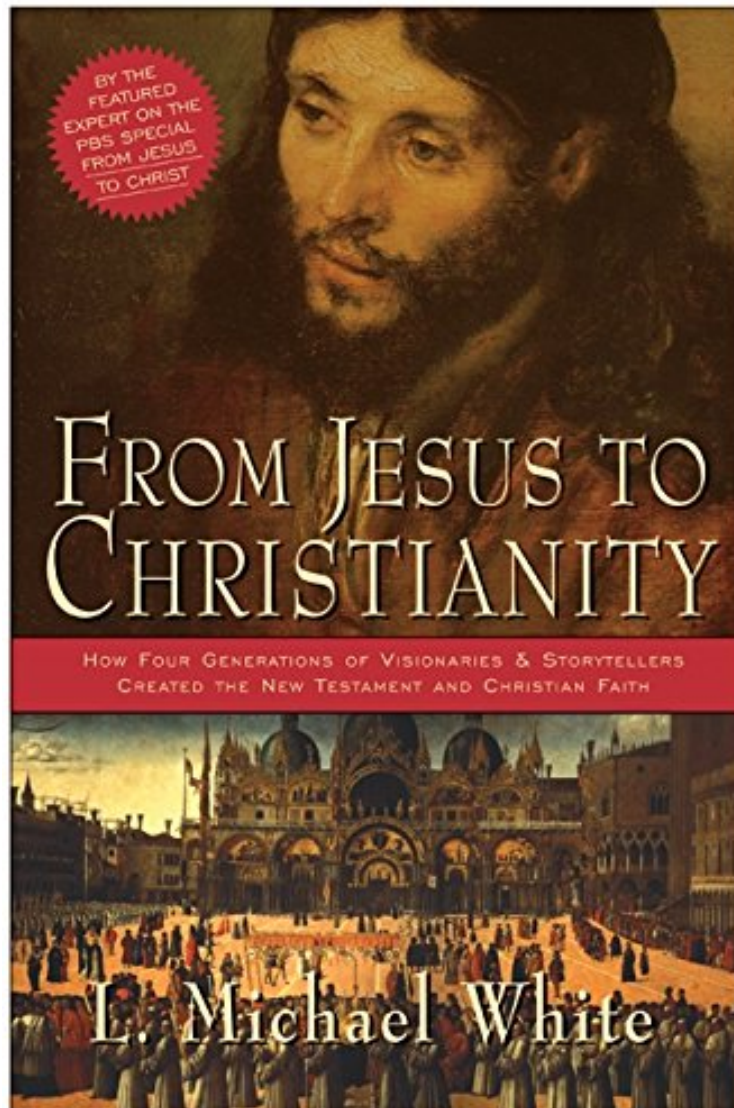


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From Jesus to Christianity: How Four Generations of Visionaries Storytellers Created the New Testament and Christian Faith

L. Michael White

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The path from Jesus to Christianity is not as straight as we might think. Now, for the first time, L. Michael White, one of the world's foremost scholars on the origins of Christianity, provides the complete, astonishing story of how Christianity grew from the personal vision of a humble Jewish peasant living in a remote province of the Roman Empire into the largest organized religion in the world. Many take for granted that the New Testament is a single book representing God's coherent, unwavering word on Jesus and his church. A closer reading reveals not one story, but many. The New Testament is a collection of books -- the result of a variety of influences on a number of faithful but very human visionaries, preachers, and storytellers. The texts contain a wealth of biographies, histories, novels, letters, sermons, hymns, church manuals, and apocalypses, providing a spectrum of views of Jesus, his message, and his movement. Given this diversity of people, stories, and drastically different points of view, how did Christianity ever become what we know it as today? White draws on the most current scholarship to bring alive these ancient people and their debates, showing in depth how their stories were formed into what the world has come to know as the New Testament. Rather than reading the New Testament straight through in its traditional order -- Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and so on -- White takes a historical approach, looking at the individual books in the sequence in which they were actually written. He explores what these books divulge about the disagreements, shared values, and unifying mission of the earliest Christian communities. White digs through layers of archaeological excavations, sifts through buried fragments of largely unknown texts, and examines historical sources to discover what we can know of Jesus and his early followers. It is this early, hidden history that shaped Christianity as it grew from an errant, messianic movement to a state religion and then into a world religion that has lasted for over two thousand years. White shows how the early debates spurred the evolution of Christianity as we know it. He delves into the arguments over how to understand Jesus as both human and divine, the role of women in the church, the diversity of beliefs among Christian communities, the Gnostic influences, and the political disputes that raged over which books would ultimately be included in the New Testament. Complete with illustrations, photos, charts, and maps, *From Jesus to Christianity* presents the fullest picture yet of the beginnings of what became the most popular religion on earth.

From Publishers Weekly
Joining an already distinguished lineup of narrators of early Christianity that includes Bart Ehrman, John Dominic Crossan and Gregory Riley, White contributes this rather predictable and pedantic story of the ways in which early Christianity developed its religious identity and its literature (the New Testament). White, who teaches Christian origins at the University of Texas at Austin and who co-wrote the PBS special *From Jesus to Christ*, chronicles the evolution of early Christianity as a family history. The first "generation" (30-70 C.E.) saw the death of Jesus, the rise of Paul and the end of the Jewish revolt against Rome. In the second (70-110 C.E.), tensions developed between the Jesus sect and Judaism, a separation that became permanent in the third generation (110-150 C.E.), when Jesus' followers broke away from their Jewish roots and began to develop their own institutional identity and intrareligious squabbles. Finally, by the fourth generation (150-190 C.E.), Christianity had assumed an integral role in the social and intellectual context of the Roman Empire. White uses sidebars to provide helpful summaries of the authorship, provenance, date and themes of various writings and to offer useful lists of further readings. However, his bland presentation uncovers nothing especially new in the story of early Christianity. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. A splendid feast of a book, rich with insights from archaeology and cultural history. (Wayne A. Meeks, Woolsey Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, Yale University) Wayne A. Meeks, Woolsey Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, Yale University) About the Author L. Michael White is Ronald Nelson Smith Chair in Classics and Christian Origins and the director of the Institute for the Study of Antiquity and Christian Origins at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *From Jesus to Christianity* and has been featured in and co-written two award-winning PBS Frontline documentaries.