

Marcus Borg writes about the "emerging paradigm" of the past 100+ years that is the "product of Christianity's encounter with the modern and postmodern world, including science, historical scholarship, religious pluralism, and cultural diversity." Borg gives a refreshing and clear response to our questions: "In this time of change and conflict within the church, what is the heart of Christianity? What is most central to an authentic Christianity and Christian life today?"

1. The Heart of Christianity in a Time of Change

"Earlier" and "emerging" ways of being Christian. Both are *modern* products. Both are ways of seeing the tradition. There are specific conflicts as well as foundational issues.

Specific issue conflicts: 1) ordination of women; 2) gays & lesbians; 3) Christian exclusivism—Christianity is the "only way".

Foundational matters conflicts: how to see the Bible and its authority. Bible is absolute and unchangeable vs. view that passages about subordination of women to men, homosexual behavior sinful, & Jesus as the only way to salvation do not express God's will for all time.

Paradigm—comprehensive way of seeing, an overarching interpretive framework that shapes how we see everything. Different paradigms can look at the same phenomena but see them differently.



Earlier Paradigm

Bible is a divine product; unique revelation of God; has a divine guarantee.

- Hard form: Bible infallible or inerrant. Whatever it says is "God's truth". Bible is the words of God. Holy encyclopedia with information about God.
- Soft form: Not claim every statement in Bible is inerrant. Writers of scripture guided by Holy Spirit to not make any errors in anything that matters for our salvation.

Bible infallible usually linked with Bible literal-factual.

Biblical literalism

- Hard form: *everything* in Bible is factually true (including Genesis creation).
- Soft form: not all stories are factually true (e.g., six days of creation are metaphorical, Jonah is a parable), but really important events (spectacular, miraculous ones) *did* happen.

Bible tells us what God want us to believe and how God wants us to live. For some people, this view extends to creeds as well. Creeds are literally true.

Vision of Christian Life

1. Faith as believing
2. Afterlife is central (promise and motive)—where will you spend eternity?
3. Life of requirements and rewards. Main reward = afterlife & requirements exist so we can get reward. One must be a "good" Christian. Usually includes believing the right things and sometimes that requires us to suspend rational thought—have faith to believe. Life of requirements nullifies grace. *Believing* is what will save you.

Modern Product

Western cultural history since Enlightenment of 17th century—birth of modern science and scientific ways of knowing. Central features of earlier paradigm as modern product:

1. Biblical infallibility and inerrancy appeared in 1600s and insistently affirmed by some Protestants only in the 19th and 20th centuries.
2. Literal-factual interpretation is modern product. Enlightenment identifies truth with *factual*. Today truth = factual.
3. Notion that Christian faith = belief is modern product.

Emerging Paradigm

Been around for over a century.

Way of seeing the Bible: Bible is sacred in its *status* and *function*; *NOT* in its origin.

1. **Historical:** Bible is historical product of ancient Israel and early Christian movement. Bible was written for *them*. Interpret them in their ancient historical contexts.
2. **Metaphorical:** Bible is "more than literal", "more than factual" meaning. What is the meaning of a particular story for us?
3. **Sacramental:** Bible's ability to mediate the sacred. Sacrament is a means of grace.

Vision of Christian Life

Relationship and transformation: relationship with God that transforms the *present*.

Not about requirements for a future reward and not about believing the "right things".

Borg's summarizing table

	Earlier Paradigm	Emerging Paradigm
Bible's Origin	Divine product with divine authority	A human response to God
Biblical interpretation	Literal-factual	Historical & metaphorical
Bible's function	Revelation of doctrine and morals	Metaphorical and sacramental
Christian life emphasis	An afterlife and what to believe or do to be saved	Transformation in this life through relationship with God.

Bridging the Differences

1. Christian diversity—recognize that there has always been a diversity of views, worship, various cultural forms, theological diversity. Recognize that earlier and emerging paradigms both are ways of being Christian (not right or wrong).
2. What they share—affirm reality of God, the centrality of the Bible and Jesus, importance of a relationship with God as known in Jesus, and need (ours and world's) for transformation. Relationship with God and Jesus is key for both paradigms. They achieve that relationship differently. Earlier paradigm: because they *believe*, that is why the relationship matters.
3. Recognize that the issue is functionality—whether the paradigm “works” or “gets in the way”. For many, the earlier paradigm works. For many, the emerging paradigm works.

Questions

1. Why don't labels of “conservative” and “liberal” work for what Borg is describing?
2. If you don't adopt a literal-factual interpretation of the Bible, are there any absolute truths that are as true today as they were “back then” and how do you know?
3. What do you think of Borg's description of the “earlier” paradigm? Is it a fair one and did he leave anything important out? How does it make you feel?
4. How does the realization that the “earlier” and “emerging” paradigms are relatively recent products affect the discussions of what is a “truer” or “more traditional” practice/view of Christianity?
5. What are three ways of bridging the differences between the “earlier” and “emerging” paradigms does Borg give? Are these enough to bridge the “gap”? Are there other ways that Borg missed?