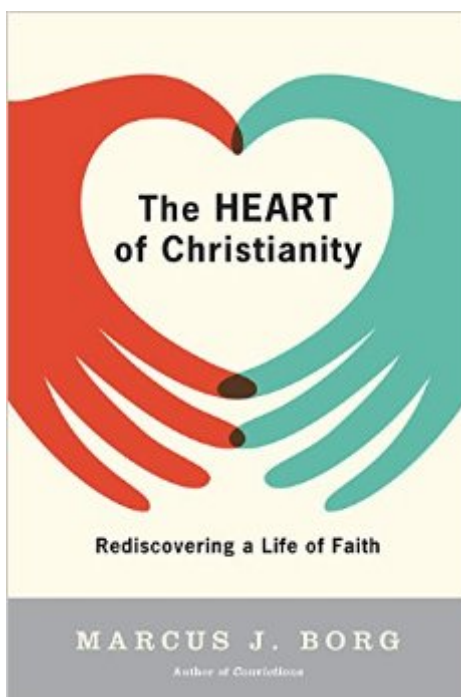


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The Heart Of Christianity: Rediscovering A Life Of Faith



Synopsis

In *The Heart of Christianity*, world-renowned Jesus scholar and author of the bestseller *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* argues that the essential ingredients of a Christian life—faith, being born again, the kingdom of God, the gospel of love—are as vitally important today as they have always been, even during this time of conflict and change in the church. Borg wants to show us, as today's thinking Christians, how to discover a life of faith by reconceptualizing familiar beliefs. Being born again, for example, has nothing to do with fundamentalism, but is a call to radical personal transformation. Talking about the kingdom of God does not mean that you are fighting against secularism, but that you have committed your life to the divine values of justice and love. And living the true Christian way is essentially about opening one's heart to God, and to others. Above all else, Borg believes with passion and conviction that living the Christian life still makes sense.

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Customer Reviews

I just finished reading Marcus Borg's new book "The Heart of Christianity" and it's the best book on contemporary Christianity that I've read in a long while. Borg talks about the "earlier paradigm" of Christianity and an "emerging paradigm". He discusses the history of the "earlier paradigm" and provides useful insights such as the rather recent notions of Biblical infallibility (post-Enlightenment) and Papal infallibility (1870) which many may assume have ALWAYS been a big part of the Christian tradition. Borg makes quite clear early on in the book that the "earlier paradigm" can and does WORK, insofar as bringing people into fuller communion with God and can certainly produce

lives which work for compassion and justice. However, for various reasons (institutional, scientific, and cultural - for example), many in the modern Western world find the "earlier paradigm" to be unconvincing and "unbelievable". Borg attempts to show throughout the book how much more deep and wonderful the Christian tradition is than merely "believing" certain doctrines or defending the literalness of certain events (creation, the flood, the Exodus, walking on water etc...) in order to "prove" the strength of our faith. Did the Exodus really happen? Maybe not. Is it a true story of the human need for liberation from bondage - certainly. Confusing "did it really happen - could I have videotaped it?" with "Is that story true?" is a big issue. Borg argues that we diminish our faith stories by making them merely literal. He pushes for the "more-than-literal" meanings in the Christian scripture.

Evangelicals beware --- this is the same Marcus Borg of the Jesus Seminar, the one who has categorically stated that he does not believe that Christianity is the only path of salvation, that the Bible is the Word of God, that Jesus experienced a bodily resurrection, or that Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God. So why review this book? Why give him any cyber ink at all? There are any number of reasons why evangelicals need to be aware of what Borg believes and what he has written, not the least of which is his tremendous influence on non-evangelicals, particularly those who have left mainstream denominations but still long for a way to express what faith they have left. Borg offers them a way of returning to the church that does not require them to adhere to a rigid set of beliefs that they have long considered suspect. And he's very good at what he does and how he does it; his books always sell well, and he is constantly in demand as a speaker. He has a knack for welcoming people "home" --- to mainline churches --- in a warm and compassionate way. In *THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY*, Borg lays down a welcome mat that has already proven attractive to those who have been disenchanted with what they perceive as an anti-intellectual faith. His welcome mat encourages people to give Christianity another chance because the times have changed, and from those changes a new, inclusive paradigm has emerged. Christianity, he holds, is no longer about a belief in a set of doctrines but about "loving God and loving what God loves." That said, Borg never demeans those who do hold to a strong doctrinal stance and a literal interpretation of the Bible, much of which he considers to be metaphorical.

I've read several of Prof. Borg's books, and all of them are excellent. In his latest book, *The Heart of Christianity*, Borg summarizes a lifetime of reflection on the Christian faith. Borg claims that the "traditional paradigm" is losing its power over people. Here traditional paradigm refers to a

Christianity where God is a being out there with a will and who has all the power in the world and who sent Jesus into the world to die for our sins--literally. Christianity is the only true religion, and if we don't get ourselves to believe in doctrines about God and Jesus (and perhaps eschatology) then we're in big trouble when Jesus returns to earth. While the TP is still nourishing for many in the church, others find it harder and harder to accept; they just can't believe that the Bible is a biography of God, of Jesus, and of the end times. There are several reasons, the biggest one being that contemporary Biblical criticism gives us a different picture of the origin of the Bible; instead of the Bible being God's words about humans, it's the words of humans about God. This doesn't mean that the Bible is false and doesn't contain anything divine; it just means that humans had a lot of say about what's in the Bible. Borg endorses the "emerging paradigm". Here there's no emphasis on giving intellectual assent to a body of doctrines or creeds in order to be saved, that is, go to heaven. For Borg, this isn't the heart of Christianity. Rather, Christian faith deals primarily with *this* life, and it's a life that emphasizes a *relationship* with God, the key elements being trust in God to provide for all our needs, as well as loving what God loves--in other words, compassion and justice.

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