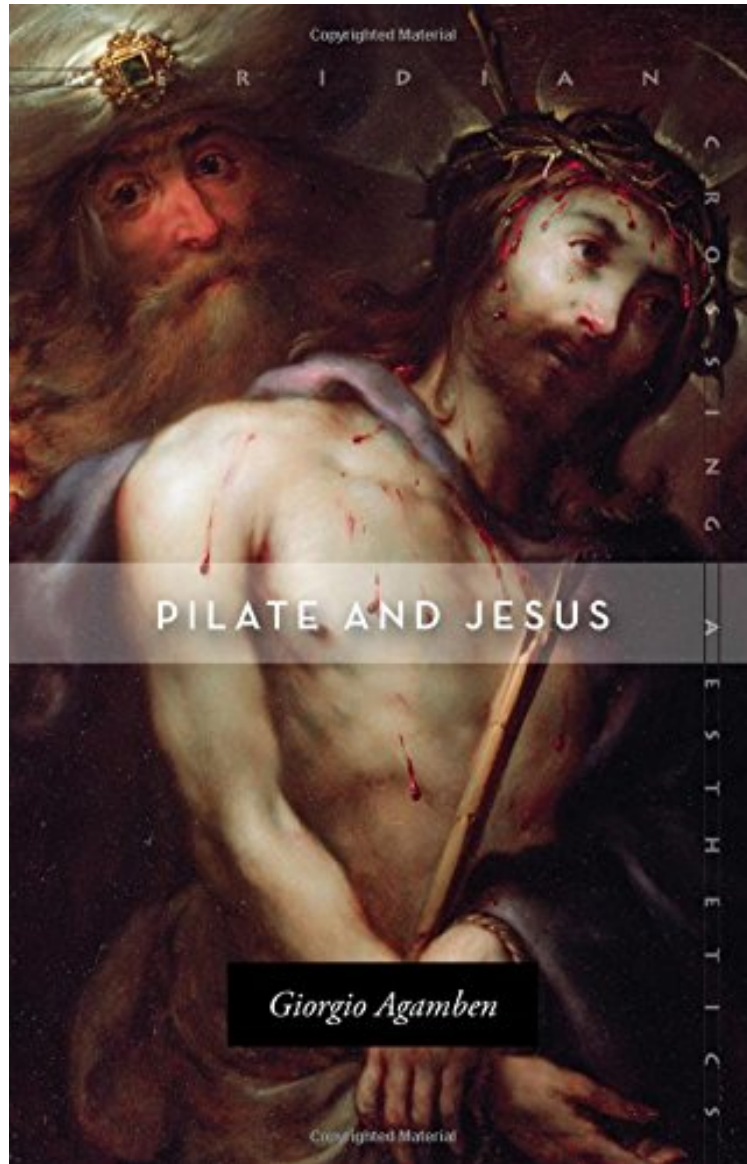


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Pilate and Jesus (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics)

Giorgio Agamben

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Pilate and Jesus. Agamben gives a balanced, well researched view. His theme is profound and worth an honest exploration.³ of 3 people found the following review helpful. On the Crisis of JudgementBy StreetlightReaderIn this little book (essay really) Giorgio Agamben turns his considerable philological prowess to the parable of Jesus's trial and its strange significance with respect to the question of judgement. For Agamben, the singular import of the trial resides in the confrontation between two orders of judgement: the first celestial and eternal, the other, terrestrial and historical - corresponding to the judgements of Jesus and Pilate respectively. And what happens at this crossroads, at which the kingdom of divinity touches upon the kingdom of humanity, and at which the one is called upon to judge the other? Agamben's surprising answer is not much. Certainly, the consequences are lethal and ramifications far reaching, but as far as judgement goes, the curious and surprising fact of the trial consists in the seeming lack of judgement handed down at any point during the proceedings. Indeed this abstention from judgement exemplified by the indecision and evasiveness of Pontius Pilate, who presides over the trial leads Agamben to pronounce that the trial of Jesus is thus not properly a trial, but something that remains for us to define and for which it is likely we will not manage to find a name. Thus, over and against those who affirm the properly juridical nature of the trial (Dante being one of Agamben's main targets here), Agamben instead insists on the grey zone into which this nameless event places the efficacy of the law. The encounter between Pilate and Jesus then, results in a sort of suspension of the law, one in which no decision is made and in which a state of 'krisis' (which means 'judgement' in Greek) prolongs itself indefinitely (writes Agamben: "the indecisive one - Pilate - keeps on deciding; the decisive one - Jesus - has no decision to make"). The upshot here for Agamben is that the trial of Jesus is thus nothing less than an ominous "allegory of our time", one according to which we live in a state of unending crisis. As usual with Agamben, it's not so much the specifics of theology that is at stake here, so much as the limit and threshold of the law, which Agamben's work has never ceased to critique. Read in conjunction with his other, recent work on the Christian tradition (*The Kingdom and the Glory, The Highest Poverty*), *Pilate and Jesus* offers a fitting accompaniment.

Pontius Pilate is one of the most enigmatic figures in Christian theology. The only non-Christian to be named in the Nicene Creed, he is presented as a cruel colonial overseer in secular accounts, as a conflicted judge convinced of Jesus's innocence in the Gospels, and as either a pious Christian or a virtual demon in later Christian writings. This book takes Pilate's role in the trial of Jesus as a starting point for investigating the function of legal judgment in Western society and the ways that such judgment requires us to adjudicate the competing claims of the eternal and the historical. Coming just as Agamben is bringing his decades-long *Homo Sacer* project to an end, *Pilate and Jesus* sheds considerable light on what is at stake in that series as a whole. At the same time, it stands on its own, perhaps more than any of the author's recent works. It thus serves as a perfect starting place for readers who are curious about Agamben's approach but do not know where to begin.

About the Author Giorgio Agamben is a contemporary Italian philosopher and political theorist whose works have been translated into numerous languages. His most recent title with Stanford University Press is *Opus Dei* (2013).