

Lecture I: Seeing the Foundations Again—Bible and Tradition

1. For this discussion, begin by identifying terms that may or may not be familiar to the members of your group. SUGGESTION FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS: You may want, in advance of your first meeting, to give assignments to several members of the group who can come prepared to briefly explain such terms as,
 - a. “Paradigm” ;
 - b. “Ptolemaic Paradigm” ;
 - c. “Copernican Paradigm.”
 How important do you think these “paradigms” are in understanding historical thought and belief?
2. Dr. Borg begins the first lecture by saying that in the Church, in America (the US) today, there is a deep division among Christians. He says that the division is evident in two distinctly different visions of Christianity and the Christian life. On one side, he sees fundamentalist and conservative Christianity; on the other, mainline Christianity. Ask the members of your group if they see the division and if they agree with Borg’s “division.” If “yes,” why? If no, “why?”
3. According to Dr. Borg, what understandings do “earlier paradigm” Christians and “emerging paradigm” Christians share?
4. What characteristic understanding of the Bible does Dr. Borg see in the earlier paradigm? Do you or have you understood or thought of the Bible in this way? Ask the group to reflect on the terms “literalist,” “absolutist,” and “exclusivist”; are these descriptors fair and accurate?
5. Dr. Borg lays out the “earlier paradigm’s” understanding of the Christian life. He says that the “earlier paradigm” view of the Christian life focuses on understanding faith as belief, being concerned about an after-life and salvation and an emphasis on guilt, sin and forgiveness. Ask your group if this is a satisfying understanding of the Christian life. If “yes”; why? If “no”; why?
6. Borg says that in the “emerging paradigm” the Bible is seen as a human product and that this does not imply a denial of the reality of God. Ask your group to evaluate the statement.
7. Borg says that in the “emerging paradigm,” the Bible is interpreted metaphorically. How does the group respond to his notion that metaphorical interpretation is not “less than literal, but more than literal?”
8. What does your group think Borg means when he says that in the emerging paradigm, the vision of the Christian life is seen as “relational” and “transformative”? What does he mean when he says that in the “emerging paradigm,” transformation is at the center of the Christian life?
9. What does your group think when Borg wants to reclaim the term “born again” as an appropriate expression for “transformational” Christianity?

Lecture II: Seeing Faith Again/Not Belief but Relationship

1. For this discussion, begin by identifying terms that may or may not be familiar to the members of your group. Quickly review the meanings Borg gives to the terms,
 - a. “paradigm”
 - b. “modernity”
 - c. “post-modern”
2. Dr. Borg says, “. . . I see the emerging paradigm as a retrieval, a recovery of something that is very ancient.” He says that “modernity” has brought distortions to our understanding of the Christian Tradition. Without going into great detail, ask the group what they think Dr. Borg means by this statement.
3. Dr. Borg begins his presentation on the meanings of faith by discussing faith as assensus. Ask the group how they understood the term “faith” as they grew up in their particular Christian traditions. Ask if faith as assensus reminds them of their early experience.
4. What did the term “orthodoxy” mean prior to the modern period which is understood to have begun in the 16th century? Ask your group how they respond to the meaning of orthodoxy as “right worship.” Ask them how such an understanding of “faith” would have been received in their respective religious communities.
5. The second meaning of the term “faith” that Dr. Borg describes is, to use the latin, fiducia. Have the group members respond to this way of seeing faith. How adequate is such an understanding?
6. Why does Dr. Borg think that faith as trust is meaningfully illustrated by the example about teaching a child how to swim? How is anxiety a good barometer for measuring our level of faith?
7. When Dr. Borg identifies the third way of understanding faith with the term, fidelita, what does he mean? Ask the group to talk about faith as faithfulness in one’s relationship with God. What are the implications?
8. Dr. Borg describes the fourth way of understanding faith as visio, the latin word that suggests the English, “vision.” This understanding of faith is related to faith as a way of seeing the world that reflects itself in the way we approach our relationship with God. Referring to the thought of H. Richard Niebuhr, the eminent theologian of the last century, Borg cites three ways of seeing the world: as hostile and threatening; as indifferent; and as “life-giving.” Ask your group to discuss how these “ways of seeing the world” influence or determine how we understand our relationship with God.
9. Dr. Borg summarizes his first lecture by saying, “Faith ultimately has to do with our relationship with God, not with a set of beliefs.” Ask your group how this statement “sits” with them.

Lecture III: Personal Transformation in the Christian Life

1. Dr. Borg opens his second lecture by asking the simple question, “What fills us?” In asking this question, he proposes to be getting at “A Christian Understanding of the Self.” Ask your group to respond to the “What fills us?” question and how it can help us come to an understanding of “a Christian understanding of the self.”
2. Dr. Borg wants viewers to reflect on the “human condition.” He wants us to ask ourselves, “What is true about the human predicament?” In the “earlier paradigm,” human sin is understood to be the fundamental condition of human existence. While he does not disagree with this notion completely, he says he thinks it may be more accurate to use the vocabulary of “bondage,” “exile,” “blindness,” “sickness,” and “alienation.” Does your group agree? Why?
3. Borg discusses a phenomenon he calls “self-worth distinction.” Ask the group to respond to this idea. Does the group see relevance for the “human condition” in this idea? If so, why?
4. Borg cites the Story of the Garden of Eden (Exodus) and says that, “. . . we spend our lives east of Eden, separated from the one from whom we came, the one in whom we live and move and have our being.” What does the group make of this statement?
5. Consider the story of the little three-year girl who wants time alone with her new-born baby sibling. Ask members of your group if this is a meaningful story. If “yes,” why? If “no,” why not?
6. Borg says that the central dynamic of the Christian life is “reconnecting.” Do the members of your group see the Christian life this way?
7. Ask one of the members of your group to read aloud the poem by Billy Collins, “On Turning Ten.” What is the poem “story” about? What does it say to us about the human condition?
8. Borg says that as modern human beings we are pre-occupied with “how well we are doing,” and this pre-occupation leaves us in a constant state of “separation, alienation, and comparison and judgment of self and others.” Quoting Carl Jung, Borg says that we live as “false selves.” Ask the group how they relate to this language.
9. Review with your group Langdon Gilkey’s story, Shantung Compound. How can the “emerging paradigm” deal with this story?
10. Ask someone in your group to read the Nicodemus story in the Gospel of John. Discuss with your group what being “born again” means in the “emerging paradigm.” Where does this understanding of “born again” lead?

Lecture IV: Political Transformation in the Christian Life

1. Dr. Borg begins the final lecture by re-stating the notion that “the Bible is both personal and political; the biblical vision of salvation is both personal and political.” What sense do you make of this statement?
2. Borg says that “. . . the church that would take the emerging paradigm seriously would proclaim, invite and sponsor participating in God’s passion for justice. It would proclaim, invite and sponsor an alternative politics. Such a community would take political transformation seriously.” What do you think he means by this? Do you agree or disagree with him? Why?
3. Dr. Borg would have the church work to help people to see how central God’s justice is in the Bible. Select passages from Amos to highlight the prophetic message about God’s justice that is so prevalent in the Bible. Ask your group to discuss whether this claim is correct or not.
4. Borg refers to Walter Wink’s notion that the biblical prophets stood against the political domination systems of their time. What is your understanding of a political domination system? Do you see these forces at work in today’s world? In America?
5. Ask your group if it is surprised to learn that the political domination systems that appear in the Bible were economically exploitive, systems like Egypt, Assyria and Mesopotamia. Does your group think this “domination system” analysis is relevant to our contemporary experience?
6. Borg says that the message of Jesus is frequently focused on the “Kingdom of God.” Ask your group what Jesus was referring to when he spoke of the “Kingdom of God.” Does your group agree with Borg that Jesus was calling for an alternative to the domination system of his day?
7. Ask one of the members of the group to read the various versions of the Lord’s Prayer that appear in the synoptic gospels. Look at a parallel gospel to see how the versions differ. Do these versions of the Lord’s Prayer have political significance?
8. Borg says that so much of early Christianity’s language about Jesus directly counters the language of the Roman Empire. For instance, many of the titles of Augustus Caesar, i.e., “Savior,” “Son of God,” “Prince of Peace,” “Lord,” were in fact employed by loyal Roman subjects well before they were attributed to Jesus. If this is true, what were early Christians intending to accomplish by choosing this language to identify Jesus?
9. In the domination systems of today, who are the winners and the losers? Who benefits in the system and who do not? How does a dedication to the Christian life compel Christians to act in the face of modern domination systems? How does this question relate to Jesus’ notion of the Kingdom of God?