

### 3. The Bible: The Heart of the Tradition

Christianity is centered in the God of the Bible—our sacred story. But biblical literalism is an obstacle for millions of people.

#### **Bible as Historical Product**

The Bible is the response of ancient Israel community and early Christian movement community to God; their witness to God and their life with God. The text—their response—is culturally conditioned. The Bible is related to their time and place. Not absolute truth but how they saw things—*not* how God sees things.

The Bible is inspired by God BUT inspiration is the *people* moved by the Spirit that is the key, not the *words* of the Bible inspired by God. The Bible is our response to God in our culture. Other cultures have their sacred text.

#### **Bible as Sacred Scripture**

Bible's status as sacred is the result of a historical process (not divine origin) called "canonization".

The Bible's function: Our foundational document, our identity document (who we are and what our life with God is about); our wisdom tradition: concerns what is real and how we shall live.

Importance of historical context. Context in life of a community, relationship to other passages in the particular book, and to other parts of the Bible.

Asking if the event actually happened is not important because much of the language of the Bible is metaphorical. (Remember from discussion about Enlightenment's influence and rise of modern science on modern Western thought in previous chapter that writers of Bible text and their communities would have thought this a very strange sort of question!)

#### **Truth of Metaphor**

(First the definition of "metaphor" from the dictionary: "a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance as 'A mighty fortress is our God'") "More than literal" meaning of language—not inferior to literal meaning. Much of the language is obviously metaphorical (e.g. hands, eyes, feet of God).

Bible has both history and metaphor. Even when describing an actual historical event, the metaphorical meaning of the event is what is important. Example: the meaning of the exile in Babylon.

Metaphors—profoundly true but not necessarily factual. Truth of Bible not depend on historical factuality. True stories—revelations—even if not factual report. Example: Genesis story and Jesus birth narratives.

Borg's response to whenever debate of "it happened" vs. "no it did not" occurs: "Believe whatever you want about whether it happened this way; now let's talk about what the story means." Emphasizing the miraculous parts as facts makes the stories sterile and unable to touch our soul the way a "more than literal" meaning does. Example of Easter

Nick Strobel's notes on "The Heart of Christianity" by Marcus Borg

story: Jesus is alive today and He is *Lord*. Not concerned with historicity of bodily resurrection.

"I walk with Jesus every day" is a true statement (metaphorically) even though a camera won't record that.

### **Metaphor as Bridge**

Much of earlier and emerging paradigm preaching uses metaphors. Example: people "paralyzed" by various things and Jesus tells them to "get up and walk." Good news of Easter story example: people feeling at the end of their life from tragedy or big disappointment, etc., "they go to the tomb but the tomb is empty"—they find new life, new beginnings. They experience resurrection.

The point is not to believe in the Bible, but to see our live with God through it.

### **Bible as Sacrament**

Visible mediator of the sacred—"outward and visible sign". The means whereby the sacred becomes present to us.

Especially in private, devotional use—lingering over a passage so we may hear the Spirit speaking to us.

### **Bible and Christian Life**

Bible as a way of seeing God and our life with God. Bible as a way God speaks to us and comes to us. Bible as foundation of the tradition.

Christian life is about a relationship with the One whom the Bible both points to a mediates.

### **Questions**

1. How does Borg's view of the Bible as a historical product make you feel? Why?
2. Can the Bible still be a sacred text if it is not factually true? Why?
3. What examples today can you give of an event or series of events that has a "more than literal" meaning?
4. Describe times when you felt the Bible as a sacrament.