



## **Review**

### ***Re-discovering the Christian Life Faith, the Way of the Heart***

- **To be a Christian is not to believe in Christianity.**
- **To be a Christian is to have a transforming relationship with God as lived through the Christian tradition.**
- **Faith, as a way of the heart, is transformation.**

## ***Review***

- 1. Faith as Belief -- agreement with propositional truths**
- 2. Faith as Trust**
- 3. Faith as Fidelity -- faith as faithfulness**
- 4. Faith as Vision -- a way of seeing**

***February 3, 2009***

## ***Seeing the Christian Tradition Again***

***The Bible,  
The Heart of the Tradition***

***For the sake of argument, let us agree that the following three statements are each true.***

- 1. While Christianity is centered in God and in Jesus Christ, Christians believe that it is in the Bible that God is revealed to us – thus the Bible is our sacred story, sacred scripture.**
- 2. While God is also known in other ways and in other traditions, to be a Christian is to be centered in the God of the Bible (Martin Luther “sola scriptura”).**
- 3. Being centered in the Bible is not a mark of Christian exclusion but of Christian identity.**

***And for the sake of argument, can we also agree that the following two statements are true.***

- 1. “In the last half century, more Christians have left the church because of the Bible than for any other single reason.” (Marcus Borg, “The Heart of Christianity”)**
- 2. Contemporary Biblical literalism – with its emphasis on Biblical infallibility, historical factuality, and moral and doctrinal absolutes – is an obstacle to millions of people.**

## ***Some Problems with Biblical Fundamentalism/Literalism***

- That the earth and the universe were created in six days and less than 10,000 years ago (Gen. 1-3)
- That a great fish swallowed Jonah, and after three days, vomited him up, alive, on dry land
- That God ordered the slaughter of the Amalekites: men, women, children, and infants (1 Sam. 15:3)

### ***1 Samuel 15:1-8***

**<sup>1</sup>Samuel said to Saul, “The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the Lord.**

**<sup>2</sup>Thus says the Lord of hosts, I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt.**

**<sup>3</sup>Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” <sup>4</sup> So**

**Saul summoned the people, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot-soldiers, and ten thousand soldiers of Judah.**

**<sup>5</sup>Saul came to the city of the Amalekites and lay in wait in the valley. <sup>6</sup>Saul said to the Kenites, 'Go! Leave! Withdraw from among the Amalekites, or I will destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.' So the Kenites withdrew from the Amalekites. <sup>7</sup>Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. <sup>8</sup>He took King Agag of the Amalekites alive, but utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.**

### ***Some Problems with Biblical Fundamentalism (cont.)***

- **That God regulated (and therefore legitimated) slavery (found in both Testaments)**
- **That God cares (or has ever cared) about whether we wear garments made of two kinds of cloth (Lev. 19.19)**
- **That God ordered the subordination of women**

***Some Problems  
with Biblical Literalism (cont.)***

- That unbelieving Jews are children of the devil (John 8.44)
- That the **Second Coming** of Jesus will involve the destruction of most of humankind
- That if a man has sex with another man, they should both be put to death (Lev. 20.13)

***Outline***

***The Bible – The Heart of the Tradition***

***The Twin Problems***

1. Interpretation
2. Authority

***Towards a Solution***

1. The Bible as Historical
2. The Truth as Metaphor
3. The Bible as Sacrament

## ***I. The Problem of Interpretation-- Are We Reading the Same Bible***

**"Of all the factors that contribute to divisiveness in our denomination, the Committee found none is more pervasive or fundamental than the question of how the Scriptures are to be interpreted. In other words, the widely differing views on the ways the Old and New Testaments are accepted, interpreted, and applied were repeatedly cited to us by lay people,**

**clergy, and theologians as the most prevalent cause of conflict in our denomination today. ... It is our opinion that until our church examines this problem, our denomination will continue to be impeded in its mission and ministry, or we will spiral into a destructive schism."**

**1976 PCUSA, Report on the Committee on Pluralism**

## ***Rick Warren on Being an Evangelical***

**“For those of you who are not familiar with what an “evangelical” is, we are people who take seriously what can be called “classical Christianity.” We really believe the historic creeds of the church—the Apostles, Nicene, and Caledonian Creeds. Like all classical Christians, we believe that God is Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We evangelicals believe that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh. That he was literally born of a virgin.**

**That he suffered under Pontius Pilate. That he was crucified, died, and buried and rose bodily from the dead. We evangelicals believe that Christ ascended into heaven and that he is one day going to come back to judge the quick and the dead. So we believe what classical Christians have always believed and taught throughout the 2,000 years of church history. And as children of the Reformation, we also believe that the Bible is our final authority for faith and practice.”**

**(This is from *The Great Awakening*  
By Jim Wallis)**

## ***Fundamentalist or Evangelical?***

**“Increasing what I see at this point is that we have a strong fundamentalist movement in the Presbyterian Church, but they want to be called evangelicals.” Movement members have redefined evangelical to include their positions on abortion, homosexuality and other social issues. “I argue that ‘evangelical’ has to do with your perception of the faith, the scriptures and salvation.”**

***Rev. Gary Demarest, PCUSA Evangelism  
Director, 1988-1993***

## ***The Religious Right***

**“Look. To be biblically consistent you have to be politically inconsistent. Evangelicals have to follow their political party ...”**

**Richard Cizik, National Association  
of Evangelicals, 2006  
(Quoted in *The Great Awakening*)**

**“The shift away from the Religious Right is not necessarily a shift to the left. And that is exactly the point that must be made.”**

**Jim Wallis, *The Great Awakening*, 2008**

## **2. Authority**

### ***Authority in Two Different Traditions***

#### ***Roman Catholic Tradition***

**Church has the power/authority  
Church interprets Scripture and will not fail us.**

#### ***Protestant Tradition***

**The church can be and has been wrong  
'Sola Scriptura' – authority belongs only to scripture  
Only scripture can interpret scripture**

### ***Authority in Two Different Traditions***

**Problem with Protestant Principle – the Bible does not speak, it must be interpreted, so because the Church is not infallible, in practice the individual conscience has the power/authority to decide (“God alone is Lord of the Conscience”)**

## ***The Problem with Authority - Who Decides Who Is Right?***

***For much of our history, the authority to interpret Scripture belonged to SWEMs (Straight, White, European Males)***

***Straights interpreted homosexuality to be 'queer'***

***Whites agreed with slavery***

***Europeans went along with the notion that non-Christians are savages***

***Males interpreted/understood that women could not be ordained.***

## ***Today, Do Fundamentalists Speak for Christianity?***

***"I don't think it's an exaggeration, in fact, to suggest that if the first Christians were exposed to the rhetoric of Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed, James Dobson, and Jerry Falwell, and company, they might well ask, in astonishment, 'How did these vicious people manage to steal the name of Jesus?' "***

***Bruce Bower, Stealing Jesus, How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity (1997)***

## ***Towards a Solution***

- 1. The Bible as Historical**
- 2. The Truth as Metaphor**
- 3. The Bible as Sacrament**

### ***I. Understanding the Bible***

***The Bible as an Historical Product,  
human not divine!***

**The Bible is a product of two historical communities: ancient Israel and the early Christian movement.**

**As such, it is a human product, not a divine product. The Bible is not written by God but is a response of these two ancient communities. That is – the Bible is not God's witness to God, but the witness to God by these two communities of Faith.**

## **Scholar Sends Another Blast Across the Bow of Biblical Fundamentalism**

**“Not only do we not have the originals (manuscripts of the Bible), we don’t have the first copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later – much later. In most instances, they are copies made many centuries later. And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places...these copies do differ from one another in so many places that we don’t even know how many differences there are... Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.”**

***Misquoting Jesus, Bart Ehrman, 2005, pg. 110***

## **A Bold Step by The Presbyterian Church (1967)**

**The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God’s work of reconciliation in Christ. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless words of human beings, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken the divine word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that God will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.**

***The Confession of 1967, 9.29***

## ***The Bible as God's Inspired Word***

**Mainline Presbyterians believe God 'inspired' the Bible – but it understands it differently from literalists/fundamentalists who argue that this inspiration must be 'plenary' (that every word is inspired by God and thus has the truth and authority of God standing behind it).**

## ***Understanding the Bible as an Historical Product***

**When the Bible is read as inspired (but not read literally), when one understands that God's revelation is culturally conditioned, the problems of Biblical interpretation begin to largely disappear.**

**Example: Who did Cain (son of Adam and Eve) marry?**

## ***7 Scriptural Guidelines***

- 1. Redemption through Jesus Christ is central.**
- 2. Context is important.**
- 3. Depend on guidance of the Holy Spirit.**
- 4. Be guided by doctrinal consensus of the church.**
- 5. Let all interpretations be in accord with the rule of love—the two-fold commandment to love God and neighbor.**
- 6. Interpret the influence of historical and cultural context.**
- 7. Seek to interpret a particular passage of the Bible in light of all the Bible.**

*Jack Rogers, Jesus, The Bible, and Homosexuality*

### ***I. The Bible as an Historical Product***

### ***II. The Bible as Metaphor***

**Metaphor may mean non-literal.**

**Metaphor can also mean “more-than-literal meaning of language.”**

**Reading the Bible metaphorically is not inferior to literal meaning, but it is more than literal reading.**

***The Bible as Metaphor***  
***The Truth of The Bible is Not Dependent***  
***Upon Its Historical Accuracy***

- A ‘myth’ is a ‘story about the way things never were, but always are’ (Thomas Mann). So is the Noah story true? Literally true, no. Really true, yes.
- “Theology is poetry plus, not science minus.” (Swedish proverb quoted by Marcus Borg)
- “The Bible is true, and some of it happened.” (attributed by Borg to a Catholic priest).
- The same point is made by a Native American storyteller as he begins telling his tribe’s story of creation: “Now I don’t know if it happened this way or not, but I know this story is true.”

***The Bible as Metaphor***  
***Example: The Story of Adam and Eve***

**Adam**—Hebrew word for man, a collective word referring to all mankind.

‘adham (man)’ and ‘adhamah (ground)’ refers to man’s relationship to the ground from which he is formed—man is ground/dust animated by God’s breath or “spirit” which makes him a living person.

**Eve** means “mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20)

***I. The Bible as an Historical Product***

***II. The Bible as Metaphor***

***III. The Bible as Sacrament***

**A sacrament is a finite, physical, visible mediator of the sacred, a means whereby the sacred becomes present to us. A sacrament is a vehicle or vessel of the sacred (Borg).**

**In traditional language, a sacrament is a ‘door to the sacred,’ an ‘outward and visible sign’ that functions as a ‘means of grace.’**

***The Two Means of Grace:  
Word and Sacrament***

**Presbyterians have two sacraments (baptism and communion), but we also believe that in the hearing of God’s word, God becomes present to us (and this is a ‘means of grace,’ it is a sacrament!).**

**After reading scripture we say, “This is the Word of the Lord;” what we are saying is that God is still speaking to the church through this ancient document.**

## ***The Challenge – Read the Bible!***

- **Read one Psalm per day.**
- **Read one chapter from the New Testament per day.**
- **The Bible is nourishment. The Bible is Transformative! God’s word will change us. Renew us. Enchant us!**
- **God’s Word becomes our daily bread. Like Jesus, the Bible is both the “Word of God” and the “bread of life.”**

## ***Will You Accept the Challenge?***

**Will you each day**

- **Read one Psalm**
- **Read one chapter from the New Testament**

## ***A Brief Statement of Faith***

- 1 In life and in death we belong to God.
- 2 Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 3 the love of God,
- 4 and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
- 5 we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
- 6 whom alone we worship and serve.
- 7 We trust in Jesus Christ,
- 8 fully human, fully God.

## ***A Brief Statement of Faith***

- 9 Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
- 10 preaching good news to the poor
- 11 and release to the captives
- 12 teaching by word and deed
- 13 and blessing the children,
- 14 healing the sick
- 15 and binding up the brokenhearted,
- 16 eating with outcasts,
- 17 forgiving sinners,
- 18 and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.

## ***A Brief Statement of Faith***

- 19 Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,  
20 Jesus was crucified,  
21 suffering the depths of human pain  
22 and giving his life for the sins of the world.  
23 God raised this Jesus from the dead,  
24 vindicating his sinless life,  
25 breaking the power of sin and evil,  
26 delivering us from death to life eternal.

## ***A Brief Statement of Faith We Trust in God***

- 27 We trust in God,  
28 whom Jesus called Abba, Father.

**God is identified as the One whom Jesus called Abba, Father.**

**“Abba” (Aramaic) modifies “Father” indicating that God is not a punitive patriarch, but a loving parent with whom we can have an intimate relationship.**

## ***A Brief Statement of Faith We Trust in God***

29 In sovereign love God created the world good  
30 and makes everyone equally in God's image,  
31 male and female, of every race and people,  
32 to live as one community.

**God's sovereignty is qualified by "love," the basic nature of God.**

**Because we belong to God, we belong to one another.**

### ***Rediscovering The Christian Tradition***

**February 10 Rediscovering God – the Heart of Reality (*the character of God*)**

**February 17 Rediscovering Jesus – the Heart of God (*the pre and post-Easter Jesus, the quest for the historical Jesus*)**

**February 24 Annual  
Congregational Meeting**