

MM Blue Sheet 2 – January 2015

Moment Ministries...

Death reports circulate fast...
especially in these Facebook days.

So it was with the
news of the death of Marcus Borg.

I wonder how many heard of him...
how many of my readers?

If you haven't heard in 30 years
you haven't been listening to me.

His scholarship was not new
but his teaching was fresh.

What I didn't dare say myself
I let his words speak for me.

My personal heresies
were his orthodoxies.

Many came to know him
and no longer walked alone.

I decided I could be an openly
non-creedal Jesus Christian.

Many have been my teachers...
I count Marcus Borg among them.
— Art Morgan

BOOK CORNER

It just so happens that two of the four books beside my reading (and napping!) chair are by Marcus Borg.

One is *"The First Christmas — What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus' Birth"* It's from 1979, written with his good friend, Dominic Crossan. I wanted to re-read it after Christmas to see if I had missed anything.

The other is his last book from 2014 *"Convictions — How I learned What Matters Most."* It sums up his core beliefs. My marker is at the chapter, *"The Bible can be True Without Being Literally True."*

Walter Brueggemann says *"In every generation there are a handful of writers of whom it can be said, 'Read everything they write.' Borg is one."*

MARCUS BORG — TEACHER

Marcus Borg became a faculty member of Oregon State University in 1980 the year after I finished my tenure as pastor of the Corvallis First Christian Church.

He was considered a "liberal" by conservatives for his thoughtful questioning of traditional Christian beliefs. He sought to expose people to source biblical scholarship that few clergy ever mentioned publicly.

He was able to be open with his teaching in part because he was in a secular public university. That means he wasn't teaching or writing under scrutiny of a denomination or church-supported seminary. Many religious leaders are unaware of their tendency toward conformity, or else aware that non-conformity can lead to institutional difficulties, as it has for too many.

To read and hear Borg was to be in the presence of a good teacher. He had rare clarity that appealed to both lay and clerically trained audiences. His name on a panel of lecturers was sure to increase attendance. He made it a mission to deliver at least 200 lectures a year.

His basic positions on the origins of scripture and the historical Jesus were not new. Most well-trained clergy had been exposed to that scholarship from early in the 20th century, at least.

Some of us remembered what we learned and attempted to be teaching pastors. Most of us were not very good teachers. Others hesitated to "rock the boat," leaving members uninformed or in some cases disappointed when questions were not faced. The masses are biblically and theologically illiterate.

Marcus Borg challenged long-established conclusions about scriptures and Jesus with his numerous books and lectures. He brought self-described heretics and doubters out of the closet. He helped many clergy be more open. Many churches offered classes using his books.

I have been recommending his books to questioning people for over 30 years. I still refer to them myself at times when I want to present ideas with more clarity.

On occasions when I have mentioned Borg's name to other clergy there have been statements of resistance to him. I have found that those who disagree with Borg are almost without exception people who never read, heard or met him. One might not always understand or agree but it would be hard to say that we didn't always learn something. There are always points at which we might wish for more depth. If nothing else he stimulated more open discussion than most.

That so many from outside the church came to his lectures ought to tell us that there are a lot of people still interested in his kind of message.

He didn't aspire to be a preacher. He was a teacher. A good model for pastors today I would think.

— Art Morgan January 22, 2015

A MOMENT MINISTRIES PUBLICATION

— Art Morgan and Paul Pritchard Ministers and Colleagues