had been pondering the dark side of Christianity. Then one Sunday morning I experienced the glory of our faith.

While visiting some Presbyterian friends I attended Sunday worship with them. I was deeply moved by the fervor of the Congregation's full throated and emotionally charged singing of the hymn "In Christ's Love My Hope Is Found."

The Congregation was brimming with great expectations as it sang:
"This wrong, this worry, I put in your hands."

I was caught up in the awesome and overwhelming power of our faith. Not one by one, but as one body, we sang our burdens into Christ's hands. To sing your prayer is to pray twice, said Augustine. Singing as a Congregation is the fullness of grace.

There is nothing dark and sinister about this tradition.
The Jews embrace it on Saturdays and the Muslims on Fridays.
Their "Christs" or "anointed ones" are Moses and Mohammed.
They, too, go to God brimming with great expectations.

That's what makes religion so popular – and prosperous.

But then I was surprised by grace. I heard Jesus singing to me the very same hymn I was singing to him.

On his back was a sick, naked, hungry, thirsty, outlaw black woman.
His eyes were flooded with tears as he sang:
"This wrong, this worry, this burden, this hope, I put in your hands.
I have been carrying her for 2,000 years. I need your help!"

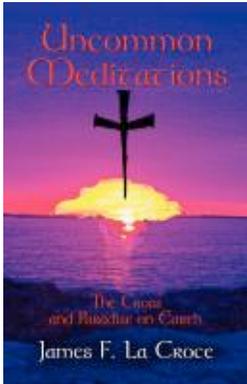
James F. La Croce

Jesus, Mary and holy St. Joseph, have pity on me, I prayed.
Neither Creed nor Country taught me to put this woman on my back.
I never did that. I cannot do it now. I am eighty years old for god's
sake.

Not to worry said Jesus. My surprise visit is not about guilt.
Guilt is a sinister emotion posing as a virtue. It has none of the grace
of grief and regret for harm done to self or others.
Do what you can. Do more than you are doing now.
But at least stir up a little anger about what was given to you.

This book of uncommon meditations is the best I can do for the sick,
naked, hungry, outlaw, black woman on the back of Jesus.

There is in these meditations an undercurrent of anger.



These meditations presume Jesus was not born to be crucified but to usher in God's kingdom on earth. The crucifixion was a defeat, not a victory. They presume Jesus was not sent to satisfy the wrath of God, but to satisfy the love of God by treating the least as if they were Jesus, and commanding his followers to do the same. How else could planet earth become the kingdom of the love of God?

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