

Helen Bellamy reports on Marcus Borg's recent conference

About 50 folk had each travelled over 100 miles to be there and around 200 others had made a journey longer than half an hour. That was in addition to the 80 or so who lived closer to St Mark's. Everyone was filled with anticipation, keenly looking forward to hearing Marcus Borg speak about *Reclaiming the Inheritance of Jesus*. Many of us had heard Marcus speak when he last visited CRC and most of us had been there for his lecture the previous evening (a sparkling introduction to the ideas set out in his recent book *Speaking Christian*). Our expectations were to be amply fulfilled.

Marcus spoke first about the recent reverberations around *God and Atheism*, looking initially at two different referents of the word 'God' – the God of supernatural theism, a super-being who both loves and judges, and the God of pantheism, who is the encompassing reality pervading all that is. He pointed out how the difficulties created by the former understanding are dispelled by the latter, under which intervention is replaced by intention, interaction and presence. Then he had us think about God's character and passion, considering alternatives present in both the Bible and post-biblical Christianity. God can be understood as judging, punitive and violent or as gracious, compassionate, loving and womb-like. Which of these pictures is more helpful can be decided in the light of Jesus' passion for the Kingdom of God – the world and its people transformed into one of distributive justice and peace.



In his second talk the focus was on *God and Jesus*. Marcus looked at various construals of the story of Jesus : Jesus the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, Jesus the super-human, Jesus the great teacher – none of these persuasive or compelling – or that deriving from the historical-metaphorical approach affirmed by mainstream scholars. This last is based on the understanding that the gospels are the product of a developing tradition involving memory and testimony and use metaphorical language. In them the pre-Easter Jesus – what he was like as a man – and the post-Easter Jesus – what he became after his death – are both present and conflated.

The final session looked at *contemporary discipleship*, seeing the Christian life as being about the embodiment of what we see in Jesus. It involves personal transformation – becoming conscious of and intentional about a deepening relationship with God (most often through worship, prayer, devotion and compassionate acts, rather than by believing the right things).