

17. Fox, Robin Lane, *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible* (Vintage Books 1991)

I looked in this book for any sort of corroboration of some of the charges that Freke and Gandy make about the text of the letters of Paul being much more Gnostic than modern translations make them seem. I did not find anything directly useful to that purpose in this interesting and highly readable book.

On his pages 283 through 310 Fox covers the same material covered in even greater detail in Maccoby's book (see item # 27) as well as in several of the other books in this review list: the trial of Jesus and the trials of Paul. Unlike Maccoby, however, Fox suggests the stories make an effort to line up with social structures and judicial rules of the time. Maccoby says they violate both. But Fox is not suggesting the stories can be taken at face value either. On page 285 he talks a little about the difficulty of taking the stance that . . . "we can know the 'Christ of faith', whereas the 'Jesus of history' is lost, or even rather unimportant." He explores this idea for several pages showing the one depends on the other, and the four Gospels in terms of describing the movements of Jesus "differ irreconcilably." In later pages it turns out that some key points in Jesus' life were placed into different meaningful time frames in different accounts, etc. Much like the allegations of Freke and Gandy (see items 18 and 19) but Fox never suggests that there was never a Jesus!

The book is a good discussion, perhaps a great discussion, of what has been learned from the scholarly work that has critically evaluated the Bible, Old and New Testaments over the last hundred years. To me the more interesting part this time around (I had read the book when I first bought it) was to be reminded once again that the gossellers (as he calls

the authors of the Gospels were not historians, they were not trying to convey anything resembling a logical history. They were trying to write convincing accounts about the meaning of the life of Christ some considerable time after the fact. The Old Testament is also not a historical record. Both have messages we would reject today, as Fox stated it, they contain items that: . . . "are no longer any sort of guide to decent living;" . . . (p. 400) On the same page, he asserts that the idea that the New Testament Gospels . . . "give us Jesus's exact words in their exact context is a popular mirage: there are too many disagreements."

But Fox makes an interesting positive observation when he suggests that in spite of the shortcomings of the Bible it still allows "recognition" of "human truth" by the reader (page 402):

In the Bible, therefore, we recognize human truth even when the stories themselves are untrue. Among readers and hearers, the sense of nearness and closeness to a text will vary according to who the recognizers are: I doubt, however, if biblical people, authors or stories will ever vanish beyond the horizons of shared humanity. Not that its humanity is always a comfortable companion, especially for half the human race. Women may look for alternative voices nowadays in the scriptures, but biblical women do not the role, scope or range which most Jewish or Christian women would nowadays recognize in their lives. Childbearing and infidelity are the two actions which most often bring women to the centre of the story, but only if the child is to be a significant son.

The latter part of this two-part statement is of course in quite good agreement with my own reading of the treatment of women in the Bible as can be seen elsewhere in this website.

(2 links here) But the first part is an important statement in and of itself. The Bible, in spite of its shortcomings, is still a goldmine of human truths. I agree.

Note that I really enjoyed reading Robin Lane Fox's *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (1986) many years ago. I did not look at this book again for this review because, by definition, it begins where my current interest leaves off.