

THE GOD WE NEVER KNEW

Marcus J. Borg, *The God we never knew* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancoscsp, 1997),

PART I. THINKING ABOUT GOD

- 1.
- 2.

PART II. IMAGING GOD

- 3.
- 4.

PART III. LIVING WITH GOD

5. Opening to God: The Heart of Spirituality

6. The Dream of God: A Politics of Compassion

Shalom: The dream of God is a vision of Shalom, a rich Hebrew word often translated as “peace” but meaning much more than the absence of war. It means well-being in a comprehensive sense. It includes freedom from negatives such as oppression, anxiety, and fear, as well as the presence of positives such as health, prosperity, and security. *Shalom* does include a social vision: the dream of a world in which such well-being belongs to everybody. Marcus J. Borg, *The God we never knew* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancoscsp, 1997), 134.

[This compassion lead us to seeing](#) the impact of social structure on people’s lives.

It leads to seeing that the economic suffering of the poor is not primarily due to individual failure. It leads to seeing that the categories of “marginal,” “inferior,” and “outcast” are human impositions. It leads to anger toward the source of human suffering, whether individual or systemic. It leads to advocacy of a different social vision. “Compassion” seeks alleviation of suffering caused by social structures. It leads to minimizing social boundaries, whatever the basis for drawing them (status, wealth, gender, race, sexual orientation, and so forth). Marcus J. Borg, *The God we never knew* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancoscsp, 1997), 151.

St. Paul spoke of inclusive social vision which negated the sharpest social boundaries of his time: “In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentiles, slave nor free, male nor female.” Paul’s list should not be seen as exhaustive or comprehensive but as examples of the boundaries overcome “in Christ” (Borg. God. P. 152)

Just as we as Christians need to learn how to pray, so also we need to learn how to see and think and live compassionately. The Christian life involves a journey inward and a journey outward.

Our journey outward as followers of Jesus, as advocates of the dream of God, as the church, calls us to be a community of compassion and the leaven of compassion in the world. We are called to compassion not just as an individual virtue but to compassion in our political thinking.

It is this dream that so many voices in the biblical tradition speak of: Justice rolling down like waters; the lamb lying down with lion; the earth as the pasture of God; a time when we will beat our swords into plowshare, when the hills will drip with honey, and the mountains run with wine, when the covenant with God will be written on our hearts, and when every tear will be wiped away, and there will be no grief or sorrow anymore.

7. Salvation: What on Earth Do We Mean?

The Oxford English dictionary defines “salvation” as the saving of the soul; the deliverance from sin and its consequences, and admission to eternal bliss.”

Salvation on Earth

The first explicit unambiguous reference to life after death is in the last chapter of the book of Daniel, written around the year 165 B.C.E. It was not central issue then.

The stories of Abraham and Sarah are set around year 1700 B.C.E: the Exodus from Egypt occurred around 1300 B.C.E.; and the classical prophets spoke from about 750 to 400 B.C.E. Through all of these centuries, the people of ancient Israel seem not to have believed in life after death. This means that for most of the biblical period, ancient Israel’s life with God was not motivated by hope of an afterlife. Thus, the primary biblical understanding of salvation seemed to be in this worldly, not otherworldly (Borg P. 157).

Salvation and Wounds of Existence

The word “salvation” comes from the same root as “salve,” a healing ointment. Salvation thus has to do with healing the wounds of existence. Wounds of existence are many and deep. Some of these wounds are inflicted on us, some are the result of our own doing, and some we inflict on others. Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 157.

Salvation in the Bible has both a divine and a human aspect: Salvation comes from God, and salvation is something that we experience(Borg P. 158)

Biblical Image of Salvation

Bondage and Liberation

The Exodus story of Israel’s liberation from bondage in Egypt including economic and political oppression as well as psychological and spiritual meanings in the Bible.

Paul mentioned “bondage to the law, bondage to the powers; the powers are cultural, spiritual and psychological powers operating both within us and outside us.

It is human condition; (Borg P. 158;)we are in bondage to many things. Bondage of poverty, illness, habits, helplessness, hopelessness and homelessness

And therefore, liberation from bondage is thus one of the central meanings of salvation. Liberation is a central theme in the story of Jesus. According to Luke, Jesus' mission (then and now) is "to proclaim release to the captives, and to let the oppressed go free." Paul also said that "for freedom Christ has set us free... therefore, do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Borg P. 159).

Estrangement and Reconciliation

To be estranged means to be separated from that to which we belong. The central biblical image for the condition of estrangement is "exile," into Babylon in the 6th century b.e.c. (Borg P. 159). Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Life in exile can have political and cultural meanings as well as psychological and spiritual ones (Borg P. 159).

To be alienated is to feel oneself a stranger to oneself, to others, to life itself. Alienation involves feeling cut off from a center of meaning; it is the psychological effect of estrangement from God (Borg P. 160. I call it "homelessness."

Therefore, salvation as reconciliation is the experience of being reconnected to God. It is returning to Eden, restoration from alienation and homecoming. Repent means to return from exile to God. God invites, encourages, and empowers the return. The reconciliation is the work of God as well as something we experience. According to Paul, God in Christ was reconciling the world to God, thereby making our own reconciliation to God possible. The reconciliation work of God also brings about reconciliation with one another, breaking down the walls of separation and hostility (Borg P. 160)

Salvation as Enlightenment

We can associate with enlightenment with images of blindness and seeing, darkness and light, abound in the biblical and Christian tradition. Though we have eyes, we often do not see. We typically are blind to the glory of God all around us; we do not see each other as God sees us, and we do not see ourselves as God sees us. We are "in the dark," living in the night even when it is daytime. In the night we cannot easily see, and we stumble or get lost. Night and darkness connect to fear and loneliness: we are often afraid in the dark and feel alone in the night. The night can be cold. It is also associated with death: things die without light. We yearn for the coming of the light like those watching for the morning (Borg P. 160)

It is no wonder that the biblical tradition speaks so often of seeing and of the coming of the light: According to the Gospel, Jesus is the source of light and sight. In John's gospel Jesus is the light of the world. In Luke 4: Jesus came to bring light to the blind. Those who sit in the darkness has seen the great light (Borg P. 161)

Salvation as Forgiveness

Salvation as the overcoming our sin and guilt is another central image in the Christian tradition. We have sinned against God, deserve judgment, and need forgiveness (Borg P.161)

We wound each other and by doing terrible things to each other. Some of these are willful acts and some are the result of our blindness, bondage, and alienation. The result is that we often injure and even destroy each other. In this case, the meaning of salvation is forgiveness. This is unconditional grace of God, who accepts us just as we are. God loves us in spite of our sins and guilt. Christian life is not about meeting the requirement of God. It is rather living our lives in a relationship with the God who already accepts us and about letting the transforming power of the relationship with God work in our lives (Borg P. 162-163)

Salvation as Experiencing the Love of God

It involves a transformation in self-understanding from “condemned” or “rejected” to “beloved of God.” “you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.” To know that one is not worthless but precious, not unlovely and loveless but beloved by God, is a salvific experience (Borg P. 163)

Salvation as Resurrection

One must die to an old way of being in order to enter a new way of being. Paul spoke of such experience saying “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Our old selves are to be crucified so that we might be raised with Christ and walk in newness of life. In John’s gospel, Jesus is “the resurrection and the life,” as well as “the way” that leads to new life in the present. Salvation is resurrection to a new way of being here and now (Borg P. 164)

Salvation as Food and Drink

In the story of exodus, God fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna from the sky and satisfied their thirst with water from the rock. Using the language of thirst and hunger, a prophet said, “he who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come and buy and eat.” In the synoptic gospels, the feeding of the multitude with a few loaves and fishes echoes Israel’s story of being fed by God in the wilderness. In John, Jesus speaks of himself as the true bread from heaven; “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never be hungry. Salvation is having one’s thirst quenched, one’s deepest hunger satisfied (Borg P. 164-165)

Salvation as Knowing God

Knowing God doesn’t mean knowing about God. It means experiencing the love of God. To know God is already an experience of “eternal life.” In John, not knowing God is associated with images of being “in the dark.” To know God is to be in the light. And therefore, knowing God and enlightenment are closely connected as images of salvation (Borg P. 165)

Salvation as the Kingdom of God

For Jesus, the kingdom of God is both a social vision (and thus future) and a present reality (whose power is already at work and which can be known in the present). As a social vision, it points to a way of living together in which the destitute are blessed, and the hungry are filled. As a present reality, the “kingdom of God” points to living under the kingship of God instead of under the kings and lords of this world (Borg P. 166)

People under political and economic bondage often experience hunger and thirst as well: The rations for slaves in Egypt were meager. The exiles in Babylon were not only strangers in a strange land but also blind and deaf. Bondage and sin can be combined: we are in bondage to anxious self-preoccupation and habituated and hurtful ways of being. We are anxious because of our exile and blindness, estranged from that to which we belong, and unable to see the presence of God around us (Borg P. 166)

Together, these images of salvation also make striking affirmations about God.
 God wills our liberation, our exodus from Egypt.
 God wills our reconciliation, our return from exile.
 God wills our enlightenment, our seeing.
 God wills our forgiveness, our release from sin and guilt.
 God wills that we see ourselves as God’s beloved.
 God wills our resurrection, our passage from death to life.
 God wills for us food and drink that satisfy our hunger and thirst.
 God wills, comprehensively, our well-being – not just my well-being as an individual but the well-being of all of us and of the whole of creation.

In short, God wills our salvation, our healing, here on earth.
 The Christian life is about participating in the salvation of God (Borg P. 166-167)

THE GIFTS OF SALVATION

(Borg P. 167)

SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Salvation comes by grace, and we participate in it through faith (Borg P. 167)

Grace

Whatever God has for us to experience salvation stated above is from the grace of God. We didn’t earn any of them. They were given to us by the grace of God (Borg P. 168)

Faith

Faith is the response to the divine initiative of grace. Faith is the human response to God. What God wants from us is faith that makes us right with God. Faith as faithfulness, trust, and as a belief. Faith is not a matter of will. We are led into it. It grows. And the process continues throughout our lifetime (Borg P. 168-169).

SALVATION AND AFTERLIFE (Borg P. 171)

Experience after clinical death.

Hell

Heaven
Purgatory