

Marcus Borg reintroduced me to Jesus

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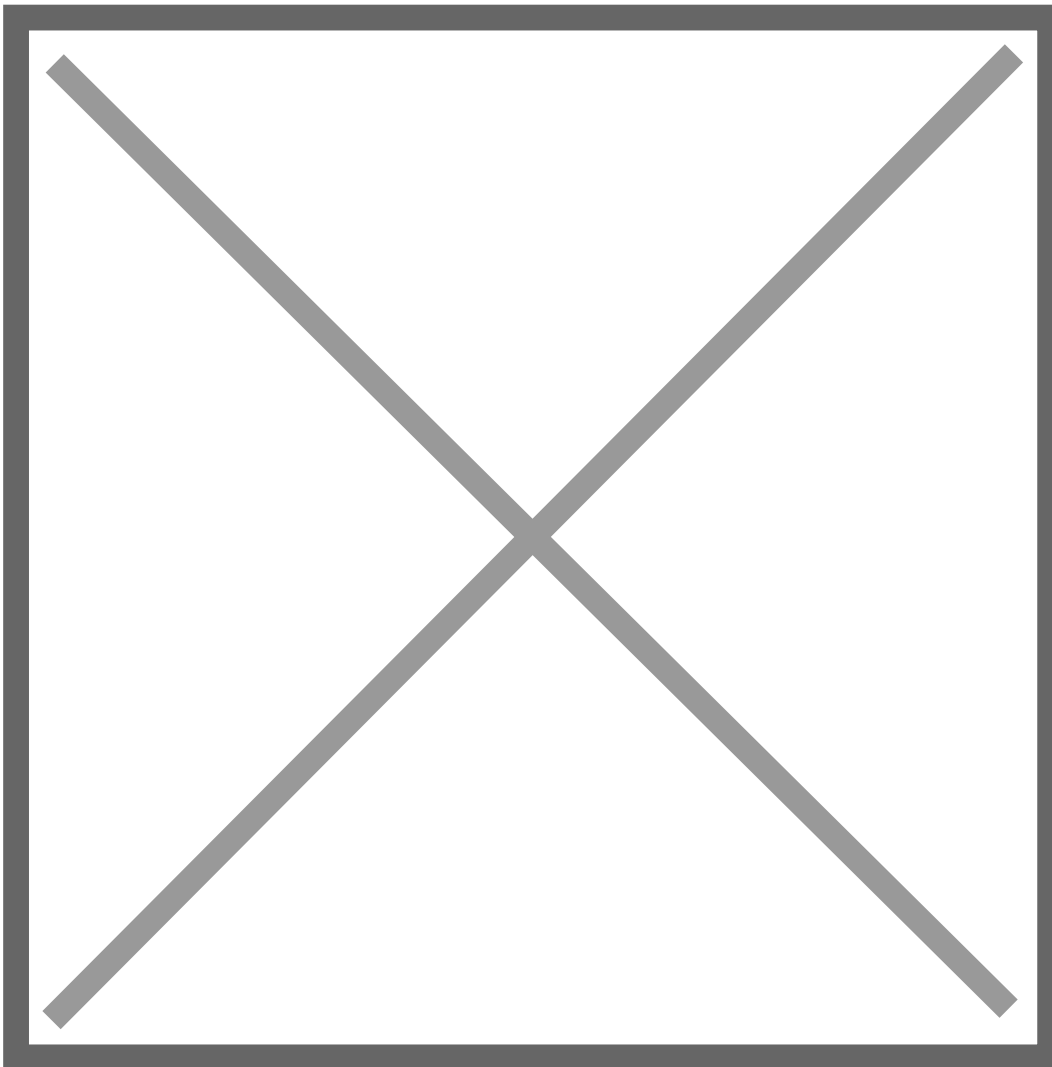
I learned of [Marcus Borg's passing](#) on Facebook, from Diana Butler Bass. The news spread as news does these days, from person to person, fanning out across the social media feeds of liberal Christians everywhere. As one friend noted, “A lot of people do not know the name Marcus Borg. Those who do know that name seem to *really* know it.”

I lost count of how many friends and acquaintances posted appreciative reflections of Borg and his work (and, incidentally, his taste in footwear; more than one person fondly remembered his tendency to wear colorful socks). A distinct theme emerged from this chorus of eulogies: many progressive Christians identify Borg as the person who made space for them to return to—or remain in—the Christian faith.

That Borg would end up being remembered an evangelist *par excellence* is a wonderful irony, given the furor the Jesus Seminar generated amongst conservative Christians. If you'd asked an evangelical what she thought of Borg and his cronies back in the early 1990s, she likely would have implied that they were leading people

away from the truth (or Truth).

In [his moving elegy to Borg](#), illustrator and blogger David Hayward recalls the derision with which folks at his conservative seminary spoke of the seminar's "blackballing" of Jesus. And perhaps it's true that some of the Jesus Seminar scholars had a bit of contempt for Christianity. But not Borg. Borg was a scholar who had the intellectual and spiritual integrity to be humble. That's the quality Hayward admires most:



Borg modeled how to doubt faithfully, how to believe rationally, and—most importantly—[how to move “beyond belief \(and beyond doubt and disbelief\) to an understanding of the Christian life as a relationship with the Spirit of God.”](#) Though his progressive take on scripture was anathema to many, to others it was a revelation.

I read *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* when I was in my early 20s. I can't recall who recommended it, a fact I regret. I owe him or her a big thank you, because it was exactly what I needed to read. The title was apt: I felt as though I was indeed encountering Jesus again, anew. Before I read the preface I was teetering on the edge of walking away from the whole Christian scene. By the time I closed the book I was researching seminaries, eager to dive headlong into the faith and church of this new/old Jesus.

I often recount my early spiritual misadventures, my failed attempts to become a Christian by way of altar calls and sinner's prayers. It wasn't until I tried to enter through the gate manned by Borg that I found my home in the Christian faith. Borg was more of a Billy Graham for me than Billy Graham himself.

In the years since, I haven't read a lot of Borg. My religious interests and spiritual idiosyncrasies led me to other authors, other theologies. But I've loaned out my dog-eared copy of *Meeting Jesus* to so many people it's a miracle I still have it on hand. (I'll thank the Christ of Faith for this miracle; the Jesus of History doesn't brook such superstition.) When people come to me in the midst of a particular sort of "dark night of the soul," wrestling with questions they're afraid to ask, I prescribe Borg. His gentle revisioning of Christianity is as comforting as it is challenging. Read at the right time, it can be life changing.

We mourn the loss of a biblical scholar, a fine writer, an unexpected evangelist, and a faithful Christian.