



# The Orthodox Heretic And Other Impossible Tales

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## **The Orthodox Heretic And Other Impossible Tales** Peter Rollins

Rollins has already established himself as a major voice and an astute, generative force within the emergence Christianity. *The Orthodox Heretic* is his most accessible and engaging work to date." - Phyllis Tickle

In this bold new book Peter Rollins presents a vision of faith that has little regard for the institutions of Christendom. His uncompromising critique of religion, while often unsettling, is infused with a deep and abiding love for what it means to genuinely follow Christ.

Pete Rollins writes with clarity and compelling conviction." - Frank Schaeffer

"I remember driving around Belfast with Pete, sitting in the front seat listening to him tell these parables that he'd written—thinking, 'Everybody needs to hear these.' And now you can."  
—Rob Bell, author of *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*

## **The Orthodox Heretic And Other Impossible Tales Details**

Date : Published April 1st 2009 by Paraclete Press

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Author : Peter Rollins

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## From Reader Review The Orthodox Heretic And Other Impossible Tales for online ebook

### Jason Thomas says

The book is a series of modern parables intended to convey various ideas about Christianity and the practice of it. Many of the "Impossible Tales" originate with a faith community in the UK known as IKON. The parables are easy to read but the author tends to over-explain them, which I feel steals some of their mystery.

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### Jon Gill says

I hadn't planned to read this book at this time, but received it by surprise from a friend. I'm glad I did!

These "impossible tales" are modeled after the style of reflective and symbolic teaching found in Jesus's parables (indeed, several are just modified versions of Christ's own). The thing is, when we read Jesus's parables thousands of years later, they have become their own orthodoxy to us - they no longer always strike the same chords - even offensive ones - that His struck for His audiences. Just as Jesus's parables pointed out things religion had wrong about the Kingdom of God, Peter Rollins employs the "parable with a twist" strategy for today's audiences to confront us with the ways we've missed it today.

Jesus often used the phrase "let him who has ears to hear, hear." This is the principle in these stories; not every story necessarily resonated with me or challenged me to the same degree. Some were a little confusing, and ones that were "offensive" to my religious mind sometimes were effectively challenging, and sometimes just fell flat. But all in all, the principle is one of useful and challenging reflection on what we think faith is, what the gospel teaches, what the value of the Kingdom is, and many other deep and important principles. There is something in here for everyone, as long as you're willing to take control of your own (over)reactions.

If there's a flaw in the book, it's the discussions. While I'm not opposed to discussing the stories and what he meant to say by them, I think it would be easier to reflect on the stories as stories by arranging it a little differently - perhaps with some discussion/reflection questions, and maybe his own explanations in a different section of the book (like an extended endnote). The stories are short and simple, and some are familiar but with a twist, some are clear and others opaque, but the true value of a story is its openness to reflection and connection. I would have been able to do that more easily if I wasn't immediately drawn into his explanation, but did a bit on my own or with others first. It might even work better as a sort of devotional.

Still, it's very much worth a read. You don't have to be a fan of the "emergent" church to get at least something from this, but if you hate postmodern Christianity and all its ideas, this will probably not connect with you as well, because you'll be too much on your guard against "heretical" stories. I would challenge everyone to be willing to examine your own faith critically and humbly. I think there's value in every form of Christianity, and while I don't fully agree with every viewpoint Rollins may have, the stories, their discussions, and main lessons are, at the least, a useful reflection on faith, and at most, a beautiful homage to God's ways being higher than ours. We should all seek to challenge ourselves in this way.

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## **Johanna Barker says**

Like the parables of old, these stories challenge our preconceived notions of love & spirituality, and calls for the reader to better connect with one another and with the Divine. It demands not the critiques of a reader, rather the actions of Love at work through our own lives.

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## **Madison Boboltz says**

This book is PHENOMENAL! I found each of these parables deeply moving and challenging. Not only that, I think they are unforgettable to anyone who reads them. I truly feel inspired and changed by these. I think any Christian looking to read something different that will cause them to think and even be moved to action will really enjoy this book.

"Parables represent a mode of communicating that cannot be heard without being heeded, in which the only evidence of having "heard" its message is in the fleshly incarnation of that message. The parable is heard only when it changes one's social standing to the current reality, not one's mere reflection of it. The parable does not create more self-aware purveyors of irony--whereby one mocks the very behavior that one engages in, thus enjoying the activity in the very moment of disavowing it. Rather, the parable facilitates genuine change at the level of action itself. The message is thus hidden in the very words that express it, only to be found by the one who is wholly changed by it. In the words of one great Storyteller, the parable can be heard only by those with ears to hear."

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## **Austin Sill says**

Rollins tales, though highly approachable, are also vastly paradoxical. In this way Rollins causes his readers to think upon the paradoxes of their faith, to surrender to their doubts, and to admit their heresy... And in doing this, Rollins helps us on the road to true orthodoxy.

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## **Martijn Vsho says**

Wow.

My life is not the same after reading this book.

Peter Rollins does a phenomenal job in deconstruction a person's current beliefs and showing how shallow and wrong they are. In his parables he builds up a world the reader understands, a world the reader can relate to and agree with, even a world that the reader currently lives in. He then turns the world upside down and makes the reader question his own world. He shows how fallible we are and how much our Western, first-world thinking has affected our theology.

These tales have been parables to me. They are provoking me to reexamine my life and change it. And I can't help but allow them to transform me.

As a student who want to be a pastor, these parables have challenged me to teach in parables and stories.

They are powerful teaching tools that will leave hearers untouched and deep in thought.

This is a great, challenging read for anyone wishing to be challenged and transformed. This book is not for the simple nor the readers who want a nice bed time story or a quick read.

This book will change your worldview.

## Heidi Archer says

Love, love, love!! Will read again and again.

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## Nathan Duffy says

This is a sad little volume with an appropriate title, though not for the reason intended.

Structured as a collection of short parables followed by a short reflection on each parable intended to elicit contemplation by the reader, Rollins seeks to utilize this beloved pedagogical tool of Jesus' for its capacity for subversion and depth, in contrast to more discursive devices.

Unfortunately, once one understands the position the author is coming from (or especially if you're already aware of it going in), the parables themselves become rote and highly predictable very quickly. And the didactic explanations -- rather than drawing us into 'mystery and unknowing' or deeper contemplation -- provide nice, neat, cookie-cutter templates of meaning. Indeed, the reader is positively assaulted, not by the author's vaunted 'mystery and unknowing', but by a veritable systematic theology which is as dogmatic as those which it decries. As could hardly be avoided, the opponents of dogma and certainty can do naught but trade sound dogma, based on divine revelation, for bad dogma based on whim.

One very curious feature of the volume is its presentation of a few very basic, traditional, orthodox Christian concepts, which the author seems to think are novel revelations. For example, the notion of the soteriological importance of 'incarnating' the commandments of Christ, rather than merely believing them. Granted, as a reaction against certain novel, heretical modern forms of contemporary Christianity -- esp. various forms of Protestantism with strong antinomian strains -- this might seem like a radical revelation, but for all historic, traditional Christianity, it's nothing other than what has always been affirmed, taught, and strived to be accomplished.

Of course, not content with affirming this -- because what kind of radical would you be if you didn't set yourself over against every other Christian who has ever lived? -- Peter goes on to claim, contrary to the Bible and all historic Christianity, that belief (as an aspect of faith) not only doesn't matter at all, but can actually hinder one from obeying the commandments. Well, no. Sorry. Fail less.

Similarly, Peter draws false dichotomies throughout the book. Between belief and action ("only action matters, period!" when in fact right action is most important, but is inseparable from and flows from right belief), between prayer/Bible-study and service of the poor ("only the latter matters period, the former is nothing"), between even love of God and love of man. Yes, if you pray and read your Bible but don't follow the commandments, your faith is dead. The flipside (which Peter doesn't acknowledge or understand) is that if you don't pray and read the Bible (or, to go further, believe rightly, go to church etc.), you can not possibly 'incarnate' the commandments. Though the two are intricately interwoven, the commandment to love God comes before and is higher than the commandment to love man.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the book is the tweaking of gospel accounts and parables, turning them into new parables, and developing teachings that are often directly contrary to the actual gospel account. To give just one example, the author is apparently uneasy with the parable of the prodigal son presenting repentance as preceding forgiveness, so he retells the parable almost unchanged, except it moves the

prodigal's repentance to the end. Instead of waking up from his wallowing with swine, having seen his own depravity, and repenting (which is demonstrated by both his words and his action of returning home), Peter imagines his return is self-interested and not penitent, and only later does he experience repentance as a result of forgiveness. Of course, experiencing our gracious Lord's long-suffering mercy does lead us to \*greater and deeper\* repentance, but there is no forgiveness w/o repentance. As the parable (in its original form) clearly reveals. Peter apparently prefers a different moral, one contrary to Christ's words. Christ could have, of course, told a parable of a father who drags his son -- kicking and screaming, against his will -- out from the mire and muck of his sin, back into his arms, but this would rather obviously not be loving or true forgiveness. Yet it's the model of forgiveness Peter ultimately endorses, whether he realizes it or not.

He also flirts with a genuinely Orthodox (capital-o) theme in dealing lightly with apophaticism. Of course, he doesn't endorse the apophatic way of St. Dionysius (though he cites him), St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Maximus the Confessor or the entire Orthodox tradition, but he mines it and manipulates it into something it isn't. Whereas authentic, apostolic Christian tradition on the matter holds that God's unknowability is balanced by His self-revelation and intimate communion with Him, offered via the salvific acts of the All-holy Trinity in history, Peter pits his unknowability \*against\* his self-revelation, and essentially sees his self-revelation as swallowed up in unknowability. But this is ultimately a denial of God's goodness and desire to draw us into His kenotic life of love.

To be fair, I did not heed the pretentious advice in the intro which instructs readers to read the parables slowly, and many times, so as to fully appreciate their power. Seriously? I lightly chuckled at the absurdity of that before reading the text, but now having read it my laugh is deep and guttural. The parables are paper-thin, the explanations cut against deep reflection, and the morals contained therein are deeply anti-Christian. Avoid this book altogether, or only read it as a sad reminder of the bitter, pretentious, divisive fruits of the emergent or post-evangelical progressive movement.

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## **Maria Longley says**

I heard one of these parables used at Easter on Iona this year and although the name was mentioned I didn't quite catch it, so I was delighted when I came across the parable in this book without expecting it. The format is a short little story and then a short commentary and I found it best reading these a little at a time. Rollins explores familiar stories from different angles. Some of these could well be used as standalone parables but for others I was glad of the commentary to try and understand what the point of the story was. Definitely some gems in there.

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## **David says**

A retelling of the parable of Jesus feeding the 5000, only this time Jesus and his disciples steal their food and eat it all? A story about a holy priest who shows hospitality to all who come to his church, even a demon from hell? The tale of a woman who goes off to a foreign land hoping to translate the scripture but ends up using the money she raises to help the residents after natural disasters only to find that this act translates scripture just as well as words on a page?

These are just a few of the tales Peter Rollins tells in this creative, fun and thought provoking book. Some of the stories made me laugh, many made me think. He writes as from a position of comfort and prosperity and the book is targeted to other such Christians of similar station. The question perhaps at the root is can such

people truly grasp the radical beauty of Jesus' gospel when we are so far removed from Jesus and so much more like those who rejected Jesus?

Some of the stories and comments may appear controversial or questionable, especially if we try to reduce them to a systematic theology. But I believe even if you disagree with what Rollins is saying, this work will make you think about the person and work of Jesus which can only be a good thing.

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### **Rachael says**

The thing which turned me off of this book is its pretentiousness. It is too conscious of its own greatness and depth and in the process loses most of it. Likewise, the author is often too superficial in the way he critiques 'consumerism' and the capitalist system under the guise of what he calls the 'radical' demands of Christ. He seems to paint through his stories a picture of a black and white world, one in which there are people who follow what he claims to be the true spirit of Christ and those who live by the letter of the law and in the process miss the whole point- this, for him, seems to be manifested in some selflessly living for the poor and dispossessed and others simply going through the motions of religion even if sincerely. This is far too simplistic. Just consider the empirical reality of the situation and that often sincere interest in religion and belief claims is in fact yoked with charitable giving and activity, more so than with those who are more liberal with their theology. This book of stories just does not address the complexity of the real situation.

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### **Elizabeth says**

I really liked some of these stories (Rollins isn't willing to go so far as to call them "parables" himself).

Some of them are really troubling (though Rollins includes a commentary after each tale, which helps explain what he was trying to get at in each given tale). Though hey, this coming Sunday has a troubling parable in its lectionary, so I suppose Rollins is in keeping with tradition.

Something one reviewer mentioned and which I noticed partway through the book is that they get somewhat redundant -- forgiving people even before they repent, wholly welcoming people with all that you are and all that you have, asking nothing in return from them ... doing that as a way of living in and of itself, though the stories also show how that enables/encourages the forgiven/accepted person to self-transform.

Another theme -- which struck me as so very Jewish (in part because some of the books I've read recently have been on post-Holocaust theology) -- is the idea of living in the Way of Christ, regardless if even the Voice of God commands you to do otherwise (and also about holding God to God's standards).

[Upon rereading: Er, wow, that sounds wrong to say it's a Jewish idea to follow in the Way of (Jesus the) Christ. Can I trust that you understand what I'm trying to get at?]

I think the quality of these tales (and commentaries) is variable -- and the book probably is better experienced reading the tales (as Rollins suggests) one at a time, letting them sit with you for a while before reading another one. Doing selected ones with a small group (one tale per session) is probably a good use of them.

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## **Walter says**

A collection of short stories/parables that bring the author's philosophy and theology to light. Peter Rollins' "radical theology" is not easy stuff, and I'm still absorbing this - my comments would not do any justice to it (except to expose my near-complete ignorance of theology). If you want to know what I'm talking around, I recommend you read this book, as well as "Insurrection."

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## **Zach Christensen says**

This is my favorite Peter Rollins book I have read so far. The book is a collection of parables told by Peter; they are all powerful and jostling. If you only read one of his books, I'd strongly suggest this one.

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## **Steven Fouse says**

The Orthodox Heretic and Other Impossible Tales by Peter Rollins is a collection of original parables by Rollins that explore three themes: Beyond Belief, G-O-D-I-S-N-O-W-H-E-R-E, and Transfigurations. Each of these 33 short parable is followed by a brief commentary/rationale by Rollins.

Some of my favorites include, in no particular order:

No Conviction (1)

Jesus and the Five Thousand (2)

Translating the Word (3)

The Third Mile (8)

The Last Trial (15)

The Mission of Judas (18)

Betrayal (21)

The Believer (22)

The Father's Approval (24)

The Unrepentant Son (26)

The Book of Love (30)

These are great, easy-to-share stories that explore many of the messages of Jesus. I will be returning to this volume!

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