

Taking the Bible Seriously



*"Both read the Bible day and night
but thou readst black where I read white."*

– William Blake

1st break:

"Inerrancy" is the idea that the Bible is without error in its original form. "Infallibility" claims that the Bible is inerrant on issues of faith and practice (but not history or science). How do you think these ideas would affect a person's day-to-day living?

Borg suggests that a more historical and metaphorical approach to the Bible provides a way for non-literalists to be Christian. How does this sync with your experience?

Geering suggests that literalists are the "enemies of the Christian tradition." What is your response to his claim? What examples can you think of?

2nd break:

Levine lists some "discrepancies" in the Bible. What are they (and can you add any you know of)?

Rossing, Brueggemann, & McKenna speak of the Bible as “inspired,” as an “act of faithful imagination,” and as “sacred.” How do those descriptions work for you?

Borg describes the Bible as a “lens through which we see God.” What does that mean for the way you look at the Bible?

3rd break:

What does Borg mean when he says, “The Bible is a human product and a response to the experience of the Sacred.”

General Reflection:

What do you find most helpful or interesting from the material so far?

What are the implications for your personal spiritual journey? For Christianity as a whole?

Try it

After reading scripture in most churches, the clichéd affirmation “This is the word of the Lord” is muttered by the worship leader. Instead of reinforcing that conventional wisdom about the origin of scripture, try the less misleading, more persuasive, “Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.” Now the progressively-minded congregation can respond with a clear conscience: “Thanks be to God.”

Words of Wisdom

In the early part of the 20th Century, a pamphlet was circulated about the “Fundamentals” of Christianity. Advocating the inerrancy of scripture and other supposedly bedrock doctrines, it spawned the Fundamentalist movement. Defenders of the infallibility of scripture pointed to one verse as a “proof text”: 2nd Timothy 3.16. Even though the scripture this verse refers to is what we call the “Old” Testament (the New Testament hadn’t even been put together yet), literalists used it and adopted a kind of circular argument: because the whole Bible is “inspired” (without error or inconsistency), it must be the work of God. Then, because it is the work of God, it must be without error or inconsistency. It doesn’t matter which proposition comes first, the other is argued to follow. Keeping in mind that 2nd Timothy was written not by Paul, but by a second or third generation follower of Paul writing in his name, read all of 2nd Timothy Chapter 3. How is your take on verse 16 affected when you read it even just a little more “in context”?

Spirit Practice

Lectio divina (“divine reading”) is an ancient practice of directed listening. Passages of scripture are read aloud, meditated upon, and then discussed as a group as a way of seeking spiritual insight.

First you are invited to hear the reading, listening for the word or phrase that attracts you. In the second stage, the question is asked, “How does this passage touch my life?” Stage three asks the question, “Is there an invitation here?” and participants seek to discern what the Spirit might be nudging them to do in the next few days. In the fourth stage the leader invites each person to pray for the person seated on their right. Each of the four stages is separated by a time of silent reflection.

Looking for a detailed “how to”? Check out: *Gathered in the Word: Praying the Scriptures in Small Groups* by Norvene Vest (1996: Upper Room Books ISBN# 0-8358-0806-8).