

Congregational Church of Austin Lenten Series

Outline and questions – Class I (on March 10)

Words in italics are my comments

Chapter 1 The Heart of Christianity in a Time of Change

Two paradigms of Christianity

The earlier paradigm

- Christianity is grounded in divine authority [*authority can be taken in two ways: boss and wisdom. Which is meant here?*]
- The Bible is a divine product – meaning inerrancy or authority [*same question*].
- The Bible is interpreted literally and factually – either in whole or in part
- Faith as believing is central.
- The afterlife is central.
- The Christian life is about requirements and rewards – Grace has conditions attached.

The emerging paradigm

- The Bible is a historical product of ancient communities.
- The Bible should be understood metaphorically.
- The Bible should be approached sacramentally, as mediating the sacred [*yet modernity has robbed the notion of the sacred of most of its power and meaning*].
- The Bible is sacred in its status and function but not origin. [*what does “sacred” mean here?*]
- The Christian life is a life of relationship and transformation.
- It affirms religious pluralism.

There is no single right way of understanding Christianity and no single right way of being Christian. There has been a great deal of diversity within Christianity throughout history.

The issue is not whether one or another of these visions of Christianity is right or wrong. The issue is whether a paradigm "works" or "gets in the way." For many the earlier paradigm works. For others it does not.

Discerning the heart of Christianity involves us in an unending conversation.

Chapter 2 Faith: the Way of the Heart

The common understanding of faith is that it means holding a certain set of beliefs.

Faith is certainly central to Christianity, especially to Protestants.

Four meanings of faith:

1. Faith as assent, believing that a claim is true. The opposite is either doubt or rejection. This is the most common understanding of faith in Protestant Christianity.
2. Faith as trust, trusting in God. The opposite is anxiety.

3. Faith as faithfulness, i.e. to our relationship with God. The opposite is infidelity. Biblically the opposite is idolatry.
4. Faith as vision, seeing the whole, seeing beyond. Its opposites are fear, indifference and ingratitude.

Numbers 2, 3, and 4 are relational.

Number 1 establishes the nature of the reality to which we relate.

1. The reality of God
2. The centrality of Jesus
3. The centrality of the Bible

When we recite the creeds, we are saying, "I give my heart to God, whose story is as follows..."

To believe is to believe.

Some Questions:

What does it mean to take the Bible metaphorically?

It seems to me that Borg implies that if one takes the Bible as literally true, one is then unconcerned with meanings. The history of biblical interpretation does not confirm that.

If the Bible is not factual to some degree, which should we take it seriously?

Borg uses the term "sacred" several times. What makes something sacred? What is the opposite of sacred?

Usually if something is sacred, it is set apart, having power that is independent of humans. That power can be used by humans, but only with care, and usually within a set of rules.

Is anything really sacred in Protestantism?

Borg lists three claims as central to Christianity: the reality of God, the centrality of Jesus and the centrality of the Bible. Some would add a fourth "assent": the Church. The argument would be that if relationship is so important, it cannot be only vertical. The church is the community of Christians. Would you agree? (You might know note that there is no listing for "church" in the index.)

Modernity is usually described as asserting the autonomy of the individual. It locates final authority in the person. If this is so (one can argue the point) do God or Christ have any authority? Is their authority derivative, meaning that I give them authority (and thus could take it away)?

Is the reality of God a given? A fact? An opinion? A metaphor? (Can something be a reality and a metaphor at the same time?)