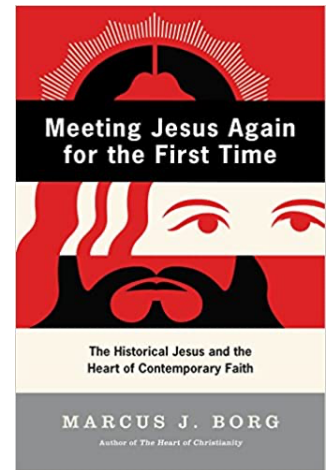


Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time by Marcus Borg

Study/Preparation Guide: Session 6

1. Read the following pages from *MJAFT*
 1. Chapter 6: Images of Jesus and Images of the Christian Life [pp 119 - 140]
—or—
 2. Summary on reverse – if you don't have the book
2. Check out this on-line reference for a biography of Borg, a list of his books, as well as some supplementary information for our discussions:
<http://www.aportraitofjesus.org>



Focus Questions for our discussion:

- What is story theology? [pp 119-21]
- What are the two claims of all religious traditions (according to William James)? [pp 121-2]
- How do the macro-stories (exodus, Exile and Return and the Priestly Story) image life? [pp 122-7]
- How has the Priestly Story dominated Christian interpretation of Jesus? [pp 130-2]
- What four elements do the macro-stories have in common? [pp 132-3]
- What is your response to “Jesus and the Christian Life as Journey”? [pp 133-7]



Summary: Chapter 6

Borg reprises book, and definition of Jesus: “he was a spirit person, subversive sage, social prophet, and movement founder who invited his followers and hearers into a transformative relationship with the same Spirit that he himself knew, and into a community whose social vision was shaped by the core value of compassion” (119)

So what “vision of Christian life” does this imply?

Broaden consideration of Jesus beyond NT to include OT – how does Jesus fit within the whole biblical arc

“Story theology” – discusses the narrative character of the Bible – or, the centrality of “story” in the scriptures.

Three features:

- narrative framework of the Bible as a whole (i.e., history of salvation)
- Bible contains hundreds of individual stories
- at center of Bible are a small number of “macro-stories”

Story theology criticizes theology and historical scholarship – they conceptualize, or compartmentalize so that the story is lost

Bible WAS about stories; stories were how Scripture was experienced for centuries: think, too, of stained glass windows or hymns or ritual

Stories appeal to the imagination, not so much as rules/laws/doctrine

The Macro-Stories of Scripture

Three “macro-stories” at the heart of Scripture that shape the Bible as a whole (121). Each “Images the religious life in a particular way” (122). Two are grounded in history, the third in an institution (priesthood).

Bases his analyses on William James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. “James states that the religious traditions of the world . . . make two claims. First, they claim that something is wrong with our lives as we typically live them . . . Second, they speak of a solution to that problem” (122). I.e., a diagnosis and a cure

The Exodus Story

Exodus story primal for ancient Israel – shaped who they were and their sense of God

Story was to be told by parents to children, it was remembered and celebrated liturgically (e.g., Passover). Story was told about “us, too, the living” (123).

A story about bondage, liberation, a journey and a destination.

What is it saying (*a la* James)? Our “problem” is that we’re in bondage. And, so to what are we in bondage? The solution is liberation . . . coming out from the lordship of

Pharaoh and the lordship of culture. This leads to a journey through the wilderness (a place of danger as well as nourishment).

The story of the exodus images the religious life as a journey from the life of bondage to life in the presence of God” (125)

The Story of Exile and Return

Grounded in historical experience as well – All about Babylon 587-539 BCE.

This experience “seared itself into their consciousness and became for them a metaphor for their relationship with God” (125)

So, our problem is “exile”. What is it like to be in exile? Separation?

Think “By the waters of Babylon”

Think “O Come Emanuel” . . . *mourns in lonely exile here*

Think E.T.: “Home”

Exile as estrangement or alienation

Solution is journey of return

This story is a story of journeying, homecoming

The Priestly Story

Institution: temple, priesthood, & sacrifice

“A story of sin guilt, sacrifice, and forgiveness. Central to it are notions of impurity, defilement, and uncleanness, or that primal sense of ‘being stained’” (127)

In this story, we are sinners who’ve broken God’s laws, stand guilty before God. The story become a story of sin, guilt and forgiveness.

Jesus and the Macro-Stories of Scripture

All three stories shape the message of Jesus the NT and subsequent Christian theology.

Gustav Aulen (Swedish theologian) – understandings of the atone

Christus Victor: Central work of Christ to be triumphing over the powers that hold humans in bondage. Like the exodus story

Substitutionary/Objective: Central work of Christ is to be sacrifice for sin that makes God’s forgiveness possible. Like the priestly story.

Revelation/Disclosure: Jesus reveals something that is true. He is the incarnation of the path of return from exile.

Priestly story has dominated the popular image of Jesus – the dying savior who death is a sacrifice for our sins.

We see this liturgically with the prominence given to confessions But it is a good story. There're new possibilities for us; we aren't held in bondage

It has limitations. It produces six distortions in our understanding of the Christian life:

- 1) Static understanding – a repeated cycle of sin guilt, and forgiveness
- 2) Passive understanding – God has already done what needs to be done; leads to a passivity toward culture. Priestly story is a politically domesticating story.
- 3) Christianity a religion about the afterlife
- 4) God is primarily lawgiver and judge. God's forgiveness becomes contingent and conditional
- 5) Story is hard to believe!
- 6) Some people do not feel much guilt, but they may have strong feelings of bondage or feelings of alienation.

Four elements that the macro-stories share:

- 1) All are stories of suffer and of being at an experiential distance from God
- 2) All make powerful affirmations about the human condition, and also about God. God is intimately involved with human life.
- 3) All are stories of hope. God does not will our present condition, but wants something more.
- 4) All are stories of a journey.

Three stories – pastorally envisioned. Some need liberation, some need homecoming; some need acceptance.

Jesus and the Christian Life as Journey

Borg encourages us to see Jesus and Christian life in light of all the stories.

- He subverted conventional wisdom – like being under bondage and exile. He came to set captives free
- Jesus teaches a “way”, a journey
- Jesus subverts priestly story *a la* Hebrews – “once for all”

NT has story of its own: discipleship – journeying with Jesus. Means being on the road with him. In his company. Listening to his teaching; questioning, denying, betraying. Eating at his table, being nourished and fed by him. Being/journeying in community (“Gather the folks, tell the stories, break the bread” John Shea).

Vision of Christian life as journey of transformation. A life of not believing or obeying, but being in a relationship with God.

“Believing in Jesus does not mean believing doctrines about him. Rather It means to give one's heart, one's self at its deepest level, to the post-Easter Jesus who is the living Lord, the side of God tried toward us, the face of God, the Lord who is also the Spirit . . . Jesus is not simply a figure of the past, but a figure of the present” (137).