

Marcus Borg: the Tragedy of Reaction

An Essay Review

Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & The heart of Contemporary Faith*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994.

CONTENT

The author addresses the question: Who is Jesus? In the Preface Borg presents himself as offering two perspectives on the answer – that of the secular Jesus scholar and that of the believing Christian (viii). He aims to bring these perspectives together for Christians in mainline churches who, Borg believes, need help in replacing their childhood image of Jesus with his alternative (1). The problem these mainline Christians have, Borg says, is that they have a popular image of Jesus (2). In one of these images Christians see Jesus not so much as a teacher of what to believe, but of how to live a good life. This is a problem, Borg argues, because there is more to the Christian life than being good (2).

Borg reviews his Christian upbringing in order to show us another popular image of Jesus, how it developed in his own life and why it became a problem. It is a standard story. Its memories are punctuated by heartfelt connection with Jesus. But he also recalls the importance of believing in God for the sake of receiving eternal life. This became his popular picture of Christ and a bone of contention for Borg. In hindsight, there are spiritual and intellectual growth spurts. As a child Borg was unable to put together that God was both “everywhere present” and “up in heaven.”(6). Borg chose for a God up above who could decide to be everywhere, but did not need to be. He recognizes his step as one that removed God from the world into a supernatural realm from where he could intervene.

As a teenager – our author writes – he began to doubt the existence of God. He entered a cycle of sin, guilt, and forgiveness. Sin because of the doubt. Guilt because he believed doubting was wrong. Forgiveness for the wrong asked in prayer. A continuing cycle because Borg discovered that he could not stop doubting. This raises important issues which were apparently not addressed so that this became a tragic experience shared unnecessarily by many Christian youths. The doubt of God’s existence, Borg later recognized issued from a clash of the worldview of his youth with what he characterizes as “The modern worldview, with its image of what is real as the world of matter and energy and its vision of the universe of a closed system of cause and effect [which] made belief in God – a nonmaterial reality – increasingly problematic.” Borg concludes that asking these questions marked his entrance into the world of critical thinking (7). Apparently unaware, he was repeating in his personal growth the development of naturalism in the history of Western culture (see Assessment below).

In college, a religion course exposed Borg to the answers of the intellectual giants of Western religious thought to all the big questions. Borg’s popular childhood image of Jesus collapsed, but the new knowledge did not help him to believe. It is one thing to be aware that the Bible and the Christian teaching don’t have to be taken literally. It is another to know what a nonliteral approach might mean (8).

Seminary introduced him to higher biblical criticism with its distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Borg recalls as mind-boggling the realization that the Gospels are neither divine nor historically reliable, but report human religious experience. The take-home message was that Jesus spoke in a Palestinian Jewish milieu. In contrast, the Gospel writers worked in the larger Mediterranean world

to which they adapted Jesus' message. As a result the message grew. For example, while in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus is said never to claim to be the son of God, this claim emerges first in the gospel of John.

In sum, Borg sees two popular images of Christ among mainline Christians. One pictures Jesus as the divine savior to be believed in for the sake of eternal life. In this case the Christian life is concerned with correct belief and aimed at eternal life. The other takes Jesus as a teacher of good behavior and as an example of the Christian life. The alternative suggested by Borg (3, 30, 119) sees Jesus as (i) spirit person, (ii) teacher of wisdom, (iii) social prophet, and (iv) founder of a movement. This image of Jesus is presented as based on contemporary biblical and historical scholarship associated with the Christian life as a journey of transformation. The remainder of the book describes how Borg has moved on from the popular to the historical Jesus.

ASSESSMENT

The transitions that characterize Borg's spiritual journey are false dilemmas. For instance, the Gospels as divine documents is not an alternative to the Gospels as human tradition if one believes that human tradition can be divine revelation under God's providence. The reason Borg felt he had to choose is likely that he had an earlier problem with believing that God is closely involved in the world when as a youth he decided that God was 'up above' rather than everywhere. Further, one has to choose between doctrine and authentic faith only on the modernist assumption that doctrine represents reason and excludes faith. In philosophy of science it is an accepted fact that theory choice involves subjective faith. The realization that this applies to doctrine as well could have prevented another false dilemma. Next is Borg's move from the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. This one is discussed in more detail below.

The transition from God as a concept or article of belief to God as an element of experience is a more complex issue. A concept cannot express a mystical experience, but this appears not what Borg means. It is also widely accepted in negative theology that concepts cannot describe who God is, only who God is not. But this too is not what Borg is trying to say. He seems to be saying that having a concept of God excludes the possibility of experiencing a personal relationship with God. Next to last is the move from God as a remote and transcendent creator far removed from this world to a God who is with us. It is true that logically God cannot be both remote and close. One would have to choose if logic was the standard of truth in theology. That Borg did choose shows that reason is his standard of truth. More on this below. But why should human reason be the measure of truth about the creator of the faculty of reason?

Another unusual feature of the book is that the author makes statements that are patently false. For instance, he states that in the Gospels Jesus never presents himself as the son of God. For the sake of argument I will ignore those events where circumstances clearly show that Jesus is the son of God even though He does not say so because Borg might account for them as a result of human experience or of visions such as the transfiguration. Even then, one still ends up with a reputable number of instances that flatly contradict Borg's assertion. To mention just one, when the high priest asks Jesus: "... tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God," Jesus said to him, "You have said so." (Matthew 26: 63-64).

Borg's question is deceptively simple. Does Jesus present himself as God's son? But he does not reveal his standards of evidence, at least not in this book. For that one has to look at the procedures of the Jesus Seminar. Members only accept affirmations that are inescapable by the standards of logic and historical research. As a result, most members of the Jesus Seminar excluded by vote most texts that by ordinary standards would count as affirmations that Jesus is the son of God. This exclusive reliance on scholarship

is another problem that I will address shortly. For now the question is whether Borg's assertion is reasonable when it must exclude as evidence such sayings of Jesus as: "...; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son" (Matthew 11: 27).

What is Below the Surface

A lot remains hidden in Borg's book no doubt because it is for a popular audience. But this background information is crucial for a critical evaluation of what Borg does offer his popular readership. I will limit myself to three aspects of this hidden background. The first is the well-known distinction between *the Jesus of history* and *the Christ of faith*. In Borg's words: "The first phrase refers to Jesus as the particular person he was – Jesus of Nazareth, a Galilean Jew of the first century who was executed by the Romans. The second phrase refers to the Christ of the developing Christian tradition – namely, what Jesus became in the faith of the early Christian communities in the decades after his death." (10). The next two aspects concern the reasoning behind Borg's assertion that Jesus never said of himself that he is the son of God (11).

From Kant to Borg

There are two phases in the history of the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Phase 1 began when Isaac Newton (1642-1727) published a comprehensive theory that explained the behavior of the planets above and that of the pebbles below.¹ What Newton did not answer was how distant bodies could attract each other when there was nothing but empty space in between. One of Newton's solutions was to imagine that the space between them was filled with an ethereal matter called the ether. This allowed him to imagine that one body could influence another by contact action propagated through this matter-filled space. Unfortunately, friction with this matter would also slow down the planets. To prevent them from falling into the Sun, Newton thought that God would from time to time make course corrections. He was not sure how God would do this – he allowed for direct intervention or divine use of instruments such as comets.

The problem with Newton's solution was that it limited God's involvement in the universe to unusual events such as planetary course corrections. This all too easily implied that otherwise God was not involved. The use of comets as instruments made clear that a causal explanation would suffice.² What happened next was that a better mathematical description was found for the planetary orbits. It made divine course corrections superfluous as the Scottish sceptic and philosopher David Hume pointed out when he was working on his list of arguments showing that one cannot know whether God exists. As a result the received interpretation of Newtonian science became one in which the material world was seen as a causally closed system in which there was no room for God to act.

Kant attempted to avoid Hume's conclusion. To protect religion and morality from the consequences of Newtonian determinism he made a sharp distinction between the physical world as known to science and the moral world. Two different kinds of reasoning characterize each world. Pure reason applies to nature and practical reason to morality and religion. The limited knowledge we can have of God is not a part of the sphere of pure reason. The mechanistic conception of a causally closed world of Newtonian science does not contradict religious belief because it belongs to a sphere of knowledge different from that to which religious knowledge belongs, and one can not reason from one sphere to the other.

¹Newton, Isaac. *Principia*. London. 1687.

²Brooke, John H. *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 147-48.

Kant's strategy of separating knowing by faith and knowing by reason was adopted with minor modifications by the fathers of modern liberal theology Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard and Bultmann. For instance, Schleiermacher (1768-1834) argued that

‘The piety which forms the basis of all ecclesiastical communions is, considered purely in itself, neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness.’³

Thus doctrines are not knowledge, but expressions of faith. Nor can they be derived by reasoning from any kind of knowledge.

. . . Christian dogmas are supra-rational For there is an inner experience to which they may all be traced: they rest upon a given; and apart from this they could not have arisen, by deduction or synthesis, from universally recognized and communicable propositions Therefore this supra-rationality implies that a true appropriation of Christian dogmas cannot be brought about by scientific means, and thus lies outside the realm of reason(67)

Borg's distinction between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history originates in Kant's distinction between religious belief and scientific knowledge. The Christ of faith can be known by practical reason while the Jesus of history can be known by historical research that meets the standards of objective science. But there is one important difference between Borg and Kant and it marks phase 2 in the development of Borg's distinction. In Kant's construction scientific knowledge cannot threaten religious knowledge because they are completely separated. Since Kant, however, scientific knowledge has become the standard for knowledge to the exclusion of all other kinds of knowledge such as knowledge by acquaintance or knowledge by faith. This is known as ‘scientism.’ The German theologian Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976) illustrated this scientism when he wrote,

We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament. And if we suppose that we can do so ourselves, we must be clear that we can represent this as the attitude of Christian faith only by making the Christian proclamation unintelligible and impossible for our contemporaries.⁴

Bultmann is perhaps the best-known theologian whose exegesis has been developed in interaction with the world view of the Enlightenment, and more specifically with that of the natural sciences as he understood them. According to Bultmann God cannot be found in miracles because miracles are incompatible with the uniformity of causation.⁵ Bultmann did not deny that a supernatural spirit may act in a natural body or that God may act in nature, but these actions manifest themselves as natural events. Thus there can be no resurrection of the body because it contradicts our experience of nature. The subjective religious meaning of the virgin birth, the resurrection, the ascension does not require their objective factual occurrence.

³Schleiermacher, Friedrich D. E. *The Christian Faith*. 1821-22. Translated from the 2nd German edition *Der Christliche Glaube*, 1830. Edited by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1976, p. 5.

⁴Bultmann, Rudolf (1984) *New Testament and Mythology and other Basic Writings*. Ed. Ogden, Schubert M. Fortress Press. Philadelphia, pp. 4-5.

⁵Bultmann, Rudolf (1933) *Glauben und Verstehen*, Band I. J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Tübingen.

There are three take-home points to this history. Most importantly, it is crucial to recognize scientism for what it is. Like Hume, Bultmann and Borg have a view of knowledge that leads to religious scepticism if followed consistently. Hume had the courage to do so while Bultmann and Borg do not. This is why they make the impression of being inconsistent which is what makes their work puzzling. The view that scientific knowledge is the only kind of knowledge worth having is self-defeating because scientific knowledge itself cannot be explored scientifically. Moreover, such a view of knowledge is a value judgment and scientific knowledge cannot make such judgments because it would lose its neutrality and not be value-free.

Secondly, the reason for this separation of faith and reason no longer exists. The view of a causally closed universe in which God cannot act came to an end with the discovery of uncaused phenomena in the first half of the twentieth century. Ironically, this happened during the peak of Bultmann's work, but he seems to have been unaware of it. Borg and other members of the Jesus Seminar still appear to be unaware of these developments, but they have no excuse. Their standard of evidence – objective science – is, therefore, outmoded.

Finally, the story of Borg's religious upbringing drives home the importance for church communities of creating a non-threatening environment where questions are taken seriously not as signs of heterodoxy, but of spiritual growth. The story of his life might have been very different if there had been room for the two questions he raised, first about how God can be both present everywhere and transcendent and then about God's existence. These were good questions. A similar question had been raised centuries before by the astronomer Kepler (1571-1630) who struggled with its scientific and theological aspects. There are good answers, but they were not available to him. The result was what I consider a tragic experience shared unnecessarily by many Christian youths.

My assessment could end here. There is, however, another independent way of assessing Borg's work which focuses on how he and other members of the Jesus Seminar support their conclusions. In the remainder of this review, I will assume their outmoded views of the neutrality of science and the objectivity of scientific knowledge in order to focus on this dimension.

The Jesus Seminar

Borg asserts that in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke "Jesus never spoke of himself as the Son of God, ..." (11). This despite the fact that the text states that Jesus did so (Matthew 11, 27; 12, 8; 13, 41; 16, 17; 17, 5; 26, 27-29; 26, 63-64). No justification is given so readers cannot assess Borg's views for themselves.

Borg is a member of the Jesus Seminar. To get a taste of the reasoning accepted as scholarship in that group let me sketch the situation they address as they see it. Jesus himself did not publish a record of his sayings and actions. Later writings dating from his generation, but from after his death attribute sayings and actions to him. As William Alston, a Christian philosopher and a critic of the Jesus Seminar, points out, attribution of sayings to Jesus are acceptable only if they are different from those of his contemporaries as well as from those of his followers. For instance, Bultmann proposed that writings attributed to Jesus can be accepted only on two conditions. Firstly, the writings must be sufficiently different from what was being said and written both by contemporaries of Jesus and in the Jewish tradition. Secondly, acceptable writings must be sufficiently different from those of the followers of Jesus after his death.⁶

⁶Adapted from Alston, William P. "Historical Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels," in: *Behind the Text:*

Here is the first example of how Bultmann applies these criteria to a story central to Christianity: Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Christ, the son of the living God (Matthew 16: 13-23).⁷

Who do men say that the Son of man is? And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elija, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

On the face of it, the story passes the first criterion because no one in the Jewish tradition had ever claimed to be the son of God. Yet Borg simply denies that Jesus ever said of himself that he was the son of God. Borg gives no reasons for this denial even though Jesus refers to God as "my Father who is in heaven." We need to go to Bultmann for the reason why Borg asserts that Jesus never claimed to be the son of God. Bultmann writes,

The fact that Jesus takes the initiative with this question ['Who do you say I am?'] itself suggests that this narrative is secondary [i.e., not stemming from the historical Jesus], as does the content of the question altogether. Why does Jesus ask about something on which he is bound to be every bit as well informed as were the disciples? The question is intended simply to provoke the answer; in other words, it is a literary device. Once more [] the disciples represent the Church, and the passages give expression to the specific judgement which the Church has about Jesus, in distinction from that of those outside.

This then is a legend of faith: faith in the Messiahship of Jesus is traced back to a story of the first messianic confession which Peter made before Jesus.⁸

This is the kind of reasoning that leads members of the Jesus Seminar to vote against including this text as a saying of Jesus. Let us reconstruct the argument. First, Bultmann sidesteps the criterion that Jesus' claim has never been made in the Jewish tradition and would, therefore, count as authentic for Jesus. He does this by assuming that Jesus cannot be interested in the disciple's belief about his identity. It is, therefore, a literary device made up by the Church. This turns the rest of the narrative in which Jesus clearly asserts to be the son of God into a literary device with no correspondence to historical reality. No reasons are given. But this is the assumption that Bultmann uses as a warrant for his conclusion that this text fails the second criterion, namely that this writing is not sufficiently different from the writings of his followers in the early church. If you find this 'reasoning' puzzling you are on the right track – it makes absolutely no sense. What would make more sense for a teacher such as Jesus than to want to know whether his instruction had come across? And how much sense does it make to assume – as Bultmann does – that the early Christians were inept enough to concoct an unbelievable story in which Jesus asks a question to which he already knows the answer? Of course the church confessed Jesus as Messiah. Why else would they be his followers? There is a reason why it is difficult in British and American circles to find distinguished scholars who follow Bultmann closely. Bultmann's work has all the signs of seriously flawed scholarship. Yet Bultmann is the guiding light of the Jesus Seminar of which Borg is a member.

History and Biblical Interpretation, edited by Craig Bartholomew, C. Stephen Evans, Mary Healy and Murray Rae, Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2003, p. 163.

⁷More examples in Alston, William P. "Historical Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels," in: *Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Craig Bartholomew, C. Stephen Evans, Mary Healy and Murray Rae, Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2003, pp. 151-179.

⁸Bultmann, Rudolph, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, (trans. J. Marsh; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 5th ed. 1963): 257-58.

Alston (2003) characterizes the line of ‘reasoning’ illustrated above as reasoning from dissimilarity. A saying or action can be attributed to Jesus only if it is sufficiently dissimilar from (1) his own culture and tradition, and (2) his followers, the early church. Alston offers the following arguments for his view that these criteria have no substance.

(1) A saying or action can be attributed to Jesus only if it is sufficiently different from his own culture and tradition. This criterion is plausible only if it is unlikely that the historical Jesus would say something that is similar to what would be said in his Jewish environment. But it is very likely that he would say things that exhibit such similarities. Studies show an increasing recognition that he stood, and was perceived by his contemporaries as standing, in the line of the great Hebrew prophets. What could be more likely that Jesus would, at least some of the time, sound and act like a first-century Jew who was very much involved in (some of) the Jewish movements of his time. There is no reasonable basis for taking *any* similarity to Judaism as a reason for rejecting an attribution to Jesus. This would be to attempt to divorce Jesus from the context in which he lived and moved and had his being. It would be like saying that the only statements authentic for the pope would be those that are not in the Roman Catholic tradition.

(2) A saying or action can be attributed to Jesus only if it is sufficiently different from his followers, the early church. To begin with, the early Christian church developed in ways that go beyond what one might find in the life and sayings of the historical Jesus. In this respect this is a reasonable criterion. But it is reasonable only when we discriminate features unique for the early church from those shared with Jesus’ words and deeds. After all, the Christian church stemmed and self-consciously so, from the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It would be unreasonable in the extreme to suppose that no emphases, attitudes, beliefs, and so on of the early church are to be found in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Indeed, a picture of the historical Jesus from which all such features are excised would, just by that fact, be under suspicion. So, a blanket, indiscriminating use of this criterion has nothing to recommend it. Each case must be considered on its own merit. Not doing so would be like saying that the only statements authentic for the pope would be those that are not made by the members of the Roman Catholic church.

So, if there is nothing to be said in favor of these two criteria, what do members of the Jesus Seminar offer in its support? Specifically, what is meant by saying that most of the Gospels cannot consist of teachings authentic for Jesus because they stem from the early church?⁹

The early church fabricated statements and attributed them to Jesus. The question here is: how are we to understand the expression “stemming from the early church?” The obvious meaning is the truism that the early church made true reports about what happened in an earlier historical situation involving Jesus. The world would be in serious trouble if this obvious meaning would not also be the true meaning. Yet this is not what the Jesus Seminar has in mind. They claim that the early church made up stories about Jesus without regard for truth merely to satisfy their own spiritual interests. But that begs the question because it presupposes what has to be proved, namely fraud on the part of the early church. Therefore, there is no support for the conclusion that what stems from the early church is false or impossible to authenticate as originating in Jesus’ activities.

⁹The next three paragraphs describe the opinions of a member of the Jesus Seminar, Perrin, N. *Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967. The discussion is based on Alston 2003, p. 164-67.

The early church did not distinguish between its own statements and those of Jesus. Here the issue is that the early church did not distinguish between words spoken by the historical earthly Jesus and those spoken by the risen Jesus through a prophet in the community such as Paul or Peter. The church ascribed to the historical Jesus what they received from the risen Jesus. The Jesus Seminar concludes that it is impossible to establish the authenticity of sayings attributed to Jesus. In response, consider two points. (1) The situation described does not make it impossible to attribute sayings of Jesus to the earthly Jesus rather than to the early church as the Jesus Seminar claims. It leaves this possibility open. Therefore, it does not support the conclusion that the sayings of the earthly Jesus actually originated in the early church and not with the earthly Jesus. (2) It is true that the early church completely identified the risen Jesus with the earthly Jesus. But this does not mean that the two were not distinguished. For instance, when Peter has a vision on the roof of Cornelius' house in which a voice from heaven, addressed by Peter as Lord, tells Peter that all foods are clean (Acts 10), Peter makes no attempt to attribute this ruling to the earthly Jesus. Again, in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul is discussing celibacy, marriage and divorce, he distinguishes between "a word of the Lord" and his own advice. In conclusion, the early church sometimes distinguishes between statements of the earthly and of the risen Jesus, but not always. If it did not, this cannot be used to reject alleged sayings of Jesus as authentic. This argument begs the question because it assumes that 'making no distinction' means that alleged sayings of Jesus originate with the early church.

The early church had no interest in giving historically reliable accounts of the ministry of Jesus. The argument of the Jesus seminar is that only if the early church was genuinely interested in giving an historically reliable account of the ministry of Jesus would they have done so. But in fact they had no such interest. Rather the early church was interested in its own promotion. For instance, "...when we read an account of Jesus giving instruction to his disciples, we are not hearing the voice of the earthly Jesus addressing Galilean disciples in a Palestinian situation but that of the risen Lord addressing Christian missionaries in a Hellenistic world, and if the early Church had not needed instructions for those missionaries in that situation, there would have been no such pericope in our gospels ... So far as we can tell today, there is no single pericope anywhere in the gospels, the present purpose of which is to preserve a historical reminiscence of the earthly Jesus."¹⁰

I agree with Perrin that a) the Gospels were designed to serve the purpose of the church, and b) that this acts to some extent as a filter for what enters into the Gospels. Going beyond Perrin, I further believe c) that the ultimate aim of the Gospels is to induce faith in Jesus as Christ or Lord rather than to provide accurate history according to the standards of current historical scholarship, d) that the Gospel writers and their immediate successors were not disturbed by minor differences in details within a single Gospel or between Gospels, e) that each author was shaping his account in terms of his own theological perspective and/or that of his particular community. But none of this implies that the Gospel writers were not concerned to give a report of Jesus' ministry that was historically accurate or that in fact the reports were not accurate. What Perrin and other members of the Jesus Seminar appear to have overlooked is that the goals of the church can be the goals of Jesus (a-c), that minor inaccuracies in detail do not cancel historical accuracy by and large (d), and that the same reports with different theological focus can still be accurate reports of what happened. More seriously, they give no reason for supposing that the early church had no interest in giving historically reliable accounts of the ministry of Jesus. There is, therefore, no ground for their conclusion that "..., there is no single pericope anywhere in the gospels, the present purpose of which is to preserve a historical reminiscence of the earthly Jesus." That assertion is like a rabbit magically pulled out of a hat.

¹⁰Perrin, *Rediscovering*, 15-16.

At this point a legitimate question must be raised. The critique leveled at Bultmann and the Jesus Seminar is so severe that it may look as suspicious as the critique directed by Bultmann at the Gospels. How could Bultmann and his followers get their scholarship so wrong? In *The Origins of Christianity*, Schuyler Brown – professor emeritus of New Testament at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto – suggests that historical Jesus scholarship derailed for fear of being seen as unscientific. But, Brown writes,

Bultmann's fear that fallible judgments about history might be made the basis for faith has no legitimate bearing on the conduct of historical inquiry, and the criterion of dissimilarity does not assist the investigation of the Jesus tradition. Since the historian claims nothing beyond probability for his reconstruction, he will prefer to make use of all material which is probably authentic, rather than to exclude what is possibly inauthentic, particularly if the reasons advanced for the inauthenticity are themselves improbable.¹¹

In other words, Bultmann and his disciples have mixed up the concerns of faith and reason. They expect the absolute certitude of faith from the products of reason as practiced in historical scholarship. But reason cannot bear this burden because its knowledge is probable at best. This confusion arises because like many others they operate with an absolute separation of faith and reason. This was the separation introduced by Kant in response to what he perceived was a threat of the causally closed universe of Newtonian science to religious faith. The Kantian apartheid proved to be unstable when the successes of the natural sciences deluded many to believe that scientific knowledge is the only standard for reliable knowledge. Bultmann and his followers demonstrate this instability by attempting to burden historical scholarship with the certitude of faith. The tragedy is that in attempting to rescue faith from reason, they have allowed faith to fall victim to reason. They have fallen in the hole they wanted to avoid.

An additional tragedy is manifest in Marcus Borg. He describes himself as having moved from the Gospels as divine documents to the Gospels as human tradition (9), from doctrine to authentic faith, from the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith (10), from God as a concept or article of belief to God as an element of experience (15, 39, 137), from God as a remote and transcendent creator far removed from this world to God as all around us – as the one in whom we live and move and have our being,“ (38), and finally, from a community focused on a religion-inspired socio-economic class system to one shaped by compassion (53). Note that every move he has made except the last one is a reaction to a caricature. The choices he makes involve false dilemmas. But the Gospels are both divine and human. God relates to us both in concept and in experience. We know God both in doctrine and in faith. He is both near and far. He is a friend to those who fear him.

¹¹Brown, S. *The Origins of Christianity*. Oxford: OUP, 1984, pp. 49-50.