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ON "BELIEVING THINGS THAT CAN'T MAKE THEMSELVES BELIEVED"

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A commentary on the Faith & Values "stars of the Jesus wars" hour 24June96

1 Never during the hour did the warriors face each other! It's the first time--isn't it?--you ever heard of a nonconfrontational war. Nor did any one of them ever even name an opposing warrior. Oh, what a lovely, clean, nice, academistic war! What does this say about the state of academic life & of the media's presentation thereof?

2 The only book-covers displayed were one work each of two Jesus Seminar cronies: Marcus Borg's ON MEETING JESUS AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME & Jn. Dominic Crossan's THE HISTORICAL JESUS. These two academicians, an ex-orthodox Lutheran & an ex-priest (Roman Catholic), are seen coteaching a Jesus course in Borg's school (the Corvallis branch's of Oregon's state u.), which Borg got to house "Jesus 2000" (over 1,000 in attendance), as equally obviously he got Trinity Institute (Trinity Church, NYC) to fund it. (T.I. may have edited out confrontations.)

3 Borg being the center & pivot of the show (you might say *being* it), we should not be surprised that he's never shown being confronted by any of his peers, i.e. Jesus scholars of equal or higher rank & achievement. We do see him easily finessing questions/challenges from a few lesser folk ("lesser" in the sense of less able to confront him within his field [Jesus-studies PhD]).

4 What'd've happened had he been confronted, say, by N.T.Wright? His fuzzy gnosticism, prostituting NT language, would have been exposed....e.g. by this question from Wright: "Did Jesus say anything after they killed him?" The wording is mine, but the clarity of the continuity issue (viz., Is the resurrected Lord the same person as the pre-death Jesus?) properly represents Wright (& L.T.Johnson).

5 Trinity Church is to be commended for its attempt at evenhandedness in pasting snippets together (short sound-bites [not bytes!] on both sides of the war). On the other side from Borg & Crossan were Luke Timothy Johnson (the pertinent NEWSWEEK article ending with a quote from him) & N.T.Wright (the pertinent TIME magazine article ending with a quote from him).

6 In this Thinksheet's title, the quoted words are Borg's, from the show. His postmodernist test of truth is plausibility: (1) It's subjective, because nothing's true that strikes me as untrue because unbelievable; (2) It's ad hominem because ditto for "you" (Borg's hearers/readers); (3) It's old-fashioned scientistic (not new-fashioned scientific) in limiting the method & content of knowledge to Enlightenment reason; (4) It's New Age in making one's own personal experiencing the touchstone of religion reality, downplaying Scripture, tradition, & the living Church while (in his case) still claiming to be Christian.

7 Borg offers us a shrunken, shrivelled Jesus, reduced by being redesigned *within the limits of* (1) rationalism, (2) historicism (history reduced by rational criteria), & (3) personal mystical experience. His "real Jesus" is thus a mix of Jesus Seminar versions of "the historical Jesus" (especially his own, the teacher of compassion) & his "nature mysticism." Johnson rightly scores such Jesus Seminar Jesuses as "eliminating the hard message of the Cross." "The real Jesus is the living Lord, present in the Spirit in believers." "The real Jesus is the Jesus in the pages of the Gospels," & we don't need "alternative versions." We come to know Rembrandt by exposing ourselves to his paintings, not by studying art history.

8 No ancient literary materials can satisfy the demands of today's historiographers, who aim to give us the actual person/event/situation. But the actual Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Jesus are *forever* unavailable by use of historiotools, so the Jesus Seminar (including Borg) is academically silly....The program provided some relief in showing us two InterVarsity Christian Fellowship evangelical witness-workers radiant with the living Lord, & (thrice) old-friend Huston Smith, now recovered from the antisupernaturalism I repeatedly confronted in conversations with him 55 years ago (he's against the Jesus Seminar's antisupernaturalism).