

## BIBLICAL FAITH AND PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY – MY WAY

Here's what I understand and believe about the not-so-new area on the spectrum of Christian belief that is being called Progressive Christianity. My own faith and theology generally aligns with much of what Progressive Christian people and groups are saying about their own faith.

To start with, though, I'm not all that enamoured with the label itself – "Progressive Christianity". It carries an unfortunate tinge of arrogance, as if everyone with a different faith perspective is somehow not progressive, and therefore less worthy. Whether or not such a response is intended, that's what can well be felt by those elsewhere on that spectrum. However, I and others haven't found a good alternative for a label.

Progressive Christianity, the way I see it anyway, pushes beyond some of the assumptions and limitations of what I over-generalize as traditional Christian theologies. Most such theologies begin with the Bible, while Progressive Christianity begins with life itself, as experienced by the peoples and beings of this world. That life and what nurtures it is itself sacred – revealing the Divine. In this sacredness, all things are connected. We humans share the opportunity and responsibility to treasure and build upon what surrounds us, as well as repair what has been destructive and life-denying in human interaction with each other and all of creation.

Not deistic or pantheistic, however, my theology still connects strongly with the Bible. I understand the Bible as a package of human writings that is both historical and metaphorical in a very complex way. Human experience linked to careful scholarship are increasingly opening it up for new understandings, none of which should be taken as ultimately authoritative.

The Bible is historical – to some extent and at some points. It tells of many factual, historical events and people, albeit told with the intentions and biases that emerge from the life-contexts of its writers. Such writing is inherently subjective. The history presented in the Bible is sometimes self-contradictory, sometimes supported and attested by other ancient tales, and sometimes stands alone without external referents at all. A sweep of history of a limited area of the Middle East gets told in the Bible in an engaging, intricate, subjective, inter-related, multi-faceted narrative arc involving many writers, editors, and viewpoints over many centuries.

The Bible is also metaphorical. Some of its content is pure mythology that evokes important truths and understandings about why things are the way they are, through larger-than-life stories that are truly ancient or created to appear so. Some is fiction that gets woven into stories based on particular understandings and truths, as perceived by the writers. Is the Bible factual? Not throughout. Truthful? Yes, insofar as the overarching story tells deep truths about the human experience of struggling to understand and connect with the Divine. It's often a metaphORIZATION of human experience.

Through a Progressive Christian lens, I see Jesus in much the same way as I see the Bible itself. I can accept that there was a man of history upon whom and about whom much of the Christian scriptures are based. (Not all Progressive Christians may accept this.) Still, some of

the Jesus-story in the Bible is metaphorical, much like the more ancient books of the Hebrew scriptures. Through this lens, Jesus is a man like us, struggling to understand, embrace, expand and proclaim his experienced connection to the Divine, and who had a profound influence on many people during and after his life. A preacher, a teacher, a revolutionary, a mystic, a healer, a social activist, and a leader of a small religious reform group – Jesus was all of these and more. Son of God? Certainly, as are we all, but one who more than any other person was aware of, tuned into, and in touch with the intimate connection between his human spirit and the pervasive holiness and divinity at the root of everything.

With this foundational understanding, I see the church down through the centuries as a human institution based upon evolving Biblical and theological understandings that encompass the whole range of human experiences and motivations, from the highest and most sublime to the meanest and most destructive. The church's and individuals' uses of Bible-based faith through history have at times valued and supported the sacredness of life and creation, and at other times and in other ways have fostered inhumane and hugely damaging views and practices for relationships of humans with each other, and with the rest of the natural order.

Progressive Christian faith for me, then, is a lived and practiced understanding of the need to hold and foster positive, creative humane values affirming life in all its complexity and its inherent sanctity. It encompasses wisdom from many and varied sources, with Jesus, the Bible, and Christian tradition prominent but not alone among them. Life-denying human behaviour at any scale is to be named, challenged and resisted, and life to be understood as journeying with, in, through, and toward love in its fullest.