

MARCUS BORG "CONVICTIONS" SESSION #6  
**JESUS IS THE NORM OF THE BIBLE**  
(pp 77-101)

JESUS = WORD OF GOD = BIBLE      Stage of Precritical Naiveté

**BORG'S CONVICTION:**

"The Bible is our great heritage, our guide. Spreading its truth should be our chief endeavour."

The HOLY BIBLE  
THE SACRED SCRIPTURE  
THE MOST IMPORTANT BOOK OF ALL

**Borg's Post Critical Affirmation:  
FIVE POINTS**

1. Jesus, as the Word of God, embodies in a person much of what we find in the Bible — Old and New Testament alike.
2. When conflict occurs between the Bible and Jesus, Jesus is the norm (standard) — ancient Christian Teaching — Jesus trumps the Bible.
3. Through Jesus, Christians can understand the Bible and Christianity as a whole.
4. As a Christian, Borg takes both the Bible and Jesus seriously.
5. The Bible can be wrong when interpreted literally and can be wrong even when interpreted correctly.

This affirmation leads to a "**Positive understanding of the Bible and its role in the Christian life.**" p. 82

- a. Believing in biblical inerrancy, divine information, truth guaranteed by God, absolute authority of the Bible is a **PROTESTANT PHENOMENON**.
- b. Believing in biblical inerrancy is a recent stream of Protestantism.
  - **Martin Luther (1483-1546)** did not include the letter of James or the Book of Revelations in his German Bible even as he coined the revolutionary slogan *sola scripture (the Bible alone)* in his challenge of RC church doctrine.
  - Luther affirmed "evident reason" as having equal authority to the Bible for the Christian life.
    - "Until I am convinced by Scripture and evident reason, I cannot and will not recant."
  - **Richard Hooker (1554-1600)** affirmed three interactive authorities for living a Christian life: scripture, tradition and reason.
- c. Believing in biblical inerrancy and absolute authority of the Bible is a post-Reformation Protestant development. Widespread affirmation of biblical inerrancy is a product of the last 100 years.

## Five Fundamentals of Christianity- Early 20th Century CE

1. The Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ (John1:1;John 20:28; Hebrews1:8-9).
2. The Virgin Birth (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:27).
3. The Blood Atonement (Acts 20:28; Romans 3:25,5:9; Ephesians1:7; Hebrews 9:12-14).
4. The Bodily Resurrection (Luke 24: 36-46;1Corinthians 15:1-4,15:14-15).
5. The inerrancy of the scriptures themselves (Psalms12:6-7; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20).

According to Fundamentalist Christians,

**Those who disagree with any of the above doctrines are not Christians at all. Rather, they are the true heretics.**

## THE BIG QUESTIONS - FIVE BIG QUESTIONS

### 1. How and why has this precritical naïveté affirmation become “orthodox” Christianity for half of American Protestants?

a. Clergy and Christians can believe that what they have learned is the way it has always been. There are few, if any, academic requirements for ordination.

b. There is a “desire for security: some people yearn for an absolute authority that clearly delineates the right way from the wrong way.”

### 2. When is the Bible wrong? Literally? Ethically?

a. Many of the passages proclaim **violence in the Name of God.**

- Does God command and will indiscriminate violence?
- What does it mean to believe in a violent God?

b. Many of the passages **condone slavery as being endorsed by God.**

- New Testament writers offer advice to masters and slaves.
- For centuries, Christians have commonly understood that slavery is consistent with God’s will.
- Has slavery ever been consistent with the will of God?
- Was it once acceptable to God, but is no longer? Can what, that once was the inerrant will of God, be changed?
- IS EVERY TEXT IN THE BIBLE THE INERRANT AND ABSOLUTE REVELATION OF GOD?

c. In ancient times, according to the “Word of God”,

“in patriarchal societies, woman were economically dependent upon men - initially upon their fathers, then upon their husband, and then upon their sons.”

- Was it acceptable for a woman and her rapist to be together for life?
- Are these God’s words and thus the inerrant and absolute will of God?

- Why don't we follow them today?

d. Is **Patriarchy** the Will of God?

- Scripture affirms patriarchy and subordinates women.

- New Testament texts attributed (though unlikely) to Paul tell how women should behave. Page 90 "Women are to be submissive and to have no authority over men.

**-Are these texts the inerrant will of God? Do they tell us God's view of women and their proper relationship to men? OR Are these texts the product of a Christianity accommodating itself to the patriarchal values of the world in which it lived?**

e. Passages in the New Testament proclaim the **second coming of Jesus** in the near future. p. 91-92

- the second coming "near" and "soon" didn't happen in the time of the early Christians.

- **"Biblical inerrancy and the truth of Christianity go hand in hand, however when the former collapses, so does the latter." P. 93**

**3. IS THERE A Positive Alternative to seeing the Bible as an infallible, inerrant and absolute revelation of the Word of God.**

a. Is it possible to embrace the Bible and its riches without affirming that it is inerrant and infallible?

b. **The Bible**, "the most important book of all," **matters greatly for Christians**. It is the product of our religious ancestors in two ancient communities. It is a human product that tells us how our religious ancestors saw things, **not how God sees things**.

c. Paul's "Treasure in earthen vessels", was the gospel, the good news, the message, about Jesus.

d. The Bible contains the words of ancient Israelis and early Christians:

- the stories about God and their experiences of God

- Early Christians wisdom about "the way."

- praise and prayer - hymns and liturgies

- How long, O Lord? - grief and despair, the Book of Lamentations

- puzzlement and questioning - Job, Ecclesiastes

- ethical teaching, law codes, prophetic indictments and admonitions, general principles,

e. The writings cover a thousand years of time - 900 BCE to 100 CE - the words of "storytellers, prophets, lawmakers, record-keepers, priests, liturgical leaders, evangelists, apostles and teachers." p. 95

f. The Bible is the product of a multiplicity of human voices in the Bible.

#### 4. HAS THE BIBLE ALWAYS BEEN SACRED Scripture for Christians?

a. The books were not sacred scripture when they were written but became sacred over time in a process called **Canonization**.

Pentateuch (Torah) 400 BCE,  
the Prophets 200 BCE,  
the Writings 100 CE to 300s CE.

- first list of all 27 documents of the N.T. came in 365 CE

b. These are the most important documents we know - are foundational for Christian understanding and identity.

#### 5. How do we know when the Bible is wrong?

a. Use reason:

-Origen in 200 CE rejected a literal interpretation of the six-day creation story.

- Augustine in 400 CE said that Christian teachers, who taught “truths” that contradicted “facts” about the world that were learned from experience and the light of reason, should be chastised.

- Martin Luther in 1500s affirmed reason as an authority in addition to the Bible

b. Use Jesus:

- Jesus is the norm of the Bible, the standard by which the rest of the Bible is to be understood.

- the Christian stereotype that the New Testament is superior to the Old Testament is wrong, according to Borg. (**Supersessionism**)

- Jesus embodies much of what the Old Testament proclaims about the character and passion of God

- Jesus was deeply shaped by the Old Testament. Frequent references.

**All of the Bible matters.**

#### CONCLUSION

Borg affirms that the decisive revelation of God in the person of Jesus is distinctive to Christianity. “The Word became flesh - what Christians call “**the incarnation**” triumphs over words in a book.”

Jews — Torah

Muslims — Quran

Buddhists — teachings of Buddha

Hindus — teachings of their tradition

Christians — Jesus

Following are three cartoons, published in the Punch magazine during the 19th century, that develop the theme of tonight’s session.



**"WAKE HIM UP!"**

FARMER BULL. "IF THAT DOG OF YOURS CAN'T KEEP THE SHEEP FROM STRAYING, I MUST GET YOU ANOTHER!"

May  
1899



"BLACK SHEEP."

May 1874



PAPAL ALLOCATION.—SNUFFING OUT MODERN CIVILISATION.

Apr. 1861