

American Savior
By Roland Merullo

American Savior: A Novel of Divine Politics by Roland Merullo is a timely novel, given our recent election excitement. In this case, there is a most unusual candidate. Having despaired of the United States solving its problems and becoming a better nation, Jesus returns to run for President of the United States as a third-party candidate. He assembles a motley and unlikely crew to be his disciples, not unlike his earlier choice of disciples. This group is to orchestrate his campaign despite their lack of experience. The chief organizer is Russ, a TV reporter who mostly doesn't even believe in God.

Merullo certainly touches on most of the major issues of our time, and through his Jesus offers readers another way of seeing what is and what could be. Depending on how one reads the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, some readers may not find Merullo's fictional Jesus very acceptable, but his account certainly could stimulate discussion. I like Merullo's vision of Jesus. He is strong and compassionate. He is sometimes impatient when Russ and others don't "get it." In the story, we find him riding a bull at a rodeo, successfully I might add, as well as surfing on the California coast. It's interesting to think about how we arrived at the picture of this man who changed the world forever. There have been many portrayals in art. Merullo's vision is of a strong, handsome young man and this time, he was born to a strong, very wise Native American woman whom he also chooses as his running mate. This Jesus also frightens and angers his new "disciples" by disappearing without a word or refusing to be bound by their carefully worked out security plans.

There are some humorous touches in the book. I particularly enjoyed many of the names of characters which are plays on the names of people you will recognize. I don't think Merullo has left anything out as he turns his spotlight on the strengths and foibles of the present time including people at whom he is poking fun.

I found the book interesting, enjoyable, even touching in parts with likeable, believable and all too human characters with which Jesus surrounds himself. I've always thought that if Jesus returned, we would crucify him once again. You will have to read to discover what happens to this fictional Jesus. Merullo is also the author of *Golfing with God* and *Breakfast with Buddha*. *American Savior* is published by Algonquin Book in hardcover for \$24.95.