

## Book Review: *The Third Jesus: The Christ we can't ignore*

*The Third Jesus: The Christ we can't ignore* written by Deepak Chopra is a *New York Times* best seller. This book has been endorsed by the queen of talk show Oprah and has the blessings of the vanguards of higher academia.

As Chopra examined the landscape of Christianity, he came to the realization that Jesus whom Christians acknowledge as the Lord and Savior is in “trouble” because he has become a ‘mythical Jesus’ that has been “created” by the Church to serve her agenda. In doing so, “he has served to divide people and nations...and his teachings have been hijacked by people who hate in the name of love” (p.7). With this enlightenment, Chopra began a quest in “redeeming the redeemer” by unfolding for us what he believes to be “true” meaning of the New Testament (4). There is not one Jesus, Chopra argues, but three. “One Jesus is historical and we know next to nothing about him. Another Jesus is the one appropriated by Christianity. He was created by the Church to fulfill its agenda. The third Jesus...is as yet so unknown that even the most devout Christians don't suspect that he exists. Yet he is the Christ we cannot – and must not – ignore” (p. 8).

In part two, Chopra explains that the Gospel of Jesus is a “gospel of enlightenment” that teaches about reaching higher consciousness. In this quest, Chopra identifies eight topics that are found within “traditional” Christianity- love and grace; faith; revelation and redemption; Jesus and the Self; Meditation; Contemplation; Prayer and unity. Chopra has been able to identify two more lessons, karma and world as illusions in the teachings of Jesus Christ. In part three, with the Jesus' model, Chopra provides a path to God- consciousness by emphasizing practical applications- having courage; care for the poor; truth- telling; sympathy and tolerance; love and forgiveness.

The fundamental assumption of this book is that it is God who reaches out to people in various ways and Jesus is one person through whom God reached human beings. In this approach, any “uniqueness” to Jesus Christ as the universal constitutive element of salvation is dropped in favor of all religions representing many ways to God. In other words, Chopra bases his philosophical

understanding on the fact that different religious traditions have different ways of responding to the divine Mystery that permeates all of creation. In so doing, Chopra challenges the traditional exclusive Christian faith statements about the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ and the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. In fact, on page 139, Chopra writes, "The salvation Jesus offered was the same as Buddha's..." Chopra simply ignores the divinity of Christ Jesus in favor of a teacher who wanted to do God's will.

In this re-interpretation of Christ, Chopra's understanding appears to be influenced by neo-Hinduism that emphasized the moral teachings of Jesus Christ. This kind of deconstruction has become the stock-in-trade of people like Chopra to criticize the Jesus of history and creeds and dogmas of the Church.

The methodology of Chopra's writings needs to be examined closely. The research questions beg the conclusion. The whole purpose of the book is to legitimate the "pluralism" project. Instead of an open-ended inquiry, the book was justification of a- priori assumption: the existence of an alternative reading that would welcome dialogue with people of other faiths. While Chopra argues, Christianity needs to overcome its exclusive claims there is no engagement with the whole Hindu religion as such. For example, Chopra having introduced the importance of revising the absolute claims of Christ in order to enter "Christ consciousness" that is universal there is no attempt to reconcile his need to de-construct the exclusive claims found within Hinduism or Buddhism. Thus Chopra invites criticism of being selective and subjective.

It seems Chopra is very comfortable about re-interpreting Christ through the spectrum of Hinduism. But if I were to suggest that Christianity is the logical extension of Hinduism or that Jesus is the crown of Hinduism, Chopra would object to this claim suggesting that it is colonialism. Furthermore, if Chopra wants to discuss "what would Jesus do about the mess that Christianity finds itself in;" (p.222) then it seems valid to explore "what would Jesus do about the mess that Hinduism or Buddhism finds itself in." Therefore, it seems that for Chopra there are two standards, one for eastern religions and another for Christianity.

What we have uncovered in this book is that Chopra reading the teachings of Jesus from a Hindu perspective for its ethical and social teachings. In the Bible he does not find a *new* testament but the re-statement of the eternal dharma. In the final analysis, in trying to find the “true” Jesus, Chopra has only applied his interpretation to the Gospel narratives.