

## WHO WAS JESUS?

### An interesting quotation: Dorothy Sayers

(cf. Chapter 5 p.82)

The people who hanged Christ, to do them justice, never accused him of being a bore - on the contrary; they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild', and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies. To those who knew him, however, he in no way suggested a milk-and-water person: they objected to him as a dangerous firebrand. True, he was tender to the unfortunate, patient with honest inquirers, and humble before heaven; but he insulted respectable clergymen by calling them hypocrites; he referred to King Herod as 'that fox'; he went to parties in disreputable company and was looked upon as a 'gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners'; he assaulted indignant tradesmen and threw them and their belongings out of the Temple; he drove a coach-and-horses through a number of sacrosanct and hoary regulations; he cured diseases by any means that came handy, with a shocking casualness in the matter of other people's pigs and property; he showed no proper defence for wealth or social position; when confronted with neat dialectical traps, he displayed a paradoxical humour that affronted serious-minded people, and he retorted by asking disagreeably searching questions that could not be answered by rule of thumb. He was emphatically not a dull man in his human lifetime, and if he was God, there can be nothing dull about God either. But he had 'a daily beauty in his life that made us ugly,' and officialdom felt that the established order of things would be more secure without him. So they did away with God in the name of peace and quietness.

### **Dorothy L. Sayers**

Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1949), pp. 5-6. Quoted in Rosamond Kent Sprague, *A Matter of Eternity: Selections*

Sayers' thesis is that just as the establishment of his time did away with Jesus so modern establishment, by re-presenting him as a safe, non-threatening figure, does away with him today. Any thesis is necessarily partial. It may leave important facts to one side since it is concerned to establish one particular point. And we live in a different era today, an era where few adults, let alone children, would be able to enter into the debate which Sayers initiates in this passage simply because they do not have sufficient knowledge of the evidence in the Bible. Nonetheless it is quite possible that pupils today have picked up the idea that Jesus (and any of his associates today) is boring and linked with establishment and forms of repression.

*Tackle this head on.*

What is the evidence as to the character of Jesus?

Was he a boring character or was he a 'firebrand'?

Get the pupils to describe their idea of what a boring character would be like and then, what an exciting character would be like.

Then select passages from the gospels for them to investigate, perhaps using some of Sayers's examples (tender to the unfortunate, wine-bibber etc.)

Who would be upset if Jesus were around today?