

Two Paradigms: A Tale of Two Christianities ...

	EARLIER CHRISTIANITY	EMERGING CHRISTIANITY
The Bible's Origin	<i>A divine product with divine authority.</i> The Bible comes from God as no other book does. The unique revelation of God. A divine product coming with a divine guarantee. The Bible is true because it comes from God.	<i>A human response to God.</i> The Bible was written for the ancient communities that produced it.
Biblical Interpretation	<i>Literal-factual.</i> Truth and factuality go hand in hand. "The miraculous" is central to the truth of Christianity.	<i>Historical and metaphorical.</i> It is more than literal and more than factual. Concerned with the meaning it has for us.
The Bible's Function	<i>Revelation of doctrine and morals.</i> The Bible as the revealed will of God is the ultimate authority for both faith and morals.	<i>Metaphorical and sacramental.</i> Sacred in its status and function, but not in its origin. Living within Bible and tradition as a means whereby the Spirit speaks to us.
Christian Life Emphasis	<i>Emphasis on an afterlife and what to believe or do to be saved.</i> It takes faith to believe things that are hard to believe. Really important question: where will you spend eternity? A religion of requirements and rewards. Believe in Christianity now for the sake of salvation later.	<i>Transformation in this life through relationship with God.</i> To be Christian does not mean believing in Christianity, but a relationship with God lived within the Christian metaphor and sacrament of the sacred.

Expanded from *The Heart of Christianity*, p. 15

Metaphors of Salvation

PREDICAMENTS IN THE HUMAN CONDITION

- captivity
- exile
- being lost
- blindness
- hunger
- thirst
- having a closed heart
- separation from God
- living a false self
- infirmity

WHAT WE NEED FOR WHOLENESS

- liberation
- returning home
- finding a way
- seeing
- satisfaction for hunger
- quenching of thirst
- opening our hearts
- connecting to the source of life
- dying and being born again
- healing

JESUS AS OUR SOURCE OF NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

- our liberator
- our way of return
- our door, our way
- light of the world
- bread of life
- living water
- a heart of compassion
- our way to God, the vine
- our path of dying and rising
- the one who makes us whole

p. 14

Frames of Comparison

WORLDVIEWS

Religious Worldview

- There is "More" than the visible world
- There is a nonmaterial layer or level of reality named as God, Spirit, the Sacred, Yahweh, the Tao, Allah, Brahman, Atman, and so on
- Data: witness and wisdom of the world's religions, sacred religious and visionary experiences, affirmations of postmodern science

Nonreligious Worldview

- There is no "More"; there is only "This"
- There is only a world of matter and energy
- The universe is a giant system of particles plus force fields operating within natural laws

CONCEPTS OF GOD

Supernatural Theism

- God, as a person-like supreme being, created the world separate from God
- God is "up in heaven" or "out there"
- God occasionally "intervenes" in world
- This intervention may include spectacular events
- God continues to intervene, especially in response to prayer
- God is more remote as the universe grows

Panentheism

- God as encompassing Spirit in whom everything that is, is
- The universe is in God, not separate from God
- God is the one in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Paul)
- God is "right here" and "more than right here"
- God is transcendent (the "More") and God is immanent (right here)
- God is not a God of intervention, but a God of intention and interaction

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

It makes a difference how we see the character of God, for how we see the character of God shapes our sense of what faithfulness to God means and thus what the Christian life is about. —Marcus Borg

God of Requirements and Rewards

God of Law

- God is a lawgiver and judge
- "The monarchical model of God" is the correct one
- Relationship is expressed in legal language: our disobedience—Jesus's sacrifice—salvation
- If you believe, you will be saved

God of Love and Justice / God of Grace

- The language of love speaks of God's relationship with Israel
- The God of love is the God of justice (biblically, justice is the social form of love)
- God loves everybody and everything
- The Christian life is about a relationship with God that transforms us into more compassionate people

Engage 1: Emerging Christianity in a Pluralistic World

If you have access to the Internet, go to www.marcusborg.com and play the Marcus Borg clip "Emerging Christianity in a Pluralistic World." How did that segment illuminate your reading of this chapter?

Engage 2: The Sacramental Understanding of Religion

Because we are faced with the growing reality of religious pluralism, it is important that we think through some of the implications and opportunities of that new reality. Beginning on page 213 of *The Heart of Christianity*, Marcus Borg offers us seven statements that describe the "sacramental" understanding of religion, an understanding that is consistent with the vision of emerging Christianity that is at the heart of this book.

The sacramental understanding of religion sees religions as

1. Human creations or "imaginative human constructions"
2. Responses to experiences of the sacred in the cultures into which they came into being
3. Cultural-linguistic traditions within which the faithful live
4. Wisdom traditions deeply rooted in the past, which enshrine wisdom of "the real" and "the way"
5. Aesthetic traditions that value and create beauty
6. Communities of practice that provide practical means for living the religious life
7. Communities of transformation: transforming self to a new way, and the world through compassion

In summary, Marcus Borg writes the following:

The enduring religions share these characteristics in common. Each is a massive and magnificent sacrament of the sacred, a finite means of mediating the sacred, a "treasure in earthen vessels." Each of the enduring religions is a mediator of "the absolute," but not "absolute" itself. (215)