

the new reformation

Why the “New” Reformation?

The easy answer is that the NEW reformation is necessary for the same reason that the original reformation was. The institution of the church has, in large part, strayed far beyond the message of Jesus. The church today commonly focuses on itself, on WHAT THE EARLY CHURCH TAUGHT, rather than on WHAT JESUS TAUGHT. The doctrine, dogma, and creeds that sought to unify the early church have, in the 20th Century, only divided it. Not only has it splintered the church, but it has also driven many away.

The purpose of the essays on this site is not to change anyone’s mind, but rather to offer support to those who have always had, or are beginning to have doubts about their childhood faith. For most of us the faith of our childhood could be summarized as “following the rules as best you can, so you can go to live with Jesus when you die”, Doubts are a good thing because they mean that the individual is ready to move to a more adult understanding of God.

Often people repress their doubts, rather than confront them, for the lack of an alternative understanding. If the choice is between the childhood understanding of God, and no God or atheism, many will cling to the childhood understanding. What I seek to do here is to offer another, more traditional choice.

I wish I could claim to have coined the phrase “The New Reformation”, but alas, many have used the phrase in recent years to describe their adult faith experience.

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Making Religion Relevant

September 15, 2013 in [Uncategorized](#)

By Bob Cahill

The root word in progressive is “progress”, a word that infers growing and becoming more, in this case more like the God they seek to imitate. Progressive Christians are not so much

about focusing on a core set of beliefs or fundamentals that were firmly established 2000 years ago. Instead they tend to imagine the mystery we call God as that holy spirit that lives within each of us.

Rex A. E. Hunt in the book, "Why Weren't We Told" ascribes five characteristics to Progressive Christianity:

1. A spiritual vitality and expressiveness
2. Insistence on a Christianity with intellectual integrity
3. An elimination of traditional gender boundaries
4. Belief that Christianity can be vital without claiming to be the best or the only true path to God
5. Strong ecological and social justice commitments

Hunt goes on to say that Progressive Christians see their role in mainline Christianity as similar to that of the canary in the coalmine. The evolving and growing witness of Progressive Christianity could be dismissed by the mine managers and overseers, who wish for nothing more than "peace and unity in the ranks", but that dismissal will not make the mine shaft a more relevant and safe space. It may prove better in the long run to feed the canaries and to listen to their song.

Progressive Christians tend to be free thinkers feeling that each person is ultimately the final authority in matters of belief, doctrine, and biblical interpretation based on one's own reason and experience, rather than deferring to the assertions of others however official or authoritative they may claim to be.

For most Progressive Christians conversation is as essential as the bible is for mainline Christians. They image Christianity as like a group of spiritual explorers traveling into the great unknown. Therefore ongoing conversation with others is a large part of a lifelong growth

process of forming their own reasoned conclusions. Progressive Christians actively engage in examining what is meant by God, Jesus, and Christ, utilizing the abundance of science, historical, and archeological information that we now have available; information that we did not have even one hundred years ago.

This approach is not new. Progressive Christianity was evident as early as the first century, particularly among those in the Eastern Church and more contemplative mystical traditions. For them Christianity was always a faith of behavior rather than beliefs, compassion rather than creeds, and the Mystery rather than absolutes.

Being a "Progressive" Christian

September 15, 2013 in [Uncategorized](#)

By Rev. Keith Rowe

Progressive Christianity is a contemporary iteration of Christian witness that has deep roots in the Christian tradition. There are commonalities that bind Progressive Christians together. Progressive Christians seek to live in conversation with all areas of human knowing, experience and exploration: philosophical formulations, scientific exploration, literary insight into the human condition, economic and political systems, the experience of the poor and of the wealthy, the various cultures that shape human communities, and most importantly the religions of the world. This commitment to inter-human conversation, built on respect and willingness to learn, makes progressive Christians suspect to conservative Christians who are dedicated to building sharp boundaries around Christian truth.

Progressive Christians see themselves as living within a river of life that is never static. While progressive Christians respect the traditions

they have inherited, they refuse to be enslaved by them. Progressive Christians value the Christian Bible and respect holy books and traditions of other faiths. We welcome scholarship that helps us understand demystify and interpret these ancient words of God.

Progressive Christians seek to be shaped by the way of life taught and embodied by Jesus while also living in conversation with the world today. Jesus is understood to be a manifestation of God, but not necessarily the only manifestation of God. Jesus, we suggest, represents an evolutionary possibility for the human family. Progressive Christians believe humans are responsible for the sort of world we live in and tend to be critical of contemporary economic, and political structures that serve the interests of wealthy nations and persons, lead to wars shaped by imperialist mentalities and degradation of creation in the interests of wealth creation. Progressive Christianity is part of the Christian Church, and seeks the renewal of Christianity as a way to heal a tired and often violent world.

It's More about Transformation

November 9, 2012 in [General](#)

The primary challenge of Jesus is to redemption; to change, grow, and transform our lives. This repeated call always takes the form of an invitation to more, to move deeper into our relationship with God.

Conversion is not something that can be
“forced” or “pushed”,
but NEITHER is it to be seen as optional.

It is also important to keep in mind that for most of us transformation is a journey, not a one-time event.

On the other hand, the common tendency to ‘nest’, or just get comfortable with simple

assent to given beliefs, runs the risk of making spirituality into religion, or the church into a social club: a group of like believers whose total God experience is Sunday morning worship.

Religion, in this sense, makes belief something to acknowledge on Sunday morning, while getting on with “real” life during the rest of the week. Perhaps this is an attitude we should each search ourselves for regularly. That is why **the invitation to more needs to be repeated often**, and **spiritual growth must be emphasized** to enhance, enrich and deepen the relationship with God.

NO RELATIONSHIP WILL LAST UNLESS IT IS TENDED TO.

The tendency to seek comfort and avoid pain seems like just common sense, but it runs counter to establishing an ever-deepening relationship with God. Transformation will likely require each person to confront some pain, and to grow from that experience.

. . . Less About “Right Belief”

November 7, 2012 in [General](#)

Since the enlightenment in the late 1800’s and the advent of the scientific method, people have begun to equate “true” with “factual”. With this mindset, traditional Christianity began to look to many as a religion that asked us to believe the improbable for the sake of the hereafter. For many faith became what was needed when belief and knowledge conflicted. As a result millions of people have left Christianity.

In post-modern Christianity, there is less emphasis on the hereafter and more emphasis on now, building the kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven”. This new paradigm presents metaphorical interpretations of the old doctrines, dogmas, and concepts that seem

more true for the post-enlightenment mindset. For this reason it is important to present these newer interpretations.

**Post-modern Christianity
is NOT about right belief,
but about experiencing
the surrendered life
in relationship with God
and living “the way”,
affirming an alternative vision
of the world grounded in
God’s passion for the well being of all.**

God’s Word? Well, Sorta!

November 10, 2012 in [General](#)

The Bible Is Not the sacred Word of God, dictated inerrantly to some devoted scribe who simply wrote it out. It is the revered testimony of men from 2000-3000 years ago about their experience of God. The Bible as it exists today does not even contain the original texts, but is based on copies of copies of copies. The fact that it has survived at all is reason to take it seriously, but not to read it literally.

**The oldest extant text we have today
dates from the 9th century.**

None of this is new to your clergy. It has been known and taught in university schools of religion for decades. Clergy have known these facts, but often, it seems, felt that it would be too much for their congregations to handle.

Keep in mind that this website is not about simply deconstructing or “debunking” common mainline belief, but about reconstructing a richer, deeper spirituality based on the original metaphorical understanding of scripture.

Return to the Mystical Tradition

How is it that all those Christians who came before us, could have gotten it so wrong for hundreds, or even thousands of years?

First it is important to state clearly, that what was passed down, the common belief, was not wrong so much as incomplete, with resulting misplaced emphasis. People did the best they could with what they were given.

Christians struggled for all those years to understand Jesus and his mission. As a result there have always been many Christianities: ARIANS, ATHENATIANS, CATHOLICS, ANGLICANS, LUTHERANS, BAPTISTS, etc.,

Among those Christianities there were always many mystics who knew God directly, who experienced a relationship with God, as others struggled to know more about God. The distinction is between faith as an act of the head (intellect) and faith as an act of the heart (imagination).

Knowing God with the head was something that could be controlled, codified, standardized and institutionalized; and so it was. Think Constantine, dogma, papacy. Think right belief, crusades, inquisition, reformation.

It was as though after Jesus, this **God of the intellect** was spread to all by the equivalent of mass media, the authority of the church-state. Whereas the **God of the imagination** relied on word of mouth communication (person to person manifestation). The church-state not only promoted their view of God, but they actively suppressed other understandings.

In the 21st century we are recovering this mystical, metaphorical, experiential God.

THE SERENITY PRAYER

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

What is at the HEART of Christianity?

November 12, 2012 in [General](#)

No, God is NOT Santa Clause, but there IS a God, and It is NOT me. God is Real, NOT hypothetical.

God is both transcendent, a person-like being, separate from the universe, a loving authority figure, **and** immanent, around and in all, as the Holy Spirit is commonly thought of. This immanence is called Panentheism, not to be confused with Pantheism, Marcus Borg notes in The Heart of Christianity.

We know this God through the bible and through Jesus. The Bible is the work of men expressing, testifying to, their experience of God. Both Jesus and the Bible must be interpreted in a historical context since time and place impact them. Both also must be interpreted metaphorically, that is, as pointing to the more than literal meaning.

For Jesus the OPPOSITE OF FAITH
is not doubt,
but “worrying about many things”.
(Mark 4:40)

Jesus is the definitive revelation of God. The Bible is in effect a secondary source. When there is a conflict, Jesus trumps the bible.

Believing in Beliefs or orthodox statements about Jesus is a relatively recent development. Until 1600 Christianity was simply about loving Jesus and loving what Jesus loves.

Do You Admire Jesus?

November 12, 2012 in [General](#)

A recent book from Robin R. Meyers, provocatively titled “Saving Jesus from the Church – How to Stop Worshiping Christ and Start Following Jesus” is in large part

responsible for the beginning of this website. It also provided our title, “The NEW Reformation”

Christ is NOT Jesus’ last name!

“Who was Jesus before he was the Christ? What does it mean to follow him as a teacher and not just worship him as a supernatural deity on a rescue mission?”

Nearly all the Christian church at the close of the 20th century had gotten really good at worship. This passivity, and the focus on doctrine, is the reason membership numbers continue to decline. Perhaps we should be imitators of Jesus rather than admirers. Discipleship can energize the church, and would bring us together. Jesus was a teacher of an alternative, even subversive, wisdom. Actively striving for Social Justice, as Jesus did, is the work of the church.

I will be sharing much more from this amazing book as the days pass.

Focus Pokus

November 14, 2012 in [General](#)

Imagine celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr. by wearing small gold rifles around your neck. Then once a year we would celebrate his killing by considering his last meal and perhaps the few days that lead up to his going to Memphis, Tennessee. We’d certainly want to recall that after he was killed, he lived on in the hearts and lives of those who knew him, and those they told about him.

We would want to acknowledge that he made some moving speeches in his lifetime, but few take the time to study them. The man was remembered and admired, but what he had taught became much less important than the conclusions about him from those who admired him early on.

In this imagined scenario there seems to be little interest in King's "I have a Dream" manifesto, and not a word about his civil rights struggle, work for desegregation, or opposition to the Vietnam war.

Isn't that rather descriptive of what Christians today have done to Jesus? We debate endlessly about the resurrection, ascension, incarnation, and atonement, but where are the action steps Jesus taught? How many of us visit the imprisoned, care for the least among us. How many of us speak out about the violence used by our military, or worry about money and the capitalistic system? For many of us, it seems that the passivity of worship and praise has come to have replaced actively working for justice. Perhaps it's time to change our focus.

Resurrection Yes, Resuscitation No!

March 5, 2013 in [Uncategorized](#)

An essay based on "Saving Jesus from the Church" by Robert R. Myers

Does an Easter faith require us to believe in the resuscitation of a corpse?

Jesus' followers had a sense that he was still with them after the crucifixion. That is in fact the resurrection. Resuscitation of a corpse would never have occurred to a first century Jew considering the level of scientific understanding of the day. The concept of an interior life of the mind would also not have been evident to those alive in the first century, so they described their experience of Jesus' continuing presence among them metaphorically, as a bodily happening. Imagine seeing the Grand Canyon for the first time, then trying to explain it to a friend over the telephone. Of course you resort to metaphor, and likely add, "You just have to see it for yourself!".

Surprisingly to us, the hard-to-believe part in

the first century was that it happened to someone like Jesus. The claim was often made at the time, but only for royalty or someone with "institutional power".

The church has confused many would-be followers of Jesus over the centuries by in effect requiring them to believe "the impossible in order to feel the implausible". Requiring them to check their brain at the door. "God's "yes" to Jesus is assumed to be a "no" to the laws of the physical universe."

Yes, Paul did write, "Without the resurrection ... your faith has been in vain." (1 Cor. 15: 13-14), But also, "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body." (1 Cor. 15: 44) Only when we get to Luke-Acts and John, written 66-70 years after the crucifixion, that a physical body is depicted as walking out of the tomb. Recall also that many times Jesus was not recognized even by those who knew him well. (p. 79)

"What can be known with certainty is that the Jesus movement in Judea did not cease after the execution of its leader under Pontius Pilate—but expanded. By the early decades of the second century it had reached all the way to Rome. It is obvious that after the death of Jesus his followers did not cease being his followers. That is, they went right on healing and teaching and hosting the open table that was the centerpiece of his kingdom.

Jesus is a figure of the present not simply of the past. As the angel in the story puts it, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?' (Luke 24:15). You won't find Jesus here. He has been raised into the land of the living—resurrected in his disciples, who have all the proof they need: hearts that burn within them." (p. 77)

In fact, there was no written account of either a crucifixion or a resurrection until around 70 CE. In the early Gospel of Thomas we read only about an abiding presence that sustained his followers like the wisdom of God on earth, but

nothing about resurrection or atonement. In fact, to explain this physical absence but spiritual presence, the only title in Thomas for Jesus is “the living Jesus”. Perhaps on Easter our exclamation should more correctly be, “He lives still!”

Easter Faith: Reconstituting the Church

March 13, 2013 in [Uncategorized](#)

A Bob Cahill essay, relying heavily on “Saving Jesus from the Church” by Robert R. Myers

Robert R. Myers is the author of “Saving Jesus from the Church”. The subtitle to this this amazing book with the somewhat off-putting title is: How To Stop Worshiping Christ And Begin Following Jesus. The author’s premise is that mainline Christians today are so focused on what the early church taught about Christ or what we believe in, dogmas, doctrines, and creeds, that most of us completely miss how Jesus actually lived his life, what Jesus taught. It’s been said that Jesus seems to have many more admirers than followers.

What makes this book important is the way Meyers goes beyond “debunking” traditional belief, the tendency perhaps of many Progressive Christians. He actually offers **more than literal, intellectually authentic alternatives** that I believe strengthen our faith. In fact Meyers writes, this book is, “meant not to do further harm to the church—rather, to help reconstitute it”! Something that, I submit, has been sadly lacking until now; a direction many of us, as progressive thinkers and seekers, need to explore more fully.

Meyers writes, “Consider this: there is not a single word in [the Sermon on the Mount] about what to *believe*, only words about what to *do*. It is a behavioral manifesto, not a propositional one. Yet three centuries later, when the Nicene Creed became the official oath of Christendom, there was not a single word in

it about what to do, only words about what to believe!” (p.14). Meyers also identifies at least one reason why this shift occurred and continues to be so popular:

“Christianity as a belief system requires nothing but acquiescence. Christianity as a way of life, as a path to follow, requires a second birth, the conquest of the ego, and new eyes with which to see the world. It is no wonder that we have preferred to be saved” (p.15). And so it has become the case that, to many, “Being a disciple today often means little more than believing stuff in order to get stuff” (p.20).

The early church needed to establish its leadership, which is the true reason for the appearance stories. Those who witnessed the Resurrection were seen as an authority (under Peter) with special power. Those who had not seen the resurrection, but began to teach were declared heretics as early as the second century.

“In the end what right do human beings have to expect eternal bliss for being good—on the cheap, just believing the right things? ...” “And what single idea is more shameful or horrific than to project our human longing for vengeance upon God by claiming in God’s infinite mercy has made and maintains a place of eternal torment? It is no wonder that so many good people avoid the word “Christian” like the plague. It has become synonymous with hypocrisy, mean-spiritedness, and conspicuous consumption.” (p. 94)

Yet some churches do not just celebrate Easter, they live it. These are Jesus followers who live as Easter people every day. And provide more proof of the resurrection than any literalized empty tomb”(p. 94)

“The church now faces the fundamental challenge of recovering the God of Jesus and the empowering way of life that Jesus taught and for which he died, while abandoning the creedal claims of the institutional church that separate the saved from the unsaved based on assent to discredited propositions.” “Easter was God’s ‘yes’ to a peasant revolutionary, and God’s ‘no’ to Roman Empire” and subjugation of the people. (p. 91)

“It is a daring and dangerous statement that says when you follow the way of Jesus, you will see God. And that when you dare to live in the radical freedom that is authentic faith, you need fear nothing at all—not even death.” (p. 92) When the author uses the phrase “authentic faith” he means **more than** an assent of the will or believing in God. He means a life lived in love for all, surrendered, without reservation, to God: a life free of striving and self-reliance.

I strongly recommend you get a copy of this book. It is so rich with detail and pregnant with insight. I could only briefly touch on that here.

Saving Jesus From The Church – A Review

March 13, 2013 in [Uncategorized](#)

Reviewer [James F. McGrath](#)

Sometimes a book you didn’t expect to read, and hadn’t even heard of, crosses your path and makes an impact on your life, or at least an impression. [Robin R. Meyers’](#) book [Saving Jesus from the Church](#) is such a book. What makes it valuable is that Meyers is a Liberal Christian and is unapologetically both, and is concerned to move beyond stating what he as a Liberal Christians *doesn’t* believe, beyond even stating what he *does* believe and value, to actually *proclaiming* the Gospel as he understands it. The cover flap provides endorsements from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Bill Moyers, John Shelby Spong, Fred B. Craddock, and Diana

Butler Bass.

The book is full of so many eloquent and memorable expressions that I could run a series of “Quotes of the Day” for a week and still not be finished. I will try to share at least some of the best ones.

Meyers begins by asking the question at the heart of a recent debate on and around my blog: “Am I a Christian?” The book begins with a nightmare of all the horrific things people have done in the name of Christ, and the refrain that if that’s what being a Christian is, then I don’t want to be one. By the end of the book, the nightmare will have given way to a dream, the list of offenses and shortcomings to one of powerfully challenging ways of living out Christian discipleship, and a different refrain: If that is a Christian, then I want to be one.

The essence of Meyers’ vision is summarized well in the prologue. His is a call, akin to that of the Protestant Reformers, to get back to what Christianity looked like before “the fourth century, when a first-century spiritual insurgency was seduced into marrying its original oppressor.” Closely connected with this major shift in the nature of Christianity, as Meyers sees it, is a shift to focus on creeds: “Students who once learned by *following* the teacher became true believers who confuse certainty with faith...We have a sacred story that has been stolen from us, and in our time the thief is what passes for orthodoxy itself (right belief instead of right worship)” (p.10).

The first chapter continues this theme, focusing on Jesus as teacher rather than savior. Here he clarifies his aim: not to offer yet another book on why fundamentalism is wrong, but instead to offer a positive alternative vision of what Christianity is, can be, and should be (pp.13-14). Meyers writes, “Consider this: there is not a single word in [the Sermon on the Mount] about what to *believe*, only words about what

to *do*. It is a behavioral manifesto, not a propositional one. Yet three centuries later, when the Nicene Creed became the official oath of Christendom, there was not a single word in it about what to do, only words about what to believe!" (p.14). Meyers also identifies at least one reason why this shift occurred and continues to be so popular: "Christianity as a belief system requires nothing but acquiescence. Christianity as a way of life, as a path to follow, requires a second birth, the conquest of ego, and new eyes with which to see the world. It is no wonder that we have preferred to be saved" (p.15). And so it has become the case that, to many, "Being a disciple today often means little more than believing stuff in order to get stuff" (p.20).

Chapter 2 focuses on faith as "being, not belief". Meyers points out that neither claiming to believe the virgin birth as a sign of one's faith, nor claiming not to believe it as a demonstration of one's critical thinking, necessarily leads to "a changed heart or a self-sacrificing spirit" (p.37). Meyers also has some wise words about wisdom to offer in this chapter, which relate to the subject of inerrancy and the Bible. Meyers' Jesus-centered approach to the Bible translates into the following principle: "when there is a conflict between what the scriptures say in particular and what we have come to expect from the wisdom of Jesus, *his wisdom wins*. We hold the Bible accountable to the message of Jesus, not Jesus accountable for everything in the Bible" (p.45). In order to put such a principle into practice, of course, it helps to be using historical methods of study. But it isn't necessarily essential. Even if one places the focus on Jesus' teaching as found in the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, the point still stands, even though the sermon quite plainly represents teachings of Jesus redacted, rearranged, organized and interpreted by the Gospel's author. And Meyers is aware of this, pointing out, for instance, that the "parables" of

final judgment are found largely in Matthew's Gospel and seem to reflect that author's redactional and compositional activity (p.54).

Lately I've found myself thinking that Jesus' *humanitarian emphasis* in his saying about the sabbath law could be applied to the whole Law and indeed the whole Bible: "The Bible was made for human beings, not human beings for the Bible. Therefore a human being is lord of the Bible." Humanitarian concerns (themselves articulated in the Bible) must be allowed to determine and shape our own humane use of the Bible. But I digress...

Chapter 3 focuses on the cross, and notes the tendency of much contemporary Christianity in the direction of docetism. "Yet when Jesus ceases to be human and becomes only Christ the God Man, we can choose to believe it or not to believe it, but we cannot follow. We can admire, but we cannot emulate" (p.71). When we emphasize Jesus' humanity, we pay him a great honor, since his impact on history becomes all the more remarkable (pp.71-72). The chapter touches on, among other things, the relationship between the cross and violence.

Chapter 4 is on Easter as "presence, not proof". As readers have probably had enough discussion of Liberal Christian understandings of Easter in recent weeks, I'll not say more.

Chapter 5 is about the concept of original sin, and ends with a call for a new Reformation that restores the notion that creation is blessed and in the process shifts the focus back away from beliefs about Jesus to following Jesus (p.116).

Chapter 5 is about the concept of original sin, and ends with a call for a new Reformation that restores the notion that creation is *blessed* and in the process shifts the focus back away from beliefs about Jesus to following Jesus (p.116).

Chapter 6, entitled "Christianity as Compassion, not Condemnation", focuses on (among other

things) the limitations of words and the danger of our professions of faith, since we are prone to assume that, if we are talking about something all the time, then we must in fact be *doing it* (pp.117-118). Meyers suggests that, rather than speaking of Jesus as “the Answer”, perhaps we ought to think about him as “the Assignment” (p.120). It is in this chapter that he dives into politics. His approach to the subject of homosexuality is remarkably succinct: “Until we have homosexuality all figured out, shouldn’t we practice radical hospitality? As long as we see “through a glass darkly,” isn’t it wise to err on the side of inclusion and compassion, rather than condemnation?” (p.137).

Chapter 7 is about discipleship, which he points out seems to require relatively little sacrifice on the part of most Christians in affluent societies of our time. I will not quote in detail the humorous analogies between the contemporary approach to church attendance and between the dating game on the one hand, and a familiar airline script on the other (pp.141-142). Here the emphasis on practice and obedience rather than doctrine once again comes to the fore.

It continues into chapter 8, on justice, where the contemporary Christian silence on the subject of *greed*, and even at times aberrant encouragement thereof, is shown to be a recent phenomenon. He eloquently points out that many of today’s Christians are silent on matters about which Jesus spoke, whereas on matters about which he was silent, they condemn (p.177). The fact that the faith of which Christians have historically spoken was in most instances *trust* is also mentioned (p.179). When we claim unconditional faith in our own “side” and its “rightness”, we in fact are not showing trust but mistrust, in both God and other human beings (pp.179-180).

Chapter 9 focuses on the [prosperity “Gospel”](#).

Chapter 10, on “Religion as Relationship, not Righteousness”, devotes a significant amount of attention to Buber’s famous distinction between “I-Thou” and “I-It” relationships. Having earlier mentioned the “airport theology” of Christians who celebrate only, or focus primarily on, Christmas and Easter (he calls it that because it is all about arrival and departure), Meyers here notes the details of Jesus’ human life that are omitted from the creeds. Looking at the Apostles’ Creed’s affirmation that Jesus was “...born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate...”, Meyers sums it up well: “The world’s greatest life is reduced to a comma” (p.207). By the end of this chapter, Meyers is summing up a powerful vision of a different way of being Christian, focused not on doctrines but on discipleship. “Christianity requires no sacrifice of the intellect; it can withstand any question we dare to ask and any answer we are brave enough, in the service of truth, to answer” (p.218). A concluding epilogue rounds the book off with a dream to replace the nightmare with which it began.

The book is not entirely free from the sorts of moments that are liable to make a Biblical scholar cringe – such as connecting Nineveh with the Arabs, or getting a little too excited about the possible influence of Mithraism on what later Christianity developed into (pp.26, 28). But this is a book by a preacher, and books by conservative preachers are no less prone to get historical details wrong here and there. Whatever minor shortcomings Meyers’ book may have, it performs a useful service, since it is not enough to say that Liberal and Progressive Christians are not committed to inerrancy, to exclusivism, to various doctrines and dogmas. We must be *for* something, just as Jesus was not merely opposed to the Pharisees or to various religious authorities, but was *for* the outcasts, the marginalized, the “sinners” and the “unclean”. What makes this book so

valuable is that Meyers is a Liberal Christian with a liberating Gospel to proclaim, and is eager to unleash its power into the world, transforming not merely individual lives but also social structures.

What makes Meyers' vision for Christianity so powerful is that it at once combines an openness to contemporary issues and concerns (including, but by no means limited to, modern science and scholarship) and a rediscovery of the message of Jesus. The latter is there in the Bible, and I suspect that the greatest fear of conservatives is not that people will dissect the Bible and challenge it with the tools of historical critical investigation or other methods of academic investigation. Their fear is that people will *read* the Bible for themselves and, whether asking critical questions or not, will discover that the voice from its pages that calls to them to follow is not talking about the issues conservatives generally concern themselves with. And so the issue is not whether Meyers' vision is "Liberal" or "Conservative". He is offering a call away from many of the things that both ends of the spectrum share and have confidence in in contemporary society, calling us to follow Jesus with the expectation that our lives will be transformed not by our strongly-held dogmas but by the surrender and self-sacrifice of discipleship.

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/2009/04/review-of-robin-meyers-saving-jesus-from-the-church.html>

Rethinking Good Friday

March 30, 2013 in [General](#)

For Progressive Christians it is important that we mark Good Friday with a church service. The Tenebrae Service is a good model. What I would suggest we do differently from the way this service is commonly done, is to choose different scriptures.

The traditional reading of the passion narrative only serves to reinforce an impression in the mind of the hearer that it is an eyewitness account of events as they happened. Historians and other scholars know this is not the case.

The passion story, as with all the new testament, was written forty years and more after the actual event, by people who were not present at the events they describe. There is however an important story about the death of Jesus that needs to be told.

With this service we have an opportunity to answer the question pastors hear over and over: Why did Jesus have to die, and why did Jesus have to die by crucifixion?

The candles, and the music both remain traditional (although I would suggest no more than two verses of each song be sung and that an instrumental version provide background for the scripture that precedes it). We would simply use different scripture passages. Scripture passages that illustrate Roman subjugation, the temple system, and Jesus' revolutionary response to that that actually lead to his crucifixion. I will leave to others the task of choosing the appropriate scriptures.

Some additional text for the moderator, or better a scripture reading would also be helpful to explain that it was our self-reliance that Jesus' life and death saved us from.

Chairity & Justice – A Distinction

Charity is about redemption for the giver. Justice is about liberation for the receiver!

Think about it then watch this 30 minute video:
<http://video.pbs.org/video/2363634725>

My Adult Faith Journey

April 3, 2013 in [General](#)

I have been a serious spiritual seeker my entire adult life. My adult faith journey of 40+ years began in my mid-twenties when I realized that the religion of childhood was inadequate. Summarized as “following the rules as best you can, and going to live with Jesus when you die”, I realized as an adult that that gave me nothing for “the now”, nothing to mitigate the experiences of life today.

The church has always honored the conclusions of men and women, even raising some of them to the level of doctrine. I began to consider these and more contemporary conclusions by looking at the basis for each conclusion to determine what was true for me.

Our conclusions will differ since you have not lived my life nor I yours. I cite my five conclusions here ONLY to encourage you to continue or to begin your own Adult Faith Journey, and to encourage everyone to share their conclusions, and the basis for those conclusions, so we might further refine them together, so that we each can discover our own personal truth. Here are mine:

1. The Bible is NOT the infallible word of God, but a record of one culture’s experience of God. It was their best attempt to describe the God they experienced. That’s one reason why I take the Bible seriously, but NOT literally. I see it as more than true.

2. Jesus did NOT die to save us from our sins; Jesus lived to show us God and to save us from excessive self-reliance! An awareness of God was foundational in the life of Jesus. Jesus died by crucifixion because he was a radically inclusive revolutionary, worked for justice, and showed a preference for the marginalized. He died to free us from bondage to anyone, in this

case the Romans. To follow Jesus is to imitate him.

NOTE: The atonement theories explaining why Jesus died, were conclusions that found final form only with Anselm (1033-1109), a 1000 years after Jesus.

3. God is both transcendent AND imminent: both “out there” beyond our ability to understand, AND living within each and among us all.

Perhaps mainline Christian worship tends to over-emphasize the “out there” at the expense of our recognizing the God within and among. We have gotten used to that. But knowing it, recommends the solution.

Praise as gratitude is always appropriate, It also makes us feel good. Unfortunately many seem to use it as a substitute for actively following Jesus.

4. Moving toward Adult faith means looking again at what we were taught as children. Adult faith is NOT about believing the improbable, while following the rules well enough, so that we can go to heaven when we die. It is about following the teaching and example of Jesus to “love one another” and work to bring about the reign of God, now.

Adult faith is about not fearing to confront doubts and to question, seeking to integrate the insights of modern science and scholarship into what we believe about God. Adult faith is about seeking to integrate the God I knew as a child with the God of my life experience, the God I have experienced through others, through reading, study, and prayer.

5. Among the things modern scholarship tells us is that there is a significant difference between the pre-Easter Jesus, and the post-Easter Christ. The human Jesus, who walked on the earth pre-Easter was God in the same way we all are. An awareness of God was foundational in the life of Jesus, and shaped his teaching and actions.

However the Jesus who lives today, the post-

Easter Christ, is God in a way we ARE NOT YET. He became spirit. He walked through walls, and some of His good friends did not appear to recognize him on sight. This is the Jesus we call Lord, and who is the focus of our worship. This is the Jesus we seek to have a relationship with.

We acknowledge that God is mystery and beyond any attempt to use words to describe. In our humanness however, we still try.

How the Jesus Story Grew

April 3, 2013 in [Uncategorized](#)

Bishop John Shelby Spong wrote this essay in the winter of 2006. It eventually formed the basis for his book, "Jesus for the Non-Religious" This text has been lightly edited for clarity.

It Ain't Necessarily So

None of what follows is new. It has been known and taught in university schools of religion for decades. Clergy have known these facts, but often, it seems, felt that it would be too much for their congregations to handle. What follows may cause dismay, but recalling that the word "repent" means to "change the mind you have" you are encouraged to continue reading.

Most Christians seem to assume that the details of their faith system dropped out of heaven in a fully developed form. Nothing could be further from the truth. The creeds began as baptismal formulas in the 3rd century, and did not receive the shape we now recognize until the 4th century. 400 years after the death of Jesus. Doctrines like the Trinity and Incarnation were still being formed in the 5th century.

Moving closer to the life of Jesus, scholars now suggest that miracles were added to the Jesus story only between 70 C.E. and 80 C.E. The Virgin birth and the suggestion that resurrection meant physical resuscitation all come to be in the mid 90's C.E., and the account of Jesus' ascension enters the tradition only after 100 C.E. Perhaps the biggest gap in our knowledge

of Jesus, however, occurs in those 40 years between 30 C.E. when Jesus' death, and 70 C.E. when gospels first began to be put in written form.

Today, by lining up the gospels in chronological order with Mark first (about 70 C.E.), then Matthew (about 80 C.E.), Luke (about 90 C.E.) and finally John (about 100 C.E.), we can see that the later the gospel, the more the miraculous was heightened, the details become more graphic, and supernatural activity more pronounced as the years passed. Later gospels were the products of a community of Christians who wrote their gospels, at least in part, in order to claim the authority of God, and of Jesus for their point of view.

If the story could grow as dramatically as it did from 70-100 C.E., is it not reasonable to assume that it also grew from 30-70 C.E.? Yet with no written sources, entering that time of oral transmission is a problem.

The obviously the story of Jesus was passed on, or we would not have it today. So the questions are by whom, how and in what context. The context of the gospel narratives appears far too complex and patterned to have been handed on simply person to person.

The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures of the telling of the Jesus story is evident. Mark, for example, opens his gospel with two quotations from the Hebrew prophets, one from Malachi and the other from II Isaiah. He then builds into his narrative of Jesus image after image from the Jewish scriptures.

Matthew seems to imply in his gospel that everything Jesus does is in fulfillment of the words of the prophets. He retells a story of the birth of Moses as if it actually happened to Jesus (see Exodus 1:15-22, Matthew 2:16-18). He patterns the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5-7) on Psalm 119 portraying Jesus as the new Moses.

Matthew and Luke both provide us with genealogies of Jesus that relate him to both Abraham and King David. They both quote Jesus as using texts from the Hebrew Scriptures to ward off the attacks by Satan in the story of the temptation.

Luke models the life of Jesus frequently on the life of the prophet Elijah. On two occasions Luke says the role of the resurrected Jesus was to open their minds to understand the scriptures as the way to make sense out of his death.

The Fourth Gospel opens with a hymn of praise to the “Logos” or the “Word” that John believes he has discovered in Jesus. This hymn was patterned on a hymn to Wisdom from the book of Proverbs.

John constantly has Jesus invoke the name of God, “I am,” that was given to Moses at the burning bush as part of his own divine claim. One cannot read the gospels without confronting the Hebrew Scriptures on every page. These facts point powerfully to the source of the oral tradition.

The only way place this interweaving of the Jesus story with the Hebrew scriptures could have occurred was in the synagogue, since that was the only place where people heard the scriptures read and interpreted.

In the first century no one owned books since few people could either read or write. The books of the Jewish Bible had to be copied by hand on great scrolls. They were enormously expensive. They were the treasured possessions of the whole community, kept in the Tabernacle of the Synagogue and brought out with great solemnity to be read aloud in weekly public worship on the Sabbath.

They were always read in order. One does not skip around with scrolls. The handles of the scrolls were laboriously turned as they were read and the male reader began the next

Sabbath where he had stopped the previous Sabbath.

Through a description of synagogue worship included in the Book of Acts (13:13-16), we can further imagine this setting and gain more insight.

Synagogue worship consisted of long readings from the three major sections of the Hebrew Bible interspersed with prayers and Psalms.

After the final reading, the leader of the Synagogue would normally inquire, as happens in Acts 13, whether anyone had a message to bring that would illumine the morning’s readings.

This became the setting in which his followers told stories about Jesus, recalled the sayings and parables of Jesus and remembered and shared the developing Jesus tradition. This explains how then, over the years, the early Christians conflated what they had experienced of God in the Hebrew Scriptures with what they had heard about Jesus.

The content of the memory of Jesus was thus organized by the liturgy of the Synagogue. To recognize this connection becomes a major breakthrough into the oral period of Christian history.

By the time the gospels were written, the memory of Jesus had been so deeply shaped by the Synagogue context that it is impossible now to separate history from scriptural interpretation. This with the fact that NONE of the original biblical texts have survived is what makes knowing anything about the Jesus of history so difficult.

The conclusion of the scholars of the Jesus Seminar, for example, was that only 16% of the sayings and actions attributed to Jesus in the gospels are actually authentic. The other 84% are words read into the Jesus of history by an interpreting community during the oral period.

For example, was Jesus really born in Bethlehem or was the Bethlehem birth story an attempt on the part of people during the oral period to claim for him the messianic status of being heir to the throne of David?

Did Jesus really feed 5000 people in the wilderness, or was that an attempt to portray him as a new Moses who also fed a multitude in the wilderness with bread called manna?

Did Jesus really march triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey, or was that an attempt to identify him with the figure of the Shepherd King in the Book of Zechariah, who also came to Jerusalem, humbly riding on a donkey (9:9-11)?

Did Jesus really drive out the moneychangers from the Temple and reclaim that place as “a house of prayer for all people”, or was this an early Christian attempt to show that what the prophet Zechariah said about the Messiah had been acted out by Jesus? That prophet had written that when the Day of the Lord comes, there would no longer be a trader in the House of the Lord (14:21).

Did Jesus really pray for the soldiers who crucified him, as only Luke records, or was this story developed to identify Jesus with the Servant of Il Isaiah (53:12), who made “intercessions for the transgressors?” On and on we could go, posing this same question in literally hundreds of different ways about hundreds of familiar stories.

This study by the scholars of the Jesus Seminar points out the very small amount we actually know of the historical Jesus about whom the gospels and creeds were written, or the doctrines developed. At the very least it must give us considerable pause as we look back at those documents today in the light of what we know in the 21st Century.

If we are willing to journey to this place with openness, I think we can be assured that Jesus

will look very different. I hope to show you this Jesus. Perhaps in the words of my friend Marcus Borg, we might “see Jesus again for the first time.”

More Focus, Pokus

April 4, 2013 in [General](#)

Once we change our focus to the teaching (and manifestations) *of Jesus* rather than the teaching of the early church *about Jesus*, what do we have that has meaning for our lives today. Progressive Christians are NOT simply setting aside former beliefs for nothing, or atheism, but looking deeper for a *more than literal understanding of God*.

Perhaps the transformation of my original Roman Catholic literal belief in the “real presence” of Jesus in the Eucharist (communion) can be illustrative. Early on I realized that Roman Catholic ordination was not required to make the magic happen, so that was complete before my move to a protestant congregation. *Yes, I’ve always been a radical.*

Once I made the move, I had to consider:

1. what does it mean to “take” this gift rather than to receive it,
2. What if any meaning is in the fact that, in this new church, it is not only not Jesus, but not wine, but juice,
3. I also have to find a way to give up the powerful symbol of drinking from the cup, and then
4. What new *more than literal* meaning, beyond a mid-morning snack, does the activity of taking this “wafer and juice” have for my life today.

I now understand and appreciate that communion is a symbol of inclusion, that all our welcome. As with Jesus we do not discriminate in any way. For a long time it seemed to have little of the power of the earlier belief. I have now come to fully appreciate this less literal

more mythological understanding, but it did take me considerable time and prayer to come to this.

Let's look for a moment at the *more than literal* meaning of Jesus as savior. Jesus often spoke of setting us free from bondage. I have come to cherish the meaning of Jesus as the savior who has set us free from the "bondage of self" or self-reliance. I've recognized that in the past when all was going well in my life I tended to take the credit. It is only when I hit a snag that I turned to God. Sound familiar? This is illustrative of the "bondage of self" or self-reliance.

For me Jesus as savior means that I can hope to become more mindful of God through surrender and acceptance at all times. This *more than literal meaning* speaks a deeper truth to my soul than the guilt inducing 4th century Greek dogma, doctrine, and creedal formulas of the early church. The transformation Jesus calls us to, does take time, and there may be some real pain involved as we move along the life long journey of faith. Eventually however, real transformation is very much worth the effort..

It is companions for this journey that we seek and come to value. This is the true reason we need "church" and communion. God has blessed (and cursed) us with an intellects, and I believe he intends us to use them as one path to him, along with the mystical or direct experience of God in nature and in man-made beauty.

Seeing God-With-Us

April 4, 2013 in [General](#)

Excerpted from an essay by Michael Morwood

Are we humans, because of the nature of our conscious awareness, the only life form capable

of combining wonder, appreciation and gratitude? I think Jesus must have given great human expression to all three.

I also see him inviting me to take these wonderful human qualities to an even deeper level. Jesus lived in a quite different worldview, but across the centuries that bridge his life and mine, he can reach into my mind and into my sense of wonder and move me to even more appreciation and gratitude.

I can imagine Jesus saying to me, "Michael, the human enterprise and the universe in which it has come to be is God-charged; you not only give the universe a way of manifesting itself, you give "God", the Ground of all Being, a way of coming to expression. That is what it means to be human.

I see what I have always been led to see and believe – that Jesus embodied the Divine Presence in human form. When I bring his story to the contemporary scientific story about our human origins and how life evolved on earth I'm being led to a new awareness and appreciation of the Divine Presence all around me, bonding all that exists. I now think it was this awareness and appreciation that drove Jesus when he preached about "the kingdom of God". He wanted people to see what he saw: people giving human expression to the Divine in their living and loving.

I see Jesus differently now. I see him as revealer of the Divine-always-here-with-us, rather than as the unique gateway to a God in the heavens. I see myself differently. I am not living in exile from a God. Far from it. I have this wonderful opportunity – my lifetime – to give human expression to the universe and to the Divine Presence charging it. What I most appreciate and am challenged by in this perspective is that Jesus was concerned about this world, about the Divine Presence with me in this world, and about me giving the best possible human

expression to this Presence. It is a passionate plea that we use this “seeing” to transform our personal, social, religious, political, legal, educational and economic interactions.

The Journey to Adult Faith

April 16, 2013 in [General](#)

I recently had an experience that confirmed for me what I had come to appreciate about transformation (repentance, redemption). As I understand it, “Repent!” (change your mind, be transformed) was not merely a suggestion; but a challenge to change, to continue growing spiritually throughout our lifetime. However this movement from a “Sunday School” faith to adult faith is often very, very painful. And in our society today, in the middle class and above, we seek to avoid pain at all costs.

Most of us spent the first half of our lives creating an identity, finding some traditions and structures that make sense to us and authorities that we could trust, earning money, getting an education, marrying, and raising children—all of which we come to feel we must defend for the rest of our lives! Most of us are so invested in these first answers that by the age of 40, we couldn’t imagine anything more—not realizing, of course, the self-centeredness of all of these strivings!”

Historically all of this self-focus brought on a fear of death, so Christians, in the first half of life, became obsessed with going to heaven when they die. Religion became a rather privatized “evacuation plan for the next world” (as Brian McLaren calls it), and even the clergy seldom seem to recognize that the faith life of most has stalled at this individualistic and egocentric level. No actual love of neighbor, the outsider, the poor, or even God is really necessary. This became the common “garden variety” first-half-of-life religion, and it has passed for the real thing for much of the

Christian era.

For those who resolved the fears of death with a “Sunday School” faith in God, the essential movement beyond these childhood certainties, to confronting directly the doubts and questions that arise in living life as an adult causes intense emotional pain and encourages avoidance..

Some fear that if they confront any doubt or questions that arise on the way to adult faith that they will slip into atheism. Confronting doubts or questions need not lead to atheism, but can lead to a glorious and deeper sense of the spiritual. Much of the pain occurs because people feel they are alone with their doubts and questions, and they begin to fear losing God entirely. Many simply cannot go there yet because their fear is so intense. Would the God of Love want you to live in fear?

We must leave that timing of conversion to God while encouraging the uncertain and fearful to face their fears and begin to move beyond them. They feel so alone because everyone they know seems to be doing so well with the Sunday school faith model. Of course those who seem to be doing so well with the Sunday school faith model seem this way because they fear that to express any doubts or concerns would make them somehow unfaithful or less than loyal. They are in all this pain because they are “comparing their ‘inside’ to everyone else’s ‘outside’”. So they pray more and try harder, thus delaying the deeper, more gratifying spirituality that only comes with adult faith. This purpose of the church, a loving Christian community, is to see us through this growth to adult faith..

Those who have made the transition to adult faith must come to recognize that in the battle between reason and emotion, or logic and fear, emotion will nearly always be the victor. So as progressives we can best offer others entry into

that deeper spirituality of adult faith, not with facts, but by being in relationship with them and truly showing them the love that perhaps we only gave lip service to formerly.

It seems that few of us came to Adult Faith without going through the pain. That should create empathy in us for those who follow after.

Two conclusions are then evident. It is only in an environment of love that others can, in God's own time, come to a place where they are psychologically able to confront their fears and doubts. Still, some may never be able to do that. In the meantime we must show everyone the love of Jesus by 1) doing nothing to encourage their fears (including portraying God as a vengeful Judge or them as a wretched wretch) and 2) by presenting healthier positive alternatives in a non-threatening, and loving way. We should provide a number of opportunities for everyone to hear and be heard. Love can resolve fear where logic and confrontation cannot. I had to learn that.

Following Jesus to God

June 16, 2013 in [General](#)

As I see it, Jesus is NOT the answer. Jesus is pointing to the answer: a surrendered life lived in relationship with God. At the center of a Christian life is (1) a transforming relationship with God as manifested by Jesus, and (2) living 'the way' in the framework of that Christian tradition. Following Jesus is following a pathway to God.

**God has shown you what is good,
what he requires of you.
Simply this:
work for social justice,
be compassionate,
and don't take yourself too seriously.**
Micah 6:8

According to Marcus Borg in his book *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*. The cross is BOTH personal and political..It involves us **personally through** transformation, "Born Again" "Dying and Rising with Christ". Being attentive to our relationship with God is central, NOT believing. **And it is political because it requires us to** work passionately to transform the world, confronting the powers of this world. Working toward justice for all, and for World Peace Living within Christian community is essential, for formation, affirmation, and re-socializing us into a new way of being in the world, confronting the alternative, non-Christian, western values of affluence, achievement, & appearance.

"The Way" and Progressive Christianity

June 26, 2013 in [General](#)

We progressives have done our movement a great disservice by putting so much of our effort into loudly "shooting down" many, if not most of the church's beloved doctrines, dogmas, and creeds. We did it because that is how we came to Progressive Christianity, and in those early days that's all we knew. We were excited about these new insights and wanted to share them, but often they were not well received, in fact many were unable to hear us at all. They feared we were destroying their beloved faith that had sustained them for so long.

It wasn't until much later that we began to consider what we were left with if we dismissed the doctrines, dogmas, and creeds. What we found was an even deeper, more profound spirituality as we focused on God and what Jesus came to teach us about God. We realized that over the years the church had done many horrible things in God's name, but many admirable things as well. Among those things the church gave us was scripture with the

“Sermon on the Mount” which so beautifully summarizes the teaching of Jesus. Our task now is to live it and bring about the reign of God, “On earth as it is in heaven”.

As we began to see scripture as very much of its time and place we came to see the history of the church in the same way. Before the church and the new testament there was “The Way”. The people of “The Way”, rather than placing their faith **IN** Jesus, as the church came to do, they lived the faith **OF** Jesus. And Jesus constantly pointed to God, and working to bring about God’s kingdom on earth, here and now. Jesus was a 1st century Jew so yes he pointed “up” to God beyond the dome of the sky. He also knew that God lived in and around him.

For me in many ways Progressive Christianity is a return to “The Way” supported by modern science, scholarship, history and scripture (read metaphorically as a product of its time and place”. We continue to discover more profound implications of that in our lifelong Journey of Faith as we just love one another.

Protestant “Original Sin”

July 9, 2013 in [General](#)

The original sin of Protestant Christianity was the same as the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah! No, not sex, but inhospitality. In the Protestant Reformation people left the Roman Catholic Church because with the coming of the printing press they could now read the bible for themselves. Having read it, they each came to understand it differently, and so they organized a new church around these different interpretations.

The original sin, as I am using the term, was that they further splintered Christianity and formed another church whenever someone disagreed with a given interpretation. The purpose of this essay is not to beat up on Protestant Christians,

but to point out that even today many if not most continue the practice of marginalizing those who have even a slightly different interpretation of a scripture. My experience is that they often circle-the-wagons around whatever belief has been passed down to them from their elders, and find it quite difficult to even consider the insights of modern science and other scholarship.

I’m suggesting that perhaps the followers of Jesus, known as “The Way” might rather have looked for common ground among divergent belief and found of way to be inclusive of the new group. I don’t know that, of course, but it does seem plausible in the light of the inclusiveness that Jesus taught. A number of Protestant Christian groups have reunited, to be sure, and many others in recent years have begun to declare: All are welcome! It remains to be seen if they can really live that, rather than, “You are welcome as long as you believe as we do”.

20-Plus Books That Changed My Life

July 25, 2013 in [General](#)

[The God We Never Knew](#) – Marcus Borg

[Saving Jesus from the Church](#) – Robin R. Meyers

[Quest for the Living God](#) – Elizabeth A. Johnson

[Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary](#) - Marcus Borg

[Christianity for the Rest of Us](#) – Diana Butler Bass

[A New Kind of Christianity](#) – Brian D. McLaren

[Jesus for the Non-Religious](#) – John Shelby Spong

[Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time](#) – Marcus Borg

[Why Weren’t We Told](#) – Rex A . E. Hunt

[Integral Christianity](#) – Paul R. Smith

[The Heart of Christianity](#) – Marcus Borg
[Without Budha, I could Not Be Christian](#) – Paul F. Knitter
[A Heretics Guide to Eternity](#) – Spencer Burke
[Speaking Christian](#) – Marcus Borg
[When Things Fall Apart](#) – Pema Chodron
[Why Christianity Must Change or Die](#) – Spong
[The Naked Now](#) – Richard Rohr
[The New Earth](#) – Eckhart Tolle
[Falling Upward](#) – Richard Rohr
[A New Kind of Christian](#) – Brian D. McLaren
[Is Jesus God](#) – Michael Morewood
[The God of Jesus](#) – Stephen J. Patterson

Beyond “That Old-Time Religion”

September 16, 2013 in [Uncategorized](#)

It’s quite simple:

All God requires is that we work for Justice, be compassionate, and surrender our ego acknowledging that God is God and we are NOT! Micah 6:8

Away with your hymns of praise—they are mere noise to my ears. I will not listen to your music, no matter how lovely it is. I want to see a mighty flood of justice—a torrent of doing good. Amos 5: 23, 2

Consider for a moment that we have admired and praised Jesus so much over the years that many who call themselves Christians, seem to have forgotten all about following him. We may have become focused on the creeds and dogmas of the church to such an extent that much of what today passes for Christianity is actually “Church-ianity”. What the church taught trumps what Jesus taught. Believing it seems to be more important than living it.

It has gotten so that some would admit that they need the Sunday “Pep Rally” just to lift their spirits in order to live their mostly secular lives. Perhaps it is a bit too cynical to say so, but it does seem that many exit the church building, pausing to distract themselves with a bit of football or shopping, only to dive right into lives of striving for meaning and security through consumerism like all those non-Christians.

For some it may appear odd even to suggest that there is anything particularly problematic with this credal form of Christianity. After all, belief in Christian doctrines and creeds, and obedience to a lifestyle associated with them, have been fundamental elements of Christian orthodoxy throughout the centuries. Furthermore there is evidence that many people in Western society continue to find this kind of credal, orthodox Christianity a meaningful, healing and inspiring resource in their lives. What’s the problem, then?

Well, a significant problem lies in the fact that Western culture, over the past two centuries, has witnessed a gradual sea-change in attitudes towards religious faith. There has been a slow, but inexorable, shift away from seeing the meaning of life as being revealed by external authorities such as the Bible or the Church, towards a belief that truth is revealed to us (by God?) through our own personal experience.

Because credal Christianity remains associated with a metaphysical realm above our earthly lives, or with a life after this one, it is therefore perceived as less relevant by the majority of people in Western society who want concrete answers as to how we can achieve well-being within our lifetimes in this world.¹

Perhaps part of the answer lies in making clear the distinction between Church-ianity and Christianity.

The majority of people in Western society, who

find “that old-time religion” not meaningful for their lives are not even presented with the Christianity informed by what Jesus taught.

The faith followed by those who knew Jesus and lived in the 35 or so years after his death didn’t have any of the creeds, dogmas, and beliefs that we have come to think of as so crucial. It was called “The Way” because that’s exactly what it was. Living life day to day based on the principles that Jesus taught. Principles like love, relationship, compassion, hospitality, and inclusion. How would our lives, our churches, be different if we did that?

Millions of people have left “that old-time religion” because they thought that that was all there was: assenting to the Nicene Creed or the evangelical dictum of “Jesus died for your sins” or simply being ‘good enough’ now, so when you die you can go live with Jesus. What Jesus actually taught was so much richer than any of that. Surely love and justice demand we present a fuller truth for all.

As the words of the hymn have it, “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love.” Jesus’ Manifesto was the Sermon on the Mount. Shouldn’t that be in the forefront of our practice?

If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you.

¹Dreaming of a Post-Credal Christianity by Gordon Lynch

What does



Mean to you?

Beyond Church-ianity

September 16, 2013 in [Uncategorized](#)

If we choose to follow Jesus, rather than simply admire him, we will realize that Jesus was constantly pointing to God. God was his focus. “Jesus is not the answer, Jesus is pointing to the answer!” Since we can truly come to know God through prayer and meditation, perhaps we should focus more on God and what Jesus came to teach us about God, and less on what the church has taught about Jesus: Church-ianity.

Virtually all we know about Jesus is suspect. NONE of the scripture authors actually knew the historical Jesus. What we “know” from the New Testament, would have been news to those who DID know Jesus. Early Christians conflated (inadvertently combined) what they had experienced of God with what they had heard about Jesus.

Jesus was certainly a topic of conversation among those who knew him, but nothing was put in written form until nearly 40 years (2 or 3 generations) after Jesus’ death. We don’t even have any of these early writings, but only copies of copies. The early church misunderstood these writings as literal history, and incorporated them into liturgy. And so they have come down to us.

God is spirit. God is mystery. Our attempts since Constantine, to concretize God in creeds, doctrines, and dogma (in an attempt to achieve certainty for ourselves) can only be approximations and conjecture. Words can never fully define or describe God. We must get to know God, to experience God for ourselves. It is a do-it-yourself proposition.

This deconstruction/reconstruction (rebuilding faith in the light of truth) can all seem very threatening for the casual reader, as it seems to call into question so much of what they have built their lives on. It may actually trigger their

survival instinct. Some will not be ready to hear this truth, as I was not the first time I heard it, but we must encourage them through repetition, if for no other reason than our love for those who are so scandalized and harmed by “The Old-Time Religion”. There is a reason we cherish truth as a value.

The reconstruction phase is an individual process and therefore a much more complex endeavor than deconstruction.

Following deconstruction/reconstruction (and the giving up of long believed understandings), it is probably good to remind ourselves that this takes nothing away from our relationship with God. The God of our experience “in whom we live, and move, and have our being” is still there.

Deconstruction/reconstruction is simply one more growth opportunity calling us to surrender egoism.

According to Marcus Borg in his book *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*. The cross is BOTH personal and political..It involves us personally through transformation, “Born Again” “Dying and Rising with Christ”. Being attentive to our relationship with God is central, NOT believing. And it is political because it requires us to work passionately to transform the world, confronting the powers of this world. Working toward justice for all, and for World Peace Living within Christian community is essential, for formation, affirmation, and re-socializing us into a new way of being in the world, confronting the alternative, non-Christian, western values of affluence, achievement, & appearance

WAYS TO PRAY

A Common Christian Approach

1. Talk to God as you would an intimately close friend.

2. Give thanks for things in your life and the world that are going well.

3. Ask for God’s involvement in the lives of others who need God’s healing touch.

4. Ask God who you might be able to make a difference by letting God work through you.

5. Boldly ask for forgiveness for doing what you shouldn’t and for failing to do what you should. Accept God’s assurance of pardon and ask God to help you change and reorient your mindset and your life toward healthier ways of living.

6. Ask for God’s assistance in your own life and circumstances.

7. Thank God for spending this time with you.

8. Say Amen! (meaning “may it be so!”)

Centering Prayer

1. Set aside 25-45 minutes in a quiet place. Sit comfortably and maybe light a candle.

2. Sit still and just BE with God.

3. Turn off thinking by focusing on the in and out of your breathing. Perhaps count them in groups of five.

4. Don’t think of things to say or ask, just sit quietly in God’s presence and enjoy each other’s company.

5. If your mind starts to wander or become distracted, don’t fight it. Acknowledge the distraction, let it run for a bit if you like, then say a “prayer word” in your mind to bring you back to center (e.g. “Jesus”, “Peace”, “Grace”)

6. Just – “be still and know I am God”. (Psalms 46:10)

Learn more at www.centeringprayer.com and <http://www.sacredspace.ie/>

Newsletters and Other Resources:

<http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian.html>

<http://progressivechristianity.org/>